

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting April 10, 2017

Members Present: Neil Robinson (Chair); April Allen; Cynthia Bennett; Anne Bull; Rep. Raye Felder; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Greg Hembree; Rep. Dwight Loftis; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Sen. John Matthews; John Stockwell; Patti Tate; and Ellen Weaver.

EOC Staff Present: Melanie Barton; Kevin Andrews; Hope Johnson-Jones; Rainey Knight; Bunnie Ward; and Dana Yow.

Mr. Robinson welcomed the members and guests to the meeting.

The minutes of the February 13, 2017 meeting were amended on page 3 to refer to the appropriate school year and then approved as amended.

Mr. Robinson then called recognized Austin Stone, Executive Director of Youth Entrepreneurship South Carolina, otherwise known as YESCarolina. Mr. Stone provided a brief explanation of the history and mission of YesCarolina. He then called upon Molly Crete, Vice President of Programs who documented that 925 teachers have been trained to date in the program and 17,000 students have written business plans. Then Steve Swanson, Board member of YES Carolina and Nate DePor, former founder and CEO of People Matter acknowledged the impact of the program on entrepreneurs in the Trident area. EOC members then then asked questions about the implementation of the program and funding. Currently, donations and grants support the initiative that is implemented in public and private schools in courses taught in career and technology education classes along with some training of afterschool leaders The program would like to expand into the Hilton Head, Florence and Greenville areas if additional funding, such as state funds were available to train classroom teachers.

Ms. Hairfield asked for clarification about the career and technology education courses in entrepreneurship. Rep. Felder asked about the number of teachers who are projected to be trained this summer. Ms. Crete responded that two training sessions will be provided to train an additional 40 teachers. Dr. Stockwell asked about the curriculum used. Ms. Crete noted that the curriculum is based upon the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship and is on the state approved adoption list. Rep. Loftis asked about recruitment of teachers into the program, noting that most classroom teachers do not have personal experience in entrepreneurship. Rep. Loftis and Ms. Hairfield noted that entrepreneurship includes life skills such a personal and business finance as well as other soft skills. Mr. Robinson thanked the staff of YESCarolina and especially Mr. DePor and Mr. Swanson for traveling to Columbia and updating the EOC on their work.

Then Mr. Robinson recognized the newest member of the EOC, Senator Kevin Johnson. Sen. Johnson is the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Sen. Leatherman's designee to the EOC. Mr. Robinson expressed the Committee's eagerness to have Sen. Johnson on the EOC and to learn from him.

Then, Mr. Robinson recognized Dr. Lee D'Andrea, who has evaluated the implementation of the Palmetto Digital Literacy program this school year for the EOC. The Palmetto Digital Literacy Program is an initiative of Learning.com, an American-based company, providing software and technology tools to students, school and districts. The General Assembly appropriated \$1.3 million in the 2016-17 General Appropriation Act for this initiative and charged the EOC with overseeing the program.

Regarding implementation, Dr. D'Andrea noted that 35 of the 46 school districts that were eligible to participate in the digital literacy program in school year 2016-17 implemented the program this school year with variations in their level of implementation. Dr. D'Andrea conducted onsite visits to fourteen of these districts and conducted surveys of districts. Furthermore, as of March 17, there were 16,241 unique student accounts on Learning.com. Overall district and teacher satisfaction surveys indicated a 4.59 out of 5.0 rating with the program. Many districts, though not all, conducted pre and post-assessments to measure the impact of the software on student learning. Based upon the assessments, visits and surveys of the districts, Dr. D'Andrea made the following overall findings:

(1) There is a demonstrated and articulated need for instructional materials in the areas of keyboarding, digital literacy and internet safety, inquiring learning through technology integration and coding in schools among students in grades kindergarten through grade 8. Districts reported that the number one current need is keyboarding application based on the on-line state testing to be implemented. Students without keyboarding skills are clearly disadvantaged when responding to items with a required written response. In pre-assessment data, 15.3% of the students scored Proficient on the Pre-Assessment of skills correlated to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). This data clearly indicates a need for teaching and learning digital skills.

(2) There are significant unmet infrastructure needs in the provision of digital learning environments for students. The infrastructure includes the hardware distribution model developed by the district (types of devices and numbers per student as well as teacher access), the backbone of the hardware distribution system (servers, routers, wireless access points, back-up plans and staff to set-up and maintain) and the software (programs, apps and internet resources) available to the teachers and students.

(3) More extensive planning time and professional development are needed as digital learning environment are created with schools and districts. Lab managers, teachers and district contact staff reported the need for additional planning time to best use the software for integration in other content areas.

The recommendations were as follows:

(1) Continue the implementation of the Palmetto Digital Learning Project for FY2017-2018, collecting data on student achievement through January 2018, to make more informed decisions about the effectiveness of the software on student learning in the areas of keyboarding and digital learning. Since the funds are appropriated through the EOC, the EOC should contact districts currently enrolled to notify them of the program's extension and to require pre and post-assessment data. If possible, professional development and planning time for teachers in the summer and fall for 2017 should be negotiated with Learning.com.

(2) At the state level, some guidance should be provided for districts regarding models of distribution that are effective with different budgets. Priority planning should focus on student

learning and teacher preparation. In addition, assistance in budget review and planning should be provided.

(3) Technology resources must be the focus of instructional support for students. Students without access to technology are at a disadvantage; the achievement and poverty gap will only grow wider. In addition, the state must focus on a revision of the traditional textbook procurement and delivery process while developing a statewide process for the planning, review and provision of software products.

Mr. Robinson asked the staff to distribute to the EOC members a memorandum that he received a few hours prior to the meeting from the State Superintendent of Education regarding this report. He asked Dr. D'Andrea to respond to the three issues noted in the letter.

Dr. D'Andrea took each issue and provided the following observations:

1. VirtualSC has developed an elementary keyboarding course that is used in 41 districts with 67,570 active students. As Dr. D'Andrea noted, with the 35 districts participating in the Palmetto Digital Literacy program and with the 41 using the VirtualSC, there still are likely districts not using any curriculum. If the VirtualSC program has pre and post-assessment results, it might be beneficial to compare the effectiveness of Learning.com with the VirtualSC course.

2. Regarding Finding 2, the unmet infrastructure needs, the Department has convened follow-up meetings to share expertise. The Department will also implement a new State Education Technology Plan on July 1, 2017. Such efforts reinforce the findings of the report.

3. Regarding Recommendation 3 about procuring software, the Department has pursued developing its own digital resources and has conducted open source digital materials curation. Dr. D'Andrea noted districts would still welcome a list of approved, effective software in the future.

Mr. Robinson agreed with Dr. D'Andrea that evaluating the impact of Learning.com with the VirtualSC course would provide beneficial information. Sen. Matthews noted that the Abbeville equity lawsuit has created a firestorm of vendors wanting to provide services to districts in the lawsuit. However, the top-down approach is still not addressing larger issues of capacity in the districts. Sen. Hembree concurred with Sen. Matthews that solutions have not focused on key policies and barriers in these districts. Sen. Hembree also agreed that choosing schools to participate using a needs-based criteria rather than participation in the Abbeville lawsuit would be a more effective public policy. Sen. Johnson asked if districts that did not participate in the pilot in the prior year could still participate in school year 2017-18. Mrs. Barton stated that she would personally reach out to districts this month and gauge their interest as well as plan for professional development opportunities. Rep. Loftis asked if someone from the Department of Education could respond to the vetting of software. Emily Heatwole, Director of Legislative Affairs with the Department of Education explained that a proviso in the general appropriation bill as adopted by the Senate would require the Department of Education and the State Board of Education to review the current process for the adoption and appropriation of instructional materials and establish an updated process that will include both print and digital instructional materials and to report to Governor and General Assembly by December 1 of 2017.

Mr. Robinson then called for the Subcommittee reports.

Academic Standards and Assessment

With Dr. Merck not in attendance, Mrs. Barton summarized the recommendation of the ASA Subcommittee to approve revised evaluation criteria for adopting formative assessments. The revised criteria reflect the changes proposed by the State Board of Education at its February 14 meeting as well as one additional amendment proposed by the Subcommittee. The additional criteria would require any vendor providing K-2 formative assessments in ELA or mathematics to provide a score or range of scores that identify whether or not a student is on track to meet or exceed English language arts/reading or mathematics standards by the end of third grade using nationally normed data. Rep. Felder asked for clarification from the SC Department of Education regarding criteria 14. She asked specifically when the Department would complete its own analysis of K-2 formative assessment data and SC Ready results. Liz Jones, Director of Assessment, and Dr. Sheila Quinn, Deputy Superintendent for Innovation and Effectiveness at the Department of Education responded that the studies would be completed this spring. Rep. Felder asked what happens when a formative assessment identifies that a student is at risk of having a reading disorder. She inquired if the student would receive additional screenings as described in a public hearing on pending legislation. Neither Dr. Quinn nor Ms. Jones were able to respond to Rep. Felder's inquiry since they were not in attendance at the specific hearing and are not involved in implementation of Read to Succeed.

There being no further questions, the committee voted unanimously to approve the revised formative assessment criteria.

EIA and Improvement Mechanisms

With Dr. Couch not in attendance, Ms. Ward of the EOC staff provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the report on military-connected students. While reporting of military-connected students and federally-connected students has improved, additional efforts should be made to collect data that would increase the amount of federal impact aid allocated to districts. Regarding the achievement of military-connected students, military-connected students continue to outperform their peers in English language arts, mathematics and science in all grades. The attendance of military-connected students was down slightly due to an increase in deployments. The report also includes documentation of the implementation of the Military Child Education Coalition in Fiscal Year 2016-17. The initiative was funded through the EOC.

There being no further questions, the committee voted unanimously to approve the report and forward it on to the Governor and General Assembly.

Public Awareness

Ms. Hairfield guided the EOC through 2017-18 Communications and Public Awareness Plan. She emphasized three objectives and five audiences (general public, parents, educators, business and policymakers) that the EOC will focus its public awareness plan around. Mrs. Hairfield noted that one of the measures to be addressed is developing civic-life ready competencies to support the Profile of the SC Graduate and exploring assessments, rubrics, or other measures to assess these competencies at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Members asked for clarification on the plan. There being no further debate, the committee approved the 2017-18 Communications/Public Awareness Plan.

Old Business

Mr. Robinson called upon Mrs. Barton to update the Committee on the pending accountability legislation. Mrs. Barton provided an overview of the status and components of H.3969 and S.534, which are currently being debated in the General Assembly. She focused her remarks on three key components: assessment, ratings and report cards. In addition Mrs. Barton provided

data to the subcommittee that had been requested from members of the General Assembly regarding the results of the 2016 administration of the ACT to all 11th graders. She also updated the members on the 2017-18 General Appropriation Bill as adopted by the Senate and the House, emphasizing appropriations for accountability. Sen. Hembree noted that the Senate would take up H.3969 since the bill was referred to the Senate prior to the cross-over date and that the debate would likely focus on the future of the 11th grade college and career readiness assessments.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.