

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Meeting
June 9, 2014

EOC Members Present: Mr. Phillip Bowers; Sen. Mike Fair; Mrs. Margaret Anne Gaffney; Ms. Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Wes Hayes; Mr. Alex Martin; Dr. Danny Merck; Mr. Neil Robinson; Rep. Andy Patrick; Ms. Patti Tate; Rep. Roland Smith; Mr. John Warner; Mr. David Whittemore; and Dr. Mick Zais

EOC Staff Present: Mrs. Melanie Barton; Ms. Paulette Geiger; Dr. Rainey Knight; and Mrs. Dana Yow

Mr. Whittemore called the meeting to order. He announced that the EOC's annual retreat would be on August 11-12 in Hilton Head Island. Mr. Whittemore also announced that the audio system related to the online streaming system was not working.

Then turning to the agenda, the members unanimously approved the minutes of the April 28, 2014 meeting of the EOC.

Subcommittee reports were then received.

Academic Standards and Assessments – Dr. Merck reported that the subcommittee did not meet in May. However, due to passage of H.3893 the General Assembly had created a special assessment panel that would be assisting the Executive Director of the Budget and Control Board in securing an assessment in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3 through 8 and 9 and 10 if funds are available and a college and career readiness assessment for all students in grade 11. All students entering the 11th grade for the first time in school year 2014-15 will take both the WorkKeys assessment and the procured college and career readiness assessment. Dr. Merck announced that he was serving on the assessment panel. He notified the committee that on June 19 there would be a public hearing to get input on the characteristics of the assessments. He encouraged EOC members to notify staff their constituents and attend if they desired.

Ms. Hairfield asked about the cyclical review of the current standards. Mrs. Barton notified the EOC that the agency would be contracting with a vendor to provide an online survey that the public could access to comment on the strengths, weaknesses, etc., of the current standards. The survey will be online in July.

EIA and Improvement Mechanisms – Mr. Martin reported for the committee. The first item was the 2012-13 report on the Teacher Loan Program, as required by state law. Mr. Martin summarized the key components of the report noting that the number of applicants to the program has decreased over two years by 45 percent while the pipeline of teachers from the Teacher Cadet Program continues to be strong. The South Carolina Teacher Loan Advisory Committee has been formed and is working on the marking of the program, especially focusing on recruiting minorities and recruiting individuals from areas of the state that have traditionally had great difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers.

Mr. Robinson moved to approve the report while Rep. Patrick seconded the motion. The EOC unanimously approved the report.

Mr. Martin then discussed the report on online education in South Carolina. The report presented two conclusions: first, students in an online learning setting made academic gains that were the same as the gains made by students in a traditional learning environment.

Second, all constituents of the online learning setting (students, parents, and teachers) reported more favorable attitudes regarding the learning environment of their schools.

Mr. Martin then called upon Mrs. Barton to provide an update on the Fiscal Year 2014-15 General Appropriation Bill. Mrs. Barton focused on the funding of the Governor's education initiative and of the Read to Succeed legislation. She discussed the funding of technology, reading coaches, expansion of the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP), increased funding of summer reading camps, and the early literacy assessment.

Public Awareness Subcommittee – Mrs. Hairfield noted that the subcommittee had not met but the staff continues to implement the Communications Plan for school year 2014-15.

Then Mr. Whittemore recognized Dr. Knight to provide an overview of the model district reading plan. The Read to Succeed legislation requires that the district reading plan that was piloted this year in districts must be used in school year 2014-15 while the Read to Succeed Office develops a state reading plan. Thirty-three educators met in August at the EOC and looked at reading plans of other states including Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi and Florida. Then between November and December the group designed a South Carolina plan. In the spring semester twelve districts piloted the plan, providing input to the EOC. The EOC staff has met with over 400 individuals, including English language arts coordinators, superintendents and assistant superintendents, who have participated in designing and redesigning the plan.

Dr. Knight also discussed two initiatives that the EOC will undertake this summer as part of the P-20 reading initiative. The EOC will work with 20 districts to evaluate pre- and post-camp reading achievement levels and to document the best practices used in these summer reading camps. Then this fall Dr. Knight will report back to the EOC. In addition to a survey, Dr. Knight and EOC staff will visit each summer reading camp in these districts to document the programs. And, finally, the EOC and South Carolina ETV will work together to showcase two districts, Barnwell 45 and Darlington, who have designed innovative approaches to the summer reading camp. Barnwell 45 has focused on engaging the business and faith-based community while Darlington is expanding its summer reading camp to address the needs of younger children as well as rising fourth graders in addition to utilizing the camps as an opportunity for professional development for teachers.

Mr. Bowers commented that some schools and districts have too few students to provide a program. Dr. Zais commented that districts need flexibility in meeting the needs of its struggling readers.

Readiness Assessment of Early Literacy - The General Assembly approved a proviso in the budget that requires the EOC to recommend the characteristics of an early literacy readiness assessment to the State Board of Education by July 30, 2014. Mrs. Barton presented to the EOC a document proposing nine characteristics of such an assessment. The characteristics were developed from multiple sources including the January 2014 report on the CDEPP program and from individuals who participated in the P-20 reading initiative. Mr. Neal asked about the early literacy assessment and whether Head Start entities would be able to use the assessment. Sen. Fair and Mrs. Baton commented that the proviso allows does "publicly" funded four-year-old providers to use the assessment, and thus includes Head Start.

To meet the timeframe for procuring the assessment, Mr. Robinson moved to approve the characteristics of the early literacy assessment and then forward the recommendations to the Board of Trustees for the Office of First Steps to School Readiness for its consideration. If any changes are made, then the EOC staff would communicate those changes to EOC members who would then record their approval via online voting. Mr. Martin seconded the motion. The EOC approved the motion with Mr. Warner asking to be recorded as voting no.

There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

Note: On June 26, 2014, EOC members were forwarded an online survey to comment on suggested additions to the characteristics of the early literacy assessment RFP from the SC First Steps Board. Six responses were received: five were "yes" votes. Voting "no", John Warner requested the following statement be reflected in the minutes:

"My objection remains from when the EOC originally voted on this initiative. More top down standards and high stakes testing will teach no child in South Carolina to read. We need to move in the opposite direction by treating teachers as professionals and giving them the flexibility to do their jobs. Collectively we don't trust teachers to do their jobs, which is why we insist on a top down approach, so we need to address that problem rather than piling on more mandates and testing. I would like this objection included in the minutes where this vote is recorded."