SC EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

October 12, 2020
Blatt Building, Room 110
1:00 p.m.

Members present: Ellen Weaver, Chair; Dr. Bob Couch (via WebEx), Vice-Chair; Rep. Raye Felder; Rep. Neal Collins; Melanie Barton; Barbara Hairfield; Dr. Scott Turner; Patti Tate; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Rep. Terry Alexander; Neil Robinson; Sen Greg Hembree; April Allen; and Dr. Brian Newsome

EOC staff present: Matthew Ferguson; Dr. Kevin Andrews; Dr. Valerie Harrison; Dr. Rainey Knight; Hope Johnson Jones and Dana Yow

Others Present: Dr. Lee D'Andrea and Diane Sigmon

Ms. Weaver called the full committee meeting to order, asking for approval of the minutes from the August 3 full EOC meeting. The minutes were approved and seconded.

Dr. Couch asked Ms. Hairfield to present an update from the Public Awareness/Academic Standards and Assessments subcommittee. Ms. Hairfield summarized the Community Block Grants Evaluation for 2018-19.

Community Block Grant Evaluation for 2018-19

- At subcommittee, Dr. Lee D'Amico presented the results of the evaluation that was completed of the grants that were received in 2018-19. Seven districts or consortia received funding: Berkeley; Chesterfield; Greenwood 50; Lexington/Richland 5; Pee Dee Consortia; Spartanburg Consortia; and York 1. The range of funding per district/consortia was $84,156 to $240,050
- The report provides a summary of findings which were collected by an evaluation team from USC and Clemson. Data included mid-year and end-of-year numbers and assessment results; end-of-year outcomes based on logic model; impact survey; site surveys with each district/consortium; and development of profiles for each district/consortium with review.
- Some of the outcomes of the evaluation were:

Berkeley

- Improved teacher-student interactions in targeted classrooms from baseline to mid-year in three domains of CLASS

Chesterfield

- Expanded 4K in district by six classrooms to better meet needs of community

- Improved school-home partnership through repeated reading initiative based on common titles in classrooms that are also provided to families for at-home reading

Greenwood 50

- Student referrals decreased by 61% from 2018-19 to 2019-20 when comparing August-March of each school year

School District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties

- Increase in total key practices from 55% at the beginning year to 85% at mid-year

- Increase in the number of teachers who improved key practices from 72% to 100%

Pee Dee Consortia

- Approximately 85% of teachers scored a 75% or higher on the TPOT in Fall 2019

- TPOT data over time indicated positive correlation between improvements and amount of professional development

- Social-Emotional Assessment Measure (SEAM) piloted with Florence 1 teachers; teachers shared SEAM data with parents and goals for each student with the parent

Spartanburg Consortia

- Expanded initiative to include eleven new 4K classrooms within three new districts

York One

- More than 50% of children who participated in summer program demonstrated improved skills in letter/number recognition

- Parents who participated in Parent Institute indicated improved knowledge/skills

Ms. Hairfield asked Dr. D'Andrea to present an eLearning update to the EOC.

eLearning Update

Dr. Lee D'Andrea presented to the EOC a report Year 3 of the eLearning Project. Currently, there are 49 eLearning districts and 23 Readiness Districts

In the previous years, there were a total of 15 eLearning districts. The pandemic and its impacts changed the landscape of eLearning.

Details of the previous findings:

- In the implementation of eLearning, district leadership and organizational structure were vital and critical to the overall success of each district. Commitment from the district superintendent, school boards and district and building level staff are critical.
- Successfully separating from the physical school space is *based on the foundation of a well-established digital learning environment within the physical classroom*. This pilot project examined the use of eLearning when schools were forced to close (or separate students from the physical space) for short periods of time, in cases of inclement weather, utility emergencies, out of school suspension or student illness. An extensively

implemented Learning Management System (LMS) like Google Classroom, Canvas, Blackboard, or Schoology is critical.

- Preparation and planning make a difference in the quality of the migration from digital learning environment (in school) to eLearning (away from school).

The lessons learned from eLearning districts have been critical as online learning for extended periods of time has been extended. The foundation may be different, but equity and access can help equalize. Students with special needs must be addressed, as well as student support for wrap-around services, like guidance and mental health counseling.

Ms. Barton said that one district is entirely virtual now, but they are not on the list. Dr. D'Andrea said that a few districts started applications but didn't complete them.

Dr. Turner asked if there is an opportunity for the state to allow districts more bandwidth. Ms. Barton said that K-12 Technology Committee would be the group to ask about this.

Ms. Hairfield stated there is a need for wraparound services to occur. She also asked about the teacher evaluation 4.0 rubric; would the rubric be revised to involve teachers who are teaching remotely?

Rep. Collins asked if we know from March to May how many students were without access. Ms. Nilges stated that number was approx. 16,000 students.

Ms. Hairfield resumed an update on other items that came before her subcommittee.

Re-think K-12 Grant

- In July, it was announced that SC was the recipient of $15 million in funding for the Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant from the US Dept of Education as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

South Carolina's application, titled *Return to Learn: Delivery Quality Instruction Virtually Anywhere*, once carried out, will:

- Increase availability of remote learning resources to students and teachers in areas of SC that lack broadband access;
- Improve education resources for specific, identified gaps by developing and curating engaging, high-quality content;
- Increase teacher experience, confidence, and proficiency with remote learning technology and resources;
- Improve communication between families, teachers, and schools to support remote learning.

- The EOC is a partner in this grant, along with SCETV. Part of the EOC's role will be to improve the supports for remote learning for families and educators.

Communications Plan

- EOC staff maintains a thorough communications plan to identify ways to improve how the EOC communicates with, relates to, and influences its various stakeholder groups. The plan is updated at least every two years to support and enhance the overall mission and values of the agency.

- The EOC's mission is to affect the dramatic, results-based and continuous improvement of South Carolina's educational system by creating a truly collaborative environment of parents, educators, community leaders, and policymakers. The values, which support the mission of the EOC, are:
    - A sole focus on what is best for students;
    - A belief in broad-based inclusion and collaboration;
    - A belief in rigorous standards, assessments and publicly known results;
    - The implementation of research and fact-based solutions that improve results; and
    - A passion for immediate, dramatic and continuous improvement that is unaffected by partisan politics.
- The EOC Retreat on August 3, 2020 was devoted to strategic planning; communications emerged as an area in need of operational improvement. High expectations still matter for students and data-informed decisions can be more made more difficult when the data is not accessible or available. Now more than ever, it is important to provide timely and accurate information to everyone who is a member of a student's success team, whether they are a teacher, parent, caregiver, school board member, or a legislator making decisions designed to benefit all students in the state.

The proposed objectives for FY2020-21 are:

1. Increase the use of state and school report cards and other sources of data for decision-making and continuous student and school improvement.
2. Support a more coherent approach to effectively deploy and utilize the array of data and public reporting tools.
3. Continue to implement public awareness strategies which focus on providing support to students and families served by the PK-12 public school system as well as teachers.
4. Equip and empower parents and families to advocate in partnership with community organizations, businesses and others to be aware of, and part of, school improvement efforts.

For each of the objectives, there are specific strategies are tactics outlined for communicating with different stakeholder groups. The groups, or intended audiences of the EOC, are identified as:
1. Parents and families of school-age children
2. Education community
3. Policymakers (legislators, State Board of Ed., School Board members
4. Business leaders and community members

Some other highlighted activities of the plan include:
- Analysis of remote learning March 2020-June 2020: high level briefings for policymakers and materials for educators to use.
- Develop online tool to help families and students plan for high school, college, and careers (2016 High School Task Force recommendation)
- Update tool to help families understand early childhood options
- Develop materials for families to support students who are learning remotely (ReThink grant)

- Update Family-Friendly standards for Social Studies

Ms. Barton said she has a newfound appreciation for all the data that comes out, and she supports efforts to give data more emphasis

Ms. Weaver asked about assessing the current staff capacity since there is a lot in the plan. Mr. Ferguson said we have talked about bringing in more help in the communications area.

Dr. Newsome updated the committee on the cyclical review of the accountability system.

The Accountability Advisory Committee continues its work, completing the Cyclical Review of the Accountability System, which is required every 5 years. The EOC should expect to see the Accountability Framework at its December meeting. It is expected that there will be short-term recommendations as well as long-term recommendations made in that framework. Since there is not a deadline in the law that outlines when that report goes to the General Assembly, we may perhaps want to have discussion about working with members of the State Board of Education following the report's release to make certain that recommendations for moving forward are clearly outlined.

EOC members also took a survey on the accountability system, and the results were shared with the subcommittee. As a summary:
- Members ranked *High quality instruction, Safe Learning Environment*, and *Rigorous Core Academics* as the most important school characteristics

- In terms of school improvement, members ranked *effective leadership, assessments, and instruction* and most important

- In looking at important measures to include in an education accountability system, the following items ranked highest: *Progress in reducing the achievement gap among students and 3rd grade reading success*

- *Measures of workplace skills and results on college and career readiness exam results* are considered the most important data to have when determining college and career success of students

- When looking the Profile of the SC Graduate, the skills and characteristics EOC members felt were the most important were *Integrity, Perseverance, and Work Ethic.*

- In terms of the current accountability system, over 40% of respondents felt that 90 to 95% of students should be performing at grade level or above in ELA and math for a school to receive the highest rating

- The majority felt that school report cards are effective tools to improve education, but some felt that they label schools and are divisive

- The point weightings in the current system were largely agreed with except it was recommended more weight be given to Academic Achievement in ELA and Math for elementary, middle, and high schools.

- Finally, there was general agreement that schools and student success should be celebrated with state recognition and awards; increased funding; community recognition; and additional resources and support.

Ms. Felder asked about the survey results. Ms. Yow stated that they would see the full, larger set of survey results once the final recommendations came forward to the EOC. What the EOC had been given was just the results of the survey of EOC members only.

Dr. Turner stated he agreed with the academic achievement piece; we do need multiple data points.

Mr. Ferguson gave an accountability overview and update. He reminded the committee that the SCDE is submitting a waiver to the USDE that requests all federally accountability-related testing requirements be waived for the current school year. He gave the committee members an overview of the current system and the impact of waivers on the 20-21 report cards and other potential issues. He put forth the following staff recommendations:

1. EOC staff recommends a commitment to administering state assessments to all students in SY 20-21 to provide statewide and district level data.

   - Given the unprecedented instructional disruption that has occurred as a result of COVID-19, the importance of understanding and being transparent about student mastery of state standards has never been more critical. We have a responsibility to provide policymakers and education leaders the information required to make data-informed decisions.

2. EOC staff recommends requesting from *SCDE* a plan to administer assessments to a sample of students in SY20-21 to provide state level data by subgroup in the event it is not possible to administer state assessments to all students.

   - Recognizing that schools and educational delivery have never looked like they must this year, we must remain adaptable and resist the urge to continue as we always have simply because that is how it has always been done while also acknowledging our responsibility to know so we can continue to do better.

3. EOC staff recommends waiving school ratings for SY 20-21.

   - Because the administration of state level assessment was waived in Spring '20, there are significant gaps in the data available to calculate school ratings for SY 20-21. Up to 50 points of the elementary / middle school report card are significantly affected. Forty (40) points of the high school report card are potentially affected.

There was a question about why the student survey was chosen. Ms. Barton stated that the student voice was given priority in the last cyclical review.

Ms. Weaver asked for members to consider a 4th recommendation: the EOC recommends the publication of school report cards for SY 20-21 by October 2021 to include all available data. The committee concurred.

Ms. Allen stated she had a very grave concern about what children are missing, particularly those that don't have an opportunity to go to preschool.

Members inquired about the COVID slide, if we knew what it was? We don't know what the slide is although we have predictions now from the psychometricians that show up to a year's loss nationally.

Ms. Tate mentioned MAP, stating that some of these students will not have math until 2nd semester so she thinks the data will be skewed in the remote learning study. Pre-assessment data will still be relevant. Pre and post for December will be relevant.

Ms. Allen asked if there was a statewide strategy for footnoting exceptions and determining what was missed and how we are going to make that up for these children? We need data about what students are getting this year – access to devices and broadband? We need to collect that data. How is instruction given: Synchronous vs. asynchronous?

Rep Alexander suggested we are wasting money and time in testing during a pandemic possibly. We are putting these kids through all the things in the pandemic and then making them test. It bothers him that the process is so hung up on testing. We have tested students for years and we are still showing that we are not doing as well as we should. He stated that kids don't have the resources that they need. He said we don't know how this thing will pan out; wasn't there a policy for hold harmless, grace over grades?

Mr. Robinson said he likes the sampling recommendation and asked for clarification on the subgroup reporting piece.

Dr. Turner asked if we know how many different assessments were approved for districts to give? Mr. Ferguson believes it is 6 or 7. Do you know how many modified assessments to make it a true pre-test? Do you know of all the assessments available to students if they chose the completely virtual option? The preference was that students had to come into the school building, but you can look at that to see if students took assessments remotely or in person, said Mr. Ferguson. Dr. Turner agrees that we need the assessments but the results need to be heavily asterixed.

Rep. Alexander said he just doesn't like testing in the middle of a pandemic.

Ms. Tate said she lives in a high school world. Educators are for accountability and are not opposed to testing and accountability. She is about qualitative data, not just quantitative. These tests take 2 to 3 hours. We have 18 of these tests this year. She is concerned that children are losing 18 times of instructional opportunities. There are stories behind these numbers. Also, we must consider logistics and social distancing.

Rep Collins doesn't agree with recommendation #3; he thinks that this is an even better year to have ratings schools. Mr. Ferguson said there is no way to rate schools this year the way we have done in year's past. Some states are looking at skip year growth. There is so much variation between synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning.

Rep. Collins asked about going out further. We hopefully would be able to do that because we would be able to do growth. He thinks ratings are a little more complex but can still be done.

Sen. Hembree offered a different viewpoint. He typically feels very strongly about honest, clear data. We have asked teachers and administrators to build this airplane while they are flying it. He thinks the little bit of benefit in having ratings this year would be outweighed by the human response in the field.

Rep. Felder stated it reminds her of the spring when we didn't grade students. Students are still working. Our entire state was impacted by a catastrophe. We are talking about something a year down the road, and she believes this is a preliminary discussion at this point. We have spent so much time trying to be open and honest with parents and communities. We must be able to show the difference between having a teacher in the classroom face to face vs the alternative. She thinks districts will find a way to get the kids caught back up.

Ms. Weaver said she thinks it is important to have this discussion now.

Mr. Robinson stated that he thinks we lose credibility as an accountability body if we rate schools without all the data we need. He suggested forwarding the recommendations to the Gen Assembly and let them decide. Sen. Hembree seconded the motion.

Dr. Newsome said staff did a great job on recommendations. It would be difficult to give a rating this year.

Ms. Weaver asked how we are measuring absenteeism in the state? Very important data point to have, and we need to be strategic and purposeful now. Ellen would like to see a suggestion of additional data to be collected.

Dr. Tuner stated that this year is a standalone year in terms of creating a new rating system; this year is so unique.

Ms. Nilges followed up on an earlier question, stating the SCDE is partnering with others to find children who are absent from school. They are being proactive. Not everyone is being counted present, like they were in the spring.

Rep. Collins asked about how we will do ratings next year since growth will be an issue. Mr. Ferguson reminded members that the cyclical review report would come to them in December.

A motion was made to accept the recommendations. The vote was seconded and passed unanimously.

Ms. Weaver recommended the formation of a Nominating Committee to nominate the EOC Chair and Vice Chair. Members will include: Mr. Robinson, Dr. Couch, and Rep. Alexander.

Ms. Weaver also recommended the formation of a Strategic Planning Subcommittee, who will be receiving a Governance Study, which was being conducted by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The members are as follows: Dr. Bob Couch, Chair; April Allen; Melanie Barton; Rep. Neal Collins; Rep. Raye Felder; Sen. Greg Hembree; Sen. Kevin Johnson; Neil Robinson; and Dr. Scott Turner. Ms. Weaver will serve Ex Officio and Mr. Ferguson will staff.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.