

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Full Committee Meeting
Minutes of the Meeting
June 10, 2024

Members Present (in-person or remote): April Allen, Melanie Barton, Russell Baxley, Dr. Bob Couch, Rep. Bill Hager, Barbara Hairfield, Sen. Kevin Johnson, Sen. Dwight Loftis, Jeri McCumbee, Melissa Pender, Sen. Ross Turner

EOC Staff Present: Tenell Felder, Gabrielle Fulton, Hope Johnson-Jones, Dr. Rainey Knight, Dr. Matthew Lavery, Dr. Jenny May, Dana Yow

Guest(s) Present: Dr. Matthew Ferguson, SCDE; Sally Cauthen, Consultant; Dr. Sara Jane Arnett, Consultant

EOC Executive Director Dana Yow opened the meeting and welcomed EOC committee member Jeri McCumbee as the new business appointee of Senator Greg Hembree.

Ms. Yow then asked for a motion to approve the April 8 full committee minutes. After the minutes were approved, Academic Standards and Assessments (ASA) subcommittee Vice Chair Barbara Hairfield was asked to give a report of the May 20th ASA subcommittee meeting.

Ms. Hairfield reported the ASA subcommittee received one information item from EOC Deputy Director Dr. Matthew Lavery on the cut score concordance of college readiness exams – specifically for the ACT and SAT. The subcommittee has received data on this topic and had discussions for several months with the goal of finding an equivalent score for both tests.

The subcommittee did not act on this item and expect to receive it as an action item in September.

Next, Ms. Hairfield reported that the ASA subcommittee approved the 2023 Report on the Educational Performance of Military Connected Students. The report found that military connected students outperformed their peers on all measures of academics.

Citing an increase in students having one parent die as a result of military service, one report recommendation was to monitor military connected students who have experienced loss or trauma and work with school-based liaisons with specialized training to both identify and effectively support these students.

Ms. Hairfield stated the report also indicated a lack of military student identifier collection protocol at the national level. As a result, states have difficulty in accurately capturing data on military connected students. It was recommended processes be put in place to accurately identify military connected students, and that if not implemented, the reporting accuracy would continue to have challenges. Recommendations for this include working to incentivize school reporting for military connected students within school district information systems.

Also included in the report was a recommendation to include military connected students as a filter on the SC Education Data Dashboard which would give the public access to the data. By surfacing this data publicly, districts that currently do not report will be incentivized to change data collection practices to improve data collection and quality.

Ms. Hairfield concluded her report and asked for a motion from the committee to approve the 2023 Report on the Educational Performance of Military Connected Students.

The motion carried as all were in favor.

Ms. April Allen then invited Dr. Bob Couch, chairman of the Education Improvement Act committee, to share the committee's report.

Dr. Couch stated he would share with the committee the findings and recommendations presented of the Teacher Loan Program (TLP) report. He stated he would be reporting on the governance of the program, funding, data collection and quality, and on the teacher pipeline.

Dr. Couch informed the committee that the EIA subcommittee met on May 20th and received an EIA budget update from Dr. Knight. He stated that at the retreat the committee should have the final information for the 2024-25 budget.

The 2024 TLP report was presented to the EIA subcommittee by Sally Cauthen, Consultant to the EOC.

The following points were presented in the governance findings:

- The TLP statute did not provide governance structure conducive to a single entity to have the authority to manage the program – including to take the actions for the TLP recommendations.
- Funding for all loan types have remained at the same level for 10 years or more.
- Balance in the revolving loan fund has more than doubled. This was suggestive of the programs perceived value to program participants.

The following point was presented in the data collection and reporting findings:

- The reporting process is labor intensive and paper driven, including self-reported data for some of the more significant data points.

The following points were presented in the Teacher Pipeline findings:

- The percentage of Alternative Certification programs and international teacher hires are the only categories of teacher hires that have increased over the past year.
- Program goals for African American and Male TLP applicants and recipients are not being met even though the respective thresholds are low.
- After two years of noticeable decline the number of students enrolled in bachelor and masters level education preparation programs for public and private institutions declined only slightly
- Clemson and USC have 1/3 of the overall enrollment of education prep programs. Clemson shows a 56.7% bachelor's enrollment increase since 2014, USC-Columbia a 28% decrease (but a slight uptick the last two years).
- Teacher cadets continue to be a significant source of TLP recipients.

Dr. Couch then presented the EIA subcommittee recommendations which included the following:

- The Teacher Loan Advisory Committee (TLAC) be directed to perform a critical review of the TLP report and submit to the EOC viable recommendations.
- A single entity be designated to direct the program and implement changes.

- The review of core program components for all three loan types, statutes, provisos and regulations governance approach, goals, loans and loan structure amounts.
- Establish clearly defined and targeted goals with measurable outcomes.

He then presented other recommendations that included consolidating type 2 and 3 funding with type 1 funding, streamlining and modernizing the TLP application process, and emphasizing methods to increase efforts for each component of the teacher pipeline and establish goals and expectations for each. Dr. Couch bought the recommendations for approval to the committee, after which Ms. Allen asked if there were any questions or comments.

Melanie Barton commented that the education field is facing multiple issues, citing nationwide teaching shortages. She suggested using the \$21 million revolving loan funds to incentivize more people to consider teaching, especially in rural communities. Barton also stated that a major problem is that no one entity is responsible for the TLP.

Senator Kevin Johnson asked how schools fund positions before ESSER funds. He noted he would need to be able to explain that to constituents.

Ferguson responded that it was not currently known how many teachers would be affected by the withdrawal of ESSER funds, but that a lot of the positions were created as new positions with ESSER funding.

Senator Dwight Loftis then asked how many of those positions were teaching positions.

Ferguson responded that it depended on how the district allocated their resources, but that many of those positions were coaches and interventionists.

In summary, Ms. Yow stated that the biggest recommendation to come out of the report is the EOC asking the TLAC to provide a report to the EOC on the Teacher Loan Program. She also suggested that the \$21 million in the RLF could be used to innovatively market the program or to market the teaching profession.

Allen asked if there were any other questions. As there were none, she asked for a motion to accept the report and recommendations from the EIA subcommittee.

The motion carried.

Next Dr. Jenny May and Dr. Rainey Knight were called forward to present the findings of the EOC's Beating the Odds Investigative Study (BTOIS).

Dr. Knight the presented the questions that drove data collection for BTOIS and explained the different phases of the study. The study will be carried out in two phases – the exploration phase and the confirmation phase. Each phase will be repeated at the middle and high school levels.

Dr. Knight shared that the partner schools selected to take part in the study had to meet the following criteria:

- Enrollment of more than 100 students.
- “Excellent” overall rating with no “Below Average” or “Unsatisfactory” indicator ratings.
- Poverty ratio greater than or equal to 77.6% based on average poverty index of elementary schools with an overall rating of “Below Average.”
- Open enrollment policies that do not permit admission based on application or criteria.

The partner schools for the elementary level were as follows: Cleveland Elementary School, Spartanburg 7 School District; Monaview Elementary School, Greenville School District; Latta Elementary School, Dillon 3 School District; Kelly Edwards Elementary School, Barnwell 29 School District; Mathews Elementary School, Greenwood 50 School District; Merrywood Elementary School, Greenwood 50 School District and Waterloo Elementary School, Laurens 55 School District.

Dr. Knight then referred to the BTOIS graphic which outlined themes that EOC staff observed at the partner schools. We talked about our interviews and the themes that emerged.

The themes included High Expectations (There is a solution-oriented focus present at the school. Principal, teachers, student, and community consistently hold belief in students and adults.); Strong Leadership (There is a strong principal present and a supportive superintendent.); School culture (Family environment. Coaching up through individualized professional development. Coaching out is an option when needed. Teachers feel empowered and their voices heard); Community culture (There is a strength-based perspective and strong communication); Effective Teachers-Strong Tier 1 Instruction (Classroom teachers deliver high quality instruction with high quality resources), and Consistent Use of Data (Data usage is visible in the school. Data drives instruction with sense of urgency).

Next, Dr. Knight stated that students holding high expectations believed they could do the work and that teachers had empowered their students to be able to do the work. The high expectations adults held meant that they did not see poverty as a factor in whether or not a child would be able to succeed. Teachers also provided “bell to bell” instruction with a “laser like” focus on instruction.

Dr. Knight then introduced the next theme: a strong school leadership team. This team consists of the instructional leadership team, strong principal and a supportive superintendent. She stated that of the leadership team, a strong principal was the most crucial aspect. Characteristics of strong principal observed during the study are as following: visibility in school and in the community, clear communication, approachable, supportive of staff, ability to use data for student success and have the ability to “coach up or coach out.”

Dr. Knight also noted that teachers expressed trust and respect for their leadership.

In conclusion for her section, Dr. Knight spoke of the superintendent’s role to support the principal, be knowledgeable of what is happening at the school, and to set reasonable high expectations. She also stressed the importance of the superintendent being seen in the community.

Next, Dr. May discussed the findings in school culture from the Beating the Odds Investigative Study. The study found that the culture at the partner schools reflected the following characteristics: strong relationships and authentic care for the community, teachers feeling heard and valued by school administration, professional development for staff is individualized and incorporated through “coaching up,” and celebration for success is balanced with consequences.

Dr. May then showed photos from schools visited during the study that showcased what school culture looked like in BTOIS partner schools. In one photo, Dr. May pointed out that school character posters were in English and Spanish which reflected the school culture valuing the community culture. In another photo, Dr. May showed how school signage was used to create a common culture in the school.

Next, Dr. May discussed the importance of BTOIS partner schools also having a strong community culture. She defined this as having strong relationships and utilization of all available resources in the community. She also defined it as the school valuing its community and not supplanting values and the existing culture. For specific examples of community culture, Dr. May showed photos from a community reading night she attended where books were supplied in English and Spanish for students. She also referred to a school that partnered with a local church to fund a math lab for students.

The next theme discussed was effective teachers and strong Tier 1 instruction for which teachers deliver high quality instruction with high quality resources. Other characteristic of this theme included preserved instructional time and longitudinal grade level planning.

Consistent use of data was the next theme observed at BTOIS partner schools. Dr. May stated that schools needed to monitor and know where their student are and to monitor progress. She recalled that in BTOIS partner schools, the following characteristics were observed: visible data usage, evidence of routine data meetings and progress monitoring, data-driven instruction, and a value and use of the accountability system for continuous quality improvement.

Dr. May referred to a specific principal who used data to also monitor students' patterns such as being picked up late or requests for additional food.

Following this Dr. May discussed the next steps of the BTOIS which includes a confirmatory analysis with additional qualifying BTOIS schools and an upcoming exploratory analysis for high schools and middle schools.

Questions and comments were then accepted.

Ms. Barton commented that the themes presented in the study were indicative of a well-functioning organization that knows their objective, problem solves, communicates and is data driven and asked the committee to consider how to duplicate its measures. She stated concern over keeping it going because of burn out that school principals experience. She also stated the need for principals and schools to be recognized for the hard work that they do.

Dr. Knight shared that the results of the study would be shared at SCASA by Drs. May and Lavery. She also stressed teachers using their instructional time effectively.

Dr. Couch then stated that having been a principal for ten years, he came to realize the importance of establishing relationships with teachers. He stated that what was revealed in the study concerning the importance of the school culture, leadership and standards was on target with what he experienced.

Melissa Pender commented that the report was powerful and that the importance of student self-efficacy and school culture stood out to her during the report. She asked if EOC staff saw any commonality in Tier 1 instruction beyond "bell-to-bell" instruction and goal setting.

Dr. Knight replied there was evidence of LETRS training, though not all schools were involved in LETRS. She stated it was evident that teachers felt responsibility for all students. Dr. May added that while there was not an overall uniformity in the instruction, EOC staff did observe progress monitoring. She also stated that she saw evidence in every school that when a teacher needed to supplement instruction after seeing that a child needed additional support, they were able to get the assistance needed to do so.

Ms. Yow stated they also observed Montessori instruction in some of the schools visited.

Ms. Pender then asked if the schools selected for this part of the study would be observed for a number of years or if new schools would be added.

Dr. Knight responded that these schools would be followed but that new schools would be added as well based on 2024 report cards. She also stated they are looking to add elementary and middle schools. She stated that for the confirmatory phase, the initial partner schools would be reviewed.

Ms. McCumbee then asked if EOC staff noted parental involvement in the visited schools and if they noted any behavioral issues.

Dr. May responded that a focus group of parents at one of the schools indicated that there was not enough parental involvement while the teachers at that same school regarded the parent involvement as fine. She noted this as an example of the differing opinions on the topic. She also added that in general, EOC staff did see a good bit of parental involvement.

Dr. Knight noted the importance of parents forming relationships with their students/ teachers.

This marked the conclusion of the presentation.

Next, Ms. Allen asked Dr. May to present to committee her findings for the Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children (ECENC) Fund Report.

Dr. May shared the timeline of the ECENC application process for schools. She then showed a graphic of the participating schools across the state noting that the upstate region had the most ECENC grants awarded at 670 and the most money per student.

She also noted that all CERRA regions had an increase in the number of grants though the funding decreased.

The EOC recommendations for the ECENC program were as follows:

- Convene the advisory committee of the ECENC, which is a requirement of Act 247.
- Offer summative state assessments to ECENC students in public schools.
- Consider the communication around the ECENC program and other scholarships.

Dr. May then asked if there were any questions.

Ferguson asked who should ask schools if they are interested in SC Ready, reiterating that the SC Department of Education's position was that any child could access SC Ready. He said if any schools in the program were trying to access SC Ready, that they could work to make it happen.

Senator Loftis asked for clarification if parent would go through the school to administer the SC assessment to which Ferguson replied yes.

That concluded Dr. May's presentation.

Following this, Ms. Yow was asked to present the recommendations from the SC K-12 Military Readiness Task Force.

She recalled that the task force was assembled in response to the vision statement adopted by the EOC on December 11, 2023 and that in January 2024, it was decided that the EOC would

create a working group of Military Recruiters, School Liaison Officers, School Liaison Program Managers, SC Purple Star School District Point of Contacts and Department of Education staff to define and measure the academic and physical characteristics of a “military-ready” student.

It was decided that the working group would make recommendations to the EOC no later than June 30, 2024.

Ms. Yow then provided the guiding questions that led the task force’s discussion:

- If we were to define and measure the academic and physical characteristics of military-ready students in K-12 public schools, what would that look like?
- What are the barriers to military readiness in the armed services that may be repaired with a focus on preparedness before enlistment?
- If the purpose of accountability is to incentivize behaviors (from students and adults) that lead to better student outcomes, is including military readiness in an accountability system advisable?

Key findings from the report were as follows:

- A lack of understanding of civics, misunderstanding of military service.
- There is difficulty in defining military readiness due to different requirements for each branch of service.
- SC currently uses the lowest published qualifying score (31) that any military branch uses for career-ready designation, although task force members noted that ASVAB scores are not consistently exclusionary.
- There is not currently a quantifiable, widely used way to measure physical fitness and general health among K-12 students.
- Meeting military readiness markers, enlistment, or receiving designations such as Purple Star should be incentivized for students and schools.

After presenting this, Ms. Yow presented the recommendations from the report. She stated that the recommendations were divided into four categories – accountability, physical fitness, civics education and awards/recognition.

For accountability recommendations, the task force stressed the importance of continuing to incorporate military readiness as a career readiness measure in the accountability system rather than making it a separate category. The task force also recommended that schools use military enlistment and/or entrance into an Officer Commissioning Program as a part of the Five-Year Student Success measure but stressed that the data must be provided from an authorized source and not self-reported.

For the physical fitness recommendation, the task force suggested that as a part of the 2025 cyclical review of the accountability system, an assessment of physical health and fitness be required. Ms. Yow stated that Connecticut includes physical fitness in its accountability.

As the recommendation for civics education, the task force suggested the removal of the state budget proviso that suspends the testing of social studies in grades 3-8.

As the recommendation for awards, it was suggested that military designations such as Purple Star are prominently displayed on a school and/or district’s Report Card.

After reviewing the findings and recommendations, Ms. Yow asked if there were any questions. As there were none, Ms. Allen asked for a motion to approve.

Once the motion and the second were given and accepted, the motion passed.

Following this, Ms. Allen asked for a motion to accept the ECENC report. The motion and the second was given and the motion passed.

Next, Ms. Yow reminded members about the upcoming EOC retreat.

Following this, the meeting was adjourned.