

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Meeting
June 8, 2015

Members in Attendance: David Whittemore (Chair); Dr. Danny Merck (Vice-Chair); Anne Bull; Dr. Bob Couch; Sen. Mike Fair; Rep. Raye Felder; Mrs. Margaret Anne Gaffney; Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Wes Hayes; Rep. Dwight Loftis; Deb Marks; Sen. John Matthews; Neil Robinson; The Honorable Molly Spearman; and Patti Tate

EOC Staff Present: Dr. Kevin Andrews; Mrs. Melanie Barton; Ms. Paulette Geiger; Ms. Bunnie Ward; and Ms. Dana Yow.

Mr. Whittemore called the meeting to order.

The minutes of March 9, 2015 meeting were amended to correct a typographical error and then approved.

Mr. Whittemore introduced Brenda Campbell, Principal of Saluda Trail Middle School in Rock Hill, a 2014 Exemplar School by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and TransformSC school. Ms. Campbell thanked the EOC for its support of innovation in public schools. She discussed the integration of the school from an International Baccalaureate School to a STEM school with an arts integration over the past three years. Saluda Trail is engaged in project-based learning with much involvement of the local community in assisting students in collaboration on real-world issues and applications. For example, over 450 individuals from the school participated in a school health fair that was organized and led by the 7th grade students. Ms. Spearman applauded Ms. Campbell on her leadership and the school's achievements.

Then Mr. Whittemore recognized Joe Waters, Vice President, of the Institute for Child Success. Mr. Waters congratulated the EOC on being named as a 2015 Champion for Children award recipient for its work on behalf of improving early literacy and early readiness. The Beaufort County School District was also a recipient. The EOC will be recognized at its research symposium on October. Mr. Whittemore thanked Mr. Waters for the recognition and expressed his hope that many EOC members would be able to attend the October meeting.

Mr. Whittemore asked Ritchie Tidwell and Dr. Joann Cox of Tidwell & Associates to provide an overview of the results of the district efficiency studies. The General Assembly appropriated \$300,000 to the EOC in one-time funds in Fiscal Year 2014-15 to conduct at least three district efficiency studies. Tidwell & Associates was selected through the State Procurement Process to complete the studies which involved four of ten districts that volunteered to participate. The four districts in the study were Barnwell 19, Clarendon 1, Lexington 4 and Dorchester 2. Mr. Tidwell and Dr. Cox described the process used in collecting data and local stakeholder input. The recommendations are listed in tiers with Tier 1 being recommendations that need the most immediate attention. The evaluators noted some recurring themes including the need for: (1) more training of local school board members, especially in policy development; (2) shared central office services; (3) more insurance for breaches in data and technology; and (4) greater assistance from the Department of Education regarding technology.

EOC members then were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Robinson asked about the degree to which the local district or local school board had resisted any of the facts and findings. Dr. Cox responded that she had met with the majority of the superintendents and board

members to review the facts and findings. To date, all had concurred with the facts and findings of the report. She noted that the remaining visits would be conducted this week and then the final reports submitted to the EOC. Mrs. Spearman agreed that many of the smaller districts in the state need more technical assistance and support from the Department, which is a goal of her agency. She noted that there are funds in the new state budget to provide more technological assistance to districts. She expressed her desire to have time to review the reports and provide additional feedback to the EOC at a later point in time.

Subcommittees then reported accordingly.

Academic Standards and Assessment - Dr. Merck reported that the subcommittee met earlier in the day to discuss with the staff of the Department of Education a draft request for proposal regarding assessments to be administered in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 in school year 2015-16 and a college readiness assessment in grade 11. A proviso pending in the state budget requires the EOC provide consultation to the Department in the design of the request for proposal. The subcommittee is bringing before the full EOC today its formal, written recommendations that emphasize the need to align better the request for proposal to Acts 155 and 200 of 2014. The subcommittee is proposing specific changes in the request for proposal. Mr. Robinson encouraged the full EOC to adopt the recommendations to guarantee that the assessments procured serve the specific statutory requirements. There being no additional discussion, the EOC unanimously adopted the recommendations.

EIA and Improvement Mechanisms – Dr. Couch, the new subcommittee chair, informed the full committee that the subcommittee met on May 18, 2015 and is bringing forth one information item and two action items. The first, an information item, is an update on the Fiscal Year 2015-16 budget. He called upon Mrs. Barton to give an overview. Mrs. Barton noted that the annual appropriation bill, H.3701, is currently being debated by the budget conference committee. Both the Senate and House funded:

- EFA at a base student cost of \$2,220, or a \$100 increase over the current year. There are \$7.6 million in transition funds to guarantee that no district receives fewer funds in the upcoming fiscal year than in the prior fiscal year.
- Read to Succeed Office as well as an increase of \$4.9million for Reading Coaches. The appropriation for Summer Reading Camps was increased by \$1.5 million to \$7.5 million for the upcoming year.
- Regarding the Education Improvement Act (EIA) budget, there was over \$2.0 million in increased funding for vocational equipment and for connectivity (\$2.1 million).
- The House and Senate also authorized funding of \$1.5 million for Reach Out and Read to serve all children participating in the Medicaid program.

When the budget and provisos are finalized, EOC staff will provide additional information to the EOC.

Dr. Couch then referred to the next item, the Annual Report on the SC Teacher Loan Program, which comes as a recommendation of the subcommittee. The key findings were as follows:

- The gap between the number of teachers leaving the classroom and the number graduating from a SC teacher education program is growing. This growing gap is also occurring throughout the United States.

- The number of applications to the Teacher Loan Program declined for the second consecutive fiscal year.
- For the first time since 1986-87 no funds were used from the Revolving Loan Fund to supplement the EIA appropriation. And, in fact, the EIA appropriation of \$5.1 million had a balance of \$241,926 at the end of the fiscal year.

The Subcommittee recommends that the General Assembly consider a tiered loan forgiveness program to allow a teacher to have his or her loan forgiven if the loan recipient works in any public schools with a shorter period of loan forgiveness if the teacher teaches in a geographic and/critical need areas. In addition, the subcommittee recommends that the Teacher Loan Advisory Committee and CERRAA continue efforts to engage education partners in publicizing the Teacher Loan Program. Finally, the subcommittee recommends that the EOC adopt the report and forward it to the General Assembly and to the House and Senate task forces looking at the Abbeville Equity lawsuit. According to Dr. Couch, clearly, there is a larger teacher recruitment and retention problem impacting our state that will only be exacerbated in the rural, districts of our state.

Rep. Loftis and Mrs. Hairfield discussed issues related to recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas of the state including salary, housing, student loan debt, and access to amenities. Rep. Felder noted that expanding the mentoring program to new teachers beyond the first year of teaching would increase the retention of teachers. Sen. Hayes clarified that the teacher pipeline study is still in the budget. Sen. Matthews noted that economics have a significant impact on young people's career decisions.

There being no further discussion, the committee voted unanimously to adopt the report

Dr. Couch then turned to the final item, the *Results of the 2014 Parent Survey*, which comes as a recommendation of the subcommittee to the full EOC. While the number of parent surveys completed and returned declined by 11.2 percent from the prior year, parent satisfaction with the learning environment, social and physical environment and home and school relations at their child's school remained consistent with the results of prior year's surveys. One possible reason for the decline in surveys returned was the fact that the survey was administered later in the fiscal year, with the window of administration including Spring break for some school districts.

The report also provides information on the Gallup Student Survey. At least one school district in our state, Spartanburg 7, had its 5th through 12th graders take the free, online survey that measures the Hope, Engagement and Well-Being of students. The EOC is encouraging districts to participate this fall in the survey. All community block grant recipients are required to conduct the survey as part of the evaluation of this initiative.

Again, the subcommittee recommends that the EOC adopt the report.

There being no questions or discussion, the committee voted unanimously to adopt the report.

Early Readiness Assessment – Mrs. Hairfield discussed EOC’s report that addressed the selection and implementation of a readiness assessment for kindergartners. First Steps Reauthorization requires the EOC to recommend by July 1, 2015 to State Board of Education an assessment to evaluate and measure school readiness of students prior to entry into a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten program. State law also mandates a comprehensive readiness assessment for all developmental domains be established for the 2016-17 school year. Currently, state law requires a readiness assessment for language and literacy only. In order to meet this requirement, the EOC established the Early Readiness Assessment Subcommittee. This subcommittee convened four times from November 2014 through May 2015. The EOC also convened a working group April 13 to discuss local assessment practices, assessments currently used in districts, and the EOC framework that was developed by staff. About 25 professionals representing Head Start, private childcare centers, First Steps, early education research, and schools districts were invited and/or participated April 13. Appendix G in the report includes a list of the working group participants.

Mrs. Hairfield noted that the report includes the following components:

- A synopsis of the various developmental domains that are specifically listed in the state laws, including social and emotional, approaches to learning, language and literacy development, cognitive and mathematics development, and physical health and motor skills.
- The EOC Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Framework, which provides specific examples of skills children entering kindergarten should possess. This Framework connects these developmental skills to the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate and to Kindergarten ELA and math standards.
- Discussion of specific assessments that measure the quality of adult-child interactions. In previous reports, the EOC has reported on strategies to improve the quality of early childhood programming by focusing on the quality of the teacher child interaction.
- Specific 4K language and literacy assessments that were discussed during the April 13 working group are also detailed in Finding 1 of the report on page 32. My IGDIS is currently used by Charleston County School District. Head Start uses Teaching Strategies GOLD. Other assessments addressed include: ELSA, PALS Pre-K and the mCLASS:CIRCLE. A pending proviso would allow the Department of Education to select up to three language and literacy assessments so that publicly-funded 4K programs could choose one to administer to their children during the 2015-16 school year.

Ms. Hairfield also addressed the report recommendations:

- The Department of Education and First Steps should first consider assessments that are currently being used by early education programs for inclusion in the three assessments that will be endorsed by the Department.
- The physical health status of children (physical, vision, dental care) should be collected as part of a comprehensive readiness assessment so that children may be linked to health services if they currently do not access them on a regular basis.

- The voice of local school districts, teachers and school leaders should be considered during the selection of assessments.
- Assessment should also include ongoing teacher observations, work samples and performance-based tasks so teachers can obtain the fullest picture of a child’s ability and progress.
- The inclusion of performance-based tasks should be considered so teachers can determine how individual children learn best. In later grades, the process of learning is more evident. For example students in math are often required to “show their work” in determining an answer.
- A formal, continuous standards alignment and assessment process for early education should be established. The State Board of Education should formally adopt the SC Early Learning Standards to ensure they are aligned with 5K content standards.
- Finally, to improve the quality of instruction for young students, the General Assembly should support creative, evidence-based approaches. A pilot program would encourage innovative approaches to measuring and improving quality, such as the enhancement of teacher-child interaction in classroom settings.

Rep. Loftis asked who would complete the physical well-being checklist. Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Ward responded that it could be a school nurse or other trained individual at the school. Mrs. Marks asked if the subcommittee had considered allowing parents to opt out of any portion of the readiness assessment, especially the social and emotional assessment. Mrs. Ward referred Mrs. Marks to the Table 6 of the report that addresses the skills under each domain. Under social and emotional, teachers would determine whether students: (1) show initiative by making choices and accepting responsibility; (2) adjust well to changes in routines and environments; (3) express emotions and needs through appropriate words and actions; (4) treat others with respect in words and actions; (5) show caring for others; (6) follow directions and school rules; (7) respect the property of others; (8) work and play cooperatively with others; and (9) interact easily with familiar adults. Mrs. Ward also noted that social and emotional screenings may also indicate whether children need further evaluation for autism.

Public Awareness – Mrs. Hairfield reported on two action items and two information items.

First, the Public Awareness met on May 18 and recommended revised district and school report cards for the 2015 release of the State Report Cards. Mrs. Hairfield recommended that the report card format as recommended by the subcommittee be further amended to clarify that the “social sciences” of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate be amended to reflect 21st century core courses in social sciences. Rep. Loftis asked if the staff would look into ways to incorporate into the accountability system a measure to determine compliance with or implementation with the EEDA law of 2005. There being no further debate, the recommendation as amended was approved unanimously.

The second item, the development of a single accountability system with public engagement, was approved as submitted. The EOC in the first half of 2016 will engage local stakeholders in determining the format for and information needed in a consolidated report card. There being no questions, the recommendation was approved unanimously.

Finally, Mrs. Hairfield described the status of two publications, the student reading success activity guide and the family-friendly standards. These will be released this summer and upcoming year, respectively, to provide assistance to educators, parents, and communities.

The staff provided information to the EOC members on the annual retreat which will be held at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, SC on August 3 and 4.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.