

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Meeting
December 14, 2015

Members in Attendance: Mr. David Whittemore (Chair); Dr. Danny Merck (Vice Chair); Ms. Anne Bull; Dr. Bob Couch; Sen. Mike Fair; Ms. Raye Felder; Ms. Barbara Hairfield; Sen. Wes Hayes; Mr. Dwight Loftis; Ms. Deb Marks; Mr. Joe Neal; and Mr. Neil Robinson.

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

Mr. Whittemore called the meeting to order, extending best wishes to all the members for a wonderful Christmas.

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes from the October 12, 2015 meeting. Mr. Robinson moved to approve the minutes as distributed. Dr. Merck seconded the motion. There being no objection, the minutes were approved as distributed.

The chair then recognized Darren McPhail with Gamecock IMG Sports Marketing and Ben Harling of Clemson Tiger Sports Properties to discuss the results of the *Read Your Way to the Big Game* contest. Mr. McPhail and Mr. Harling provided an overview of the contest, noting that the participation of over 76,000 students exceeded their expectations for the initial year of the contest. The men provided a PowerPoint presentation that showcased scenes from the schools that won monetary awards and from students who were selected. Pictures from game day as well as from the radio shows were provided to the members.

Then the chairman recognized Dr. Kevin Andrews to present the findings from the Assessment Survey of school districts. First, Dr. Andrews provided information on the number of assessments that were administered in the 2014-15 academic year as required for state and/or federal accountability. Students in grades 4 and 5 spent approximately 5.8 hours taking tests for accountability, while grades 6 through 8 spent 6.6 and 6.7 hours. Grade 11 students tested for the greatest amount of time at 8 hours. The time for end-of-course testing is not included for grade 8 students.

To determine what assessments beyond the assessments required by state or federal law were administered in school year 2014- 15, the EOC contacted each district superintendent for voluntary participation in a survey. Of the 82 school districts, including the South Carolina Public Charter School District, 39 districts agreed to participate. These districts were representative of the state in size and geographic area.

There were two components of the survey. Part I was a survey of district instructional personnel to determine what continuous, formative, benchmark, diagnostic or interim assessments were administered districtwide in school year 2014-15 and how the results were used. Part II was a survey of classroom teachers in districts to also determine what assessments they administered in 2014-15, their perceptions of how the assessment results were used and communicated, and for teachers in grades 3 through 8, their preparation for summary assessments used for state and/or federal accountability.

Thirty-four (34) districts actually responded to Part I of the survey, which is 41 percent of the 82 school districts in South Carolina. Teacher surveys (Part II of the survey) were distributed to the original 39 school districts that had agreed to participate in the survey. Large, urban school districts were slightly over-represented among respondents. Teacher responses were obtained from 37 of these districts; however seven of these districts had fewer than ten respondents. A total of 7,007 school individuals responded to the teacher survey, of which 5,518 taught in pre-K through grade 12 classrooms.

Dr. Andrews summarized the results.

- 1) In school year 2014-15, the mean number of hours students spent in testing for state or federal accountability in grade 3 was 2.9 hours, and ranged from 6.6 hours in grade 6 to 8.0 hours in grade 8.
- 2) In general, district personnel indicated that fewer assessments were administered than did teachers, with more substantial differences for grades 3 through 8 and grades 9 through 12.
- 3) The median number of other assessments teachers reported giving in 2014-15 was two for teachers of pre-K through grade 2; three for teachers of grades 3 through 8; and two for teachers of grades 9 through 12.
- 4) The maximum number of assessments teachers reported giving in 2014-15 was nine for teachers of pre-K through grade 2; 16 for teachers of grades 3 through 8; and 14 for teachers of grades 9 through 12.
- 5) Both district personnel and teachers perceived that the most important purpose of assessments given in 2014-15 was to inform curriculum decisions, inform instruction, and determine student interventions/accelerations. School district personnel placed greater value on the use of assessments to develop professional learning opportunities than did teachers.
- 6) Thirty-six percent of teachers reported having spent one week or less preparing students for summative assessments used for state and/or federal accountability; however, 24 percent of teachers reported having spent four weeks of the month before summative assessments preparing for these summative assessments.

- 7) The purpose for the testing of students was often not understood by teachers. For example, teachers did not distinguish among assessments administered for district, state, or federal purposes when judging whether too much assessment was occurring.
- 8) There was little agreement regarding who is the primary communicator of assessment results to students and parents.
- 9) In the perspective of teachers, the most valued use of an assessment is to inform instruction, and the least valued use of an assessment is for student learning objectives (SLOs).

Finally, teachers were given the option of providing open comments. These comments were included in the report. Issues teachers raised in their comments were: (a) the amount of time spent testing students; (b) the redundancy of assessments; (c) the time taken from instruction and used for assessment; (d) the desire to obtain more information from assessment in order to use information more effectively and communicate results to others; and (e) the focus on standardized assessments leading to a loss of focus on instruction.

Mrs. Hairfield expressed support for the staff recommendations. Sen. Hayes noted that there is a perception that teachers are teaching to the test, a perception that threatens the accountability system. Ms. Marks noted that the new federal law reauthorizing No Child Left Behind does not allow parents an opt-out provision from testing. Rep. Loftis asked for clarification from educators on the EOC about why districts are requiring additional assessments. Dr. Merck responded that his district is using MAP and TE21, which is a common formative assessment to gauge how well teachers and students are prepared for summative testing. Rep. Loftis discussed his concern with the percentage of teachers spending the last several weeks of school merely doing test prep without introducing new materials. Mrs. Hairfield noted that in her experience teachers do think that all assessments are mandated at the state level and emphasized the need for better communication on the usage of assessments. Dr. Couch noted that until teachers encourage students to make application of their learning, through project-based learning, then real learning is not occurring. Rep. Neal noted that if the criticism is valid, that teachers do not have time to take results of formative assessments and change instruction, then the tests are not being used effectively.

Subcommittee Reports

The chairman then recognized Dr. Merck and Mrs. Hairfield who provided an update on the joint meeting of the Academic Standards and Assessment and Public Awareness Subcommittees. The two subcommittees recommended that the EOC contract with an outside entity to conduct focus groups in the first-half of 2016. The results will be recommendations on the district and school ratings.

Then Dr. Couch summarized the budget, proviso and policy recommendations of the EIA Improvement Mechanisms Subcommittee for Fiscal Year 2016-17. Overall, the State projects additional EIA revenue of almost \$55 million for Fiscal Year 2016-17, which is an increase of \$43 million over last year's appropriation level. The EIA Subcommittee focused on two primary strategies: (1) supporting educators for 21st century learning; and (2) improving students' college and career readiness.

In supporting educators for 21st century learning, the subcommittee focused on two critical needs facing our teacher workforce:

- (1) the current educator pipeline is not sufficient to meet existing or future needs, with significant shortage of special education and STEM teachers; and
- (2) Teachers need assistance to know how to teach and facilitate the learning of 21st century skills like communication, collaboration and critical thinking.

The subcommittee recommended the following increases:

- \$750,000 increase for teacher supplies to fully fund the maximum allowable amount of \$275 per teacher;
- \$350,000 to fund the STEM Teacher Fellows Initiative to recruit highly-qualified secondary level STEM teachers in rural communities; and
- \$217,474 to ensure that teachers at state agencies/special schools are paid at a level commensurate with the pay of local school district teachers (Rec 1C).

There were also a few policy issues impacting the teacher workforce the EIA Subcommittee recommended:

- The state should consider adjustments to the statewide minimum teacher salary schedule to recruit more teachers into the pipeline. The subcommittee recommended retaining an outside expert to develop a teacher salary schedule that would help attract and retain high-quality teachers. EOC staff identified \$16.5 million in unexpended funds for National Board Certification and Teacher Salary Supplement and Fringe Benefits that could be reallocated to enhancing the teacher salary schedule or to the Rural Teacher Initiative (Rec 1D).
- The state should continue to invest in school technology, which is critical for equipping teachers with tools to engage students. Continued funding of technology to school districts should continue at least at the current year's level of approximately \$29.3 million (Rec 1E).

To improve student's college and career readiness, the subcommittee recommended that approximately \$53.75 million of the anticipated EIA surplus be expended to support students.

- \$1,309,051 for the High Schools that Work initiative. The EEDA requires every high school to implement the principles of HSTW, such as: setting high student expectations; increasing rigor of study; and actively engaging each student in the learning process (Rec 2A)
- \$300,000 for STEM Premier that would be managed through the Department of Commerce working with the Regional Education Consortium. As we discussed at our August retreat, STEM Premier provides students a digital platform to showcase their skills, talents, interests, and assessment scores to colleges and companies. (Rec 2C)
- \$1,501,307 for modernization of vocational equipment that would annualize the appropriation. The subcommittee also recommended that the minimum allocation per district be \$50,000 (Rec 2D).
- \$12,987,128 for the South Carolina Public Charter School District to fund the District's projected enrollment increase for 2016-17. This increase does not address the confirmed or potential new schools; 28 new letters of intent have been filed with the District (Rec 2E).
- \$1,000,000 to pay for national industry exams. There are students and schools who do not have the resources to pay for these exams, which typically cost as much as \$100 for each exam. This issue was also discussed during the EOC's report card working group session. It is likely there will be a need for additional increases to this initial allocation over time. (Rec 2F).
- The EIA Subcommittee also recommended that \$12,146,750 in non-recurring EIA revenues be allocated to instructional materials (Rec 2G).
- The balance of \$36.6 million in EIA revenues should be allocated to school districts under the Aid to Districts line item. The Subcommittee recommended districts expend these funds to support and enhance the skills and knowledge students need to be successful in 21st century colleges and careers (Rec 2H).
- Assessment is an ongoing issue that is evolving. There is a significant amount of carry forward in the EIA appropriation. Based upon information provided to the EOC, staff projects \$27.9 million in costs for FY 2015-16, with an EIA appropriation of \$34.6 million and a carry forward of \$6.6 million. The actual cost for procurement for grades 3-8 assessment is being finalized now since Data Recognition Corporation was awarded the contract after the Subcommittee made its recommendations.

In general, the Subcommittee recommends that the college readiness assessment be implemented in grade 9 or grade 10 but not in both grades. Assessment costs for 4K and 5K should continue to be paid out of unexpended EIA revenues allocated for the half- and full-day 4K programs.

On the policy side, the Subcommittee considered three additional issues:

- Regarding dual enrollment, EIA Subcommittee concurs with SCDE. The EFA should be amended to include a weighting for dual enrollment of .15 (Rec 2I).
- The State's higher education institutions should adopt college readiness benchmarks. Upon admission to a public postsecondary education, students scoring at or above the scores would not be required to take developmental, supplemental or transitional coursework. Dr. Terry Holliday of Kentucky noted that this resulted in \$15 million in savings in tuition costs for Kentucky parents and students (Rec 2J).
- Less than 1 percent of all AP exams in 2015 were in computer science. For students to be prepared for work and study after high school, they must understand the basic principles of computer science. Increasingly, states allow computer science to count toward high school math or science graduation requirements. Currently 27 states do this, including Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee and Virginia. The EIA subcommittee recommends that a Computer Science Initiative (a public-private partnership) be implemented in 2016-17. The Initiative would lay the groundwork and develop a process that would (for example) establish computer science standards; identify available curriculum for schools; and determine a clear certification pathway for computer science teachers (Rec 2K).

Mr. Robinson and Mrs. Hairfield proposed an amendment to the Subcommittee recommendations that would include support of an initiative focused on improving the number of quality district and school leaders. Rep. Neal seconded the amendment. Senator Fair asked if the initiative would be a new proposal or an expansion. Mrs. Hairfield responded that the initiative should be an enhancement of existing programs. The committee unanimously approved the amendment.

There being no further discussions, the Committee unanimously approved the subcommittee recommendations as amended

Finally, the chair called upon Sen. Hayes who chaired the nominating subcommittee composed of Rep. Loftis and Mrs. Hairfield. The subcommittee moved that Mr. Neil Robinson serve as chair and Dr. Danny Merck as vice-chair for the next two-year terms. Sen. Fair seconded the motion. There being no further nominations, the two were unanimously approved.

Mr. Whittemore took a moment of personal privilege to thank the EOC members for their support during the past two years. He noted that in January he will be moving to the State Board of Education, serving the Thirteenth Circuit. Dr. Merck presented Mr. Whittemore with a token of appreciation from the Committee and the Clemson family.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.