DRAFT MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Standing Committee on School and Division Accountability
Wednesday, July 27, 2016
1:00 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the July 27, 2016 meeting of the Committee on School and Division Accountability: Diane Atkinson; Dr. Oktay Baysal; Wesley J. Bellamy; Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; James Dillard; Daniel A. Gecker; Joan Wodiska; and Sal Romero, Jr. Dr. Steven Staples, the superintendent of public instruction, was also present. Elizabeth Lodal was absent.

Ms. Atkinson, chairman of this committee, convened the meeting and welcomed the Board members and guests. As part of her introductory remarks, she said today's meeting would focus on how schools are accredited.

Approval of the Minutes from the June 22, 2016 Committee Meeting

Ms. Atkinson said the minutes from the June 22, 2016 committee meeting were posted on-line and provided to Board members. Ms. Wodiska made a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Cannaday seconded the motion, and the minutes from the June 22, 2016 committee were approved unanimously.

Public Comment

Antoinette Rogers from the Virginia Educators Association spoke about the importance of student opportunities and teacher engagement.

Presentation: Current Measures in Virginia Accreditation Model

Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent for Student Assessment and School Improvement for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), made the following presentation to the Board:

Current Measures in Virginia Accreditation Model

The following questions were raised:

- Could the category of denied accreditation have different levels within it? Becoming fully accredited can take several years of hard work, so, are there levels within the denial that could serve to recognize that schools are moving in the correct direction?

- Is accreditation meant to incentivize schools? Assuming, in good faith, that all schools want to be fully accredited, what is accreditation meant to do? Are the labels to inform parents which school districts to seek out?

- For a high school that is failing, are the middle schools feeding into the high school examined as part of the problem?

- Why does the Board not step in more forcefully when a school starts slipping from fully accredited?

- What parts of the accreditation system are within the power of the Board to change? What parts are mandated by legislation?

The following topics were discussed:

- One Board member voiced concern that schools cannot move from denied accreditation to partial accreditation, even if the school has complied with everything they've been asked to do. The Board wants to recognize the hard work schools are doing and the fact that they're in compliance with their state plan. However, currently schools that are denied accreditation have no middle ground—they have to either stay in denied status, or become fully accredited.

- It was noted that using a low expectation does more harm than good—it is undesirable to give the impression that effort is enough. The Board does not want to limit expectations in order to ensure success.

- One Board member emphasized that the partially accredited rating has been very helpful, particularly in showing growth, and also in giving credit to schools making academic improvement. The Board is interested in ways to reward significant growth without simply moving schools to full accreditation as a reward for progression.

- It was noted that schools can only be in partial accreditation for four years, and then are moved to denied accreditation if they fail to become fully accredited in that four year period.

- Prior to this system of accreditation, the Board based accreditation on input measures, such as the number of books in the library and the size of the classrooms. The current accreditation system was developed as an outcome system. The Board wants schools to be able to demonstrate that students are leaving with the requisite knowledge.

- The correlation between failing schools and poverty was discussed. One Board member noted that broad generalizations are inaccurate; some schools with poverty are doing well, and some are not.

- It was noted that accreditation was created as a reaction to diminishing test scores and misalignment of curriculum across the state. The accreditation system also gives the Board and the public knowledge of what is occurring in the schools.

- One Board member emphasized that school improvement is the Board's most important duty.

- For those schools that request reconstitution, is there criteria that the schools must meet to be considered reconstituted?
    - Ms. Loving-Ryder responded that schools do have to provide some evidence demonstrating reconstitution (i.e. change in governance, change in instructional program, or a change in student body), and they also have to show some evidence of progress.

- What kind of technical assistance does the Board provide?
    - Ms. Loving-Ryder specified that VDOE frequently offers training, either through contractors going to the school, or the school employees coming to VDOE to do training. Also, VDOE staff work with schools on assessing their plans.

- The details of the technical assistance menu were discussed. One Board member asked how the menu translates into "assistance?"
    - Ms. Loving-Ryder said that most menu options are trainings that VDOE would bring people together to attend.
    - Dr. Staples stated that the menus help to provide division context to school-based interventions. In the past, state training and division training sometimes overlapped. The menu allows schools to choose an alternative if the VDOE training would be duplicative.

- Are schools allowed to freely choose from the technical assistance menu themselves? Are certain schools encouraged to choose certain items from the menu?
    - Ms. Loving-Ryder replied that it depends on how long the school has failed to be fully accredited. For some, the technical assistance might be part of their corrective action plan. For others, they might be encouraged to take certain trainings.

- One Board member asked about measuring growth of English language learners and their progress on the SOL tests. How can such growth be accounted for?
    - Ms. Loving-Ryder indicated this is something they will be looking at going forward.

Presentation: Additional Measures for Consideration in an Accreditation Model

VDOE staff presented information on the use of multiple indicators to measure school quality. Ms. Atkinson introduced the presenters of this information as:

- Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent for Student Assessment and School Improvement;
- Dr. Cynthia Cave, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications; and
- Dr. Jennifer Piver-Renna, Senior Executive Director for Research

[Additional Measures for Consideration in an Accreditation Model](#)

The following topics and questions were discussed:

- How can the Board encourage localities to make certain issues, like teacher absenteeism, a priority? The role of the Board was discussed, particularly the Board's role in influencing, intervening, and instructing localities. The allocation of responsibility between the Board and local school boards was discussed.
    - Dr. Staples stated that there are two ways in which the Board can drive change – through data reporting, and by moving that data into the accountability system.
    - It was noted that self-reported data is not necessarily reported equally.

- One Board member asked about funds allocated for positive behavior interventions in the budget. How do schools get access to these funds?

- If the Board increases the number of measures in an accreditation system, what kind of support does the Board provide to schools now that they're holding them accountable for these additional factors?

- One Board member emphasized that it is undesirable to incentivize measuring absenteeism – it is preferable to incentivize measuring attendance rates.

- One Board member noted that there is value in having data reported by elementary, middle, or high school division. But, it could also be beneficial to have data reported by alike-peers across the state. Within a peer group, rather than a school division, schools could compare themselves with other schools with similar population or resources and learn from each other.

- One Board member expressed support for looking at other states' School Quality Profiles as exemplars of what to include in Virginia's accountability system. Colorado's accountability system was mentioned as a good example to examine.

- Family engagement was mentioned as an important aspect to student success. Why has this not been included in the research that was presented?
    - Dr. Cave replied that the work group, in its first draft, had primarily researched indicators from the school quality profile; however, they would continue to examine other indicators moving forward.

- Is the Board currently collecting the type of data discussed in the presentation? If not, who is or who would be in the future?
  - Dr. Piver-Renna answered that most of the data is already being collected. School climate and teacher absenteeism are not currently being collected, but could be collected without difficulty.

- Is staff planning to merge the accountability system and the accreditation?
  - Dr. Cave answered that the goal is to merge the federal accountability system and the state accreditation system. ESSA requires a state accountability plan, which provides an opportunity to merge the state accreditation and federal accountability plan and no longer be operating under two systems.

- State accountability, federal accountability, and accreditation are currently treated as three separate systems. Is the proposal that the accreditation system encompass all accountability elements?
  - Dr. Staples explained that the proposal is for state accreditation to encompass all the components of ESSA. Thus, state accreditation and ESSA would be aligned.

- It was noted that some of the highest performing schools in accreditation have the highest gaps in some specific indicators, such as dropout. The accreditation system can be blind to these performance gaps. The Board would like to use accreditation to drive schools to continue improvement, even if they're high achieving.

- Attendance and chronic absenteeism were discussed. One Board member noted concerns about how attendance formulas would take into account students with chronic health problems and 504 plans who miss school frequently, but are still receiving instruction.
  - Dr. Piver-Renna answered that currently the federal baseline of ten percent or more is being used, and the system does not take into account other factors like suspension or chronic health issues. Dr. Piver-Renna indicated that the goal is to better reflect true chronic absenteeism in the attendance formula in the future.

- What is the purpose of the accreditation system, if there is a healthy accountability system? Is it required? Could the accreditation system be done by another body outside of the state?
  - Dr. Staples stated that part of the reason for the accreditation systems is to define for VDOE how to intervene.
  - Dr. Cave confirmed that the Code of Virginia requires schools to be accredited.

- One Board member mentioned three red flags that correlate with schools not being fully accredited:
  - Misalignment between state standards and curriculum taught in the classroom;
  - Inadequate, unprepared, or ill-equipped school educators; and,
  - A climate of low expectations.

- What matters most to achieve our key education goals? One Board member listed three key elements of an accountability system:
    - Meaningful learning, as opposed to academic learning;
    - Professional capacity; and
    - Resource accountability.

- The importance of teacher effectiveness was discussed. It was noted that the quality and effectiveness of educational staff should be included on the list of indicators to be considered.

- One Board member spoke in favor of focusing more on the students at the bottom that need resources and support in order to succeed, as opposed to focusing on students at the top who already have the necessary support to succeed.

- One Board member noted that human resources—teachers—are the biggest, and most important, resource in state education. ESSA provides an opportunity through a requirement for equitable distribution of effective teachers. This could be used to ensure that the teachers with the most tools are paired with the students that need the most resources.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:26pm.