

Connecticut State Board of Education

Accountability and Support Committee

Monday, March 14, 2016

State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307A
Hartford

Draft Minutes

Members Present: Dr. Estela López
Robert Trefry, Ex Officio
Erin Benham
Malia Sieve

Staff Present: Ellen Cohn
Pamela Charland
Shondel Edwards
Ajit Gopalakrishnan
Mark Linabury
Desi Nesmith
Charlene Russell-Tucker

Members Absent: William P. Davenport

I. Call to Order

Chairwoman López called meeting to order at 3.09 p.m.

a) Approval of April 21, 2015, Minutes

On a motion by Dr. López, seconded by Mrs. Benham, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the Accountability and Support Committee meeting on April 21, 2015.

b) Update on Alliance District Activities

Mr. Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer, provided updates on the Alliance Districts including convening sessions and monitoring meetings in Danbury, Hamden, Hartford and Manchester. This allowed for him and others in his office to interact with the superintendents and their teams to dig a little deeper on any issues or concerns. He noted that at a superintendent's-only needs assessment meeting, superintendents were given an opportunity to address their professional needs within the four areas of Talent, Academics, Culture/Climate and Operations. Twenty-five districts attended. Some of the highlights are minority teacher recruitment, social and emotional supports, and family engagement. The results are being used internally to guide professional development and next steps.

In terms of sharing best practices, Vernon, Bloomfield and East Hartford had the opportunity to share at a recent Netstat convening. A resource fair was introduced at the most recent Alliance District convening allowing districts to access multiple offices within the department. The feedback was very positive and another resource fair for districts will be scheduled in the near future.

The fall-to-winter benchmark growth in the Alliance Districts indicated that 63% of districts showed an increase in reading and 64% in math. For district's that showed no growth, the Turnaround Office will review the data and determine what needs to be done.

Deputy Commissioner Ellen Cohn stated that all Alliance Districts are expected to use a standardized benchmark assessment for English language arts and mathematics to measure benchmarks in fall, winter and spring. The benchmarks are established by the test publisher. Mr. Nesmith stated that each district used different assessments, so there is no district-to-district comparison. However, the assessment data within each district helps guide conversations about student performance. Most growth is shown from the first to third assessment. Dr. Lopez said she is interested in seeing patterns, what is being learned, how it is working, and where it is not working.

Mr. Nesmith stated that the Turnaround Office is working on differentiating supports that are provided to schools, in addition to the compliance that has historically taken place. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) consultants go in and work with teachers in the Commissioner's Network Schools. Strategically schools are chosen either in the Alliance Districts or Commissioner's Network to highlight what they have done and are doing.

c) Update on Commissioner’s Network Structures

Mr. Nesmith reported that audits were conducted on three Winchester schools: Batchelder, Hinsdale, and Pearson. Audits have been released and they are working on their turnaround plans. A meeting is scheduled between Winchester and the Science Center to discuss the possibility of a partnership.

Mrs. Cohn stated that publicizing successes within the Network is an effective way to reach other schools that are seeking successful models to emulate.

d) Next Generation Accountability

Mr. Gopalakrishnan answered questions regarding the recently released Next Generation Accountability System. He mentioned that the majority of the high needs schools exceeding overall district average occurs in the Alliance Districts. Also indicated in that listing, are schools where the high needs subgroup exceeds the state high needs average.

Mrs. Cohn stated that CSDE is going to explore the possibility of withholding some Title I grant funds for celebrating academic achievement by giving grants to schools of distinction and schools where high needs subgroups outperform district and state high needs averages. This would recognize the honor roll and those contributing to improvement.

Mr. Trefry asked if Charter Schools are included in the data. Mr. Gopalakrishnan indicated that the high needs exceeding district are not designed for charters, as they are considered their own district. Moreover, comparisons to host districts are often problematic due to selection bias. He referenced a study on school choice conducted by the CSDE that controls for such selection bias and he offered to provide it to the Board. Mr. Gopalakrishnan also noted that for this year CSDE is not classifying all schools, but just the lowest performing schools and the schools of distinction. Next year, CSDE will be issuing categories for all schools (i.e., 1, 2, or 3), including charters.

Ms. Sieve asked about the inclusion of high school indicators for the Norwich School District, and how that was inappropriate considering that Norwich does not have a high school. She expressed that this was skewing Norwich’s accountability index. Mr. Gopalakrishnan expressed understanding of Ms. Sieve’s concern. He clarified that accountability results must include all students, including those in high school grades who are under Norwich’s responsibility. Ms. Sieve asked that the CSDE take a close look at this given the impact of such results in the local district context. Mr. Gopalakrishnan assured that the CSDE is already in conversations internally and with the superintendent and is looking at systemic solutions.

e) Update on Booker T. Washington Charter School

Chief Operating Officer, Charlene Russell-Tucker provided a brief background on Booker T. Washington Academy (BTWA) Charter School; this school was approved in 2014, for three years. Part of the approval condition was to report updates to the Board on the first year of operation. At a recent meeting with the Board and the Commissioner, it was suggested that the report first be submitted to the Accountability and Support Committee, the report included a range of areas: Curriculum and Instruction, and Special education; the on-going work with the summer school, and educational progress. It showed what has happened with the financial viability, as well governance. It should also be noted that next year, Booker T. Washington Charter School will be applying for a charter renewal.

Mr. Mark Linabury, Bureau Chief of Choice Programs, stated that Booker T. Washington Charter School have been trained as a board; and they have since added a grade two. From a fiscal standpoint, the school has received private donations and working with CSDE staff have improved financial procedures. They have been able to offer extended day programs to help supplement the educational approach and there is a significant waiting list.

Follow up Actions

II. Future Meetings

Dr. López requested a follow-up meeting in April to review data from the Commissioner’s Network schools.

III. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4.28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Shondel Edwards
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