

**DRAFT MINUTES**  
**Virginia Board of Education**  
**Standing Committee on School and Division Accountability**  
**Wednesday, March 22, 2017**  
**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 March 22, 2017 meeting of the Committee on School and Division Accountability: Diane Atkinson; Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; James Dillard; Daniel Gecker; Anne Holton; Elizabeth Lodal ; and Sal Romero, Jr. Dr. Steven Staples, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, was also present. Dr. Jamelle Wilson was absent.

Ms. Atkinson, chair of this committee, convened the meeting at 1:05p.m.

**Approval of the Minutes from the February 22, 2017 Committee Meeting**

Ms. Lodal made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 22, 2017 committee meeting. Mr. Romero seconded the motion, and the draft minutes were approved unanimously.

**Public Comment**

Ms. Atkinson opened the floor to public comment. No individuals requested to address the committee.

**Presentation: Accountability Measure – Chronic Absenteeism**

Dr. Cynthia Cave, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), presented information on school accountability system changes under consideration by the Board.

Please see slides 1 – 7 of the following link: [Review of Accountability Measure: Chronic Absenteeism](#)

- Dr. Cave began by presenting a brief overview of the guiding principles and philosophies of accountability upon which the Board has already reached consensus. These guiding principles and philosophies include providing a comprehensive picture of school quality, driving continuous improvement for all schools, building on strengths and addressing

gaps in the current accountability system, and informing areas of technical assistance and school improvement resources.

- Dr. Cave also discussed how the Board's philosophy of accountability balances academic outcomes (achievement on assessments, graduation rates, and college/career readiness) with other factors that affect learning (family engagement, access to different types of courses, and opportunities for experiential learning).
- Staff already has reliable data with which to measure some of the indicators the Board has discussed. However, some indicators, like school climate, do not yet have a reliable way to be measured. Staff is looking at possible data collection for school climate through surveys on engagement.
- Dr. Cave discussed the mechanisms of accountability, including what systems are currently in place to inform the Board on how schools are progressing. This included an overview of both state accountability and federal accountability, with an emphasis on aligning these two systems of accountability as much as possible. Dr. Cave also discussed the Standards of Quality.
- The presentation also included an overview of the matrix-based system upon which the Board has already reached consensus. Under the matrix-based system, school quality is measured through a process which is based on multiple measures and drives continuous improvement. Schools are assigned performance levels for each measure, and multiple school quality indicators are used.
- Dr. Cave reviewed the criteria for selecting quality accreditation measures. These criteria include: the measure is related to academic performance; standardized data collection is possible across all schools and divisions; data for the metric are reliable and valid; the measure is modifiable through school-level policies and practices; the measure meaningfully differentiates among schools based on progress of all students and student subgroups; and the measure does not unfairly impact one type or group of schools or students.
- Dr. Cave discussed the process for defining school performance benchmarks. The important questions to be examined in defining school performance benchmarks are: (1) Does the benchmark reflect our objectives and expectations? (2) What are the unintended consequences? (3) How will we know if we are moving in the right direction?

## **Presentation: Accountability Measure – Chronic Absenteeism**

Dr. Jennifer Piver-Renna, Senior Executive Director for Research for VDOE, presented information to the Board regarding chronic absenteeism as a potential measure to be used in determining accountability.

Please see slides 8 – 15 of the following link: [Review of Accountability Measure: Chronic Absenteeism](#)

- Dr. Piver-Renna presented information on chronic absenteeism in response to the Board’s questions from the February 2017 Accountability Committee meeting:
  - At what percent of enrollment should students count toward the chronic absenteeism rate?
  - How does the distribution of schools across the matrix change with a lower threshold for improvement?
  - Where does Virginia rank nationally on chronic absenteeism?
- Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student being absent, excused or unexcused, for ten percent or more of the school year—in an average school year of 180 days, this would mean a student who is absent for 18 or more days per year.
- Regarding the percent of enrollment at which a student would be counted towards chronic absenteeism, the threshold previously used by Dr. Piver-Renna counted students enrolled for fifty percent or more of the school year. This is consistent with the current requirements for federal accountability under ESSA.
- Dr. Piver-Renna explained that lower thresholds tend to capture more transient students. Transient students are often enrolled in multiple schools per year, and would not meet the fifty percent enrollment threshold. Transient students are also known to be more chronically absent.
- In response to inquiry from Board members at the February meeting, Dr. Piver-Renna examined data on chronic absenteeism using different thresholds. She presented chronic absenteeism data counting students enrolled greater than fifty percent of the year, students enrolled greater than thirty percent of the year, and students enrolled greater than ten percent of the year.

- The data demonstrated that, as the percent of enrollment threshold lowers, the distribution of schools shifts slightly towards the lower performance levels of the matrix. Dr. Piver-Renna stated that this is because the data is picking up an increased level of highly mobile or transient students who have higher levels of chronic absenteeism rates.
- Regarding the percent used as a threshold for improvement for chronic absenteeism, Dr. Piver-Renna previously used a two percent increase as a threshold. She also noted that available data indicates that chronic absenteeism is increasing slightly overall across the Commonwealth.
- In response to inquiry from Board members at the February meeting, Dr. Piver-Renna examined data on chronic absenteeism improvement using different thresholds. She presented data using the two percent improvement rate and compared that with data using a one percent improvement rate. The one percent rate did not change the number of schools in the level one of the matrix and only changed the number of schools in level four very slightly. The biggest shift from the use of a one percent improvement rate was in the second and third levels.
- Regarding how Virginia ranks nationally with regard to chronic absenteeism, Dr. Piver-Renna presented data from the 2013-14 school year, which is the most recent data available on a national level. This data demonstrates that Virginia ranks 24th out of fifty states. Virginia had a chronic absenteeism rate of 12.7 percent which was slightly lower than the national average of 14.1 percent.
- Finally, Dr. Piver-Renna discussed considerations for allowances with regard to chronic absenteeism. If a student receives homebound instruction, that student would not be counted as absent. She explained that students with chronic illnesses or medical needs would need to be counted, perhaps in a separate data field, in order to capture that data without counting such students in the chronic absenteeism rates.

The Board discussed the following points:

- One Board member noted that absenteeism differs across elementary, middle, and high schools, and inquired how strategies would vary across grade levels. Dr. Piver-Renna stated that interventions for younger students are more focused on family engagement and community involvement. For older students, the interventions are more individually tailored and targeted, as older students are more individually responsible for their attendance.

- One Board member emphasized that compassionate and caring teachers are an important part of attendance, and asked which indicators reflect this teacher engagement. Dr. Piver-Renna discussed engagement, and more broadly, school climate, which encompasses elements like compassion and caring in the classroom. Surveys are useful in measuring levels of engagement, by asking teachers and students for their perceptions and examining the results for alignment. VDOE is currently working on school climate surveys for teachers, students, and parents in order to better gauge elements like compassion and engagement in the school climate.
- Students with chronic illness on homebound instruction were discussed. Such students would not be counted toward chronic absenteeism.
- One Board member asked how to anticipate costs for chronic absenteeism interventions and the return on investment of such interventions. As there are limited resources, the Board should consider which measures would have the greatest improvement on student outcomes. However, a lack of resources should not be blamed for lack of action. Dr. Staples stated that, although precise analysis is difficult, research indicates that incremental increases in attendance have positive correlations to student outcomes.
- Regarding the matrix generally, one Board member noted that the words used to label the four different levels of accreditation on the matrix should be in alignment.

### **Presentation: Accountability Matrix Benchmark Selection – Academic Achievement Indicator**

Dr. Piver-Renna and Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent for Student Assessment and School Improvement, presented information to the Board on the development the academic achievement indicator.

Please see slides 16 – 30 of the following link: [Accountability Matrix Benchmark Selection: Academic Achievement Indicator](#)

The following slides were also presented by Ms. Loving-Ryder: [Supplemental Slides for the Academic Achievement Indicator](#)

- Dr. Piver-Renna began the presentation with a brief summary of the timeline in which the Board has considered certain indicators:
  - In January, the Board considered the graduation indicator and the dropout rate;
  - In February, the Board considered chronic absenteeism;
  - During this presentation, Dr. Piver-Renna focused on the academic achievement indicator, including achievement on academic assessments, student growth, and English Learner progress;
  - In April, the Board will begin considering achievement gaps and college and career readiness.
  
- Achievement is defined as the pass rate (with recovery) on state assessments for reading and writing and mathematics. Achievement also includes pass rates on state assessments for science. Recovery gives a student credit for remediation received after failing an assessment, if the student goes on to pass the next assessments, by counting the student twice.
  
- Student growth is defined as year-over-year gains in reading and mathematics, based on progress tables. This gives credit to students who have failed an assessment, but demonstrated growth. The progress tables have four levels below passing: low below basic, high below basic, low basic, and high basic. Thus, a student is able to demonstrate growth, by moving up a level, even if that student has not passed the assessment.
  
- English Learner (EL) progress is defined as year-over-year gains towards English proficiency based on the ACCESS for ELLs assessment. There is a large population of ELs in the Commonwealth. This indicator rewards schools for moving ELs towards English proficiency.
  
- Dr. Piver-Renna presented goals associated with the academic achievement indicator, as this is a large part of the current accountability system. The goals for developing the academic achievement are: (1) The indicator is accurately reflective of student achievement; (2) The indicator is aligned with important elements of achievement; (3) The indicator is actionable at the school level; and (4) The indicator is transparent and succinct.

- Dr. Piver-Renna presented three possible achievement indicators for the Board to consider:
  - Science pass rate – including the accreditation pass rate and decrease in failure rate;
  - Mathematics combination rate – including recovery, student growth for Grade Three through Algebra I, and a decrease in failure rate; and
  - English reading and writing combination rate – including the accreditation pass rate with recovery, student growth for Grade Three through Grade Eight, EL progress, and decrease in failure rate.
- For the English reading and writing combination rate, Dr. Piver-Renna presented data to the Board using a seventy percent benchmark instead of the 75 percent benchmark that is currently used.
- Dr. Piver-Renna also explained that the combination rates give equal weight to growth or progress among students who do not pass state assessments. Students are only counted once in the numerator, with the exception of recovery. And, achievement metrics can be reported individually for increased transparency.

The Board discussed the following points:

- One Board member expressed support for having the flexibility to use either the one year rate or the three-year average for academic passing rates, as this provides an allowance for an unusual year.
- One Board member noted that, across multiple indicators, the same number of schools were assigned to the red performance level. The Board member inquired whether the same schools are failing in all areas, and whether these schools are located in one geographic area. Ms. Loving-Ryder stated that challenged schools struggling in one area tend to be struggling in other areas as well. Dr. Piver-Renna added that these schools are widely dispersed around the Commonwealth, including both urban and rural schools, in many different areas.
- One Board member noted that integrating growth into the measures creates realistic and achievable goals for schools that are starting far behind the benchmarks. Dr. Piver-Renna stated that the inclusion of progress and growth did not over-inflate the rates. One of

staff's concerns looking at this data was that progress/growth would become a mask for very poor passing rates. However, the inclusion of progress/growth only changed the rates by a few percentage points. Dr. Staples added that these measures look at growth as related to a trajectory towards reaching the benchmarks, not just objective growth.

- One Board member asked whether the use of progress tables as presented are considered an acceptable and reasonable proxy for measuring growth. Ms. Loving-Ryder answered that, with the movement towards computer adaptive testing, staff are hopeful to be able to use a more granular level of growth. She added that the growth tables used in the presentation are used by many other states where they are referred to as “value tables.” Such tables are well respected amongst experts. There are four levels below proficient on these growth tables, so if a student stays on the trajectory, he or she should achieve proficiency within four years.
- In considering whether to include growth as a component of academic indicators, one Board member noted that if it were included in the forthcoming regulations, a more effective growth measure could be incorporated in the future.
- One Board member expressed concern about the use of the color red on the accreditation matrix, as red may be seen as punitive, especially by schools in that category.
- The Board discussed whether the pass rate for English should remain at 75 percent or be moved to 70 percent, as science and math are. The higher overall rate may be distracting to school divisions, when the focus should be more on achievement gaps. The Board requested data on the achievement gaps in order to better consider this benchmark.
- One Board member noted that there are more students living in poverty today in Virginia than when the 75 percent rate was established. Research needs to be done as to why the 75 percent was implemented so that those circumstances can be compared to the current circumstances.

### **Presentation: Discussion of Considerations for Achievement Gap Indicator**

Dr. Piver-Renna and Ms. Loving-Ryder presented information to the Board on achievement gap indicators.

Please see slide 31 of the following link: [Achievement Gaps Discussion](#)

- In preparation for next month’s discussion, Dr. Piver-Renna presented information to the Board members on achievement gaps. The Board will consider this indicator at the April meeting of the Accountability Committee.
- There are seven reporting groups used for achievement gaps, as defined by federal law under ESSA. These groups include: Asian students, black students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, and white students.
- Dr. Piver-Renna’s presentation focused on some key considerations for Board members:
  - How to define the gap – should the benchmark be a comparison to the state rate or a comparison to all students (e.g. students in that division, students in the state, or students outside of the reporting group)?
  - Should the Board focus more on the size of the gap or closing the gap—should the indicator focus on performance or improvement? Additionally, should the focus be on all groups or certain groups?
  - How can the Board measure changes over time when the number of reporting groups varies across schools from year-to-year?
- Dr. Piver-Renna explained that reporting groups are only currently counted when the number of students in the group is at least thirty. This is in alignment with ESSA.

The Board discussed the following points:

- One Board member expressed two concerns with ESSA in regards to achievement gaps: first, English Learner (EL) students are not given enough time for language acquisition before they must be tested; and, second, students with disabilities are often tested for grade levels that they will not achieve.
- One Board member advocated focusing on economically disadvantaged children, as this group is the most all-encompassing, and poverty is an impediment that can be overcome. One Board member suggested this focus could also include categories for economically disadvantaged students plus disabilities and economically disadvantaged plus ELs. There was concern that some students could be double-counted if included in more than one reporting group.

- One Board member noted that it is important for Board members to understand human brain development and why poverty has such an impact on students. The barriers to learning associated with poverty need to be better understood by Board members, including what happens in pre-school and what exposure is most important that economically disadvantaged children are not receiving.
- One Board member stated that professional development for teachers in high poverty schools is essential. Educating teachers on the relationship between poverty and brain development impacts teachers' perception, how they approach the students, and what teaching strategies they use.
- The Board discussed what benchmark should be used to measure the achievement gap. One option is to measure the achievement gap against the state standard pass rate. Another option would be to measure the achievement gap against the pass rate for students outside the group being measured.
- One Board member asked whether progress and growth would be included in the achievement gap indicator. Dr. Piver-Renna answered that staff is currently calculating the data both including progress/growth and excluding progress/growth.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:18p.m.