Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #103-21

DATE: April 16, 2021

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: **An Update on LASER - the State-wide Decision Analytics Platform**

The Virginia Department of Education started the development process of our new decision analytics system last fall. LASER (Learning Analytics to Support Education and Reporting) will be a suite of reporting tools and dashboards which will allow teachers, school leaders, and division administrators to better understand the performance of their students and make data-informed decisions. The development is underway, and this memo serves to provide an update on the progress achieved so far and illuminate some upcoming steps.

The goal is by the end of the 2021-2022 school year, LASER will contain an Early Warning System and an Accreditation Tracking System. The Earning Warning System (EWS) will use student-level coursework (academic), behavioral, and attendance data to identify students who are at risk of not achieving their potential and highlight areas that need intervention. The Accreditation Tracking System will show a detailed breakdown for each of the accreditation metrics used to determine performance levels.

In an effort to make sure LASER is designed to fit the needs of as many divisions as possible, the VDOE has engaged various educators across the state. Orange County Public Schools has been partnering with the VDOE to develop a prototype system and provides constant input through all stages of development. Interviews and focus groups with teachers, counselors, school leaders, and divisional administrators at OCPS have helped us gauge the baseline

requirements of the system. Additional perspective is provided by a steering committee of 14 other individuals representing each of the divisions and will help determine what additional functions are desired and provide further testing of the system. Lastly, three demo and Q&A sessions were attended by over 300 school and divisional leaders who demonstrated interest and excitement about the potential offerings through their engagement and questions.

The VDOE's intention is to have a fully functional EWS with around 10 school divisions on-boarded by the fall and then continue to bring on more divisions on a rolling basis based upon interest and need with a goal of about 50 school divisions connected to LASER by the end of 2021-2022 school year, and LASER being available to all interested divisions by the beginning of 2022-2023 school year. The basic Accreditation Tracker (available to all divisions in spring of 2022) will primarily leverage data already available within VDOE through data collections such as SRC and MRC, but will have daily refreshes for other data sources like SOL testing results. Additional Accreditation Tracker features and visualizations will be made available to those divisions that have an established data link for purposes of the EWS. Development work is underway to build repeatable connections to LASER through the use of APIs with all of the common SIS systems currently in use throughout the state.

As a reminder, **the VDOE support of the Performance Matters Analytics tool (also known as the PowerSchool EWS or Baseball Scorecard) expires on June 30, 2021.** Any other PowerSchool products (SIS, LMS, and Assessment Generator) that you may use and have a division-based contract with PowerSchool for will not be affected and you can add the PMA product to your contract if desired. As LASER is not currently available to all divisions, VDOE may provide grants to school divisions to assist with the inclusion of the Performance Matters analytics tool for the 2021-2022 school year based on need and available funding.

If you are interested in LASER, either to learn more and be provided with updates or to be added to the list of divisions for integration, please fill out the LASER Interest Form.

For more information

Please reach out to Paul.Corbett@doe.virginia.gov if you have any questions about the new LASER system or the termination of the VDOE PowerSchool Performance Matters contract.

JFL/PC