

**MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
COUNCIL OF BASIC EDUCATION**

**333 Market Street | 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126**

November 18, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 1:45 p.m. by Chairman James Barker.

Attending:

James Agras	James Grandon	Colleen Sheehan
Carol Aichele	Kirk Hallett	Craig Snider <i>(via phone)</i>
Jay Badams <i>(via phone)</i>	Maureen Lally-Green <i>(via phone)</i>	Lavinia Soliman
James Barker	Jonathan Peri	Joshita Varshney
Nicole Carnicella	Mollie Phillips <i>(via phone)</i>	Larry Wittig

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 16, 2015, meeting of the Council of Basic Education were approved on a **Hallett/Aichele** motion.

**REPORT OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Deputy Secretary Matthew Stem presented a report framed around how the work of his office is meeting the Department's broad goals and fits into PDE's overall mission.

Goal 1

Providing quality resources and supports that assist schools in preparing students to be college and career ready

Mr. Stem said PDE is updating the web-based application that districts use to submit their comprehensive plans to make it more intuitive and easier for districts. He spoke to the purpose of comprehensive planning and the elements that are included in district-level plans.

Mr. Stem also reported that the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) is funding 12 targeted LEAs to pilot dropout prevention strategies and activities that have been recognized by the National Dropout Prevention Center. The results from these pilots will be disseminated to all Pennsylvania LEAs to help guide their efforts. Additionally, Mr. Stem said PDE has partnered with Hispanos Unidos para Ninos Excepcionales (HUNE) to engage parents and students with disabilities whose first language is not English. HUNE is a nonprofit organization that provides free bilingual English and Spanish training, technical assistance and individual assistance to parents of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities and to professionals who work

with children of special needs. Through mentoring and community engagement activities, HUNE, in partnership with PDE, will develop resources and materials that will be made available to all LEAs throughout the Commonwealth. Finally, Mr. Stem noted that the Statewide System of Improvement Plan, developed through BSE, includes a graduation and dropout prevention plan for schools that will increase the target of improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates for students with disabilities. Collectively, these activities tie together strategically with PDE's goal of improving graduation and reducing dropout rates among students with IEPs.

Mr. Stem also reported that the Office of Safe Schools is accepting applications for safe schools grants to support training, school resource officers, school police officers and security-related equipment. Public school entities, non-public and private school entities are eligible to apply for this third year of grant funding. Mr. Stem shared an anecdote from a superintendent in a rural district that previously received a safe schools grant highlighting the invaluable services resources secured through the grant played in saving a life.

Goal 2

Ensuring that assessment and accountability systems are aligned to College and Career Ready student outcomes, incentivize effective practices at the school level and provide meaningful indicators of success

Related to goal 2, Mr. Stem said that PDE created a user guide for Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) data collection to provide support to schools with uploading data for the purposes of accountability and reporting.

Mr. Stem shared that 13 public schools and four private or non-public schools in Pennsylvania were recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as 2015 National Blue Ribbon Schools and said the awardees will be recognized at a special event in December 2015.

Further, Mr. Stem said PDE continues to look at possible revisions to the School Performance Profile (SPP). Mr. Stem said the current SPP is weighted heavily on one assessment measure that then becomes the overwhelming majority of the profile score. Recognizing that what is measured drives behavior at the school level, PDE is engaging in dialogue with stakeholders about potential revisions to make SPP more holistic and to focus on college and career-ready outcomes. For example, Mr. Stem said the Department is looking at how to increase dual enrollment activities in high schools and that including a dual enrollment measure in SPP may be a means to incentivize schools to focus on dual enrollment.

Finally, Mr. Stem shared that the Obama Administration released an action plan and report around the state of standardized assessments throughout the nation. He described the report as a call to action for states to ensure they are reflective about their standardized testing systems and the role that assessments play in day to day instruction. Mr. Stem said PDE has a team looking into how other states assure high rigorous standards and assessment systems that are well-aligned and also ensure that students are not being over-tested.

Goal 3

Creating systems that foster the ongoing growth and development of all Pennsylvania educators.

Mr. Stem reviewed the extensive professional development opportunities PDE offers to teachers throughout the Commonwealth. Training on the use of formative assessment for students with cognitive disabilities was provided to instructors of more than 16,000 students eligible to take the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment. Mr. Stem also highlighted the free professional development courses and activities available through the Standards Aligned System (SAS) portal that have allowed more than 6,000 educators to obtain 68,177 hours of Act 28 credit to date in 2015. Mr. Stem announced that the SAS portal is in the final stages of an upgrade to make it accessible on handheld devices.

Additionally, Mr. Stem said other training programs and initiatives supported by the Department have provided 171,205 hours of Act 48 credit to educators. Further, PDE continues to offer training sessions regarding data submission and also is acting as the lead state in a federally-funded initiative to work with migrant preschool educators on kindergarten readiness.

Upon time for questions, Chairman Wittig asked if the SPP includes availability of Advanced Placement (AP) courses as one of its criteria and if AP courses are weighted at a level equal to dual enrollment courses. Mr. Stem responded that AP, IB and dual enrollment courses are all part of draft revisions to SPP based on stakeholder feedback. Based on his recollection, Mr. Stem said he believed they are all part of the same indicator and share equal weighting. Mr. Wittig shared that his local school district is heavily involved in dual enrollment and, as a result of those programs, participation in AP courses has significantly cut back. Mr. Stem said PDE's goal is to incentive without prescribing all of those pathways for students.

Maureen Lally-Green asked how information regarding grants is disseminated to schools and whether there is a website that presents information on all available grants. Mr. Stem said the primary communication tool for making schools aware of grants are Penn*Links, which reach all school districts and charter schools. Most grants also are listed on PDE's website in the e-Grant system.

PRESENTATION

PSSA Assessment Anchor Content Standards & PASA Alternate Eligible Content

Ray Young, a Division Chief in PDE's Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction, and Pat Hozella, Director of PDE's Bureau of Special Education, presented assessment anchor content standards (anchors) for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and alternate eligible content for the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA). The anchors were developed by Pennsylvania educators, staff of Data Recognition Corporation and staff of PDE, with additional input from local, state and national subject matter experts. Mr. Young said the anchors seek to clarify the broad-based instructional standards in the Pennsylvania Core Standards in terms of what parts of the Pennsylvania Core are eligible for and can be reasonably assessed on a large-scale state assessment. Mr. Young explained that the anchors do not replace the Pennsylvania Core, rather they align to the Core and hold together, or anchor, the assessment system, as well as curriculum and instructional practices. Mr. Young then presented examples of the anchors.

Carol Aichele inquired about clarity regarding the anchors for mathematics and whether the anchors were specific enough for teachers. Mr. Stem shared that grade-level teachers were involved in drafting the anchors and said he would be happy to invite them to the next Board meeting for additional follow-up if necessary. Colleen Sheehan said the anchors feel like administration gone amuck and that, if she were a teacher, she would want to focus on just teaching students and not bureaucracy that gets in the way of teaching. Ms. Sheehan asked about the reaction of teachers who want to be in the classroom teaching rather than worrying about where a decimal is placed in the anchors. Mr. Stem said the anchors are a roadmap and that, in his experience as a superintendent, teachers are able to provide engaging and authentic instruction that covers academic standards when they are given support, time, autonomy and professional development to connect the dots. Ms. Sheehan said at a later date she would like to look into how bureaucracy gets in the way of teaching and that good teachers can select appropriate materials without the state telling them how to proceed in the classroom. Mr. Wittig said there must be some standardization in approach when there is an assessment component involved and that, no matter how small the district, somebody will be in charge of curriculum because there must be a coordinated effort and not a system where each educator teaches in a different way.

Pat Hozella reviewed the history of why the PASA was developed as an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities, which stems from federal law. She then reviewed the alternate eligible content standards for the PASA that specify the academic content appropriate for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and which is required to align to the state's academic standards. Ms. Hozella said the depth and breadth of the PASA alternate eligible content is not a one-to-one match with state academic standards because students eligible to take the PASA are unable to adhere to all of the academic standards. Ms. Hozella said the state endeavors to meet federal requirements for the assessment while ensuring that the PASA provides meaning for teachers, for students within the unique population that take the PASA and for parents who receive assessment reports.

Ms. Hozella reported that the PASA alternate eligible content was developed by diverse stakeholders, including teachers of students with significant disabilities, grade level teachers, English language learner teachers, higher education faculty, parents and advocates for students with disabilities. The alternate eligible content also was made available for public comment online and almost 280 comments were received. Finally, the alternate eligible content also was reviewed by an outside expert to ensure alignment to state academic standards.

Regarding format, Ms. Hozella explained that the PASA is not strictly a pencil and paper test and that the assessment includes videotaped elements that are scored by teams independent from the student's teachers. Finally, Ms. Hozella reviewed the resources PDE makes available to support educators in delivering instruction related to the PASA alternate eligible content.

James Grandon asked how children are evaluated for eligibility to take the PASA. Ms. Hozella shared that each state developed guidelines for students that meet the definition of significant cognitive disability and that, annually, a student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team meets yearly with parents and teachers to determine if the child should take the PASA. Ms. Hozella further stated that the population of students who take the PASA typically is consistent from year to year. Mr. Grandon asked if parents can choose if the child

participates. Ms. Hozella explained that the PASA requirement is similar to the PSSA in that every child must take a statewide assessment based on federal requirements. She noted that parents are part of the IEP decision-making team, but the only alternative to taking the PASA is the PSSA or, if the parent has a religious objection, the child could be exempted from a statewide assessment.

Colleen Sheehan asked if Pennsylvania was fine with the PASA as a federal requirement and complying with it. Ms. Hozella shared that, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the federal government provides approximately \$440 million annually and 90 percent of that goes directly to school districts for services to students with disabilities. If Pennsylvania did not participate in IDEA, the state would not receive any federal funds for those services. Ms. Sheehan said the state then had not exercised its discretion in participation, but does so because it is held hostage. Ms. Hozella stated that she would not characterize it as being held hostage as the issue of alternate assessments was highly controversial within the disability community with two philosophical groups presenting differing perspectives as the issue of alternate assessments emerged. One group felt that if students with disabilities were not assessed, school districts would only focus on things that were publicly reported and had consequences attached to them. That group advocated vehemently that there be some method of including students with severe disabilities in state assessment systems as a means of accountability for what happens in those classrooms. Ms. Hozella said a different group argued that the assessment should be a child's IEP goals which they viewed as a more relevant measure. Ultimately, the alternate assessment was included in federal regulations. Ms. Hozella said the requirement for an alternate assessment was driven by the grassroots disability advocacy community who sought an alternate assessment to ensure the kids would count.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION **Master Plan for Basic Education**

Chairman Wittig shared that development of a Master Plan for Basic Education for adoption by the State Board of Education falls among the many statutory duties seated with the Council of Basic Education. The purpose of the plan is to provide guidance to the Governor, the General Assembly and all public school entities. Mr. Wittig reviewed the 10 areas defined in the School Code in which the Board is to offer recommendations through the Master Plan.

Mr. Wittig said a recent a performance audit of the Department of Education conducted by the State Auditor General included a review of how the State Board of Education and the Department of Education interact in establishing and implementing education policy, rules, regulations and procedures. He noted that the Board fully participated in the audit process, providing information in response to numerous requests for written materials and taking part in personal interviews. The audit findings noted that the Master Plan for Basic Education is not up-to-date with the intended five-year timeframe established in the School Code for adopting such plans. Mr. Wittig said the Auditor General recommended that the Council of Basic Education convene immediately to update the plan. In response, Mr. Wittig said this matter was placed on the Council's agenda for discussion at this first meeting following the release of the audit findings in order to educate members about the statutory parameters for the Master Plan and to initiate preliminary discussion about the document. Copies of the most recent Master Plan also were distributed to Council members.

Chairman Wittig asked that Council members review the most recent Master Plan and familiarize themselves with the areas defined in statute that are to be addressed in the plan. After sufficiently digesting these materials, Mr. Wittig requested that Council members provide feedback to himself or to Board staff on their thoughts related to next steps for bringing the plan up-to-date. Specifically, Mr. Wittig said the Board will need to determine the process it will use to undertake this work, what information is necessary to inform its deliberations, what resources are necessary to support its work, and how it will engage stakeholders in the process.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ACTION ITEMS

PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT: ASSESSMENT ANCHORS AND ELIGIBLE CONTENT

A motion to approve the assessment anchors and eligible content for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) was made by James Barker and seconded by Carol Aichele.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

PENNSYLVANIA ALTERNATE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT: ALTERNATE ELIGIBLE CONTENT

A motion to approve the alternate eligible content for the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) was made by James Barker and seconded by Carol Aichele.

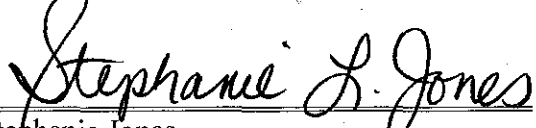
VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:53 p.m. on a Sheehan/Hallett motion.


Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant