

**Virginia Board of Education**  
**Standing Committee on School and Division Accountability**  
**Wednesday, February 22, 2017**  
**1:00 p.m.**  
**Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building**

**Accountability Committee meeting**

Welcome and Opening Comments

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the February 22, 2017 Committee on School and Division Accountability meeting: Diane Atkinson; Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; Jim Dillard; Dan Gecker; Elizabeth Lodal; Sal Romero, Jr; Anne Holton; and Dr. Jamelle Wilson. Dr. Steven Staples, superintendent of public instruction, was present.

Mrs. Atkinson, chairman of this committee, convened the meeting at 1:05p.m. and welcomed the Board members and guests. She introduced two new Board members, Ms. Anne Holton and Dr. Jamelle Wilson. As part of her introductory remarks, she said that today's meeting continued the work of the Board to revise Part VIII of the Standards of Accreditation. The meeting would start with a review of last month's accountability indicators: Graduation Completion Index and dropout rate. Then there would be a panel discussion on chronic absenteeism followed by a VDOE staff presentation on chronic absenteeism. She reiterated that the committee would receive a presentation on one-two accountability indicators per month for the next few months to gain a better understanding of how these indicators could possibly fit into an accountability system.

**Approval of Minutes from the January 25, 2017 Meeting**

Mrs. Atkinson said the draft minutes from the January 25, 2017 meeting were posted online and provided to Board members. Mrs. Lodal made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 25, 2017 committee meeting. The draft minutes were approved by Board members. Ms. Holton and Dr. Wilson abstained.

**Review of Accountability Measures – Graduation Completion Index and Dropout Rate**

Dr. Cindy Cave's presentation provided a review of the Board's discussion of school quality and school quality indicators over the past few months, including the guiding principles, criteria for selection of indicators, and schedule of indicator review. Dr. Cave also discussed stakeholder feedback in relation to Graduation Completion Index (GCI) and dropout.

Dr. Heather Carlson-Jaquez's presentation provided a review of January's two school quality indicators, Graduation Completion Index (GCI) and dropout rate.

The GCI calculation includes students in the cohort of expected on-time graduates, students who were first-time ninth graders four years earlier, plus transfer in and minus transfers out, and students are carried over from previous cohorts depending on their status. GCI more widely used by other states for accountability than dropout; dropout rate is only reported by other states. She noted that all 5 schools in Level 4 serve special populations and are currently under alternative accreditation plans.

Dropout is calculated as a four-year cohort. Dropouts are not students who are: 1) awarded a diploma, certificate or GED, 2) transferred out of state, 3) deceased, 4) on a long-term absence, 5) still enrolled, 6) enrolled in state operated agencies.

Both metrics have merit. For GCI, all students get points in GCI except long-term absences and dropout. It encourages and gives credit to school for taking steps to help students complete a program of study. For dropout, it is a simple calculation that provides schools with a clear measure of how many students they are losing to dropout and allows schools to determine if their efforts to reduce dropout are effective.

A copy of Dr. Cave and Dr. Carlson-Jaquez's presentation is available at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees\\_standing/accountability/2017/meeting\\_materials.shtml#feb22](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_standing/accountability/2017/meeting_materials.shtml#feb22).

- A Board member asked if it made sense to use both GCI and dropout rate in the Accountability matrix since they are somewhat similar.
  - Dr. Cave stated that students who dropout are not counted in the Graduation Completion Index.
  - Dr. Staples stated that there are gaps in our current accountability system and in conversations with local superintendents, having both of these indicators included in the matrix made sense to them. GCI measures how well you do with the students who stay enrolled in high school.
- A Board member noted that consideration must be given to a three-tiered vs. four-tiered accreditation system.
- A Board member referenced a Brookings Institute report about lessons learned from No Child Left Behind and mentioned two lessons of interest to the Board: 1) the bar should be set high enough so that it is aspirational for some schools, and 2) the goals should be in reach of all students. Board members should keep these two questions in mind moving forward.
- A Board member stated that they must begin to think about how schools are going to approach narrowing the achievement gap besides making proclamations to do so.
- A Board member asked to see more information about the dropout codes.

- Dr. Cave responded that she would be happy to provide more information to all Board members.
- A Board member stated that if this data is not ready for the accountability matrix, it could be included in the School Quality Profile.
- A Board member asked when is the Board/VDOE going to alert school divisions to the assistance they can receive if they don't meet the accountability benchmarks. They further remarked that if these data points are going to be included in the accountability matrix, then we must believe that they're important enough to provide support and action to the schools to improve outcomes.
  - Mrs. Atkinson responded that Part 8 of the Standards of Accreditation will articulate what schools will need to do if they don't meet the benchmarks outlined in the accountability matrix. The Board will continue to have the conversation about what can be done to change outcomes as Part 8 of the Standards of Accreditation are developed.
- A Board member remarked that they are pleased that the Board is having a conversation about actions versus strategies. Too often, strategies don't change the outcome for students or schools.
- A Board member stated that dropout is often a systemic problem, especially for those students who work to support their families.
- A Board member asked that as the Board talks about supports for schools and teachers, at what point is it appropriate for others to enter into the conversation about a student's path toward graduating or dropping out.
  - Dr. Cave responded that many years ago, there was a major focus on dropout prevention. The research shows that dropping out of school is a process that often begins in elementary school. Discipline and grades can show patterns towards dropping out. VDOE has resources to help school divisions with strategies to reduce dropout rates.
- Dr. Staples reminded the Board that they are trying to build a system that changes the perspective on accountability. The Board will be asking all schools to adopt a continuous improvement model which is a shift from our current accountability model. This new accountability model will continuously raise the ceiling and help to identify best practices across the state to share exemplars with peer schools.

### **Overview of Chronic Absenteeism definition**

Dr. Cave provided a definition of chronic absenteeism to help frame the next discussion and presentation. Chronically absent students are enrolled in the given school for at least 50 percent of the school year and miss 10 percent of the school year, about 18 days. This definition includes excused or unexcused absences.

- A Board member asked why a student must be enrolled in the given school for at least 50 percent of the year.
  - Dr. Cave agreed that staff will take another look at this definition. She stated that the current definition is taken from the federal definition in ESSA.
- A Board member asked about the difference between chronic absenteeism and truancy.
  - Dr. Cave responded by saying truancy is unexcused absences.
- A Board member asked if the Board was going to look at and address chronic tardiness.
  - Dr. Cave stated that tardiness and partial day attendance has been an issue that has been looked at for many years. Currently, VDOE does not have data on tardiness.
- A Board member stated that they are concerned about students who have chronic medical issues, especially special needs students.
  - Dr. Cave responded that this is an issue that staff will continue to look at further.

### **Panel Discussion on School Improvement**

Mrs. Atkinson outlined the format for this agenda item and introduced the following panelists who had been asked to share their experience in working with chronically absent students:

- The Honorable Frank W. Somerville, Presiding Judge, Culpeper Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of Virginia
- Dr. Kevin Siers, Superintendent, Pulaski County Public Schools
- Ms. Jane Moreland, Program Administrator of Outreach Services, Newport News Public Schools
- Mr. John R. Van Wyck, Director of Student Services & Title-I, Page County Public Schools

Judge Frank Somerville reviewed his presentation that included data on truancy, dropout, and chronic absenteeism. He also discussed the role of the courts in addressing truancy and chronic absenteeism.

Dr. Kevin Siers stated that there are a number of obstacles that make chronic absenteeism a big challenge for school divisions. Some of those challenges include: 1) Apathetic parents, many of whom did not have a positive experience when they were in school; 2) Transient families that relocate before truancy cases can be progressed toward an end; 3) Procedural red tape that often take months per child to navigate; 4) Unsupportive court systems who often seem to project fault onto the administrators or school systems. He stated that it's no secret that the overwhelming majority of school administrators are opposed to having chronic absenteeism count toward school accreditation. Many school administrators will tell you, with good reason, that there are too many extraneous variables that impact attendance and that schools are limited in what they can do to improve in this area. He is quick to shoot down this prospect because attendance is key to everything. In his experience, as a high school principal & superintendent, chronic

absenteeism can be improved using the same tiered support structures that we have been trying to apply to instruction over the past several years (Virginia Tiered Systems of Support-VTSS).

- Tier 1 – Attendance for all students can be improved just by ensuring the school has quality instructional programs that offer opportunities for students to engage with the curriculum.
- Tier 2 – This level of support nets improved attendance habits for those students who have some basic resources and support but, when left to their own devices, choose to not be at school because it is the easiest path to take. Some of the more successful supports for these students are peer mentors, linking them to extra or co-curricular activities, and attendance incentives.
- Tier 3 – More often than not, students who need this level of support do not have positive parental support, have significant substance abuse or mental health issues, may have had previous legal charges against them, and are effectively disconnected from school. Some programs to help these students include making referrals for counseling (truancy diversion, substance abuse, or general mental health), alternative education options (on-line classes, the ISAEF program, alternative schools, homebound instruction, flexible scheduling, etc.), and mentorships with an adult with whom they have built a relationship and level of trust.

During Dr. Siers first two years as the principal of Christiansburg High School, they were able to see steady gains in the attendance rates (.25%-.5%) primarily by making improvements in the instructional program and trying to link every student with an extra or co-curricular activity. During his final two years, they started seeing even more improvement through expanding the tier 2 & 3 levels of support (approximately 2.2%). The system was not perfect and they continued to have too many students displaying poor attendance habits but they were able to chip away at decreasing the number of students who ended up in court for truancy. He concluded by saying that there's nothing more impactful than teaching the future workforce the importance of showing up.

Ms. Jane Moreland provided information about her background including 25 years of working with students who have attendance issues and the demographics of her school division. She stated that even though she has been working in this field a long time, she has not come up with a perfect answer to solve these challenges. Ms. Moreland provided historical background information on truancy and chronic absenteeism in her school division. She stated that the challenges of chronic absenteeism are best addressed early in a student's career, preferably by third grade. Her school division works with the local police department and court system to try to solve challenges of chronic absenteeism. School personnel begin meeting with students after their fifth absence to develop an ABC plan (academic, behavior and curriculum plan). If all school staff don't make attendance a priority, parents won't listen. School culture is one of the first areas that need to be addressed to help with chronic absenteeism. All students need to be connected to activities, not just the classroom. Absenteeism is part of school benchmarks

developed by the local school division. By putting attendance and absenteeism in the benchmarks, it shows the community the importance of going to school. Team meetings are held every week to discuss chronically absent students and how to best get those students back in their schools. The school division utilizes the Virginia Tiered Support Systems. It is imperative to remind all staff about the importance of relationship building – teachers make personal calls and visits after a student’s first absence. Graduating high school is a topic of discussion, even in the very early grades, to cement the goal of all students completing high school. Ms. Moreland concluded by saying that personal relationships with teachers, parents and school personnel plus wrap-around services will help solve many of the challenges surrounding chronic absenteeism.

Mr. Van Wyck provided information about his background and demographics of his school division. Several years ago, Page County Public Schools (PCPS) modified its attendance policy to add a specific policy regarding 5, 6, and 7 “unexcused absences” and “15 absences of any type.” 5 unexcused absences or 15 absences of any type now triggers a “truancy process” that requires students and families to attend attendance meetings, complete a needs assessment, and use specific form (that require a doctor signature) for any future absences to be considered “excused.” After implementing this policy, the attendance system is organized and all schools and staff are on the same page with attendance requirements. PCPS utilizes the Virginia Tiered Support System in all of their schools. To continue this work, PCPS must implement systemic, research-based Tier-1 school climate and culture initiatives so as to transform their schools into places where students want to be, rather than home or anywhere else. For Tier-2 and Tier-3, PCPS continues to implement their attendance policy and require a needs assessment and face-to-face meeting with parents. There is strong support from the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Judges for Tier-2 and Tier-3 students and this critical support must continue to ensure success. Also, for Tier-2 and Tier-3 students who have experienced trauma and crisis, easier access to mental health and psychiatric services is vital. Mr. Van Wyck concluded by saying it is imperative to build a strong school climate and culture. There are experts in this area who can help like Frank Palatucci, Director of School Leadership Programs at the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association. If all of these tiered supports are available to school divisions, chronic absenteeism can be eliminated.

In response to the presentations, Board members raised the following questions and concerns:

- A Board member thanked the panelists for their candor and asked for a copy of their remarks.
- A Board member echoed the thanks that other Board members stated. They asked Ms. Holton – Echo the thank you! As we look at this indicator, do you have suggestions for us on how we should shape this outcome measure and connect the measure in a tiered accountability system of support for divisions?
  - Dr. Siers responded by saying that many superintendents are against including this indicator in the accountability matrix. He said that chronic absenteeism is a

key to everything educators do. It is important to educate administrators between the data, the links of chronic absenteeism and student success.

- A Board member stated that they were impressed by each of the panelists, especially since they didn't just talk about hitting a specific target on chronic absenteeism, they talked about the other parts of a child's life that will improve if chronic absenteeism is addressed. Attendance prepares students for success beyond high school.
- A Board member directed a question at Ms. Moreland. They asked her to talk more about how she brings parents into the schools, to provide appropriate programs and information to them, to break the cycle of poverty.
  - Ms. Moreland responded by stating that her school division has been committed to addressing chronic absenteeism at the earliest levels, including preschool and elementary school. They utilize data to look for attendance challenges with each student and build a strong relationship with the parents. The conversation with parents start the moment a parent steps into a building, and is best started with a home visit. The initial parent meeting should be able building a relationship, not going straight to a negative discussion. It's important to highlight successes with parents when their child has a good week. Be strategic with staff about who is best to work with a parent, utilize all staff (parent engagement specialists, Title I staff, or school counselors) to have these critical conversations. Internal staff communication is also very important to communicate about everyone's efforts in addressing a student's absenteeism. Another critical part is equipping parents with the right tools to help their children; this could include teaching them to check their child's attendance or grades online, working with them to ask the right questions in an IEP meeting, etc.
- A Board member asked what are the foundational resources that are needed by schools and divisions as they begin to talk about how to deal with the challenges of chronic absenteeism?
  - Judge Somerville responded by saying that mental health services are critical in our schools. Dr. Siers stated that his school division has a strong partnership with their local community services board to offer counseling services. They also look for solutions within their own faculty; for example, a teacher may be assigned as part of their "duty" to mentor students. Ms. Moreland stated that she is seeing more mental illness in students than ever before. School divisions need resources to address these issues. Mr. Van Wyck stated that quick and timely access to mental health services is vital. School climate and culture initiatives are still the most important aspect in addressing chronic absenteeism.
- A Board member asked the panelists what are the things that they have done or seen that are most successful with school climate and culture?
  - Dr. Siers responded that they created at least one success for every student , developed a peer mentorship program, created a Math180 and Reading180

program to help with the basics, and linked every student with an extracurricular activity. Mr. Van Wyck stated that his school division gave out random acts of kindness awards, held Words of Wisdom announcements in the morning, added additional extracurricular clubs and sports for students to participate in, and hosted an attenDANCE for students who missed less than two days of school for that month. Ms. Moreland responded that school culture is a tough thing to deal with but you must hold students and teachers accountable for their actions.

- A Board member stated that the parent relationship is so important, and it's also important to listen to the needs of the parents instead of telling them what they need.
- A Board member stated that improving a child's attendance at school is a proxy for improving the student and school experience. While some administrators believe that they don't have influence over student attendance, they do have influence over creating a good learning experience to make a child want to come to school.
- A Board member reiterated important themes that they heard throughout the panel discussion including the need for good relationships with parents, the need for students to have solid relationships throughout the school, and the importance of an interest connection for a student to their school.

Mrs. Atkinson and all of the Board members thanked the panelists for their participation and open discussion.

### **Discussion of Accountability Measure – Chronic Absenteeism**

Mrs. Atkinson introduced the presenters for this agenda item.

Dr. Heather Carlson-Jaquez's presentation provided an overview of the process for defining school performance benchmarks. This month, the school quality indicator was Chronic Absenteeism. To determine a recommended calculation, VDOE staff looked at research from other states, examined patterns in current Virginia data, and established and tested benchmarks for each level on the matrix.

Scientific studies show 1) Attendance makes a significant difference in student achievement and growth, 2) attendance explains about 25 percent of the overall poverty achievement gap, and 3) school-based action can make a significant difference in student attendance.

States that currently use chronic absenteeism as an indicator in their accountability system are Hawaii, Connecticut, Wisconsin and New Hampshire.

The chronic absenteeism data for Virginia is skewed, but the average is 10.73 percent of students are chronically absent. Using a three-year average stabilizes the scores so that schools are moving across accountability levels yearly.

Chronic absenteeism has a significant relationship to academic achievement and a significant relationship to graduation. Research-based interventions enable schools to have an impact on this metric.

- A Board member asked if there were other research-based interventions that they did not hear earlier during the panel discussion.
  - Dr. Carlson-Jaquez said that the panel discussed many of the research-based strategies to impact chronic absenteeism.
- Dr. Staples acknowledged Dr. Joann Burkholder, VDOE Director of Student Services, for her work on this issue. He stated that the chronic absenteeism indicator likely has more research-based interventions than any other indicator the Board will review.
- A Board member asked if more weight could be given to progress with this indicator than other given the wide spread of schools in each level and if there is a way to reward progress more in this indicator.
  - Dr. Carlson-Jaquez said that progress is taken into account with this data set. The progress data will be calculated year-over-year, not a three-year average.
- A Board member stated that the matrix works well for the requirements of ESSA but they need to figure out if it works well for Virginia's accountability system. Many of the details still need to be addressed in the coming months.

### **Update on Petersburg City Public Schools Memorandum of Understanding**

Dr. Cannaday provided an update on the Petersburg City Public Schools Memorandum of Understanding. He shared that he and Dr. Staples visited with the Petersburg School Board on February 1<sup>st</sup> in a public meeting. The school board/superintendent relationship is positive and collaborative with strong communication. There is consistent Board support of the Superintendent's recommendations and the public's confidence in the school division has been restored. The State MOU and improvement process has been positive and helpful. However, significant challenges persist despite progress including challenges with the City of Petersburg, teacher recruitment, and overall funding.

- A Board member asked if Petersburg is seeing any progress in the schools.
  - Dr. Staples shared that the superintendent believes the schools are making progress according to the plans he established and he's hopeful that half of the schools will be fully accredited this year.
- A Board member asked if there's any way to assist Petersburg schools in their challenges with the City.
  - Dr. Staples responded by saying that the City is also facing many financial challenges and only able to pay the SOQ minimum. The superintendent will recommend the same amount of financial support from the City for the upcoming year but will need an increase in funding in FY '19.

Mrs. Atkinson provided closing remarks. She thanked staff for their hard work and Board members for their attention and thoughtful questions.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:06p.m.