MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
COUNCIL OF BASIC EDUCATION

333 Market Street | 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

July 8, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 1:15 p.m. by Chairman James Barker.

Attending:

James Agras *(via phone)*	Kirk Hallett	Craig Snider *(via phone)*
Carol Aichele	Maureen Lally-Green	Lavinia Soliman
Jay Badams	Donald LeCompte	Joshita Varshney
James Barker	Jonathan Peri	Karen Farmer White
Nicole Carnicella	Mollie Phillips	A. Lee Williams
James Grandon	Colleen Sheehan *(via phone)*	Larry Wittig

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the May 13, 2015, meeting of the Council of Basic Education were approved on an **Aichele/Lally-Green** motion.

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Deputy Secretary Matthew Stem shared the following updates on behalf of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Federal Special Education Monitoring

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has recognized Pennsylvania as one of 21 states to receive the highest distinction regarding its federal special education monitoring. Mr. Stem said this is noteworthy because, as the process changed two years ago, USDE not only measures compliance to IDEA regulations but also places heavy weighting on student results. Mr. Stem commended Pat Hozella, Special Education Bureau Director, and her team.

21st Century Community Learning Center Grants

Mr. Stem provided an update on 21st Century Community Learning Center grants. In May, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) issued an invitation to apply for cohort 6 grant recipients. Grant funds totaling $18 million were made available among the 58 schools that

applied. PDE also released a cohort 8 grant application that would be effective from 2015 through 2018.

Professional Development

Mr. Stem said the Department is making efforts to act not just as a compliance agency, but as a supportive resource for school districts. As an example, Mr. Stem reported that, since mid-May, PDE led over 24 professional development sessions in the field and another 18 sessions were planned for the summer. Most of the sessions focused on assisting schools with comprehensive planning.

Special Education

Deputy Secretary Stem complimented the work of the Bureau of Special Education and the staff's dedication to supporting schools in the field over the summer months. He noted that the Department not only provides direct supports to schools, but also provides direct supports to parents on special education programming. He acknowledged the good feedback that is being received on the collaborative nature of the Department's work related to special education. Mollie Phillips commented that she had the opportunity to work with Pat Hozella and stated that Ms. Hozella is an outstanding special educator and a good leader.

Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE)

BCTE has taken a lead role in facilitating work across the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education related to College and Career Readiness. On May 29, 2015, PDE hosted an external stakeholders meeting with representatives of business and industry, education, elected officials and key stakeholders. Mr. Stem said the Department is compiling a report for the Governor and the Secretary of Education to share recommendations made during the very productive meeting. Topics covered during the meeting included: 1) career pathways; 2) use of workforce data; 3) bridging the gap between employers and educators; and 4) establishing benchmarks and indicators that define success. Deputy Secretary Stem acknowledged Dr. Lee Burket, BCTE Director, for her leadership as well as her staff for their vital role in this project. James Grandon stated that he attended the meeting and commented that it was a tremendous and inspirational day.

Act 71

Deputy Secretary Stem provided an update on implementation of Act 71, which requires school entities to adopt a Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy and to provide ongoing professional development in youth suicide awareness and prevention for professional educators in buildings that serve grades six through twelve. Act 71 also permits school entities to incorporate curriculum on this topic into their instructional programs. Since January 2015, PDE's Safe Schools Office has led a multi-agency committee in work to develop a model suicide awareness and prevention policy. Mr. Stem said he expects the model policy to be finalized in July 2015. Related resources, including guidelines for age appropriate curriculum, professional development training and guidelines, also will be made available by PDE in July.

Jonathan Peri asked if PDE was concurrently tracking the suicide rate of students in Pennsylvania and whether it will go down as a result of this program. Mr. Stem replied that the primary metrics are directed at implementation of the supports in schools and that PDE is not engaged in any short-term or longitudinal studies of direct impact on the number of suicides throughout the state. Mr. Stem stated that he would be willing to look into that. Mr. Peri warned against not tracking the impact in order to ensure efficacy of the program. Lavinia Soliman said she supported Mr. Peri's suggestion regarding tracking data on suicides rates.

Migrant Education

In May, the Migrant Education Program hosted a graduation ceremony celebrating the accomplishments of 215 senior migrant students in Pennsylvania representing various groups throughout the Commonwealth. Of those 215 students, 166 are already enrolled or planning to attend an institution of higher education, three will join the armed forces, and others will enter the workforce.

PRESENTATION
Proposed Pennsylvania System of School Assessment Cut Scores and Performance Level Descriptors

Rita Perez, Richard Maraschiello and John Weiss, of the Department's Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction, were joined by Pamela Herman and Dr. Juan D'Brot, of Data Recognition Corporation (DRC), to present recommended revisions to the cut scores and performance level descriptors (PLDs) for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and to discuss the process the Department undertook to develop its recommendations. Dr. D'Brot led a PowerPoint presentation that covered the following topics: background on the PSSA; standards setting process; standards setting results; and the Secretary's recommended cut scores and PLDs.

Dr. D'Brot said the PSSA is a system and the Pennsylvania Core Standards serve as the base of the system. He noted that these standards have increased expectations for students to prepare them to be college and career ready. He said the PLDs articulate expectations for students in each grade level through detailed narrative statements related to each of the four performance levels. Dr. D'Brot also noted that the PLDs were drafted by Pennsylvania educators, and said that using PLDs is considered a best practice in standard setting because they make meaning out of the process.

Dr. D'Brot said standards setting is a methodology used to define levels of performance and the range of scores on an assessment that correspond to those levels of performance. The process of developing cut score recommendations for the PSSA involved two components – a bookmark process and a review committee.

Dr. D'Brot said the bookmark process is the most prevalent method for standards setting used in K-12 for the past two decades, and that it is relevant for the PSSA because it can be applied to assessments that use both text dependent analysis and multiple choice questions. Dr. D'Brot said 58 Pennsylvania educators participated in the bookmark process, and he provided a detailed description of activity undertaken during the process. Bookmark participants engaged in

a content-based review and, ultimately, developed cut score recommendations in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics in each grade level from 3–8.

Karen Farmer White asked how educators participating in standards setting were selected and how educators were made aware of the opportunity to participate. Mr. Weiss explained that interested educators complete an application process through DRC and that the Department reviewed and selected the final participants from among names submitted by DRC. In making these selections, Mr. Weiss said the Department targeted diverse representation from different demographic areas (urban, suburban & rural school districts; small, medium & large districts) as well as diversity in teaching experience. Deputy Secretary Stem said that the external validators engaged by PDE to review the standards setting process also looked at the quality of the individuals involved and their participation in the process. Finally, Ms. White asked about the size of the pool from which the 58 standards setting participants were selected. Mr. Stem said he did not have the exact number on hand but would follow-up with that information. Ms. Soliman offered that she thought it would be valuable to include student input during the standards setting process.

Dr. D'Brot said a review committee comprised of 8 Pennsylvania educators (2 bookmark participants, 3 district-level administrators and 3 building-level administrators) also was convened to discuss cut score recommendations from a systems perspective to check for coherence and alignment across grades. Dr. D'Brot said the review Committee found the recommendations of the bookmark panelists to be sound and felt very comfortable with the justifications of the bookmark participants. He said the review committee did not recommend any changes to the bookmark participants' recommended cut scores for ELA. In mathematics, the review committee recommended five minor changes to the cut scores recommended by the bookmark panelists to show a smooth transition among grade levels, all of which were within one standard error.

In addition, Dr. D'Brot said two expert independent evaluators were brought in to oversee that the standards setting process was conducted with fidelity.

Dr. D'Brot then presented the Department's recommended scale scores. He discussed how the scores translate into student performance by showing performance impact based on real data from the PSSAs administered in spring 2015. Deputy Secretary Stem said the action before the Council is to consider adopting the scale scores, and that the Department's goal was to provide the Board with enough information about the standards setting process to assure members that the process was implemented with fidelity and integrity and so that members would have confidence in the scale score results. He said the decision previously was made to move to college and career ready standards, and that we are now measuring how students are meeting those standards in a snapshot in time.

Upon time for questions, Mr. Peri asked why the bookmark process was chosen over an alternate process. Mr. Peri asked whether it would have been possible to have a few hundred students take a mock test, sort the results and go from there to get to a similar end. Deputy Secretary Stem said that from a validity and reliability standpoint, PDE used the most prevalent methodology to produce scaled scores. Dr. Karla Egan, one of the independent validators who

joined the meeting by conference phone, responded that most states use bookmarking because it is a process that lends itself well for both multiple choice and constructive response items. Mr. Peri asked about subjectivity in the process rather than making determinations quantitatively. Ms. Egan responded that other processes also have some qualitative element, and said the role of review committees has become important since cut scores are used not only to make content judgments about student learning but also to make systems' decisions about teachers.

Dr. Lee Williams said it is important to understand the difference between norm-referenced vs. criterion-referenced tests. She said the idea of putting all scores together and norm referencing them, as suggested by Mr. Peri, is appropriate when you are administering a norm-referenced test. But, the PSSA is criterion-referenced. In this matter, Dr. Williams said the Board is setting a bar, not a score. She said the task before the Board is not telling you what your performance is ultimately going to look like, it is telling you where the bar for ultimate performance lies. Dr. Williams said Ms. Phillips, her colleague on the Board, spoke about a need for consistency when the Pennsylvania Core Standards were adopted and advocated for setting a bar for teachers to meet and not hopping all over the map, and that those comments were relevant to this matter as well. Dr. Williams said as a criterion-referenced test, the percentages of students in different performance levels will change over time, but the bar for proficiency will remain consistent. She said setting the bar based on performance results doesn't make sense for a criterion-referenced test. Dr. Williams further stated that we need to let go of the idea of valid and reliable and we need to focus on trustworthy, believable and repeatable. She said the process of determining how standards match the assessments is qualitative research and that is hard to wrap your head around if the sole focus is on validity and reliability. Dr. Jay Badams echoed Dr. Williams' comments on norm-referenced vs. criterion-referenced assessments.

Dr. James Barker said there was some question over the selection of educators to participate in standards setting, but it is important to remember the process involved educators who are going to live and die on this sword. He said with norm-referenced tests, every year the percentage of students passing went up, it took more skills the next year for students to meet the same mark. With a criterion-referenced assessment, the number of students scoring at a particular level can increase while the bar remains consistent. Dr. Barker said he thought the standards setting process was visible and trustworthy.

Deputy Secretary Stem said it was important to note that even after educators who participated in the bookmark process saw impact data, they did not recommend any adjustments to their cut scores. He said they recognized that this represents a snapshot in time and where we are on the continuum on increased rigor at the moment. Mr. Stem said that speaks volumes about the commitment of Pennsylvania's educators and their commitment to students.

Maureen Lally-Green commented that the challenge facing students and teachers in mathematics looked daunting and asked the Department to comment on that. Mr. Stem said the role of the standards setting committee is to ensure that the PLDs aligned to PA Core Standards are being accurately measured in order to provide a snapshot in time relative to where we stand with the new standards that reflect 21st century learning. He said participants in that process expressed confidence that this reflects the current circumstances, and believed that as students matriculate and have more exposure to the standards we will see improvement. He noted that a

lot of the mathematics content has been shifted to a grade level almost a year earlier. Ms. Phillips said districts have only had a year and a half to provide instruction in the new standards.

Dr. Badams said it is easy for this to become a passionate issue and to lose sight of the task before the Board, which he said is really a psychometric exercise. He said the use of assessment data is important in light of teacher evaluations and school performance profiles, and that the Board has a responsibility to clearly explain how the PA Core Standards have raised the threshold in what we expect of students to provide context for communities to understand the new scores. Dr. Badams said it is no mystery that the cut score recommendations reflect declines because of how the bar was raised.

Craig Snider commented that transition to the new standards is impacted by variation in resources available to districts, but the standards take effect for all districts at the same time. He asked whether a companion piece might create a curve or other action to avoid penalizing students in underfunded districts for things outside their control. Mr. Snider said he favored increasing academic standards, but said the evaluation of students across different populations is anything but standard.

Chairman Wittig said he had a great deal of confidence in the process and that he appreciated the Department's efforts to bring in external validators as another avenue to ensure fidelity.

Hon. Carol Aichele shared a concern that parents of students who are unsuccessful will use their child's scores to discredit the process. Ms. Aichele thanked PDE and DRC for its crystal clear presentation. She said that, moving forward, PDE needs a plan to address the concerns of parents during this transitional period that describes how we are going to move from where we are now to proficiency. Mr. Wittig noted fierce local control issues regarding the Department telling districts how to operate rather than providing guidance. Ms. Aichele said, as a former math teacher, that a three-year plan may be called for given that math skills build on what was learned in the prior year.

Mr. Grandon commented that immediate communication is needed from the Department to schools, parents and the public at large to help digest and provide context for the new standards and revised PSSA cut scores.

Dr. Badams said his district has been working on this ever since the state indicated it would move toward core standards. He noted that eighth graders represented in the proposed cut scores for mathematics had one and a half years of increased rigor in instruction. Dr. Badams said if we stick with it and are consistent for a long enough period, we will see improvement as current second graders move through the system. Mr. Wittig reiterated that Dr. Badams' comment about consistency was crucial.

Dr. Williams asked how invitations to participate in standards setting were distributed. She said the demographics of the panel looked very representative, and encourage PDE to think about establishing a system to communicate directly with teacher leaders in schools akin to how the Department's postsecondary office communicates with faculty leaders in higher education.

Dr. Barker concluded by stating the Mr. Grandon's comments related to communications were critical. He said efforts need to be made to help the public understand that the cut score setting process is by design and that the goal of the overall system of standards and accountability is to make Pennsylvania student more competitive.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Harris Zwerling, Assistant Director of Research for the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), commented that he has followed the path of PSSA and Keystone Exam cut score setting since 2002 and that he remembered the adjustments that were made to the initial PSSA cut scores. Dr. Zwerling stated that he did not see summary statistics showing how many of the 58 educators that participated in standards setting were classroom teachers who taught the subjects being assessed or demographic breakdowns by race or type of districts in which the educators are employed. Deputy Secretary Stem responded that this information could be provided. Dr. Zwerling then stated that the question of what constitutes college and career readiness is not an easily identifiable standard and asked whether the standard is related to community college or Harvard and whether the career in mind falls within the massive service industry or medicine. He asked how the cuts points for mathematics translated in terms of believability and questioned how teachers would accept that students who they thought were doing just fine are failing. Dr. Zwerling stated that standards setting is ultimately a policy judgment and not a pure science. He asked what had been done to validate the scores externally, and cited a student from the National Center for Education Statistics that he said found that 60 percent of students who scored basic or below basic on the National Assessment of Education Progress graduated from either 2-year or 4-year colleges. Dr. Zwerling said he understands the system is criterion-based, but reiterated his opinion that the scores need to be validated.

Chris Clayton, Assistant Director of Education Services for PSEA, said sampling needs to have strict controls to make sure you get diversity. Mr. Clayton also said the new standards heavily rely on text dependent analysis and asked what role text complexity and depth of knowledge (DOK) levels played in the bookmarking process. He stated that standardized assessments cannot really get to DOK level 4 and wondered about the role of subjectivity in grading writing being translated into a quantitative process. He also asked whether there was confounding complexity in math problems that are now more text dependent by asking students to read lengthy questions that have real world scenarios. Mr. Clayton said there is legislation to delay Keystone graduation requirements, but this legislation does nothing to delay evaluations for teachers who are struggling with these tests. Finally, he asked if there are any comparisons or contrasts with PARCC and Smarter-Balanced assessments.

ACTION ITEMS

REVISED PSSA CUT SCORES AND PERFORMANCE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

A motion to approve the recommended PSSA Cut Scores and Performance Level Descriptors was made by James Barker and seconded by Carol Aichele.

Upon discussion on the motion, Mr. Grandon reiterated his prior comments about the need for swift communications with the public and stakeholder groups to help them understand the new cut scores. Mr. Badams asked whether the Board could place conditions on the Council's recommendation to address this. Mr. Hallett asked whether attaching conditions was the proper way to undertake this and whether it would also address questions raised relative to the new teacher evaluation system. Mr. Stem said that how assessment results are used as part of evaluating educator effectiveness is codified, and Ms. Molchanow added that additional thought would need to be given to how teacher effectiveness is addressed in the Commonwealth's waiver of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Ms. Molchanow suggested that if the Board wished to provide advice or guidance to PDE, that could be handled through a separate action item or joint letter of the Board. The Council directed Board staff to develop a separate action item addressing Mr. Grandon's comments on communications for consideration by the State Board of Education the following day.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

AJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m. on a **Barker/Phillips** motion.

Stephanie Jones

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant