

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

333 Market Street | 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

March 14, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 1:33 p.m. by James Barker.

Attending:

Erin Agnew	Sandra Dungee Glenn	Colleen Sheehan
James Agras (via phone)	Paul Ferrera	Ed Sheehan
James Barker	Kirk Hallett	Shannon Sullivan
Wendy Beetlestone	Francis Michelini	Karen Farmer White
David Collins	Jon Peri	Lee Williams
Connie Davis	Mollie Phillips	Larry Wittig
Sen. Andrew Dinniman	Sen. Jeffery Piccola	

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the January 12, 2012 meeting of the Council of Basic Education were approved on a **Davis/Farmer White** motion.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

ACADEMIC STANDARDS/CHAPTER 4 COMMITTEE

Dr. Lee Williams, Committee Co-Chair, provided an update on public hearings convened by the Committee to solicit public comment on draft proposed revisions to Chapter 4 relevant to Keystone Exams. The first hearing was held at the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit on February 29. A second hearing scheduled in Pittsburgh for March 7 was cancelled due to lack of stakeholders registered to provide public comment. The final hearing was held March 14 in Harrisburg in conjunction with the March 2012 State Board of Education meeting. In addition to providing opportunities for stakeholder input at the hearings, the Committee also invited testimony to be submitted in writing so that individuals who were unable to attend the hearings had an avenue to comment on the draft regulatory revisions.

Dr. Williams noted that copies of all testimony, both written comments and copies of testimony presented at the hearings, were given to all Board members for review, along with copies of the draft proposed revisions to Chapter 4. She also noted that the Board would have an opportunity to discuss the draft revisions during the Council meeting. Finally, Dr. Williams said the Committee's next steps would be to review and consider the testimony presented on draft revisions, along with State Board member comments, and determine whether any additional changes were necessary to the draft proposal.

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Deputy Secretary Carolyn Dumaresq called upon Department of Education staff Rich Maraschiello and Dr. Jean Dyszel to review three major initiatives of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education related to standards and assessments – development of the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards, revisions to align the PSSAs to these standards, and draft proposed revisions to the Keystone Exams.

Dr. Dyszel spoke to the Department's efforts to develop the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. The standards represent a comprehensive set of Pre-K thru 12 academic standards that were developed by Pennsylvania educators with the engagement of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Dr. Dyszel said that the standards 100% embed the content and rigor of the national common core standards previously approved by the State Board and reflect the flavor and format of current state standards in a manner that is familiar to Pennsylvania educators. Dr. Dyszel also noted that the standards align with the revised assessment anchors and eligible content, which are the blueprints for the state's revised PSSA tests for ELA & mathematics.

Sen. Dinniman asked if Geometry was included as part of the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards and, if so, how it will be assessed if there is no longer a Keystone Exam in that subject. Mollie Phillips responded that schools would still be required to assess students' knowledge of geometry, but using a mechanism other than a state assessment. Dr. Dumaresq reiterated that current state standards address many subjects that schools are expected to provide planned instruction on, but that are not subject to state assessment.

Chairman Wittig asked whether the Pennsylvania Common Core addressed the concern with current state academic standards being an inch deep and a mile wide and whether the Pennsylvania Common Core achieved the narrowing and deepening of the national Common Core. Dr. Dyszel responded that she believed the draft Pennsylvania Common Core met that mark and called members' attention to an outline of learning progressions as a concise look at how the standards are of higher rigor, fewer in number and organized in a cohesive manner.

Sandra Dungee Glenn asked what assistance the Department will provide to districts in curriculum development relevant to the Pennsylvania Common Core. Dr. Dyszel reported that the Department will convene Intermediate Unit trainings for curriculum directors.

Mr. Maraschiello then presented the Department's Common Core transition timeline which included a schedule for administering revised PSSA exams aligned with the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards. The transition will take place in stages over the next three school years. In 2012-2013, the PSSA will assess current Pennsylvania academic standards in grades 3 through 8, but not grade 11. The grade 11 PSSA will be replaced by the Keystone Exams in Algebra I, Biology and Literature at that time.

The first stage of PSSA transition will begin in 2012-2013 by field-testing items aligned to the PA Common Core in ELA and mathematics in grades 3 through 5. Rather than continuing to administer stand-alone reading and writing exams, the new ELA PSSA will assess reading and writing concepts in one exam. Mr. Maraschiello reported that, next year the PSSA also will be available in two modes: paper and pencil and, for the first time, online. In 2013-2014, PSSAs in grades 3 through 5 will assess the PA Common Core Standards. That year, the state also will field test items to assess the PA Common Core on a revised PSSA in grades 6 through 8. In the 2014-2015 school year, the Department will implement PSSAs aligned to the PA Common Core in all grades 3 through 8.

Mr. Maraschiello reminded the Board that the Keystone Exams in Algebra I, Biology and Literature will be used for two purposes: 1) assessing student proficiency to meet state graduation requirements beginning with the class of 2016-2017 and 2) as the high-school level accountability system required by federal law. He reported that the Department had prepared and submitted documentation to the U.S. Department of Education (US DOE) for approval to use the Keystone Exams for this purpose, and that peer review of PDE's request is scheduled to occur in April 2012. Mr. Maraschiello then discussed the proposed plan to transition the use of the Keystone Exams for federal accountability purposes.

The plan will be fully implemented in 2016 when the state will use the grade 11 enrollment as the population for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as it currently does. However, since students take the Keystone Exams at various points between grades 7 and 11, the state needed to develop an interim method for defining the AYP population. Subject to US DOE approval, for the next few years the plan would define the high school AYP population as all Keystone test takers in grades 9, 10 and 11. Students who take a Keystone Exam in grade 8 and below will have their scores banked and those scores will count when the students enter high school. The Department also plans to request approval to use students' best scores in AYP calculations for those students who re-take the exams. Since the keystones also are new assessments, Mr. Maraschiello said the Department will be able to set new annual measurable objects for AYP purposes.

Finally, Mr. Maraschiello reported that the Department's current contract for PSSA exams is set to expire on December 31, 2014 and its current contract for Keystone Exams will expire on June 30, 2015. A new request for proposals will be required for each contract.

Sen. Piccola asked what happens with banked AYP scores if a child moves school districts between middle school and high school. Mr. Maraschiello said the score would follow the student to the high school they attend, and that these students also would be taking the grade 8 PSSA for middle school accountability purposes.

Ms. Dungee Glenn expressed concern with narrowing of the curriculum if the number of Keystone Exams is reduced and asked how the Department intended to keep pressing districts to increase rigorous instruction if the high school level math assessment focused only on competencies in Algebra I, while the current PSSA assessed content from a broader spectrum of math competencies. Mr. Maraschiello said he would not describe the shift as a lowering of standards, but changing the focus from a survey of mathematics to a more focused end-of-course

exam in Algebra I, which is a core foundation course. Ms. Phillips took exception to the notion that schools would only take instruction seriously if a subject is assessed by a state exam. Sen. Dinniman said he understood Ms. Phillips perspective, but that state assessments serve as a signal to the public on school quality and a tool that can drive schools to focus on the standards and improve. Sen. Piccola suggested that state assessments are necessary to ensure all students are being provided with an equal level of education and to ensure that a high school diploma in Pennsylvania guarantee students have achieved a minimum level of knowledge regardless of the district they attend, as well as to ensure taxpayers are getting what they pay for. He pointed to a previous study conducted by Penn State that identified a lack of rigor and consistency in local assessments and demonstrated that schools were all over the lot in what they taught, which he said was reaffirmed by the Keystone Exam field tests. The Senator suggested that any movement by the state to dumb down the assessments was a move in the wrong direction.

Dr. Dumaresq then reviewed draft proposed revisions to Chapter 4 related to the Keystone Exams that were presented for the Board's consideration. The administration is recommending that Keystone Exams be de-coupled from a student's course grade and utilized as a stand alone graduation requirement. Dr. Dumaresq discussed concerns with incorporating a Keystone score as one-third of a course grade, including the lack of a consistent statewide grading scale; how early exams need to be administered in order to return scores in time for districts to provide grades; and questions about students retaking Keystones to obtain a higher score either to improve their GPA, boost their class rank or affect scholarships opportunities.

She noted that the draft revisions maintain local flexibility for school districts to develop their own validated local assessments that could be used in place of the Keystones to assess state graduation requirements. A second revision to the regulation would mandate participation in supplementary instruction for students who do not score proficient on a Keystone exam. Dr. Dumaresq said supplementary instruction should be based on the needs of the student to become proficient in the eligible content missed on the exam, and that such instruction could take multiple forms such as tutoring, study halls, online instruction and differentiated courses.

Related to project-based assessments, Dr. Dumaresq said the Department is recommending that these alternate assessments be scored by statewide panels, rather than regional panels, to ensure consistency in grading. To address time constraints of students who may be completing multiple project-based assessments during their senior year, the culminating local project would become optional. Finally, Dr. Dumaresq said the revisions provide for chief school administrators to request emergency waivers on a case-by-case basis for students who have met local graduation requirement but were not able to demonstrate proficiency on state requirements via a Keystone Exam or project-based assessment. However, the regulation would require districts that request waivers for more than 10 percent of students to create an action plan to ensure that course rigor is matched to the rigor of Keystones, appropriate supplemental instruction is being provided, and that there is appropriate support for the project-based assessment.

Finally, Dr. Dumaresq said the Department hopes to identify resources to support other Keystones in the future, and indicated a high level of interest in bringing back an exam in Civics and Government. She noted that the Department is working to develop language that would

allow it to bring back additional Keystones with permission of the State Board, but without having to undertake regulatory revisions to Chapter 4.

Sen. Piccola expressed concern with scaling back the number of Keystone Exams due to a funding issue, and said the state needs to utilize the assessments to insist on a high level of rigor and accountability in our education system. He discussed legislation introduced by himself and Sen. Dinniman that would prohibit the Board from making changes to policies related to Keystones and that would reimburse districts for costs incurred related to exams that would not be developed. Speaking from the perspective of a school board member, Chairman Wittig suggested that districts should focus their budgets to gear up to meet academic standards regardless of whether Keystone Exams are in place.

Sen. Dinniman noted that the incorporation of a Keystone score into the course grade was previously incorporated to alleviate concerns about high-stakes testing. Ms. Agnew agreed that incorporating the Keystone scores into a student's grade would compel student to take the exams seriously, and expressed concern that using the exams as a stand alone requirement placed unnecessary pressure on high school students. Ms. Agnew also address the funds her district has spent to realign courses with Keystones and said, as a student, she felt she had benefitted from this investment.

Sen. Dinniman asked how the Commonwealth could reward districts that are doing well on state assessments, rather than constantly focusing on identifying districts that are not meeting the mark. Dr. Dumaresq replied that the Department is discussing ways to reward such districts by relieving some of the state reporting requirements they are subject to, such as strategic planning.

Ms. Beetlestone suggested that the Board's focus should be on what is right for students, not on how those needs are funded. She suggested the Board motion to ask the Department to go back to the drawing board on its proposal, however, Sen. Piccola suggested such a motion was premature given that the proposal was just in draft form and had not yet begun the formal regulatory process which includes avenues for making modifications.

Dr. Williams reminded the Board that the current regulation addressing Keystone Exams included a focus on providing support for schools that were not meeting expectations. She stressed that the state should not lose focus on providing that assistance as a part of the regulation that is equally important to student assessment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ACTION ITEMS

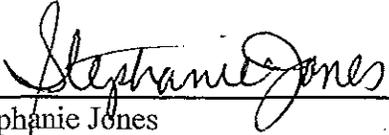
There were no action items.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 pm

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephanie Jones". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant