

**Accountability and Assistance
Advisory Council
April 8, 2009
Worcester Technical High School
Minutes**

Attendance: Andrew Churchill, Robert Consalvo, Dr. Judy DeLucia, Joseph Esposito, Dr. Anders Lewis, Anne McKenzie, Beverly Miyares, Linda Noonan, Laura Perille, Steven Sharek, Susan Therriault; Eva Mitchell, John Portz, Mary Street, Catherine Sullivan, Tyreese Thomas, Dr. Karla Baehr, (ESE)

1. **Welcome and Update**– Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr provided updates on the status of the 15 district reviews for the 2008-2009 school year.

2. **Presentation of ARRA and its implications to Targeted Assistance *feedback and questions from the group***
 - ESE’s pressure on districts to spend on strategic investments forces districts to have to be creative about their funds. ESE guidance is pushing districts in a new direction.
 - There is nothing radically new about ESE’s recommendations for district use of the money. It maintains the status quo and amounts to preserving jobs but “under the guise of improving student achievement.”
 - Is lifting the cap on charter schools a prerequisite to receiving the competitive grants?
 - Karla clarified that ESE has an obligation to provide transparency and accountability but is given no money under ARRA to provide this.
 - There was discussion about the FY10 proposed budgets for accountability and the amount being significantly lower than what EQA was allocated to perform the same functions that ESE is now being tasked with.
 - There is a clear mismatch between the money required for ESE to take over the accountability functions from EQA and the funds being allocated in the proposed FY10 budgets to perform those functions.
 - ESE should look at this budget challenge as an opportunity to re-think their way of doing business and a “more focused review” as a result may not be a bad thing.
 - ARRA should be looked at as an opportunity for differential pay for physics teachers and innovative dropout intervention programs.
 - ESE should focus on a public communications strategy with foundations and community groups. If the goal is transparency, more stakeholders should be included in the communication to districts. There should be an FAQ document sent to every possible network to generate more ideas and expand on whose ideas get heard. The current strategy is “too top-down”.
 - There needs to be a bigger push for ideas on how to spend the money because local cuts are discouraging innovation.

- Are districts being asked to connect district “needs” for ARRA spending with specific data? Will ESE request that proposals be grounded in context?
- The speed with which these grants have to be rolled out in combination with the pace of local cuts is a “bad mix”. ESE should assist districts in thinking strategically about spending ARRA money.
- Karla clarified that ESE will be conducting a series of regional technical assistance sessions in May to help districts use ARRA funds strategically.

3. Discussion of Integrated District Standards for Accountability and

Assistance– *feedback and questions from the group*

- Karla began the discussion by clarifying that the big messages ESE took from the last AAAC discussion on district standards were to (1) “cross-walk” the EQA, national self-assessment, and NEASC standards with the Essential Conditions to create an aligned and integrated new set of standards; and (2) include “guideposts” for what is most important.
- ESE should be sure to “vet” the final product with the field.
- Are the reviews going to “weight” the standards by those that are most important? Will there be a hierarchy?
- Karla clarified that the most “important” standards would be at the top of each list and bolded.
- ESE should consider conducting district reviews solely using “power standards”.
- ESE should focus on narrowing down the indicators focusing mainly on curriculum and instruction.
- Standards should avoid “subjectivity” in the language.
- Standards should focus on outcomes.
- Karla clarified that tying standards to outcomes can hinder the diagnostic effect of the indicators. But overall findings on student achievement are included in the reviews.
- The challenge is to develop a set of standards that is not bureaucratic and is useful to districts who want feedback.
- EQA standards covered everything we needed to measure.
- Karla clarified that the review process must apply to a full range of districts – not just those that are low-performing. Even a well-functioning district should get useful feedback.
- Districts get “caught” in the review process because of their schools. The way to reform education is school-by-school.
- ESE should consider adding standards on “family engagement” and “quality of school leadership”.
- Feedback from districts should inform changes to the standards and review process regularly as long as we go forth with a willingness to improve.

4. Presentation of School Intervention Options at Levels 4 and 5 of the

Accountability and Assistance Framework– *feedback and questions from the group*

- The accountability and assistance staff must ensure strategic use of the funds used for Level 4 and 5 schools. ESE should hold districts accountable for spending this money on their district intervention plan.
- Principals do not have as much authority over hiring and firing as many think. This is a serious problem.
- ESE must ensure that Lead Partners be rejected if a district has a conflict of interest.