

**Accountability and Assistance
Advisory Council
June 10, 2009
Worcester Technical High School
Minutes**

Attendance: Andrew Churchill, Dr. Judy DeLucia, Joseph Esposito, Dr. Anders Lewis, Anne McKenzie, Beverly Miyares, Linda Noonan, Laura Perille, John Portz, Steven Sharek, Susan Therriault; Eva Mitchell, Catherine Sullivan, Jesse Dixon, Matt Deninger, Dr. Karla Baehr, (ESE)

1. **Welcome and Update**– Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr provided updates on the following issues:
 - District review surveys have been conducted with personnel from each reviewed district in order to gather feedback about review processes. The preliminary results from some of those surveys were included in the packets.
 - The final district reviews for the 2008-2009 school year are concluding and the reports will be completed over the summer. One member requested that the list of reviews be sent to the Council.

2. **Presentation of the Annual District and School Trend Profile** – Matt Deninger in the ESE Office of School Planning, Research, and Evaluation presented current ESE work-to-date on the Annual District and School Trend Profile as a tool to analyze district and school-level data. Beginning in fall 2009, every district and school will be evaluated annually on more than forty quantitative indicators presented through visual displays of data that will be publicly accessible through the Department website. The Profile will also include a “comparison” tool to allow users to compare schools or districts to any other school or district in the Commonwealth so that they can identify trends as well as promising practices in settings with similar challenges – *feedback and questions from the group*
 - Participants asked if users would be able to create their own “group” of comparison districts. Matt explained that this is a feature that could be included.
 - The question was raised whether there would be a way to indicate the differences statistically between “significant improvement” and “noise”.
 - One participant asked how this tool would compare with what other states are using for similar purposes. Matt explained that the Trend Profile is unique from similar tools used by other states in that a) each indicator can be analyzed by subgroup, and b) the choice of indicators is more robust than what other states analyze.
 - When asked who the primary user would be, Matt responded that it is being designed for use by both district staff and parents.
 - One member suggested that there should be large pre-made groups for comparisons such as large urban districts, vocational-technical districts, charter schools, etc.

- Most members agreed that ESE was “on the right track” with the direction of this project. One member pointed out that this would help districts analyze data in useful ways and that pictures are more compelling than looking at data. The group suggested additional indicators such as guidance counselor-to-student ratio and superintendent turnover data.
- Karla added that feedback from the field has indicated that the EQA reports had useful displays of data. The purpose of this project is to replicate and expand that tool to every district and school annually. ESE plans to roll this out with the release of fall MCAS results.
- The Council requested that they be able to weigh in on the roll-out plan.

3. Review of District and School Interventions at Levels 4 and 5 of the Accountability and Assistance Framework *feedback and questions from the group*

- Karla began the discussion by informing the Council that ESE will be presenting the Framework to the Board at the end of the month.
- There was some discussion of the accountability and assistance at Level 3. Karla clarified that the Level 3 self-assessment process would be reflected in the District Improvement Plan. These Plans would be formally reviewed by ESE through a “desk-audit” process, but would be examined closely by the regional District and School Assistance Centers.
- The Council noted that the communication to districts about Level 3 and the regional system of support is important and should be clear. Karla explained that there would be regional presentations in the fall to announce the Framework and introduce the District and School Assistance Center to each Level 3 district. The Council suggested that ESE invite participants beyond just district personnel for these regional presentations to cultivate greater stakeholder support.
- Discussion of Level 4 centered focused on the division of roles and responsibilities between the Accountability Monitor and the Assistance Liaison. Karla clarified that the legislation moving EQA to ESE was explicit about the need for this separation.
- One participant noted that it needs to be clear what the limits of the Targeted Assistance Liaison’s responsibilities are – they cannot be blamed for the district’s failure to meet benchmarks. Karla clarified that this tension will be addressed through clear job descriptions and communication to districts. Members emphasized the importance of having “good people” to fill this role because they are critical to the success of Level 4 interventions.
- Discussion at Level 5 focused on the definition of “co-governance”. Karla clarified that “shared decision-making” implies that ESE would have veto power and oversight over certain decisions, but the theory of action is to build capacity for the district to turn around its own schools.
- Karla explained that every district in Level 5 will have a customized co-governance agreement unique to the context.

- Members of the Council stated that this Framework was “ready to go” and be operationalized.

4. Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness – *feedback and questions from the group*

- Karla explained that some Essential Conditions do not become “essential” until a school is in trouble. Accordingly, some of the wording in the latest draft of the Essential Conditions was changed to be worded generally in Levels 1-3, but be more prescriptive at Levels 4 and 5. She also announced that ESE plans to use the Essential Conditions as the framework for all units in the Department to organize their assistance to districts (e.g., the Office of Special Education would work with the Office of Literacy on Condition #5).
- Members expressed concern that with this broader application of the Essential Conditions, it was important that they address more than just reading and math.
- The Essential Conditions should not be “set in stone” – the regulations should allow for some flexibility and improvement as we move forward with implementation.
- Making “MCAS” synonymous with “academic achievement” in #4 could be problematic.
- There was some discussion about Essential Condition #3. One member stated that the language has improved, but “without regard to seniority” is not based in research because no contracts allow for staffing decisions to be made on seniority alone. Another member stated that leaving that language in the Condition would be helpful for the state application for Race to the Top funds and other federal competitive grants.

5. Review of District Standards – *feedback and questions from the group*

- Karla summarized the major changes reflected in the process of adapting the EQA standards into a revised set of ESE District Standards and Indicators: the original 72 indicators have been made into 35 more comprehensive and less fragmented indicators; priority indicators have been identified and labeled to help districts focus and ESE target priorities for assistance. The new standards are more coherent, aligned with NEASC and the Essential conditions, are a tool for assistance and improvement while preserving the rigor of the EQA indicators.
- One member noted that the current draft addresses AAAC concerns and represents some key learning from the years of Ed Reform.
- There was some discussion about the relationship between the Essential Conditions and the District Standards. One member asked if the Essential Conditions should be linked linearly to the ordering of the district standards. The suggestion was also raised about developing a “framing paragraph” to explain the purpose of these documents and how they fit together in order to clearly present the Framework, the Essential Conditions, and District Standards in one coherent document. One

member suggested that the District Standards be referenced in the Framework.

The Council agreed that there would be a tentative meeting in Worcester scheduled for July 22nd at 9am.