

Meeting Minutes for the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education

Thursday, January 17, 2019

NC Department of Transportation Board Room

In attendance

Dr. Fouad Abd-El-Khalick, Ms. Melody Chalmers, Mr. Jim Deal, Hon. Rick Glazier, Mr. Mark Jewell, Ms. Leigh Kokenes, Dr. Helen "Sunny" Ladd, Dr. Patrick Miller, Mr. James Moore, Mr. Mark Richardson, Mr. Nick Sojka, Mr. Michael Williams, Dr. Stelfanie Williams, Mr. Brad Wilson (Chair), Hon. Leslie Winner, Ms. Henrietta Zalkind

Welcome

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:30 am and welcomed members. The Chair read the Conflict of Interest statement.

Commission Business and Updates

The Chair presented the minutes from the December 4, 2018 meeting of the Commission and asked if members had any edits. Hearing none, the Chair approved the minutes as presented.

The Chair shared that the Commission's discussion today will focus on the importance of specialized instructional support personnel (school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers) in helping schools address student well-being so that all students are able to be successful academically. The Chair thanked Commissioner Leigh Kokenes for her help in putting together the agenda for today's meeting and in lining up our resource experts. The Chair invited Ms. Kokenes to share some thoughts on the agenda for today. Ms. Kokenes thanked the Commission for the opportunity to focus on this issue and to highlight the important work of these professionals.

Supporting Student Success through Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)

The Chair recognized Dr. Ellen Essick, Section Chief, NC Healthy Schools, NC Department of Public Instruction, to provide an overview of the framework for supporting students physical and mental health needs through specialized instructional support personnel (SISP). Dr. Essick shared that the State Board of Education has adopted the "Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child" (WSCC) framework as a coordinated way to engage students, schools, and communities in supporting the students' non-academic needs. As a part of this strategic plan goal, the State Board created an inter-agency advisory committee to make recommendations on how to respond to the non-academic barriers that students face. Much of the work of schools and districts in the WSCC is done in response to data collected on youth risk behaviors through the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). Dr. Essick shared state-level results from the survey on key risk behaviors, such as smoking, considering attempting suicide, and homelessness. Commission members asked for additional data on how NC's YRBS data compares with the national data as well.

The Chair recognized Ms. Cynthia Floyd, Consultant for School Counseling, NC Department of Public Instruction and Mr. Tim Hardin, School Counselor at Sadler Elementary School in Gaston County Schools and President, NC School Counselor Association to discuss the role of school counselors. Ms. Floyd shared that currently there are 4,137 counselors in NC's public schools, which equates to a student-counselor ratio of 1:367. The national recommended ratio is 1:250. Ms. Floyd shared that to be licensed, counselors must have a masters in counseling. Enrollments in the state's counselor preparation programs varies.

Mr. Glazier asked if school administrators need additional training on the roles of SISP in our schools. Ms. Floyd shared that administrators are often not trained in the roles of SISP, which could be changing under possible State Board policy changes. In many schools, administrators do not have adequate staff and so counselors play multiple roles.

Mr. Tim Hardin noted that the goal of SISP is to support and promote a healthy and safe school environment where students with critical needs are identified early and provided the appropriate interventions. It is critical that SISP collaborate as they often work on a rotating schedule on complex issues. They all share a commitment to the WSCC model.

Ms. Winner asked if there is flexibility for districts to use SISP funding for other purposes. Ms. Floyd shared that SISP are funded through the instructional support allotment as a lump sum to districts. Nursing and counseling services are required, but are not necessarily in all schools. The other supports are not required.

Commission members asked for additional information on how much it would cost to for the state to ensure there are enough SISP in the public schools to reach the nationally recommended ratios.

The Chair recognized Ms. Ann Nichols, School Health Nurse Consultant, Division of Public Health, Children and Youth Branch, NC Department of Health & Human Services to discuss the role of schools nurses. Ms. Nichols shared the state currently has 8 school health nurse consultants that operate as a cross-agency, multi-disciplinary team to support school nursing services. The Department of Public Instruction and the Division of Public Health have set a goal of at least one school nurse per school and a statewide student-school nurse ratio of 1:750. Currently, the ratio is 1:1055, but the number of school nurses in districts varies widely across the state. Asthma is the number one issue that causes absenteeism in school. School nurses are required to be RNs and to earn their school nurse certification within three years of being hired. School nurse positions are easily filled if salaries are competitive in the region because many nurses like the flexibility of the school nursing schedule and the public service aspect of the work. The attrition rate for school nurses is lower than the nursing profession as a whole. The Program Evaluation Division in the NC General Assembly conducted a study of school nurses in NC that includes how school nurses are funded in the state.

The Chair recognized Ms. Lynn Makor, Consultant, School Psychology/Traumatic Brain Injury, NC Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children Division to discuss the role of school psychologists. Ms. Makor shared that to effectively implement the WSCC framework, then schools and districts need the appropriate staffing of the SISP positions to appropriately meet the needs of students. Currently, the staff-student ratio in NC for school psychologists is 1:2088 (the national recommended ratio is 1:500-700). Ms. Makor shared that there are currently only 5 school psychology preparation programs in NC, which is not sufficient to meet district needs. Last school year, there were 75 vacant school psychology positions in the state. The state must work to raise salaries and improve working conditions to recruit and retain more school psychologists.

All students have access to school psychology services, not just students with disabilities. Ms. Makor shared that the national associations for each SISP set the recommended staff-student ratios based on research on the effectiveness of meeting students' needs.

The Chair recognized Ms. Elizabeth Munson, School Social Worker, River Bend Elementary School, Wake County Public School System, and Past President, NC School Social Worker Association to discuss the role of school social workers. Ms. Munson shared that school social workers help to meet an array of student needs that negatively affect a student's well-being and readiness to learn. School

social workers also help to coordinate student access to school- and community-based resources, including health services; provide evidence-based education; and promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence. There are currently 1,081 school social workers in the state and some schools and districts do not have any social workers. The national recommended staff-student ratio is 1:250. Unlike the other SISP services, there is not Department of Public Instruction staff to support school social workers through coordinating training and data collection.

Dr. Helen Ladd asked about the role of teacher assistants in supporting students. Ms. Munson shared that the reduction in the number of teacher assistants has impacted the work of other support personnel by increasing the need SISP to provide coverage for other duties and reducing the time teachers are able to spend working with support team members.

Specialized Instructional Support Personnel in Cabarrus County Schools

The Chair recognized Ms. Amy Lowder, Director of Student Safety and Well-Being; Ms. Lynn Rhymer, Deputy Superintendent of Operation; Mr. John Basilice, Director of Student Services; and Ms. Amy Jewell, Student Services Coordinator, Cabarrus County Schools to discuss the district-wide SISP framework that Cabarrus County Schools has implemented. Ms. Lowder and her team shared that students are increasingly facing a new array of challenges both in and out of school. To help address these challenges, Cabarrus County Schools has created a unified system of SISP support across the district. To do this, the district created a district-level, cross-functional leadership team to support the work of all SISP. To mirror the district team, each school also created a school-level, cross-functional SISP team. Each school-level SISP team meets at least monthly to discuss information and to problem-solve. The district also implemented district-wide professional development for SISP. The district adopted the National Association of School Psychologists' comprehensive framework to address crisis prevention, intervention, and recovery. The district also created best practice protocols around key student crisis situations that all SISP and other school personnel can access when facing a challenging student crisis. The district also seeks to discourage "group think" by appointing some to ask questions and identify potential challenges to what is being discussed during every meeting.

To help support the implementation of this type of support model in more districts, the Cabarrus County Schools team recommended that the state provide proportional funding for SISP team members that comes from non-competitive, recurring services. In addition, the state should fund 12-month school resource officer positions. Lastly, the state should create a state-level, cross-functional leadership team to support the work of all SISP and should encourage school districts to create district-level leadership teams as well.

Discussion and Next Steps

The Chair thanked the SISP representatives for their attendance today, their service to students and schools across NC, and their passion for their work each day. The goal of ensuring every student receives a sound, basic education will not be achieved without the work of individuals like them.

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the full Commission would be held on February 28, 2019. The Teacher and Finance and Resources work groups will meet at 1:00 pm today.

Mr. Jim Deal asked how much it will cost for the state to meet the national recommended ratios for all SISP positions. Mr. Geoff Coltrane shared that the State Board of Education has calculated that it will cost around \$688 million assuming current local funding would not change. In many instances, federal special education is funding school psychologists.

Dr. Fouad Abd-el-Khalick shared that there is a severe and real shortage of SISP professionals in our schools. The Commission needs to consider how we can improve the preparation pipeline for these professionals and how we can recruit more individuals into these positions.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 12:40 pm.