

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)  
Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) Meeting Minutes  
December 9, 2015  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell, Sarah Barzee, Shannon Marimón, Bruce Douglas, Sheila Cohen, Everett Lyons, Patrice McCarthy, Karissa Niehoff, Joseph Cirasuolo, Miguel Cardona, Robert Rader, Jan Hochadel, David Cicarella, Gary Maynard, Paula Colen, Mark Waxenberg

**ABSENT:** Randy Collins, Catherine O’Callaghan

**FACILATATOR:** Mary Broderick

*Welcome*

Mary Broderick reviewed the meeting objectives (see agenda) and asked for any clarifications or changes. Introductions were made. Mary reminded members of the established norms.

*Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes from September 16, 2015, Meeting*

Mary noted that the minutes were emailed on September 28, 2015, and asked everyone to take a few minutes to review them (hard copies provided). She asked for comments, corrections, or suggestions. None were made. Minutes from the September 16, 2015, meeting were accepted.

*ESSA Update and Review Charge of PEAC*

Commissioner Wentzell shared that she was in Washington D.C. the previous day as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was about to come up for a vote in the Senate. She reviewed the history of the ESEA, which dates back to the Civil Rights Movement. Given that there will be lots of information coming forward in the next several months, she asked that the group consider the frequency of PEAC meetings.

Bruce Douglas suggested that it is time to review our (Connecticut’s) successes and challenges under ESEA. He recommended that we conduct an analysis of what has been accomplished. He asked, “Are our children better today than they were before ESEA was passed?”

Commissioner Wentzell thanked Bruce for his suggestion and said that we should think about the role high-quality teachers and leaders play to ensure that students are better off. The Commissioner expects that the bill will pass, and said that state waivers will be in effect through August 2016. “The ESSA really builds on what we have achieved over the last years and this is exciting because in CT we have never shirked our responsibility to students.” Since PEAC represents the field, we should consider whether we have the right people in the room. Are there others who should be included?

ESSA returns decisions about methods to evaluate educators back to the states, which has been and will continue to be PEAC's focus. She asked members to consider what are we proud of, what has been challenging, and what we want to do going forward.

The Commissioner added that "ESSA will replace NCLB and that is long overdue. Today is a day we can celebrate success for our kids. Signing this bill will be historic." She recalled that President Johnson signed the original bill.

One of the things Commissioner Wentzell is most proud of is that CT is being recognized in Washington D.C. for putting forth an accountability plan that considers more than just test scores. She emphasized that we want to continue to have an accountability system that evolves, so that we have schools where students want to attend and teachers want to teach. We will continue to think about using growth as part of the matrix and not just focus on student test scores. "What we had to ask permission to do is now being viewed as a model." She reminded everyone that the law still requires high standards for students, and CT has already adopted college- and career-ready standards. "CT has always had high expectations." She advised that we need to remember to "keep the 'all' in "all students." We need to make sure all kids have access to a high quality education.

In addition, the ESSA will provide some flexibility to determine which grades will be assessed in science. She cautioned that flexibility sometimes makes us ask what we are holding constant. She said that we anticipate that CT will be asked to hold to a higher standards for ELs.

These flexibilities and changes give PEAC more things to consider. PEAC has a lot of work ahead as ESSA continues to allow for evaluation and professional learning. Remember why we became educators: "we wanted to make a difference for kids." This gives us the authority and responsibility to do that.

She assured everyone that as more information comes in, it will be shared.

Mary followed with a review of PEAC's initial charge and commented that PEAC is the group to absorb the implications of the new ESSA. The next meeting is set for March 9, 2016, but we may need to meet sooner. Late January or early February were suggested.

Mark Waxenberg responded that "ESEA was predicated on equity for all students. I would venture to say that 50 years later we don't have that." He agreed with Bruce Douglas that an analysis is worthwhile but stated that "this group is specifically charged with evaluation and how it impacts teaching and learning." He further shared that the CEA, in anticipation of this change, has been holding focus groups to make recommendations to PEAC regarding the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation. They expect the final results to be ready by January 2016 and plan to bring them to PEAC for review and discussion. He recalled that PEAC was formed in 2012 as a result of a political movement and suggested that the core issues introduced in 2012 not be abandoned, but that using test scores needs to be discussed. Although we have always tested, it should be

about what is in the best interest of teachers and students. He sees this is as a tremendous opportunity to refocus on ensuring that students are getting the best education.

Bruce Douglas expressed concern that this might diminish the importance of testing. There isn't common agreement on what we expect to get out of testing. It is important to make sure that testing is helping to address the achievement gap. There has to be an appropriate way to use testing to improve ourselves. He cautioned that this should not be an opportunity to put testing aside.

Joseph Cirsuolo agreed and reminded everyone that PEAC existed prior to 2012, and "When we had a chance to do something we didn't, "let's do it right this time."

Commissioner Wentzell said there are meetings scheduled, and we will get some additional transition support from the U.S. Department of Education. The fact that PEAC exists means we are well-positioned to do this work.

The Commissioner recalled that PEAC previously used subcommittees to inform the work, and believes that this was a good structure; she suggested that PEAC consider using subcommittees again in the coming months.

Mary Broderick checked with the group about scheduling a meeting in January 2016 or early February 2016 and everybody agreed. The CSDE will send out proposed dates.

Mark Waxenberg clarified that CEA is not advocating moving away from the whole evaluation process, but some of the feedback from the focus groups is suggesting there may need to be some changes in legislation as well as the Guidelines. Because we are entering a new year, decisions need to be made for the next school year.

Commissioner Wentzell reiterated that PEAC has the statutory right to advise the SBE, as necessary.

#### *Ad Hoc PEAC Workgroup Updates and Discussion*

Mary Broderick proposed that PEAC subcommittees be called workgroups, going forward, because the membership is more than just PEAC members. All agreed.

Shannon Marimón referred everyone to their packets and resources included from the workgroups.

As Bruce Douglas rose to depart the meeting, Commissioner Wentzell asked that the group take a moment to say good bye and thank you to Bruce for his service to children and to PEAC. She presented him with a certificate of appreciation.

Shannon Marimón continued explaining that the *Partial-Year/Part-time Employment Workgroup* developed a set of guidance intended to assist districts in thinking through partial-year employment or other unique employment situations.

She shared the membership of the group and introduced Joe Frey of the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC), who, in partnership with Sharon Fuller, CSDE Talent Office, co-chaired this workgroup.

a) *Partial-Year/Part-time Employment Workgroup Final Report*

Joe Frey presented an overview of the workgroup. The group felt that in order to ensure fair/accurate evaluation given unique circumstances, they needed to develop a set of guidance regarding four specific areas (see packet for more details each area):

1. Nature of assignment
2. Length of assignment
  - a. What happens if a teacher isn't there for the whole year? How does the length of the assignment impact the students and evaluation model?
3. Timing of assignment
  - a. Time of year will influence how this impacts student learning and evaluation of the teacher.
4. Orientation/training
  - a. Not all teachers will be in their positions at the beginning of the year. How will they be oriented and trained to the evaluation model?

Mary Broderick asked everyone to take a few minutes to review the guidance document in their packets and then opened it to questions.

Before beginning the discussion, Mary Broderick invited Gary Maynard, who was also a part of the workgroup, to add his own comments. He reiterated the importance of reviewing expectations upfront when someone is hired.

Karissa Niehoff commended the workgroup on the guidance document saying that it was reflective of deep conversation. A discussion followed that focused on the importance of the time when someone is hired and the impact on students and a teacher's evaluation. Joseph Cirusolo shared his concern that a teacher needs to be there for a good part of the year before we can look at outcomes and asked that this be made clear. Mark Waxenberg added that (quoting from the minutes taken by the CEA workgroup member) "Unique assignments will have to be reviewed on a case by case basis." He stressed that flexibility is key.

The Commissioner observed that there is a difference between guidance vs. guidelines, and suggested that this needs to be clarified. Shannon Marimón proposed renaming it "Points for Consideration."

Professional Development and Evaluation Committees (PDECs) need to determine what works for their districts in developing their own plans. There are different ways a PDEC can think about this. Robert Rader raised a concern that when two people are in a similar situation they may be treated differently, which could lead to a dispute. The guidance should be clear that districts need to develop consistent guidelines for these situations. It was suggested that districts should come up with their specific language that makes the policy uniform and consistent for all in that district. This would improve the implementation.

It was agreed that there needs to be clarification regarding what is required and what is just suggested, at the district level. The group agreed that this kind of guidance is helpful, but wants to be sure all are in agreement with whatever we send out for those partial-year situations, which can be problematic. It was established that the CSDE has the flexibility to say yes to districts who make these decisions in their plans.

Mary Broderick summarized the discussion- while consistency is important, context matters. She asked, “Does the committee need to reconvene or does the Talent Office make these decisions?” The group agreed that the Talent Office will continue to advise the PDECs. Shannon Marimón suggested that the workgroup review the recommendations of PEAC and make adjustments to their guidance document. Miguel Cardona asked that procedural considerations be provided that would allow for a subgroup of the PDEC to review various situations as they come up. Commissioner Wentzell requested that, if possible, the workgroup meet prior to the next PEAC meeting and send their revised guidance to PEAC ahead of time so that members would have time to review.

*b) Evaluator Training and Proficiency Workgroup Progress Report*

Mary Broderick introduced Everett Lyons who gave a status report and overview of the workgroup’s two meetings. The first meeting was to review the support and training offered. The second meeting focused on looking at the status of programs and where we might make recommendations for additional training. He reviewed the concepts of proficiency and calibration as outlined within the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation, which, he said, framed the context of the workgroup discussions. Trainings are provided to support improved performance for all educators. Everett Lyons described a process for ensuring that all evaluators are proficient in conducting evaluations and in providing high-quality feedback and coaching to teachers for improved practice (see graphic on PPT slide 15), which is the goal of the work.

He reviewed the processes currently used across the state for calibration. He affirmed that calibration needs to be more than are “we all on the same page;” it needs to be a way to sharpen the evaluators’ skills. The workgroup may propose a requirement that evaluators demonstrate proficiency every three years to ensure there isn’t “drift.” This could be done online to address time/capacity constraints. The accuracy of an evaluator in determining a teacher’s performance is essential.

The Guidelines mandates expectations for a demonstration of proficiency on the part of the evaluator and ongoing calibration, but they don't provide specifics. Can the workgroup make recommendations to PEAC to make the guidelines more specific? What should the end product look like? Should there be some form of validation of the process? What does it mean to be proficient? The workgroup hopes to come back with recommendations.

A discussion about the difference between initial proficiency and calibration followed. Does calibration mean proficient? Do we want to wait three years to know if someone is still proficient? It was acknowledged that there needs to be multiple ways to demonstrate proficiency. Calibration is a part of that process. Initial proficiency should be followed by calibration within the district. While interrater reliability is important, people could be calibrated to a low standard and not be proficient. The group all agreed that teachers need to trust that their evaluators are proficient, and regardless of who the evaluator is, the results are fair and reliable. Sheila Cohen pointed out that "the evaluator is at the crux of the system." Teachers need to know they are being evaluated fairly, and it is equally important for the students. They need teachers who are good teachers and evaluators who can recognize it. Without this trust, student learning suffers.

Members agreed that the process needs to be more embedded in the daily work within the district, and it makes sense that there is a demonstration of proficiency at least every three years to keep everybody on the same level. It needs to be embedded and ongoing, and we need to give guidance and direction to ensure that is happening. Miguel Cardona advised that there needs to be checks and balances to ensure that the system is fair. The more external it is, the more it becomes about compliance. However that is framed, it must be a part of what is expected of evaluators. Everett Lyons agreed and clarified that this is why we need to provide guidance to districts regarding proficiency and ongoing calibration.

Commissioner Wentzell thanked Everett Lyons and the workgroup for taking this on. She said that teachers deserve evaluators who are consistent and skilled in conducting evaluations. It is important that the district ensure internally that evaluation is a fair process. Everett Lyons agreed, saying that is why the committee used the three-level approach. Mark Waxenberg agreed that initial proficiency is important, but ongoing proficiency is necessary, as well.

The Commissioner added that it is essential work for our school leaders to develop their ability to see the work of teachers in the same way. We are always hearing that conversations between teachers and principals is a positive outcome of the new system of educator evaluation. We should feel good about that outcome over the past few years.

Karissa Niehoff added that "We, at CAS, are always having conversations on teaching and learning and are constantly hearing that the conversations are being elevated." She said that CAS would love to support this increased focus on professional development for leaders, and they want to be supportive of this work.

Mark Waxenberg said we may want to examine some of the district plans that received a waiver from some of the Guideline requirements in order to identify approaches we may want to consider.

Sarah Barzee shared that the Commissioner has asked us to request a status report from districts that received waivers. We will share highlights from waiver reports at the March 2016 meeting.

Mary Broderick asked if there is anything that this workgroup should cover that they might not have covered. No additional suggestions were made.

Sarah Barzee shared that we just became aware of CCSSO's new standards for principal supervisors. If we are thinking about a system that builds support and accountability, then these are standards we may want to review to see how they fit into this work, as well. Commissioner Wentzell said that we will share the link to these standards so PEAC members can review them.

*c) Tested grades and subjects*

This workgroup has not met. Pending passage of ESSA, there is a question about how assessment and evaluation will work. The question was posed: Is this something this group can handle or should there be a workgroup? Some felt that it was too soon to determine and wanted to wait until the ESSA was officially passed. Others felt that it was important to have both a workgroup and discussion with the full PEAC membership.

Commissioner Wentzell suggested that it would be reasonable to keep it with this workgroup now and depending on ESSA, then determine if there was still a need for the workgroup. This will be revisited at the January/February 2016 meeting.

Shannon Marimón announced that the Talent Office is sponsoring a second annual conference, "Moving from Compliance to Coherence: Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices" on February 25, 2016. The strength of the conference is that it is practitioner-driven.

*Adjournment/Closing*

Mary Broderick said, "In the spirit of continuous improvement, let's talk about what worked, what didn't?" She charted the responses which were primarily positive and included: the facilitation; the structure of the meeting, and a not too overloaded agenda which allowed for good discussion. She thanked everyone for their energy and commitment to the work.

Mark Waxenberg asked about adult educators. Shannon Marimón recalled that we agreed at the June 2015 meeting that we would not require them to adhere to the Guidelines for Educator Evaluation. They still need to be evaluated, but they have flexibility.

Commissioner Wentzell handed out a summary of the proposed ESSA bill and the meeting was adjourned.