

MINUTES

State Board of Education Meeting

Date

September 3, 2024

Time

1:00 p.m.

Location

Rutledge Conference Center
429 Wholesale Lane
West Columbia, SC 29172

Dr. David O'Shields, Chair

Ms. Rita Allison, Chair-Elect

Ellen E. Weaver, State Superintendent of Education,
Secretary and Administrative Officer to the Board

Visitor Information

If you require Section 504 or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations to attend or participate in this public meeting, please contact Tracy Moore.

Due to allergies of staff and visitors, we ask that visitors refrain from wearing scented products when attending the State Board of Education (SBE) meetings in South Carolina Department of Education facilities.

State Board of Education Mission

The State Board of Education's mission is to provide a leadership role in helping South Carolina set policy and direction to transform teaching and learning so that students are prepared with the necessary knowledge and skills, including innovation, to compete globally and live a productive life.

The following State Board of Education (SBE) members physically attended: Chair David O'Shields, Eighth Judicial Circuit; Chair-Elect Rita Allison, Governor's Appointee; Maya Slaughter, First Judicial Circuit; David Mathis, Second Judicial Circuit; Delaney Frierson, Third Judicial Circuit; Jacqueline "Jackie" Lynn, Fourth Judicial Circuit; Beverly Frierson, Fifth Judicial Circuit; Joyce Crimminger, Sixth Judicial Circuit; Dr. Joette Johnson, Seventh Judicial Circuit; Dr. Christian T. Hanley, Jr., Ninth Judicial Circuit; Sallie Lee, Tenth Judicial Circuit; Richard Harrington, Twelfth Judicial Circuit; and Ken Richardson, Fifteenth Judicial Circuit; Jackie Terrible, Sixteenth Judicial Circuit. Tammie Shore, Eleventh Judicial Circuit and Cheryl Collier, Thirteenth Judicial Circuit was absent.

The following South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) staff attended: John Tyler, Deputy Superintendent, Parliamentarian, General Counsel, Division of Legal Affairs; Dr. Matthew Ferguson, Deputy Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, College, Career and Military Readiness Division; Barbara Drayton, Deputy General Counsel, Office of General Counsel, Division of Legal Affairs; Henry Gunter, Deputy General Counsel, Office of General

Counsel, Division of Legal Affairs; Phillip Cease, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs, Division of Legal Affairs; Robert Cathcart, Policy Advisor, Office of Governmental Affairs, Division of Legal Affairs; Tracy Moore, SBE Executive Liaison, Office of General Counsel, Division of Legal Affairs; Cricket Katsos, Administrative Coordinator, Office of General Counsel, Division of Legal Affairs; Travis Huggins, Information Technology Manager I, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations; Raymond Dues, IT Specialist II, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations; Brando Butler, IT Specialist III, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations; Jonathan Glover, IT Specialist III, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations; Alex Vora, IT Specialist III, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations; and Mark Jones, IT Specialist III, Chief Information Office, Division of Data, Technology and Agency Operations.

I. WELCOME/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SBE meeting convened at 1:04 p.m. Chair O'Shields called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone who attended.

Chair-Elect Allison led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. APPROVAL OF STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES FOR THE REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING ON AUGUST 13, 2024

Chair O'Shields asked if there were any objections to approving the minutes as presented for the SBE meeting on August 13, 2024. Hearing no objections, the motion passed.

III. APPROVAL OF STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AGENDA FOR SEPTEMBER 3, 2024

Chair O'Shields asked if there were any objections to approving the agenda as presented for the September 3, 2024, SBE meeting.

IV. RECOGNITION OF VISITORS AND NEWS MEDIA

Chair O'Shields welcomed any media and asked if any visitors had signed in. The visitors on the list were announced in the Superintendent's report. The following media were recognized: Josie Frost, WLTX; and Mary Green, WIS TV. The following visitors were recognized: Kathy Manness, Palmetto State Teacher's Association; and Patrick Kelly, Palmetto State Teacher's Association.

V. STATE BOARD CHAIR REPORT

Chair O'Shields reported, "Welcome to the first Tuesday in September, neatly packaged right after Labor Day. In an effort to give Labor Day its due, I looked at, of all places, the Department of Labor's home page for inspiration. Labor Day is an annual celebration of the social and economic achievements of American workers. The holiday is rooted in the late 19th century, when labor activists pushed for a federal holiday to recognize the many contributions workers have made to America's strength, prosperity, and well-being.

But, you see, September has other notable events as well: Grandparents Day, Patriot Day, which we know as 9/11, Constitution Day, it is coming up this month, I think the 17th, and of course, the autumnal equinox. I think we all could use a little fall weather about now anyway.

Today we will undertake a policy regarding cell phones in public schools. There is absolutely no question cell phones cause educational disruptions, physical violence, and a host of other emotional and mental health issues. According to the data from ZipDo, a statistical resource for education data, the trend of cell phone reliance is not found in schools alone. Worker productivity can be reduced by as much as 40%. Cell phone use during work hours shows a decrease in engagement and productivity. For us today, it is the expectation of this board to define a policy in keeping with the House and Senate subcommittee's recommendation of school day. My hope is whatever is cobbled together today focuses more on the carrot and not the stick. Implementation of such a policy over a school day scares me, why? Because once we create this policy, it is a requirement of every district to follow suit, and there is the law of unintended consequences, and it frightens me, and it is not even Halloween.

When I assumed my first principalship in 1997, the outgoing principal, Randy Wright, Mr. Wright, gave me sage advice. "David, the gnats will drive you crazy, but it's the elephants that will kill you." In other words, as Stephen Covey said, "Let the main thing," in our case, educating and protecting the students, "be the main thing." I want to thank and compliment Miss Weaver, the Office of School Safety, Robert McCullough, James Rawl, all the people that are here to make and keep our schools better, that is the main thing.

I have already told my district the rules for cell phone use, those rules are going to change, not at all for the elementary and middle schools because students cannot have them out during the school day. But currently at Clinton High School, we do allow students to look at their phones at lunch, but not during class changes. We will certainly give our best effort as districts to abide by whatever we decide here today but remember that schools, like children, are of different sizes. One size does not fit everyone, we understand that. At Clinton High, 200, 250 people in the cafeteria, pretty manageable. But in large schools, where there are 700 and 800 students with the mandate to watch cell phones, Apple watches may be a much graver issue. We cannot put the onus of this policy on our teachers and administrators just because we pass it here today. Our teachers and administrators are absolutely amazing. They are resilient, incredibly hard working, and dedicated to the development of their students. The intent of this policy by the General assembly and the subcommittee that produced where we are today is good and needed. However, that stick of losing state aid to districts money is akin to bullying but we passed a policy about that too, didn't we? Remember, the gnats will drive you crazy, but the elephants will kill you, thank you."

That concludes the state board chair report.

VI. STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION REPORT

Chair O'Shields recognized Superintendent Weaver. Superintendent Weaver reported, "It has been a busy back to school here at the state Department of Education, as I know it has been for our districts and schools all across the state.

I am excited to have put in front of you our refreshed strategic plan. This grew out of a planning session that the executive team did earlier in August, and you will see that everything on there is exactly what you have seen before. That excites me because it shows a consistency of mission and vision that we are over the right targets. The one thing that I did want to call your attention to though, was that we have changed one of the 3-year objectives. I love to be able to optimize things right and fit as much as possible into every nook and cranny. What we did under those 3-year objectives is take our objectives for math and for literacy and combine those into the first objective, which is advanced evidence-based instruction of foundational skills, right? That is our math and our reading. Then we added the second strategy, which is to expand access to employment aligned career pathways, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities. Because what we realized was, we did not have anything in our 3-year goals that addressed secondary education. We know that it is every bit as important that we continue to equip our secondary students for their future, even once they are past those foundational years in their reading and math. We went ahead and added that because do you know what? That is great work that is already happening in districts all over our state, and something that we want to continue to build on and to grow.

One thing that I wanted to point out in particular, an initiative that is a new initiative that is happening. Lieutenant Governor Evatte, in partnership with the Department of Employment and Workforce, has rolled out an initiative that is called empowering tomorrow's leaders. This is a site that lives on the do web page. The point of this is to introduce high school students to information about how they can get a job, even as high school students. You all may be aware that Lieutenant Governor Evatt actually came out of the private sector and is very, very passionate about connecting our students with meaningful employment. At this website, it talks about soft skills, what they are, why they matter. It shows students how to build a resume. It shows them how to apply for a job and go to an interview. And then it also connects them to the SC works offices that are around the state to help them actually find available jobs. So again, one very practical thing that is already happening in addition to much of the great work that is already happening in our CTE centers around the state. We have some wonderful apprenticeship opportunities. We just want to make sure that we highlight and elevate that in our strategic plan and continue to make that an intentional focus of what we are doing here in the department. We are also working right now with the manufacturing sector here in the state on our credentials. Our stackable credentials here at the agency to ensure that those are meaningful and that they are aligned with the skills that our employers are looking for. And so that work is ongoing. Grateful to Dr. Ferguson and his division for the hard work they are doing

on that. Looking ahead again, just as a refresher, we have adopted at least 75% of students at or above grade level by 2030. As our North Star, our 2030 education moonshot. That was unanimously adopted by this board as well as by the education oversight committee.

And so of course, we have had our 2023-24 test scores that have come in since our last meeting. I just wanted to give you a quick look at that. Dr. Ferguson is going to go a little bit deeper into that in his presentation. But here we are in ELA, you see that we held steady this year. We did not lose ground, but we did not gain ground either. We still have a lot of work to do in reading. Again, I am very, very encouraged to see that we have held steady still seven points higher than we were coming out of the pandemic. o South Carolina is on the right trajectory there. Math, we saw a bump up of 1% point statewide. And so again, we know that we have a lot of work to do there. Dr. Ferguson, in his presentation, is going to talk about the Palmetto Math Project. Which is the strategic approach that we are going to take to build on the success that we are seeing in reading and translate that into math as well.

I also wanted to take a minute to read all of these, just because it is especially important that we celebrate success when we see it. This is what I have called the 75% club. We have set a 75% proficiency goal for our districts. These are districts that, in various different categories of testing this year, have reached that 75% proficiency goal. We will clap for them at the end if you can hold your applause until I get through the list. We have and I am not going to read all the tests. Abbeville, Anderson 1, Anderson 2, Anderson 3, Anderson 4, the Charter Institute at Erskine. Dillon 3, Greenwood 52, Horry, Kershaw, Limestone Charter Association, Lexington 1, LR 5. The South Carolina Public Charter School District, Spartanburg 1, Spartanburg 2, Spartanburg 3, Spartanburg 4 and 5, and then York 2 and 4. Let us go ahead and give these districts a huge round of applause.

But we also know that proficiency does not just happen overnight. We also want to celebrate growth in districts that are seeing exceptional growth towards that 75% proficiency target. Again, if you will bear with me as I read the districts here, we have Anderson 2, Greenwood 50, Greenwood 52, Dillon 3, Williamsburg, Calhoun, Greenwood 51, and Spartanburg 3 that have all made exceptional growth over fifteen points of growth in these respective areas. Which again, is just incredible, incredible progress for anyone who is an educator. You know how hard it is to show this kind of growth. We are so proud of these districts, the hard work that we are doing, and I think we should give them a round of applause, too. Like I said, Dr. Ferguson will go in a little bit more on that in his presentation. But I wanted to make sure that we touched base on just a lot of the information to ensure that it was all on the table for this meeting.

As we consider the adoption of the cell phone policy that is before the state board here. One thing I will tell you about this job is that it is never a dull moment. It is never when you are in the office either, it is always when you are out and about. I had the most interesting experience, this Friday morning a gentleman came up to me. I was having breakfast at Lizard's Thicket early, getting ready for the day. Let me tell you, that is a good down-home breakfast if

you are looking for some good eggs over medium. This gentleman came up to me and he said, hey, aren't you the education lady? I said, well, yes, sir. He is like, he said, I have seen you on the news. He is a local dad from here in Columbia. He pulled his phone out of his pocket, and he said, these things are destroying our kids. We need parents to step up and be involved. He went on just to tell me about his family's story. He has four children, three of whom have successfully flown the nest, one who is still a fourth grader. He is just a hardworking dad. He owns his own landscaping company; you can see he was prepared to go out into the South Carolina heat in August and work hard to support his family. It is just those moments that I think really bring into focus what we are talking about here, that these are real people, real lives that are impacted. It is so encouraging to just see that there are parents that are paying attention all across this state and that are engaged and ready to do what needs to be done in order to ensure that we are giving our students every educational opportunity possible. As I think about the underlying impetus of the action that is before the board today, I cannot help but think of the moral imperative that we have here. These are charts that you all have seen before, but just showing the dramatic increase in suicide rates for young adolescents 10 to 14. Just look at that hockey stick in the data. Of course, reports of major depression amongst teens have gone up significantly since 2010. While the statistically minded among us can quibble about cause versus correlation, I think when you see a correlation like this, there is no excuse for adults in the room not stepping up and taking action.

I was just reading an article that came out in Education Week last week that I shared with the local district superintendents when I had the privilege of being with them at their meeting, their symposium last week. And I am just going to read these two paragraphs to you because they are very illustrative of what brain science is now telling us that we are dealing with. This author says humans evolved to think, learn, and problem solve with other people, not alone. But emerging brain research suggests that stress and anxiety, isolation, and information overload in the modern world, from pandemic distancing to social media and screen addictions, are making it more difficult for our brains to cope with even mildly uncomfortable conversations. This can be especially damaging during adolescence, the critical period for social development. Just as children need explicit instruction in how to learn to read before developing into fluent readers. Research suggests that adolescents explicitly learn to reflect on themselves and others in social interactions before becoming able to automatically process intentions and other social cues along with cognitively demanding information. Without opportunities to learn and practice emotionally and cognitively challenging conversations, students cannot develop the mental strategies needed to engage as healthy social adults. That is the moral imperative that we face in this conversation, is that we know that our students have to exercise those relational skills every bit as much as they have to exercise their academic skills. Ironically, we live in an age that is more connected than we have ever been before, and yet in many ways more isolated and disconnected. This policy is a great step forward when you consider the fact that our students are spending about a third of their life each day in the school environment. If we can create a distraction-free environment for them to focus and to connect not only with their learning, with their teacher, but with other students, I think we will have done a great service for their future.

Of course, South Carolina is not alone in this journey. This is just a quick reminder that there are other states that are on this journey as well. I actually had the privilege of spending some time with some fellow state school chiefs late last week. And the State Chief, Lisa Coons from Virginia, was there, and their governor just issued an executive order that mirrors the policy that we are implementing here in South Carolina. It was wonderful to be able to talk to her and to get some ideas about implementation strategy. One of the things that she said that their department is working with their local districts on the is just ensuring that they are refreshing that district communications plan. We have talked about how essential it is in a school safety emergency that districts are able to communicate quickly, effectively, and clearly with parents. That is certainly a “word to the wise” and something that we ought to take a look at here in South Carolina.

This is just a quick timeline that kind of walks us through how we got to where we are today. If I had a little bit more room on the slide, I really should have put a date that goes back four years to when Governor McMaster first started calling for this policy in his executive budget. He had been asking the General Assembly to do this for four years at this point and was very, very complimentary. Of course, as you saw in the letter that he provided to us today of this board's efforts, of the proviso, and of the benefit that he believes, and that, I agree, will be of great value, value to our students. But we were at a conference in November of 2023 when I first saw those charts that I just showed you that Dr. Jonathan Haidt has put together from his research in the book, *The Anxious Generation*. And I just remember being absolutely staggered when I first was presented with that data. I was very encouraged to see the General Assembly move through the iterative process that they did of the house introducing a proviso. The Senate taking that proviso, changing its, strengthening it, then hashing it out in conference, what the final language was going to say. And then, of course, the work that the staff and team have done here that I am so grateful for in talking with local superintendents, talking with members of local boards, and of course, just being out and about in the community. I have been speaking with civic organizations, with parent groups, everyone who is concerned with this policy. I am excited that we have this on the agenda today, and I am hopeful that we will be able to pass this along to ensure that our local districts have plenty of time to fully utilize the flexibility that this policy gives them. To set parameters around what implementation is going to look like in their districts so that our districts will be fully ready to go phone-free in January of 2025. Just a quick refresh of the policy framework here. We know that we have defined what access is as viewing, holding, wearing, or otherwise using devices that must be off and stored. And again, I want to emphasize that often stored is something that is determined by the local district as to how that looks. It could look like some kind of assistive technology, like a yonder pouch, it could look like a cell phone locker, it could look like up and away and off in a book bag. There are different things that it can look like, and that will be determined by the district. And while this policy does require consequences, that is also a locally determined piece of this policy. We did not feel that it was right for us to recommend that the state board set a draconian consequence from the state level and that this was something best managed by the local districts. And of course, we all know that exceptions are permitted in this policy, medical exceptions, as well as

other exceptions designated for instructional use by that local superintendent. We have defined devices and accessories in this policy. And of course, the real, I think, nub of the feedback that we have gotten from a small handful of superintendents is that there is concern about the definition of the school day. It is clear when you look at the legislative intent and discussion around this that the legislature was not simply talking about instructional time, but they did mean bell to Bell, meaning the morning tardy Bell, to the dismissal bell at the end of the school day. I am really grateful that this board has taken that into consideration. I do not want to ever dismiss or diminish the concerns, the legitimate concerns that our administrators and teachers on the ground have when it comes to the implementation of this policy. We recognize that as leaders, oftentimes we are required to do hard things. But the reason we do hard things is because we believe it is worth it in the end. I think that the dividend that we will see this pay for schools and for our students' future will be worth it in the end.

Moving ahead, we are working, as we mentioned in our last meeting, as a department to put together some resources that we hope will be helpful for districts as they communicate this policy to their parents, to their teachers, and to their other community stakeholders. And we are calling this initiative Free to Focus because I think many times it is easy to focus on what you are taking away. And rather than thinking about this as taking something away, I think what we are really doing here is giving students the gift of a phone free space, a distraction free space in which they are free to focus, first of all, on their learning. They are also free to focus on their friends and building that person-to-person muscle that we were talking about earlier. Free to focus on safety. I want to highlight here how thankful I am to Chief Kiel, who has taken the lead on this project at SLED. They are aware of this policy, and they are ready to support districts and the agency and the implementation questions that might arise around any school safety crisis scenarios. I am very, very thankful to the chief for his partnership and the help that I know he will continue to be as questions come up. And then, of course, most importantly, when we talk about retaining our teachers in the classroom, we know that for years they have been saying, yes, of course, we want more money, right? Let us continue to increase the teacher's salary but let us also give them the freedom to teach. Free to focus on instruction. Imagine that, not having to play cell phone police all day, every day. This is an exciting way for us to frame this and really a gift that we can give to our teachers.

I wanted to share just briefly some comments that I had gotten from Superintendent Kathy Hipp, who is a Superintendent up in Anderson 3. She was talking about how 2 years ago, Anderson 3 actually implemented this policy of their own accord and said that they have seen decreases in cyberbullying the middle school made significant gains in closing math and continued math gaps and continued gains in ELA. She said our administrators have actually been able to spend less time disciplining students related to cell phone, text, and social media incidents. She says we began the 24-25 school year emphasizing the cell phone policy with our students and parents. The proviso gave us additional credibility to advertise that this is now state law and that the district will be adjusting our policy accordingly. I also stress with our staff members the importance of setting an example for our students by keeping their cell phones

out of sight in areas around students. We want our students and staff to be free to focus on fully addressing the individual needs of each student with the goal of each student graduating with the qualities associated with the profile of the South Carolina graduate. I was really appreciative to Kathy for those comments, which I know you got as well, David, and these are some of the resources that we are looking to roll out a district communications toolkit. We have videos coming out, branded social media, some Op-Eds obviously with our tv stations who are here doing some interviews and information sharing with them, would love to see some statewide radio PSA's and then other resources as districts need them. We are going to house all of that content on ed.sc.gov/FreetoFocus. Stay tuned there for more information. We had the opportunity, as I get close to wrapping up here, to go to Rock Hill, which actually implemented this policy bell to Bell last school year again of their own accord.

Superintendent Smalley had wanted to be here today but was detained by some interviews that he had to do. He sent this short paragraph to share. "We decided to limit cellphone usage on campuses across our district last school year. Change can be scary, but we were willing to try something different to see if it could help remove barriers to learning, and it worked. Our children are less distracted during the school day. In Rock Hill schools, we are in the business of developing leaders, and this gives students an opportunity to make good decisions. What we have found is that our kids are not spending time on social media, but rather interacting with one another face to face. It is refreshing to see our children reconnecting. "

Superintendent Weaver then showed a short video highlighting the positive impacts of a cell phone policy already in place in an S.C. school.

Ms. Weaver continued, "it is September, which means it is Constitution Day on September 17. I cannot think of a more exciting time to kick off a civics initiative here at the Department of Education. We had, sadly, here in South Carolina, only 44% of our students earned a passing grade on our US history end of course exam this year. That shows that we really have a lot of work to dig in and do when it comes to helping our students understand the rights and responsibilities that they have as citizens of this great state and as citizens of this country. We are going to be rolling out a compendium of supplemental civics resources here at the department that will be free of charge to our local teachers and districts. The first of those was rolled out on August 28, which is the 61st anniversary of Dr. King's iconic I have a dream speech. In that speech, he said, when the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men, as well as white men, and I would add women, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We are excited to provide our students with these resources, stay tuned. In the coming weeks, we will have a number of other resources that we are rolling out. The first was fifteen lessons on the virtue of hope, grounded in the teachings of Dr. King. We are excited to be able to make this available to our students and excited to continue to grow this in the years to come, especially as we look ahead to 2026 and

the 250th anniversary of America's founding.

We have a lot of exciting things to celebrate that we are looking forward to celebrating. And again, I appreciate your patience with a longer superintendent's report this month. Thank you very much.”

This concluded the Superintendent’s report.

VII. PARLIAMENTARIAN COMMENT

No Parliamentarian comments.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair O’Shields welcomed those signed up for public comment. “Normally we give five minutes, but that would only give a few people the opportunity to speak. What I would prefer and ask of you as a board, would there be a motion to suspend our rule and allow for two minutes per public comment?” Dr. Hanley made the motion, Mr. Richardson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The following signed up for and spoke during public commenting: Susana Saravia (Greenville GOP), David Kopp, Irene Heslyer (Greenville GOP), Brian Petrano, Victoria Moreno-Jackson (parent), Marianne Sacasa de Strasburg (parent), Jay Ragley (Phone Free Schools), Miranda Williams (Excel Ed in Action), Josh Malkin (ACLU), Michelle Spires, Jessica Winters (parent) Liam Winters (student) Charlotte Wood (parent), Craig Logan (ProTruthSC), and Abdullah Mustafa.

*NOTE: Public comment names were taken from a hand-printed sign in sheet, we are unable to verify spellings.

X. STATE BOARD ITEMS

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE (PL) — COMMITTEE REPORT

Did not meet.

FOR APPROVAL

No items.

FOR INFORMATION

No items.

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONS (EP) — COMMITTEE REPORT

Did not meet.

FOR APPROVAL

No items.

FOR INFORMATION

No items.

STANDARDS, LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY (SLA) — COMMITTEE REPORT

Did not meet.

FOR APPROVAL

No items.

FOR INFORMATION

No items.

EDUCATOR LICENSURE (ELC) — COMMITTEE REPORT

Chair O'Shields recognized Ms. Crimminger who reported the sub-committee met and took action upon the following fourteen cases: one approval for initial certification, one public reprimand, and eleven suspensions. There was one additional matter where the board did not vote, and the office of general counsel will approve the next steps. Ms. Crimminger further reported that these matters were ratified during the Full Board ELC meeting.

FULL BOARD EDUCATOR LICENSURE (FB-ELC) — COMMITTEE REPORT

Chair O'Shields reported that the FB ELC met and took action upon the following one case: a permanent revocation. Dr. O'Shields further confirmed the ratification of the work of the Educator Licensure Committee.

XI. CONSENT AGENDA

No items presented for Consent Agenda.

XII. SOUTH CAROLINA BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT

FOR APPROVAL

1. **Personal Electronic Communication Device Policy** — Matthew Ferguson, Deputy Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Division of Career, College, and Military Readiness; and Robert Cathcart, Policy and Legal Advisor, Office of Governmental Affairs, Division of Legal Affairs

Dr. Ferguson presented the item for second reading, summarizing the history of the legislation and first reading of the proposed policy. Dr. O'Shields asked for questions. Ms. Allison confirmed the policy is to take effect in January of 2025 and commented that some districts already have policies in place. Dr. O'Shields asked if there would be a review of the implementation, Dr. Ferguson responded in the affirmative. Ms. Slaughter asked for confirmation that the Board was required to create this policy; that the requirement came

from a proviso in the state budget; that the legislation required the policy to include school day definition as “bell to bell”; the plan includes exemptions for certain special circumstances; that the districts will determine consequences, certain activities outside of the school day and how the policy is implemented. Mr. Ferguson confirmed. Dr. Mathis asked about language interpreting by students. Mr. Ferguson responded that would fall under the educational purpose designation. Dr. Hanley commented that the policy met the requirements of the proviso and left wide latitude for individual districts discretion in furtherance of the policy. Dr. O’Shields requested a report regarding the implementation before April of 2025. Ms. Johnson reminded everyone of the exemptions allowed for under the policy. Mr. Harrington confirmed the timeline of enacting policy and that the SCDE would review them. Dr. Ferguson confirmed. Ms. Allison added, “Because this is a proviso, as we all know, and it has to come back up in the budget next year as a proviso to be okayed or be codified in law, so that we’ll give our local boards an opportunity for input and that kind of thing.”

There being no further questions, Dr. O’Shields asked for a motion. Mr. Richardson made the motion. Ms. Crimminger seconded the motion. Dr. O’Shields, Mr. Harrington and Ms. Allison commended the agency for their work, expressed concern over potential consequences and potentially amending the policy.

Dr. O’Shields then relinquished the Chair to Chair-elect Allison.

Ms. Allison then recognized Dr. O’Shields. Dr. O’Shields stated, “I propose an amendment that, before the expiration or codification of proviso 1.103 into state law, that a survey or questionnaire be administered to all superintendents and other applicable personnel, soliciting input and seeking what worked best and what can be improved upon within the proviso Prior to the 2025-26 school year”. Dr. Hanley seconded the motion. Dr. Ferguson clarified that he was working on that and suggested a deadline. Dr. O’Shields then amended his amendment to include the language “before April 30th “. Dr. Hanley seconded the amendment to the amended motion. The motion to amend passed.

Ms. Allison then called for a vote. The motion passed. Ms. Beverly Frierson voted against the motion.

2. Academic Updates—Matthew Ferguson, Deputy Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer, Division of College, Career and Military Readiness

Dr. Ferguson reported, “Superintendent Weaver shared earlier that Our North Star will have 75% of students at or above grade level by 2030. I like to say that if children cannot perform, you did not teach, you talked. That teaching requires a change in behavior by students, it requires learning.

Going back to the slide shared earlier on ELA, these are SC ready ELA results. These are grades three through eight. And what you have in front of you are the results from 2016 to 2024. And what you will notice is that this year and last year are the two highest performing years since 2016 in State history. This is not a pandemic problem, which is often talked about that prior to the pandemic in 2019, only 45% of our students were at or above grade level. We are performing higher in 2024 than we were before the pandemic in ELA. However, it is also

important to recognize that right now it is a flip of a coin whether or not a child is reading at grade level. There is still a lot of work necessary to get us to that 75% mark. It is also important to note that with the passage of act 114, which is read to succeed 2.0 that passed last session, that children who are scoring in the does not meet category at the end of third grade are eligible for mandatory retention.

I will share a number with you that is a little staggering. But we shared it again with superintendents last week, too, that in this administration of SC ready, there were 16,238 third graders whose score does not meet at the end of their third-grade year. There is still a lot of work left to be done in ELA classrooms across South Carolina. 16,238 is a lot, but I would also submit to you that students who are scoring in the does not meet category are effectively scoring two years below grade level. These students are entering the fourth grade effectively reading at the second-grade level. We have a lot of work left to do.

What are we doing? We are focusing on the science of reading implementation. Some folks have asked, is letters training, Science of Reading training required? The answer is yes, it is, if you are an elementary or early childhood teacher. It was in a proviso; it was codified in act 114 last year and what those numbers look like currently across the state. From the fall of 2021 to the spring of 2024, the Department of Education, through the Palmetto Literacy Project and the coalition of the willing, started 8808 teachers on their LETRS journey. You see cohorts 1, 2, 3 and phase 1 and 2, how those numbers break down. With the passage of act 114 last session and the investment by the General Assembly, we have implemented a statewide rollout and starting right now in classrooms and districts across the state. There are 10,602 educators who are enrolled statewide in volume one. We are starting more teachers this fall in LETRS training than were trained in the previous three years combined. We have rolled that out. We have been working with local districts on the scheduling of those training courses and to start the implementation. Really to move the needle in that data that you saw prior to and move it beyond where the improvements that we have made. What you will also notice on here is that we are working to train locally certified facilitators of letters. Over this past summer and in the spring, the department worked to train ninety district staff, local staff folks to become letters trainers in volume one. We are training an additional forty-three trainers in volume two in September and October, and those trainers are the long-term vision for when the money that the General Assembly allocated for training runs out. How do we sustain the training of new teachers and folks coming into the profession?

What I pointed out to superintendents last week is that we have put out the all-call and said please come, we will pay for whomever you recommend who meets the qualification to become trainers. But thirty-three districts at this point have submitted names to have local trainers, and so we are actively recruiting the other half of districts to make sure that they have staff members who are trained in the trainer section of letters. In addition to those 10,602 educators who are being trained in volume one, the general assembly also passed a proviso that provided funding and a requirement for CERDEP 4K teachers to begin their training this fall

as well. Early childhood LETRS requires one year versus two years of training, and there are 877 CERDEP 4K teachers who are scheduled to begin their training to take our total to over 11,000 this August as well. Also thinking about how we get ahead of that in the future. We train twenty-nine participants from districts and letters early childhood administration as well.

We also, as Mr. Harrington has often asked about, and I appreciate that question concerning the college professors and the education providers, the Educator Prep Programs. We have forty-two college professors from sixteen of the state's training educators. I am blanking on the acronym of EPPs. It is Educator Prep Programs who are participating in training as well. All forty-two of the professors who started the journey with us completed volume one. That success is to be celebrated as well because we tried that in the past and we paid for a cohort of college professors to come on and start and two of the twenty made it through half of the units before they dropped out. All forty-two made it through volume one this time and they are on track to complete volume two.

What we are also looking at is the Act 114 requires that special education middle school teachers be trained in the science of reading, and so we are looking to procure a cohort statewide that the department is committed to paying for. For those educators in middle school special ed to also receive the LETRS training.

Math, unfortunately, math is worse than ELA, and we have a long road home in math. Forty-two percent of students in South Carolina are currently at or above grade level in math. Where our issues are most pronounced in math is upper elementary and middle school. There are a few districts and schools where there are 0% of students in eighth grade meeting or exceeding standard. And what we have been working on since being at the department is to build out our math team, modeled after our Palmetto literacy project. We have instituted the Palmetto math project. We have brought on a team of math coaches at the state level to support that work. When we got here, there were two folks who worked on standards in math for the whole agency as compared to forty-five literacy coaches. We really had to build out our muscle at the state level to be able to support that math work. If we are going to go from 42%, 45% to 75%, what does that look like for our Palmetto math project? We have started building the team, that proviso that provided the funding for that also passed in July. And so, we added five math coaches this summer.

We need 10 to 15 more, if I am being honest with you. But stealing math teachers in July from districts is a hard sell. We chose five to start the team. They have been really working intently over the last few months to view the adoption of the math instructional materials. Those materials are out for review right now to make sure that those are the highest quality. They have been trained in our math standards and will support the math standards rollout over the next few months, the next year for full implementation next year.

They have also been working to identify, based on these scores that I just shared, the elementary and middle schools that have over 50% of their fifth grade or eighth grade student

scoring does not meet. Those districts, those schools will be supported with additional training in high quality professional learning. They'll receive additional support through high dose tutoring for math, and they will also receive those instructional supports to start to turn the tide in our lowest performing schools as it relates to math, to build out a model that we can scale statewide like we did with the Palmetto literacy project.”

Dr. O’Shields asked for questions. Mr. Harrington asked how many colleges require LETRS training in order to graduate from college. Mr. Ferguson replied none. He explained that professors are being trained in LETRS so that they can take that knowledge back and inform the instruction that takes place in their classrooms. The SCDE also updated the literacy competencies, which all of the educator prep providers have to model their program off of those competencies to improve the coursework that they get there. Dr. Hanley commented that the same would be true of math. Dr. Ferguson agreed and reported that the SCDE was looking into math standards. Superintendent Weaver thanked Dr. Mathis for his work in building the Palmetto Literacy Project as a foundation to build on in literacy. She also thanked Dr. Ferguson and his team for their work on building the same kind of scaffold to support instruction in math. Dr. Mathis believes that LETRS strengthens the quality of our educators and asked if when speaking of being on grade level if that means meets expectations. Dr. Ferguson responded that it met or exceeded expectations. Ms. Crimminger commented about the need to recruit math teachers. Ms. Frierson commented that several comments today attributed actions to the State Board that were not in the purview of the State Board. She also stated that she hoped for better communications in the future from the legislature about the Board’s input on items like the policy that was presented today and be allowed the time to fully review and discuss those items when they are presented.

This concluded Dr. Ferguson’s report.

XIII. OTHER BUSINESS

Chair O’Shields reminded all members to turn in their travel forms prior to their departure.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the SBE adjourned at 3:11 p.m.