

Minutes
AIMS Task Force
Wednesday, March 25, 2009

The AIMS Task Force held a meeting at the Fairmont Scottsdale, 7575 East Princess Drive, Scottsdale, Arizona. The meeting was called to order at 9:31AM.

Members Present:

Dr. Jim Zaharis
Dr. Charles Santa Cruz
Dr. Alan Storm
Dr. Deborah Gonzales
Dr. Chuck Essigs

Members Absent:

Dr. Joe O'Reilly
Ms. Melinda Jensen

1. Call to order

Dr. Zaharis welcomed the members and asked Mr. Yanez to proceed with roll call.

Dr. Zaharis asked if members of the audience could state their name and who they represented.

Dr. Zaharis provided a brief summary of what the task force planned to accomplish. He also stated that as far as the AIMS assessment the initial position of the Task Force is that it is an initial assessment of mastery and should remain, but it is insufficient in terms of predicting college and career readiness. A new assessment should be considered that would help students know if they are ready for college courses without having to take remedial classes. Dr. Zaharis also said that the task force is trying to come to a recommendation that takes into account the current budget situation.

Dr. Zaharis said that in addition Arizona is taking part in two wonderful opportunities; one with Achieve, the College and Career Readiness Policy Institute and the other is Tough Choices or Tough Times.

Dr. Zaharis stated that Dr. Garcia would provide an update on the recommendations the Task Force has made so far. After Dr. Garcia's presentation Mr. Matt Gandal from the Achieve group will present the point of view of the college and career readiness policy institute. Mr. Mark Tucker would also present on the Tough Choices or Tough Times concepts. Dr. Zaharis stated that after the presentations there would be an open discussion to address any common ground that offers good solutions for the short term and long term.

2. Roll call

Attendance as noted above.

3. Consideration to approve minutes for March 11, 2009

Dr. Gonzalez motioned to approve the March 11, 2009 meeting minutes.

Motion second by Dr. Storm

Motion Passes

4. **Overview of Task Force's initial recommendations and presentation of perspectives from Achieve, Inc. and the *Tough Choices or Tough Times* coalition**

Dr. Garcia reviewed the major points that the legislature asked of the task force to accomplish.

- Examine whether the Arizona assessment of achievements test should be a high stakes test that high school pupils must pass in order to graduate high school.
- Examine the experiences and outcomes of states that have adopted tests that are required for the graduation of pupils from high school and that incorporate a national college admission and placement examination.
- Develop methodologies, models and other recommendations for the initial Arizona assessment of achievements test.
- Submit a written report that contains the task force's findings and recommendations by June 30, 2009 to a host of interested policy makers.

Dr. Garcia stated that the task force is well ahead of the required schedule and hopes to have the final report ready in time to have some influence in the current legislative session.

Dr. Garcia said that the task force has focused primarily on the idea of student accountability and assessments as they affect students. The members have a series of recommendations, such as keeping the AIMS assessment as a high stakes graduation requirement. However, the members have suggested some changes to the assessment schedule for the state. Other suggestions are as follows:

- Replacing the Terra Nova test with a college potential assessment.
- Reduce the number of AIMS writing administrations in the elementary grades from six grade levels to three.
- Eliminate AIMS writing as a high school graduation requirement.
- Score AIMS writing assessment at the school level with annual, random checks at the state level to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- Provide the opportunity for all high school juniors to take a college placement test, such as the ACT or SAT. The college placement test would be voluntary and the cost subsidized by the state.
- Establish a career-ready and college-ready high school graduation endorsement.

Dr. Zaharis asked if the college readiness assessment is added; should it be included as an *and/or* and also include the ASSET test as an option. He also stated that if the endorsements are considered these are to be rigorous and of great value. The other key point to the endorsements is that the decision as to who enters each endorsement is up to the student and the family, not the school.

Dr. Garcia stated that the next draft recommendations would have a series of comments to the side around major points that are still open for discussion. Dr. Zaharis stated that another major point to be discussed is if the assessment at the 11th grade be voluntary or required; is it universal with an opt-out.

Dr. Zaharis said that the presentations to follow would be additional information at a nationwide level that pertains to assessments and the college and career readiness issue.

Mr. Matt Gandal, Executive Vice President of Achieve. Mr. Gandal stated that this organization was created by governors and business leaders to help states with issues such

as academic standards, assessment, accountability, and achievement. Mr. Gandal provided the task force with a packet of additional information on the work of Achieve.

The power point presentation provided information on the percentage of students that graduate high school, start college, persist a 2nd year, and earn a degree. It also included statistics on the response from students, professors, and employers as to the preparedness level for graduates. Mr. Gandal also provided information on the skill levels for jobs.

There are three levels:

- High-skill occupations; typically requires bachelors degree or higher
- Middle-skill occupations; requires education/training beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree
- Low-skill occupations; requires high school diploma or less

The job openings for the three levels are as follows:

- 33.20% for High
- 40.20% for Middle
- 22% for Low

The key topics of the presentation were:

- Aligning high school and postsecondary assessments
- Core principles for transforming high school assessment systems
- Approaches to the college and career ready anchor assessment
- Comprehensive end of grade tests
- End of course tests
- Modified college admissions tests
- Building an anchor assessment

Mr. Gandal listed the proposed considerations for the task force:

- Alignment of new standards and graduation requirements
- Exam(s) that will signal students that they are college and career ready
- If the assessments are voluntary how will that reinforce the message that those are expectations for all students
- College/career readiness assessments to be used by high schools to help improve student readiness
- Student stakes and incentives that are appropriate to attach to the high school assessments
- Ensure coherence across the assessments

Dr. Garcia asked what Mr. Gandal's recommendation would be for states that currently have a high stakes high school test. Mr. Gandal stated that if the test is helping get the students through a minimum threshold continue using it but consider incentives that will provide further opportunities. AIMS can work for the established purpose but build another level of assessment encouraging as many students as possible to get up to the level of being college and/or career ready.

Dr. Zaharis asked Dr. Gonzalez for further explanation on what the Phoenix Union High School District is doing.

Dr. Gonzalez stated that what is being considered is partnering with the state to have different means of public accountability. Currently AYP is determined by passing AIMS and graduation rates and the district would like to continue the passing rates for AIMS but

would also like to hold a higher accountability system for the district. The district would like for part of the graduation requirement to include college readiness measures. Currently, one of the recommendations being considered is making all students take the ACT and use the results as the baseline data and in coming years measure the level of students that are being accepted to colleges and universities.

Dr. Zaharis introduces Mr. Marc Tucker. Mr. Tucker's Tough Choices or Tough Times presentation provided information on how the U.S. educational system compares at an international level.

The Tough Choices or Tough Times presentation also included a 10 step recommendation:

1. Assume that we will do the job right the first time
2. Make much more efficient use of the available resources
3. Recruit from the top third of the high school graduates going on to college for the next generation of school teachers
4. Develop standards, assessments, and curriculum that reflect today's needs and tomorrow's requirements
5. Create high performance schools and districts everywhere- how the system should be governed, financed, organized, and managed
6. Provide high-quality, universal early childhood education
7. Give strong support to the students who need it the most
8. Enable every member of the adult workforce to get the new literacy skills
9. Create personal competitiveness accounts-a GI Bill for our times
10. Create regional competitiveness authorities to make America competitive

Dr. Zaharis opened the topic for discussion and feedback from the task force members.

Mr. Tucker stated that the common ground between the Achieve group and NCEE are: standards, being clear on what is needed for students and having high expectations.

Mr. Gandal stated that he agrees with Mr. Tucker on the topic of the importance of standards. He also stated that the purpose of Achieve is to help states move forward based on what each state has in place and finding the next steps to achieve the goal. Mr. Gandal said that at a statewide level the assessments in place at a 10th grade level are not as rigorous as they can be.

Dr. Zaharis stated that recommendations should be made at short term and long term and that he would like to receive more input from the attendees.

5. Call to the public

*Ms. Kris Zavoli, College Board, Sr. Director for State Gov. Relations, asked Mr. Gandal what courses were found that could be used at the 11th grade to assess college readiness. Mr. Gandal stated that the Algebra II Multi-State test could be used as an indicator for a first year math course.

* Mr. Jacob Moore, President, State Board of Education. Mr. Moore commended the work of the task force. Mr. Moore also said that in the process of increasing the math and science standards a dual diploma system was discussed by the Board. In the discussions it was established that the Arizona high school diploma was minimum standard and one that had not been adjusted in over 10 years. It was also recognized that there was a need to add

more rigor to the system. Mr. Moore said that when the topic of having a dual diploma was discussed there was concern that by having a college ready diploma and a basic diploma there could be a perception that there was a lower diploma. Another dilemma was creating a “regents” diploma and unfortunately when this idea was discussed at a public hearing it was not perceived well. The concern raised was that a dual diploma would create a double standard. After taking all of the input into consideration the State Board decided that the option of a dual diploma would not be pursued.

*Caroline Dunn, Department Director of the AZ Stem Education Center. Ms. Dunn stated that the STEMAz Foundation and its Board of Directors would like to recommend that the task force also include in their final recommendations the need to look beyond state standards and more broadly align with international benchmarking standards and assessments.

*Dr. Karen Nicodemus, President of Cochise Community College and member of the State Board of Education. Dr. Nicodemus stated that her comments would be made as a community college president. She asked that the task force build a culture of P-20 and look at a continuum of education where everyone has the same goal in mind. Dr. Nicodemus said that the purpose of assessments should be to inform teaching and learning and establish priorities. She also stated that from her perspective as a college president, college and career ready are the same.

*John Mulcahy, past president of ACETEAz. Mr. Mulcahy stated that his concern as the system is developed keep in mind that it is important to take into consideration learning styles. Interest and relevance presides rigor, and the testing system should not preclude the students from having access to what they are truly interested in. Mr. Mulcahy asked the task force to please consider maintaining the position of electives in high school.

Dr. Zaharis asked if the members had any comments or suggestions.

Dr. Garcia stated that the next draft of the recommendations will be provided to the members within the next two days and stated that any changes should be submitted to Mr. Yanez in order to include these in the draft that would be discussed at the next meeting on April 8th.

Mr. Gandal asked to thank the members and attendees for allowing Achieve to present and Mr. Tucker also thanked the members for their hard work.

6. Adjournment

11:38PM

