Performance Evaluation Advisory Council Meeting

Friday, May 20, 2016

10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meeting Notes

Members Present: Angie Adams, Ben Boer, Dawn Conway, Randy Davis, Kay Dugan, Dave Ensminger, Larry Frank (for Audrey Soglin), Hector Garcia, Jessica Handy, Jason Helfer, Michael Herring, Kurt Hilgendorf, Steven Isoye, Stephen Ponisciak, Darlene Ruscitti (for Gail Fahey), Diane Rutledge, Jodie Scott, Dick Spohr, Michelle Standridge, Kim Stevens, Sharon Teefey (for Kristin Adams), and Rich Voltz

Observers Present: Terri Carman (Consortium for Educational Change), Amanda Elliott (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE]), Sara Hartwig, (ISBE), and Brian Schwartz (Illinois Principals Association)

Facilitators Present: Rebecca Bates, Larry Stanton, and Gretchen Weber (American Institutes for Research [AIR])

I. Approval of December Minutes and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Updates

Diane Rutledge called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. She asked for the approval of the March 2016 and April 2016 minutes. Kurt Hilgendorf motioned to approve, and Kim Stevens seconded. The minutes were approved.

II. SB 240

Sharon Teefey explained proposed Senate Bill 240 (SB 240) which is asking for an extension of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council’s (PEAC’s) work to 2021. PEAC has done strong work and provided useful guidance in the field. The Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) would like the council to continue because there is further work that needs to be done, and the arena that best serves the needs of the districts is PEAC. The bill suggests a minimum of four meetings per year as it stands currently.

Diane Rutledge shared that she wants PEAC members to have an opportunity to provide feedback before the senate makes a determination on SB 240. She reminded the council that they provide ISBE with information, but are not decision makers. Jason Helfer shared that ISBE opposes the bill because PEAC has completed the five requirements that the statute states need to be completed by 2017. ISBE agrees that the work needs to continue, but disagrees about where it is placed in the statute. ISBE would like to create a workgroup to focus on the questions and
issues concerning the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) as they surface. The workgroup would be comprised of practitioners.

PEAC members posed questions regarding ISBE’s suggestion for a workgroup. Members asked if the workgroup would only tackle ideas focused on PERA legislation because if the group takes on too many initiatives it may be difficult. Jason Helfer responded that the focus would be PERA, but that there are other issues that may tie into PERA that the group would address. Ben Boer stated that the council is an advisor to the state board and that there are a set of charges they are committed to, so if ISBE continues to seek advisement from a workgroup, they are still being advised. Jason Helfer shared that a workgroup would not be limited by a date and could be ongoing. Members asked if there would be funding support to continue the facilitation that PEAC currently has. Jason Helfer responded that so far the council has been supported by Race to the Top funds, which expire this year, but there is a budget line for PERA support, and ISBE can make an argument to continue funding it. Members asked if it will make a difference in the funding if it is a statute or an ISBE initiative. Jason Helfer responded that they do have the capability to fund initiatives that are not in the statute.

Members shared worries about creating a new workgroup because the history of PEAC may be lost with a new group and that PEAC is well known in districts, and districts know to turn to PEAC. Also, if it is a smaller workgroup, some of the voices in PEAC may not be present. They asked about the structure of the group in terms of appointments and representation if it were changed to a workgroup, and shared that there is fear of some of this history being lost if it is changed to a new workgroup. Having the council in the statute is a benefit because it cannot be eliminated in budget cuts. Members asked what the difference is between what ISBE proposes versus the statute. Jason Helfer explained that the statute is tied to the five goals of PEAC, which have been accomplished, so extending the date isn’t necessary. A workgroup doesn’t necessarily need to lose history or decrease in numbers, but it can still be committed to the work. If this bill becomes law, PEAC’s work is still focused on the five goals. If it is taken out of legislation, the workgroup can decide what goals and outcomes they are focused on.

The council would need to consider what the work would look like if it is continued. Larry Frank suggested that a viable alternative is to change the language in SB 240 to address the new outcomes or goals, but Jason Helfer suggested that we may not be at a place to make those decisions. Members shared that having PEAC in the statute makes things firm, but it also makes it restrictive and may not allow for flexibility; also that membership in PEAC has changed over four years and that new people may be a good thing. Members shared that there needs to be ongoing support, but they are not sure what the difference is between the statute and workgroups. Some members feel there needs to be something in existence that has a mix of new and existing PEAC members that is supported by outside facilitation.

Members asked if the committee could have some time to discuss and consider the next steps. Sharon Teefey shared that there was a lot of anxiety at the beginning of PEAC, but that the trust and relationships that were built through PEAC have reduced this anxiety. This is the reason that IFT thinks the legislation should continue because districts have trust in PEAC, which will reduce anxiety. The quarterly meetings are suggested because PEAC has an existing structure of working through committees between meetings. The stability that PEAC provides is valuable to
the districts. Members suggested having conversations about the role of PEAC before deciding on legislation and that the credibility of PEAC is important.

Diane Rutledge summarized the conversation in that members are in agreement as to the value of PEAC, but have questions as to what the next steps are. She said before she asks anyone to make a decision she would like to provide them the opportunity to go back and speak with their groups. She suggested that the next step is to define what the next steps for PEAC are in order to determine if there is legislation necessary. It may be too early for PEAC to determine if they support the bill. Sharon Teefey shared that IFT respects that, but that it may behoove PEAC to keep the bill alive and to ask for an extension in order to provide more time. PEAC members agree the work needs to continue, but they need to do some planning first.

PEAC broke into committees, and each committee addressed their specific tasks.

**III. PEAC Committee Updates**

**Evaluator Training/Retraining.** Jodi Scott reported for the committee. The committee has made progress on the train-the-trainer module for the student growth academy. They are planning to deliver the train-the-trainer sessions this fall. The committee has been working toward identifying existing academies that address the professional practice side of evaluation in order to provide participants a choice of which academies fit their needs. The committee discussed when recertification is needed and that ISBE is working on guidance to address this. They also discussed ensuring there is access to the academies across the state. Jason Helfer shared with the committee that ISBE’s intent is to provide sufficient time for evaluators to meet the requirements for recertification and to work with individuals whose recertification date may be difficult to meet.

**Systems Design and Implementation.** Gretchen Weber reported for the committee. The committee discussed changes they would like to see in the next draft of the District Evaluation Data Guidance. The goal is to have the guidance in final form by the June meeting and posted on the PEAC site in June or July. The changes include stating requirements from the statute at the beginning and then providing guidance; including a graphic, table, or calendar that illustrates what districts should focus on for each year of implementation in terms of purpose and what to collect; shifting the language from districts to more collaborative terms that include joint committees; and including a caveat explaining that how the reader answer questions asked in the guidance should not lead to conclusions that the answer is wrong.

Larry Frank asked if the committee discussed the idea of correlation not equating to causation. Gretchen Weber said that they plan to address this in the introduction with added language. She also commented that this guidance will be overwhelming to many districts at first, so the goal of the table or calendar upfront should help districts to focus over time.

**Outreach and Engagement.** Larry Stanton reported for the committee. The committee is completing the Virtual PERA Coach with an external grant, which is expiring and cannot be renewed until January. The committee hopes that the publication can become part of the AIR contract next year. In the meantime, the committee discussed possible topics for next year’s newsletters to include substantive topics, FAQs, and resources. The committee would like to
publish a newsletter in August, October, January, and March. They also discussed how PEAC will learn what is going on in the field. The committee would like to come up with 10 representative districts from around the state and call them four times a year to learn what is happening within the district to inform PEAC and the Virtual PERA Coach. They also may create a “lessons learned from districts” document at the end of the year. The committee is going to consider how to look at existing guidance materials developed over the last 4 years to ensure that they are still relevant and accurate. Darlene Ruscitti shared how much appreciation she hears about the newsletter and hopes that it is continued.

IV. PEAC 2016–17 Planning

Gretchen Weber facilitated a discussion on planning for PEAC. The first question for discussion was “in a state where all districts are implementing, what is PEAC’s role now?” Members shared that the topic of evaluation data collection is important if the goal of districts is continued improvement and that PEAC’s role may include sharing ideas for moving from compliance with PERA to the process for building teacher capacity. Michelle Standridge noticed a trend in comments she hears about the impact of existing guidance and asked if there should be ways to gather feedback on what is working and not working in PERA implementation. Michael Herring likes the idea of talking to districts that represent a cross-section of the state to hear how districts are implementing PERA and the lessons learned. Larry Frank has appreciated being able to bring questions from local districts to PEAC for feedback and discussion. Sharon Teeffey shared that PEAC continues to monitor PERA implementation, gather feedback, and provide guidance that supports consistency of implementation within the state.

Darlene Ruscitti asked: When districts have a question about PERA, what is the process that they take; do they ask ISBE Legal Division or go to a PEAC member? Members stated that districts go back to the guidance documents to answer questions, go to the ISBE Legal Division, or seek out PEAC members for advice. Michael Herring shared that Chicago Public Schools takes questions to the joint committee for discussion. Larry Frank said there is a difference between guidance and questions, and that not all questions are clear in the guidance; if responding to questions becomes the role of PEAC, a committee may need to be responsible for responding to the questions and how they would be answered.

Dave Ensminger asked about existing state-created structures that support districts with PERA questions. Dawn Conway stated that most of the regional offices of education (ROE) have people who take on this role, but reiterated that we need to see what additional supports are in place. Members agreed that it is important for districts to know what resources and supports are available to respond their questions as they implement PERA. Jodi Scott asked how PEAC can directly connect to the people responsible for PERA at ROEs beyond foundational services. PEAC should have a direct line to the core planning team for the ROEs to support communication regarding next steps.

Kay Dugan suggested bringing in a panel that represents districts in various areas of implementation to find out what districts need. Larry Frank suggested that if this were the first meeting of the year, it would allow for PEAC to find out if its plans reflect district needs. Larry Stanton also suggested proposing to ISBE that PEAC bring together districts that have
implemented PERA for some time and facilitate a conversation that may influence PEAC’s next steps.

Preliminary recommendations include:

- Review of existing guidance documents for any revisions or changes
- Continued sharing of district practices and common implementation challenges as well as research/impact reports through Virtual PERA Coach
- Guidance on the link between evaluation and professional development
- Guidance for districts on continuous improvement of their processes, tools, and measures
- Supplemental guidance on student growth: fictionalized common scenarios

Proposed committees for next year:

- Communication and Engagement
- District Implementation
- (Re)Training
- System Sustainability

Committee members discussed what it means for districts to be compliant, have knowledge and skills, have the necessary capacity, and be committed to the work and how PEAC can support districts during implementation of PERA. PEAC may need to create guidance on moving from compliance to implementation. There are three steps for implementation that include the following: the district is implementing PERA, teachers and evaluators are happy with the implementation, and implementation of PERA is making a difference for kids. PEAC may need to illustrate what this path looks like.

Gretchen Weber shared the five requirements of PEAC originally outlined in the statute. Members asked if they should revisit the requirements to ensure that they will be completed by the end of next year. PEAC may need additional information from ISBE to determine if the requirements have been met. For the June meeting, PEAC may want to ask about the status of the data work from ISBE to ensure that PEAC is meeting this charge.

The council may want to combine the District Implementation and System Sustainability committees as their proposed topics align.

The council next discussed a possible meeting schedule for next year. The proposal is either quarterly in-person meetings or all-virtual bimonthly meetings. Members value face-to-face time because of the technology issues and distractions when people join virtually. Members proposed having meetings on-site at early implementer sites, but acknowledged that may difficult to arrange. It was proposed to have face-to-face meetings in northern Illinois and southern Illinois concurrently so that all members can participate. Dave Ensminger shared that the virtual meetings have been worthwhile when working with a committee. Members agreed that meeting every other month has worked well, with virtual meetings in between. PEAC members requested
avoiding bad weather months, August, and December for face-to-face meetings. AIR will create a draft calendar for 2016–17 to propose to PEAC in June.

V. Public Comment and Adjournment

There were no public comments.