Uncertainty surrounds DOPR school policy

Policymakers and other stakeholders generally recognize that dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) schools face unique challenges in educating at-risk students, which is why their performance is assessed and reported on a unique state report card. And while there is broad agreement that DOPR schools should be held accountable for their performance, establishing a fair and meaningful approach to doing so has proven to be a difficult task.

In 2015, the Ohio Legislature passed a charter “reform” bill that called for creation of a committee to study and make recommendations on DOPR school accountability. The committee recommended that study of DOPR issues continue beyond its statutory deadline. It was comprised of a wide variety of stakeholders, most of whom opted not to continue to serve as the superintendent of public education established a new group – which issued a report in 2017 – to continue the effort.

Flash forward to 2019, when the State Board of Education created a DOPR work group comprised of two State Board members, and eight representatives of the DOPR community. The group met on a regular basis and released a report, which included policy recommendations, in December.

The group’s recommendations were not well received by Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria, who wrote a memo in response describing the group’s process as “not one of collaborative co-design,” “somewhat one-sided,” and one that “reflects members of a regulated educational sector given carte blanche to design their own regulations.”

“Many ideas in the work group’s report are worthy of further refinement and adoption,” DeMaria wrote. “However, several would call into question appropriate controls that are in place pursuant to law.”

Last month, the report was submitted to the full State Board, which voted unanimously to approve a resolution acknowledging receipt of the report and forwarding it to the board’s Assessment and Accountability Committee for consideration.

In the meantime, a committee created in the budget bill passed by the Legislature last year to address DOPR issues cancelled its first meeting, which was scheduled for January 29.

“I think there’s broad agreement we need to find better ways to serve this particular population of students,” said State Board President Laura Kohler.

Stay tuned …