January 19, 2012

ACCOUNTABILITY:  This week the education community took a stand in favor

of LB 870, introduced by Senator Adams, to create a school accountability

system, which would be implemented by the State Board of Education.  NCSA,

NASB, NSEA, and NRCSA supported the measure.

This morning, during the last day of bill introduction, another school

accountability measure was introduced, LB 1124, sponsored by Senator

Council.  It is important to examine the differences between LB 870 and LB

1124, the latter of which includes some of the same concepts introduced

last year under LB 635 (a bill carried over to the current session).

LB 1124 requires the State Board of Education to establish an

accountability system to be used to measure the performance of individual

public schools and school districts beginning with school year 2012-13.

The accountability system must combine multiple measures, including at a

minimum:

-- graduation rates,

-- student growth and student improvement on the assessments,

-- student attendance rates,

-- kindergarten readiness rates,

-- parental involvement,

-- suspensions and expulsions,

-- college and career readiness,

-- postsecondary enrollment rates,

-- postsecondary retention rates per high school, and

-- other indicators of the performance of schools and school districts.

The measures selected by the State Board for the accountability system may

be combined into a school performance score and district performance

score.  The performance score must take into consideration the growth of

students who score in the top quartile and bottom quartile on the

assessments to ensure that the accountability system identifies schools

and school districts that are not sufficiently meeting the needs of both

high-performing and low-performing students.

The State Board must also establish levels of growth for the indicators

used in the accountability system in order to classify the performance of

public schools and school districts.  Any school that does not meet the

minimum level of growth established by the board shall be designated as a

"priority school."

NDE would be annually required to report the performance of individual

public schools and school districts, including the growth of students who

score in the top quartile and bottom quartile on the assessments, as part

of the statewide assessment and reporting system.

By each August 1st beginning in 2013, the commissioner must report to the

Governor, the Legislature, and the Educational Service Unit Coordinating

Council (ESUCC) on all schools designated as priority schools.  The report

must include the name of the school, the grades included in the priority

school designation, the name of the school district, the years for which

the school was designated a priority school, a summary of the progress

plan, and the measurement of progress.

The school board of a school district containing a priority school must

permit the "priority school intervention teams" and any person performing

duties on behalf of the intervention teams full access to the priority

school, school personnel of the priority school, the school district,

school district personnel, academic information, financial information,

and any other requested information.

The intervention teams, in collaboration with the priority school and the

district, would develop a "progress plan" for approval by the State Board.

The progress plan would include specific actions required by the school

and the district in order to remove its classification as a priority

school.

\*\* Compliance with progress plans would be a requirement to maintain

accreditation for any school district that has at least one priority

school.

The ESUCC, comprised of the administrators of the ESUs, must establish and

assign priority school intervention teams in each service unit containing

a priority school.

Each ESU containing a priority school would work in collaboration with the

ESUCC and NDE to create intervention teams focused on the following areas:

-- The student intervention team designated to provide care management for

students having the greatest behavioral and social needs who often disrupt

and derail classroom instruction and require the intervention of outside

providers.  The student intervention team must review high-risk students'

needs and develop and monitor interagency intervention plans for

interventions including in-school counseling, school-based health centers,

enrollment in public assistance programs, and referral to outside

services;

-- The instructional support team designated to provide support to

students with academic needs that can be met through school and

classroom-based resources and strategies.  The instructional support team

must identify unmet needs of both high-performing and low-performing

students, coordinate care and intervention strategies with staff members,

and provide professional development for teachers; and

-- The core team designated to focus on overall school safety and culture,

disciplinary codes and behavioral norms, classroom practices, and parent

and community engagement.

A progress plan is required for each year a priority school is so

classified.  The State Board must annually review any progress plans and

work with the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council and the

intervention teams to determine whether any modifications are needed.  If

a school has been designated as a priority school for the third

consecutive year, the state board must determine whether further steps

should be taken.

\*\* If a school has been designated as a priority school for the fifth

consecutive year, the State Board must determine whether further steps

should be taken or whether the school district would lose its

accreditation and be "subject to dissolution."

Note:  LB 1124 also requires NDE to establish a kindergarten readiness

advisory group to develop a kindergarten readiness assessment standard by

December 1, 2012, which may be utilized as a baseline to measure student

growth and to assess performance of early childhood education systems that

utilize public funding.