
Act 173 Advisory Group

Approved Meeting Minutes

Meeting Place: Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-552-8456

Conference ID: 578 441 305#

Date: July 13, 2020

Present:

Advisory Group (AG) Members: Meagan Roy, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators (VCSEA); Marilyn Mahusky, Disability Law Project; Don Tinney (representing Jeff Fannon), VT-National Education Association (VT-NEA); Lisa Bisbee, (VT-NEA-selected practitioner); Peter Garrecht (VCSEA-selected special educator); Cheryle Wilcox, Department of Mental Health; Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendents Association; Mill Moore, Vermont Independent Schools Association; Karen Price, VT Coalition for Disability Rights; Sue Ceglowski, Vermont School Boards Association; Brenda Fleming, Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO); and Dan French, Agency of Education (AOE).

AOE: Emily Simmons, Clare O'Shaughnessy, Meg Porcella, Maureen Gaidys

Others: Marianna Donnally, Department of Mental Health (DMH); Kimberly Gleason, State Board of Education (SBE).

Call to Order/Roll Call/Introductions/Amendments to Agenda

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Review and Approve Minutes from May 4, 2020 Meeting

Chair Roy asked for a motion to approve minutes from the May meeting. Wilcox moved to approve the minutes; Fleming seconded. Chair Roy called a roll call vote: Fleming, Tinney, Francis, Price, Bisbee, Moore, Garrecht, Ceglowski, and Wilcox voted to approve. The motion passed.

Opportunity for Public to be Heard

Chair Roy asked for any public comments. There were none.

Updates from Agency of Education (AOE):

Chair Roy asked Secretary French for an update on the timeline and how it has impacted the AOE's workplan.

Revised timeline for 2200 series rules (legislative update), AOE proposed workplan timeline, Proposed stakeholder group members

Secretary French said the AOE has been working on a draft of the 2200 rules series and the draft was ready for stakeholder feedback. He asked for input from the AG on specifying who the stakeholders should be and when they would like this shared with the AG. Chair Roy asked the AG for thoughts on which stakeholders should review the draft prior to bringing it to the AG. Secretary French said there had been no stakeholder input thus far. There was discussion on the AG including various key stakeholders, including independent school representation and special educators who engage with these independent schools, and schools that are alternative placements for special education.

Simmons clarified that the primary purpose of the rules is to enable students who have access to district-funded tuition in facilitating their enrollment in an approved independent school on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. This does not impact special purpose independent schools, but there can be incidental impacts. There was discussion on the incidental impact and alternative independent schools being represented. Secretary French offered to reach out to independent school representatives. (Mahusky joined at 9:43 a.m.) Chair Roy asked for clarification on if Secretary French wanted an identified list of stakeholders or if he would have an actual convening. Secretary French said it would be a convening to include dialogue. Chair Roy summarized that representatives should include independent schools, special needs schools, special education teachers and someone from VCSEA who works with independent schools. Secretary French will reach out to Tom Lovett.

Secretary French said the interactions will be organized and the goal would then be to present a revised draft to the AG, followed by a conversation about how to proceed.

Discussion:

COVID-19 Impacts and Role of the Advisory Group and Professional Development

Chair Roy asked about the role of the AG and how this is impacted by COVID-19 and asked for folks to share their thoughts.

Secretary French offered an update on AOE's response to COVID-19. He spoke about the AOE's top priority being re-opening schools. There was guidance issued in early May on graduation celebrations and that was when work started on planning for summer and fall. It quickly emerged that the public health emergency was not over, and it was an opportunity to look at summer as planning for reopening vs. remediation for the spring. There is a large planning framework produced by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and it was concluded that the health information should be the cornerstone of reopening schools. A larger planning group was created, led by public health experts, virologists, pediatricians, school nurses, etc. [A Strong and Healthy Start-Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#) was produced by that group and is 25 pages; it is comprehensive, with some specificity (masks) and recommendations in other areas.

This launched the AOE to apply health guidance to situations and this guidance is provoking a lot of reaction on the application. Implementing the public health guidance is extensive. This week AOE hopes to produce guidance that will frame out some of the hybrid learning options. AOE is surveying the public landscape and there is interest from parents and teachers, but what AOE is doing is acknowledging that the learning environment will be very dynamic, and this requires significant preparation. There is a separate workgroup working on the social-emotional impacts of COVID-19, and that guidance will be produced soon. We now have a primary objective with COVID-19 to structure the education system to put an emphasis on in-person instruction, but it needs to be done safely for both students and staff. This becomes a complex planning conversation, even without the emotions, and emotions are very high. Once the discrete planning pieces are done, the AOE will gear up their support functions around helping districts to navigate these circumstances.

Mahusky asked about remote learning and its reliance on access to technology and asked for an update on statewide access to Wi-Fi/broadband. Secretary French said the Legislature considered connectivity in their appropriations of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding and data is being collected; there will be a need for more. Connectivity is part of it; tools is another important aspect. At the state level, we have expanded tools. Through extending access to the Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative (VTVLC) at no additional cost, educators have access to various systems, professional development tools related to distance learning, and many other resources. The other piece of infrastructure is Edmodo, a professional development curriculum which builds an ecosystem for teachers to share resources. Edmodo is more useful for elementary-level teachers, as it is organized around class vs. course structure. There is a plan to address the last mile issues of connectivity; the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) funding is the beginning of what will be a larger public investment in the infrastructure.

Chair Roy asked what would be helpful for AOE to have from the AG. Secretary French said the issue of professional development (PD) is still a priority, and what teachers need to teach online is a significant need. As the PD was framed out by the AOE, the context was the four essential elements that are pillars of a strong instructional support system for students: educational support teams, local assessment plan, coordinated curriculum and needs-based professional development system. All four are still relevant in the context of COVID-19.

There was discussion on how education support teams (ESTs) will function in a hybrid learning environment, the issue of a coordinated curriculum and how that will now be envisioned, local assessment as critical and accompanying PD, and that maybe there is an opportunity to re-imagine educational practices. Chair Roy reminded the group that the AG had planned to pick up PD again and hear from the AOE, and that the AG does better when they have something to work from. She asked when the right time would be to hear from the AOE on how the districts are currently being advised by the AOE or if that opportunity had already passed, when might be appropriate to hear more on the deeper structures. Secretary French said it would be useful for the AG to review/inventory what has happened so far and try to make sense of that in relation to Act 173.

Secretary French suggested asking how school districts/systems orient themselves to supporting students in this COVID-19 environment. Act 173 is an opportunity/responsibility to bring coherence to that process, but there is a need to acknowledge that there is limited bandwidth. As Edmodo is set up, the AG has an opportunity to be in that ecosystem and promulgate coherence and share best

practices. He suggested that the AG inventory the structures and guidance and recommend how to help people navigate this new and disruptive educational period and think about how to situate the goals of Act 173 in the context of COVID-19.

There was discussion on the breakdown of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) during COVID-19, avoiding this in the future, additional guidance from AOE, that AOE needs to see some practices emerging before further guidance is issued, this could distract from the priority focus (re-opening this fall), that this is not the time to promulgate guidance, significant work is focused on re-opening schools and the underlying health conditions, there is a limit to how much schools can digest, there has been considerable communication across agencies around social-emotional learning, students in crisis cannot learn, AG could be a great conduit to individual networks to connect around resources, and differences in hybrid guidance based on age/grade level. Secretary French said preliminary guidance on hybrid learning should be released this week and it will address the regulatory and statutory framework because COVID-19 was not contemplated in statute or regulation. AOE will issue "considerations" based on patterns emerging, but this week's guidance will be focused on answering the legal questions.

There was discussion on challenges faced by educators and how they are supported, tracking attendance and ensuring safety, opportunity to do some planning and be proactive, how the different groups of stakeholders will be managed, purposeful adoption of a delay of the AG's work with emphasis on the need to support districts with COVID-19, opportunity to re-imagine systems but there is an issue of attenuation and time, and the continued need to emphasize systems change.

Chair Roy said she is hearing two bodies of work for the AG: 1) inventorying the guidance and understanding its connection to the structures of Act 173 as it would be useful for districts to have a connection between the work around managing school closure/reopening in the context of Act 173 and make suggestions/recommendations and 2) review the draft rules series 2200 following stakeholder review. Chair Roy spoke about being judicious with the AG's time and focusing on what is important and useful and asked if an August meeting was needed, as school re-opens that same month. She asked if the AG should pause for the next two months and do some behind-the-scenes work and reconvene in October. There was discussion on meeting dates, reviewing guidance, PD, financial considerations and context will be critical, leaving it open to convening in September and/or October, and keeping the August meeting scheduled for an update from Secretary French and subgroup report to get an idea of what forward navigation might look like.

Chair Roy directed the AG to the [COVID-19 guidance for Vermont schools posted on the AOE's webpage](#). She said she might also create a form or Doodle document to collect information. It was decided to keep the September meeting, as well as the August meeting, on the calendar; these can be cancelled if not needed. Wilcox suggested that a discussion on Success Beyond Six (SB6), led by Laurel Omland, might be a possible agenda item for September.

Adjourn

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 10:50 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.