



# Steering Group: Commission on the Future of Public Education – Meeting

July 23, 2024: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

## Location:

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-552-8456

Conference ID: 876 244 629#

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## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Steering Group Members:** Peter Conlon, Representative Addison-2 District; Ann Cummings, Senator Washington District; Zoie Saunders, Interim Secretary of Education; Jennifer Deck Samuelson, State Board of Education; Nicole Mace, Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA)  
**Commission Member:** Meagan Roy, Chair

**AOE:** Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague

**Others:** David S.; Nancy Russell; M. Kendrick; Chester Telegraph; John Castle; Doug Racine; Abby Shepherd; Cole Siefer; Flor Diaz-Smith; Rick; Herb Olson; Bridget Burkhardt; Sue Ceglowski; Julie Regimbal; Jeanne Jensen; Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman; Tara Sweet; Rene; Jay Denault; Jay Nichols; Margaret MacLean; Julia Richter; Jeff Francis, Elizabeth St. James; Jeannie Waltz; Sherry Sousa; Rep. Elizabeth Burrows; Jeff Fannon; Matthew DeGroot; Mike Leichliter; Allen Gilbert; Dan MacArthur; Oliver Olsen; Ray Nails; Jack Hoffman; Jolie Frechette; Stacey L Peters; Kim Gleason; Rep. Angela Arsenault; Lauren Brady; Tom Little; DS; Paul Anderson

### Call to Order, Introductions and Roll Call, Amendments to the Agenda

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. and provided a brief introduction of the Steering Group's focus for the meeting. She asked each member to introduce themselves. She gave a brief overview of the Steering Group's charge and explained the rationale of the agenda items. Chair Roy asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. Mace asked to add a section to clarify the role of Chair Roy on the Steering Group since the legislation was not clear. Mace added that she would like Roy to be empowered to develop agendas and support the group. There were no other suggestions. Chair Roy welcomed the conversation regarding her role. She said it would be difficult to facilitate and coordinate the Commission if she was not part of the Steering Group and there is a lot of behind the scenes work that is required. Chair Roy added that she is happy to take on the work if desired by the Steering Group. Discussion followed regarding different chairs managing the work, asking for consensus of the Steering Group to allow Roy to serve as Chair, support for Roy to continue and clarification between Roy acting as a facilitator or active participant as the chair. Chair Roy clarified and said that she considers it more of a facilitation role. Chair Roy agreed to take on the role of facilitator for the Steering Group.

### Determine Schedule for Regular Steering Group Meetings and discuss Steering Group's Charge and Timeline

Chair Roy said it was important to discuss the frequency and structure of the Steering Group

meetings/work sessions. Discussion followed regarding meeting more frequently until the workplan is developed, the bill mentions no more than 30 meetings and the need to be mindful of the number of subcommittees and total number of meetings, reimbursement is for no more than 30 meetings, Commission's ambitious timeline, having a discussion about not being reimbursed for some meetings if the Commission goes over 30, and the need for backwards planning to identify how to structure the Steering Group to advance the key deliverables and then come back to establishing a regular cadence.

## **Commission Structure**

Chair Roy explained the Steering Group's approach to the work and shared the alignment with the Commission's work: 1) communication and engagement with named stakeholders, the public and other stakeholders as the Commission decides; 2) education finance which has the earliest deadline of preliminary recommendations due by December; 3) governance, resources and administration; 4) education delivery system; and 5) role of public schools. Discussion followed regarding examples of education delivery systems, expanding the list to include outcomes, agreeing that there is a problem and what is to be accomplished, setting a foundation of shared understanding, goal of the Commission is to produce a vision for public education, using data, the need to articulate the current state to envision the future state, importance of being data driven, participatory and inclusive, leveraging work that is underway through different organizations and associations to inform the work of the Steering Group and Commission, AOE's Listen and Learn Tour, working very closely in partnership with the community to identify the priorities and how best to be supportive, data to include both academic and nonacademic indicators to give a comprehensive view of the current state of education in Vermont and defining educational opportunities.

Chair Roy asked to discuss the idea of leveraging existing work that the Commission does not need to duplicate and looking at data and history to help inform. Discussion followed regarding this same conversation about challenges facing our public education system has been happening in Vermont for 2 decades, bringing together a set of cross functional indicators that look at academic outcomes to understand the whole system, shared understanding of data contributing to the success and challenges of education, if the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) will support the Commission's work, JFO is not specifically tasked with supporting the Commission, value in bringing forth previous work in describing the vision of the Vermont education system and the vision should be developed in the context of what the Vermont tax base can afford.

Chair Roy asked if the Steering Group and then the full Commission should do a data dive to help inform and identify how to group the work. Discussion followed regarding this being work for the full Commission, supplying raw data may not be helpful, the Steering Group could decide which data is useful and steer the process, identifying data that does not exist, the process may take a lot of time that the Commission does not have, using a high-level focus to bring down costs and improving student outcomes, data can be overwhelming, AOE sharing at the next meeting data that can be reported out that is both relevant and actionable, identifying variability across our system to identify where things are working well and modeling it, giving the Commission basic grounding by explaining what education spending is, how the money is spent and supplying a picture of what Vermont's education system is, and identifying districts with lower tax rates and relatively higher student outcomes.

Chair Roy identified 3 topics from the discussion: 1) sustainability and cost; 2) student outcomes; and 3) delivery and demographics. She added that if the desire is for the Steering Group to engage in a picture of the system and simultaneously looking at the data then the Steering Group must

decide what data is not available and how to obtain it. She believes it is a necessary conversation. Discussion followed regarding adding the following topics: school and community demographics, enrollment trends, facility condition, staffing, student conditions and budget. Mace shared her list of data she feels is important to review. Chair Roy said that the next work session could be to look at the categories of cost, outcomes and deliveries/demographics, populate the list and then spend some time on what data exists, what data doesn't exist, and what data is necessary to do the work. Secretary Saunders said it would be helpful if the committee members could share with Chair Roy the data points needed so she can cross reference with what the AOE has and does not have.

Chair Roy asked Steering Group members to send their list of data points directly to her to be compiled in one document and to avoid back and forth emails to not run afoul of open meeting law. Once compiled, it will be shared with the Steering Group in advance of the next meeting. Chair Roy said the Steering Group should have at least one work session to create a work plan for the full Commission's approval that is due by September 15.

Mace mentioned that the formation of the Education Finance Subcommittee is important, and members should be identified. The subcommittee should be invited to the Commission meeting where the data is shared. Discussion occurred regarding the law indicating the Steering Group can appoint non-committee members, the subcommittee was envisioned to present cost containment strategies that could be debated for potential implementation to the legislature, representation from the administration, having a balanced committee, including the tax department, more than one way to engage various viewpoints, agreement on size of the subcommittee and expertise required, Commission members can be included on the subcommittee, value in having someone who has deep education policy and economic expertise, smaller as opposed to a larger group that might be more challenging to manage and having less than a 10 member subcommittee.

Chair Roy suggested the Steering Group identify a skill set for members of the subcommittee. Discussion followed regarding having an understanding of the educational and constitutional underpinnings of our education funding system, clarification on if the subcommittee will exist for the entire 18 months, high stakes appointment, adding appointments to the subcommittee to the next agenda, expertise and experience in education outside Vermont but with similar size and demographics, charge for the subcommittee, strategic shorter term budgeting decisions and allowing the consultant to be a member of the subcommittee.

## **Workplan Design**

Not discussed.

## **Identify preliminary dates for Full Commission Meetings**

Chair Roy said a work session for the Steering Group is the next meeting to be scheduled. She suggested a discussion on the structure of the Steering Group meetings and the full Commission meetings schedule so all meetings can be warned. The public will know where the meetings will be held and make necessary arrangements to attend or hear the meetings. She invited conversation around length of meetings and time of day. Discussion followed on scheduling the meetings on Mondays, minimum of 3 hours in length, frequency of each group's meetings, set date makes sense, 14 meetings are defined in law to rotate in each county with no more than 30 meetings, preference for morning sessions, public participation may be limited in the morning, engagement process that is separate from the meetings, subcommittee meetings can fulfill the in-person meeting requirements, in-person locations must be able to accommodate a hybrid meeting and full Commission meetings after work hours to allow for more public participation.

Chair Roy said to expect a Doodle poll soon to determine the date and time of the next Steering Group meeting. An additional Doodle poll will be sent to the full Commission to determine its next meeting. Agenda items for the Steering Group meeting include the required expertise and who should sit on the Education Finance Subcommittee and examine data needs to frame the work. Chair Roy asked that Steering Group members send her any data requests to be compiled into one document. Discussion occurred about the Steering Group meeting every two weeks on a Monday through December and the full Commission to meet monthly on different Mondays from the Steering Group.

## **Public to be Heard**

Herb Olson addressed the Commission. He thanked the Steering Group. He said it would be helpful to have a place to share the data for the Commission and have it available for the public as well. He said it would be helpful to have good factual financial information showing the savings or not of closing a school or district consolidation.

Paul Anderson addressed the Commission. He said the Commission's primary focus needs to be reducing the cost of education in Vermont. He said to look at states that are spending less per student and get Vermont back to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on education costs per student. It means significant reductions and that Vermont taxpayers can afford.

Rick Dustin-Eichler addressed the Commission. He appreciated comments around data sets and encouraged the Commission to look more broadly at data rather than to look at rear facing data that identifies gaps. And to look at data around what we hope and dream our schools will be like and what our communities are looking for in schools, what our economies are looking for in schools and within this try to engage groups from the voice of marginalized populations to make sure that we are creating a vision for education that is inclusive of all.

Jay Denault addressed the Commission. He provided background on his school district and noted that it has extremely high student performance and spending is low. He said the district was forced to merge and it has been beneficial to their schools, and they are able to avoid the things that affect their ability to keep what they feel is important. They're one of the successes that pertains to Act 46, and they want to preserve what they have. The district is very cautious about the Commission crunching data that may not be universal to all schools and to think about the data that you're trying to change to assist you in making decisions or recommendations.

Ray Nails addressed the Commission. He wanted to make sure the Commission was having a frank conversation and said the Commission was in a losing battle. Vermont has the highest per pupil spending in the country, declining populations, people are leaving the state and yet school budgets are exploding. He said that like any industry, when you have less customers, you must reduce your workforce. The spending level is unsustainable for Vermonters. We expect our elected representatives to work with our governor who we all elected.

## **Adjourn**

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 3:58 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague.