



Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

September 9, 2024, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-828-7667

Conference ID: 498 453 246#

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Commission Members: Meagan Roy, Chair; 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); Craig Bolio, Tax Commissioner; Oliver Olsen, Vermont Independent Schools Association; John Castle, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; Michael Leichliter, Vermont Superintendents Association; Jeff Fannon, VT-National Education Association; Jay Nichols, Vermont Principals' Association; Elizabeth Jennings, VT Association of School Business Officials.

AOE: Nicole Lee, Annie Gianni, Deborah Bloom, Jill Briggs-Campbell, Heather Bouchey, Emily Simmons, Rose Neddo, Maureen Gaidys, Suzanne Sprague.

Others: Chelsea Myers, Ken Fredette, Greg Hughes, John, Dr. Mary Gannon, Margaret MacLean, Dylan Lamson, Bud Meyers, Megan K, Jeremy Little, John Clifford, Cheryl Charles, Chester Telegraph, Austin Davis, Sue Ceglowski, Elizabeth Atkins, Steve Rosenberg, Erica Loomis, Mike Moriarty, Mary Lundeen, Andrew Haas, Keri Bristow, Libby, Julia Richter, Jeff Francis, Kristen Rodgers, Christine Bourne, Nancy Cornell, Elizabeth St. James, Elizabeth Burrows, Action Circles, Allen Gilbert, Jeanne Jensen, Alison Novak, Kendal Smith, Jay Denault, Maggie Lenz, Meg Fuerst, Rene Sanchez, Clare Buckley, Sheila Soule, 8022234526, Eric, Bridget Burkhardt

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

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and took roll call. Members present included: Roy, Jennings, Nichols, Cummings, Fannon, Saunders, Mace, Leichliter, Deck-Samuelson, Castle, Olsen, and Bolio. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Approval of [Draft Minutes from August 26, 2024](#)

Nichols moved to approve the [minutes from the August 26, 2024 meeting](#); Cummings seconded. Discussion followed on updating the deadline on the deliverables from September 5th to September 15th, updating the committee assignment section to include Representative Kornheiser as chair of the Education Finance subcommittee, adding Leichliter as a member of the Education Finance Committee and removing Conlon and updating the title of the electronic version of the minutes on the web site. Chair Roy called the vote to adopt the minutes with the suggested amendments. The motion carried.

Public to be Heard

None

Committee Reports

Steering Group (SG): Interim Secretary Saunders said that the SG worked to define the key terms and guiding principles. The SG reflected on the feedback from the initial work plan and discussed how to revise the work plan to provide clarity on the scope of the work and the deliverables timeline. A full commission conversation will occur at the meeting.

Communications and Engagement Subcommittee (CES): Fannon said the subcommittee met and some of the work is contained the meeting materials. The subcommittee discussed contracting with a consultant to assist in the work which will include a scientific survey, improving on how the Commission will engage with the public and stakeholders and how to educate and engage meaningfully with the public. The CES is tackling with geography of the state and the limited time available and being thoughtful about how to structure feedback mechanisms, so that opportunities are equitable across the state.

Education Finance Subcommittee (EFS): Cummings said the EFS elected Representative Kornheiser as its chair. The EFS mainly discussed “what is the problem that is being asked to solve”. They decided that the problem is how does Vermont provide the quality education that our children deserve that is affordable. They also discussed the need for a consultant to gather data, interpret data or both. Cummings shared that the EFS discussed how the work of the Commission will mesh with the General Assembly (GA). Discussion followed regarding using a consultant and their role and what the act language implied, frontloading work and working with the tight deadline, reviewing prior policy and using data driven, results-oriented decision making and the Act 46 Report.

Discussion/Action Items

Chair Roy reminded the Commission that the workplan should be voted on at this meeting because the deadline is September 15. She provided background on the [Definition of Terms/Guiding Principles](#) document. She advised that it is a working document, and feedback is welcomed/being sought.

Discussion on the [Definition of Terms/Guiding Principles](#) document followed and included state responsibility and authority versus local responsibility and authority and recognizing the tension between the two, maintaining some level of local responsibility, focusing on sustainability/affordability, equity and quality, updating the graphic, clarifying constitutional rights at the local level, state’s obligation, focus on high quality, substantially equal education for every student, tension between local control and the GA, education quality is defined in the Education Quality Standards (EQS) and it is not the Commission’s role to redefine it, operationally defining quality and having a parallel definition of it when used in rule, some independent schools are not governed by EQS, narrowing the focus to a specific rule versus a statement of principle, publicly funded students, using the definition as defined in State Board rules related to education quality, public funds paid to independent schools, and governance and private/public partnership is part of the current delivery model.

Olsen offered the following statement: The Commission is committed to the fundamental principle that all Vermont students must be afforded high quality educational opportunities that are equitable, inclusive, anti-racist, culturally responsive and anti-discriminatory, as defined in Vermont State Board of Education rules. Discussion followed regarding State Board of Education (SBE) Rule Series 2200 that governs independent school program approvals, suggested statement is broader than what appears in EQS and encompasses both public schools and independent schools in a

way that is consistent with SBE rules, keeping the statement broad, identifying high priority standards, the goal is for public schools that satisfy EQS would be providing quality education, what the public considers quality, wide disparity of quality education across the state, outcomes and test scores, ensuring that students are afforded substantially equal educational opportunities that is sustainable and if the Commission identifies other measures of quality that may need to be considered the Commission can make a recommendation at that time.

Olsen offered the following amended statement: All Vermont students must be afforded high quality educational opportunities that are equitable, inclusive, anti-racist, culturally responsive and anti-discriminatory as defined in Vermont State Board of Education rules. The Commission acknowledges that the SBE rules focus primarily on inputs and that accountability and outcomes for adherence to the rules is critical. Discussion followed about adding “publicly funded”, making other recommendations as needed and learning outcomes for students or outcomes for meeting EQS. Olsen offered that the last sentence read: “The Commission acknowledges that the SBE rules focus primarily on inputs and that accountability and outcomes is critical. Discussion followed regarding adding “student” before outcomes and adding “school accountability and student outcomes”.

Olsen read the following amended statement: All publicly funded Vermont students must be afforded high quality educational opportunities that are equitable, inclusive, anti-racist, culturally responsive and anti-discriminatory as defined in Vermont State Board of Education rules. The Commission acknowledges that the SBE rules focus primarily on inputs and that school accountability and student outcomes are critical. There was agreement with the statement amongst the Commission members.

Chair Roy moved the topic to the term equity. Discussion followed regarding adding “student and region” to the equity draft statement, different regions requiring different amounts of resources, equity versus equal, profile of a system defined by population, geography and need, leaving “students and need” out and decisions of adults impacting kids are creating equity disparities. There was agreement with the statement amongst the Commission members.

Chair Roy moved the topic to the term sustainability. Discussion followed by adding affordability to the draft statement, updating education funding system to education finance system, cost containment cost drivers, funding formula and statewide system and local cost pressures, reinvestment opportunities, excess spending penalty, changing the wording to spending decisions instead of cost containment, revenues and expenses, being intentional and descriptive with what the Commission means, and adding the statement “requires a comprehensive look at the education finance system, including how we raise money and how we spend education”. There was agreement with the statement amongst the Commission members.

Chair Roy summarized the discussion around equity, quality and sustainability and affordability and noted that the visual will be stripped out of the documents. Discussion followed regarding the state responsibility and authority, the constitution allows the state to delegate the responsibility but does not require it to do so, adding a statement that the Commission values the balance between the two, value in cultivating and supporting continued local responsibility, adding “the Commission acknowledges the tension between the state’s ultimate responsibility and our tradition of local decision making and the Commission will continue to explore the balance between the two” and concern that statewide solutions may not be relevant or work in every community.

Chair Roy asked if the Commission was comfortable with the updated guiding principles and noted that it can be further refined if needed. There was agreement. Chair Roy committed to providing an

updated clean document at the next meeting.

Chair Roy moved the conversation to the [Workplan Framework](#). She said the Commission will be voting on the document. She further explained the changes in the document that followed a recent SG meeting. Mace moved to adopt the Workplan Framework; Cummings seconded. Discussion followed on wordsmithing the guiding principles section to read “consistent with”, striking the visual, more fully developed workplan, preliminary report from EFC due in November to meet the Commission’s deadline of December 2024 and adding a version number and date to the workplan since the document is iterative. Chair Roy called the vote to adopt the framework as amended. The motion carried.

Chair Roy moved the conversation to the [Communication and Engagement Framework](#). She said that the Commission will need to adopt this framework. She provided background on the document. Discussion followed regarding the survey to collect feedback from Vermonters who cannot attend the Commission’s meetings, qualitative data, facilitated input opportunities following each Commission meeting, ongoing media summaries, frequently asked questions sheet, media toolkit, timing of meetings, engagement session in each county may not be sufficient, using an expert in survey design, informed input, Agency’s role with request for proposal (RFP) and the expertise needed, coordination with the Listen and Learn Tour and prioritizing data, work of the Commission is separate from the Listen and Learn Tour and education finance policy expertise. Castle moved to approve the Communication and Engagement framework: Deck-Samuelson seconded. Chair Roy called the vote to adopt the framework. The motion carried.

Chair Roy moved the conversation to the [Request for Proposals](#) document. She mentioned the logistics and process for having a consultant and content expertise. She hopes that the process is kicked off as soon as possible. Interim Secretary Saunders said the Agency will look at the framework and will work with the CES, so the Agency is clear on scope of work to be included in the RFP. She added it is important to acknowledge that some of the deliverables are on a tight timeline and in working with a consultant we must identify the number of meetings, the number of surveys, etc. so that we can get a comprehensive bid out that meets our needs. Interim Secretary Saunders will attend the next meeting of the CES with additional questions to help build out the scope of work. Discussion followed regarding having a consultant with knowledge of education systems in other states, adding the guiding principles into the work of the consultant, budget and additional consultancy services and assuring resources are available to help the entire work of the Commission.

Confirm Next Meetings

The next meeting of Communication and Engagement Subcommittee is Monday, September 16, from 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

The next meeting of the Steering Group is Monday, September 16, from 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

The Education Finance Subcommittee is working on scheduling their next meeting.

The next full Commission meeting is Monday, October 7, from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. The location is to be determined. Please follow up with Maureen Gaidys or Suzanne Sprague if you have any suggestions on where to hold the meetings. The input sessions will follow the full meetings.

Public to be Heard

Greg Hughes, a Friend of Vermont Public Education, addressed the Commission and read this [statement](#). He requested that the Commission become familiar with the [Amicus Brief of the Carson versus Makin Case](#) and the [Brigham versus Vermont Decision](#).

Keri Bristow, Woodstock, addressed the Commission. She hopes the Commission is addressing the yield situation pertaining to any bonds that would be subject to the penalty phase of taxes which means many districts will not be able to do any capital improvements. She wondered what the Education Fund actually pays for. She understands that the Education Fund is paying for tax increment financing (TIF) districts and doesn't understand why that is happening.

Ken Fredette, a Friend of Vermont Public Education, addressed the Commission and read this [statement](#). He requested that the Commission read his [article](#) that appeared in the Rutland Herald, December 19, 2023.

Mary Gannon asked if the RFP on the consultant was the final version. Chair Roy responded that it was not and was offered as an initial draft for discussion.

Jeff Francis, Montpelier, addressed the Commission. He said the field accepts the fact that the current dynamics in the education delivery system have and will continue to necessitate change. The Commission would be well advised, as would the delivery system and the public, to understand that this change in the way we look at things and behavior should be embraced across the board by all of the various parties of interest, particularly if we are as Governor Scott hopes, and he thinks we all hope to have the strongest cradle to career education system in the country.

Cheryl Charles addressed the Commission. She said that there is [a letter of public comment and recommendations](#) that was submitted by about 40 people. She asked that the Commission members to review the letter. There were 5 recommendations offered. One asks the Commission to review and consider prior legislation, one of which is Act 46 and to look at the four different laws that were specified when the Commission was created.

Adjourn

Olsen moved to adjourn the meeting; Fannon seconded. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague.