



# Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont Public Input Session

October 21, 2024, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

**Randolph Union High School Theater**  
**15 Forest Street**  
**Randolph, VT 05060**  
**Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting**  
**Call In: 1-802-828-7667**  
**Conference ID: 294 129 938#**

## 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 Lechliter**, Vermont Superintendents Association; **Jeff Fannon**, VT-National Education Association; **Jay Nichols**, Vermont Principals' Association; **Elizabeth Jennings**, (virtual) VT Association of School Business Officials.

**AOE:** Suzanne Sprague, Jill Briggs-Campbell, Maureen Gaidys.

**Others:** Wes Gibbs, Pam Reed, Rick, Pattie/ANWSD, Chester Telegraph, Nancy Russell, Darren Allen, John Clifford, Charlie Kimball, Jay Denault, Matthew DeGroot, Bobby-Jo Salls, Rebecca Sameroff, Sarah Pulaski, Jeremy Tretiak, Rebecca Holcombe, Davis McGraw, J. Hinman, aemrich@vtnea.org, Kim Wessex, Deecie, Pattie Martin, Lila Richardson, David Delcore, Anna Couperthwait, Kyle, Will Baker, Sarah, Sarah Lohnes Watulak, Elizabeth Pfeffer, Oliver, Dan Roscioli, Bethany, Amy, Asher, Michelle Boleski, Bob Worley, Caitlin Hollister, Hannah Arias, Aimil Parmelee, Sam Hooper, Rachel Gaidys, Vicki Johnson, Ron Wold, Timothy Moynihan, Lisa Manning Floyd, Greg Hughes, Ken Fredette, Flora Quevedo, Kate McCann, Allen Gilbert, Arthur Puritz, Barbara McKeon, Neil Richardson, Mickie Richardson, Neill O'Dell, Anne Kaplan, Herb Perez, Colin Duclos, Stephen Barrett, Katherine Savary, Alison Novak, Tina Scheindel, Kayla Link, Brandy Kolling, Melinda Robinson, Tevye Kelman, William Floyd, Lynn Petrucelli, Elizabeth Burrows, Madeline Reynolds, Nika Oakes, Michael Calrk, Heather Lawler, Dr. Martha Matts, Robert Piasecki, Domon Cytz.

### Welcome and Overview

#### Purpose and Charge of the Commission

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. and framed the evening. She began by stating that the Commission was committed to hearing from as many Vermonters as possible as it completes its work. Toward that end, they wanted to be thoughtful and planful in developing engagement opportunities. It was decided early that the Commission would contract with a Communication and Engagement consultant to do this work properly. While the process of selecting a consultant is ongoing, we didn't want to lose the opportunity while traveling and meeting around

the state to hear from Vermonters. They hope to learn and improve upon this first session. She thanked participants for being part of the first input session.

Chair Roy explained the current education context in Vermont and provided the statutory responsibility. She shared a presentation titled, "[Information & Input Session](#)" and covered Session Goals, Duties, Commission Charge and Membership. She asked Commission members to introduce themselves. Members present included: Mace, Leichliter, Nichols, Conlon, Cummings, Bolio, Deck-Samuels, Fannon, Olsen, Saunders, Castle, and Jennings.

Chair Roy continued with her [Information & Input Session](#) presentation and spoke about Duties, Policy Considerations, Commission Deliverables, Guiding Principles, Subcommittees and Communications & Engagement.

## Current Education Context in Vermont

Chair Roy gave the group time to discuss the below question and then participants shared their thoughts.

### What are the strengths of public education in Vermont?

Responses included:

Knowing our students really well.

High quality public education.

Commitment and passion of the human capital in Vermont.

Strength of public system and diversity.

Strength of community and community connection.

Strong value of education.

Student voice.

Local care – putting kids first.

Role in town communities, especially rural schools, center of the community

Often the largest employer in communities and play an important role.

Fannon provided information on Statutory Responsibility and Current Context and then gave the group time to discuss the below questions and the opportunity to share their thoughts.

### What are some of the challenges of our current system?

### What suggestions do you have for the Commission?

Responses included:

Education system is trying to meet many of the community's social needs as well as educational needs.

Serving as a provider for physical health.

We have a lot of need that we are trying to meet through the education system.

We have multiple delivery systems.

A significant portion of our public education tax dollars are going to private schools in the state, out of state and out of the country and with those dollars there is a different set of rules.

Local control can be highly organized.

Small schools taught by a few teachers creates great inequities.

Need to get arms around a consolidated/regional school might be a longer bus ride, but there are larger issues at play, and we can do this well.

Commission is fighting multiple battles and trying to change the DNA of education in Vermont.

Funding education not through the property tax, but through income tax.

Parallels between education funding crisis and health care; increasing costs of health care.

Getting the cost of private insurance off the books of schools?

Schools cannot do it alone.

When you lose scale, you lose the ability to provide equitable education.

Right-sizing classrooms – too big of an ask to spread librarians and school nurses across various schools and not a big enough ask to have an AP teacher teach a class of 12.

Giving students ownership in their education.

Meeting students' needs that vary and giving appropriate opportunities.

Students feeling a level of entitlement for services provided.

Very little external support to the adults; need to support those doing this work.

Greg Hughes read his [Suggestion Regarding Vermont's School Voucher Program](#).

## Current Education Finance System

Olsen and Nichols provided an Overview of the Current Education and asked the group to think about FY25 Budget Challenges and Cost Drivers and gave the group time to discuss the below questions and then participants shared their thoughts.

What questions do you have about the finance system?

What suggestions do you have about the finance system?

Responses included:

Getting certain non-education things out of the Education Fund.

There are advantages to being small; we are constantly trying to scale things to our size.

Special education costs continue to grow, and federal government needs to step up and help out.

Four private schools in Vermont that are seemingly beyond the realm of local control of the legislature, and they still get state funds – why are they getting this?

Non-residential property tax being less than residential in many places and could we reset that and decouple the private business to keep them here.

Need to look at infrastructure needs and not just demographics.

Personnel as cost driver – this needs to be separated from administrative personnel.

Student-facing personnel should not be on the chopping block at this point.

Easily digestible graphic on where/how the money is spent to help engage people in understanding.

Need asset-based conversation vs. deficit-based conversation.

Extracurricular activities are important to keeping kids at school and excited about school.

Inequities for kids going to a small school.

Value of consolidation and balancing that with the benefits of a tight community.

Consolidating in ways that improve education; community engagement and transparency is an important piece of this.

Need details on where taxpayers' money is going and think deeply about that.

Need to make sure students are healthy and well-fed; unfair for the state to ask our public schools to do more and more.

Consolidation doesn't have to lead to closing schools; schools can and should be repurposed.

## What Else?

## Next Steps

Chair Roy spoke about continuing communication and engagement, securing a consultant, having a survey/input tool, refining the Commission's workplan and providing preliminary cost containment recommendations by December 2024.

There was a question about the difference between the Commission's input sessions and the AOE's Listen and Learn tour. The Commission has a separate charge given to them by the General Assembly. That said, the Commission benefits from data gathered from existing sources, such as what will come from the Agency's listening tour. The Listen and Learn tour is helping the Agency to develop a strategic plan and align resources. There are similarities between what is being asked in both input opportunities, but they are separate.

Superintendent Clark thanked the community, the Commission and is excited about the work around a vision for education in Vermont. He encouraged participants to look forward and not back. He spoke about school facilities, passing budgets, the staffing/workforce crisis, and the increasing need for mental health and social services. He expressed appreciation for the Commission's time and work.

Chair Roy thanked Superintendent Clark, the Culinary Program students, the technology support and all who helped to host this session.

## Adjourn

Chair Roy adjourned the session at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.