



Education Finance Subcommittee - Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

December 9, 2024, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-828-7667

Conference ID: 133 836 090#

1 National Life Drive, Davis 513

Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Subcommittee Members Present: Representative Emilie Kornheiser, Chair; Nicole Mace; Michael Leichter; Elizabeth Jennings; Zoie Saunders, Megan Roy (Commission Chair)

AOE: Suzanne Sprague, Ted Gates, Sean Cousino, Jaime Kraybill, Jill Briggs-Campbell, Roseanne Neddo, Maureen Gaidys.

Others: Jeanne Albert, 802-272-6395, Ashley Moore, Allen Gilbert, Bud Myers, Chester Telegraph, David S, Elizabeth Burrows, Ezra Holben, Jeanne Jensen, John Castle, John Clifford, Katrina Menard, M. Kendrick, Marcy Harding, Morgan Daybell, Nick Adams, Sue Ceglowski, Chelsea Myers, Mary Gannon, Maggie Lenz, Matthew DeGroot, Andy Hooper, Elizabeth St. James, Bridget Burkhardt, Ken Fredette, Ethan Weinstein and Emily Norris.

Call to Order, Roll Call, Amendments to the Agenda

Chair Kornheiser called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. and asked for roll call: Saunders, Mace, Leichter, and Jennings. Chair Kornheiser reviewed the agenda; there were no amendments.

Approval of [Draft Minutes from November 25, 2024](#)

Leichter moved to adopt the meeting minutes from November 25, 2024; Mace seconded. Chair Kornheiser called the vote. The meeting minutes were approved.

Public to be Heard

Jeanne Albert – commented that there was an updated version of the policy grid; she thanked the Commission for their commitment to data and evidence; she suggested that the Education Finance Committee include and convey to the legislature that further study is needed to assess school mergers/consolidation and its impact on savings; she cautioned that reduced costs, might actually be cost shifts.

David Schoales – encouraged the Subcommittee to limit the report to short-term considerations; he said if the Commission goes beyond that they will risk affecting credibility; don't want to present anything that cannot be backed up by data; presenting them with disclaimers will not be enough; to retain credibility and avoid criticism and

reaction, limit the list to short-term cost containment.

Discussion: Final Review and Recommendations for Policy Grid

Chair Kornheiser spoke as the Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and expressed gratitude for the understanding that the Commission's and the legislature's work is inextricably tied together and somewhat separate. She explained that these discussions are going to need to start in the House (Ways and Means and Education Committees). All of the ideas in the spreadsheet are live – whether we want them to be or not. There are a lot of new legislators elected in the context of this issue, and they have their own ideas – and no matter what the Commission recommends, all of those ideas would still be alive. It will be most helpful to have the legislature not begin their work in a vacuum with a brand-new brainstorm. If we eliminate ideas now, they will be re-introduced once the session starts and without the value of thought that this subcommittee has put into this. “Considerations” are what is being put forth, versus recommendations.

There was discussion on support for this plan, initial groundwork has been covered and hope that this will be a structure that will continue to be used as the work progresses, the Commission's role going forward, reservations for including the list and regardless of how it is framed it will be seen as recommendations, some are already seeing the brainstorm as recommendations, don't think the brainstorm meets the professional standards expected of this Commission, need to have more discussion on the list, there is contradictory information in the brainstorm, making sure the public sees all areas that are being explored, submitting the list will lose the opportunity to own the complexity of this work and that further data and analysis is needed, report is really an update to the legislature on the work that has been done, what is to be expected from the Administration, AOE has been sharing data and information gleaned throughout this process, future path forward, and changing what is in the report will impact the vote that was taken and passed to include the whole brainstorm document.

Discussion continued on the list being contradictory, this complex challenge requires a multifaceted and complex solution, further data and analysis is required, community nuance needs consideration, naming where tensions exist, Legislature/Governor will be moving on this in the next month, wanting the Commission to stay relevant and produce good work products, changing the name of the list, need to acknowledge the work that is done and what lies ahead, work transcends politics, feels disrespectful that the Governor is considering a framework for proposal outside of this Commission, collaboration is the only way through this, would like to hear a recommendation from the Agency, hard to focus when everyone has a different constituency they represent, public education needs something to happen here, need to narrow the field, Vermont is unique in ways that may not serve us well, still have a lot of wonderings, still a lot of complexity that needs focus, naming the critical takeaways from this list, frustration that the Governor might bring forth a proposal separate from this Commission, Commission's energy has been all about the report, need to talk about the intersection of ideas, need to start thinking about the larger vision for public education, significant modelling is needed, to lose the work in just discussing dynamics risks irrelevance, need for discussion at the Commission level of the list and the final draft report before making final decision, clarification that the grid will be included as an addendum, Governor has been asked to provide a proposal that is built

upon the best ideas emerging over the last several years and the work of the Commission, Agency has been an active partner in this and in providing a high-level framework, Governor's proposal is not new ideas, trying to increase the level of engagement and bring these pieces together.

Chair Kornheiser recessed for break at 11:03 a.m. The meeting resumed at 11:21 a.m.

Chair Kornheiser asked if the group wanted to discuss the AOE data spreadsheet, discuss the State Profile Report or review the AOE Education Funding System Report. There was consensus on reviewing the [Vermont Education Funding System: Explained and Compared to Other States](#) report.

Secretary Saunders began by providing a high-level overview of the key components found in the "Future Considerations" section included in the [Vermont's Education Funding System: Explained and Compared to Other States](#) report. She said this section does not include foregone conclusions but instead, what has emerged as promising paths forward. Secretary Saunders said the current timeline is challenging for schools, lower income communities are not taking advantage of some of the systems and are spending less on education, concern exists around widening the gap between the haves and have nots, many districts are not able to offer the ranges of programming due to budgeting constraints, enforcing the need to approach the work to achieve equity, changes to funding requires complex thinking and stakeholder involvement and collaboration, lack of budgeting parameters creates volatility, promoting scale and sustainability, several staffing challenges and insufficient workforce to fill the needs. Discussion occurred regarding foundation formulas, the capacity of districts to make the changes, challenges of implementation and readiness, timeline, any change that results in better opportunities for students is worth it and many believe that Act 46 failed.

Secretary Saunders continued and reviewed scale and disrupting school governance, comprehensive multi-faceted strategy should be inclusive of governance, funding and programming, difference in how other states fund education, measuring equity and developing policy to support it, Vermont's approach to funding equity, cost-drivers, differences in educator salaries across the state, Vermont's system of governance, practicality of managing larger school systems, teaching and learning best practices, limited comparative analysis with other states, continuous improvement approach, small class size, reliance on paraprofessionals, special education and costs associated with it, aligning staffing to enrollment and student need and the role of tuitioning in the public school system.

Discussion followed regarding AOE capacity needed to support some of the transitions, teacher workforce shortages, challenge of teaching through COVID and other challenges with maintaining teachers, celebrating those that enter the education field, teacher burnout, lottery system or open enrollment requirements of independent schools, public schools serve higher needs population of students, data to support enrollment in public school, housing shortages and challenge for educators, building high performing educational systems, defining student success, schools are representative of community challenges, affordability, building budgets, timeline, relying on incomplete spending data, need for more

collaboration and alignment across systems, Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) and Vermont has the same challenges as other states.

Chair Kornheiser said the Steering Group should consider the role of the Commission pertaining to unpacking future considerations. Mace asked for Secretary Saunders' guidance on how the Commission can support the work of the AOE and Legislature. Secretary Saunders said the next report from the AOE will include the qualitative themes from the Listen and Learn Tour. She added that the Special Education Report should be available in January 2025.

Discussion: AOE Data Request Spreadsheet and the Vermont State Profile Report, Questions, Next Steps and Recommendations

Chair Kornheiser said that the Steering Group will decide on the purpose and future of the Education Finance Subcommittee and how it fits into the broader work. There is no meeting on December 23, 2024. Chair Kornheiser will continue to work with the subcommittee during the legislative session if the Steering Group decides to keep the subcommittee active.

Discussion: Lessons Learned from Previous Education Finance Reform Efforts

Chair Kornheiser began the discussion and said that these act's rank on the top of her list: Act 60, Act 68, Act 46, Act 173, Act 127 and healthcare bargaining consolidation. She added that one of the lessons learned from each Act is that they happened in isolation of a complicated system. Discussion followed regarding core metric goals and understanding the outcomes, hearing from each organization regarding clear lessons learned, sharing organizational wisdom, difficulty in recreating an evaluation and isolating the impact of one specific bill, framework for what should be evaluated such as intended outcomes and expectations, budget evaluation framework, barriers and strengths, clarity on what the bill was designed to do, legislative process may not include intended outcomes, many different intentions driving to same outcomes and process, modelling out any changes, complex pieces of legislation implemented through local systems, complexity on top of complexity and broad distributed authority and responsibility, identify key takeaways to build into future policies, lessons learned, and tackling all pieces at once and not piecemeal.

Chair Kornheiser said that the full Commission has the latest version of the brainstorm document. Secretary Saunders will work with Chair Roy on the Commission's report to the legislature. The full Commission will decide and vote on the report at its next meeting. The Steering Group will decide on the next steps for the subcommittee.

Adjourn

Chair Kornheiser adjourned the meeting at 12:37 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague and Maureen Gaidys.