



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

September 4, 2024, 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-828-7667

Conference ID: 858 882 63#

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Subcommittee Members: Nicole Mace, Craig Bolio, Michael Lechliter, Ann Cummings, Elizabeth Jennings, Representative Emilie Kornheiser, Zoie Saunders, Megan Roy (Commission Chair)

AOE: Emily Simmons, Annie Gianni, Nicole Lee, Jill Briggs Campbell, Maureen Gaidys.

Others: John Clifford, Heather Bushey, Jeanne Albert, Chester Telegraph, Jay Nichols, Jeanne Jensen, Stacey Peters, Clare Buckley, Amy Rex, Colin Robinson, Elizabeth St. James, Jack Hoffman, Jeanne Jensen, Julia Richter, Katrina Menard, Kristen Rodgers, Matthew DeGroot, Megan K., Representative Diane Lanpher, Sue Ceglowski, Ashley Moore, ...

Call to Order, Introductions and Roll Call

Roy called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. and took roll call: Lechliter, Jennings, Kornheiser, Mace, Saunders, Cummins, and Bolio.

Subcommittee Leadership

Roy explained that this is a subcommittee of the full Commission. She asked for nominations for a subcommittee chair. Cummings nominated Kornheiser; Lechliter seconded. There were no other nominations. There was no discussion. Roy called the vote. Kornheiser was voted in Subcommittee Chair.

Amendments to the Agenda

Kornheiser welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda. There were no amendments to the agenda. She asked participants to raise their hands prior to speaking and confirmed that the meeting is being recorded but not live-streamed. Mace added that cameras should be off unless you are a member of the subcommittee or speaking during public comment.

Public to be Heard

John Clifford: spoke about getting salary information from his district and doesn't know how his town can afford this; consolidation did not save money; he shared data that he had researched.

Subcommittee's Charge and Work Plan

Chair Roy shared the [Draft Communication and Engagement Plan](#) and walked through the document with the subcommittee.

Saunders read the Subcommittees' charge and offered to walk members through the [policy considerations](#) (page 6) in more detail. She also shared that there was a report shared out last week, [the State Profile](#) and is also working with education leadership (superintendents, principals, etc.) on getting more clarity on how budgets are built and working to get more feedback from the field to get a better understanding.

Saunders also said there are resources available, including consultant resources, if that were something the subcommittee would like to consider. Kornheiser asked members of the subcommittee to address the problem that the subcommittee is trying to address:

- property tax growth is unsustainable for many and a system that is challenging for most to understand and for everyday Vermonter to engage with;
 - unsustainable amount of property tax increase growth – working to honor the Brigham decision; need high-quality education at a price that is sustainable;
 - very complicated and complex – failure of school budgets and property tax pressures and that trend has been in existence for a long time – outcomes are not equitable, and buildings are in disrepair – what are the cost drivers that make it difficult to have our cost lines mirror our demographic trends? The incentives at the local level are for increased spending – not a lot of support from the state when those decision get hard – changing the funding formula will not change how hard the decisions are to make;
 - balancing high quality education amongst a situation where buildings are failing, staffing is not right -sized (or might be) but not at a sustainable and affordable cost – complicated in that it is inequitable among districts – need to home in on cost drivers and they won't be the same in every district; data will help determine cost drivers;
 - not just local and state control but significant federal mandates – many federal unfunded mandates but they provide important services to students with challenges and that needs to be considered – this subcommittee has a lot of important work to do in a short time – budget development is underway;
 - explore ways to redesign our education finance system to ensure equal access for every student – to support high-quality education that is affordable – helpful to pull in as part of data review: federal mandates, how education is being delivered,
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acknowledging that one size does not fit all, evaluating the feasibility of methods that could be replicated from other states;

- every year property tax increase are not sustainable – not sure if we are spending too much money or spending it in the wrong places – want to not cause further harm to struggling communities – problem is that we have created a situation where no one feels responsible for the decision being made so it is easy to blame each other for decisions made – would like clarity on zones of responsibility for spending and budgeting – timelines are a problem to be solved – timelines are a structural problem that creates a strange incentive system;
- there is an expectation that bills will be coming in January, and many who expect this process to be a failure - we need to talk through some first steps and some long-term steps, and we need tools for local officials to hold the line;
- there is a not one quick fix – need comprehensive menu of options with concrete recommendations – iterative process – staying mindful of affordability and education quality;
- public participation is very important – curious about what would it take to get some consent on what needs to change and for folks to understand what needs to change – need to discuss scope of work and possible consultant as that takes time.

There was discussion on needing clarity on this subcommittee using a consultant, communication and engagement committee also considering a consultant, needing baseline data inventory to identify gaps that could be addressed with a consultant, not ready to decide on if we need a consultant or not, reviewing data sets on the revenue and expense side, AOE can share report that is available and additional analysis as it becomes available, historical modeling, informed input from the public, level of specificity of past 10 years of Education Fund sources and uses, breakdown of \$1.9 billion payment to districts, dig into how money is spent, understanding the one-time money and that gap, seeing numbers in different ways to better/best understand, department data and object code data, AOE bridging with the field to collect additional data, and analysis of impact on cost and quality.

Kornheiser suggested working with AOE and the Tax Department for the next meeting and to offer a presentation to the subcommittee. Saunders shared that in the first report, AOE started to analyze higher performing and higher spending districts to better understand best practices and strategies deployed. Part of what the Listen and Learn tour is doing is looking to use that data to engage in conversations with the field and inform broader policy considerations. There was discussion on the Picus study. Lee asked that as data requests come up to be specific in requests – what is hard is that these drivers are big topics and need to be defined. Saunders added that timing is important as sometimes AOE needs to engage with the field in planning sessions.

There was discussion on shared definition of “spending,” and a shared set of definitions

going forward, open flow of ideas and communication, statewide trend over 10 years and what percentage of what kinds of districts are driving it for cross-reference, prime time to engage in specific categories of analysis, and Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA) and Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) put out a good resource on cost drivers in August 2024.

Confirm Next Meeting/Meeting Schedule

Kornheiser shared that full Commission and SG are meeting on Mondays. Kornheiser would prefer to meet in person; Cummings and Leichliter agreed. Saunders said AOE would be happy to host. There was discussion on meeting Mondays, not limiting meetings to Mondays, checking with Chair Roy, needing a more aggressive meeting schedule, and using a Doodle poll.

Public to be Heard

There were none.

Adjourn

Kornheiser adjourned the meeting at 4:23 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.