

March 10, 2017

*Strategic Goals: (1) Ensure that Vermont's public education system operates within the framework of high expectations for every learner and ensure that there is equity in opportunity for all.
(2) Ensure that the public education system is stable, efficient, and responsive to changes and ever-changing population needs, economic and 21st century issues.*

State Board of Education Legislative Subcommittee Special Meeting Draft Minutes

Present:

State Board of Education Legislative Subcommittee Members: Bill Mathis, Chair; Krista Huling, Mark Perrin, Peter Peltz

Agency of Education (AOE): Robert Stirewalt, Maureen Gaidys

Others: Matt McMahon, MMR

Item A: Call to Order

Chairman Mathis called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. He asked subcommittee members and any other participants on the conference call to introduce themselves. Robert Stirewalt, Peter Peltz, Mark Perrin, and Krista Huling did so. Chairman Mathis asked any other participants to introduce themselves. Matt McMahon from MMR did so.

Chairman Mathis asked that the record reflect a correction to Item B – in that it should read “Approve February 21, 2017 meeting minutes” not “Approve February 1, 2017 meeting minutes.”

Motion: Perrin moved to amend Item B to reflect that the minutes that were being approved were for the February 21, 2017 subcommittee meeting. Huling seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Chair Mathis called a vote.

Vote: The vote passed unanimously. The motion was carried.

Item B: Review/Approve Draft Minutes for February 21, 2017 Meeting

Motion: Peltz moved to approve the draft minutes from the February 21, 2017 subcommittee meeting. Perrin seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Chair Mathis called a vote.

Vote: The vote passed unanimously to approve the draft minutes from the February 21, 2017 meeting.

Item C: Discussion of Active Education Bills

Robert Stirewalt, Director of Policy, Regulations and Legislative Affairs spoke about the Miscellaneous Education Bills in House and Senate and that the House bill has more language suggested by the Agency than the Senate version. Language that was originally suggested was taken out of the Senate version, but subsequently inserted into draft seven of the bill on March 3. The AOE

language is primarily technical amendments. One difference in the two bills is the Senate version does not clarify the division of responsibility between AOE and DCF for conducting criminal background checks on employees and contractors who work in schools, which is still under discussion by the Senate Education Committee. Stirewalt is also tracking the bill that expands flexibility for communities having difficulty merging under Act 46 and adhering to the current timelines. There is also a combined PreK/CTE draft bill in House Education that was reviewed on March 3. The bill is designed to make it easier for families to enroll a child who is three, four or five years of age but isn't yet enrolled in kindergarten, in a public or provide high-quality child development program. The bill would also create a Career Technical Education grant program to support programming for students in grade 7 and would expand the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund. H.319 (Incentives for lower education spending) potentially has legs and penalizes excess spending for school districts above per pupil spending and rewards those below it. He is also tracking the Special Ed bill H.168 (long-term membership and educational reimbursement) and S.87 (child exploitation).

There are 93 bills in the mix – and Stirewalt will divide them by subject next week – and track what is read a second time. Mathis asked where to get a copy of the Miscellaneous Education bill. Stirewalt said that he could provide the latest version and emailed the board both bills on March 10. Peltz asked about funding for PK – Stirewalt said they are still undecided on how that would work/ how it would be funded. Mathis asked about qualifications of PK staff and the SUs monitoring the programs. Peltz asked about the S.24 version – which affects the SBE – and where the House is on that bill. Stirewalt offered to send the most current version to the subcommittee. Mathis asked if there was anything on special education – Stirewalt said there is concern that we are spending too much money, per the Picus report. Mathis asked if anyone was questioning the credibility of the data in the Picus report. Stirewalt said that House Education Chairman David Sharpe wants Picus to come back in and testify. Mathis said that he will follow up with Picus next week. Peltz asked about Town Meeting Day votes regarding Act 46 mergers and budgets. Stirewalt said Haley Dover sent a summary out – and offered to forward that on to the subcommittee.

Item D: Future Direction of the Subcommittee

Mathis asked the members to reference the Strawman document that he had sent out as a rough draft/starting point. He expressed concern that this subcommittee meets irregularly and it is often after the fact and that there is not capacity for timely monitoring. He acknowledged that Stirewalt and Dover are a big help, as is the Legislative website, but that to follow everything requires aggressive effort. The problem is that the subcommittee is not getting out in front of the issues. He asked how they could be more proactive in their efforts.

Perrin said that under concerns – he wanted to remind the group that they are supposed to be a non-political board, and they walk a fine line – at some point that needs to be realized. Huling agreed – and added that the line between being political and being relevant needs to be clarified. Peltz stated that they are quasi-judiciary and think they need to be very cautious in engaging in the legislative process.

Chairman Mathis stated that the SBE's responsibility is to develop policy and often times that will take a legislative form – they are specifically tasked with what is best for education – and are the independent policy voice. He said if we don't speak for kids and education, then we aren't doing what we are supposed to be doing. And he added that it's complicated.

Perrin asked that as we move forward, we keep our role in mind as our guidelines. Peltz said he doesn't think we need to be in the fray of that process. Huling agrees that we need to stay above the fray – and think long-term. Chairman Mathis said we need to be cognizant of the environment in which we operate and speak with a single voice. The group talked about the history of the SBE - and that it has been disbanded three times since its inception.

Huling said the subcommittee needs to make the distinctions between the level of policy involvement/development – and staying at the bird's eye view vs. getting into the weeds. Peltz said that there will soon be two new appointees to the SBE and this will give a clear direction as to where the SBE is headed. Huling said this could happen as soon as today. Huling reminded the group that they are not a political body.

The group discussed taking time at the annual SBE Retreat to focus and be more proactive on legislative matters and what we will focus on – maybe three topics. It was agreed that that we need to help bring the knowledge level into these discussions and suggested that we have a board member who can serve as the point person on specific issues. Peltz expressed concern over the amount of meeting time available to address all the various issues. Huling shared that she and Mathis has hoped some of this work could be done at the SBE Retreat.

Chairman Mathis asked if Stirewalt has time to be the contact point for the SBE. Huling stated that she is still working on getting staffing for SBE. Mathis added that there needs to be somebody in Montpelier that is close to the process and can coordinate these various angles. There was discussion about having members added to the mailing lists for VSA/VPA/VSBA. Huling will have legislative subcommittee members added to these email lists for legislative issues and comparison. Stirewalt sends the daily agendas for House and Senate Education committees out and can include the Legislative subcommittee on these emails.

Mathis stated that he felt the conversation was productive and useful. Peltz hoped that this will carry forward to next meeting. Huling asked to have the SBE Retreat Agenda added as a discussion item to this month's SBE meeting.

Item E: Adjourn

Motion: Peltz moved to adjourn. Huling seconded this motion. There was no further discussion. Chairman Mathis called a vote to adjourn.

Vote: The vote to adjourn passed unanimously.

The legislative subcommittee meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

Minutes recorded and prepared by Maureen Gaidys
