



# Steering Group: Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

August 5, 2024, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

## Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-552-8456

Conference ID: 591 052 160#

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## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Steering Group (SG) Members:** 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.

**Commission Member:** Meagan Roy, Chair

**AOE:** Maureen Gaidys; Suzanne Sprague

**Others:** Jay Denault, Jeanne Albert, Allen Gilbert, Austin Davis, Bridget Burkhardt, Chelsea Myers, Clare Buckley, Colin Robinson, Dan MacArthur, Dave Edwards, David S., Eleanor Zimmerman, Elizabeth Burrows, Elizabeth St. James, Jack Hoffman, Jean Waltz, John Castle, John Clifford, Julia Richter, Katrina Menard, Ken Fredette, Erica Loomis, M Kendrick, Margaret MacLean, Meghan Metzler, Jill Remick, Rene Sanchez, Ryan Heraty, Abby Shepard, Stacey L Peters, Sue Ceglowski, Matthew DeGroot, Keri Bristow, Representative Angela Arsenault, RWH, Mill Moore, Jay Nichols, Ethan Latour.

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

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. She reminded participants to keep their microphones and cameras off. She took roll call: Cummings, Bolio, Conlon, Mace, Saunders, Deck-Samuelson and Roy. Chair Roy offered an amendment of adding a public comment period to the beginning of the meeting. There was discussion on executive session. There were no other amendments.

Jay Denault: [referenced a letter sent to Krowinski, Kornheiser and Conlon, from VSBA, Vermont Superintendents Association \(VSA\), Vermont Principals' Association \(VPA\), Vermont Association of School Business Officers \(VASBO\)](#). He read one of the many recommendations in the letter that addressed streamlining processes to achieve more efficient district organization and governance. He said this is a reprehensible attack on the people of Vermont and is totally unacceptable. He will be sharing his concerns and filing an official complaint.

### Approval of [Draft Minutes from July 23, 2024](#)

Chair Roy asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Deck-Samuelson moved to approve; Cummings seconded. There was no discussion. The minutes were approved.

## Preliminary Data Review

Chair Roy said this meeting was not to review the data provided but instead to discuss what was received and see if it is appropriate and complete and/or if there are other pieces of data needed. She referenced a [data framework](#) that she drafted.

There was discussion on breaking down the education payment by object and function for current and prior fiscal years, breakdown of data to identify trends, and facility needs by district.

Saunders said AOE is working on providing enrollment data for the past 5-10 years, trend data for assessment for English Language Arts (ELA) and math and subgroups, demographic trends, staffing ratios for past 5 years, teacher salaries (statewide average), operating expenditures per pupil for past 5 years with break down by funding sources, and mapping school performance by demographics. AOE will also be collecting new data via a survey from the public on what is important to preserve and/or change in education and to help see how the public values education.

Chair Roy asked if there was any other data that is needed and not represented. Mace offered the use of Education Fund sources over time. Conlon suggested having Nicole Lee and Julia Richter present to the Steering Group/Commission with some grounding information. Saunders asked if there was any information that SG members would like to be included in the survey. There was discussion on trends of sources and uses of the Education Fund, positive framing, and striking a balance with wants and the financial reality of our tax base.

## Action Item: Workplan Development

Chair Roy started with the 4 main areas to focus on in the [workplan framework](#): 1) education finance system 2) governance, resources and administration, 3) education delivery system, and 4) communication and engagement. There was discussion on these four buckets, plan for cross-pollination, having a SG member on each committee, not creating silos in assigning work, and organizing agendas and ensuring alignment.

Chair Roy discussed each bucket individually to determine how the work will be done, via subcommittee, full commission or some other way.

Communication and engagement: There was discussion on the importance of informing people of the Commission's work, how to change the dynamic around the historical context of this conversation, need creative strategies to increase engagement, intentionality of building on opportunities/convenings already in place, engaging in smaller grassroots organizations, phased approach, finding available grants, using an outside consultant, and leveraging existing partnerships. There was further discussion on fundamental information to start with, forming a committee, needing time to communicate beyond the education community, what will frame and define the body of work and scaffolding engagement. Chair Roy asked how the SG wants to populate these committees. (Education finance subcommittee is different.)

Government, resources and administration: Deck-Samuelson shared what is underway with the State Board of Education (SBE) and the separate roles and responsibilities with the AOE and SBE. She suggested that this bucket does not need a committee and that this work should be allowed to play out. There was discussion on state vs. local control falling under this topic. Mace suggested a committee structure for this item could be useful as it is bigger than how the AOE and SBE work

together. There was discussion on timing, staggered committees, and overlap with education finance committee here and in multiple places. The SG was in general agreement for a subcommittee for this bucket of work and for that subcommittee to start up later and/or be staggered. There was discussion on legal framework on roles and responsibilities, national standards, and clear parameters for this discussion. Chair Roy added that once these subcommittees are convened, they will confirm their charge and affirm it back to the SG.

Education delivery system: There was discussion on this being a big item, form follows functions, keeping this topic for the full Commission, having this work rest with the SG, identifying common key themes, consulting with outside interests, this group's work would run parallel to the other work, and the SG is comfortable steering that work. Chair Roy asked what the SG is prepared to show/propose to the full Commission. There was discussion on how to move forward, how to address equity, alignment of the delivery and finance systems.

Saunders proposed five phases:

1. Direction setting – analysis of current state, establishing a shared vision, defining terms
2. Subcommittees – setting best practices, engaging experts, identifying strategies/considerations
3. Public engagement - focused opportunities for input
4. Reflection and synthesis of data collected
5. Policy considerations and recommendations

Chair Roy proposed to the SG, that she and Saunders merge the buckets and the phases and bring it back to the full Commission later in August.

### **Action Item: Education Finance Subcommittee Membership per [H.887, Section 1 \(c\)](#)**

Chair Roy stated that the SG needs to name the members of the Education Finance Subcommittee. She reviewed the [Education Finance Subcommittee criteria](#) supplied from recent conversations: 6-8 members, school business manager, superintendent or other district leader, member with expertise in Vermont's funding system and Vermont's constitutional requirements for equity as well as knowledge of other state models, (some members could check more than one box), representative of the Administration, VSBA representative, and General Assembly (GA) representative. There was discussion on House and Senate member(s), investment from the GA, balance of points of view, making hard decisions, balance of good perspectives (school boots on the ground and outside vantage point), geographic diversity of perspectives, need for strong financial acumen, outside facilitation, appropriate composition, challenge of aggressive timeline, significant pressure to have some solution to tax bills by next year, fear that field representation will block conversations around changes, number of members, January is too late as budgets are done, need education finance and tax expertise, timing is urgent, two sides of education finance (local level budgeting process and formula, which is a construct of state government), and having enough representation to ensure effective conversations.

Chair Roy recapped that she didn't hear specifically that changes were needed to the original list of members to serve on this subcommittee. She suggested moving to the discussion of "who" would serve on the subcommittee and what expertise exists on the Commission and that might make the selection process more efficient.

Discussion continued on the size of the subcommittee, possibly looking at past legislators as

members, needing an executive session for discussing specific names for appointment, subcommittee members not being public officials, Open Meeting Law is subject to interpretation, having AOE General Counsel weigh in, and starting by identifying who within the Commission could fill some of these roles.

Chair Roy went through the membership to see who might already potentially exist on the Commission: school business manager (Elizabeth Jennings); superintendent (Mike Leichliter); individual with expertise in Vermont's funding system and Vermont's constitutional requirements for equity as well as knowledge of other state models (many on the Commission with varying degree of Vermont experience); representatives(s) of the Administration (Bolio and Saunders); VSBA representative (Mace); and legislative representatives (Conlon and Cummings).

Mace added that Jennings has a number of small rural districts and is part of VASBO's leadership and that Leichliter has experience in education funding from Pennsylvania. Saunders said she received input from AOE General Counsel who advised that the SG could enter executive session to discuss names but would need to vote on any names discussed outside of the executive session.

Conlon moved that they enter executive session for the purpose of discussion, not voting, on the other appointments to the Education Finance Subcommittee. Deck-Samuels seconded the motion. Saunders offered an amendment to the motion, to add that the motion was to consider the appointment of a public officer who will serve on the finance committee, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. 313(a)(3). If this motion is passed, no formal action to appoint will be taken in executive session. The final decision to appoint or not appoint will be made in the open meeting, with reasons for the steering committee's final decision made during the open meeting. Conlon accepted the amendment. Deck-Samuels seconded the amended motion. Chair Roy called the vote. The vote passed unanimously.

Conlon suggested moving ahead to hearing from the public prior to entering executive session.

## **Public to be Heard**

John Clifford: tried to give comment but was not able to do so.

Margaret MacLean: appreciates looking at strengths and values; Vermonters value community schools that Vermonters can interact with, convenient education of youth is used in the Constitution and is an equity issue in rural communities, and Vermonters value democratic engagement. She suggested the SG consider Jack Hoffman or Paul Cillo from the Public Asset Institute for the Education Finance Subcommittee.

Mary Gannon: expressed concern on how the issue of diverse representation is being addressed between the Commission and the SG and she will continue to push for this to be addressed. She also appreciates the discussion on equity and encouraged all members to decide on a definition of educational equity.

Allen Gilbert: had four observations – 1) very important to know what costs have been shifted from General Fund to Education Fund over the last 20 years; 2) important to understand equity in regard to the Brigham decision, district must have the same opportunity as all other districts; 3) many people would appreciate a report of how much money was saved after Act 46 (consolidation); 4) try to use less jargon in these meetings so that the general public can better understand and it can be off-putting.

The SG entered executive session at 4:02 p.m. and exited executive session and rejoined the regular meeting at 4:38 p.m.

Mace moved that the Steering Group appoint Elizabeth Jennings, Michael Leichliter, Craig Bolio or designee, Zoie Saunders or designee, Senator Anne Cummings, Representative Emily Kornheiser, and Nicole Mace to the Education Finance Subcommittee. Bolio seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Chair Roy recognized that this Education Finance Subcommittee will need to engage with various perspectives and expertise and not all those perspectives can commit to an 18-month term on a subcommittee, so it will also be identified where that needs to be addressed. Chair Roy called the vote. The motion carried.

## **Reporting Structure**

Chair Roy advised that SG members need to think about communication loops from the SG to the full Commission and from the subcommittees. There will be standing reports from all committees/subcommittees at the full Commission meetings, giving Commission members the opportunity to ask questions and engage in agenda setting.

## **Next Steering Group Meeting/Propose Meeting Cadence for Full Commission**

There was a scheduling survey and ideally there would be discussion on the cadence of the SG. Monday, August 26, 2024, from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. is confirmed as the next full Commission meeting. There will be confirm of future meeting dates when the full Commission meets next and not at this meeting. Chair Roy and Saunders will work to merge two concepts of a draft workplan into a draft for the full Commission to review.

Other upcoming agenda items will include data review (significant), draft work plan, and future meeting schedule.

## **Public to be Heard**

Dan MacArthur: would like to see more educators represented and involved throughout this process. This is not a criticism, just a comment.

## **Adjourn**

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.