

Education Finance and Effectiveness Legislative Committee Minutes
November 5, 2009
9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
4th Floor Conference Room, Pavilion Building, 109 State Street

Present: Jeff Francis; Sen. Robert Hartwell; Mo Germain; Bill Mathis; Carolyn Schwalbe; Rep. Martha Heath; Commissioner Armando Vilaseca; Rep. Janet Ancel; June Rosenberg; Sen. Mark McDonald; Bob Rusten; Sen. Rick Hube; Sen. Robert Starr; Rep. Joanne Donovan; Sen. Susan Bartlett

9:40 a.m. Commissioner Armando Vilaseca convened the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

Committee members debriefed Dr. David Silvernail's October 14 presentation and brainstormed on issues to address in its final findings and recommendations: transformation policy commission, Roots of Success report

1. What is best for students?
2. Look at the ideal governance system
3. Analyze potential savings in a new system. One size/system does not fit all – need a range based on current levels of efficiency. Must be objective, non-legislative study
4. Look at a different education funding system
 - Is consolidation a good idea or bad idea? It's not a panacea. Nothing will be saved in one year.
 - Don't let savings be the only driver
 - Reducing staff is the only way to save money – entails huge swap-outs
 - Will it happen on its own as locals make their own choices?
 - Look at financial incentives for schools to move toward consolidation

Karin Edwards, DOE Student Support Division Director and Susan Marks, DOE Special Education Attorney spoke about expanding collaboratives between districts to provide specialized instruction focusing on capacity and inequity issues throughout the state.

Continued brainstorm list (Special education recommendations)

5. Consider centralized special education staff - build regional capacity
6. Share best practices. Sanctions/incentives
7. Training/culture change of all staff/administrators is needed
8. Cap reimbursement for residential placements

What are the root cause issues that continually make improvements difficult to implement?

- Large change in education culture would be needed
- DOE lack of capacity to provide training
- Local decision-making/leverage. Schools can do what they want to do
- DOE needs to be more directive, especially with high-spending districts.

Committee discussed potential benefits of increasing the teacher/student ratio in the state.

12:45 The following handouts related to morning and afternoon agenda items were disseminated:

1. A May 21, 2009 Memo from State Auditor Tom Salmon
2. A 10-page summary of the recently released DOE report: *Roots of Success: Effective Practices in Vermont Schools*
3. Two documents outlining SU and district level special education spending.

4. A document detailing the changes to Vermont's grand list.

The committee discussed potential changes at the supervisory union level, including current Title 16 section 261(a) items outlining the roles and responsibilities of superintendents. The committee considered changing the "optional" items to be "mandatory"; the certification of business managers, contracts and other services that could be done at the local rather than the district level, and clarifying the chain-of-command between boards and administrators. Jeff Francis and John Nelson agreed to review the current statute to pull out what items specifically were problematic, and Commissioner Vilaseca agreed to work with them on that.

The group then discussed next steps, and set the next meeting date for December 14. At that time Commissioner Vilaseca, DOE Communications Director Jill Remick, Carolyn Shwalbe and June Rosenberg (and potentially others) would set a time to create a final report. The agenda for the next meeting will include an adult-to-student ratio discussion, and proposed draft legislation.

The group then moved to the topic of Teacher Retirement. State Treasurer Jeb Spaulding spoke to the committee on the background of the current system and some of the potential changes the Retirement Commission is considering. The committee discussed the topic, the impact on the Education Fund and need for this to be a part of contract negotiations. The statute requires the current system.

Next meeting: 9:30 – 3:00 December 9 in Room 10, Statehouse, Montpelier.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Cindy Lee and Jill Remick