



Commission on the Future of Public Education – Meeting

July 15, 2024: 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Location:

Vermont Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive
Davis Building, 5th Floor, Room 513
Montpelier, VT 05620
OR

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-552-8456

Conference ID: 110 799 033#

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

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Members Present: **Meagan Roy**, Chair, Census-Based Funding Advisory Group; **Peter Conlon**, Representative Addison-2 District; **Ann Cummings**, Senator Washington District; **Zoie Saunders**, Interim Secretary of Education; **Craig Bolio**, Tax Commissioner; **Jennifer Deck Samuelson**, State Board of Education; **Jeff Francis**, Vermont Principals' Association (VPA); **Michael Lechlitter**, Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA); **Jeff Fannon**, Vermont National Education Association (VTNEA); **Nicole Mace**, Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA); **Elizabeth Jennings**, Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO); **John Castle**, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; **Oliver Olsen**, Vermont Independent Schools Association (VISA)

AOE: Suzanne Sprague; Maureen Gaidys; Wendy Scott; Karen Abbott; Deborah Bloom; Jill Briggs Campbell; Niamh O'Donoghue; Riann Gianni; Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary

Others: John; M. Kendrick; Dan MacArthur; Jody Normandeau; Elaine; David S.; Allen Gilbert; Andrew McKeever; Rachel Van Vliet; Matthew DeGroot; Bob Thibault; April Jennings; Cheryl Charles; Polly Allen; Katy White; Scott Brown; Calvin Cutler; Timothy Jarvis; David; Stacey Peters; Eric; Cole Siefer; Nancy Cornell; Austin Davis; Elizabeth Atkins; Adrienne Raymond; Julie Regimbal; Robert Otty; Clare Buckley; Randi Lowe; Jack Hoffman; Ryan Heraty; Ethan Weinstein; Debbie; Marcy Harding; Chani Waterhouse; Lila Richardson; Leon Johnson; Flor Diaz Smith; Christine Bourne; Jake Feldman; WCAX News; Jean Marie Clarck; Clare Wool; Kendal Smith; Emily Wheeler Reynolds; Macon Phillips; Tif Donza; Elizabeth Burrows; Erica Loomis; Bill Bazyk; Margaret MacLean; Chelsea Bray; Representative Angela Arsenault; Brenda Fleming; Steve Perani; Representative Kevin Christie; Matt Wormser; Mill Moore; Mary Gannon; Jennifer Botzjorns; Representative Laura Sibilia; Tom Little; Sandra Cameron; Sue Ceglowski; Chelsea Myers; Greg Hukkes; Ken Fredette

Call to Order, Roll Call, Amendments to the Agenda and Introduction of Committee Chair

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. and provided a brief introduction of the Commission's work. She asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. There were none. She asked each member to introduce themselves. Chair Roy said she would help organize the

Commission's work and when requested to represent the Commission's work, she would do her best to represent the work of the Commission as a collective. She said she would be clear when there was agreement and when there was no agreement, she would express the different positions that exist.

Steering Group: Introductions of Steering Group Members

Chair Roy reviewed this [presentation](#) and identified the Steering Group members. She advised that she would be included in the Steering Group meetings for the purpose of organizing the work. She additionally reviewed the charge of the Steering Group: provide leadership and work with a consultant or consultants; develop and propose a work plan for the Commission for the full Commission's consideration; and form a subcommittee to address education finance topics in greater depth. A meeting of the Steering Group will be scheduled as soon as possible.

Review of Statute, Commission's Charge and Timelines

Chair Roy reviewed the [duties](#) of the Commission which include holding at least 14 public meetings which will be hybrid, holding a meeting or subcommittee meeting in each county, reimbursement is available for not more than 30 meetings, final recommendations will be submitted on or before October 1, 2025 and these recommendations require a minimum 30-day public comment period, a public outreach plan must be included and all feedback will be represented in an addendum to the final report due on December 1, 2025. Proposed legislative language to achieve a vision for Vermont's public education system is due by December 15, 2025. Chair Roy added that preliminary recommendations are due to the General Assembly on December 1, 2024.

Chair Roy reviewed the policy considerations for which the Commission is responsible. These include education finance system and allowable uses for the Education Fund, a method for setting the tax rate, consideration of alternative funding models, adjustments to the excess spending threshold and spending caps, monitoring of the Education Fund Advisory Committee, education governance, resources and administration, physical size and footprint of the education system, role of public schools in both the provision of education and the social and emotional well-being of students and additional considerations at the discretion of the Steering Group and Commission. Discussion occurred regarding the mechanics of the chat function in Teams during the meeting.

Chair Roy reviewed the key stakeholders to be consulted as well as existing laws, policy and reports to that members might wish to review including State v. Brigham 166 Vt. 146 (1997), Act 46 of 2015, Act 173 of 2018, Act 127 of 2022 and Act 76 of 2023. She said the Agency of Education will contract with one or more consultants or facilitators. Additionally, the Agency will provide necessary educational and financial data and school districts will comply with requests from the Agency to assist in data collections. Chair Roy reviewed the Commission's deliverables again and noted that the Commission will cease to exist on December 31, 2025.

Clarify needs/qualification of consultant (per Section 1))

Chair Roy advised that the Commission was given an appropriation for consultants and facilitators. She reviewed a [slide](#) that included the potential skill sets or areas of expertise needed by a consultant and mentioned that the consultancy services will depend on the bodies of work undertaken by the Commission. Discussion followed regarding requiring additional help, learning from other states that have an equity provision in their constitution, a consultant requires a strong understanding of Vermont's unique education delivery system, the Commission's charge is to look at how we can do things differently, adding an understanding of education governance systems, adding that we want to look at highly successful systems, the current process for choosing a

consultant, Steering Group is responsible for determining what consultation is required, procurement process takes time, focus on states that are similarly rural, equity index and equitable access to educational opportunities, student needs are growing and funds are more restricted, and looking to efficiency, effectiveness and excellence will be a challenge.

Next Meeting, Meeting Cadence

Chair Roy indicated that Commission members would receive a scheduling poll for its next meeting, and that regular meetings would be scheduled on a more consistent basis. It was discussed that the next full Commission meeting would occur after the first Steering Group meeting.

Review of [32 V.S.A. § 1010](#) for reimbursement of no more than 30 meetings

Reviewed earlier in the meeting.

Public to be Heard

Mary Gannon addressed the Commission. She questioned the Commission's membership and noted that it may not be representative of all geographic areas and not representative of the areas in Vermont most impacted. She referenced the language in the bill "the members shall represent the State's geographic, gender, racial, and ethnic diversity". She asked what the difference is between the Commission and the Steering Group.

Dan MacArthur addressed the Commission. He represents a small rural school district with a single town school. He hopes that the Commission will recognize the value of small schools to the community and to the kids in them. He asked the Commission and Steering Group to review the data comparison on the outcomes between small, unmerged schools and larger merged districts. He offered to be on a subcommittee.

Rachel Van Vliet addressed the Commission. She is a Barre educator and Barre UUSD is the one district that did not pass an FY25 budget. They have a divided community that is rife with disinformation and misinformation. She is looking forward to how the public will be involved and how information is going to be presented to our community and our state about the benefits of public education.

Polly Allen addressed the Commission. She said it is important to have a specific line item for further collaboration with Vermont's communities. Some of the most meaningful, positive and impactful opportunities for the children of Craftsbury have come from the close integration of the school and the community. As the Commission considers local control versus state control, she encouraged everyone to not forget that communities are the wellspring for positive growth.

Clare Wool addressed the Commission. She appreciated the leadership, preparation and access to the meeting. School Board members are actively engaged in participating and working with the Commission. She shared her willingness to support in all aspects of the Commission.

Matt Wormser addressed the Commission. He said the main hope for the Commission is to focus on what other states are doing to address challenges. The challenges from COVID and student mental health are real and not acute or unique to Vermont. Many have a strong interest in keeping service delivery as local as possible in terms of small schools even though there is a different cost profile. He asked if there are ways to drive efficiencies and drive down costs through some sort of

statewide consolidation or at worst, countywide consolidation around there.

Ken Fredette addressed the Committee. He will be glad to serve on a subcommittee if needed. He would like to submit written comments and hopes there will be a way to do that, He would like to be added to an email list to know when future meetings notifications.

Chair Roy asked people to send written comments to her attention via email. She will make sure they are noted on record. Chair Roy recognizes that the representatives by organization on the Commission may not be representative of Vermont as a whole. It means that it is even more important for the Commission to figure out how it will lift those voices and bring them into the room.

Polly Allen added a comment in the Teams chat. In Policy Considerations fully consider and evaluate opportunities related to furthering collaboration with framing communities/towns. There is a line item for furthering collaboration with Post-Secondary, which is great, also have a line item for furthering collaboration with Vermont's communities. They are a well-spring of opportunity--from small town to large.

Margaret MacLean added a comment in the Teams chat. Transparency is Key a lack of it erodes trust. There is already a lack of transparency about how commission members were selected by their respective organizations and how the subcommittee members were chosen. Can this be requested and published? What process was used by the respective organizations to reelect their member? The includes the legislators on the committee not just organizational members.

Representative Burrows added a comment in the Teams chat. Please commission a full long-term economic analysis of local and state taxation rates on school closures before considering closures. For example, school closures bring about demographic changes and challenges. If a town's school closes, does the demographic shift to a pattern of retired or second-homeowners? How does the latter affect voting? How does the former affect the provision of services? We have this data already, but have not collated it. Also, the public needs to understand the extended (past five years) benefit/s of school closure. Illumination of these details would create buy-in either way.

Margaret MacLean added a comment in the Teams chat. RE Consultant comments - A knowledge of rural Governance models as opposed to suburban and urban governance models is essential.

Mary Gannon added a comment in the Teams chat. An equity-centered lens is essential to the work of this Commission!

Macon Phillips added a comment in the Teams chat. As someone who is learning about VT education policy, I would like to learn more on the merits of equity vs adequacy (both sound great!). Is there a good link with more reading about that? Other states grappling with this?

Nancy Cornell added a comment in the Teams chat. Does the Steering Committee meet in open session?

Matt Wormser added a comment in the Teams chat. As the goal is ultimately a more efficient and equitable system, I would second the focus on statewide governance systems. What is the role for the AOE vs. individual districts, and what opportunities are there for services to be more cost effectively delivered centrally/state-wide, even as teaching remains highly localized.

Macon Phillips added a comment in the Teams chat. This goes back to a VT Supreme Court

decision referred to as "Bringham", which resulted in Act 60 and a series of other legislative changes to try and uphold the constitutional standard of "substantially equal"... to your larger point, it would be helpful for more Vermonters to understand how education funding is structured and why

Margaret MacLean added a comment in the Teams chat. West Virginia spent 1 billion \$ on consolidation. They closed 300 schools. They did not save money. The administration budget increased 16%. They spend more on transportation than any other state. Children are daily on buses for 2-3 hours. The commission needs to learn what works in rural areas before enacting changes. We need a model that works in rural areas and build on Vermont's strengths - democracy, community - rather than diminishes or undermines them.

Jennifer Botzjorns added a comment in the Teams chat. In addition to looking at other states, there are other countries that have rural populations and successful delivery, cost and academic achievement systems.

Flor Diaz Smith added a comment in the Teams chat. Thank you to all members! Looking forward to your work and making sense of the future together.

Adjourn

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague.