

Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

Information & Input Session

October 21, 2024

Session Goals

- Provide information regarding the purpose of the Commission along with an overview of the scope & timeline of the Commissions work.
- Provide an overview of the statutory responsibility and authority for public education along with an overview of the current context & complexity of Vt. Public Education.
- Provide an overview of the current education finance system.
- Ensure community members are engaged regarding the successes, challenges and future of Vermont public education delivery and funding.

1.

DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

Act 183 of 2024

Commission Charge

The Commission shall study the provision of education in Vermont and make recommendations for a statewide vision for Vermont's public education system to ensure that all students are afforded substantially equal educational opportunities in an efficient, sustainable, and stable education system. [Act 183 \(2024\)](#)

Membership

- **Meagan Roy**, *Chair (Census Based Funding Advisory Group)*
- **Zoie Saunders**, *Interim Secretary Agency of Education*
- **Craig Bolio**, *Commissioner, Department of Taxes*
- **Jennifer Deck-Samuelson**, *State Board of Education Appointee*
- **Sen. Ann Cummings**, *Senate Appointee*
- **Rep. Peter Conlon**, *House Appointee*
- **Nicole Mace**, *Vermont School Boards Association Appointee*
- **Jay Nichols**, *Vermont Principals Association Appointee*
- **Michael Leichliter**, *Vermont Superintendents Association Appointee*
- **Jeff Fannon**, *Vermont - National Education Association Appointee*
- **Elizabeth Jennings**, *Vermont Association of School Business Officials Appointee*
- **John Castle**, *Vermont Rural Education Collaborative Appointee*
- **Oliver Olsen**, *Vermont Independent Schools Association Appointee*

Duties of the Commission

- Shall conduct at least 14 public meetings.
- At least one meeting of the Commission, or a meeting of a subcommittee, shall be held in each county
- Members shall receive compensation and reimbursement for not more than 30 meetings, including subcommittee meetings
- Submit final recommendations on or before October 1, 2025 and receive public feedback
 - ◆ Minimum 30-day public comment period
 - ◆ Process must include a public outreach plan
 - ◆ All feedback shall be included as an addendum to final report on December 1, 2025

Policy Considerations

- **Education finance system:** *Recommendations geared toward an education funding system that affords substantially equal access to a quality education in accordance with State v. Brigham*
- **Education governance, resources, administration:** *The structure and needs of the AOE, composition, role, and function of the State Board, roles, functions, and decisions of local control v. state control, and integration of career and technical education.*
- **Physical size and footprint of the education system:** *The most efficient and effective number and locations of school buildings, districts, and supervisory unions; workforce retention & capacity driven by class-size data; town tuition program; role, designation, and tuitioning outside VT; use of private therapeutic schools; legal and financial impact.*

Commission Deliverables

- Meet for the first time **on or before July 15, 2024**
- Prepare and submit a **formal, written work plan and communication plan** that will maximize public engagement **by September 15, 2024**
- Write a **preliminary findings and recommendations report, including short-term cost containment considerations**, for the 2025 legislative session **by December 15, 2024**
- Write a **final findings report with recommendations** for a statewide vision **by December 1, 2025**
- **Propose legislative language** to achieve a vision for VT's public education system **by December 15, 2025**
- **Cease to exist December 31, 2025**

Guiding Principles

- **State Responsibility for Education in Vermont:** Vermont has a constitutional obligation to provide public education, and there is tension between state responsibility and authority, and Vermont's tradition of local decision making.
- **Equity:** The Commission is committed to decision making that centers equity for Vermont students and is committed to the following core understandings of equity:
 - ◆ Equity does not mean equal/same.
 - ◆ Solutions with an equity focus must be differentiated by need.
 - ◆ Equity must be considered both in terms of inputs (access) and outputs (outcomes).
- **Quality:** All publicly funded Vermont students must be afforded high quality educational opportunities that are equitable, inclusive, anti-racist, culturally responsive, and anti-discriminatory, as defined in Vermont State Board of Education Rules.
- **Sustainability & Affordability:** Public education in Vermont must be sustainable and affordable for Vermont taxpayers.

The Commission has organized its work into four overarching elements.

These elements overlap and intersect; separating the work is to provide clarity and organization about the Commission’s approach.

Communication & Engagement	Education Finance System	Governance, Resources & Administration	Education Delivery System
<p><i>Design and propose a public outreach plan for Commission, to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Identifying existing events/opportunities that can be used to share and engage on the Commission’s work</i> ● <i>The development of a “toolkit” for engagement for member use at other events</i> ● <i>A framework for engagement sessions that may be added to the Commission meetings as they rotate around the state</i> ● <i>Drafting a process for the Public Comment 2025 period</i> <p>Timeline & Approach: Subcommittee convened in August 2024 Recommendations and decision making by full Commission</p>	<p><i>Propose recommendations regarding cost containment strategies in the short term and the entire education finance system in the long term, so that the full commission can provide preliminary financial recommendations to the General Assembly by December 2024 and more formal recommendations by December 2025.</i></p> <p>Timeline & Approach: Subcommittee convened in August 2024 Preliminary recommendations: December 2024 Formal recommendations: December 2025 Recommendations and decision making by full Commission</p>	<p><i>Propose recommendations regarding the structure of the Agency (and whether an agency or department structure is prudent), whether changes need to be made to the composition, role and function of the State Board, and what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of local control and what roles, functions, or decisions should be a function of control at the State level</i></p> <p>Timeline & Approach: Full Commission work Steering Group organizes/facilitates for agenda planning purposes Recommendations and decision making by full Commission Work is ongoing and phased, with initial knowledge building beginning immediately</p>	<p><i>Propose recommendations regarding “the physical size and footprint of the education system,” workforce development, the role of tuition programs (including designation, therapeutic schools and “the legal and financial impact of funding independent schools and other private institutions”, and the role of public schools - “whether Vermont’s vision for education shall include the provision of wraparound supports and collocation of services”</i></p> <p>Timeline & Approach: Full Commission work Steering Group organizes/facilitates for agenda planning purposes Recommendations and decision making by full Commission Work is ongoing and phased, with initial knowledge building beginning immediately</p>

Subcommittees

Steering Group	Communication & Engagement	Education Finance System
<p><i>Zoie Saunders</i> <i>Craig Bolio</i> <i>Jennifer Deck Samuelson</i> <i>Sen. Ann Cummings</i> <i>Rep. Peter Conlon</i> <i>Nicole Mace</i> <i>(Meagan Roy)</i></p>	<p><i>John Castle</i> <i>Jeff Fannon</i> <i>Jay Nichols</i> <i>Oliver Olsen</i> <i>Meagan Roy</i></p>	<p><i>Zoie Saunders</i> <i>Craig Bolio</i> <i>Sen. Ann Cummings</i> <i>Rep. Emilie Kornheiser (non-commission appointee)</i> <i>Nicole Mace</i> <i>Mike Lechlitter</i> <i>Elizabeth Jennings</i></p>

Communication & Engagement

→ **Information Sharing:** *Educate*

Informing and educating the public about the current Vermont education context and the complexity of the challenges we face. Information sharing includes providing accurate, valid data in a manner that is understandable to provide context, as well as providing ongoing information about the work of the Commission.

→ **Listening & Learning:** *Gather Information*

Gathering feedback from collaborators and the public in real time can help inform the Commission as it conducts its work. In particular, the Commission can leverage existing data and feedback being gathered from other organizations, groups and individuals.

→ **Engage:** *Partner & Influence*

Engagement is an ongoing, two-way process of building relationships, working collaboratively, and sharing power.

DISCUSSION:

What are the strengths of public education in Vermont?

2.


CURRENT CONTEXT

Statutory Responsibility for Public Education

Statutory Responsibility for Education

State Responsibility and Authority for Education in Vermont

In the State vs. Brigham 166 Vt. 164 (1997), the Vermont Supreme Court held that **the State has a constitutional obligation to provide public education**, and while “[t]he state may delegate to local towns and cities the authority to finance and administer the schools within their borders; it cannot, however, abdicate the basic responsibility for education by passing it on to local governments, which are themselves creations of the state.”



Vermont's long-standing value of **local governance** allows school boards and districts to be the ultimate decision makers about our delivery system, within the context of our **accountability system**

DISCUSSION:

What are some of the challenges of our current delivery system?

What ideas do you have to address these?

3.

VERMONT'S EDUCATION FINANCE SYSTEM

Local Decision Making - Shared Costs

Overview of Vermont's Finance System

- Vermont's education finance system is different from other states
 - ◆ Statewide funding formula coupled with local property tax administration
- School district spending is determined at the local level
 - ◆ Publicly elected school board members set budgets that must be approved by voters
- The Legislature sets education yields and property tax rates annually at the level necessary to fund education expenditures
 - ◆ Two types of property taxes – homestead and non homestead
- Since the Brigham decision (1997), the homestead property tax rate is a function of district per pupil spending
 - ◆ District rates are not a function of property wealth
 - ◆ Taxes vary in proportion to per pupil spending across districts

FY25 Budget Challenges & Cost Drivers

- Education finance
 - ◆ Cost drivers: Personnel (number, salaries, benefits), special education, facilities, healthcare, tuition
 - ◆ Revenue generation
 - ◆ Use of the Education Fund
- Delivery models
 - ◆ Class and school size, district size and infrastructure
- Governance, resources & administration
 - ◆ Decision making about school size, structure, budget, etc

How local systems choose to spend their education dollars impacts cost and quality.

DISCUSSION:

What questions do you have about the finance system?

What suggestions do you have about the finance system?

4.

NEXT STEPS

- **Continued communication & engagement**
 - ◆ **Securing consultant**
 - ◆ **Public input sessions (in person and virtual)**
 - ◆ **Survey/input tool**
- **Refinement of Commission Workplan**
- **Preliminary cost-containment recommendations by December, 2024**