



Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

August 26, 2024, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Call In: 1-802-828-7667

Conference ID: 866 285 229#

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Commission Members: **Meagan Roy**, Chair; **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; **Oliver Olsen**, Vermont Independent Schools Association; **John Castle**, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; **Michael Lechlitter**, Vermont Superintendents Association; **Jeff Fannon**, VT-National Education Association; **Jay Nichols**, Vermont Principals' Association; **Elizabeth Jennings**, VT Association of School Business Officials.

AOE: Emily Simmons, Rose Neddo, Nicole Lee, Annie Gianni, Jill Briggs-Campbell, Deborah Bloom, Jennifer Hicks, Karen Abbott, Megan Kinlock, Stephanie Vogell, Bob Donahue, Maureen Gaidys.

Others: Jay Denault, Chelsea Myers, Ken Fredette, Greg Hughes, Jeanne Albert, Allen Gilbert, Austin Davis, Ben Freeman, Bridget Burkhardt, Cheryl Charles, Chester Telegraph, Christine Bourne, Clare Buckley, Dan MacArthur, Davis S., Diane Barrows, Don and Bernadette Pierson, Elaine Bellavance, Elizabeth Atkins, Elizabeth St. James, Emily Wheeler Reynolds, EWSD-B Donahue, Lisa Gerlach, Heather Bushey, Herbert Ogden, Jeff Francis, Jessica Claire, Jessica Oski, Jim Hoag, Jim Salsgiver, Kathy Magill, Katrina Menard, Keri Bristow, Libby Bonesteel, Maggie Lenz, Margaret MacLean, Mary Lundeen, Matthew DeGroot, Megan Sullivan, Nancy Cornell, Paralegal, Ryan Heraty, Rachel Van Vliet, Sheila Soule, Sue Ceglowski, Tim Smith, Tony Kay, Valerie Wood, David Zuckerman, 978-852-4441, Morgan Daybell, Kendal Smith, Jeanne Jensen, Matt Wormser, Mari Cordes, M. Kendrick, Jack Hoffman, John Clifford

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

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and took roll call. Members present included: Jennings, Nichols, Cummings, Fannon, Saunders, Mace, Lechlitter, Deck-Samuelson, Conlon, Castle, Olsen, and Bolio.

Chair Roy acknowledged appreciation for the level of engagement in this process and said it is important to have the community participate in this very important work and noted two themes. First, there is a clear desire for the Commission to focus on ALL relevant data and information, including financial, student outcome data, and much more. The second theme is regarding the concern with who is at this table. The members appointed to this Commission by the General Assembly to this Commission might not represent all of VT; it is important to state this as a reality. We can and will work to bring voices from all over into this conversation. She expressed fear that

this work will be dismissed before it begins because of the make-up of the committee. She hopes that today's conversation will allay some of these fears and that the Commission will leverage the capacity of its members to seek broad engagement – and seek external support with this as needed.

There was discussion on public comments, using/not using the Chat function, accessibility, protocols for handling emails, and Chat comments.

Approval of [Draft Minutes from July 15, 2024](#)

Conlon moved to approve the [minutes from the July 15, 2024 meeting](#); Leichter seconded. Chair Roy called the vote. The motion carried, 9:0:1. Nichols abstained.

Public to be Heard

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 \(VASBO\)](#) dated, April 15, 2024. He spoke about his concerns with this proposal, that this is an outrageous attack on the democracy of Vermont.

Ken Fredette, representing Friends of Vermont Public Education, provided [this public comment](#) to the Commission.

Dan MacArthur, Greg Hughes, School Board Chair, Marlboro, VSBA member, addressed the Commission and said that educators and principals should be included in this conversation. He hopes that this Commission will work in concert with the School Construction Aid Commission.

Greg Hughes, representing Friends of Vermont Public Education, and prior Bethel School Board member, shared [his public comment to the Commission](#).

Committee Reports

Steering Group (SG): Conlon shared that the SG discussed the workplan going forward, what committees should/shouldn't exist, and finalized the first active subcommittee (Education Finance). He added that everything discussed in the SG becomes broader discussion for the full Commission.

Data Presentation

Chair Roy stated that both the Commission and the SG discussed that there is some amount of data needed to ground the Commission's work. Interim Secretary Saunders and her team have been working on that data.

Interim Secretary Saunders shared her presentation, "[Data Presentation State Profile](#)." This presentation included legal context, AOE's Listen and Learn tour, state data profile and next steps.

There was discussion on independent school enrollment including therapeutic school enrollment and separating approved independent schools from recognized independent schools. There were questions/comments about data on special education federal funds, disaggregating special education expenditures, equalized pupils are using outdated weights, equalized vs. actual to avoid double counting, issues with implementation of the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System (VCAP), not focusing enough on quality of education, accountability, solution is not always adding staff, other variables of to be considered (implementation of Act 173, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), increased chronic absenteeism), and consistency in language.

Interim Secretary Saunders asked for feedback from the Commission on what additional analysis would be most helpful as the next phases of reporting and planning are prioritized.

There was discussion on additional analysis on special education spending, clarity on how we define terms (per pupil and equalized per pupil), biases affecting the interpretation of data, stabilization of the census block grant does not mean local budgets will stabilize, making sure the chart shows special education spending regardless of state or local funding, holding that the recommendation due in December is a *preliminary* recommendation, capturing the impact of lack of scale on the Education Fund, being clear on how and what we are measuring, profile of districts that have low spending/high performance/challenging demographics, replicating exemplars statewide, acknowledging changed inputs and how that might change our outcome, what is education spending and what is it not (mental health), breakdown of school staffing, sources and uses of the Education Fund, basic geographic barriers, analyzing census data against free and reduced lunch (FRL) data, overlay on outcomes with teachers' salary, and a slice of data with population density as a factor.

Interim Secretary Saunders thanked the Commission for the conversation and reiterated that this is the first in a series of reports and that AOE would work to incorporate where possible and will update in future reports. Interim Secretary Saunders thanked the Agency for their work. The slide show and narrative will be shared with the Commission and posted on the [Commission's webpage](#). Chair Roy said that the Commission is benefitting from and capitalizing on work the AOE has already started.

Presentation of Draft Work Plan

Chair Roy reminded members that the SG is charged with presenting a draft of a work plan and the full Commission's charge is to adopt that on or before September 5, 2024. She encouraged members to ask clarifying and probing questions and that this item could be acted upon today or at a later date. At the SG meeting Interim Secretary Saunders volunteered to provide a phased overview of the work, and the SG considered a work plan of sorts.

Interim Secretary Saunders shared [the memo and draft work plan from the SG to the Commission](#) and explained the phases: set direction, establish subcommittees, promote public engagement, reflect and synthesize, illustrate future impact, policy recommendations and considerations and implement/evaluate impact.

There was a suggestion to establish criteria under setting direction and there was a comment about concern with lack of integration with the School Construction Task Force and the need for a more deliberate approach to integration. There was discussion on the appropriate number of committees and committee liaisons.

Chair Roy spoke to the draft work plan, tension around committees and the understanding that any recommendations will be from the full Commission, not the subcommittee. She asked if there were any questions or clarification needed from the SG before work continued. Mace shared that the SG has appointed members to the Education Finance Subcommittee, and they will meet next week. Chair Roy said the subcommittees will determine their charge and create their own work plan and report back to this group.

There was discussion on the timeline, two major work streams that will not have a committee to start work until January, body of people on this Commission who will be underutilized, public and

political pressure, educational quality and cost containment, not having an educator's voice on the Education Finance Subcommittee, finance and programmatic expertise, timing of public engagement, whole Commission work vs. subcommittee work, consideration of the SG to establish guiding principles, and having guiding principles established by the Commission.

Chair Roy asked the SG if they had enough information to turn around a second draft by the next meeting. Castle noted that the need for recent analysis is inferred but not explicit and he encouraged the SG to think about where that fits into the process. Olsen added that it could be beneficial to look at the many studies that have been done over the years to understand what has already been analyzed. Chair Roy concluded that the Commission is not ready to take action on a work plan and that there would be another meeting before September 15, 2024.

Committee Assignments

Education Finance Subcommittee: Chair Roy asked for a member of the SG to give a brief recap from the Education Finance Subcommittee. Conlon said the subcommittee is made up of all Commission members except for Representative Kornheiser. Others are Conlon, Saunders, Jennings, Bolio, Mace, and Cummings. The SG discussed size and decided on seven members and looked for expertise in legal obligation as well as expertise in Vermont's financial mechanism. Mace added that there was a desire to balance additional criteria of familiarity with the local budget development process and how spending decisions relate to programming and quality. Having folks from the field while not having a majority was discussed and also wanting to ensure that this group was connected with the work of the Commission. Chair Roy said this subcommittee will meet on September 4, 2024 from 3-4:30 p.m. The work of this subcommittee will be very transparent; meetings will be hybrid and recorded even though they are not required to do so.

Communication and Engagement Committee: Perspective is limited, and it is incumbent on this subcommittee to seek other perspectives. It is the recommendation of the SG that this subcommittee start work soon. Chair Roy asked to hear from the Commission on what is needed from this committee. She suggested that this committee might warrant the assistance of an outside entity/consultant with expertise in equitable community engagement. Chair Roy said she expects to be a de facto participant on all subcommittees. Other interested members were Castle, Fannon, Olsen and Nichols. A scheduling poll is forthcoming.

There was discussion on the process for hiring a consultant and the timing for that, needing at least two months, amending existing contracts, Listen and Learn tour and how it dovetails with this work, disconnect between perception and actual data, continuity in terms of engagement could be helpful, defining the purpose of engagement and the target audiences, what is already happening that could be leveraged and what do we need, problem statement is well-defined, solutions are politically challenging, building political will involves educating the public beyond the education community, and informed input.

Confirm Meeting Schedule

There was discussion on the full Commission meeting the first Monday of the month, starting after September. The Commission would meet next on September 9, 2024, and then return to the cadence of the first Monday of the month. There was discussion on a morning (9AM-12PM) or afternoon (1PM-4PM) meeting and members were asked to consider that engagement sessions might be added on to the meeting and that there would be travel around the counties of Vermont. The Commission decided to meet once a month on the first Monday of the month, except for September, when the Commission will meet on September 9, 2024, in the afternoon. The

Commission meeting should rotate across counties and there will always be a hybrid option. Chair Roy offered that it might make sense to hold the third Monday of the month for subcommittee or SG meetings. This is irrelevant for the month of September as the SG will need to schedule something before September 9, 2024. Olsen suggested moving meeting times around to best accommodate members of the public. Chair Roy suggested scheduling the next SG and subcommittee meetings offline after this meeting. (The SG meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 5, 2024, from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. The Communication and Engagement Subcommittee will meet next on Thursday, August 29, 2024 from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.)

Chair Roy spoke about receiving public comment and her process for handling that. Public comment will be posted; correspondence to the Chair will be replied to with the Commission blind copied. There was discussion on public comment and how it is shared /managed. If the entire Commission is emailed, the expectation will be that the Chair responds at her discretion.

Public to be Heard

Greg Hughes: requested that everyone read [the report from Sanders, Chairman, Health, Education Labor & Pensions \(HELP\) Committee issued in June 2024](#), on the coordinated attacks on public education in the US. These attacks are pervasive, well-organized and well-financed. Vermont is not immune to this.

Margaret MacLean: knowing what data analysis exists and gathering this is important work that needs to be done. She asked what the Commission will do if they find information/data gaps that exist and if the Commission will require the gap to be filled prior to making decisions.

Elizabeth Burrows, Windsor - 1 Representative, and school board/supervisory union member: commented that when making a presentation it would be helpful for people to identify themselves. She said it is important to project 20 years out and not just 5 years. She asked about the data presentation and asked how data will be analyzed without including independent school data, if spending data includes money spent on tuitions and if not, can we get that data disaggregated. The role of independent schools in equalized pupil spending needs to be consistently defined. She asked at what point will the Commission look at other allocated funding for outside expertise and what happened to looking at models across the country. She suggested that Mark Perrault be invited to participate in the Education Finance subcommittee to offer a historical perspective.

Chair Roy reiterated that questions will not be answered live during the public to be heard portion of the meeting.

Jay Denault: reminded the group that public comments made in a public meeting become part of the official record of that meeting,

Mary Gannon: she will continue to express concern over the lack of diverse representation on the Commission, per statute, and she wants to keep this as part of the discussion. She encouraged people to ask themselves why that was not a consideration and to pay attention to personal biases. She worries that people who are integral to this conversation will not trust the process.

Adjourn

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 11:56 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.