



Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont Public Input Session

November 4, 2024, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

St. Albans Town Education Center
169 South Main Street
St. Albans, VT 05478
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting
Call In: 1-802-552-8456
Conference ID: 565 022 007#

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 (AOE); **Jennifer Deck Samuelson**, State Board of Education (virtual); **Nicole Mace**, Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA); **Craig Bolio**, Tax Commissioner; **Oliver Olsen**, Vermont Independent Schools Association; **John Castle**, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; **Michael Leichliter**, Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA); **Jeff Fannon**, VT-National Education Association; **Jay Nichols**, Vermont Principals' Association (VPA); **Elizabeth Jennings**, VT Association of School Business Officials (VASBO).

AOE: Taylor Goodwin, Rose Neddo, Maureen Gaidys, Suzanne Sprague.

Others: Jack McCarthy; Rob Backlund; Patricia Jedlicka; Travis V; Don and Bernadette Pierson; Chester Telegraph; Darren Allen; A. Emrich; Sarah; K Anderson; Joseph Duquette; Jennifer C; Kate McCann; Melissa; Sarah Capron; Catherine Campbell; Diane Bruley; Heather Lamson; Dylan Lamson; Mike Campbell; Cathy Brannon; Meagan Conley; Phylis Quarles; Jennifer Callahan; Melissa Price; Tudy Cioffi; John Cioffi; Rusty Brennan; Veronica Chisholm; Zachary Kelly; Philip Gervais; Barbara Tenney; Jay Denault, John Muldoon

Welcome and Overview

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. and welcomed the participants. She thanked the Maple Run Unified School District and the St. Albans Town Education Center for hosting the Commission's meeting and public input session. She shared this [presentation](#) and reviewed the session's goals: 1) provide information regarding the Commission's purpose 2) provide an overview of the statutory responsibility 3) provide an overview of the education finance system and 4) ensure community engagement. Chair Roy reviewed the Commission charge and asked Commission members to introduce themselves. Members present included: Mace, Leichliter, Nichols, Conlon, Cummings, Bolio, Deck-Samuelson, Fannon, Olsen, Saunders and Castle. Chair Roy continued with her [presentation](#) and reviewed the duties of the Commission, policy considerations, Commission deliverables, Guiding Principles, how the Commission organized its work, subcommittees and communication and engagement. Discussion followed regarding the Commission's work and the AOE's Listen and Learn Tour.

Chair Roy said that the virtual members will engage with Leichliter in a virtual breakout session and

the rest of the members will have small group discussions.

Current Education Context in Vermont

Chair Roy gave the group time to discuss the below question:

What are the strengths of public education in Vermont?

Responses included:

Quality of students.

We do good work with students with disabilities.

We look at every child and find their strengths, even if they have disabilities.

Post Bringham, zip code is not determinative of access to a good education.

Feeling you can get involved at the local level and make a difference.

Fannon and Castle provided information on Statutory Responsibility for Education and Current Context and then gave the group time to discuss the below questions and the opportunity to share their thoughts.

What are some of the challenges of our current system?

What suggestions do you have for the Commission?

Responses included:

What is the role and expectation of teachers? Is it teaching curriculum like writing and math or dealing with social emotional issues? Assessments are reflective of what is being taught.

Trying to do it all and not doing any of it well.

Students are not invested in assessments since assessments do not impact their grades.

Too much weight is being given to assessments.

Not affordable.

The idea that currently with the funding formula, how a school district funds its local school system effects everyone else in the state.

Property tax is extremely regressive and the state should go to an income-based system up to a certain level of income, and then beyond that do a combination of income and property tax.

Look at our secondary education and either look at more online opportunities or do more regional high schools similar to our CTE models.

Challenges that unfunded mandates have caused to our funding system.

Current Education Finance System

Olsen provided an Overview of Vermont's Finance System. Nichols provided an overview of FY25 Budget Challenges and Cost Drivers. The groups discussed the below questions and participants shared their thoughts.

What questions do you have about the finance system?

What suggestions do you have about the finance system?

Responses included:

Are we missing opportunities for federal or state drawdowns like other states have?

Advantages of going statewide versus local, such as a statewide teachers contract which may be more equitable.

It is a complex issue that is difficult to solve in roundtable discussions.

Busing and how it differs among districts and schools relying on tuition who can offer buses with Wi-Fi and drop off at home.

Huge cost of busing and bus services.

Too much bureaucracy.

No more unfunded mandates.

Educational dollars should be used for educational purposes only.

Human services programs should not be funded with education dollars but rather a social services program.

Blaming the teachers for lack of education when teachers are expected to do more than teach.

A lot of people on school's payroll that do not teach.

Central office staff is huge like curriculum specialists, coaches, behavior specialists, diversity specialists that do not impact teachers directly when they are teaching.

Need more and regular facetime with kids.

Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) and the adjusted tax rate for unified districts creates bad feelings because some are paying different amounts than others for the same education.

If an expensive home sells or a home is sold over asking price, it skews the CLA.

Consider the average priced homes only when determining the CLA and get rid of the anomalies.

Why we send public tax dollars to private institutions out of state and why we would need to send money out of state given Vermont's education system.

Look at second home ownership as an opportunity to increase resources.

Recognizing the pros and cons of learning in a small school setting and keeping or closing small schools.

What Else?

Next Steps

Chair Roy spoke about continuing communication and engagement, securing a consultant, having a survey/input tool, refining the Commission's workplan and providing preliminary cost containment recommendations by December 2024.

There was discussion regarding having enough teachers in the state in the future, offering grant opportunities to young people that want to pursue education, teachers get blamed for a lot, revising current mentor programs to support new teachers, keeping new classroom teachers, teachers need more prep time, standard/cost of living is too high, not enough substitute teachers, retired teachers can only work a certain amount of hours, student needs are not being met, students are struggling academically, community disconnect, teachers are burned out, students with high needs and health insurance costs.

Chair Roy thanked everyone for attending.

Adjourn

Chair Roy adjourned the session at 6:51 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Suzanne Sprague.