



# Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont

Monday, December 16, 2024, 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

**Virtual via Microsoft Teams**  
**Call In: 1-802-552-8456**  
**Conference ID: 636 152 442#**

## DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Commission Members Present:** Meagan Roy, Chair; Peter Conlon, Representative Addison-2 District; Zoie Saunders, 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 Leichliter, Vermont Superintendents Association; Jeff Fannon, VT-National Education Association; Jay Nichols, Vermont Principals' Association; Elizabeth Jennings, VT Association of School Business Officials.

**AOE:** Rose Neddo, Emily Simmons, Jill Briggs Campbell, Suzanne Sprague, Maureen Gaidys.

**Others:** Cheryl Charles, Elizabeth Burrows, Chelsea Myers, Margaret MacLean. Ethan Weinstein, Allen Gilbert, David Weeks, John Clifford, Ken Fredette, Matthew DeGroot, Chester Telegraph, M Kendrick, David S., Elizabeth Atkins, Dr. Mary Gannon, Alison Novak, Cal Hale, Clare Buckley, Jeanne Albert, Bridget Burkhardt, Emilie Kornheiser, Bill Edgerton, Stacey Peters, Katrina Menard, Jeff Francis, Terry Williams, Elaine Bellavance, Ashley Moore, Elizabeth St. James

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

Chair Roy called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. and took roll call: Roy, Nichols, Deck-Samuelson, Olsen, Mace, Conlon, Saunders, Leichliter, Jennings, Fannon. There were no amendments to the agenda.

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 2, 2024**

Olsen moved to approve the meeting minutes from the December 2, 2024, meeting; Deck-Samuelson seconded. There was discussion on the bottom of page one and if the agenda item was changed. The agenda item was not moved, and the minutes need to be corrected to delete, "that there was agreement to make this change." On page 3, it says that the Commission has moved quickly but not quickly enough. There was discussion that the Commission has moved quickly with the information that was available; the deadline was

not adequate to get the work done that was asked of the Commission. This section will be reworded to reflect this edit. Chair Roy called the vote; the motion carried. The minutes were approved.

### **Public to be Heard**

Cheryl Charles, Chair of Westminster Town SD Board and Windham Northeast SU Board, thanked the Commission and shared her public comment: [Public Comment: C. Charles](#).

Elizabeth Burrows – questioned where these documents can be found. Chair Roy advised that the current draft report is posted on the Commission’s webpage with the meeting materials.

### **Full Commission’s Report to the General Assembly**

Chair Roy said there was a revised draft report sent out Sunday and asked if any members needed time to read that.

Chair Roy recapped the discussion topics for today 1) including or not including the working document of the Education Finance Subcommittee – there was agreement that it would be included as is and not edited and 2) the recommendation section of the report. She added that the Steering Group will meet after this meeting for the purpose of final wordsmithing of the report. She asked if there was anything else of substance to discuss.

Castle expressed concern about the recommendations and his understanding of the charge to be that the Commission should provide some concrete and actionable recommendations. He also has great concerns about the inclusion of the brainstorm document; he thinks it is an important document, but including it creates contradiction.

Chair Roy said the core question is whether it is important and instructive to show the General Assembly all that has been raised, acknowledging that we don’t have recommendations and therefore include the working document OR simply reference the working document and not include that in the report. She surveyed the members.

Jennings: yes to include the working brainstorm document; if we are referencing it, it should be included.

Olsen: as a full commission have not discussed any of these ideas, does not support its inclusion at all.

Leichliter: preference has been to include it as a brainstormed document for ease of reference; in this case would go along with the consensus of the group to not include it and endorse the edits of Secretary Saunders.

Fannon: does not support its inclusion; could be a working document, including it gives it some tacit agreement and is not appropriate.

Nichols: need to keep document attached as an appendix for transparency; don't want anyone to think anything is being hidden; in some cases, would be inappropriate not to share it; worry that it would look like we are not open to all ideas if we don't share it.

Deck-Samuelson: not in favor of including the working brainstorm document; since last meeting have read several news articles that present these as recommendations – something is lost in the translation and this list is incomplete and does not include public comments; for transparency, it should be posted and noted as a working document.

Mace: Agrees with efforts of being transparent; also worries that this decision is fracturing the broad consensus that is reflected in the body of the report. She is generally supportive of the framing, appreciative of breadth of information captured and three policy bullet points – and that reflects more of the commission's work over the upcoming year; want members of the public to access the brainstormed document but do not feel strongly that it needs to be included in the report.

Saunders: suggested excluding the brainstorm list and offered some revised language, voiced reservations on including the list at the last meeting; for this level of a report we need to be intentional about what is included; this list is not ready to be reviewed as recommendations, public will interpret this as a set of policies and it will be problematic as it will take on a level of importance that the Commission does not subscribe to at this point; it is an important working document and we want to have transparency.

Conlon: supports the brainstorm list being part of the report if it is going to be referenced in the report; the act says that a report is required that includes preliminary findings and recommendations including short term cost containment considerations and sees this document as fulfilling that requirement of the law.

Bolio: supports Saunders' edits; concerned that if the brainstorm document is included the conversation could spiral out of control.

Castle: shared his comments at the start of this discussion.

Roy: what resonates most is Mace's comments around not creating a fracture in the Commission at this time; concern is the credibility of this Commission, and she believes it is more credible to be transparent; she thinks people can read things for what they are; are stronger as a Commission if we can represent consensus, this might not be the hill to die on; do believe that it is important to have the most recent version of the brainstorm document included in meeting minutes.

There was discussion on public comments and including those in the brainstorming list, Commission decides on the recommendations after hearing from the public, some ideas have been raised that are not on the spreadsheet – needs to be an opportunity for those other ideas to at least be discussed, we can continue to work on the brainstorm list and can commit to a process for doing so, generating another document that represents ideas from the public, if this spreadsheet is not provided – are we providing what was required,

concern that the press is getting it wrong is not a good driver of the work, concerns of credibility, much of the spreadsheet is not short-term cost containment, detailing the actual cost containment, much of the brainstorm does not impact FY26, Commission made an intentional shift to look at broader strategies and could be helpful to name that in the report, saying clearly that there are not any short term cost considerations, only thing we can realistically do is to have a recommended target for schools next year to have everyone working towards a common goal, are short term cost saving measures (referenced-based pricing) that could be applied sooner rather than later.

Chair Roy recapped where Commission members were and said members fall on both sides of the issue, but she is hearing a willingness to say the working brainstorm document does not need to be included in the report. She side-commented that it needs to be posted prominently on the website under the Education Finance Subcommittee meetings.

There was discussion on having a link to the brainstorm document in the report and ensuring that Leichliter's updated brainstorm document will be linked to the Education Finance Subcommittee's December 9, 2024, discussion and that link will be included in the report. Discussion continued on consensus approval and embedded link to the brainstorm might make that possible, working document language to become a link, concerns with contradictions in how the information is presented, important to start analysis with a broad list but to be more focused with recommendations to the General Assembly.

Chair Roy summarized that the plan is not to cut and paste the working document into this report but are linking it and tying it to the work of the Education Finance Subcommittee. She proposed that the Steering Group be authorized to tighten up the language and provide final wordsmithing to the report. Saunders suggested that whatever framing is agreed to in the report will also restated on the brainstorm document and calling out that there are additional ideas that may not have made it to the brainstorm document yet. Chair reiterated that the Commission is more useful whenever there is consensus.

Chair Roy summarized the two current recommendations – 1) affirm the purpose of the Commission moving forward and 2) continue to ensure substantive, equitable community engagement.

There was discussion on the last sentence in second paragraph (“we believe that it is important for the general assembly to use the Commission as the body it created to bring important perspectives to this work”), concern with Commission doing parallel work, most of the recommendations were the same as those put forth by various education organizations, expect level of scrutiny around offering up specific recommendations, closing statement to include an offer for the Commission to continue this work, needing more time to look through the edits offered by Saunders, role of Commission to provide input for future policy decisions, Saunders' revisions were threading the needle between work that has already happened and that is ongoing, making a clear statement/recommendation that the Commission be used to bring important perspectives to this work, concerns with references to data section, clarification that data section does not contain new information but more specific data that has been reviewed, and it is not this Commission's role to validate if data

is correct.

Chair Roy asked for a motion to adopt the most recent draft report with updated data findings, removal of the edited brainstorm chart, addition of a live working document framed as the most recent version, including a comment on the role of the Commission, and allowing the Steering Group to make final edits.

Conlon moved that we adopt the draft report with the inclusion a link to the working document, framed with the appropriate language, with the addition of a clear recommendation for the Legislature to use the Commission in its ongoing work and pending any small changes from the Steering Group. Deck Samuelson seconded. There was discussion on considering succinct recommendations. Chair Roy called the vote. The motion carried 8:3. Yeas: Bolio, Mace, Deck-Samuelson, Conlon, Saunders, Nichols, Leichliter, Jennings. Nays: Fannon, Castle, Olsen.

Fannon explained that his no vote is due to the edits received late last night and he thinks they deserve greater attention.

### **Public to be Heard**

Chelsea Myers, VSA: has two concerns with discussion of short-term cost containment – 1) local school officials are currently working with inaccurate budget data, specifically long-term weighted ADM and this has real impacts on budget modeling and decision making; volatility of budget data contributes to losing public trust and 2) recommendations for enforcing uniform growth parameters contributes to further fiscal inequities.

Margaret MacLean – the Education Finance Subcommittee brainstorm is not a brainstorm of the full commission and it does not include concrete suggestions received by the public; need to review public input and brainstorm should be from the full Commission; she urged the Commission to connect the work of the subcommittee, Commission and public and widen perspectives as a choice moving forward as opposed to narrowing it.

Ethan Weinstein: asked for clarification on no votes. There were three no votes: Fannon, Castle and Olsen.

### **Adjourn**

Chair Roy adjourned the meeting at 10:07 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Maureen Gaidys.