

Meeting Minutes for the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education

January 23, 2020

NC Department of Transportation Board Room

In attendance

Hon. Charles Becton, Ms. Melody Chalmers (virtual), Mr. Jim Deal (virtual), Mr. Alan Duncan, Hon. Rick Glazier, Ms. Leigh Kokenes, Dr. Helen "Sunny" Ladd, Dr. Patrick Miller, Mr. James Moore, Mr. Mark Richardson, Mr. Nick Sojka, Mr. Michael Williams, Dr. Stelfanie Williams, Mr. Brad Wilson (Chair), Hon. Leslie Winner, Ms. Henrietta Zalkind

Welcome

The Chair, Mr. Brad Wilson, called the meeting to order at 9:30 am and read the Conflict of Interest statement.

Commission Business and Updates

The Chair presented the minutes from the October 14, 2019 Commission meeting. Shortly after, the Chair approved the minutes after hearing no edits from Commission members. The Chair introduced the agenda for the day: (1) to discuss the findings and recommendations from WestEd's report, which was released publicly in December; (2) to discuss any changes the Commission may want to make to its recommendations; (3) to discuss which actions from the Commission recommendations and WestEd's recommendations the State should undertake initially as it develops the court-ordered plan for achieving constitutional compliance; and (4) to determine whether to formally adopt the Commission's recommendations at this time.

The Chair announced that on January 21, 2020, Judge Lee, the presiding judge over *Leandro v. North Carolina*, signed an initial consent order negotiated among the *Leandro* parties that outlines seven key areas that the state will address and lays out a timeline for when the parties need to submit a plan of action to the court.

The Chair also reported that he and the work group leads met with Governor Cooper to share the Commission's initial recommendations. The Chair noted that the Governor was very appreciative of the Commission's work thus far and asked that the Commission continue to be ambassadors for this important work. The Governor also reiterated the importance of focusing on the State's teacher pipeline and improving learning opportunities and supports for children birth through age 5.

Discussion of Findings and Recommendations from West Ed's Report – *Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina*

The Chair recognized Susan Mundry, Senior Program Director, Learning Innovations Program, at WestEd; Jason Willis, Director, Strategy & Performance, at WestEd; and Dr. Glenn Kleiman, Professor and Senior Faculty Fellow at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation to present on WestEd's findings and recommendations.

Ms. Mundry introduced WestEd's presentation to the Commission, noting that they had prepared a crosswalk of the recommendations in the WestEd report, *Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina*, and the draft recommendations of the Commission. Ms. Mundry stated that the findings and recommendations in WestEd's report are the result of thirteen research studies and policy analyses and direct engagement with more than 1,300 stakeholders across North Carolina. Ms. Mundry noted that WestEd sought to understand the history and context of the State and to address the challenges facing students and schools in the 21st century.

As a result, the WestEd report identified eight critical need areas for the State: (1) Adequate, Equitable, and Aligned Finance and Resource Allocation; (2) A Qualified and Well-Prepared Teacher in Every Classroom; (3) A Qualified and Well-Prepared Principal in Every School; (4) High Quality Early Childhood Education; (5) Support for High Poverty Schools; (6) State Assessment System and School Accountability System; (7) Regional/Statewide Supports for School Improvement; and (8) Monitoring the State's Compliance. The seven focus areas included in Judge Lee's recent consent order align well to the critical need areas with the addition of the specific inclusion of the alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations.

Mr. Willis shared an overview of WestEd's *Study of Cost Adequacy, Distribution and Alignment of Funding for North Carolina's K-12 Public Education System*. Broadly, the study examined questions of adequacy, distribution, and alignment of educational funding.

Mr. Willis shared a series of research findings demonstrating the decline in per pupil funding since 2009-10, inequitable funding distribution, costs to meet student needs, and policy barriers to allocating personnel and funding to meeting students needs. As a result, WestEd offered the following recommendations: (1) Increase the cost effectiveness of the North Carolina funding system so that public education investment prioritizes higher-need students and provides appropriate flexibility to address local needs; (2) Modify the school finance system to ensure future stability in funding for public education, including predictable, anticipated funding levels that acknowledge external cost factors; (3) Increase the overall investment in North Carolina's public schools first by identifying a small number of foundational, high-impact investments.

Dr. Ladd noted that the study is focused on state operating expenditures and asked for clarification on the role of local funding in the determination of adequate and equitable funding. Mr. Willis responded that the Court has ruled that there is no limitation that can be placed on the ability of local jurisdictions to raise funds to support their schools. Therefore, the report articulates the State's responsibility.

Dr. Ladd also stated that the focus of the analysis is primarily on the narrow relationship of student test scores to funding. Mr. Willis agreed and responded their methods have evolved and also incorporate student graduation rates and the input of professional judgment panels from eight regions of the State.

Mr. Glazier commended the meticulous and thoughtful school finance study. Mr. Glazier requested clarifications on the cost model included in the WestEd report. After a discussion, Mr. Glazier requested that the cost model be updated to include early childhood expenditures and modified to differentiate continuing and one-time expenditures. Ms. Winner noted that in North Carolina we are accustomed to considering recurring and non-recurring costs and it would be helpful to present the model in this way. Chair Wilson agreed and asked that all future communications include all expenditures be translated into the common vernacular. Ms. Zalkind agreed and noted that we should carefully consider start-up and scale-up costs, particularly for high need populations and schools.

Mr. Richardson asked if there is a priority item among the recommendations. Ms. Mundry acknowledged the substantial work and investment but noted that a systemic approach is required to meet the State's goals. The WestEd report outlines some initial ways to monitor the effectiveness of the recommended actions and expenditures.

Dr. Kleiman presented the initial crosswalk of recommendations from the WestEd report and recommendations of the Commission related to teachers. He noted that there is substantial alignment in the broad priority areas with some distinctions in the underlying timelines or implementation approaches.

Dr. Ladd noted that given the State's prior experience with the NC Teaching Fellows Program, it is important to address the placement of Fellows in high need schools and districts in the final implementation plan. Ms. Winner described incentives and preferences included in the Commission recommendations.

Ms. Zalkind recommended that the early childhood educator workforce and K-12 educator workforce plan and actions be better coordinated in the document and as we move to implementation.

Ms. Winner expressed pleasure in the alignment between the reports. She also shared a concern from Dr. Abd-El-Khalick about the current capacity of the State's educator preparation programs to meet the recommendations in the report. These programs have been reduced by one-half to one-third of their size in the last decade. They stand ready to serve but will need time and resources to rebuild and develop the state's professional high quality teacher pipeline – recruited, trained, supported, developed, and retained.

Dr. Kleiman presented the initial crosswalk of recommendations from the WestEd report and draft recommendations of the Commission related to school leaders. He noted that there is substantial alignment in the broad priority areas with a few distinctions in the underlying implementation approach.

Ms. Mundry presented the initial crosswalk of recommendations from the WestEd report and draft recommendations of the Commission related to early childhood education.

Dr. Williams requested the definition of "at-risk" in the early childhood section of the report. She noted that it will be important to ensure that individuals reading the report and implementing the policies and programs have a clear understanding of the term and its alignment to terms used in PK-12.

Ms. Zalkind clarified that WestEd's analysis did not include a review of the use of lottery funds or the reallocation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. The report does not address federal funds. The primary focus is on State-funded Smart Start and NC Pre-K. Chair Wilson clarified that though the WestEd report is specifically focused on state funding, the impact of federal funding is recognized in WestEd's calculations. For example, in determining the cost of early childhood education to the State, the number of placements supported by federal funds is taken into account.

Ms. Mundry presented the initial crosswalk of recommendations from the WestEd report and draft recommendations of the Commission related to the assessment and accountability systems.

Dr. Ladd clarified that the revised student assessment system aligned to the Court's standard should be broader than math and reading, incorporating history, social studies, the arts, music, student safety and well-being, access, etc. Ms. Mundry noted that while the report does recommend a comprehensive definition and possible multiple measures of achievement, this system has not yet been fully developed.

Update on Recent Leandro Court Order

The Chair recognized Mr. Geoff Coltrane, Senior Education Advisor to Governor Roy Cooper, to provide an update on the consent order signed by Judge Lee and to discuss next steps in the process. By March 30, 2020, the parties are to return to the Court with a short-term action plan. Within six months, the parties are responsible for developing mid-term and long-term action plans.

Mr. Duncan added that Judge Lee asked several questions about engagement with members of the legislature. Judge Lee also noted that it is his responsibility to have an enforceable order in place based on guidance from the prior Supreme Court order. This initial order defines the agreed upon focus areas. Subsequent orders will include detailed action steps and timelines.

Mr. Glazier noted that we now know what the constitution requires, and we have a plan and a remedy in place. All officers of the state take an oath to uphold the constitution.

Chair Wilson noted that we are at an historic moment. We can now focus solely on delivering on the constitutional mandate and moral imperative. When the debate is tension-filled, we can remember that we have finally reached this time.

Dr. Miller asked who is responsible for gathering input on the initial recommendations. The NC State Board of Education is currently gathering feedback. The Governor's office is also coordinating input among the parties and other stakeholders.

Commission members provided input on the development of the action plans and significant engagement with state leaders and state and local stakeholders. Commission members will be important ambassadors in this process.

Mr. Glazier offered a motion that the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound, Basic Education adopt its recommendations as currently drafted, reserving the ability of Chair Wilson and Mr. Coltrane to make edits, changes to the format, and the corrections necessary to prepare the recommendations for publication. Mr. Glazier noted that it is both an important and symbolic action by the Commission that should be undertaken in a timely manner. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sojka. The motion was unanimously approved.

Dr. Ladd noted that the Commission had not changed the current approach to charter schools. Mr. Moore noted that the recommendations did not directly and sufficiently address family support.

Discussion

Chair Wilson and Mr. Coltrane sought input on the recommendations from the Commission and WestEd that the State should include in the court-ordered plan of actions to be taken in 2020.

Chair Wilson stated that the parties will continue to develop the plans requested by the judge. Mr. Coltrane will gather the feedback offered by the Commission and will continue to seek the Commission's insight and feedback throughout the development of those plans. Mr. Coltrane will also highlight items that require additional follow-up or edits to the Commission's priorities. The Chair asked that members consider the appropriate scope and scale of each action at each phase as they offer feedback.

Next Steps and Adjournment

Chair Wilson stated that he will follow up on scheduling future meetings as needed.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:15 pm.