

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

May 14, 2019

The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation

In attendance

Dr. Fouad Abd-El-Khalick, Ms. Melody Chalmers, Mr. Jim Deal, Mr. Alan Duncan, Mr. Fernando Solano-Valverde, 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, called the meeting to order at 9:02am and read the Conflict of Interest statement.

Commission Business and Updates

The Chair presented the minutes from the April 11, 2019 Commission meeting and asked if members had edits. Hearing none, the Chair approved the minutes. The Chair reminded the Commission that the next two meetings will take place on June 4 and June 25. The Chair recognized Alan Duncan for an announcement. Mr. Duncan announced that Judge Manning was nominated and selected as the winner of the John J. Parker award by the North Carolina State Bar. The Chair will send him a card on behalf of the Commission.

Discussion of Distributive Values: Equity, Equality, and Adequacy

The Chair recognized Dr. Sunny Ladd for a presentation on distributive values. She stated that policy should be driven by values and goals and that the goal of schools should be to provide educational goods to students. Educational goods include the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that enable an individual to flourish as an adult and help others flourish. "Equity" is too broad. The three principles of adequacy, equality, and benefitting the less advantaged should be considered when making funding decisions around differentiation, supplements, and autonomy/flexibility.

Ms. Winner asked how we can help low-wealth students while not hindering top/middle income students from flourishing and reaching their fullest potential. Shouldn't there be a focus on all students flourishing?

Dr. Abd-El-Khalick stated that equity should be the focus. High-wealth districts should understand why they should get less funding than low-wealth districts. It is critical to provide adequate resources for underserved students and disadvantaged districts, especially when we know their counties can't supplement funding like high-wealth counties.

Finance and Resources Work Group Draft Principles

The Chair recognized Mr. Jim Deal for a presentation on the draft priorities identified by the Finance and Resources Work Group. Mr. Deal said the work group thinks their priorities are parallel to West Ed's, but that West Ed hadn't shared specific recommendations yet.

In recommendation #1, the Chair suggested adding "state" between "of" and "funding" to clarify that the state should provide an adequate level of funding to provide children with a sound, basic education.

Ms. Winner noted that the State has a history of providing capital assistance on an occasional basis, only once there are billions of dollars of need. She suggests the concept of a continuous capital funding stream so that districts can access funding as they need it (could include district match component for districts that are not low-wealth).

Dr. Abd-El-Khalick said it is important to consider that adequate resources also include an adequate number of teachers and principals – they, too, must be seen as resources. He does not agree with a standard minimum teacher salary schedule, instead suggesting a schedule based on district type (e.g. rural, low-wealth, hard-to-staff, etc.) would be better. Mr. Richardson and Mr. Glazier agree that a universal salary schedule statewide won't help hard-to-staff districts attract good teachers – schedule should take geographic and economic differences into account.

On recommendation #5, Ms. Zalkind asked if there is a standard that identifies districts that do not have enough local support for capital, infrastructure, and technology needs. Mr. Deal notes that there is a metric that the Public School Forum uses in its annual Local School Finance Study that addresses the “relative effort” of a county in providing resources for its schools.

Mr. Duncan noted the importance of adequate state funding because local supplements will vary across counties. On recommendation #3, he agreed that flexibility of funds is critical to improving student performance, but wondered about what might happen if locals mismanage the money. What is the tolerance for that? Dr. Ladd noted that there can be levels of accountability at the district, school, and student levels to ensure responsible spending, which the Commission might want to build into its recommendations.

Dr. Miller shared that lawmakers took away the public school capital fund allotment for construction after the recession. In a recent facility needs study, Greene County was told they have \$34M in unfunded capital needs; the InvestNC Bond would give Greene County \$10M and they would still need additional funds to meet their capital needs. He notes that access to funds that can be used for maintenance and renovation are extremely important and that they should be included in the allowable uses for various capital funding streams. The lottery was supposed to be a reliable chunk of money for districts, but that funding has since been diluted and isn't helping.

Dr. Ladd is interested in the effect that charter schools are having on district funding and whether it is affecting student performance in other district schools as the charters take money away.

Mr. Richardson brings up the uncertainty surrounding who covers what expenses, especially as it relates to capital vs. operational expenses. Where do the district, school board, county, state fit in?

Following the break, Mr. Glazier introduced a new resource recently published by the NC Justice Center focused on targeted actions the state can take to ensure that funding and resources for public schools are effective and equitably distributed. Mr. Glazier called on Kris Nordstrom to share some additional information about the resource. The resource is available on the Commission's website.

Teacher Work Group Draft Priorities

The Chair recognized Ms. Leslie Winner for a presentation on the draft priorities identified by the Teacher Work Group. Ms. Winner noted the importance of starting recruitment early – pipeline begins in high school; however, none of the high school preparation programs demonstrate strong enough success data for the work group to recommend one over the other.

Ms. Zalkind noted the critical role that high school guidance counselors can play in recruitment, but many aren't selling teaching as a career path. We must continue to build up the profession and show teachers the respect they deserve so that kids see it as a valuable career pursuit. Mr. Glazier noted that there is a large loss in the number of students pursuing an IHE path for teaching

Dr. Ladd asked what proportion of new teachers come from out-of-state. Data show about 27%.

Ms. Kokenes stated that we should extend preparation and grow-your-own programs to include specialized instructional support personnel. Mr. Glazier noted the gap in focus on support personnel. Group will discuss where to fit this issue in its priorities.

Dr. Ladd asked if there are special training programs in the UNC system for students that will teach in rural areas. Dr. Abd-El-Khalick doesn't think so – thinks there is a broader focus on inner-city school issues rather than rural.

Mr. Glazier asked how the group determined the \$10,000 bonus in Placement Recommendation #1. The group borrowed that amount from a pilot program in Lenoir County, but explained that it is just a starting point.

Dr. Miller mentioned his work with an SREB Human Capital Roundtable that is recommending a 2+2 teacher pathways program. It would reinstate something like Teacher Cadets and students would matriculate into a community college before moving to a partner university, helping local grow-your-own efforts, reducing student debt, and helping middle of the road students who weren't selected for Teaching Fellows.

Dr. Williams asked if there were discussions on the teacher-student experience, specifically on the teacher to student ratio. She suggested incentivizing schools that have team teachers or other specialized support personnel in the classrooms. She noted the importance of improving the student to teacher ratio to help boost low-performing districts. Commission members also recognized the importance of reaching the national average for specialized instructional support personnel, but know that it will take a significant financial investment and will take time to build up to capacity (need to start recruiting students into these fields).

The Chair asked about the increase in teacher workdays in Teacher Support and Retention recommendation #3 and the effect this proposal might have on working families. Ms. Winner noted that these workdays could be planned in a coordinated way (e.g. before/after the school year).

Dr. Miller outlined his idea for a potential differentiated salary schedule design based on the county tier system. There would be three schedules; Tier 3 would have the existing salary schedule, Tier 2 would have a salary schedule 12-15% greater than the existing schedule, and Tier 1 would have a salary schedule 25% above the existing one. This would incentivize teachers to move to these areas. The salary schedule would be based on the county's tier designation average over the past ten years.

Commission members agree that to entice new teachers, especially into hard to staff districts, the benefits package needs to be more enticing. They agree that districts could offer a menu of options for incentives (i.e., college loan payments, supplemental salary, vision/dental insurance) to attract teachers.

Principal Work Group

The Chair recognized Dr. Patrick Miller for a presentation on the Principal Work Group's draft priorities. Dr. Shirley Prince with the NC Principals and Assistant Principals Association spoke briefly about their programs. Members asked about the TP3 Fellows, a two-year preparation program that includes a full-time, fully paid internship opportunity. The Principal Fellows program only provides pay at level 0 on the assistant principal salary schedule. For many eligible individuals, that would be taking a pay cut, so the program isn't a viable option.

Dr. Ladd asked if there should be a differentiation in the training for high school vs. middle school vs. elementary school administrators. Dr. Miller stated that school administrators should have training that covers all ages because at any point they could be moved from school to school.

Ms. Winner suggested adding training on “collaborative decision-making” and “teacher recruitment and retention strategies” to the list in recommendation #3. She also suggested that as programs are replicated, safeguards are put into place to ensure they’re as good as the prototypes (e.g. TP3).

Commission members agreed that it is important to bolster the principal pipeline and then to provide adequate support and professional development opportunities to principals.

Mr. Glazier asked if superintendents receive training for their work overseeing principals and assistant principals. Group didn’t consider that but will add to the recommendations.

Mr. Deal mentioned the idea of funding a regional grant-writer position for low-wealth counties that likely don’t have the capacity to do that kind of work. This could help low-wealth districts take advantage of opportunities that they might not otherwise be able to pursue. Members noted lack of central office capacity.

Ms. Zalkind noted that the role of the LEA in the current environment (with homeschools, charters, etc.) is increasingly complex as it relates to school finance. This will be an issue to grapple with in the future.

Dr. Ladd asked how many assistant principals are typically in each school. Dr. Miller shared that in Greene County, there are 2 at each high school and middle school and 1 at each elementary school. She asked how important it is that the additional adults be asst. principals or if it could be other support staff. It might be helpful for districts to have flexibility to use counselor or other staff funds. Commission members agreed that districts should be given more flexibility for the principal allotment formula.

Early Childhood Work Group

The Chair recognized Ms. Henrietta Zalkind to present on the Early Childhood Work Group’s draft priorities.

Dr. Ladd asked if Pre-K teachers should have Bachelor’s degrees. Ms. Zalkind said no but noted that there should be minimum requirements and that those minimum requirements might differ throughout the early childhood education continuum.

Mr. Williams asked how NC Pre-K is tied to school districts. Ms. Zalkind explained that districts get allocations – not based on need, but on capacity to absorb money. Programs run through a contract administrator, usually Smart Start partnerships or school systems, with the occasional private provider.

Ms. Winner asked for the total served by NC Pre-K (29,000) and total eligible (62,000 – just looking at poverty). The state currently doesn’t have the capacity to serve all of these children. Ms. Zalkind noted that if we can better serve kids earlier there will be less at-risk kids at age four. Recommendations to expand the program to serve a higher proportion of kids would require additional resources and facilities, transportation funding, etc. Commission members would like the work group to add capacity needs to the recommendation.

Dr. Ladd asked what the mix between family contributions and government contributions is. Ms. Zalkind said there is no family contribution for NC Pre-K and that care for children ages 0-3 operates on a graduated scale based on the number of kids in the family receiving care.

Assessment and Accountability Work Group

The Chair recognized Melody Chalmers to present on the Assessment and Accountability Work Group's draft priorities. Commission members requested adding assessments to the list in priority #1.

Ms. Winner stated that letter grades are not the best way to communicate relevant information on student performance and that this group should suggest doing away with them and adopting a different way of assessing student performance. Commission members agreed. Members suggested equal weights in the ratio around student growth/student achievement if the state must maintain the letter grading scale. Commission members noted that the current letter grades are highly correlated to student poverty levels in each school.

Mr. Glazier noted that it is important for this group to discuss the effects charter schools are having on other public schools. Need to discuss that they are receiving state funding with little to no accountability.

Dr. Abd-El-Khalick suggested clarifying or removing "student-driven" to avoid confusion. He also noted that assessments should serve student learning, not just accountability. Assessments are the best way for teachers to know where their students stand and should be more formative and less summative.

Mr. Duncan requested that the work group add the disaggregation of student discipline data in priority #1 to get a better picture of the issue. He would also like to see closing the achievement gap for marginalized students addressed in this group's work.

Commission members discussed the need for additional staff at NC DPI to increase capacity. Over the years the department has been asked to do more reporting and meet more requirements with less personnel and funding.

Commission members stated the need to focus on additional teaching assistants. Ms. Winner would prefer this group not make a recommendation specific to adding reading teachers or teaching assistants. She would prefer a recommendation saying that an "adequate number of teaching resources in whatever variety is needed" so as not to limit the ask.

Mr. Solano-Valverde said the state should be investing in what teachers say they need, and consider what students are losing without it. He reiterated the importance of early intervention. He also shared how difficult it is for teachers when teacher evaluations play a role in determining a school's performance grade.

Chief Moore asked if the assessment tool for 3rd grade literacy is effective (if such a high percentage of students aren't reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade) and asked what happens to students who aren't reading on grade level at the end of 3rd grade. Ms. Kokenes noted that there are multi-tiered systems of support for these students. Teachers should provide direct instruction for groups that need additional help. Dr. Miller noted that the "standards" students are expected to reach vary and that if good cause exemptions were taken into consideration, the state would add 37 percentage points to our 3rd grade reading proficiency.

Ms. Kokenes stated that learning to read starts in kindergarten and that kindergarten teachers should be very knowledgeable in literacy and ensure that literacy minutes are spent strictly on literacy instruction during the school day.

Discussion

The Commission identified the following areas as gaps in their current identified priorities that the work groups should consider in making revisions.

- Homeless students

- Specialized support personnel
- Funding for central office staff
- Transportation issues
- School safety
- Extracurricular resources
- Charter schools and vouchers (where do they fit in on these conversations?)

Next Steps and Adjournment

The Chair reminded Commission members to keep June 4 and June 25 on their calendars for the next meetings. Work groups will refine their draft priorities based on the conversations from this meeting. If work group chairs feel they need more time, the Commission may not meet on June 4; however, at this point, June 4 is still on the calendar for a meeting.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:05pm.