

Meeting Minutes for the Commission on Access to a Sound Basic Education

Thursday, November 30, 2017

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, Raleigh, NC

Call to Order

Chair Brad Wilson called to order the first meeting of the Commission on Access to a Sound Basic Education at 10:00 am on November 30, 2017. The Chair read the Conflict of Interest reminder and invited Commission members to introduce themselves.

The following members were present:

- Dr. Fouad Abd-El-Khalick
- Hon. Charles Becton
- Ms. Melody Chalmers
- Mr. Jim Deal
- Mr. Alan Duncan
- Hon. Rick Glazier
- Mr. Mark Jewell
- Ms. Leigh Kokenes
- Dr. Helen “Sunny” Ladd
- Dr. Patrick Miller
- Mr. James Moore
- Mr. Mark Richardson
- Mr. Nick Sojka
- Mr. Fernando Solano Valverde
- Mr. Michael Williams
- Dr. Stelfanie Williams
- Mr. Brad Wilson (Chair)
- Hon. Leslie Winner
- Ms. Henrietta Zalkind

Remarks to the Commission

The Chair invited Governor Cooper to give remarks. The Governor thanked the Commission members for serving and highlighted the importance of the work they will be undertaking for ensuring that all of North Carolina’s children receive a sound, basic education. He then charged the Commission with identifying what the state needs to do to accomplish the three areas highlighted in the *Leandro* rulings:

- Staffing each classroom with a competent, well-trained teacher;
- Staffing each school with a competent, well-trained principal; and
- Identifying the resources necessary to ensure that all children, including those at-risk, have an equal opportunity to obtain a sound, basic education.

Discussion of Challenges to Providing a Sound, Basic Education

The Governor invited Commission members to share feedback about what they think the Commission should focus on related to his charge. Commissioners shared the following feedback.

- Dr. Fouad Abd-El-Khalick
 - High-quality teachers and principals are important to ensuring a quality education for every student
 - Important to look at how we can place are most qualified teachers and administrators in the hardest-to-staff areas and get them to stay
 - Emphasized the importance of encouraging more young people to become educators
- Hon. Rick Glazier
 - The state's school finance system must be adequate and equitable, but also simple, transparent, and flexible
 - State funding for our public schools continues to fall behind
 - Should look closely at what does it take to ensure our schools have adequate funding
- Ms. Melody Chalmers
 - Teacher retention is a big issue and we need to focus on the necessary supports to retain teachers
 - Provide mental health supports for students and mental health training to teachers and administrators
 - Need to address the growing re-segregation of our public schools due to expanding school choice options
 - Early college high schools are a promising model, but only as long as the focus remains on under-represented students and first-generation college going students
- Hon. Charles Becton:
 - Commission should focus on other areas that impact a student's readiness to learn, like health care and early childhood education, to identify ways to prevent the achievement gap from developing
 - Commission should focus on equity and not just on adequacy
- Hon. Leslie Winner
 - Important to have a robust teacher workforce and Commission should take a holistic approach to strengthening the teacher pipeline
 - Need to look at teacher recruitment, training, induction, and supports (including better pay)
- Ms. Henrietta Zalkind
 - Focus holistically on cradle to career and the importance of literacy and school readiness, especially in the birth to kindergarten years
 - Need to strategically invest in teachers (including salaries) across the spectrum, PreK – 12th grade
 - Need to better coordinate resources to help ensure students receive the appropriate supports based on their needs

- Mr. Nick Sojka
 - Reiterated the importance of looking at the adequacy of resources across districts
 - Look at the ability of local school boards to exercise flexibility and discretion in the use of resources to best educate children
- Dr. Stelfanie Williams
 - Focus on advanced, innovative education for all children to minimize the gap between students of means vs. students of lesser means who may currently be unable to compete
- Dr. Sunny Ladd
 - Need to look closely at the relationship between the state and local districts from a funding perspective
 - Look at the charter school movement's effect on public school funding and how we should think about charter schools in the context of a system that was developed before they existed
- Mr. Alan Duncan
 - Increasing need in our schools for mental health services
 - Need to find ways to address the achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and different racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Mr. Mark Jewell
 - Teacher recruitment is important and strong leadership and the necessary resources are key to recruiting more teachers
 - Need to focus on high poverty areas where it is difficult to recruit teachers
 - Important to have sufficient support staff available in our schools (school psychologists, guidance counselors, early intervention specialists, etc.)
- Mr. Jim Deal
 - Teachers are our most important sector of the workforce
 - Need to change the public perception of and value for teaching, both through higher pay and more respect for the profession
- Dr. Patrick Miller
 - Reiterated the importance of equity in per pupil funding across local school districts and how local districts generate significantly different amounts of local funding for public schools
 - Reiterated the need for wrap-around services in high-poverty areas (social workers, guidance counselors, etc.)
 - Important to focus on birth through kindergarten years to help reduce the achievement gap
- Mr. Mark Richardson
 - Emphasized the difficulty of meeting unfunded mandates at the local level, especially because of the differences in funding between local school districts
 - Employers are the ultimate customer of our public education system
 - Disparity of parenting environments puts some students at a disadvantage
 - Need to look at charter schools that are producing a good return on investment to see what we can learn from their experiences
 - Need to address pre-kindergarten more pragmatically

- Ms. Leigh Kokenes
 - Need for more school psychologists across the state (currently providing reactive services when focus should be on preventative services)
 - Need for holistic psychological services in our schools (mental health, behavioral health, etc.)

Governor thanked Commission members for their input and emphasized the need to ensure that the great things happening in our public schools in some areas of the state can, and should, happen everywhere.

Swearing-in of Commission Members

Governor Cooper introduced the Honorable Burley Mitchell who administered the oath to members of the Commission. The Commission then took a brief recess.

Commission Structure and Operations

The Chair provided an overview of the Commission structure and operations and named the Governor-appointed Executive Committee: Ms. Chalmers, Mr. Deal, Dr. Miller, Mr. Valverde, Mr. Wilson, and Ms. Winner.

The Chair provided an overview of the relationship between the Commission and the consultant, who will be hired by the court. The parties in the *Leandro* case will select an independent consultant by January 15, 2018 to help develop detailed recommendations on what the state needs to do to ensure compliance with the constitutional requirements under the *Leandro* ruling. The consultant will work for the court but will work collaboratively with the Commission throughout the process. Within 12 months of appointment, the consultant will submit its report to the court, the Commission, and the *Leandro* parties. The Commission will review the recommendations and, in conjunction with the *Leandro* parties, create a plan for implementation. Within 60 days of receiving the report, the Commission and the parties will submit the implementation plan in the form of a consent order to the court for consideration.

The Chair proposed that the Commission adopt a “rule of no surprises.” If members are contacted by the media, they are to let Mr. Geoff Coltrane in the Governor’s Office know beforehand and provide an update afterwards. The Commission will meet at least quarterly over the next 12-18 months. Business will proceed if a quorum is present.

The Executive Order establishing the Commission states that meetings will be called by a majority of the Commission. Chair asked for a motion that the Chair may, in consultation with the Executive Committee, call meetings. Motion was made by Mr. Richardson and seconded by Dr. Ladd. The motion was passed unanimously by the Commission.

History and Overview of *Leandro* Case

Mr. Larry Armstrong, an attorney with Armstrong Law and board attorney for the Halifax County Public Schools, provided an overview of why the five plaintiff school districts originally filed the lawsuit. Mr. Eddie Speas, former Chief Deputy Attorney General for North Carolina, provided an overview of the NC Supreme Court’s 1997 *Leandro* decision and described how Chief Justice Burley Mitchell defined a “sound, basic education” in the ruling. Ms. Melanie Dubis, a partner with Parker Poe and lead counsel for the plaintiffs in the *Leandro* case, provided

an overview of Judge Howard Manning's 2004 ruling in the case and what the state has done over the 13 years since the ruling to address the findings in the case.

Briefing on State Ethics

Mr. Greg McLeod, Deputy General Counsel for the Governor's Office, provided a briefing on state ethics. Mr. McLeod shared that it is important for Commission members to review the conflict of interest packet provided to them and to contact him if any ethics-related questions arise.

Briefing on State Public Records Law

Mr. Blake Thomas, Deputy General Counsel with the Department of Justice, and Ms. Sondra Panico, Assistant Attorney General with the Department of Justice, provided a briefing on state public records law. Mr. Thomas reminded Commission members that all documents, emails, and other communications related to the work of the Commission are public records and must be retained. Commission members can forward any materials for retention to Mr. Coltrane in the Governor's Office. Mr. Coltrane will also send Commission-related emails with a subject line indication.

Overview of Relevant Education Commissions or Task Forces

Mr. Coltrane provided an overview of five other statewide commissions, task forces, or councils that were created in 2017 and that are focused on issues relevant to the Commission's work. Those commissions included the My Future NC Commission, the Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform, the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission, the Board of Postsecondary Education Credentials, and the B-3 Interagency Council.

Adjourn

Chair adjourned the meeting at 12:52pm.