

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

June 29, 2021

Office of State Budget and Management Commission Room and via WebEx

Members in attendance

Hon. Charles Becton (virtual), Dr. Melody Chalmers-McClain (virtual), Mr. Jim Deal (virtual), Dr. Fouad Abd-el-Khalick, Hon. Rick Glazier, Ms. Leigh Kokenes, Dr. Patrick Miller (virtual), Mr. James Moore, Mr. Mark Richardson, Mr. Nick Sojka, Mr. Brad Wilson (Chair), Hon. Leslie Winner (virtual), Ms. Henrietta Zalkind, Dr. Sunny Ladd (virtual), Mr. Michael Williams (virtual)

Welcome and Conflict of Interest Statement

The Chair, Mr. Brad Wilson, called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and read the Conflict of Interest statement.

Commission Business

The Chair welcomed the Commission back together both in-person and virtually and reminded the Commission that it approved recommendations during its last meeting on January 23, 2020. A copy of the final recommendations were included in the meeting materials. The Chair shared that since the Commission's last meeting, the State and State Board of Education have presented the Comprehensive Remedial Plan to Judge Lee that provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to address the immediate needs and systemic needs of students. The Chair introduced the focus for the day – to learn more about the Plan and actions already underway.

The Chair presented the minutes from the January 23, 2020 Commission meeting. After hearing no edits from Commission members, the Chair approved the minutes as presented.

Updates on *Leandro* Comprehensive Remedial Plan and Recent Court Orders

The Chair called on Geoff Coltrane, Senior Education Advisor to Governor Cooper, to provide an update on the Plan and recent court actions.

Mr. Coltrane began by sharing a timeline of actions in the *Leandro* case from December 10, 2019, to June 7, 2020. On June 15, 2020, the parties in the case presented an initial year action plan to the court, but much of that plan was delayed due to the pandemic. The initial year plan noted that the needs of students and schools were exacerbated by the pandemic and that the state's fiscal status was unknown at the time of submission. On September 11, 2020, Judge Lee entered an order approving that plan.

On March 15, 2021, the State and State Board of Education submitted the full Comprehensive Remedial Plan, which includes actions through Fiscal Year 2028 the state will take to achieve constitutional compliance, as well as timelines, goals, estimated costs, and responsible parties for those actions. The actions the Plan are based on the seven key areas outlined by Judge Lee in the January 2020 consent order.

Mr. Coltrane presented details on the Plan actions across the seven key areas: teachers, principals, finance and resources, assistance and turnaround, assessment and accountability, early childhood, and postsecondary alignment.

During the discussion on the Plan actions for teachers, Ms. Henrietta Zalkind noted that as the K-12 teacher recruitment and retention efforts are implemented, those efforts could have an unintended impact on the early education teacher pipeline. Mr. Richardson agreed and indicated that the same is true for teacher assistants and other education support personnel who are essential in lower grades. Mr. Coltrane agreed that this is a critical concern.

Dr. Abd-el-Khalick asked about appropriations to support 2+2 teacher preparation programs. Mr. Coltrane shared that the Plan calls for \$2.2 million in recurring funding beginning in Fiscal Year 2021-22.

Mr. Moore asked what entity is tasked with coordinating these efforts and focusing on the diversity in the teaching workforce. Mr. Coltrane shared that the State Board of Education is statutorily charged with approving educator preparation programs, and that the Plan calls for a study to identify the best entity to coordinate recruitment and retention efforts.

Mr. Richardson expressed his interest in engaging the community college in educator preparation but noted that it is often difficult to recruit students into our community colleges.

During the discussion on finance and resources, Mr. Glazier recommended that the Commission receive information on which Plan actions are included or not included in the House and Senate budgets when available. The Chair agreed that it would be very helpful to have this information as quickly as possible. The Chair also shared that it will be important to have a uniform scorecard related to funding for and implementation of the actions and action steps to track the state's progress on the Plan. If the state does not adopt some common language and metrics around the Plan, then implementation of the Plan would be in the eye of the beholder. Ms. Zalkind agreed and said it could be like the community health indicators. Mr. Sojka added that this type of scorecard will be invaluable to aiding local boards of education in understanding where the state is in terms of implementing the Plan.

Mr. Coltrane noted that the State Board of Education is developing a dashboard that will report progress on *Leandro* performance indicators. A corollary that reports on implementation of the plan in consistent language would be helpful.

Following the discussion on the Plan actions, Mr. Coltrane shared updates on the current status of implementation of the Plan actions, including what actions have been accomplished and the current status of the state budget process. The Governor proposed fully funding and implementing the Plan actions for the next two fiscal years in his budget proposal. The Senate's budget proposal included funding for a portion of the Plan's actions over the next two years.

Mr. Richardson noted that the Plan outlines state funding responsibilities for school operations and leaves capital funding responsibilities to the district- and local-level.

Updates on State Supports for Low-Performing Schools and Districts

The Chair recognized Dr. Beverly Emory, Executive Director of Leandro Implementation, NC Department of Public Instruction, to present on state supports for low-performing schools and districts provided by the NC Department of Public Instruction.

In the fall of 2020, the State Board of Education needed a point person for Leandro implementation and specifically around support for low-performing schools and districts. The State Board allocated \$4.5 million from federal CARES Act funds towards school and district support and reallocated 9 additional state-supported positions. The Department's eight regional directors are essential to identifying and providing support. This work is focused on four key areas: statewide services, diagnostic services (identified through a comprehensive needs assessment), strategic reform (restart), and intensive intervention.

With these funds, the district and school transformation team is supporting six of eight continually low-performing districts (two districts chose not to participate) and 44 continually low-performing schools

with coaching support, a comprehensive needs assessment, customized supports, and training and development for district and school leaders, including the NC Instructional Leadership Academy for current principals (through a contract with the RELAY/Leverage Leadership Institute). The hope is to use recurring funds identified in the Plan to make these supports permanent and to extend supports to schools and districts on the cusp of being identified as low-performing.

Dr. Chalmers-McClain is familiar with the work of RELAY and Leveraged Leadership and thanked Dr. Emory for bringing this to the districts. The Chair thanked Dr. Emory for her and her team's work.

Updates on Early Childhood Actions

Following a break, the Chair recognized Ms. Susan Gale Perry, Chief Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being, NC Department of Health and Human Services to provide updates on the implementation of the Plan's early childhood actions.

Deputy Secretary Perry shared information on the pandemic's effect on childcare and how children lost access to childcare during the pandemic. Deputy Secretary Perry shared that there is a critical need to invest in the early childhood workforce, and that this critical need was reinforced during the pandemic.

Deputy Secretary Perry reviewed the Plan actions for early childhood and shared that DHHS has used federal preschool development grant (PDG) funding to begin implementing some of the Plan's early childhood actions, including the Family Connects home visiting pilot program, the Transition to Kindergarten pilot program, and a feasibility and cost study for an infant/toddler program similar to NC Pre-K. In addition, there is federal COVID funding available for childcare support through 2024.

Deputy Secretary Perry reviewed the proposed funding for the Plan actions in the Governor's budget proposal and the Senate budget proposal. Deputy Secretary Perry shared that much of the increased investments in the NC Pre-K program that is in the Plan and that is proposed in the Governor's budget are intended to help address the needs of the counties that have declined additional NC Pre-K slots because those counties are not able to afford the local funding requirement for NC Pre-K.

Mr. Glazier asked if the counties that Deputy Secretary Perry identified as declining slots for the NC Pre-K program are rural and high poverty. Deputy Secretary shared that for the most part that is true and that those counties have declined additional slots but still have eligible children for the program. Ms. Zalkind also noted that transportation, access to teachers, and access to full-day, full-year care is also often an issue in these counties.

The Chair asked how many children are impacted by this funding gap. Ms. Perry stated that 19,000 children are on the waitlist for childcare subsidies, but that DHHS does not keep waitlists for NC Pre-K because the period of eligibility for the program is so short. We know that the state is meeting about one-half of the need. Mr. Glazier requested county-by-county numbers of eligible children for NC Pre-K who were declined a spot because the county could not afford the local funding need.

Leandro Impact Analysis Tool

The Chair recognized Mr. Rick Glazier, Commission Member and Executive Director, NC Justice Center.

Mr. Glazier shared that to help local communities see what impact the implementation of the Plan's actions would have on their local school districts, the NC Justice Center developed an impact analysis tool. Mr. Glazier recognized Mr. Kris Nordstrom, Senior Policy Analyst, NC Justice Center to provide an overview and demonstration of the tool.

Mr. Nordstrom provided an overview of the impact analysis tool and noted that at this time the tool only includes the impact of K-12 actions. The NC Justice Center is working with DHHS on the data for adding the local impact of the early childhood actions to the tool, which will be available soon. The tool is available on the Every Child NC website under the Resources tab.

Mr. Glazier credited Mr. Nordstrom and his partners for the enormous time and effort in creating the tool and the importance of using it in community discussions. Ms. Zalkind noted that it will be important to include teacher salary information in the tool if possible. Mr. Coltrane noted that the NC-specific study on teacher salaries that is in the Plan has not been funded. Mr. Nordstrom said there is a caveat regarding the exclusion of salaries that is included in the footnotes of the tool.

Dr. Ladd agreed on the importance of focusing on teacher salaries. She also inquired about the Court's authority to require the NC General Assembly to implement the Plan. Mr. Glazier noted that in several states with similar cases, courts have used sanctions against legislatures, but the goal would be to not get to that point. Mr. Glazier noted that we have a comprehensive plan and an order from the judge to implement that plan, and the hope is that the legislative branch will now do their part. If the Court has to get involved, sanctions could include holding the legislature in contempt, issuing monetary fines, withholding of the budget, etc. Mr. Glazier noted that separation of powers should not be an issue because separation of powers should not be used to allow one branch of government to violate the constitution.

Mr. Nordstrom also shared that he has developed a comparison of Plan actions funded in the Senate budget proposal and the Plan.

Discussion and Next Steps

The Chair asked that Mr. Coltrane review the next steps from the meeting. Mr. Coltrane shared that he will follow-up with the Commission with additional information on the Governor's budget proposal and the House and Senate budget proposals, including the comparison document Mr. Nordstrom referenced. In addition, Mr. Coltrane identified the request for additional data on how many NC Pre-K slots were declined by counties over the past few years and the Commission's interest in learning more about the State Board of Education's dashboard

Ms. Winner asked about the Governor's charge to the Commission since it has approved and presented to him its recommendations. The Chair noted that the Governor wants the Commission to remain engaged and to help in communicating on the next steps in the implementation of the Plan. Ms. Winner noted that if this is the task, the Commission should have a systematic plan for communicating with key stakeholders to ensure that others understand what is at stake. The Chair agreed and said that a communications strategy and plan is essential. The Chair requested a status update from Mr. Coltrane.

Adjournment

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

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:45 pm.