

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

Ad Hoc Committee on Education Cost Sharing and Choice Funding

Minutes

**Monday, January 10, 2011
9:30 a.m.
165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307A
Hartford, Connecticut**

Committee members present: Joseph Brennan, Vincent Candelora, Joseph Cirasuolo, George Coleman, Sherri DiNello, James Finley, Kathy Guay, Alex Johnston, Patrice McCarthy, Douglas McCrory, Fred McKinney, Sharon Palmer, Allan Taylor, John Yrchik

Committee members absent: Deborah Heinrich, Dudley Williams

I. Call to Order, Welcome, Greetings

Chairman Allan Taylor called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

II. Approval of Minutes of December 20, 2010, Committee Meeting

Ms. McCarthy moved, Mr. Cirasuolo seconded, to approve the minutes of the December 20, 2010, Committee meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

III. Discussion Items – Short-term Consideration

A. RESC Alliance Proposal Regarding Coordination of Statewide Regional Transportation

Mr. Taylor introduced Craig Edmonson, Chair of Connecticut's RESC Alliance. He was joined by Evan Pitkoff, Executive Director at CES, and Don Walsh, Deputy Executive Director of Finance and Operations at CREC.

Mr. Walsh began by explaining the two-step process to systematically assess the regional transportation opportunities in the State: 1) review current district contracts (costs, timelines, operations); and 2) assess the level of interest districts have for regional transportation. Additionally, there will be a focus on incentives for immediate savings.

It was noted that staff from the six RESCs will do the assessment. Mr. Walsh stated that during previous conversations with former Commissioner McQuillan, it was suggested that the Department of Education pay the RESC Alliance a token amount for its efforts – possibly \$25,000 even though it would cost more to complete the assessment.

Mr. Edmondson commented that there seems to be a lot of interest in regional transportation based on informal conversations with superintendents and business managers.

Some members questioned whether legislation was necessary to have an assessment completed. It was suggested that if legislation is required, a statement regarding collective bargaining should be included.

Mr. Edmonson commented that the legislation would empower the Alliance, and districts would participate rather than it being voluntary. The legislation will also help to initiate questions and encourage people to participate in conversation.

During further discussion, it was questioned whether the Ad Hoc Committee should charge the RESC Alliance with assessing the opportunities for transportation regionalization.

Mr. Finley motioned, Ms. McCarthy seconded, to make a recommendation that the State Board of Education (SBE) charge the RESC Alliance with assessing the opportunities for the regionalization of public school transportation in Connecticut. Members agreed, and the motion carried unanimously.

III. B. Common School Calendar

Mr. Taylor stated that the draft legislation presented was a bit ambitious since the Committee has not engaged in a major discussion regarding this matter.

Mr. Edmondson commented that a standardized calendar would be a benefit to all districts when working with regional transportation.

Members asked if the common school calendar should be added to the agreed-upon charge from the SBE to the RESC Alliance.

Members noted that it would be relatively easy to work with individual districts regarding regional transportation, whereas a common calendar impacts the entire state. It was suggested to start with regional calendars first rather than statewide.

It was also questioned how much could be saved in transportation costs if all districts ran a common calendar.

During further discussion, members expressed concern that this issue may be difficult because of contractual issues and some districts adding on extra days. It was mentioned that some regional calendars are already in place, and efficiencies between districts should be looked at.

Mr. Taylor and members of the Committee agreed that the common calendar should be added to the SBE's charge to the RESC Alliance. Mr. Taylor thanked Mr. Edmonson, Mr. Walsh and Mr. Pitkoff for taking time to address the Committee, and offered assistance to the Alliance if needed.

IV. Design Principles of a New ECS Formula

Mr. Cirasuolo explained to the Committee that once the core values were adopted, he and Ms. McCarthy, Mr. Finley and Mr. Johnston met and came up with design principles to present to the rest of the Committee for review and discussion.

Several members commented that the principles are too broad, and they don't give any indication of what it means for the districts, especially from the funding aspect.

Other members expressed dissatisfaction and displeasure with the process that took place while drafting the design principles. It was stated that the work of this group has always been introduced to the Committee as a whole. Some members expressed concern that a small group convened and completed this exercise without any previous discussion.

There was plenty of discussion regarding the process taken when drafting the design principles and whether the Committee should submit the principles. One member commented that they didn't mind the smaller group bringing information in for discussion.

During further discussion, the budget situation was brought up. Some members asked if this was the right time to even submit proposed changes to the funding formula, not only because of the budget deficit but also because of the uncertainty of the new administration's direction. It was questioned whether the Committee should pause until we know more about what Governor Malloy and the new Commissioner are expecting.

Mr. Taylor commented that whatever proposal the Committee puts through, it wouldn't be for this year anyway. There is no way a major revamp can happen this year. But if the work and consensus building waits until it is possible, then it will be too late.

It was noted that during the Committee's tenure, members knew we would have a new administration. If the Committee puts forth design principles, it at least keeps the ball rolling for a few years. It was suggested that having a new administration is the perfect reason to influence public discussion.

Other members agreed and noted that the work of the committee signals the intent of the SBE to be a partner to discussion and play a leadership role in setting policy and recommendations.

It was also a concern that it may not be an appropriate time for the Committee to submit recommendations for major increases in education when people in the state are hurting because of the budget crisis.

Mr. Finley motioned, Mr. McKinney seconded, to adopt the design principles and recommend them to the State Board of Education for further discussion.

Members continued with a lengthy discussion about the principles. Some members again were not pleased because the principles were not yet discussed and/or considered by the full Committee.

It was suggested not to vote on anything at this time, and at least agree to discuss the principles. Another member suggested that the Committee informally vote on the principles and then make a determination on what action to take based on such vote.

The matter of “consensus” within the group was mentioned. If the Committee continues on, that will create an opportunity for both majority and minority reports if necessary. It was noted that the core values were easy – principles are more difficult – and then it will just get more difficult from there.

V. Discussion of Future Work of Committee

After lengthy discussion regarding the next steps regarding the principles and future work of the Committee, it was suggested that a subcommittee be formed to review, discuss and/or revise the proposed design principles. Members agreed. It was also agreed that the subgroup would meet and provide the Committee with their agreed-upon principles in advance of the January 24 meeting. It was noted that the principles must be related to the core values so we’re not covering new ground and it won’t sidetrack the discussion.

It is anticipated that the Committee’s report/recommendations will be issued no later than February 1.

Mr. Finley withdrew his motion to adopt the design principles and recommend them to the State Board of Education for further discussion.

The members of the subcommittee to discuss the design principles are J. Cirasuolo, J. Finley, A. Johnston, P. McCarthy, S. Palmer, and J. Yrchik.

VI. The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

Prepared by Karen Kowalski