

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Legislation and Bylaws Committee

October 7, 2009
8:30 a.m.
State Office Building
Hartford, CT

MINUTES

Approved November 4, 2009

Members Present

Theresa Hopkins-Staten, Janet Finneran, John Voss, Kathleen O'Connor, Hunter Kodama

Staff Present

Mark McQuillan, George Coleman, Pamela Bergin, Harriet Feldlaufer, Tom Murphy, Barbara Beaudin, Jennifer Widness and Janice Dinnall

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:37 a.m.

Minutes of Last Meeting

The September 2 and September 21, 2009 meeting minutes were approved with no changes.

Discussion Regarding Legislative Proposals

I. Early Childhood Credential for Associate and Bachelor Degrees (for 2015)

Bureau Chief Harriet Feldlaufer provided Committee members with some background information on this proposal and described how it came about. Current law requires that by 2015, all staff in state-funded school readiness programs hold either a bachelor's degree in early childhood, or a related field, or is certified in early childhood education. Ms. Feldlaufer stated that this goal is simply unattainable at this time, due to a number of reasons. The current proposal serves as a compromise and would require that half of the staff in school readiness programs hold an associate's degree with early childhood preparation and half hold a bachelor's degree.

Theresa Hopkins-Staten asked what would happen if the law doesn't change and expressed some concern about loosening the requirements, given the critical nature of the birth-to-three years for children. Ms. Feldlaufer recognized Ms. Hopkins-Staten's concerns but explained that the current law is not feasible at this time and it may in fact force some programs to close. In addition, Ms. Feldlaufer noted that under this proposal, individuals working with infants and toddlers would be required to hold credentials in that area.

John Voss asked whether the provisions in current law might be obtainable by 2019. Ms. Feldlaufer stated that due to the fact that it takes many of these individuals seven years to get their credentials, 2019 may be too soon. Higher education and the community colleges are working on recruiting candidates for these programs but it will take some time to build the proper workforce.

II. Mandate Relief Proposals

Jennifer Widness quickly reviewed the four proposals which seek to provide some mandate relief at both the state and local level. Two of the proposals, which reduce reporting requirements for the school breakfast program and charter schools, were approved last year by the Board. The proposal to reduce reporting requirements for the Youth Service Bureau is new and the goal is to improve the quality of reporting that is generated to allow the state to measure the impact that the program has on the participants. The fourth proposal calls for a review on the research of the effectiveness of postural screenings which districts are currently required to offer on an annual basis.

III. Revisions to Charter School Statutes to Remove Barriers to Growth for Race to the Top application

Commissioner McQuillan then described a proposal to address the Race to the Top application requirements that barriers to growth for charter schools be removed from statute. He suggested a couple of steps could be taken to help remove some of the statutory barriers to growth that are currently in place. First, enrollment caps that are currently in statute should be removed. Second, the subject to funding clauses currently in statute which limit the Board's authority to approve charters based on available appropriations, should also be removed. Third, the state charter school grant should be revised so that state charter schools have financial parity with school districts. A formula should be developed to determine the grant, based on the average per pupil expenditure across the state, minus costs for transportation and special education, services which charter schools are not responsible for paying.

The fourth proposal that the Commissioner proposed is to create a new model for local charter schools which would allow priority school districts to form local charters with independent governing bodies and contractors who would manage the school's faculty and staff. Because districts would be educating their own students, they would keep

and maintain their local tax contributions and ECS allocations. In addition, as necessary, the state could provide additional funding to ensure that the per pupil allocation for local charters was the same as that for the state charters. Under this proposal, districts would retain their own staff in the charters but an independent entity would provide direction on the operations of the school.

Kathleen O'Connor questioned whether the proposal is aggressive enough and why we would not push to require that the money follow the child, if that is what is needed to be successful in the Race to the Top application. The Commissioner noted that a proposal which would require money to follow a child would be complicated given the disparity in state funding that districts currently receive. In many cases, the state contribution to a school district is very small; therefore, if money were to follow a child from a wealthier district, then a great deal of those funds would be local tax dollars.

IV. Changes to Teacher and School Leader Evaluations

The Commissioner then discussed the fact that the Race to the Top application clearly requires that states take bold steps to change current practices for evaluating teachers and school leaders. The application selection criteria urges states to submit plans to “establish ambitious targets for differentiating teacher effectiveness using multiple rating categories that include student growth and using this information in evaluation, compensation, advancement, tenure and dismissal decisions.” The Commissioner questioned whether the current legislative proposal, to require that student outcomes be a part of teacher evaluations, is enough.

Janet Finneran stated that the Race to the Top application is forcing the question as to whether we believe in merit pay for teachers. She feels that the Board should not sell its soul on this issue just so that the state will be eligible to obtain the federal funding. Merit pay is not something that she supports.

The Commissioner noted that he believes the goal should be to establish a comprehensive evaluation system that provides a district with the right tools to differentiate those teachers that are successful and those teachers that should be let go.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Theresa Hopkins-Staten at 9:30 am.