

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Legislation and Bylaws Committee

December 2, 2009
8:30 a.m.
State Office Building
Hartford, CT

MINUTES

Approved January 6, 2010

Members Present

Theresa Hopkins-Staten, Janet Finneran, Hunter Kodama, and John Voss. Kathleen O'Connor participated by telephone.

Staff Present

Mark McQuillan, Daniel Murphy, Barbara Beaudin, Jennifer Widness and Janice Dinnall.

Call to Order

Chairperson Hopkins-Staten called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m.

Minutes of Last Meeting

The November 4, 2009, meeting minutes were approved unanimously on a motion by Janet Finneran, seconded by John Voss.

The Commissioner introduced the Committee members to Daniel Murphy, the new Agency Legal Director. Mr. Murphy gave a brief synopsis of his work history highlighting the fact that he has 15 years experience in the field, including 10 years as an attorney for several boards of education.

The Commissioner then gave a brief update on the Race to the Top application. The final guidance was released by the federal government on November 12, 2009. Applications are due for Phase I of the grant on January 19, 2010. Some of the revisions to the proposed guidance have forced the Department to revise its original strategy. For example, rather than focusing on a few strategic districts to partner with, the Department is required to invite all districts to participate. In addition, there is less emphasis on turning around struggling schools and more emphasis on improving teacher quality.

The Commissioner expects that a first draft of the application will be ready for review by the public on December 21, 2009. The proposal will come from the Governor.

Jennifer Widness stated that the final guidance does not require any statutory changes for Connecticut to submit its application. However, the Department is still considering putting forward some revisions to the charter law and a proposal to incorporate secondary school reform into the state's accountability statute. The Commissioner stated that a decision needs to be made as to whether to draft the proposal for secondary school reform to be required by all districts or just the priority school districts. Committee members discussed the pros and cons of both strategies.

The Committee then reviewed the proposed revisions to the charter school statute, in anticipation of the full board's discussion of the item at the meeting later in the day. The Committee sought the Commissioner's recommendations on the various options. The Commissioner recommended that the Committee seek parity in funding for charter schools at this time, rather than reforming the funding model entirely. In addition, he supported the local charter model that was proposed as well as removing some of the statutory barriers to growth of charter schools. The Committee members agreed that this strategy seemed balanced; while it would not allow for substantial growth of state charters, it would allow for growth of local charters.

Beverly Bobroske asked that Department staff look into whether the bylaws could be changed to allow the chairperson of a standing committee to appoint a member to participate in committee meetings when another member is absent. Theresa Hopkins-Staten suggested that perhaps the bylaws could be changed to allow each committee to have one alternate member who had the power to vote. Daniel Murphy agreed to look into the issue.

The meeting was adjourned by Theresa Hopkins-Staten at 9:26 a.m.

Prepared by Jennifer Widness, Staff Attorney