

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

Ad Hoc Committee on Education Cost Sharing and Choice Funding

Work Group to Develop Proposal Regarding Committee Priorities

**Thursday, July 8, 2010
1:00 p.m.
165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307B
Hartford, Connecticut**

Minutes

Present: David Calchera, George Coleman, Kathy Demsey, Kathy Guay (OPM), Jen Harmon (ConnCAN), Alex Johnston (ConnCAN), Lauren Kaufman (designee for J. Brennan, CBIA), Brian Mahoney, Mark McQuillan, George Rafael (CCM), Kachina Walsh-Weaver (designee for J. Finley, CCM)

Absent: Allan Taylor, Dudley Williams

Commissioner McQuillan called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

Commissioner McQuillan welcomed the group, and participants introduced themselves. He then explained that this Work Group was established to discuss specific issues regarding funding/legislative changes and report back to the full Ad Hoc Committee.

Commissioner McQuillan recapped the previous Ad Hoc Committee meetings and then asked David Calchera to give an overview on his experiences with regional services. Mr. Calchera served as a Regional Educational Service Center (RESC) director and is currently a consultant for the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). Mr. Calchera stated that we currently have successful regionalism in the state through the six RESCs. However, some think that regionalism is about moving children, but that it not necessarily true. Mr. Calchera continued that all that's needed is a sufficient facility with efficient control units. There is no real need to upset communities and lose schools in any particular district. Activities such as special education, transportation, and nutrition programs all can be coordinated through RESCs. It is fine if districts still want local boards of education, but the functions would need to be dramatically altered.

There was lengthy discussion regarding regionalism and the possible reasons why more regionalization hasn't taken place. Comments/questions included:

If business activities are consolidated through a RESC, who then will be considered the "boss" (as superintendents are in the school districts)?

The group needs to find a rational reason why the state would want to regionalize and then bring it to the public.

Regionalism is a taboo word in a lot of communities. Phrases such as "shared services" may work better when discussing this matter with districts.

Though the notion is that regionalism saves money, it may not necessarily save as much as one would think.

At this point, many towns are starting to work with other municipalities to coordinate efforts.

When regionalization is mentioned, some think it's a loss of local control, and others believe the boundaries of education end at the town line. Communities need to see the value of community partnerships.

Towns don't want to see any funding leave the district if money follows the child.

Other possible factors for not regionalizing include: the large portion of state mandates in local board of education budgets, collective bargaining agreements, and high special education costs.

Additional information about the RESCs was requested: what kind of services are currently provided, what more can be added, who is accessing those services, who isn't and why. Also requested was a RESC enrollment report broken down by race.

Discussion came back around to the full Ad Hoc Committee. Commissioner McQuillan summarized that the Committee was originally charged with just looking at ways to tweak or further define choice program funding. The majority of the Committee also wanted to include the ECS formula in the discussions. After the last Ad Hoc Committee meeting, it was clear that a Work Group was needed to regain focus of the Committee's and begin to design a model to debate.

ECS, Choice programs, and regionalization were further discussed. Comments/questions included:

It was noted that the Rhode Island Legislature recently enacted legislation to provide weighted student funding statewide. It was suggested to explore the idea of weighted student funding where the money follows the child and then add in Choice and a transportation allowance. It was mentioned, however, that even though Rhode Island and Massachusetts have implemented new funding formulas, they necessarily haven't solved the entire problem.

Should the Committee look at the current ECS formula and see how it can be enhanced through a regional context? The topic of regionalization has never been discussed enough to get a clear answer.

It was commented that Choice participation is not necessarily all about the money. It was acknowledged that we do need greater choice options and greater integration of schools. That is why magnet schools were created to offer unique opportunities for all students.

The Committee needs to discuss how to come up with a regionalized funding mechanism to effect equitable outcomes: greater Choice options for all students; not tolerating segregation by poverty or race; and all students will be learners.

The Committee needs to be very clear about what problems we are actually trying to fix.

A suggestion was made to keep the group's focus more narrow and concentrate on school choice options.

Additional suggestions are to provide mandate relief and have the state take over the costs of special education.

Property tax reform was also discussed. It was noted that some larger districts in the state get most of their money from state or federal funds versus taxpayers. In those cases, it may not be about the amount of taxpayer money, but more about the ineffective use of funds.

Before in-depth discussions begin about ECS changes, regionalization, etc., should the Work Group consider the state share?

There was additional discussion about core values; how the Work Group should start thinking out of the box; and the need to think creatively for a range of attractive solutions.

Commissioner McQuillan would like the Work Group to commit to three broad issues (Core Values, Regionalism and Dollars Following the Child). These discussion topics will be brought before the full Ad Hoc Committee to try to establish commonality to arrive at recommendations. It was agreed that "Core Values" will be the first topic brought to the full Ad Hoc Committee at the next meeting scheduled for July 19. A facilitator will be invited.

Brian Mahoney distributed several documents highlighting various RESC demographics.

Commissioner McQuillan asked Ms. Kaufman (CBIA) and Mr. Johnston (ConnCAN) to discuss the topic of money following the child at the Committee meeting on July 19.

Commissioner McQuillan stated that this Work Group will parallel the full Committee and set up for larger discussions. Upcoming meetings will be scheduled. He also asked any group members to advise him if they do not wish to serve on the Work Group.

Commissioner McQuillan adjourned the meeting at 3:10 p.m.