

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

Ad Hoc Committee on Education Cost Sharing and Choice Funding

Minutes

**Monday, July 19, 2010
9:30 a.m.
165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307A
Hartford, Connecticut**

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

Committee members absent: Joseph Cirasuolo, Deborah Heinrich, Theresa Hopkins-Staten, Mark McQuillan, Sharon Palmer, Allan Taylor, Dudley Williams

- I. Deputy Commissioner George Coleman called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. Mr. Coleman welcomed the Committee, and members introduced themselves.
- II. Approval of Minutes of June 28, 2010, Committee Meeting
Mr. Brennan moved, Ms. McCarthy seconded, to approve the minutes of the June 28, 2010, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.
- III. Summary of July 8, 2010, Work Group Meeting
A memo from Commissioner McQuillan summarizing the first Work Group meeting was briefly discussed. Commissioner McQuillan and the Work Group agreed that the main discussion topics for the next few meetings of the full Committee would focus on core values; regionalism; and the potential impact of money following the child.
- IV. Introduction of Consultant
Mr. Coleman introduced Laura Downs, who was asked to help facilitate the work of the Committee. Ms. Downs is currently President of Morrison Downs Associates, Inc., and has performed a great deal of work in Connecticut and the education community.
- V. Context for Developing Core Values
In an effort to establish the Committee's core values, Mr. Coleman explained that a survey was developed and distributed to members for completion.
 - V.A. Discussion of Overarching Value Themes from Survey and Drill Down Discussion of Survey Results
 - V.B. Ms. Downs stated that 7 out of 17 survey responses were received prior to the meeting. Members who did not complete the survey were asked to do so before the next meeting. Also, a summary of this survey discussion will be forwarded to all members.

When asked if there were any important core values not reflected in the survey, several members responded:

- Transparency (where the money is and how is it spent);
- Reduced funding (a lot is said about increasing funding, but where are the major items that will need to be reduced);

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- Charter school funding control (local vs. state).

Survey Question 1: Appreciating all of the State's interests and obligations, education should be its most important priority.

It was noted that, although education is a priority, health and welfare issues are also extremely important. It was questioned whether education does, in fact, take precedence over other priority issues. After discussion, it was agreed that it is hard to choose between education and other competing interests in the short term, but education is definitely a top priority when looking at the long-term perspective.

Survey Question 11: Every student has a right to a high-quality education, irrespective of his/her race, ethnicity, wealth or zip code.

All members agreed with this statement.

Survey Question 12: The State has an obligation to ensure that every student receives a high-quality education, even if it means targeting a larger percentage of existing funds for students in need.

Members were split on this statement, and lengthy discussion ensued. The term "existing" was a major point of discussion. Members' comments included:

- Funding shouldn't be taken away from other districts that are hard-pressed to meet the needs of educating students.
- Students in rural towns, for instance, are not considered "in need", but they are in need of a more racially diverse teacher population.
- Adding additional funding doesn't necessarily mean high-quality education will be provided.
- As a principle, high-need students may require more resources to reach a level of success when compared to others, and it's the State's responsibility to make sure those resources are available to produce successful outcomes.
- What are districts actually doing with their money? It would be beneficial if extra funding was actually going directly to the students. Any additional funding should target academic achievement.
- Taking money from the wealthiest communities would increase the State's tax burden, since such towns provide the most significant portion of income tax to the State.
- The local property tax system is flawed and doesn't work in urban environments.

At the end of the discussion, consensus was reached on this statement but only when deleting the term "existing".

Survey Question 18: The State should ensure that each teacher and principal receive a basic starting salary, to ensure the equitable distribution of highly-qualified educators throughout the State.

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Members were split on this statement. During discussions, it was stated that a base may be appropriate but differentials will be needed across districts, and teachers in urban areas should be paid more because the demands are greater in such districts. Other comments included:

- The Teacher Enhancement Act was implemented years ago. The State provided resources to bring up base salaries, but then towns were left “holding the bag”.
- High-quality teachers should be appropriately awarded.
- A base salary doesn’t preclude districts from offering other incentives.
- What exactly is “highly-qualified”? An accumulation of degrees does not necessarily mean those teachers are providing high-quality teaching to their students.
- Isn’t a base already defined by our certification process?

After discussions, it was clear that the Committee members did not generally agree with the statement. They did agree, however, that quality teachers should be equally distributed across the State.

Survey Question 19: Regional collaboration has the potential to enhance educational opportunities for students and contain system costs.
All members agreed to this statement in principle.

Survey Question 13: Choice-through charter schools, magnet schools, vo-ag, open choice and technical high schools-is an effective part of a strong, diverse statewide public school system.
All members agreed with this statement.

Survey Question 16: To expand the funding for more choice options, the State needs to establish a “money follows the child” system, where the local tax dollars normally spent on a student should be transferred to the school he or she is attending.
Members were split on this statement, and lengthy discussion ensued:

- From a practical point of view, what happens when a large percentage of Hartford students, for example, opt to leave the district? Towns cannot afford to lose a huge chunk of resources. But it was noted that the number of students leaving Hartford would be mitigated to a degree by students from other districts.
- The State has an obligation to “do no harm”. This statement seems to be a contradiction to other values.
- Communities would see an erosion of resources they currently have. The system doesn’t have the kind of money in it right now to support “money following the child” concept.
- This may further disadvantage school districts that are currently underfunded.

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- Need to be cautious with this concept, especially when looking at districts that have not supported the Sheff case. Districts may now open their doors to diversity but only as an economic advantage.

Since there is a significant divide on this topic, it was suggested that additional research be done and then modeled out for potential implications.

Survey Question 17: The cost of transporting students to choice programs, including technical high schools, should be paid for by the State.

The seven survey respondents all agreed with this statement. However, other members were not so sure, with funding, of course, being a main obstacle. Additionally, members commented that if the State took over costs, local control would be lost. On the other hand, RESCs could be used to coordinate costs. It was decided that when the Committee starts considering Choice programs/funding, transportation will need to be reviewed and specific modeling explored.

Survey Question 14: Choice options for parents should be greatly, and systematically, expanded over the next decade.

The members were split on this statement. Members' comments included:

- Since overall student population will be decreasing in the future, why build more choice schools when, in fact, we will have surplus capacity?
- The presumption is that choice will lead to improvement, but is that really true? Choice could be a "course" for change.
- Over 14,000 students' names were in the recent Sheff choice lottery. Is that because these are brand new schools?
- Since all members agreed that choice is an effective part of our school system, then why wouldn't some not want to expand an effective program?

Survey Question 15: Parents should have a right to enroll their student in any choice program in the state, irrespective of where they live.

Members were split on this statement. It was stated that it's a valuable concept, but it adds funding and transportation issues, etc. Another member commented that it may work great with the parents' work schedule, for example.

Due to time constraints, the remaining survey results were not discussed and will be placed on the agenda of the next full Ad Hoc Committee meeting scheduled for August 16.

It was suggested that documentation for future meetings be sent to members at least one week prior to the meeting. Another suggestion was made to add the special education component to a future discussion.

VII. Mr. Coleman adjourned the meeting at 11:35 a.m.