

FR: Mel Myler
TO: CSSF Members
RE: Public Engagement WG Interim Report
DATE: July 27, 2020

Workgroup Major Tasks

To date, the Public Engagement workgroup has focused on its first two tasks and will begin the third following the deliberative session on July 27th, 2020 with the full Commission. Review specific plans for stakeholder, student, and public engagement (including design, key questions, and locations)

1. Identify key groups to recruit to engagement events
2. Review input from engagement activities and review summaries of that input
3. Identify key findings from engagement activities (What did we hear? What did it tell us?)

Questions We Continue to Ask

1. What kinds of stakeholders do we need to engage? (e.g., by position, advocacy area, interest area, racial and social identity diversity)
2. What are the questions we want to ask that will inform the Commission's work and decisions?
3. What data do we need to share with stakeholders, so they can provide informed input?

Activities Completed and Brief Notes on Findings

Stakeholder Meeting (March 2020)

Key stakeholders included the NH School Administrators Association, NH National Education Assoc, Career and Technical Education Advisory Board, NH Assoc. of Special Education Administrators, NH School Boards Association, NH Charitable Foundation, Reaching Higher NH, Governor's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, and the NH Coalition for Business in Education. Key themes from this discussion were:

- Start with the Realities and Basics
- Unification, Sustainability and Equitable Solutions for Students and Taxpayers
- Name Disparities, Challenges, and Definition of Adequacy
- Identify funding streams and contributors
- Keep in mind politics of communication and clarity of purpose/decisions
- Make creative and thorough solutions

12 Online Focus Groups with Municipal and School Leaders (n=48) (June 2020)

The questions referred to the Commission's charge: How are we raising and distributing funds? What are we paying for? What are the costs and drivers? This includes defining the problems with school funding in NH. Broad themes from the focus groups included:

- Reliance on property taxes is problematic overall
- Need to consider definitions of adequacy *and* what remains funded and unfunded currently, and what is needed
- Funding concerns and inequities across communities included *but are not limited to* staffing, salaries, transportation, facilities, and supplies
- Need to find a systemic solution for funding and investing in school/educational adequacy equitably in communities, for a better and equitable future for students in NH

More specific findings include:

- Teacher turnover and salaries – among schools who get first- and second-year teachers who then leave for higher salary districts
- More weight given to special education in new funding formula
- Need stability for long-term planning, relying on grants makes for less stability
- Systematic unfairness that creates winners and losers in the state – last minute changes impact budget and cause ebbs and flows in districts
- Social emotional learning and science behind learning and development
- Adequacy – take the long view and track graduates after graduation
- Don't try to be perfect in this process, just get us somewhere

First Public Commenting Session (Beginning July 2020)

First session was July 15th with 20 public attendees (10 spoke) and 10 Commission members. Topics covered by speakers included:

- Honest look at the state's revenue problem in terms of school funding
- Tax exemptions and need for local voices in the process
- Increase in state funding and progressive property taxes, eliminate inequities
- Balancing regulations and expenses if moving to state-level funding
- Nature of inequities in which NH schools are funding is extraordinary
- Costs associated with transportation, the shortage of substitutes, school funding and extra costs due to the pandemic
- Stabilization grants are not enough aid to improve student performance
- Concern about unfunded mandates, cannot cut budget, cannot raise taxes, schools are built on backs of taxpayers
- Understanding/transparency about district program costs and budget development
- Look at the costs of ELL and Special Education, transience of students and costs

Commission members and the public can refer to the Commission calendar for future Wednesday commenting sessions - <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding/calendar>.

School and District Employee Survey (n=1,768) (July 2020)

- Data analysis in process

Anticipated Next Steps for Public Engagement

Plans for convening the public have shifted due to the pandemic. All will be remote. The following are the next group of activities being developed.

Student Voice – September 2020

- Public commenting sessions for youth/student voice on September 23 and October 7; promoting these opportunities beginning in mid to late August
- Engaging high school students in social studies classes and NH graduates now in community colleges (could also include high school students)

Granite State Poll through the UNH Survey Center – September 2020

- Up to 10 questions focused on “attitudes toward school funding in NH”
- Initial draft of questions for review during next workgroup meeting
- The survey center will generate a report of this statewide polling

Statewide Convenings (October 2020)

- Host 6 meetings using the executive council districts as a guide
- Open to the public with some targeted invites to help include diverse perspectives
- Goal for participants will be able to review and discuss options under consideration

Additional Focus Groups (September and October 2020)

- Older adults (65+)
- Reconvening municipal and school leaders (inviting participants from first round and representatives from communities that were missing)