

Engagement Work Group Notes

7-16-20

Attendees: Mel Myler, Corinne Cascadden, Jon Morgan, Michele Holt-Shannon, Bruce Mallory, Sarah Boege, Susan Huard, Dave Luneau. Not present: Jon Morgan, David Ryan. 7 public attendees.

Just after 1pm Rep. Myler called the work group to order, called roll, and reminded members of the commission's shared group agreements.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved unanimously by work group members in attendance. Mel noted that there are several upcoming opportunities for public comment, and then turned the conversation over to Carrie for updates on the municipal and school leader focus groups held in June. The draft report can be reviewed here:

https://carsey.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2020/08/report_municipalschoolleaders_fgs_june2020_draft_08032020.pdf

Major takeaways included worries about the current structure of funding for education in NH, the opportunity for an adequate education, and how to measure comparable educations across communities.

Following the presentation, Mel noted the conflict inherent in creating a system that works across a wide variety of districts. Mel – was there much comment about regionalization? Carrie – some conversation (see p. 11) about some areas where regionalism provides some cost savings. Corinne – there was a mention about state and federal properties helping fund schools, perhaps PILOT-style. To my knowledge it cannot. Carrie – Great point to bring up. Towards the end of the report there is conversation about needs for local decision making and educating communities. What are the commission's opportunities to provide educational materials so legislators, local decision makers, and citizens so they can be informed about what is and isn't feasible. Want to educate the public through the process. Corinne – I have written some Nellie Mae foundation grants on regionalization, which took enormous effort, but at the end the most movement you could get was moving to one unified calendar. People see schools as their identity and meeting places, so hard to have movement for elementary schools. More progress has been made at the high school level for regionalization and consolidation. Mel – important to remember that these conversations were focused. You had people from Rye talking to people in Berlin. Was an opportunity for communities to come together and to talk across the state – dynamics of these conversations were rich, and we basically have 14 pages of report and another 30 pages of comments. Need to look at this all from a commission standpoint as a fresh look at all kinds of ideas coming from across the state. Corinne – people don't want to kick the can down the road, fix the problem and not just reallocate current funds.

Next, Carrie Portrie and Sarah Boege presented some preliminary results from the educator survey sent out in July, which can be found here:

https://carsey.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2020/08/publicengagement_schoolfunding_employeesurvey_quest11prelim_08032020.pdf.

Carrie noted that this survey is not just rich in education employee input, but also from property owners in the state. She also noted that this data shows what the constituents and stakeholders across NH and in the education system are thinking about, and the fact that it is matching much of what the commission is doing is interesting. Michele noted that an interesting finding is that anything that causes large disruption in funding (special education often named in particular) is particularly challenging. She also noted how people experience the gap between need and ability is important to capture. Susan asked about and Carrie noted the participation of more urban education employees in the survey vs few in the focus groups. Bruce noted the connection between this work and the adequacy work group, with teacher quality and quantity being most mentioned as a key piece of adequacy and also labor costs being a major driver of costs when considering adequacy. He highlighted the need for accurate information around class size and teacher salary in addition to student-teacher ratio data that is collected by DOE currently.

Conversation then shifted to working to decide on questions to be placed on the Granite State Poll in September. Carrie noted that the goal is to figure out the most important items to ask, because very limited in total number of questions. Some discussion was had about demographic characteristics and needing to check back with the UNH survey center around what typical questions are asked around demographics. Questions were reviewed, with particular discussion on defining adequacy, rating schools, targeted state aid, how to phrase questions around equity and state support, how to frame tradeoffs, specificity in questions, avoiding wrapping ourselves around spending averages, attitudes about fairness and equity, and how to word questions most appropriately. Carrie will update a new set of questions based on the feedback from the group, then the engagement work group will review the smaller list of revised question one more time before sending to the full commission for review. Ultimately, the survey center will help to finalize the questions into a format that gets to the heart of the end goals of what we want to learn.

The work group then moved to discussion of the youth voice efforts that will take place in September and October. Carrie noted that Reaching Higher is working on materials for student engagement. Youth organizers have advised that, as well as the need for helping students need educational materials and time to prepare to comment. Need to think about who we want to reach out to in terms of engaging as many young people as possible. On a related note, Susan mentioned that the community college leaders agreed to send out a survey to students if one is created. Corinne noted that YMCA has a youth in government program and leadership training programs.

A brief engagement session will be held on Friday, to be scheduled.