

## July 15 Public Comment Period Notes

### Commission to Study School Funding

Attendees: Dave Luneau, John Beardmore, Barbara Tremblay, Val Zanchuk, Bill Ardinger, Corinne Cascadden, Jon Morgan, Dick Ames, Susan Huard, Rick Ladd (via phone), Jordan Hensley. 20 public attendees.

Becky Whitley: Mom of a rising first grader in Hopkinton. We have struggled for months to pass a school budget. About to go through a third round of drive-thru voting. Not a simple problem, so many factors at play. A large piece of the uncertainty is the state funding issue. We cannot ignore that taxes for school funding are high, but Hopkinton does not have a spending problem, New Hampshire has an education funding problem. This is not sustainable. As a mom and community member the importance of public schools cannot be understated. We need broad structural changes that are more equitable. I love my community and it is painful to make false choices between students and taxpayers. We need to take an honest look at the state's revenue problem and stop downshifting.

Ann Marie Banfield: You brought up tax exemptions. With regards to remote learning, is there a way to offer tax exemptions to parents who have to do remote learning that they have never had to before at home. Wondering if there is a way to offer some kind of tax relief to parents who in the fall may not utilize. How does the state recoup money that is not used in the fall? I am against increasing state funding because if you use state money, there is a belief that the state can interfere more on the local level. Local voices can get drowned out – have to follow state and federal mandates. Local parents wondering why their voices are not heard. Have been part of taxpayer organizations and have found money that would not impact students in the schools. I have seen lobbying and other expenditures in schools, so I am not of the belief that state funding should be increased.

Gavin Kearns, Somersworth: An increase in state funding helps eliminate inequities between high and low funded schools. Would be interested in having a progressive property tax where properties with a higher value are taxed similar to income tax at the federal level.

Moira Ryan: Want the commission to consider – if we fund schools more at the state level, is there more onerous regulation and expenses. How do we balance? I don't know if there is enough property to pay for a progressive property tax. Know that funding comes from state and federal levels, but there have been severe issues with equity where some students get an exceptional education and some students only get the bare minimum. Students with IEPs at this point in time make up about 20% of each class, but only 13% are proficient in math. This would have problems for our future workforce and taxpayers. Have we looked at other solutions beside the state doling out the money? Hear a lot of things but do not see any changes. Please look at things the state has not looked at before.

Jim O'Connell: No one town in NH is better or worse than any other. The nature of the problem in Manchester because of the number of students the problem becomes egregious. Manchester has one of the lowest expenditures in the state. Bringing the city to where it needs to be cannot

be solely on those living in Manchester. ELL students in the towns around Manchester have very few ELL students compared to Manchester. In the poorest schools we are spending eleven thousand and some dollars. Homelessness and homeless students – there are just under 14,000 students. In surrounding towns, the numbers are very low. There are 796 homeless students. These are bigger problems than lack of a Chromebook. There are schools in the district where there are washing machines for students to wash clothes. The nature of the problem there is different than other corners of the state. The nature of the inequity of how our schools are funded is extraordinary. The current funding mechanism is clearly inadequate – playing around the edges will not solve.

Liz Canada: As you know, reaching higher NH is a nonprofit based in Concord. I want to share 3 considerations from the governor's guidance – transportation, funding formula, and substitute teachers. The governor shared that recs around transportation needed to be practical, and distancing on buses not feasible in NH. The costs associated with transportation are part of state funding and there will be consequences. Substitute teachers are in shortage in NH and we are hearing about the lack of substitutes and inability to pay in a typical school year, made worse by the pandemic. This year will present higher costs for substitutes, which is not part of the state funding formula. Schools face many unanticipated expenses and the CARES act money is not enough. Schools will need to make challenging decisions quickly and parents may feel unsafe. There is a provision around parents using online learning through VLA but there are many questions around that.

Carolyn Mebert: Dover School Board, faculty at UNH. Have been doing some research on relationship between school funding and state test performance. There is a negative correlation between the amount of adequacy aid per pupil and performance on test in reading and math for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. As RHNH pointed out, the best predictor of student performance is poverty level and that is highly associated with adequacy aid received – those are highly correlated. There has got to be some way to unconfound those things. You would think that stabilization aid would improve performance but that has not been the case. The number of districts getting stabilization below the state average in language arts performance has increased – the money these districts are getting does not seem to be facilitating success. In Dover, our funding is just slightly above Manchester, despite doing better. Manchester received \$4k+ per student and Dover somewhat more than half that. Those getting stabilization are doing on average more poorly so if this money is supposed to be directed toward enhancing student performance it does not seem to be doing the job.

Andrea Folsom: School board member at Hopkinton school board. Wanted to share with commission today. Reminded that our great schools are built on the backs of taxpayers who pay the bill. NH is 50/50 in terms of school funding and we should be proud of ourselves. We have unfunded mandates. As a school board member, listen to community members and will not stop listening to constituents if there is more state aid. In Hopkinton facing two conflicting statements – cannot cut the budget and cannot raise taxes. Applaud the state level look into the crisis we have. Feels unreachable at the state level and glad that there are more places here where people can make a difference.

Diane Lachance: Hopkinton NH. I will be sending a detailed letter of concerns to the commission. Have been involved in education, homeschooled her son. Have great concerns about education and have spent a lot of time with the Hopkinton school board. Differ from others – agree that taxpayers there support education greatly. One concern is that we don't understand the cost of our programs, don't have a budget that delineates what we offer and what it costs to provide those programs. Have asked for a budget more similar to Hudson, NH. Commission should look at how each school districts craft budgets, how well do they spend money, and how well do they achieve their goals. Would tell us a lot. If the state is going to do more funding (which may not be a good idea, not sure), need to know more directly what goes into budgets. Want to understand better about how and what is being spent. More transparency in budgets. Very concerned about transient nature of special needs families with how the funding has been. Would like to see if standard model of education is the correct model, maybe more funding could be spent on students with special needs and other students could do more independent learning. Will follow up in writing.

Fred Bramante: First thing that is the most important is that until we fix the state property tax so that we ensure that everyone is paying their fair share in a constitutional manner we should not be imposing taxes on anyone else. Current property tax system forces everyone else's property taxes up – shifts burden from the so called “donor towns” to everyone else. When you come up with a new system have to make it so that money is sent to Concord just like every other tax. Then if that does not solve the problem you can look at something else, but fix that first. I think that homestead exemptions or an income circuit breaker are possibilities for the commission to consider. If you look at something like an income tax it would be the most divisive conversation we could have, not necessary. Post-COVID the education world is changing. About to embark in the biggest change in education in the nation's history. Prior to COVID have been dabbling in online learning but has been a tiny part of education. Have been forced to have the online conversation as a primary component of how we educate our kids. Please do not look at that as a diminished way of learning. Fortunate to have the virtual learning charter school as one of the best schools in the US at half the cost per pupil. Not suggesting that we can do this for less because many needs in many places but have to look at the possibility. VLACS does a great job. Going to have to rethink how we look at our education system. Will take some time beyond commission's work. Not going to go back to 95% in person. Interested in what methodology is being used at costing out minimum standards. Would be happy to talk about how team did it when we won Josiah Bartlett prize. Similar to how the legislature did the same thing. The next thing is that when I have a concern about cities and larger districts, money follows the child to the school. In Manchester because of how teacher contracts are drawn up, seniority means that when there are openings in less needy schools senior teachers in needier schools move, which raises costs in less needy schools. Should be looking at costs for ELL and special education so that funding stays in those districts. Last thing is that I have a new plan. Other folks have plans as well probably and have spreadsheets, etc. Would like to know when they can provide those plans to the commission.