

August 12 Public Comment Period Notes
Commission to Study School Funding

Attendees: Dave Luneau, Bill Ardinger, Susan Huard, Mary Heath, Val Zanchuck, Dick Ames, Corinne Cascadden, Jenn Foor, UNH Carsey School: Jordan Hensley, Bruce Mallory, Carrie Portrie, Attendees: 23 public

Notes:*

Welcome: Commission Chair Dave Luneau welcomed Commission members and public attendees to the public commenting session. Dave took roll call, and reminded public members preparing to comment that this would not be a session in which the Commission answers any questions. They are welcome to provide further question and comment via the commenting link at <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding> (see bottom of the page). Or via email at SchoolFunding.Commission@unh.edu. After taking roll call, he asked Jordan Hensley of the Carsey School to call on public members to provide their comments to the Commission members, Carsey staff, and public attendees present.

Barry Brensinger (Manchester Proud): Barry provided a brief overview of Manchester Proud. It is “Manchester’s community wide movement to build lasting understanding, engagement and support for our public schools. Our work is authentically community driven since 2017 we’ve held more than 400 meetings, interviews, listening sessions, and planning forums throughout the city and more than 10,000 of our residents have participated in our process in one form or another.” In February 2020, Manchester Proud presented a plan for the future of Manchester schools to the school board to a standing ovation in a packed Memorial High School auditorium. Visit www.manchesterproud.org to learn more. Barry noted the group has been, “acutely aware of New Hampshire history of insufficient, inadequate, inequitable school funding,” and noted that “As our work has progressed and there had been an investment of thousands and thousands of volunteer hours in this initiative, it’s become increasingly clear to us that in spite of best intentions driven by hopes and dreams caring about every single child in our community, our plan will never achieve reliable sources of adequate funding. Manchester is our state’s most urban community.” Barry asserted the impacts students in Manchester face as a result of remote learning and issues that many listening in and the Commission are well aware of. He also said that, “We as a community [have] come together with the resolve to provide the supports and learning opportunities our kids need, but we can’t succeed without [the] state fulfilling its obligation to deliver needed funding. We ask you as a Commission to be bold and brave. I know you will be.” Barry expressed confidence that the Commission will find an, “enduring resolution to this vital issue facing all of New Hampshire’s communities.” Barry ended with two final points, making an appeal, “It is crystal clear to us in Manchester, Manchester Proud, that our public schools are an essential community asset that impacts the lives of everyone in our community. They are vital to our future, and in fact our fate is directly linked to the greatness to their success, and I’d ask you to consider one fundamental truth that I think often gets lost...among other distractions in conversations as it relates to our public schools. If you stop and think about it more than any other institution or organization, it is our public schools that embody who we are as a people. Think about that for a moment, who we are as a people, with all

of our strengths or weaknesses our commonality's and our differences.” Barry continued, “Because our public schools embody us, that they are the obvious and most opportune place to invest in and improve ourselves, so as we contemplate all of the challenges in our world our public schools lie at the root of the solution to so many of them, and yet somehow year after year we fail to support them adequately. Our schools are the place to build a future with opportunities for everyone in New Hampshire to be their best selves. Thank you again for all that you do and Manchester Proud is eager and ready to be supportive of a good resolution to this difficult challenge.”

Dave ask the Commission members who were present at the meeting if they had any questions.

Mary Heath asked Barry to talk a little more about the specific inequities Manchester Proud has seen during their efforts.

Barry explained that there are a substantial number of kids in the district that do not have access to technology. Barry heard ¼ without reliable, 10% without any. Barry also talked about the systemic inequities built into the system that affect the kids with the most challenges and the greatest needs for support. Manchester Proud launched a citywide school-community partnership network and plans to develop a model that includes a network where for businesses and organizations to create partnerships with schools. They are also working on a forum to address the digital inequities. Barry ended with the need for non-episodic change and the need to prioritize public schools through rational funding and a smart investment in the future of NH kids and communities.

Dave asked Barry if he had any thoughts about adequacy and funding.

Barry referred to his colleague Liz Kirwin who provided a presentation later in the session, and Dave noted that the Commission is entering into a deliberation phase and is receiving more data back from its research consultants. The Commission would be interested in hearing people’s thoughts in the upcoming meetings.

John M. Lewis: John has a history of public service in the Oyster River school board (serving with Iris Estabrook) and was previously the chairman of the State Board of Education, as well as a superior court judge. John was on the task force to regarding the definition of adequacy and costing under Governor Shaheen. John referenced a law review he wrote on Claremont I and II. He was pleased with the Commission’s work so far and asserted that the core issue with funding is based on socioeconomic class (i.e., the divide between a fairly affluent group of people and very vulnerable people that is reflected in school performance). John talked about how, “it's all getting a little complicated now by the fact that increasingly in some areas like Manchester and Nashua, you're finding an increase of minority representation, a great number of single-family households. So, when you're using that free and reduced lunch as a factor, that's a very good factor. It really is a strong indicator of need.” John referenced his 2016 article in the UNH Law Review noting comparisons with Massachusetts. He also noted the struggles other states face (e.g., New York, New Jersey, Kansas). John noted that, “\$3,500 is just totally out of bounds with what the reality is, in terms of...what is needed to fund adequately a child's education in New Hampshire.” He felt the NH Supreme Court will be very interested in the Commission’s

findings. He also felt that the presentation during the Commission meeting on August 10th provided a much more realistic estimate of costs. He offered one caution, “whatever formula you come up with...needs to be very closely reviewed and analyzed [and be] criticized before you really throw it out to the public because there's going to be a lot of demagoguery about all of this, a lot of emphasis of anything that is unclear, so challenge the experts to explain themselves in the clearest possible way.” He noted that the new formula will challenge the most wealthy to consider the most vulnerable; tax models all have flaws, and education for all children resonates beyond education itself – consider law enforcement and health. He concluded that in his opinion, he thought the supreme court would be interested in working with the Commission constructively.

Dave opened it up to questions and noted that the number of public commenting sessions will increase in frequency in the next couple months, and he opened it up for questions. He also encouraged public commenters to be aware of the length of their comments so there is time for everyone interested in participating.

Jill Hammond (Peterborough, Hollis) – Jill provided a written copy of her comments to Rep. Dick Ames prior to the meeting and will send them on to the Commission. It includes a graph for review. Jill started, “In 2006 the town of Hollis released a report ‘The Cost of Growth,’ which was an examination of the effect of recent population growth on Hollis’ property taxes and costs to the town, while I was serving as a state representative for Peterborough between 2007 and 2010.” Jill noted that the committee surveyed residents of the town about the portion of their household income that goes to property taxes (page 7 - https://www.hollisnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3271/f/uploads/the_cost_of_growth_-_october_2006.pdf). She summarized the results, “the largest group, 465 households, paid between 5 and 10% of household income property tax. The median was at about 8% below that bracket. 185 households paid between 1 and 4.9% above. 270 households paid between 10 and 15%. In total though, 490 households paid more than 10% of income and property taxes, but the extremes are the most telling. 25 households paid less than 1%, and 28 paid in excess of 35% of their household income and property taxes. Other key findings in the survey were that the longer residents had lived in their homes and the older they were, the higher their portion of income went to paying property tax. I built a graph showing the statistics as a bar chart it’ll be page two of the PDF I’ll send you.” Jill asserted that there were Hollis, “who were grossly overtaxed” residents who were overtaxed,” and “you can sign to have a big government or small government but if the taxing structure that supports that government is unfair...taxing some citizens [at an] excessive rate, then you have bad government.” Jill noted that since the 2006 report was written taxes have rising about 3/5 to nearly 2/3 due to cutting at the state level and downshifting a cost to towns and schools districts, along with an over reliance on local property tax does not seem fair, especially for something as crucial as education. Jill made one final comment that if the Commission targets anything, “don’t target need, but what is needed for education for any given student...across the whole state.” Jill wanted the Commission to find what is needed to educate children. Look at people who are overtaxed, and stated in conclusion, “some people might say then an adequate diet is bread and water, but certainly that it's not nourishing, and I think we

should change our definition of what we will fund -- education for mere adequacy to good nourishing, nurturing education.”

Dave thanked Jill for her testimony, and noted that Dick Ames has a copy of her PDF. The PDF will be sent out to the Commission. Jill recommended the Commission to talk to Rep. Squires about the study.

Michael Herrington (Charlestown) – Michael thanked the Commission for providing time to speak. He is the current vice chair and former school board chair for Fall Mountain. He is also a former NH educator and current Vermont school administrator. He has a master’s degree in special education and doctorate in educational leadership. He stated, “I am of the mind that there is a severe inequity in New Hampshire that needs to be addressed.” He acknowledged the Commission has facts, numbers, and have talked to people, and went on to assert, “what I really want to talk to you about is the strain that the current funding method puts on local government. This last year my town of residence, Charlestown, tried to leave Fall Mountain, which would have decimated education in five towns. It would have hurt Charlestown drastically. There has been a breakdown in communication between the school board and the towns, and as far as I can look back and figure it, it goes back decades.” Michael referenced the wealth differences between Walpole and Charlestown, both in the Fall Mountain district. He said Charlestown sits on route 91, which is a corridor for homelessness and area where people search for cheaper housing. He noted, “Charlestown has an abundance of [housing], the problem is the tax rate.” This year it is about \$40 for every \$1,000. Michael told the story about Charlestown leaving the district, some people being really for and others being really against it, the economic hardships in the community has caused distrust, anger, and disconnect between the want to leave the district and the true costs to Charlestown if that became the case. Overall, people want to save money and discussion over the years has created bad blood. The Fall Mountain funding formula is complicated, and Michael noted that it is the most complicated in the state. He applauded the work of the Commission and just wanted something to change. He concluded with, “Education is the social ladder that moves you up. I grew up incredibly poor and without a solid education I would not be where I am today.

Dave thanked Michael for presenting and for his service to communities in New Hampshire and Vermont. Dave acknowledged and appreciated the challenges and expressed that he hopes Michael will stay in touch with the Commission’s progress.

Kris Raymond (Allenstown) – Kris is the school board chair of Allenstown and began by thanking the Commission for their work in light of the COVID-19 challenges and looks forward to future meetings. Kris reminded the Commission members and public listening that Allenstown has one of the top 20 highest tax rates in New Hampshire. Kris asserted, “I believe adequate funding needs to consider adequate infrastructure too. So, in Allenstown we've got two school buildings that are over 60 years old they have been woefully under maintained or renovated or having any sort of...updates because our residents have no appetite for paying increased taxes for schools, so we do the budget on the curriculum only. Therefore, we have not been able to budget for any building updates nor do we have any surplus to add to our trust funds to fix the building in the very near future.” They are only able to add an average of \$20,000 per year to

their trust funds set up for building repair and renovation. She noted that it is a rate that will not provide the opportunity to fix the buildings that are in need of intense repair. They have applied for a funding from the DOE for a K-8 renovation at the elementary school, which currently holds K-4. The DOE application would allow them to have one building which would be more efficient but the cost estimates are \$10,000,000. They qualify for 60% state building funding. They are putting the renovation on the March 2021 ballot for a town vote. Kris concluded by saying, “I’m hopeful [for] positive changes to education funding. I can make a plea to the Allenstown residents, so that we can afford this \$10,000,000 portion of our school renovation in the very near future.” Kris thanked the group for their time.

Dave thanked Kris for her leadership on the Allenstown board and her comments. He encouraged her to stay in touch regarding the building aid component of funding in her community. Dave also noted that on July 16th Amy Clark Reference to the July 16th meeting, provides notes and presentation and a recording from Amy Clark presented on funding school facilities (see <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding/school-funding-study/resources/meeting-documents-video>).

Denis Goddard – Denis began his time with a question for the Commission. He said, “I want to ask a pretty naive question and again I apologize for its naivete. I understand that the vast super majority of folks both on this call and in our state do believe very sincerely that education is best funded or best managed through a monopoly run by the state, and that's fine, but I'm kind of asking as a member of a minority group basically the group of people who feel that in general funding for things is best done on a voluntary basis by willing participants and without coercion or threat because those situations do allow for market forces, rapid changes to extenuating circumstances, changes to technology that are much more difficult to do in a monopoly situation. I'd like to ask, what are your recommendations for people who are in a minority like mine who don't feel that a single organization running education for the vast majority of children is in fact a good organization for our society?” Denis thanked the members for listening and asked them to address the question.

Dave acknowledged Denis’ question and reminded the group that this session was for comment only. Denis was welcome to email his question to the Commission via the commenting form or email.

Liz Kirwan (Manchester) – Liz lives in Manchester, is an English Language Learner teacher at Manchester High School West, a parent in the district, and chair of the Manchester Proud Champion Council. Liz began by saying, “I think it's important to define what equal versus equity looks like when we're talking about this current funding status, and we know that right now the current funding status from the state to individual districts is allocating the same amount of money per pupil across the state, and this is an equality action this is an equal action.” Liz continued by asserting that to make it equitable allocations are adjusted depending on the need of the population of a district. She took a moment to appreciate the work the Commission faces and for the time the group will take to work collaborative to find an appropriate solution to fund New Hampshire schools. Liz continued, “We also know that Manchester is the third lowest funded school district in the state just ahead of Landaff and Auburn but what makes Manchester unique

is that we have close to 14,000 students and that Manchester is the largest district in the state. This means that Manchester has more students in their public schools than the entire population of 213 other towns in New Hampshire and that's out of only 234. So, in the context of our state 14,000 students makes up a significant total in the overall state system, but we can look at this even further in a different way. According to the New Hampshire DOE, the 2016 school year fifth grade classroom average in Manchester was 25 students per class while statewide the average was 20. If we consider the current average of district funding right now that's more than close to \$16,000. Manchester is at an approximate \$4000 deficit per student in those classes this from the state average this means that each classroom has a deficit of \$100,000 compared to other districts, and we know that this affects not just our students.” Liz also shared the costs for maintaining infrastructure, attracting and maintaining highly qualified educators. Manchester experiences annual equity issues. Liz hopes the, “Commission will take into account the size and needs, municipal tax wealth, and already existing funding deficits when considering the best solution to equitable funding for all of our districts.” She noted that Manchester is unique in its community response and that Manchester Proud has been established as a community response to, “the need to enhance and reinvest in our public schools.” They have held sessions with more than 10,000 community members surrounding annual deficits in school funding. Liz concluded, “Manchester Proud is invested in fostering and advocating for equity within our schools across our city and even here at the state level for our students. With adequate funding our schools will thrive, and Manchester students will all have the same opportunities as other more tax wealthy districts.” She further stated, “Our schools are our students and our students are our future. How can we deny them the success that they deserved? Through Manchester Proud and the Manchester school district we are now implementing opportunities for success, but now we need the adequate and equitable funding from the state. We're invested, and we hope the state will invest in Manchester too.” Liz thanked the Commission for considering the comments presented.

Dave asked Liz about the numbers she provided in her presentation (i.e., \$55,000,000 deficit) and wondered about the calculations. Liz explained her calculations. Dave thanked Liz for explaining and acknowledged the challenges expressed. He also noted that the Commission has been learning that every city and town in New Hampshire is facing unique challenges. He thanked Liz for the comments and encouraged attendance at public meetings.

Carolyn Mebert (Dover) – Carolyn noted that she has spoken to the Commission before and provided material via email. Carolyn agreed with Liz Kirwan’s comments, and she added that, “Dover is 4th from the bottom in per pupil expenditure or cost per pupil.” Carolyn also noted that she has, “figured out that deficit that Dover is experiencing relative to the average and our teachers and some of the members of our community have come out to City Council.” She asserted the members wanted to just be average. Carolyn digressed that it was, “kind of a sad thing for people to be saying, we would like to be from Lake Wobegon. I believe above average.” Carolyn listened to the August 10th Commission meeting and had a couple highlights to share from AIR’s presentation. Carolyn noted that, “AIR was saying that students who are doing more poorly are from districts that are spending less money, but in fact in the state students who are doing more poorly are from districts that are getting more adequacy aid, more state aid. They're just getting less overall because the cities where the municipalities are the districts when

they're combined or paying less out of their tax dollars toward education. One of the things that I think is really important to keep in mind is that the average, again, in the state is that 64% of tax dollars, property tax dollars are going to education and that's the combination of SWEPT and local, 64% dollars of 53%. Manchester is at like 40 something percent.” Carolyn acknowledged she could not remember the exact figure, and concluded by saying that, “there's quite a bit of variability in the amount of money that is coming from tax dollars or the percent of tax dollars that are going to education, and I think that's really really important to keep in mind when you're thinking about costing an adequate education.”

Closing: Dave thanked Carolyn for her comments and input. Dave hoped she would continue to be engaged with the Commission moving forward and opened it up for questions from the Commission members present. With no questions, Dave thanked everyone for attending and the thoughtful input provided. The notes will be circulated among the Commission along with the prepared remarks that were submitted via email. www.carsey.unh.edu/school-funding; schoolfunding.commission@unh.edu. The meeting concluded at 5:07pm.

* Microsoft Dictation in Word was used to capture quotations from the public presenters and Commission members who spoke, a full video of the meeting is available under August 12 meeting documents and recordings at www.carsey.unh.edu/school-funding.