

**COMMISSION TO STUDY SCHOOL FUNDING
ENGAGEMENT WORKGROUP
MINUTES 9/14/2020**

Members

Chair: Rep. Mel Myler, Members: Corinne Cascadden, David Ryan, Dave Luneau, Mary Heath, Jay Kahn, Susan Huard, Reaching Higher NH: Liz Canada, UNH Carsey School New Hampshire
Listens: Carrie Portrie, Bruce Mallory, and Ellie Masson. Public Attendees = 9.

Call to Order

Mel Myler called the meeting to order. Took roll call. Each individual introduced themselves and location.

Review and discuss Reaching Higher survey findings and Carsey final report on school district employee survey. Mel mentioned at the last meeting that we are about to enter into a very important phase with this work group. We need to make sure these next two months that the voices of the public are heard by the commission. This group is going to provide the voices of people who aren't normally engaged in this type of process because it is very important for the commission members to hear the community.

Mel opens it up to Liz Canada to present the Reaching Higher report. Liz is the Interim Director at Reaching Higher. They have a new Executive Director, Karen Scolforo. Liz asks to save questions until the end. Liz also mentions there are two remote learners in her house who might interrupt the meeting. Liz share's her screen to present Reaching Higher NH School Funding Analysis PowerPoint.

- Reaching Higher is a nonpartisan public policy community engagement resource for NH families. Their number one priority is school funding and informing the public.
- Reaching Higher released a survey in the winter on public perception on how schools are funding and school performance. Reminder that these are pre-COVID findings. It is a really good snapshot on how folks view school funding. They posted the survey on website, newsletters, leaders in the field, social media. Survey was open for 28 days. It contained 28 questions for New Hampshire residents and 26 questions for out of state residents.
- For the presentation, we will focus in on 744 respondents and the school funding questions that seemed most pertinent to our conversations here. Demographics of the respondents were majority Concord, Manchester, Dover residents, and had lived in New Hampshire for over 10 years; age distribution: 18-65+, large representation of individuals over the age of 35; educational attainment: 88% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Liz has heard this conversation in the work group about the education demographics of the surveys - something to make note of. 62% of respondents are directly connected to public schools; 27% educators. Liz notes this is not a truly random sample, so brings us to questions and analysis for further research.
- Liz displays survey results: 67% of respondents disagreed that their school received the right amount of funding. Question on whether overall funding for public schools should increase, decrease, stay same: majority of respondents said overall increase, federal increase, state increase, local decrease. State was the largest desire to increase funding in public schools. 44% of respondents desire federal and state increase and local funding

decrease. 13% of respondents want all three sources to increase. 6% of respondents want all three sources to decrease.

- Question asking to guess what percentages of funding come from federal, state, and local government. Perceived proportion of federal funding: respondents tended to overestimate. Perceived proportion of state funding: if we are considering SWEPT as a state source, it is higher. When SWEPT is included as a local source, respondents more accurately estimated the proportion of state funding. Perceived proportion of local funding: more variability in responses compared to federal or state sources.
- Question asking respondents attitudes towards funding sources: respondents tended to overestimate the share of funding provided by the federal government regardless of what they wanted to happen to it. The group of respondents who would like to see local funding decrease, produced a median that was in between the average proportion of funding when SWEPT is and isn't included.
- Question asking how much the local public school district spent each year for a child: most frequent response was \$15,000. Two-thirds responded they thought their schools spent between 10,000 and 20,000. Each respondent was matched with the actual per-student spending in their district. Respondents typically underestimated the amount spent by about 14%, no matter how the cost was computed.
- Question asking if respondents believe tax dollars invested in schools are used effectively: 50% agreed or strongly agreed.
- Outcomes questions: preparation for higher education/work/informed citizens after public high school – 50% agree that graduates from their school district are prepared for colleges; 56% prepared for the workforce; 36% prepared to be informed citizens.

Liz opens it up to questions:

- Susan Huard asks Liz to make general comments on how things broke up by age groups. Liz is going to get that info. Susan is curious if she makes an assumption on the 50+ age group is answering differently if they don't have children currently in the school district. Liz says the responses here were for everybody but is going to try to bifurcate the responses.
- Dave Luneau asks Liz how the survey might read on things like the estate property tax in the context of sources of funding. Liz provides anecdote of asking folks if they had a property bill on hand. Liz asks how many people pick that apart as separate entities anyway? Sometimes it seems clear there are very distinct items, but sometimes it is hard to determine which is a state tax or local tax/articulate the difference between those items anyway. Liz doesn't know that people are comfortable making that distinction.
- Jay Kahn wrote down that the perception he had previously was that someone else should pay for the students in my town, my state, instead of their own property tax paying for it. Jay says the results from the survey didn't really show that conclusion. Jay asks Liz if it was surprising that people came close to the proportions of contribution that it really is. Liz wasn't really surprised because the folks who would take the survey or the audience of Reaching Higher are generally informed about these issues, more comfortable speaking to these questions. Liz is curious about people who might say they want something to increase, but what they estimated it to be was actually lower than it really is. Would be curious to follow up on a lot of this data after giving folks the real numbers and then asking their thoughts and opinions again. Jay says the underestimation per town was

interesting, maybe we don't want people to know that information. Dave Luneau clarifies that: they underestimated how much was spent per student.

- Mary Heath asks Liz if Reaching Higher was able to ascertain differences by community at all. Liz says we had respondents from so many municipalities so it would be hard to draw conclusions from such small samples. Mary said it seemed that people who answered the survey were pretty well-educated, do you think this swayed the data? Liz says yes, it is something we are mindful of and asking how we get this survey into the hands of folks who represent NH in a more holistic way and are more representative.
- Bruce Mallory is curious about the quarter of respondents who are educators. Bruce asks, did you separate those responses from the other respondents and find out if they were more or less accurate in their estimations than the rest of the population? Liz would like to follow up on this. Bruce says Commission is about to survey a random sample on a range of school funding attitudes questions, it will be interesting to compare the two sets of data and how they inform each other.
- Mel says we will be sure to revisit this, especially in light of Bruce's comment.

Mel gives it over to Carrie Portrie to talk about the survey from July: School and District Employee Survey Summary Part II: Open Ended Responses 11-15

- These are the findings from the open-ended responses from the survey. Carrie wants to remind everybody that these are qualitative responses, and this is a qualitative analysis of the findings.
- 1768 employees completed the survey across 137 districts. Illustrates patterns in respondents' opinions. Majority of respondents are educators, special educators, school administration or leadership, support staff. Shows there are representatives from many points in the school system.
- Sarah and Carrie used a coding method to analyze the responses: started coding them independently (responses could hold more than one code). Then compared the codes and generated a list for each code, keeping in mind other codes may emerge. Analyzed using State to better see the patterns.
- EVPP = property valuation per pupil. Measure of wealth in a community = total value of wealth in a community / number of students in a district. This is public data and Carrie will put the link in the chat.
- Carrie presents a table to classify the school districts into low, medium, and high EVPP.
- Q11 on Survey: What are the most important factors in providing an adequate education to students in NH?
 - o 1393 respondents to the question, 23 codes.
 - o Top 10 codes: teacher/staff quality, training, sufficient staffing; class size; technology; sufficient financial resources; curriculum (broadly); teacher and staff salaries; equity; special education; student performance / outcomes; buildings and facilities.
 - Talked about challenges in small towns, sources of funding, shortages of resources.
 - o There are similarities among respondents across EVPPs in concerns in certain areas that have to do with school funding.

- Not all respondents live and work in the same community – different EVPPs. We still see very similar topics that folks are concerned about.
- Some quote topics:
 - Class to student ratios are very important, but also teacher quality.
 - Teacher retention is difficult due to low salaries. We need more special educators, way overloaded. Technology needs to be improved for teachers and students.
- Respondents who live and work in the same district, vs. those who don't still had pretty much the same ranked concerns.
- Q12 on Survey: what are most important components for the base formula of adequacy?
 - Similarity across the questions
 - Respondents are really concerned on making sure the curriculum works for students across the state and they have access to it; teacher/staff quality and training; students learning measurable goals – looking at the whole child vs. standardized testing; sufficient supports for all students.
 - Some of the least mentioned: duration of school; challenges in small towns and rural; transportation; leadership.
 - Similar pattern to what people are most focused on in terms of school funding and in terms of adequate education.
 - Equity: for all students, but also concerns for racial and socioeconomic inequities.
 - General comments about feeling like the current funding formula doesn't address all students equitably across the state.
 - Quote topics: safe facilities: safe structure, clean water, bathrooms. Appropriate special ed testing and programs. Teacher certification. Smaller class sizes.
 - School budget decisions are made on the true needs of the student population, not the burden on the community. Meet social and emotional needs of students.
 - Teachers teaching more than one subject than they are actually certified in. Setting up students to fail when they leave public schools because of lack of access to technology. Different structures for school districts in NH in general. Different means for funding education.
 - Across the districts, there was a concern that students have access to basic things in education (technology, small class sizes)
- Q13: barriers to equal opportunity to education
 - [Carrie mentions all these codes will be available in the report they're writing, and all of the data will be available for review]
 - Top 10: equity and dist. Of resources; insufficient financial resources; current school funding formula; reliance on property taxes, teacher/staff quality training, bureaucratic barriers and leadership
 - Equity: race and racism; socioeconomics; comparing communities who have concentrated needs in terms of special ed, ELL, general disparities across districts and towns; different between rural and urban communities; geography; income differences in general
 - Quote topics: Town by town funding system is the biggest barrier. General feelings of unfairness that higher EVPP towns get more resources for their

- students. It's not fair that property taxes go up in poorer towns. Money per student being different according to the county they live in.
- Carrie encourages everyone to read through these quotes to get a sense of the concerns of the different communities more thoroughly.
- Q14: what is working and what are the problems with the ways we are raising money?
 - Employees saw problems with the way funds are distributed in general.
 - Carrie notes the themes in these findings match the other responses.
 - Respondents wanted choice in terms of charter schools or other districts.
 - Limited tax base can limit funding.
 - Dependence on property taxes creates inequity.
 - Many people noted there is a noticeable increase in mental and behavioral challenges among students that require extra staff and specialists who can provide support.
 - How do we bring the learning and understanding about school funding into the community so we can make more informed decisions.
 - Many needs to balance when distributing these funds.
- Q15: additional comments:
 - Transportation concerns – shouldn't every student have transportation, not at a higher cost
 - Why do we lock students into a school system based on address – advocates for school choice
 - Teacher retention in low-income schools
 - Concerns about the aging population in the state
- This is really just a glimpse of the findings in the survey. We are moving forward with focus groups, so what do we want to keep in mind?

Mel opens it up to questions for Carrie:

- Dave Luneau: great information and great analysis of the data. Wondering if we could go back to the slide talking about Q14 – it seemed that maybe the question might have provided a little bit of response resolution to the local vs state property tax question. Specifically: the dependence on property taxes in poor towns creates inequity. Bringing it back to the question he asked Liz earlier: perception of differences in state property tax vs local property tax.
 - Carrie would have to look closer at the excel sheet for this. There are a number of references to state-based taxes for this. Look into more what people are talking about in this question. This is how people are thinking about school funding in an anecdotal way – going to do some sorting on that.
 - Dave hears what Liz is saying – for a lot of people, the understanding of the distinction of state vs local property tax is difficult. Just trying to see the public perception.
 - Mel notes that the respondents in the survey are individuals that work in the system, so there is some knowledge base of the impact of the funding and the work that they do. They are working daily with the issues of the commission's work.

- Jay Kahn has some concerns. 1. Price of local control. We pay a price for local control. We don't recognize it so much but 170K students is the size of a county in NY state. Don't know what to do with that thought. Another observation: When we say adequate education, it's important that we have opportunity for adequate education. Change the goal from input driven to something that lifts the tide for all boats; opportunity for all students, not adequacy. 3. How will our responses in October in public interest meetings differ from all of our other experience? Is that going to rise to number one (school choice) because of where people are at in October. Such a particular point in time, we can't predict where we will be in 2 years. Carrie and Mel, what kind of apprehensions do you have for trying to gage where people are at because of a particular circumstance? Uncertain and transformative period.
 - o Mel: As we come out of the pandemic, how we have viewed education is going to change. We are engaging students in different kinds of ways than ever before. Some districts adapted quickly; others didn't happen that way. We also found out that this survey talked about how the pandemic has shown inequities in access to internet, technology. A year from now, this very well could be different.
 - o Corinne: Now that we're starting to set precedent with learning methods, how would funding look for the three types of programs (remote, in person, hybrid). Have to be ready to consider funding sources for that. Not everyone will want to come back to school in the traditional medium. What will that look like and what will it cost? Remote learning vs. onsite full time. Is there a difference?
 - David Ryan thinks about this from a political frame. Look at the ripple effect to how parents are approaching what we're in right now and what we're able to provide for education. If we can't get past the notion that learning only happens in 4 walls, we have proven that school as we know it is about childcare. Seeing that students at home of all ages are still exploring and learning, even in their homes. In a lot of cases, some students are learning at a much higher level – depends on a lot of factors.
 - Corinne: the environment is key. If students don't have that; inequities.
 - David: this is bigger than money. What is the future of education?
 - Mel: kids have a much higher level of gathering information in the world than just what they're getting in school. Ex. Kids having the internet and phones. What they don't know is what to do with this information. Kids come to school with a much higher level of *their own way* of gathering intelligence. Also, thinking about homeschoolers – have been doing this for a long time. There will have to be some kind of coming together on exactly what we learn from this whole thing, it does relate to where the money flows to help kids learn.
- Carrie mentions there were codes about family and support in the home environment that they tracked in the survey, in terms of families' basic needs. Looking at peoples perspectives in general. Frequency of the code technology was clear, especially in rural and poorer districts. Another concern was that idea of the whole student: basic needs, mental health, behavioral support, food(!), parents ability to engage with their students at home – especially if these models continue to exist.
 - o Bruce responds to Mel's past comments about what we're learning about the pandemic and schooling. We don't know yet what we're learning right now. We

need to be careful about how we are saying this is changing public schools. Second, both of these surveys focused on inputs. Commission is focusing on what it costs to create a comparable opportunity for all students, which is an outcome. Transportation is a variable that clearly will be affected by the type of learning model we use. What will the need be in that specific community? Building and facilities will be a challenge in terms of the pandemic, we don't know – will cost more though to keep facilities clean and safe. Teacher quality is highly important, the future depends on their ability to manage this complex process. Taking into the account the data we're learning nationally and in NH, poor, ELL, and special education populations are the most disparately affected by COVID in school. These students are all disadvantaged by remote learning. These are the equity factors in all of this. It is possible to parse out the factors that we can and can't predict how they will be affected by COVID. We can still respond to contemporary conditions, but also anticipate what the future of education looks like.

- Jay Kahn: I appreciate the discussion. Also thinking about next challenges. Appreciate the questions and comments people provided. Back to an earlier conversation: how often to committees need to meet? We need to turn things around quick.

Mel asks Carrie for plan for the next few weeks. Carrie: we have a series of engagement activities that are coming up soon. Working with the Carsey communication person to send out invites to different focus groups this week. Youth Voice: high school students. Taxpayer associations. Residents older than 65. Municipal and school leaders that we talked to in June. We are also promoting the public commenting sessions and youth voice sessions with NH Listens and Reaching Higher to design a guide and provide materials to help frame the conversation for students.

Carrie also wants to build on Bruce's comment: the survey findings and questions we asked were really based on inputs. Want to help people hold a conversation that will inform this group.

Mel: there is a video being developed to provide a characterization of the issues surrounding school funding. Going to be a fairly basic video showing inequities in towns in NH. Suggesting this isn't just directed towards students, it will be a good video for anyone to learn about school funding. Once the video is done, we'll share it with the work group here.

- Bruce: that video may be useful for the legislative briefing.
- Carrie: that is the work of Reaching Higher – they made this accessible piece of information for communities.

Carrie is going to follow up on providing the survey findings. Mel would like to add the briefing of the finance committee in the engagement workgroup tasks.

Dave Luneau confirms Wednesday is a House Session Day 10am at the Whittemore Center – this is veto day. We also have scheduled an extended public comment for 4pm, making sure we will be back in time or have a backup to open this meeting in case Dave and Mel aren't back. Carrie clarifies this is a student youth voice session, she can open it up. Dave asks Mel about the

school funding project would like to present their petition, when should they do that? Dave will figure out a good public comment period for them to do it: full commission meeting will be best.