

Commission to Study School Funding (RSA 193-E:2-e)

Meeting Minutes

October 26, 2020, 2-4 pm

Website: <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding>
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/statstudcomm/committees/1506/>

Commission Attendance: Dave Luneau, Rick Ladd, Dick Ames, Iris Estabrook, Susan Huard, Bill Ardinger, Jane Bergeron-Beaulieu, Barbara Tremblay, Jay Kahn, Mel Myler, Val Zanchuk, Jon Morgan, Corinne Cascadden, Mary Heath, Chris Dwyer, Dave Ryan, John Beardmore. Also Present: Bruce Mallory, Jordan Hensley, Carrie Portrie, Zachary Azem, Sean McKinley, Jenn Foor. 20 attendees from the public listening.

Welcome/Call to order/Tech check/Chair's comments:

Just after 2pm Dave welcomed attendees, noted a more frequent schedule in the upcoming weeks, and called roll. Dave noted the upcoming schedule for the Commission and how through the election in particular many members will be busy. Bruce reminded Commission members to be mindful of the group agreements. Minutes from 10/26 were approved by a unanimous vote of Commission members.

Engagement Updates – Granite State Poll and Outreach Materials

Mel introduced Sean and Zach from the UNH Survey Center, and asked them to speak about the Granite State Poll and how the panel works. They gave an overview of their panel and how the survey is designed. Sean noted that the survey is taken online, but recruitment is done in a way that mirrors how they worked when they were doing live caller interviews.

Dick – I understand that you use your approach to get a broadly representative group. For a survey like this where parents are important, or ensuring that low-wealth districts are accounted for, do you look at your survey sample after you get it to see how well you are doing? Sean – absolutely. Even though we are texting a representative group, we have to weight afterwards based on respondents across a variety of factors for groups that have a lower response rate (gender, education, age, political groups).

Sean then walked the Commission through their reporting on the questions of interest to the Commission.

Bill – People seemed to underestimate total spending per student, and then people wanted to increase spending, can you explain? Sean – Gave spending amounts in the second question, which allows people to answer the question based on the same set of facts/baseline information.

Rick – Doesn't surprise me to see career/technical education rated highly as an important factor in education. Asked about specific wording. Sean – didn't tie it to direct funding of education, but asked in relation to what is most important? Could say to continue it or to increase funding, can't be sure.

Rick – Teacher quality is obviously important – what does that cover, all kinds of teachers or not? Sean – would be in the mind of the respondent, some degree of interpretation.

Jay – Asked a question about those who oppose a statewide property tax but favor a differential distribution of money to school districts. Notes that people don't understand well how NH funds public education, reading that confusion in the survey response.

Chris – think the results paint a consistent picture with the exception of figure 4b and those ages 35-49 not wanting to increase funding for education. Sean – went into crosstabs and had some further discussion of the opinion of that particular respondent group.

Bill – in terms of the overall selection, 18% were parents/guardians. The percentage of households in NH that have children under 18 is 32.8%. Wondering about that breakdown.

Sean – discussed some factors as to why those numbers may be different, noted that responses between those who are parents and not were similar. Mel – only a minority of NH residents with kids in schools currently, which puts a bigger burden on schools to stay engaged with their broader communities and keep them informed.

The Commission then moved to a review of a draft version of an overview “rotary club” presentation. Bruce noted that there will be several versions of the presentation so that each can be appropriate for differing groups of stakeholders (legislators, municipal leaders, etc).

Chris – one thing I did when I presented, I was able to show which circle was Portsmouth in various charts, which helps to explain to stakeholders. Nice to be able to approximate where communities are when presenting to specific groups.

Bill – that's an excellent point. If we don't have it, need the underlying data for that graph for transparency.

Jay – did a presentation for retired educators, took all the towns in Cheshire County in the simulator. SW NH, you might think that overwhelmingly all 23 towns might fall into one part of Exhibit 14, but it was about half. I bet even in Rockingham County towns fall in each of the 4 quadrants shown. Good to give context.

Rick – One question Bruce read was about different tax rates, one was about A/B/C properties and rates. Have we really tried to define yet what that might mean? Dave – we did have Sen. Giuda scheduled, which fell away. Heard from DRA with respect from challenges that would fall upon DRA and local tax collection if they were to tax at different rates for different classes.

Dick – Will this be available to us online to look through? Bruce – yes, we will send out a version to Commission members and will post online.

Dave – the Commission's work going back to January has followed a design thinking-style process, wondering why we wouldn't follow a similar road for this presentation? Bruce – would be possible to structure the presentation that way. Dave – Consider fewer words.

Barbara – Love this presentation, thinking about presentations to districts covering multiple towns and how helpful this would be.

Rick – if you have a district with 5 towns within it, how are we going to get a formula passed and work through those town/district agreements? Barbara – it will be challenging. Barbara spent some time discussing an example and factors at play. Trust a key factor.

Some further discussion was had about where these presentations should take place, how the group's recommendations fit into the current fiscal environment, and the overall timeline for the work of the legislature.

Review of Key Policy Questions

The group then moved to a conversation on some of the key policy questions.

Iris – Interested in the phase-in, and wondering who is working on that, and if the Commission as a whole will be working on that? Understand the rationale but do have some concerns that a 5-year phase-in means needing to get buy in from 3 legislative bodies in a row. Dave – agree with your comments, will be working in fiscal policy and adequacy, with some suggestions brought to the full Commission for discussion.

Jay – Agree that Commission needs to talk about phase-in, but apprehensive that it could drown out important recommendations we are trying to formulate on principles. Concerned that we fail to have a set of principles that regardless of funding level we want to continue to communicate/have be the foundation of proposals.

Bill – There is some tension in this work between principles and writing the ultimate product/legislation. I think the Commission's work, which has limited time left, would be better focused on core principles on the table.

Chris – I agree with that, and made comments to Bruce and Dave to that effect. Don't want to narrow conversation too much.

Corinne – Asking to consider extra time for Thursday, and talking about each work group bringing principles together and then moving those to the full group.

Bruce asked each work group and individual members to send over most important guiding principles as this draft. Noted 11/12 as a key date to have that done by. Bill noted the need for precision as the group moves forward.

Dave – exec team, supported by Carsey, will put down the major core principles with short descriptions of each, and those will be taken up soon. Bill suggested tagging notes where disagreement or concern may arise.

Public Comments:

Leslie Want, Manchester, School Board: Want to emphasize the importance of the principles behind the work, think it's incredibly important. Thanked the Commission.

Paul Deschaine, Newington: Appreciate the challenges for the Commission's work, but hope that the understanding is not lost that communities differ in tax base town to town as well as within towns. A town that may appear property rich may be different than another community that looks similar. In Newington, we appear to be a property rich location due to commercial properties, but that can be troublesome. Want to avoid a donor town situation, but not kill the golden goose. If taxes get too high business owners will leave, and counterbalancing issues should be acknowledged.

Direct further public comments to Commission Chair David Luneau at schoolfunding.commission@unh.edu

Next open public comment period: Wednesday, October 28, 4-5 pm

Next set of Commission work group meetings will take place on THURSDAY, October 29.

Adjourn

Documents:

Documents for this meeting can be found on the Commission website under 10/26 materials - <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding/school-funding-study/resources/meeting-documents-video>