

**COMMISSION TO STUDY SCHOOL FUNDING
ENGAGEMENT WORKGROUP
MINUTES 10/22/2020**

Members

Present: Mel Myler, Corinne Cascadden, Susan Huard, Dave Luneau, Jay Kahn, Dick Ames, Jon Morgan, David Ryan, Mary Heath. Also Present: Bruce Mallory, Carrie Portrie, Jordan Hensley, Zachary Azem, Sean McKinley Public Attendees = 5.

Call to Order

Mel Myler called the meeting to order. Took roll call. Each individual introduced themselves and location. October 13 engagement minutes were approved by all present.

Discussion

The meeting began with a review of the results of the Granite State. Sean McKinley from the UNH survey center described how the panel works for the Granite State Poll, recruited via text or phone. The Granite State Poll is a panel of representative sample of New Hampshire residents, which gives more confidence of representativeness of the state. The September survey got around 1000 responses, which was about a 38% response rate. Sean took the group through the key findings and some key charts. The full survey report can be found here:

https://carsey.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2020/10/2020_09_-_granite_state_poll_-_commission_to_study_school_funding_report.pdf

Jay asked a question about figure 8a and the attendant crosstabs in figure 8b. Some conversation was had about the limitations of the survey methodology and the fact that many Granite Staters are not informed on the specifics of school funding. Further conversation was had about the pros, cons, and limitations of various questions on the survey, as well as comparisons to a similar question that was asked about funding sources in 2002.

Dave – how would you characterize results where we don't have an exhaustive series of options, but inclusive, results that are split into a likert scale? Sean – There are a plurality of people who would like to explore options to lessen local property taxes, but not much of an appetite for the options provide. Sounds inconsistent, but the equivalent of having your cake and eating it too – would like something but not at the cost. Not unaccustomed to seeing those types of things. Of the three options presented, there is little support or many opposed.

Dave – I went through the results previously, but I don't recall – were there any questions in the GSP with respect to quality outcomes or school performance? Mel – Don't believe so. One of the interesting things is that the actual percent of parents in the survey was around 18%, which is a flip from what it would have been 10 years ago. The majority of those paying for taxes that support schools are those who do not currently have kids in schools. Have a body politic that has little contact with schools since they do not have kids in them. That provides a mandate for schools to reach out to the community so that they can understand what's going on in schools. That is somewhat troublesome to me when you look at sources of funding, you're dealing with a body politic that is not necessarily up to date on what's happening in schools currently. Dave – that's an important observation and it would be a good thing for us to take back and share with school board association and others. Mel – important, because you take that piece of data of lack of knowledge about what's going on in schools and combine that with the lack of understanding around how schools are funded. Those are hurdles to have to get over before you can have a dialogue about alternatives and performance of schools.

David – These numbers are reminiscent of numbers we shared when we met in January, and I quoted Sen. Morgan's dad, that 80% of our population of kids in schools. This mimics the

demographics of our SAU. I would be interested in being able to gauge the level of value schools bring to that 80% of the population. What is their perceived return on investment, what do they believe their taxes are going towards and how do we measure that? Is there anywhere in our data we can extrapolate that? Sean – I wouldn't say in the questions we asked this go-round, but certainly could in the future. I think we did a while ago, asked questions about people's thoughts about local schools. Nothing in this report about school quality, except tangentially the final one. Bruce – one point of reference is the question asked about the biggest problem facing our state. Prior to the great recession, public education/funding was one of the top concerns expressed by people. After, jobs jumped up to the top, and about 4-5 years ago the opioid crisis moved to the top. Education has really fallen off, and is among the less mentioned concerns. I think the Commission right now is dealing with a very complex, big, consequential policy question that fewer people are paying attention to than 8-10 years ago. Zach – it is what is the most important problem facing New Hampshire, have asked for about 20 years. Bruce's summary pretty close. Currently COVID-19 at the top, but it touches on both the education and the economy. I can tell you that there is certainly, if there are people saying COVID, people are talking about how it impacts schools as the most important problem, and also those talking about jobs/economy. Not that people are neglecting education, but looking at it through the lens of handling education in response to COVID. That, more than funding, is toward the top of people's minds.

Mel – I think there is confusion on part of the older generation on remoteness – in education, working from home...the pandemic has raised a lot of questions in people's minds because it is out of my sphere of reference. Gets thrown into the cauldron of the unknown. Zach – think that makes the question interesting, because it asks about what's top of mind. From our recent data COVID-19 is on the minds of mostly everyone.

Mary – Are there any questions/factors that relate education to the economy and the impact education has in building a strong economy? Sean – no questions on this survey around that, may have asked something like that in the past. Zach – we can look back. Mel – gets into the issue of presumption of those without kids in schools that schools are providing a future for the workforce development in the state and that gets into the whole issue of the economy, regardless of whether a student will go to college or the workforce directly. Are schools currently developing students to be in the jobs to keep the state economy flourishing.

Mel – let's have the group talk about what we're seeing in this survey as we begin to look forward to what the Commission has to do? Mel – one from me is the obvious one, the lack of understanding of how this works. As we begin to move forward with policy considerations, how do we provide more of an understanding of what's at stake? Will be trying to work with the legislature.

David – zeroed in on the prevalence of inequitable distribution, struck by the wealthier respondents who generally wanted to keep wealth in communities. Curious as to income breakdown of those who didn't know about distribution question.

Susan – what strikes me is such a small percentage of people having children, how do you persuade them about the importance of education if they don't have kids? Some of the other statistics about CTE and workforce development, not just the responsibility of CTE, it's all educators. How is our state going to flourish if we aren't willing to provide for education of young people?

Corinne – There are a lot of people who don't understand or pay attention to the funding system. Taxpayers don't dissect where property taxes are doing, my impression is they don't care but lash out at rate decision makers. Maybe there should be a descriptor with all property tax bills

about what school funding looks like. A couple questions on the survey, thought some of it was negative, something that does stand out is that people who want to increase sin taxes would be better than adding something new. Glad to see that teacher quality and CTE was near the top. How much weight should be put on this particular survey?

Mel – on that point, there is a wealth of information for the Commission to look at. Engagement has to report the themes we're seeing, and how do we begin to look at those themes, gather them together, and based on the input we've received, here is what we're seeing. This group provides a look beyond the Commission and the respective biases we all have and see what public perception is.

Dave – On page 9, it asks about a school funding system, and the responses are about a state funding system, and curious about the definition of that? Sean – trying to make it clear we're talking about the state, and giving them an either/or. People may have a variance of opinion here, and though there are a significant number of don't knows, think it's fairly clear it's state funding. Number of undecideds not surprising.

Jay – I found the 18-34 year old responses significant, and relative to this work group's report that is something to highlight. The group is much more aware of funding, favors the property tax. I think going through that survey's age group is important because retaining those folks as lifetime contributors to our state is key to the evolution of the state. If we continue to only attract people who have a vague notion of NH from other states, we will not have the kind of culture that this state has known over its 250 year history. This is about the workforce, our culture, a lot of things to take from that about how that age group defines its perceptions of our public school system.

Mel – One of the things we've heard from students is about a much more immediate need than we have heard from older folks.

Carrie – students really want to feel prepared for the jobs that will be available to them as they complete their education and choose their next steps. Mel – students highly valued their teachers, and wanted more, to give more options.

Sean – on the earlier question about funding methods, and did ask in 2002 but asked in that instance only for one response rather than multiple. Not sure the results would be helpful given that. We did not offer them a response about the current option, but didn't record it. On the question about quality of education, we did in 2012 ask about how satisfied people are with education.

Carrie then showed the group the summary update of the Commission's engagement activities and reminded them of upcoming engagement events.

Mel – next major piece is on the 27th, with a reprise of those who collect/spend funding focus group. And then on the 29th, need to be prepared to say what the major themes are. Submitting to the work group to use this crosswalk and the survey to list themes for the Commission. I don't want the Carsey team to be responsible for finding the themes, but rather the Commission members.

Corinne – are we able to sit in/listen to the municipal leader reprise? Carrie – yes, but can't have a quorum. Bruce – not a meeting of the Commission, but held on behalf of the Commission.

Discussion was had about presentation slides for Commissioners to be able to present on the work of the Commission.