

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

Meeting Agenda
November 30, 2020, 2-4 pm

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

General Email: schoolfunding.commission@unh.edu

Commission Attendance: Dave Luneau, Mel Myler, Dick Ames, Rick Ladd, Jay Kahn, Jon Morgan, Bill Ardinger, Jane Bergeron-Beaulieu, Corinne Cascadden, Iris Estabrook, Barbara Tremblay, Chris Dwyer, Susan Huard, Val Zanchuk, Mary Heath, Dave Ryan, John Beardmore. Also Present: Bruce Mallory, Jordan Hensley, Carrie Portrie, Jesse Levin, Drew Atchison, Jenn Foor. 27 attendees from the public listening in.

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

Just after 2pm Dave Luneau welcomed attendees and called roll. Dave expressed his gratitude to all the Commission members. The minutes from the 11/23 meeting were approved by a unanimous roll call vote of members.

Review and Approval of Final Report

Bill Ardinger moved a Motion: "To accept the final report as a fair and accurate representation of the commission's work and deliberations, as satisfactory completion of the commission's charge, and as ready to be delivered to the speaker of the house of representatives, the president of the senate, the senate clerk, the house clerk, the governor, and the state library as defined in the statute that established this commission." The motion was seconded by Iris Estabrook.

Bill – first comment is to say to the executive leadership of this Commission how much he appreciates the incredible amount of work done. Bill also thanked the Carsey and AIR staff for all their work. Bill noted that he was pleased to support the Commission's report, and that while education spending was too big a topic for everyone to agree on every point, it is a top state priority. He expressed his support for the organizing principle in education funding principle expressed on page 8 of the report that supports a distribution of public education resources in a fairer, more progressive manner, that addresses the worse outcomes for students in poorer districts. In the past, the failure of all interest groups to come together in a coordinated cohesive plan lacked an organizing principle, but this report gives the state a chance to improve education.

Iris – laid out some questions and concerns in her personal statement, but support the Commission's work as an honest and thoughtful look at the issues. Agreed with Bill that school funding is complex, and noted that there is no more important work. Expressed her hope that student and taxpayer equity would be enhanced moving forward.

Dick – agreed that this is a complex but important topic that we have wrestled with and done as well as we could. Wanted to emphasize that the finding that overall NH does well with public

education but not across all communities is what we have been focused on and worked hard to see what we could do about it. Easy to look from the outside at high average outcomes, but we know there is plenty to worry about. Thanks to AIR for their work documenting that. That is the starting point. The tough slog is getting to a better place. To start, need to underscore principles and guideposts to measure how the state is doing. In the broadest sense, student and taxpayer equity are at the core of our work. Thankful this Commission has stayed focused on those two issues. I endorse the formulation developed by AIR. One worry I have is expressed by Bill's statement that I agree with – don't think there should be an interpretation that all under the concept of adequacy has to be funded by the state. The MA experience we have looked closely at is one we can all learn from. What they have done is not ideal, but their way of providing for locally raised funds to ensure as much as practical uniform burdens on local taxpayers. Using local property tax revenues as part of a formula is appropriate when done in that way. This is a great start. Implementation will be difficult, but as a legislator we will slog ahead, perhaps starting with just making the property tax system more fair.

Jay – this has been a great journey for all of us. Want to share gratitude for those who have served and held down non-legislative roles on this Commission. Without exception, this has been the best attended Commission there is in the state. That has enabled us to respect each other and the findings in this report. I see the voice of many reflected in it, and that is a tribute to everyone participating. Thanked the Carsey school for harnessing that voice and the public voice. Nitpicky point – trying to influence the FY22-23 biennium. We can't allocate the same state aid on the basis of students vs student/district characteristics. Can demonstrate the harm of the current systems, and can use outcome measures to show that. The opportunity for an adequate education is not fair and equal across the state. Need to unsnarl education statutes to make the process simpler. Education funding is so complicated, people do not understand it. We can go forward with something simpler that directs aid to districts with greater needs that gives every student the opportunity for an adequate education. We've identified how to level the playing field for students and districts. I look forward to being able to share this information with our legislative colleagues and the governor to help NH get on track with a new funding formula.

Barbara – Has been a wonderful experience working on this Commission and to see some familiar faces I hadn't seen in a few years, as well as new faces. Had a wonderful opportunity to work in SAU 29 and SAU 62, which were very different. Through this process, hearing from Commission members and public comment has been very interesting. To hear the thoughts and feelings of various groups was wonderful and insightful. Most important is providing opportunity for students – what students have in one district they do not necessarily have in a district down the road. That is the priority – how to create equitable opportunities for students while also providing for equity for taxpayers. A nitpicky thing is not to play with the weighting in the formula, it will harm the integrity of the funding system. This funding system should be implemented quickly and monitored with data collection by DOE and DRA. Has got to be a commitment that goes along with this. May be challenging. The work of this Commission has been commendable. Affirm and endorse the motion.

Corinne – Feel this final report is an incredible summary of facts and details on school funding. Valued the time on the Commission – felt like I learned so much hearing different perspectives. Come from walking the shoes of 10 years as a superintendent laying off staff, cutting budgets – it

is very difficult to keep operations going. Hope this report will be the catalyst for major changes. Thank you to the legislators for moving this forward, and the next steps fall on you to keep ringing that bell and moving forward. Anything I can do to help I will.

Chris – add to the appreciation for the heavy lifting going on behind the scenes. This report is coming at an optimal time. The pandemic has exposed to people all over the country the inequities that are embedded into all our systems. Schools are important for education and provide many supports for communities. The student equity and taxpayer equity work have been good guideposts, and is on solid ground with the work of AIR. It reflects the philosophy and values of Commission members, even if details are not agreed on. More work needs to be done on taxpayer equities, maybe a slightly different set of people to look at. Like the way Jay said all the laws need to be examined and simplified for education – similar process for taxpayer equity needed. Wrote an appendix outlining three kinds of measures to look at the system going forward – one is the composite measure on which the ECM model is based, think that learned success should be measured differently (and consensus-based work needed), and there are additional accountability measures needed in the short term. Time will be needed to truly know if progress is being made. MA has done this well – public needs confidence that dollars being invested are spent wisely. Need consensus around accountability measures and don't only rest on learner success.

Jane – begin by saying how much I've enjoyed the opportunity to participate and found this a true learning experience. Find the report to be a thoughtful document based on solid research, which is something we have been lacking. Hopeful that the report will lead to access and equity for all NH's children and youth, particularly for students with disabilities. Applaud the public for all their guidance, feedback, and input. Echo Chris' comments about monitoring and having multiple ways to do so. Will be critical for that to be the next phase of this work. Thanked the Commission.

Susan – Thanked group. This has been a real education for me, none of this is anything I had known about working in higher education. Express particular thanks to Mel Myler, and influenced by "Our Kids". Your kids become our kids in community college, and thinking about the funds allocated to the CCSNH we spend money trying to help people learn what they are choosing to learn. If we can figure out student equity and access it will play out positively for higher education in the state. Average age of community college students is 26 – they are taxpayers too. Appreciate the work done and the civic engagement of the state. Have been sharing our work with the other CC presidents. Tip my hat to Val and Rick and their CTE work.

Val – Spent the weekend binge watching the Queen's Gambit. Think of our challenge as similar to giant chess game. We had an unconventional and bold opening based on the equity model, and now it's up to our legislators to get us to the end game. Looking forward to see how this process moves ahead.

David Ryan – Really appreciated being on this Commission. Have never been an elected official, so have not understood how intense this process can be. Tag along with the admiration for Robert Putnam. Thinking a lot about the big tradeoff – sacrificing equity for efficiency, and what this all looks like moving forward. As a dad of a student in Manchester public schools and a

superintendent in not Manchester, I live in two worlds. See a significant number of staff members committed in both districts, but the economics of efficiency hurts a place like Manchester. They lack what they need to provide the same opportunities we do in Exeter. Students coming up through the system don't get a fair shot from the beginning. There is a saying about people born on third base thinking they hit a triple. We have some students not even on the team. I think that is more about beliefs than economics. As a dad and superintendent my heart goes out to families that are trying to do what is in the best interest of their child – we have so many inequities uncovered in the pandemic it's hard to know where to begin. Have learned an incredible amount on the Commission, appreciate the flexibility provided. Thanked Bruce for letting me submit a member statement late. Would like to continue to be an active voice in school funding in NH.

Jon – wanted to say thank you to everyone. Have learned an incredible amount, and this has been an exceptional experience for me. You've seen me juggling being a legislator and parent and educator. Very hopeful and cautiously optimistic that the work done on this Commission will lead to the important changes the people of NH deserve, and more equity for students.

Mary – echo the thanks. Don't see today as a closing. David and Chris' comments really look at the needs of kids across the state. Living in Manchester my whole life and seeing the changes that have transpired in our school system – we have a lot of work to do in helping children learn and measuring how they learn. The conversation we're finishing is critically important but we have to really look at what our kids are learning and how they are learning moving ahead. Just the beginning of the next chapter. Working on an international study committee, and there are so many things we can incorporate in NH.

Mel – this really started in 2018 when Rick and I sponsored a bill for a legislative study of school finance. During the summer of '18 I was concerned when we did not deal with disparity or SWEPT. At the conclusion of that work—and much work was done—I felt the recommendations tinkered at the outside of this topic. I sponsored HB551 by myself. This became a bipartisan bill because of the need to look at this topic. Nobody questioned the \$500k. I had no clue, frankly, what an independent Commission would be. My goal was to provide multiple voices, legislators, people from the community, to discuss in an unbiased fashion.

Mel lost internet due to a storm in Hopkinton at this point

Dave Luneau thanked Bruce Baker and Tammy Kolbe for their work as part of the AIR team, as well as Michele Holt-Shannon, Sarah Boege, and Matt Gerding from Carsey and Jenn Foor from House Committee Services.

Rick – I have mixed feelings on this process. I feel we haven't gotten where we need to get. Was reading a WSJ article called “More Bang for the School Buck”, and started thinking how that relates to the Commission's work and reducing inequities for students and taxpayers. Right now I am not totally convinced that the education cost model will get us closer than the input model from 2008/18. I feel the most important issue is in front of us, dealing with the legislature. That will be a real hurdle, a big hurdle. We haven't addressed really the revenue issue that is definitely going to be asked at the beginning—where the money comes from. It will be a challenge because many communities don't have the resources. Not sure if we have a revenue or

distribution issue. We don't have time for a phase-in. Going through a monumental change in education in New Hampshire and the US. As legislators need to be prepared to move us forward, for all kids. In implementation, this model is effective if you retain the kinds, you need to maintain the weights to keep in the integrity of the formula. The legislature always messes with the weights. If we properly funded Sen. Estabrook's formula, would we be in a better place today? I feel we would be. I don't know if this is all ready for implementation, and a number of issues still need to be addressed (transportation, CTE, building aid). I believe an input-based system would be better. Need for more CTE training. We've done a great job engaging and hearing from the public, but have heard things we already knew. Wonder where we have gone, and have come up with an ECM that will be difficult to implement. Thanked everyone who has worked so hard on this and appreciate the time and effort.

Mel – when we created the Commission, I had no clue what the Commission would be. It has gone beyond what I could have imagined, and it has to do with the participants and Carsey School. Bruce and I have had a long history together, my compliments to him, Jordan, and Carrie for the work they've done. My concern in 2018 was that we were not dealing with all the kids in the state, and we knew that there was a marked difference between districts. Knew we needed to shift from my kids to our kids, and in workforce development you need to worry about kids from all over the state. The moral issue the legislature will need to look at is whether we will have equity across the state. The issue of taxpayer equity hasn't been looked at in 20 years, and we heard that from DRA. Have to be very vigilant around taxpayer equity as well. Finally – very proud of the work we have all done. This report will be foundational to future considerations on this topic. We have been very thorough – no one has ever been as thorough as we have been. Also thank you to Dave, you have done a good job looking at the numerical and policy issues and keeping us moving forward. Thanked everyone for the time put in. Laid a foundation – this is a different look than we've had before. Hopefully can have legislative action next.

Vote on the motion on the table:

Bill Ardinger: Yes

Jane Bergeron: Yes

Corinne Cascadden: Yes

David Ryan: Yes

John Beardmore: Yes

Iris Estabrook: Yes

Barbara Tremblay: Yes

Chris Dwyer: Yes

Susan Huard: Yes

Val Zanchuk: Yes

Mary Heath (Alternate): Yes

Mel Myler: Yes

Dick Ames: Yes

Rick Ladd: No

Jay Kahn: Yes

John Morgan: Yes

Dave Luneau: Yes

Final vote to accept 16-1 in favor of the motion.

Moving Forward

Bruce described the process moving forward, in posting the report and a press conference to be held tomorrow at 1pm. The Carsey School will continue to support the Commission moving forward.

Jordan will send out the link to the press conference.

More resources will be posted on the Commission website, including aids for presentations.

Bruce provided some personal comments to Commission members.

There was some further conversation thanking members and discussing how common ground can be found moving forward.

Public Comments

Jeff McLynch, Project Director NHSFFP: One final comment – expressing personal gratitude and gratitude of the NHSFFP for the work and insight provided during this process. Clear in meeting that the group was unified in desire to serve the children and taxpayers of NH and the public good. That unity is invaluable. Look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Paul Deschaine, Newington: Echo all the accolades, impressed by the work and dedication that went into this process. Had my doubts about how the pieces would fit together, but it was accomplished. Want to emphasize that while the Commission spent a lot of time on the why of school funding, but think you missed the mark/short shifted taxpayer equity. Will provide written comment, but not convinced that higher property taxes are more equitable for funding. Wish more could have been done to alleviate that impression that I am leaving with. Thanked the group again and for allowing for participation. Your efforts will provide a great basis for the legislature to move forward, and hoping for positive outcomes.

Doug Hall: Congratulations to everyone on the Commission and support staff. I first got involved with this under the Augenblick formula, even before the Claremont cases. This has been the most comprehensive effort through all those decades. Thanks to everyone on the Commission. Good job.

Jane Ferrini, Portsmouth: Echoing thanks and gratitude. Done an amazing job with complex information and distilling that – this will be the standard moving forward in approaching these topics. Agree and support the comments from Chris Dwyer and Paul Deschaine – the why and diagnosis was superb but the medicine is a little bitter, with the property tax, which is overburdened. I hope when it translates into an actual formula that we are conscious of all taxpayer equity and don't create donor-receiver towns. Thanked everyone again.

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

Upcoming Meetings

There are no scheduled upcoming meetings of the Commission to Study School Funding

Adjourn

Documents:

Documents for this meeting can be found on the Commission website under 11/30 materials - <https://carsey.unh.edu/school-funding/school-funding-study/resources/meeting-documents-video>

RSA 193-E:2-e

- a. Review the education funding formula and make recommendations to ensure a uniform and equitable design for financing the cost of an adequate education for all public-school students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 in the state.
- b. Determine whether the New Hampshire school funding formula complies with court decisions mandating the opportunity for an adequate education for all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, with a revenue source that is uniform across the state.
- c. Identify trends and disparities across the state in student performance in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 based on current school funding options.
- d. Re-establish the baseline for the costs, programs, staffing, and facilities needed to provide the opportunity for an adequate education.
- e. Study and produce recommendations regarding all costs and existing funding for special education, including listing any currently unfunded special education mandates issued to date by the state department of education.
- f. Study integrating into the education funding adequacy formula a factor that accounts for the number of Class A, B, and C properties in a community, and the distribution of education funding costs across those numbers and classes of properties.
- g. Consider other policy issues as the commission deems necessary.¹ The commission may consult with outside resources and state agencies, including but not limited to the department of education, the department of revenue administration, and the legislative budget office.