

Education Cost Sharing Task Force
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, December 1, 2011

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM.

Co-Chair Stillman opened the meeting by thanking the members for their contributions and suggestions for this meeting and reminded the participants of the upcoming interim report in January then called upon her Co-Chair Ben Barnes.

Co-Chair Barnes reported Governor Malloy's intention of using the task force's interim report as a guideline and resource for the shaping the introduction of his legislative outlines concerning education reforms in February.

Chairpersons Barnes and Stillman collaboratively decided to hear from the suggestions that were handed in on ideas how to change the ECS formula.

Brian Mahoney took the task force through the chart on the Choice Programs. He went on to explain that the programs differ from each other in the ratio of state and local funding they are provided with in different areas.

Co-Chair Stillman questioned Mahoney's assessment of Magnet Schools as the driving force of the Choice Programs.

Mahoney explained that there is no grant for the Technical High School System; they simply get their running costs completely covered by the state. Agricultural schools are run by local school districts.

Co-Chair Stillman interjected with a question, confirming that Agricultural Schools are part of the ECS and are getting funds from that source.

William P. Davenport gave a brief summary on the Agricultural School Programs.

Judith Lohman talked about statutory formula grants and introduced a page of the report concerning those numbers

Co-Chair Stillman asked where the data for the reports is coming from, since some of the grouping together of towns made little sense from a recent perspective.

Mahoney replied that the data was drawn from the 2000 census and that there were a lot of demographic factors considered in the analysis.

Theodore Sergi states that the actual amount of money changing hands stacks up to only 1% of the complete amount of money.

Mark D. Benigni threw in a question on whether the data shows an achievement gap in the students it represents or an economic gap and left the matter open for discussion.

Barnes interjected that the further introduction of data on per capita income to remark that this data was an indicator for how much a local district or town could afford to contribute to a student's education.

Co-Chair Stillmann expressed her desire to move forward by going through the different suggestions that were submitted.

Sergi wanted local schools to collaborate more on sharing test scores and helping each other out financially.

Len Miller wanted all the funds from the states for education to actually be spent on education. He didn't think that performance data should be included in the new formula but advised to set up funding for students who are doing well.

Representative Michael Molgano suggested allowing the Connecticut Coalition for Equal Funding in Education to make a recommendation to include them in the discussion.

Portia Bonner suggested using a more accurate model to determine an estimation of a town's wealth and to include in the formula the performance level of the different schools to determine whether the district needs additional funding to break that achievement gap. She wanted to include Special education and ELL students as an additional weight in the formula.

Elsa Nuñez expressed her wish to gather additional data on how the money allocated by the state is being spent to put to rest suspicions on the matter. Additionally she advised not to include prison and university populations for the population count in the districts. She also included her opinion that every public school should receive funding and that funding should be used as an incentive for the schools to develop their programs.

Co-Chair Stillman reported a similar approach that gave stipends to teachers who spend time out of the usual class time with special needs students based on the students' achievement.

Mary Loftus Levine emphasized the state's responsibility to strengthen communities' ability to provide Special education. She also suggested including all the agricultural and technological and Vo-Ag Schools in a statewide district with their own Board of Education.

Co-Chair Barnes suggested listing the suggestions in a document to gauge the level of support for the single proposals for the next meeting.

Mark D. Benigni saw three general areas for improving the formula: agree on a way to measure poverty, income/ability to pay and populations in the municipalities.

Dudley Williams wanted to give districts incentives to develop Special education programs in their own districts instead of sending Special education kids to other programs.

Sergi agreed with Nuñez that a chart of accounts would help to eliminate suspicions on how the allocated money was being spent. He also voiced his opinion that the formula resulting from the task force's efforts would very likely widely exceed the state's available funds and that they should concentrate on a total appropriations amount.

Co-Chair Barnes agreed that it was important how much money was being spent on education but reminded the task force that they could only make a recommendation regarding that matter. He opposed Sergi on the idea that it was unimportant how the available money was being distributed.

Co-Chair Stillman brought up the great disparity in funding for Magnet Schools, referring to the fact that they are not all based on the same court case.

Williams agreed with Nuñez that all public schools should receive state funding and that all the schools included in the choice programs should receive adequate funding.

Benigni agreed to include the Magnet and Charter Schools in the discussion on funding.

Lohman informed the task force about an expert coming in at the next meeting, who would talk to the task force about what other states were doing regarding the issues that the task force was facing.

Co-Chair Barnes announced that each member of the task force would receive a list of the proposals before the next meeting.

Co-Chair Stillman reminded the task force of the upcoming interim report.

Nuñez suggested that the report should include a philosophical position on the general issue taken by the task force.

Levine suggested adding another hour to the next meeting in regards to the tight schedule.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.