

Achievement Gap Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 10, 2012

10:00 AM in Room 2600 of the LOB

Attendees

Members: Dr. Miguel Cardona, Senator Toni Harp, Senator Andrea Stillman, Senator Mary Ann Handley, Steve Hernandez, David Kennedy, and Tom DeFranco

Staff: Pooja Shah, Judy Lohman, John Moran

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM.

Co-chair Dr. Miguel Cardona asked the members of the Task Force to take five minutes to review the recommendations in front of them. He stressed the importance of their work and how much impact it will have on the children of Connecticut. The group was asked to highlight any changes or revisions to the recommendations that were shared at the last meeting. He shared an additional recommendation of establishing a model curriculum for grades K-5 with assessments and benchmarks tied to the Common Core State Standards.

Steve Hernandez presented his and Elaine Zimmerman's five recommendations for closing the achievement gap. He focused on the early years specifically the first 1000 days of their education, the reading deficits- children need to be reading by first grade, chronic absences and a system to track them, Black and Latino male students, and parents as partners in their child's education.

Dr. Tom DeFranco, the Dean of Neag School of Education, said that Neag has a role in two areas to help to close the achievement gap. One is regarding putting highly effective teachers and administrators into schools and the other is hiring eight faculty members to solely develop research on low performing schools and how to turn them around. They are also developing school clinics and a leadership academy for teachers and superintendents on how to build on the necessary tool set for improving underperforming schools. Dr. Cardona added that the recommendations for higher education should encompass all schools of education, including but not limited to UCONN.

Senator Mary Ann Handley was concerned about the role of adult education. She believes this area needs more exploring and attention. 18-20 year olds have a different set of problems than those who are 8-10 and needs to be approached about their difficulties differently. Dr. Cardona agrees and said an unfortunate symptom of the achievement gap is dropping out. Co-chair Senator Toni Harp also agreed and said difficult to teach kids often get pushed out of the traditional school system to the adult education program when

they should still be in high school. She said the adult education classrooms are too big. She also addressed the increased cost of a GED from \$13 to \$120 due to it being privatized. She believes this will place an unnecessary burden and create barriers on many residents in Connecticut and wanted to know if the task force should ask the Attorney General to intervene.

Senator Andrea Stillman said there are many programs that are already in effect in Connecticut that helps lower the achievement gap. She mentioned one program in particular that assists teens who are pregnant. This program helps teen moms obtain their GED while encouraging them to read to their children. Dr. Cardona thought it was an excellent idea to take agencies and foundations that are successful and embed their ideas into the master plan.

David Kennedy wanted to look at the first 1000 days of a child's life especially for those who are experiencing a toxic stressor. He also stressed the importance of community involvement and specifically helping the children of teen parents. He also mentioned that the Master Plan should recommend that local school boards give us a report that outlines what they need from the state to help them do their job more effectively. Kennedy also noted that extending the school day would also help close the achievement gap and that a "one size fits all" school day does not work. Senator Stillman agreed, she said they also need to reconfigure the school year. Many homes do not reinforce in the summer what the students learned in the school year which negatively affects the children. She believes there should be more summer school or programs that keep children learning in the summer.

Senator Stillman mentioned that successful programs provide laptops for their children who don't have their home. Technology such as a laptop is become more important in assisting children with their education and the children who do not have one at home are become more susceptible to fall into the achievement gap. She was wondering if the state can give tax incentives to companies who donate laptops to their communities. A member also mentioned that there should also be quality Pre-K education and all day kindergarten.

Dr. Cardona wanted to limit the number of adult education programs for teenagers and keep them in traditional high schools. Senator Stillman wanted to look at teacher preparation and wanted the best young people we can educate to become the best teachers possible.

Senator Harp also recalled a conversation with a newly retired teacher who said that most of the children in pre-school come from early day care homes. She said these early day care homes are mostly concerned with safety and not necessarily education. The first 1000 days of a child's life is crucial and early day care centers should become an active participant in a child's education. Senator Harp said that the Department of Education should be charged to take more in early day care centers.

One issue also to be addressed is involving more parents to actively participate in their children's education. Some parents may have had a terrible experience in school and will be more hesitant to take part in parent-teacher days or other activities benefiting their child.

Senator Harp also commented on the importance of a school breakfast program and recess, which she believes will help combat teen pregnancy. She also mentioned the need for a re-entry plan or transitional program for students who are away from their school due to a juvenile justice intervention, a DCF or Special Education out-of-district placement, extended suspension and/or expulsion. This is important for them to build skills before they are back in school. She does not want kids to be dropped back into schools for them to only drop out later.

One idea was to have the have Neag School of Education at UCONN develop a school for students who have behavior or anger issues similar to Manchester Academy. This new school would be beautifully constructed and it would make students feel good about being there however the main goal for this school is to have them come back to the traditional school setting.

Senator Harp asked why do problems with students need to be pointed out by a juvenile justice issue. What are we doing to prevent these issues? She said that the first people to notice trouble with a student is usually grade school teachers and nurses. The school notices social issues before DCF and there needs to be a community representative similar to the one in New Haven in more districts.

Steven Hernandez and Tom DeFranco were concerned about bullying as well. They wanted to create a safe place where students can learn. A school where there is positive behavior and a good support system. Mr. Hernandez stated that prevention is where to begin but we also need to work on the existing bullying problem.

Dr. DeFranco mentioned that he knew John Hattie, who conducted meta-analysis on low performing schools and said he would try to contact him via skype from Australia to discuss his work. He also mentioned he would contact George Sugai who is a national expert on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or (PBIS).

Dr. Cardona thanked the members for their recommendations and said that even though Governor Malloy said this is the year for education reform he does not just want to reform it but evolve it continuously. He talked about the agenda for the next meeting and wanted to prioritize the recommendations and start creating a timeline. The task force discussed that they will have two more meetings with guests and wanted to discuss more on time and best practice to increase school days. He thanked the members for coming and said he will email them to ask what day is best for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.