



CLASSROOMS FIRST INITIATIVE COUNCIL MINUTES

General Meeting – December 2, 2015 2:30 P.M.

Location: 1700 W. Washington
2nd Floor Conference Room
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Members Present: Governor Doug Ducey, Superintendent Diane Douglas, Alicia Alvarez, Brian Capistran, Tim Carter (telephonic), Janna Day, Annie Gilbert, Kenneth Hicks, Beth Maloney, Greg Miller, Co-Chair Jim Swanson, and Dawn Wallace

Members Absent: Susan Chan

Staff Present: Carmen Ronan, Kristin Sorensen

Call to Order, Welcome & Introductions

Jim Swanson called the meeting to order at 2:43 P.M.

Mr. Swanson then called for an approval of the November 19, 2015 Council meeting minutes as presented. Greg Miller motioned for approval of the minutes, Janna Day seconded; the motion passed with Superintendent Diane Douglas abstaining due to her absence from the meeting.

Governor Doug Ducey thanked the Council for its work. He also emphasized the opportunity presented by Proposition 123.

Presentation: Classrooms First Initiative Council Report to Governor Ducey

Mr. Swanson thanked Governor Ducey for his leadership and advised meeting attendees that the full report of the Council's findings could be found on the Governor's Office of Education website. He began by describing the state of education in Arizona, concluding that although Arizona's public schools are improving academically as evidenced by 2015 NAEP scores, the state needs to make significant improvements to ensure more Arizonans are in "A" schools and go on to postsecondary education. He said improvements can be achieved by: setting high expectations and standards, focusing on quality teaching and learning, providing choice in education delivery, using resources efficiently, and aligning funding to student achievement. Mr. Swanson then provided some background on the state of school finance in Arizona and the establishment and operations of the Classrooms First Initiative Council.

In terms of the Council's findings, Mr. Swanson first outlined the findings in the area of Formula Clarity (largely dealt with by the Equitable Funding Structure Working Group):

Finding 1: A single funding formula for all Arizona public schools is achievable but must take into consideration differences in education delivery and funding formula and statutory inequities among public schools.

- The Council must continue to address: Bonds/Overrides/Desegregation/Small School Adjustment/Adjacent Ways, Additional Assistance (Charter and District), Capital Finance, and the development of a “School Funding Model”

Finding 2: The objective of an equitable funding structure should be a system that has standardized property tax rates, combined with state General Fund appropriations, that contribute to all public K-12 students.

Finding 3: Several variables in the funding formula may be collapsed into a base per-pupil amount for simplicity, efficiency, and flexibility in funding distribution (Group A weights, teacher weights)

- This can help the formula be more understandable and clear.

Finding 4: School finance statutes and policies should be rewritten, reorganized, and more easily accessible for policymakers, business leaders, educators, administrators, and parents to interpret and apply for their own respective needs

- The Council wants parents to be able to access information online to determine how funding is generated for their child.

Finding 5: Allocation of resources for school districts should be made more flexible through lump sum funding, accounting and fund simplification, and full expenditure flexibility.

Finding 6: Policymakers should consider a phased-in approach to the transition to current year funding for school districts in FY2017.

Kenneth Hicks, Chair of the Equitable Funding Structure Working Group, emphasized the importance of bringing together several education stakeholders to build the school funding model. Mr. Swanson then outlined the Recognition of Excellence Working Group findings:

Finding 7: The alignment between performance and funding should recognize the excellence of high-performing schools through a tiered “Achievement Weight” that rewards high-performing low-socioeconomic schools on the highest funding tier.

Finding 8: High-performing public schools should have the flexibility to expand and grow without the burden of regulatory, formulaic, and structural constraints.

Finding 9: School administrators should, where appropriate, seek to empower school leaders to be more actively involved in decision-making about school-level staffing, budgeting, and reporting processes.

Mr. Swanson then outlined the Student Centered Learning Priorities Working Group findings:

Finding 10: The state should conduct an updated cost study, or use the 2007 cost study for special education students, to identify the true costs of special education.

Finding 11: Statutes should be updated regarding the “Extraordinary Special Needs Fund” for high-cost special education students.

Finding 12: Policies should be identified for recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers.

- Examples of this are: mentoring programs, and equity and competitiveness in starting pay.

Finding 13: School-level reporting is more useful than the “Annual Dollars into the Classroom Report” in showing how the funding each student generates is allocated and expended.

Finding 14: Schools located within low-socioeconomic communities often face unique academic challenges.

- The Council has discussed the concept of permanent or transitional “Opportunity Funding” to help close the achievement gap

Finding 15: While outside the scope of the funding formula, the expiration of Proposition 301 is beginning to create financial uncertainty for all public schools.

Finding 16: Current statutes on the sale and lease of vacant buildings should be modified to allow school districts to sell or lease unused and underutilized facilities more quickly.

Finding 17: An extension of 6-9 months is needed for the Council to complete its charge.

- The Council will present a timeline for completion at the end of January.

Public Comments

Joe Geusic spoke about the importance of high-quality teachers.

Next Meeting

Mr. Swanson advised that the Council will provide information on the next meeting date as soon as it is determined.

Governor Ducey thanked the Council and said he looked forward to seeing the Council’s future work.

Adjourn

With no further business before the Council, Mr. Swanson adjourned the meeting at 3:23 P.M.