



CLASSROOMS FIRST INITIATIVE COUNCIL MINUTES

General Meeting – August 9, 2016 2:00 P.M.

Location: Kitchell Corporation
Training Room
1707 East Highland Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85016

Members Present: Co-Chair Jim Swanson, Ashley Berg, Brian Capistran, Tim Carter, Susan Chan, Annie Gilbert, Kenneth Hicks, Greg Miller, Kathy Senseman, and Dawn Wallace

Members Absent: Governor Doug Ducey, Beth Maloney and Alicia Alvarez

Staff Present: Nikki Lazarus and Kristin Sorensen

Call to Order, Welcome & Introductions

Jim Swanson called the meeting to order at 2:04 P.M.

Mr. Swanson then called for an approval of the June 21, 2016 council meeting minutes as presented. Susan Chan motioned for approval of the minutes, Annie Gilbert seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Presentations of School Funding Proposals

Pearl Chang Esau from Expect More Arizona and Darcy Renfro from Center for the Future of Arizona presented on the Arizona Education Progress Meter. The meter is a non-partisan, independent effort to put forward a shared vision of education for Arizona. There are eight different metrics, or milestones, that are tracked: preschool enrollment, 8th grade math, 3rd grade reading, high school graduation, opportunity youth, teacher pay, college going, and post-secondary attainment. Next steps would be to define goals for each milestone.

Brian Capistran asked if “post-secondary institutions” was defined as just community college and universities. Pearl and Darcy said for “college going”, it included all public accredited institutions and higher education and does not include private institutions, but a follow up item on the attainment metric would be to figure out what kind of private post-secondary information they can get.

Jim Swanson asked what other states use the meter. Pearl said it is unique for it to be led as a non-partisan, community based project. Mr. Swanson then asked if they hoped some of the metrics would be put in at the school level for input on A-F process. Pearl said they hope there is alignment between the metrics in both the meter and A-F. Mr. Swanson then asked about why the “teacher pay” metric was not available at a school level. Pearl said it is not available because it is not

collected consistently and was narrowed down to median teacher pay for elementary teachers. This was because of the broad variance of LEA operations. Jim then asked why they aren't using retention instead of pay. Pearl said retention could be interesting and was important.

Kathy Senseman asked if any of their statistics capture the alternative education students. Darcy said no, not at this point, however they are interested in getting subgroup information that might capture some of those students.

Tim Carter spoke about recruitment issues and the need for a systematic way of knowing the number of openings at a given point of time. Pearl said they would love the opportunity to collect some of that data.

Dawn Wallace talked about goal setting and how it is interwoven into the state ESSA plan. She asked for more information about how the meter and ESSA will meld together. Pearl said they are working towards alignment and they have been in touch with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and have a meeting next week. She also said the associate superintendents met to identify ADE reps for each goal. Darcy added that they are asking the County Superintendents Association to endorse the meter as an association.

Greg Miller asked where the largest risk for attainment is. Pearl and Darcy said they all were and the whole continuum is important to have in front of them at all times. Mr. Miller mentioned that over half of jobs in Arizona do not require college degrees and that we need to look harder at what the other issues are. Darcy agreed.

Mrs. Wallace read a text from Ms. Berg that said ADE would be taking the metrics into account as they develop the ESSA plan and would like comments to be submitted on the ADE website.

Mr. Swanson asked if there was a timeframe for the goals of the metrics to be established. Pearl said that the timeframes vary. Post-secondary attainment will be launched mid-September. The high school and above goals will hopefully be established in September/October. The others will hopefully be in October but there will be varying ability to get the data together in time.

Next Linda Lyon and Christine Marsh spoke on behalf of AZ Schools Now, discussing teacher turnover and urged the council not to eliminate the teacher experience index funding. Ms. Lyon also suggested adding a B-weight for students in poverty to make school funding equitable. Mrs. Marsh spoke about making sure there is more funding because currently classroom sizes are too large and teachers are unable to give fully to each student.

Chris Thomas then spoke on behalf of the Arizona School Boards Association. Mr. Thomas said the adequacy of funding is still the paramount issue in Arizona. Arizona is ranked fourth for equity but is second from the bottom in adequacy of funding. Mr. Thomas said he would like to see the council do more summative analysis and discussion of what it would take to educate a student in the 21st century. This is called an "adequacy analysis", which provides a number as a target for what would make a difference. He next mentioned local funding and voter approved funds that they believe are important. They believe voters should have the right to go to the ballot to approve more taxes (overrides and bonds) for education in their community so long as the state is doing its job of making sure instruction and education is adequate. Mr. Thomas also said that we need to recognize the poverty weight (58% or more of total student population qualifies for free lunch). Next he mentioned

dedicated capital funding and that there is a need to have capital funding separated from operational funding. Mr. Thomas said there should be a cost study for special education funding needs and that the council should make sure there are no barriers for school choice for special education students. Finally he said they would like to see an equitable and transparent financial accounting for all schools that receive public funds.

Ms. Senseman asked Mr. Thomas to elaborate on school choice. Mr. Thomas said that when you look at the numbers of students with special needs and compare those in school districts with those in charter schools, you do not see the same percentages. This puts a burden on the school districts, especially when they do not receive adequate funding.

Greg Miller spoke on school choice and his belief that parents do have school choice and are not being excluded from another system. Systems will grow and that to indicate that there is a problem with transparency in charter schools is wrong.

Ken Hicks noted that adequacy of funding for special education, and in general, does help solve a lot of the problems. And on a surface level the drop in state funding has done the biggest disservice to schools.

Mr. Swanson asked where the equilibrium is between state funding, and bonds and overrides. Mr. Thomas said he believes it starts with an adequate funding level that receives a different mix of state and local money. Also the current system appropriately caps overrides to the extent that it doesn't create major disparity in funding levels and that is OK.

Mr. Swanson then asked if they knew the true amount that is underfunded in group B-weights. Mr. Thomas said he couldn't speak to the actual number but they do agree with the FRB proposal's findings.

Susan Chan asked if he is including bond issues when speaking of overrides. Mr. Thomas said yes. Mrs. Chan then brought up the disparity in funding between districts, like Lake Havasu and Scottsdale. Mr. Thomas said that is a problem but it goes back to adequate levels of funding at Lake Havasu and that the voting population at a district like Lake Havasu is not voting for overrides and bonds and there needs to be a mechanism that considers this.

Mrs. Senseman asked Mr. Thomas if his organization has considered a statewide property tax. Mr. Thomas said the idea is something they have entertained but there is no getting around that there are some wealthy communities in the state. The overlay of property tax could help however dipping into local property tax on a voter-approved basis would not help. Mrs. Senseman then asked how they could get to an adequate level of funding. Mr. Thomas said that we have been there before and he believes they can do it again by working backwards.

Mr. Swanson asked for an example of other states that have done an adequacy analyses. Mr. Thomas said he could get an example.

Tim Carter then said an adequacy study is important but they also need to come to terms with the reality that the answer might be "times 2". And the political reality is the legislature might not be willing to fund that so what would be the point in going through that exercise unless the legislature is willing to fund it.

Mr. Miller commented on the fact that they set out trying to fix the system before talking about the money, but the problem is they can't fix the system because of money. The legislature will be hesitant to fix the system if they don't know what it will cost them in the next session. Mr. Thomas said committees like the council exist to create decision points and to create data and alternatives for which policy makers have to choose. And engaging in analysis to provide a number is important. Mr. Swanson said he is hopeful that they can make a difference.

Mr. Swanson then asked the council if there is anything they wish to talk about from the 14 different proposals they have seen to date.

Mr. Carter said he was pleased to see the commonality in the areas of support among the parties that submitted proposals.

Mrs. Senseman agreed and said it is important to keep everyone at the table to keep the long-term discussion cohesive and continue in-depth dialogue. She said she is also cautiously optimistic about the next legislative session.

Public Comments

Janice Palmer from Helios Education Foundation spoke about equity, poverty, desegregation, and transparency in findings. For equity it is about the student, the school and the state. For poverty Ms. Palmer wanted to add that they have the opportunity to say it is absolutely an issue and it's a chance to hold schools accountable to close the achievement gap. Ms. Palmer brought up desegregation to caution the council from "solving one problem and getting into another set of problems" through legal issues that are unresolved. She urges the council to either set that aside while they address bigger issues or work with districts to see if the items in the court order or OCR agreements can be solved through the process. Finally transparency is important to ensure a fair, reliable and equitable funding stream and they encourage it to be an accountability measure.

Ildi Laczko-Kerr from the Arizona Charter Schools Association and Center for Student Achievement spoke about a comprehensive set of analyses that the Center blogs about. She presented a letter with the resources for the council and the public.

Sarah Ells from Flagstaff Unified School District spoke about override bonds and desegregation funds and the great need for them. She also mentioned that she hopes that as the conversation continues the council uses its power to get more funding.

Joe Geusic spoke about school choice, adapting to the amount of money given and education excellence.

Next Meeting

Mr. Swanson addressed the proposed future meeting schedule and how he would like to take meetings on the road again. Mrs. Wallace said some local schools have offered to host meetings. There was disagreement on the proposed dates so Mrs. Wallace said she would send a Doodle poll out.

Mr. Swanson then said he had been thinking about the process and how they can bring together all of the information from the proposals in way that is workable and meaningful. Mrs. Wallace offered to have Nikki Lazarus create an executive summary of the proposals. The council accepted the offer.

Adjourn

With no further business before the council, Mr. Swanson adjourned the meeting at 4:21 P.M.