

Blue Ribbon Task Force Meeting Minutes

Meeting 3 – September 9, 2015

View 34, Pierre SD

The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Funding Teachers and Students held its third meeting on September 9, 2015 at View 34 in Pierre. All task force members were present.

Sen. Soholt chaired the meeting.

Opening Comments

Sen. Soholt gave brief opening remarks and asked the superintendents in the room how their school years were going thus far.

The task force approved the minutes from the August 19th meeting.

Trends in Educator Preparation and Employment in South Dakota

During the August meeting, Dr. Richard Ingersoll, Professor of Education and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, gave a presentation titled “Why Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their Classrooms with Qualified Teachers?” This presentation looked at national data. To provide the task force with a better understanding of the teacher pipeline in South Dakota, Abby Javurek-Humig, Director of Assessment and Accountability at the South Dakota Department of Education presented data specific to South Dakota. The presentation can be found here: <http://blueribbon.sd.gov/docs/9-9%20Final%20Blue%20Ribbon%20Powerpoint%20Teachers.pdf> A more complete report can be found here: <http://blueribbon.sd.gov/docs/9-9%20SEPT%202015%20Educator%20Analysis%20Report.pdf>.

Other Materials

Rep. Sly informed task force members that they could find the South Dakota Teacher Advocacy Study as well as the Harstad Poll at their seats. Both pieces of information can be found here: <http://blueribbon.sd.gov/materials.aspx>

Basic Tenets and Goals

Sen. Soholt asked the task force to brainstorm about basic tenets and goals to keep forefront during the small group discussions. Members of the task force suggested the following tenets and goals:

- A school really matters to a community
- Admit teachers are underpaid
- Students cannot succeed without a rigorous education
- Most important factor is teacher in classroom
- Improve perception of quality of education
- Connection between funding formula and goal of teachers in classroom

- High quality education for all youth is integral for future of the state to have a productive and prepared workforce
- Whatever is delivered needs to be passable by legislature and signable by Governor
- Need to bring teacher pay up to a level that is competitive to neighboring states
- Teachers are not paid by legislature
- Communicate the high quality of public education is SD
- Every school is unique and has their own challenges
- Don't settle for average – strive to be extraordinary
- Solution should ensure and require efficiency and not reward inefficiency
- Ensure innovation
- Funding should be stable and sustainable, fair and equitable
- Prove that current funding formula is not adequate
- Maintain a high degree of local control
- Support all teachers, just not recruiting teachers. Don't reward just at beginning but maybe at the end
- Funding formula that is directed towards districts achieving set goals
- How do we keep current teaching pool engaged – mentoring, career pathing, augment compensation
- How to encourage kids to go into teaching profession and provide support to keep them in the job
- Figure out how to implement a better percentage of students pursuing teaching degrees that stay in profession
- What do we expect to change?
- Students come first
- Innovative solutions to address teacher shortages
- Need to come to a conclusion on whether we are efficient based on data
- There may be some things that are viewed as being inefficient that are good for other reasons
- Quantify what does efficient mean
- Message that this is an investment in future and economic viability of the state
- Wholeness and fairness in what is being recommended – don't punish districts that are doing good
- Set goal to improve national ranking in teacher pay – progress against peers we rank ourselves against
- Measure efficiency not just by dollars but also by student achievement
- Need to have a plan that can also be sold to 95 other legislators – has to be something that we can sell

Small Groups

After establishing the above basic tenets and goals, the task force broke into three small groups. Each group had a mix of legislators, educators, business owners, and executive branch staff. Each group had an assigned facilitator and an individual assigned to report back to the task force at the conclusion of small group discussions.

- Group One Report Out (given by Sen. Sutton): The group discussed a number of different solutions including incentivizing innovation, change the formula to give a per teacher rather than a per student allocation, and incentivizing sharing costs with other districts. There was broad agreement that there needs to be a new funding source; a one cent sales tax as well as a two cent tax levied in unincorporated areas were discussed.
- Group Two Report Out (given by Sen. Tieszen): The group wanted to keep increasing teacher pay at the forefront of their conversation and discussed raising the average teacher salary by 8k. The group also discussed incentivizing districts to be more efficient, and the need for a new funding source. New funding source discussed at the greatest length was a combination of a sales tax and a property tax relief. Corporate and state income taxes were also briefly discussed. The group also discussed the idea of making changes to capital outlay, other revenues, and fund balance caps.
- Group Three Report Out (given by Mr. Scull): The group focused on getting teachers within market. As a group they discussed raising the average teacher pay by 9k-10k. The group discussed expanding e-learning and instituting mentoring programs. The necessity of a new funding source was also discussed; a one cent sales tax that would give flexibility for possible tax relief options was suggested.

Discussion of Small Groups

Individual task force members reacted to the small group discussions and discussed next steps.

Interest was expressed in Group 1's mention of a "per teacher" funding mechanism. Sen. Sutton explained that Group 1 originally considered a separate fund, but evolved to considering a per-teacher formula tied to class size. The point was made that some kind of staffing level parameters would have to be included if funding was allocated per-teacher. Provision would also have to be made for overhead expenses. It is difficult under the current formula for the state to direct dollars to teacher salaries, and building a formula around teachers would be a cultural shift and could incentivize changes in staffing levels.

Group 2 explained that, although members discussed increasing average pay by \$8000, they did not envision simply giving each teacher an \$8000 raise. Dr. Schopp was asked how the state could ensure that new funds went to salaries. She said that she didn't believe there would be an overnight change, but that the state has the ability to track salaries.

There was more discussion of the current funding formula. The point was made that, if we agree schools need more money, the task force is going to have to recommend a way to get more money. Another member expressed the opinion that the current formula is not broken – it is just that funding levels within the formula are insufficient. New funds for teachers could be allocated separately from the formula, rather than rewriting the current formula.

The group discussed whether there is a need to “buy value” with new funding. If the public is asked to pay more in taxes, they may want to know what they are getting for their money. Others expressed the opinion that teachers are underpaid today, so the new money will pay what we should have been paying all along.

This led to a short discussion of performance metrics, and the need to track how new money is spent to ensure that it is being used as it is intended. The group agreed, however, that performance metrics need to be carefully defined so they do not create the wrong incentives or disincentivize innovative approaches.

One obvious metric is the average teacher salary. The group discussed several approaches to defining an average – based on national rankings, surrounding states, and adjustments for cost of living. No consensus was reached, although there was an agreement to the general idea of setting a benchmark that would move over time.

Finally, a task force member spoke in favor of piloting mentorship programs for teachers in areas of the state with high needs for teachers, as a way of retaining staff.

Next Steps

After a brief discussion, it was agreed that draft legislation will not be prepared in advance of the October 1 meeting. Rather, prior to that meeting, the chairs will work with staff to collect information about the ideas and approaches that were discussed, and reported out by the small groups, with the hope that the group can coalesce around more specific proposals at the October 1 meeting.

Full Meeting Materials

Please visit the Blue Ribbon Task-Force website to listen to an audio recording of the September meeting and access all meeting materials.

<http://blueribbon.sd.gov/materials.aspx>.

Next meeting: October 1, 2015, held in Pierre, SD at View 34.