

Meeting Notes

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations
<https://portal.ct.gov/acir>

Special Education, Education Governance & Workforce Development Subcommittee

Tuesday, July 9, 2024

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/26213>

A recording is available at: <http://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=23414>

ACIR Members present in person: John Filchak, Jan Perruccio (Co-chair), Lon Seidman (Co-chair)

ACIR Members present online: Francis Pickering, Troy Raccuia

Other participants in person: Sheila McKay, Louis Rosado Burch, Lindsay Seti

Other participants online: David Abbey, John Harkins, Teri Merisotis, Matt Pafford

OPM staff: Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to order, overview of meeting procedures, agenda review

Jan Perruccio called the meeting to order at 9:09.

2. If desired: review of draft notes of the [7/9/2024 meeting](#)

There was no discussion.

3. Work program, timeline, and membership

There was no discussion

4. Education governance: possible Local Educational Agency (LEA) and interdistrict alternatives

[Handout: Education Governance Recommendations](#)

Given the potentially larger audience due to this meeting being streamed on CT-N, Jan Perruccio read an overview of this subcommittee's focus area. She highlighted that CT's reliance on the property tax creates a cost-capacity gap between local education costs and the capacity of many municipalities to fund it. She also mentioned the magnitude and volatility of special education spending and said this subcommittee is exploring school governance and shared service alternatives to reduce that cost-capacity gap. The subcommittee will also explore and recommend actions regarding hiring, training, diversity, and retention challenges in public education. So far, the subcommittee has focused on governance and some recommendations in the [2020 Report of the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services](#).

Lon Seidman provided further background regarding the 2020 task force report, highlighting that the ACIR had prepared it and that it was submitted to the General Assembly shortly before the COVID shutdowns. He described the review of that report's recommendations at this subcommittee's meeting and the broad

interest in preserving autonomy for school system staff and for towns to maintain some degree of autonomy in how their schools are operated within the bounds of state law. This is also connected to special education and workforce development. He circulated an [education governance recommendations handout](#), which was also shown on the screen, with potential additions to some of the 2020 recommendations based on this group's previous discussions.

Lon pointed out the addition of "autonomy" in blue text in subsec. 4a of the handout and the addition of a three-year time frame for [Local Education Authorities](#) (LEAs) in that subsection, noting Kathy Demsey's comment at an earlier meeting regarding the CT State Dept. of Education's CSDE's concern about excessive volatility. You don't want to have school districts being formed and unformed every six months. Lon also pointed out the recommended statutory change clarifying that teachers transferring out of a cooperative agreement maintain their years of service. Lou Rosado Burch said that will hopefully be an easy lift.

Lon continued to new subsection 4c and described issues being addressed regarding building space standards. He explained that a district considering consolidation probably has too few students, so its buildings probably are above the standard and, if two districts are trying to get together, they have multiple buildings that are too large. That results in a reduced state reimbursement rate for building constructions and he hears about districts bulldozing perfectly good buildings to meet the standard. Given the cyclical nature of school enrollment, districts doing that might need to build again when the population increases at the other end of the cycle.

Lou Rosado Burch mentioned the previous meeting's discussion of wrap around services and community schools and Lon said even a school operated jointly by two districts can achieve the goal of community schools. Lon referred to Subsec. 4d, which he has not changed, and suggested the group discuss that. Jan Perruccio thanked Lon for adding people's suggestions from the previous meeting and said this is how the group should proceed. She added that in moving these recommendations forward we should consider the impacts of changes on teachers, administrators, and support staff and said they should have seniority-based protections.

Francis Pickering asked Lon how spending decisions are made for a regional school district and if they go to a public referendum. Lon said it depends on the district bylaws. He explained the process for his district, which holds a referendum, and said most do. Francis asked about voter turnout for those referendums, which are out of cycle with municipal elections, and Lon said they had a 2% turn out for the regional school budget referendum. He pointed out that the regional budget vote is earlier so the towns' obligation is known before the municipal budget vote. added that different regional districts have different rules about whether each town must approve the regional budgetor whether the decision is based aggregate votes.

There was a discussion of the potential for improving turnout for regional district budget votes by having those votes on the same cycle as municipal budget votes. Lon noted that some votes include a non-binding question asking if a budget is too high or too low. He said he will incorporate points raised today into the document.

There was a discussion of the General Assembly's reluctance to modify regional school district statutes and of some statutes being out of date. Lon Seidman described an issue regarding the state requirement for districts that must refund unspent funds and how it does not work because of differences between audit and budget cycles. He also described the politics of regional school districts and the fragility of relationships in some regional districts. There was further discussion of regional district politics and of the recent formation of Regional School District 20.

Jan Perruccio said the district creation process is cumbersome and there was a discussion of the impediments, highlighting local concerns regarding financial oversight and about towns losing their ability to change in response to future changes in demographics, the economy, and other things. Jan said the process requires a seasoned board and superintendent and that the state should modify and incentivize the process. Lon Seidman provided further background regarding the process and said it should not be

discarded. Instead, the state should offer an alternative path in which towns can run a school together when it makes sense to do so.

Lon Seidman pointed out the expected enrollment declines in many districts and said their students will have fewer opportunities. He said districts used to be able to collaborate in ways not allowed now. David Abbey said the state should provide a large incentive, noting the scale of federal incentives to states to implement the Affordable Care Act. Lon agreed, pointing to the new subsection 3c in the handout, and Jan Perruccio noted that the current process leads to buildings having to be shut down and grants returned. She does not support mandated regionalization but would support a recommendation for state incentives large enough to encourage towns to go through the upheaval of making a regional school.

Lon described the history of district formation when Baby Boomers were being born and enrollments were increasing. State support for building construction was important then but the situation is different now. He noted the disincentive of the previously mentioned issue regarding the state building space standard and said it would not be expensive for the state to change that. Lon also mentioned the cost of studying a consolidation plan, including the lawyers and negotiations with staff. There are a lot of costs in the planning and execution phases. Communities have to pay for those expenses and a state grant program supporting that might be useful. Jan Perruccio mentioned the additional local cost to amend contracts with vendors.

John Filchak asked about the cost and there was a discussion of what is involved. John said this could be eligible for the state's [Regional Performance Incentive Program](#) (RPIP) and described that program. There was a discussion of the time needed for change and whether it can be accommodated by RPIP. The process cannot be completed in a short timeframe, but a longer timeframe can lead to the process being interrupted by a change in municipal leadership. There was no further discussion.

5. Which recommendations were not acted on and why, what are their benefits & drawbacks:

- [2020 Report of the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services](#)
- [MORE Commission BOE Spring Recommendations](#)
- [MORE Commission Regional Entities – Education Policy](#)

Jan Perruccio said these are foundational documents for the subcommittee to consider and noted that the subcommittee just did a nice job building from the first. She explained last month's request for people to think about the various recommendations and what has or has not been implemented. She invited comments and Lou Rosado Burch mentioned the CEA's interest in teacher recruitment & retention, fiscal accountability, and in a student focused agenda. Regarding fiscal accountability, Lou distinguished between minimum budget requirement and a minimum expenditure requirement, saying the latter ensures that money that has been allocated is spent on the services and facilities that that are needed.

Lou also pointed out the number of vacancies, saying there are 1300 to 1400 full time vacancies across the state and that that number is going up growing as teachers retire. Teacher diversity and class sizes have been a focus for the CEA. He mentioned their involvement in recent teacher certification reform and reciprocity, as well as in school climate and culture. They are working on starting salaries now and he provided some background on that and on collective bargaining, which is different for teachers. Lou said they are looking at the local budget process to make sure state [Education Cost Sharing](#) (ECS) funding makes it to the classroom.

Lon Seidman asked Lou about school environment and behavior challenges since the onset of COVID. It is a little better now but still not where it used to be. He asked if workforce shortages are completely attributed to that or is it demographics or other underlying factors? Lou Rosado Burch responded that he did not want to downplay the role of COVID, because the impact of the learning loss and deregulated behavior is very real. We are still catching up from that, but some challenges already were in place. Lou

mentioned the starting salary issue raised earlier and pointed out that Bridgeport has a teacher shortage but pays a significantly lower starting salary than neighboring Trumbull.

Lou said the CEA has been thinking about that kind of relationship across municipal borders and how it impacts the workforce. This was a challenge long before the pandemic. He said a lot of the efforts to date have nibbled around the edges, through the certification process and other kinds of things. The CEA believes we need to put some money on the table to attract talented professionals into the field. There was a discussion of qualifications and certification paths and of the financial situation experienced by new teachers paying student loans.

Jan Perruccio mentioned that one of the key points raised during surveys last year was that teachers felt they did not have autonomy, with people who are not educators were telling those in the field what to do. Lou Rosado Burch mentioned curriculum directives coming down from the legislature and there was a discussion of whether that is exacerbating retention and the teacher shortage.

David Abbey said another matter relevant recruitment, training, diversity, and retention is that male teachers are about 23% of the workforce, nationally. It is the lowest in the history of the Republic and it continues to go down. This is an issue we might want to consider because we are missing a lot of talent. There also is a critical need to attract more males and females of color into the field and there also are linguistic differences. David also highlighted that, nationally, only about 27% of superintendents are female, in profession 77% of the teachers are. He said we never look at the disparity in terms of males and the lack of diversity in districts, noting that there are virtually no males in elementary schools. We should look at this issue or at least mention it. Jan Perruccio agreed and said the superintendent number is startling.

There was a discussion of someone from the [American Federation of Teachers CT](#) (AFT CT) presenting information at the next meeting. There was a discussion about next steps for the group and that the group is reaching a consensus on governance. Jan Perruccio said there will be a greater emphasis on special education next month but a draft of the subcommittee's recommendations for governance should be ready.

John Filchak noted that the MORE Commission reports reviewed by the subcommittee are getting old and Jan said they provide a lot for this group to build on. There was a discussion of the fate of MORE Commission recommendations in the political process, and John Filchak pointed out that legislators directed him to remove references to regionalism from the more recent 2020 Task Force report.

There was further discussion of the political challenges of implementing regional education approaches and that when an effort goes wrong, you lose a decade. There was further discussion of a possible approach and Lou Rosado Burch suggested a legislative forum to create awareness before putting in legislation. Lon Seidman mentioned that the CSDE was supposed to have a task force that was going to look at the LEA issue but never started it. There also was further discussion of potential benefits for small towns with too few kids for some programs.

6. Meeting recap and next steps

Jan Perruccio said the next meeting will be at the CT Assoc. of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) and will include chairs of the [Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding](#). We also expect information from the CSDE and the draft governance document. She asked if there are any further topics and read the dates of that and other upcoming meetings.

7. Upcoming meetings:

- August 15, 2024, 9:00 am Municipal Workforce Development Subcommittee
- September 6, 2024, 10:30 am Full ACIR
- September 10, 2024, 9:00 am Education Subcommittee

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:11.

Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM