

M.O.R.E. Commission
Special Education Select Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 21, 2014

10:00 AM in LOB Room 1D

The meeting was called to order by Rep. Becker (Co-Chair) at 10:05 AM.

The following select working group members were present: Rep. Brian Becker (Co-Chair), Rep. Terrie Wood (Co-Chair), George Rafael, Robert Namnoum, Shelley Davis, John Filchak, Rep. Jay Case, Mike Regan, Julie Swanson, Atty. Howard Klebanoff, Deborah Richards, and Patrice McCarthy

Rep. Becker introduced Julie Swanson, the newest member of the select working group.

Ms. Swanson stated that she has been a special education advocate for 16 years and is a parent of a child with a disability.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor corrections.

Rep. Becker stated that members still had some questions from previous meetings that were awaiting answers. He then asked if it made sense to attempt to obtain the answers to these outstanding questions before moving on to a new discussion topic.

Ms. McCarthy suggested that the answers to these questions be sought as soon as possible.

Rep. Becker spoke about the plan to have the working group meet in different locations around the state during the summer to hear from different communities.

Rep. Wood asked if it would be possible, during the working group's June 12th meeting, to have a representative from a RESC give a presentation on RESC programs related to special education.

Ms. Richards volunteered to give [or was it to "arrange"] such a presentation on RESC special education programs.

Rep. Becker stated that the Speaker of the House had requested that one of the off-site working group meetings this summer be held in Hamden. He said that the Speaker wanted to obtain feedback from different parts of the state concerning areas where regionalization could

have a positive impact both on the quality of special education services provided and on municipal budgets.

Attorney Klebanoff stated that one of the largest problems in special education is the cost. He continued that the working group does not yet have the answers to questions it had asked concerning payments for special education. These questions will need to be answered for the working group to act.

Mr. Regan agreed with Attorney Klebanoff's statement and continued that the questions concerning Medicaid reimbursement also need to be addressed.

Mr. Namnoum stated that meeting in Hamden would be a good idea. He said that it would be good to have representatives from the Board of Education talk about the impact of the funding formula on income and expenditures at the district level.

Rep. Becker stated that the working group will not likely get all of the answers to outstanding questions at one meeting, but it will be the group's task to obtain these answers over the next few meetings. He then asked what types of things working group members wanted to hear those who offer testimony before the group during its upcoming series of off-site summer meetings.

Ms. McCarthy stated that she would like to hear from local districts concerning their funding challenges and concerning any challenges in providing appropriate placements for children with multiple special needs. She then asked if CT-N would provide coverage of the working group's off-site meetings.

Rep. Wood stated that some type of recording could be made.

Rep. Becker asked the working group administrator if a recording could be made.

David Desjardins, Working Group Administrator, stated that CT-N does have the capacity to travel off-site, but working group staff would have to ask if they planned to cover our off-site meetings. He also stated that it should not be a problem to at least make an audio recording of the meeting.

Rep. Wood suggested that the working group hold two meetings on June 12th: a morning meeting in Hartford with an overview of RESC special education programs and an evening meeting in Hamden to receive local input.

Rep. Becker stated that the working group leadership was in the process of creating a summer schedule, but that meetings would likely be held every few weeks in different locations around the state. He continued that these meetings would likely be held in the evening to allow local parents and other interested parties who work during the day to attend.

The working group members voted to determine the best time for the next meeting and decided to hold both a morning meeting in Hartford and an evening meeting in Hamden on June 12th.

Attorney Klebanoff stated that he would be interested in hearing from parents and local board of education representatives about problems they have identified in the current special education system. He said it would be a good idea for superintendents and local heads of special education programming to attend the working group's off-site meetings.

Ms. Richards stated that it would be helpful for working group members to have a calendar of summer meetings.

Rep. Case stated that the working group should be clear to people attending off-site meetings that members are there to listen and to come up with solutions to problems.

Mr. Namnoum stated that three hours would likely be necessary for the length of evening meetings.

Ms. Davis asked if public comments could be placed on the MORE Commission website, either via a survey or some other mechanism.

Mr. Rafael asked that the working group create a document for those attending off-site meetings in order to focus the conversation.

Rep. Becker said he wanted to make sure the conversation was not too restricted because he wanted to give people the leeway to raise new issues and concerns.

Ms. Swanson and Attorney Klebanoff volunteered to work with the co-chairs to help contact local parents groups before off-site meetings to ensure that they are included.

Ms. Swanson asked if the question members wanted to pose to those testifying during off-site meetings was to identify the barriers to effective special education.

Rep. Wood supported Ms. Swanson's suggestion.

Mr. Regan stated that he wanted to make sure that the group stayed focused during these off-site meetings and kept an eye towards the major recurring problems so members could brainstorm solutions.

Rep. Case stated his hope that working group staff would be able to cover off-site meetings.

Mr. Filchak stated that spokespersons for specific interested groups should be notified about these off-site meetings.

Rep. Wood stated that the notices to those asked to present at off-site meetings (Board of Education representatives and members of parent advocacy groups, etc.) should be specific as to what information the working group was seeking. She suggested that a small group of members discuss this after the meeting.

Mr. Namnoum stated that teachers should be involved in off-site meetings as well.

Ms. Richards suggested that an entire separate meeting be dedicated to hearing the perspective of teachers, with representatives from CEA and AFT, rather than having them present at each off-site meeting.

Mr. Namnoum agreed with Ms. Richards that a separate meeting to hear from teachers was appropriate.

Ms. Davis suggested hearing from paraprofessionals at the meeting for teachers as well.

Rep. Case asked if the working group would accept written testimony during off-site meetings. He supported the idea of accepting such testimony.

Rep. Becker thanked working group members for a productive meeting and adjourned at 11:06 AM.

Respectfully Submitted: Barbara Gordon and Dave Desjardins