

MINUTES

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION MEETING JOINTLY

Monday, August 10, 2020

1:30 PM

Room A, MAC

Little Rock, Arkansas

Committee Members present: Senators Jane English, Chair; Joyce Elliott, Vice Chair; Eddie Cheatham, Lance Eads, and James Sturch; Representatives Bruce Cozart, Chair; Reginald Murdock, Vice Chair; Rick Beck, LeAnne Burch, Gary Deffenbaugh, Jana Della Rosa, Jim Dotson, Jon S. Eubanks, Denise Garner, Austin McCollum, Richard McGrew, Nelda Speaks, Dan Sullivan, and DeAnn Vaught

Other Members in attendance: Senators Linda Chesterfield, Alan Clark, Breanne Davis, Jonathan Dismang, Trent Garner, Kim Hammer, and Mark Johnson; Representatives Fred Allen, Stan Berry, Cameron Cooper, Marsh Davis, Denise Ennett, Brian Evans, Kenneth B. Ferguson, Charlene Fite, Megan Godfrey, Steve Hollowell, Joe Jett, Mark Lowery, Fredrick J. Love, Tippi McCullough, Stephen Meeks, Marcus E. Richmond, Johnny Rye, Jamie Scott, Stu Smith, Joy Springer, Dwight Tosh, and Carlton Wing

Senator English called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes July 6, 2020 and July 7, 2020 Meetings [Exhibits C1 and C2]

Senator Elliott made a motion to adopt the minutes from the July 6 and July 7, 2020 meetings, with a second by Representative Meeks. Without objection, the motion was carried.

Discussion of Adequacy Study Update [Exhibit D]

Mr. Justin Silverstein, Co-CEO, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) Consulting, provided an update about district survey responses. They received over 200 responses out of all Arkansas districts. Stakeholder engagement is currently targeted through a stakeholder survey to educators, parents, leaders, and others. Representative Vaught asked for a link to the stakeholder survey to send along to constituents. APA will also be holding virtual educator panels beginning after Labor Day, including superintendents and teachers across five regions. The upcoming study will focus on identifying gaps, what types of student populations experience these gaps, and finding specific programs to address them. Other focuses include the correlation between performance and funding, concentrations of poverty and its funding, and the relationships between class size requirements, student-teacher ratios, and teacher salaries. Many questions were raised about how the survey results will be representative of the State's population, especially with consideration to race and gender distinctions, varying levels of parent involvement, and geographic diversity. Mr. Silverstein answers that race will be included in the demographic analysis and though male and female data has been collected, he will look into whether it is included. APA's approach is to gather as many responses as possible and have a high participation rate before analyzing if those responses are representative. Mr. Silverstein states that an overarching challenge with using engagement surveys to collect data is that there tends to be groups of people more likely to engage than others. One plan is to incorporate local media in order to get the survey widely spread throughout each region and then consider these factors, clarifying their impact and weight when presenting the results.

Discussion of College and Career Readiness [Exhibits E1, E2 and E3]

Ms. Amanda Brown, Senior Associate, APA Consulting presented how college and career readiness is defined and how to measure it in Arkansas with consideration to performance in SREB states. Nearly 50% of Arkansas high school graduates attend post-secondary institutions in Arkansas. The remediation rate of those students is higher than all national averages in both 2-year and 4-year institutions at 64.9%. According to an SREB study, less than a quarter of students in the region who require remediation earn a credential within eight years. Multiple questions were raised about the effectiveness of both the ACT and an individual's GPA in determining postsecondary success and necessity of remediation. Ms. Brown states that the ACT is still one of the best predictors. Based on national research, indicators include having less than 10% of absences, GPA, AP courses and scores, and performance on ACT with specific thresholds. Predictors do not have numeric thresholds; they refer to capabilities, involvement in social and emotional programs, or skills certifications. If a student does not meet the first assessment of ACT benchmarks, the attention shifts to the other predictors and indicators. Currently, Arkansas has a limited college and career readiness (CCR) statewide definition. Ms. Brown states that because the indicators and measurements are less specific for career readiness, there is a greater focus on academic and postsecondary readiness. There are some indicators like producing high-wage, high-skilled workers or measuring the development of 21st century skills, but an official method of measuring and quantifying success in career readiness is less defined in most state CCR definitions. The upcoming surveys and panels will give space for educators to address what is lacking in these definitions and their concerns of resources and program availability before and during COVID-19 in anticipation of collecting the actual academic impact data later in the year.

Comparison of Prior Costing Study Recommendations and the State Funding Matrix [Exhibits F1, F2 and F3]

Mr. Mark Fermanich, Senior Associate, APA Consulting presented the history of the funding matrixes through the relationship between General Assembly and Picus & Associates' recommendations. The presentation outlines the recommendations and how the General Assembly implemented them into the matrix for the following year. Picus & Associates used evidence-based adequacy studies to determine an adequate level of funding for Arkansas. This approach makes specific recommendations for staffing and spending and the General Assembly created a funding matrix based on these recommendations. The matrix assumes a 500 student K-12 school or district. APA compared their 2003 evidence-based approach study of financial adequacy, 2006 recalibration for school funding, and 2014 desk audit of the AR school funding matrix aimed at understanding costs of broadband access for all schools.

Review of Adequacy Studies [Exhibits G1 and G2]

Mr. Silverstein presented the four approaches to examine adequacy: professional judgment, evidence based, successful schools, and cost function. Professional judgment and evidence based approaches are focused on resource availability and need. The other two are data driven, identifying base costs. Forty-nine studies were done in 31 states, 21 of which used professional judgment approach and 53% were done for organizations outside of state entities. Ms. Michaela Tonking, Associate, APA Consulting presents the comparisons of Arkansas matrix ratios between the national mode and SREB studies. Arkansas matrix ratios were higher in administrative services, student support services, special education resources, and instructional resources for elementary grades class size K-2 and for library/media specialists. The ratios for class size in grades 3-12 and instructional facilitators are more aligned with, or the same as, the national mode and SREB studies, as well as technology dollars per student and instructional materials dollars per student. Mr. Silverstein states it is very important to remember these studies are just studies and not actual funding levels; unlike in Arkansas and a few other exceptions, most states have not implemented the studies. Arkansas has also decided which recommendations to adopt from their studies; for example, it was noted that the smaller student-to-teacher ratio recommendation from Picus & Associates was not implemented.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:54 p.m.