**SJR 4 – Education Funding Improvement Commission Meeting #6**

**March 14, 2016**

**Tatnall Building, Dover**

**MINUTES**

**Member Attendees:**

Sen. David Sokola

Rep. Earl Jaques

Vicki Gehrt

Barbara Rutt

Rod Ward

David Blowman

Madeleine Bayard

Ashley Dalzell-Gray

Heath Chasanov

Wendy Strauss

Kevin Carson

Darryl Scott

Brian Maxwell

Meghan Wallace

Walter Gilefski

Jill Floore

Ed Ratledge

Ray Jones Avery

Claudia Porretti

**Members Not In Attendance:**

Rep. Ruth Briggs King

Jeff Taschner

Senator Gary Simpson

Michael Jackson

Mark Stellini

Sally Maldonado

Robert Overmiller

**Non-Member Attendees:**

Rep. Kim Williams

Rep. Paul Baumbach

Tina Shockley

Donna Johnson

Bill Doolittle

Kevin Ohlandt

Javier Torrijos

Terry Richard

Elizabeth Buriand

The sixth meeting of the Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 4 Education Funding Improvement Commission was held on April 19, 2016 at the Tatnall Building, Dover. Chairman of the Commission, Darryl Scott, called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m.

Governor Markell attended the meeting to say thank you to all of the members. He noted that the commission has undertaken incredibly hard work trying to change something that has been around forever. He indicated that where the money goes and how it follows the kid are big issues. He understands that commission members come from different perspectives, which sometimes makes for difficult decisions, but for good discussion. He thanked the members of the commission for their service.

The Chair began the meeting by reviewing the agenda and handouts. The first order of business was the approval of Meeting #5 Minutes. The Chairman confirmed there was a quorum present in the room. There was a motion to approve the minutes and it was seconded. Next there was discussion on some minor changes to the minutes. A motion to approve the edited minutes was made, it was seconded, and all were in favor. The motion carried, and the minutes were approved as edited.

The Chair led the discussion based on a review of multiple modeled scenarios as noted in the Chairman’s presentation (Attachment #1). The group discussed the charts that were created at the last meeting. There was further discussion on the ones that were more evenly split (where a clear majority) was not shown.

The following were noted as areas of agreement from the prior meeting:

* Our State Education Funding System should provide flexibility to schools in order to allow them the ability to meet the unique needs of their students and community regardless of size of school or district (Majority 12-5)
* Our current funding system does not adequately appropriate funding to address the additional supports that need to be funded for ELL and low income students (16-1)
* Local School boards need the ability to increase the operating tax rate within certain parameters without referendum (12-4)
* Property assessment should be done on an ongoing basis ( 14-2)
* Our education funding system should be transparent and the public should be able to understand how funds are allocated to our schools to meet the diverse needs of students (11-5)
* We can make revisions to our existing funding system to immediately implement changes that have the ability to be expanded over a longer term transition in order to gradually reform and improve our education funding structures (18-3)
* There are existing opportunities to find greater cost efficiencies within our existing funding structure (12-1)

There was general agreement on the items noted above, but it is noted that there was some further discussion amongst the members.

Next, the group discussed possible recommendations resulting from these areas of agreement. These include:

* Increase the flexibility schools and districts have in allocating new and existing funding in order to better utilize state appropriated funding
* Create new funding structure that allocates additional per student funding for low income and ELL students that allow schools and districts the flexibility to invest in the supports more beneficial to their students and communities
* Grant local school boards the ability to increase the operating tax rate without referendum
* Enact a mechanism that will transition property assessment to be undertaken on a regular and ongoing basis
* Utilize opportunities with new funding to implement funding structures that use weights attached to student demographics in order to increase transparency of where and how funds are allocated to schools
* Pilot student weighted flexible funding calculated to provide additional supports for ELL and low income students. Study the uses and impacts of these new funds over two years on student learning to further inform.
* Explore opportunities to enhance the flexibility, equity and transparency of our funding system developing a transition plan for a longer term structure shift statewide to most appropriately meet student needs.

Again, there was further discussion among the members on the above noted recommendations.

Next, the group reviewed the revised Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC) models and it was noted that our process was similar to that of WEIC. We have focused our discussions mainly on ELL and low income/poverty. It was noted that WEIC’s charge is for several years, and what we do here may feed into what they do. We have a common goal which is to meet the needs of students whose needs are not adequately met today.

The group also reviewed the methodology to estimate unit cost of a non-weighted student in our current system and it was noted that there are policy decisions to be made throughout these models and further analysis to be done. The goal is to provide schools with additional funds with the flexibility to use in the manner they believe will provide the most benefit to students and their school(s) and measure the growth and impact to guide the statewide implementation.

The group also discussed student weights such as low income, ELL, special education, gifted and talented, and other populations. There was also consideration for Pilot Models. The Chair noted that there are some policy decisions to note, such as tiered system, definition for low SES, affluent schools vs. greater need schools, etc.

Sen. Sokola noted that there is no equity in the system. He noted that the intent is to get the dollars to follow the students. The Chair noted that the funding must be sufficient to meet the goal/outcome for the student.

The committee was asked to give thought on the suggested areas of agreement for recommendations and policy questions that will need to be answered. The Chair indicated that such recommendations will be discussed at next meeting, and noted there may be a homework exercise prior to the next meeting. He also noted the Hanover Study link would be sent to members.

The group decided that the next meeting would be on May 3, at 11:30 a.m., and a meeting invite will be sent. The Chair then asked for public comment. Javier Torrijos, Chair DE Hispanic Commission spoke and provided some written public comments regarding ELLs. Additionally, Terry Richard, ELL Coordinator for the State also spoke on behalf of ELLs needing more funding. Bill Doolittle also spoke and noted that the current model may work, and he encouraged the commission to move forward with best practices and funding to implement those practices.

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting and it was seconded. The meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Drafted 04.27.16