



OHIO CONSTITUTIONAL MODERNIZATION COMMISSION

REVISED MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FOR THE MEETING HELD
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2013

Call to Order:

Chair Chad Readler called the meeting of the Education, Public Institutions, and Local Government Committee to order at 9:15 a.m.

Members Present:

A quorum was present with Vice-chair Gilbert and committee members Beckett, Brooks, Clyde, Sykes, and Taft in attendance.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of the November 14, 2013 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Presentations and Discussion:

Chair Readler called on Malcolm Costa, president and chief executive officer, and Allyson Lee, director of the Head Start program, at Akron Summit Community Action Inc. to present on Head Start and its role in early childhood education.

Vice-chair Ed Gilbert asked Mr. Costa whether Head Start has turned away children due to a lack of funding. Mr. Costa remarked that the federal sequestration did affect monies but no child was turned away. Mr. Gilbert asked why an amendment to the constitution is necessary if Head Start is working well. Mr. Costa answered that attendance and retention is a problem that could be addressed.

Chair Readler asked the ages of children in Head Start. Ms. Lee responded that the ages of children in Head Start are between birth and five years old.

Representative Kathleen Clyde asked for the presenters to provide a snapshot of the kind of family that enrolls a child in Head Start, particularly their level of income. Ms. Lee answered

that enrollment eligibility is based on the age of the children and household income, remarking that most families are at or below the federal poverty line. Rep. Clyde asked whether the Head Start in Akron has a lengthy waiting list. Ms. Lee shared that the waitlist for the Akron Head Start is short due to the varied childcare options available to families that may not qualify for Head Start.

Governor Bob Taft asked whether there is data revealing how the graduates of Head Start are performing with regard to kindergarten readiness. Ms. Lee indicated they are at the beginning stages of tracking Head Start graduates. She said she could provide data at a future committee meeting. Mr. Costa remarked that a constitutional amendment that ensures funding sustainability for early childhood education would be a celebrated action.

Representative Vernon Sykes thanked Mr. Costa and Ms. Lee for their presentations and willingness to educate members of the Committee on the value of Head Start programming.

Chair Readler recognized William Sims, president and chief executive officer of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools, to present to the Committee.

Mr. Gilbert asked Mr. Sims to expound on the definition of “special education.” Mr. Sims said “special education” is a term related to students having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Chair Readler asked whether there are specific charter schools that provide services to special education students, and Mr. Sims replied yes.

Gov. Taft asked Mr. Sims whether his organization has amendment language that will modernize the Constitution with regard to charter schools. Mr. Sims replied that language can be devised.

Chair Readler asked Mr. Sims to discuss the evolution of schools with regards to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and its role within charters. Mr. Sims asserted the biggest challenges are how to adapt to changing circumstances, compete globally, and address the need for individualized programming.

Chair Readler noted that charters receive less funding than public schools and asked Mr. Sims to share his opinion. Mr. Sims asserted the issue must be a charge for policymakers. Rep. Sykes noted that, as policymakers, the General Assembly must grapple with issues of adequacy and availability of monies. In response, Mr. Sims asserted the challenge in addressing adequacy and funding is that they school funding relies too heavily on local property taxes. He noted the challenge ahead for policymakers is to use state funds that can also combat funding disparity. Rep. Sykes questioned how much state participation is appropriate with regards to charters.

Chair Readler called upon William Phillis, executive director of the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding, and Attorney Nicholas Pittner, of Bricker & Eckler, LLP, to provide background on common schools and funding.

Mr. Pittner noted that he was the lead attorney for the plaintiffs in the DeRolph school funding case, sharing background on the case. Mr. Pittner concluded that the Ohio education system

remains inadequate because the funding issue has not been addressed and there continues to be over reliance on local property taxes, thus leaving a disparity.

Mr. Gilbert asked whether the presenters could provide a thumbnail sketch of funding alternatives. Mr. Phillis affirmed the connection between opportunity and funding must be examined and that funding should depart from the dependence on local property taxes. He noted a worthwhile alternative is to increase state support from the current 43 percent to 65 percent and endow the state with accountability for funding.

Chair Readler questioned the definition of “thorough and efficient” within today's education system. Mr. Phillis asserted the 19th century definition of a thorough and effective system was searching for equity and adequacy within the system.

Rep. Sykes added that an established standard or mechanism by which difficult decisions must be made would lessen the reliance on the legislative branch.

Committee member Paula Brooks asserted having a first-hand understanding of the inadequacies within our education system on the local level affirms the need to make strong recommendations to the General Assembly to tackle the issues of educational disparity within the state.

Chair Readler thanked the presenters for their presentations and insight.

Adjournment:

With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.

Approval:

The minutes of the December 12, 2013 meeting of the Education, Public Institutions, and Local Government Committee were approved at the April 10, 2014 meeting of the committee.

/s/ Chad A. Readler
Chad A. Readler, Chair

Edward L. Gilbert
Edward L. Gilbert, Vice-chair