

Education Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, August 29, 2016

2:00 PM in Room 1E of the LOB

The meeting was called to order at 2:08 PM by Chairman Senator Gayle Slossberg

The following committee members were present:

Present were: Rep. Andy Fleischmann, Sen. Gayle Slossberg, Robyn Kaplan-Cho, John Pascone, Patricia Ciccone, Steven Hernandez, Paul Stringer, Desi Nesmith, Karissa Neihoff, George Sugai, Sandra Charfouleas, Kathleen Kennedy; Marc Brackett,

Absent were:

Sen. Gayle Slossberg and Rep. Andy Fleischmann welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the reason behind creating a task for to examine school climate.

Sen. Slossberg opened up the floor for member introduction.

The task force members introduced themselves.

Sen. Slossberg went over the charge of the taskforce PA 16-188 Sec. 5. (a) There is established a task force to review, streamline and align state policies relating to school climate, bullying, school safety and social-emotional learning. The task force shall examine the manner in which local and regional boards of education are implementing the safe school climate plans, pursuant to section 10-222d of the general statutes, and any issues resulting from such implementation. The task force shall make recommendations relating to (1) school climate standards for local and regional boards of education to use to develop and implement safe school climate plans, and (2) an accountability methodology that uses the results from student surveys to assess the effectiveness of such safe school climate plans.

Sen. Slossberg opened the floor for members to share preferred methodology or processes.

Rep. Fleischmann echoed the senator's notion regarding setting up a schedule for the task force, public hearing, and guest speakers.

Sen. Slossberg asked members their preference of starting the task force.

Steven Hernandez recommended informational session, examining best practices at the local level.

Dr. George Sugai recommended looking at what the task force wants to accomplish –what are we offering the community, more of a focus level, looking at the definition, looking at multi-tier policies throughout the nation.

Rep. Fleischmann asked Dr. Sugai his opinion on what areas seem focal to start at.

Dr. George Sugai responded, academic success, best school climate tool in his opinion, second part, questioned what do we mean by social competence and how does it relate to school settings, the child's academic success and home and vocational settings –has discovered the more specific we are by what we mean by social competency and its relationship to academic success the easier it gets to implement policy inside the schools. On the contrary to this notion, the more difficult it gets to finish. And last, he would look at what are the things adults have to do to arrange for students to be successful academically and behaviorally. He reemphasized on how the strategies are relatively clear, but the struggle is how to help schools implement them to get the results we are looking for.

Senator Slossberg added that the big challenge this task force and legislation has is wanting to be specific, but not so much where it becomes prescriptive, causing problems and unintended consequences –finding the delicate balance to give districts the flexibility to create multi-tier plans and programs that will help address the needs of district's communities and students. The Senator reemphasized the need to support districts instead of creating a bureaucracy that doesn't help districts.

Mr. Desi Nesmith agreed with Dr. Sugai on the importance of implementation and recognizing and bringing forward the places and folks with best practices to the task force.

Senator Slossberg concluded the task force will begin with an informational session on the definition of school climate and what is meant when the term is talked about and its reference.

Dr. Karissa Neihoff agreed with Sen. Slossberg's direction and suggested members to think of districts models that are doing well and experts who can speak on the issue to get a jump start.

Sen. Slossberg outlined the next meeting in two weeks will cover the current definition of school climate, what do we want it to mean, and current state legislation. Presentation will be done by the Office of Legislative Research. Also commented that members can funnel people the task force can hear from and districts the task force can learn from.

Mr. Paul Stringer added the need to hear from teachers and administrators whom he believes are truly the experts because they are dealing with school climate every day during the informational session.

Sen. Slossberg asked members how the task force evaluates a district on its success in implementing school climate policy.

Ms. Robyn Kaplan-Cho asked for clarification on the task force's charges in relations to the tentative informational session and suggested looking into challenges districts and schools are having with school climate policies.

Sen. Slossberg asked for Ms. Kaplan-Cho's thoughts on having a public hearing on the challenges instead of an informational session.

Ms. Kaplan-Cho agreed and commented how the educational piece upfront would be great to explain the current legislation, what the law requires, and what reporting there is under the law. And she added how she is personally interested to hear from the State Department of Education and their capabilities in terms of resources to adhere to the law. Furthermore, she suggested that the informational session included the challenges with the legislations along with the educational portion.

Superintendent Patricia Ciccone echoed Dr. Sugai's comments on the importance of defining school climate, and added clarifying the intentions of the current law, definition of school climate plan, and distinguishing between working in schools and intervening in school matters.

Sen. Slossberg agreed and would like to continue further conversation on this issue in the next meeting. She went on to recap what the task force members believe the next meeting should cover –a better understanding what the current law requires, what exists, what does the term school climate encompass, best practices and challenges.

Mr. Desi Nesmith added the need to hear from the student voice.

Sen. Slossberg agreed with the importance of hearing from the student population, but task force needs to figure out how to best incorporate their voice.

Steven Hernandez suggested creating a space for student to testify on how they are helping improve their climate and in reducing bad behavior in their schools.

Sen. Slossberg agreed with the idea.

Dr. Karissa Neihoff suggested State Student Advisory to enter the conversation.

Dr. Sugai thrilled on the task force's initiative to offer schools the chance to define what a negative and a positive school climate looks like. Further added, his belief in the need to give school the capacity to assess what makes a difference –having policy possibly stating that schools need to be strategic when assessing the climate of their building, based on your assessment and given recommendations or guidance school needs to show a set of efforts on addressing variables in their assessment and if cannot document or be accountable one hasn't done a good job with the assessment. Reemphasized the need to define school climate to help schools' assess their needs and guide schools.

Sen. Slossberg asked members for ideas on creating a social media platform for students to interact with the task force.

Superintendent Patricia Ciccone suggested skyping and getting schools involved in recruiting student participation so it is holistic.

Sen. Slossberg added that she would be interested in hearing from school climate advisory groups if districts established any.

A motion was duly made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Administrator

Leslie Navarrete
Committee Clerk