

MEETING SUMMARY
JOINT MEETING
OF THE
HOUSE AND SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION

ADEQUACY

Tuesday, August 12, 2014
9:00 A.M.
Room 171, State Capitol
Little Rock, Arkansas

Senator Joyce Elliott, the Vice Chair of the Senate Interim Committee on Education, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Joyce Elliott, Vice Chair; Senator Bruce Holland; Senator Uvalde Lindsey; and Senator Jason Rapert.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative James McLean, Chair; Representative Les Carmine; Representative Robert Dale; Representative Gary Deffenbaugh; Representative Jody Dickinson; Representative Charlotte Vining Douglas; Representative Debra Hobbs; Representative Karen Hopper; Representative Sheilla Lampkin; Representative Homer Lenderman; Representative Mark Lowery; Representative James Ratliff; and Representative Brent Talley.

NON-VOTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative Randy Alexander; Representative Jim Dotson; Representative Stephen Meeks; Representative Reginald Murdock; and Representative Jeff Wardlaw.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Linda Chesterfield; Senator Jane English; Representative Scott Baltz; Representative David Branscum; Representative Joe Farrer; Representative Jeremy Gillam; Representative Joe Jett; Representative Walls McCrary; Representative Mark McElroy; Representative David Meeks; Representative Jim Nickels; Representative Betty Overbey; Representative John Payton; Representative Sue Scott; Representative Mary Slinkard; and Representative Tommy Wren.

Remarks by the Co-Chairs

Senator Elliott said she felt compelled to make remarks on the death the previous day of actor and comedian, Robin Williams. She said he was important for two reasons: 1) what he brought to us on the screen, namely playing a teacher who dared students to think and to question in *Dead Poets Society*, and 2) acknowledging his difficulties with depression, an illness which we don't take seriously enough, in general, and as policymakers.

The Honorable James McLean, State Representative, District 63, and Chair of the House Interim Committee on Education, was recognized, and commented that issues on the agenda which will be discussed today are transformative for schools, particularly rural schools.

Discussion of Issues Related to E-Rate

Presenter & Synopsis:

Mr. Evan Marwell, CEO and Founder, EducationSuperHighway, was recognized. Mr. Marwell described EducationSuperHighway as a nonprofit organization established in 2012. He stated its mission is to upgrade internet access at every public school in America. Mr. Marwell said the organization was founded because of a deep belief in the power of technology to help level the playing field and to give every child equal access to a quality education that will allow them to compete in the 21st Century. He said the mission started at the national level working with the federal government, particularly with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and three major things were accomplished: 1) creating a conversation that made upgrading schools to gigabit Broadband and ubiquitous Wi-Fi a national priority, 2) getting a dozen major corporations to donate over \$1.4 billion worth of funds, goods, and services to help accelerate the transition to digital learning in schools, and 3) revamping of the E-Rate Program by the FCC to focus on Broadband, effectively doubling the federal government's annual investment in Broadband in schools. Mr. Marwell said that, in addition, the federal government committed \$5 billion of new funding to put ubiquitous Wi-Fi in every classroom in this country. Mr. Marwell commented that if we truly want to upgrade schools and make digital learning available to all kids, the work has to take place at the state and the district levels. He said EducationSuperHighway has chosen two states to work with on an in-depth basis to develop a strategic implementation plan and to help execute that plan to get every school in the two states to the point where they meet the 2018 national standards of gigabit Broadband to the school and Wi-Fi in every classroom. He discussed a study done over the past two months that was part of the reason EducationSuperHighway came to Arkansas. Mr. Marwell's discussion included whether or not school districts met current and 2018 standards. He said over 230,000 students in Arkansas do not meet the current standards or do not have access to the bandwidth they need to take advantage of digital learning. Mr. Marwell stated the biggest reason EducationSuperHighway came to Arkansas was the commitment the state has shown to this issue by creating the Arkansas Public School Computer Network (APSCN), by providing funding for connectivity, and by leadership making this issue a priority. Mr. Marwell stated the first phase of the work to be done by EducationSuperHighway is: 1) to complete an inventory of internet access spending in the state, and, in order to give a complete picture of getting Broadband to every student, to look at the wide area network and the condition of Wi-Fi networks inside of each school building, and 2) to work with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and Broadband service providers to develop effective spending for connectivity. He said the second phase will be to work at the district level to ensure internet access, the fiber optic connections, and the Wi-Fi that students need in classrooms. He said work will again be done in conjunction with the ADE and service providers to develop a long-term, cost-effective solution that can deliver bandwidth without having to significantly grow the amount of money the state or the district is spending, to make sure that the state is getting the maximum benefit from that \$2.4 billion federal E-rate program, and to make sure schools can get necessary technical and procurement support.

Contributor to the Discussion:

Mr. Joe Freddoso, former President and CEO, Microelectronics Center of North Carolina (MCNC), was recognized. Mr. Freddoso, who is working with Mr. Marwell and the EducationSuperHighway team in Arkansas, summarized the success achieved in leading Broadband efforts in North Carolina.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- making sure another very important component of delivery, meaningful and sustained professional development for educators, is shored up in addition to moving to a more efficient way of using funds,
- teaching specific skills to fill specific jobs, such as coding, via the internet,
- life cycle of fiber optics; other methods of delivering bandwidth,
- conducting the study of internet access in Arkansas,
- timelines for completion of different phases of the work,
- getting service providers on the same page,
- fitting the Arkansas Research Education Optical Network (ARE-ON) into the picture,
- ensuring multiple research studies are complementary and not duplicative,

- vision for APSCN vis-à-vis Broadband,
- issues in getting the needed bandwidth to school districts, and
- “school spots” as a way to give communities access to high speed internet.

Handout:

EducationSuperHighway

Discussion of Issues Related to Student Transportation - Time on the Bus

Presenter & Synopsis:

Mr. Richard Wilson, Assistant Director, Research Services, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized. Mr. Wilson discussed a report prepared in response to a requirement in Act 1288 of 2013 for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) to conduct a survey of school districts’ bus operations. He said the Web-based survey included questions on bus routes, capacities, route miles, and riders, with the primary focus on one-way travel time for a student on each route. Mr. Wilson stated that the longest period of time traveled one way for a student on each route was a primary focus of Act 1288. He went on to discuss the possible imposition of a time limit on student one-way travel on a school bus, the factors to be considered in setting such a time limit, and the fiscal impact statewide of such a time limit. After reviewing various aspects of the data compiled from responses to the survey, Mr. Wilson concluded by stating that, although additional verification is needed, the average time on the bus one way for transported students in Arkansas is 49 minutes.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- enormity of the project,
- clarification if route miles to and from school are one-way or round trip,
- clarification of the ratio of children on the bus the longest amount of time compared to those on the bus a shorter amount of time relative to the funding the school receives,
- whether there is consistency among school districts in the fiscal impact,
- addressing the limitation on opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, and
- requirements, if any, for students to be at school for programs before the first bell.

Handout:

K-12 Student Transportation Survey per Act 1288 of 2013

Discussion of Issues Related to Isolated Funding

Presenter & Synopsis:

Ms. Nell Smith, Administrator, Policy Analysis and Research Section, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized. Ms. Smith referred to a highlighted item on a handout of Adequacy Study Statutory Responsibilities, and said that the presentation today would be on expenditures from isolated school funding. She made note of a one-page summary of the funding program, and then walked the Committees through the complete report. Ms. Smith’s presentation included background, special needs isolated funding, special needs isolated transportation funding, transfer of excess isolated funding to special needs isolated funding, effects of the flow of funding, school districts receiving isolated or special needs isolated funding, use of funds, and characteristics of school districts.

Contributor to the Discussion:

Ms. Cindy Hollowell, Division of Fiscal and Administrative Services, Arkansas Department of Education

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- ◆ relationship of isolated funding and consolidation of school districts,
- ◆ student to teacher ratio and its tie to academic proficiency,
- ◆ data on students staying in their school buildings following consolidation,
- ◆ closing an isolated school area and the effect on receipt of special needs isolation funding,
- ◆ wide differences in amounts of isolated funding for school districts,
- ◆ looking at efficiency and meeting the constitutional mandate of adequacy.

Handouts:

Adequacy Study Statutory Responsibilities
Districts Receiving Isolated or SNI Funding 2012-13
Isolated Funding, Highlights
Isolated Funding SNI and SNI Transportation, Slide
Review of Isolated and Special Needs Isolated Funding and Expenditures

Discussion of Issues Related to Student Transportation – Cost Study

Presenter & Synopsis:

Mr. Richard Wilson, Assistant Director, Research Services, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized. Mr. Wilson discussed the historical development of student transportation funding in Arkansas, noting several important milestones. Mr. Wilson advised the Committees that the research indicated that the three (3) most important variables impacting school district transportation funding costs are Average Daily Membership (ADM), percent of students transported, and route miles.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- transportation costs in Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD), North Little Rock School District, and Little Rock School District changing over time because of the end of desegregation-related travelling,
- taking fuel costs into account in the model,
- route miles and riders determining variance in cost,
- changes addressing shortfalls in rural schools, and
- requirements to pick up students in state law.

Handout:

History of School Transportation Funding

Next Scheduled Meeting:

Monday, September 8, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Approved: 10/13/14