

**MINUTES**  
**Senate Committee on Education**  
**House Committee on Education**  
**Meeting Jointly**

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**Monday, July 6, 2020**  
**1:30 P.M.**  
**Room A, MAC**  
**Little Rock, Arkansas**

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Committee members present: Senators Jane English, Chair; Joyce Elliott, Vice Chair; Eddie Cheatham, Linda Chesterfield, Lance Eads, Jim Hendren, Mark Johnson, and James Sturch; Representatives Bruce Cozart, Chair; Reginald Murdock, Vice Chair; Fred Allen, Rick Beck, LeAnne Burch, Gary Deffenbaugh, Jana Della Rosa, Jim Dotson, John Eubanks, Brian Evans, Denise Garner, Mark Lowery, Richard McGrew, Nelda Speaks, Joy Springer, Dan Sullivan, and DeAnn Vaught.

Other members present: Senators Alan Clark, Trent Garner, Kim Hammer, and Larry Teague; Representatives Stan Berry, Harlan Breaux, Marsh Davis, Denise Jones Ennett, Vivian Flowers, Kenneth Ferguson, Lane Jean, Jack Ladyman, Fredrick Love, Austin McCollum, Tippi McCullough, Milton Nicks, Jr., Marcus Richmond, Johnny Rye, Keith Slape, Brandt Smith, Stu Smith, Dwight Tosh, and Carlton Wing.

Representative Cozart called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Minutes of March 9, 2020, June 8, 2020, and June 9, 2020, Meetings [Exhibits C1, C2, C3]**  
Without objection, the Minutes from the March 9, June 8, and June 9, 2020, were approved.

**Discussion of Adequacy Update [Exhibit D]**

Mr. Justin Silverstein, Co-CEO, APA Consulting | Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), provided an update on case studies and district surveys. The study team has completed all initial case study interviews and hopes to visit schools this fall. The study team also piloted the survey with several superintendents and will send it to all districts and charter systems this week. Mr. Silverstein noted that APA will present the following at the next meeting:

- Review of adequacy studies
- Comparison of prior study recommendations and legislation
- College/career readiness definition.

**Discussion of Impacts of School and District Size [Exhibit E]**

Mr. Bob Schoch, Education Finance Decisions, presented an overview of the report on the *Impact of School and District Size: Educational and Extracurricular Impacts*. The presentation included the following information:

- How the size of schools and school districts impact educational/extracurricular programs, as well as the community; a review of research findings and practices regarding school/district size
- Analysis of relevant information from the ADE Data Center correlated with school district and school size information; and analysis of extracurricular information collected by the Arkansas Activities Association for both athletic and non-athletic activities
- Background information: district size (enrollment); population increases/decreases based on birth rates, economic opportunities change, enrollment projections; consolidation of districts and school size.

The report also included information on curriculum/extracurricular diversity, operational efficiency, personnel and workforce, and disciplinary actions. In general, the following conclusions and recommendations were reached for most variables: small districts/schools can perform as well as larger ones; and there are very specific reasons that explain why some variables show positive or negative relationships to size. It was also noted that optimal size for school districts/schools is hard to define due to weak relationships and different perspectives.

#### **Discussion of School Size Best Practices [Exhibit F]**

Mr. Bob Schoch, Education Finance Decisions, spoke on the *School Size Best Practices* report. The report shows that the study team identified four states (Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Kentucky) with state laws, regulations, or guidelines based on school size. Arkansas has a six-year Educational Facility Master Plan that is required to be updated every two years in accordance with the Arkansas Public School Academic Facility Manual. The report also said that best practices from other states include public input, enrollment projections, a model of program spaces, design efficiency ratios, funding, compliance with municipal zoning; and municipal, county, and state planning approvals that may establish site and school size, community use spaces, and other factors. Site and building requirements may preclude renovation/additions to older schools and a review of school design plans and specifications by specialists in school/education architecture.

#### **Discussion of State Approaches to Addressing Small or Isolated Schools/Districts [Exhibit G]**

Ms. Amanda Brown, Senior Associate, APA, presented an overview of the report on *State Approaches to Addressing Small or Isolated Schools/Districts*. The report notes there are several types of formula adjustments intended to address the differing costs of education for schools and districts based upon size and/or isolation such as district size adjustments and density/isolation adjustments. Arkansas school districts tend to be small, with an average about 1,000 students, and there is less variation in size between districts. The state uses a more robust set of criteria for determining isolation compared to other states and defines Isolation Funding as one that meets any four of the following five criteria:

- A distance of twelve miles or more by hard-surfaced highway from the high school of the district to the nearest adjacent high school in an adjoining district; density ratio of transported students is less than three students per square mile of area; total area of the district is ninety-five square miles or greater
- Less than 50% of bus route miles are on hard-surfaced roads
- Geographic barriers such as lakes, rivers, and mountain ranges that would impede travel to schools that otherwise would be appropriate for consolidation, cooperative programs, and shared services
- District must also have less than 350 students or be in consolidation/annexation district for isolation funding
- Criteria vary for special needs isolation/ small district/ transportation funding

#### **Discussion of Impacts of Small and Rural Districts [Exhibit H]**

Mr. Justin Silverstein, Co-CEO, APA, reported on the *Impacts of Small and Rural Districts*. An overview of the report included identifying limitations to operational efficiency experienced by small and rural schools. It also explained the role and services offered by the Education Service Cooperative, which offers a wide variety of services and are cost-effective to rural and small districts. The report also addresses identifying potential opportunities to share staff and services. Limitations to operational efficiency experienced by small and rural schools include:

- Personnel and specialized positions; workforce stability, staff turnover
- Qualifications and competitive salaries
- More limited educational opportunities; specialized coursework; extracurricular offerings

#### **Requests by members:**

Representative Joy Springer requested information regarding the academic facilities partnership funding process.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:40 pm.