

**MINUTES OF THE
TASK FORCE ON LEARNING STANDARDS AND
ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**
Monday, May 10, 1999 - 9:00 a.m. - Room 405 State Capitol

Members Present:

Sen. Howard A. Stephenson, Cochair
Rep. Tammy J. Rowan, Cochair
Sen. Karen Hale
Sen. L. Steven Poulton
Rep. Jeff Alexander
Rep. Kevin S. Garn
Rep. Karen W. Morgan
Rep. LaWanna "Lou" Shurtliff
Mr. Kim Burningham
Ms. Ila Rose Fife
Ms. Jill Kennedy
Ms. Linda B. Ogden
Lt. Gov. Olene S. Walker

Staff Present:

Mr. Bryant R. Howe,
Research Analyst
Ms. James L. Wilson,
Associate General Counsel
Mr. O. William Asplund,
Assistant Director, Office of
Legislative Research and
General Counsel
Ms. Heather Hobbs, Research
Assistant
Ms. Joy L. Miller, Legislative
Secretary

Note: A list of others present and a copy of materials distributed in the meeting are on file in the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel.

1. Introduction of Task Force Members and Staff - Sen. Stephenson called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. Task force and staff members introduced themselves.

2. Opening Statements - Rep. Rowan, House Chair, said that our schools are doing a good job, but could be doing better. We need to recognize excellence and provide assistance to schools that are struggling. She said that her original idea in HB 144 during the 1999 General Session was to proceed in a certain direction. However, after listening to input and suggestions, she decided that forming a task force would be the appropriate course of action. The task force needs broad public input from all areas of the education community. Strong public support is needed before any proposals are submitted to the Legislature.

Sen. Stephenson said that during the last 20 years, Utah has made a great deal of effort in trying to improve the public education system. Several studies and reports have been produced in an effort to implement changes. Committees such as the Strategic Planning Committee for Public Education set many admirable goals. However, many of those goals have not been attained. The 1998 Educational Report Card produced by Education Week showed that 70 percent of 4th grade students in the state are not reading at the proficient level. Math proficiency levels were also low. However, Utah received very high marks for our standards and assessment system.

3. Overview of Issues in Learning Standards and Accountability in Public Education -

Mr. Wilson distributed a test containing questions on the information sent to members prior to the meeting. Members were given five minutes to take the test. Mr. Wilson discussed efforts that have been made during the last ten years concerning standards and accountability at the state level. In 1990, Section 53A-1-601 was enacted as part of a comprehensive reform package. The basic purpose was to allow for a comprehensive system with both criterion reference testing and norm reference testing in certain grade levels. In 1997, the Legislature enacted legislation to have kindergarten students participate in an assessment of the student's reading and numeric skills no later than the first two weeks of the school year. School district performance reports are also mandated by law. Each school district is required to develop a district performance report providing for accountability of the district to its residents for the quality of schools and the educational achievement of students in the district.

Mr. Wilson stated that during the 1999 General Session, there were seven major pieces of legislation concerning accountability. He briefly reviewed the legislation which includes: 1) the formation of the task force, 2) enhancing academic achievement in public schools, 3) a state literacy program, 4) incentives for elementary reading performance improvement, 5) a reading skills development center, 6) child literacy programs, and 7) a center for the school of the future.

Mr. Howe reviewed the background on performance, funding, and accountability of public education in Utah. He pointed out that public education funding has increased by \$1 billion from 1986 to 1998. Spending per public education student has increased to over \$4,000. Mr. Howe explained that Utah students consistently outperform the national ACT scores. He reviewed the comparison of per pupil expenditures and SAT scores as well as the comparison of low income students and SAT results.

Mr. Howe discussed performance-based strategies. These include two options - Centralized Accountability Systems and Decentralized Choice Programs. Centralized Accountability Systems include accountability and systemic reform programs that work within the existing administrative structure of schools. Decentralized Choice Programs include educational choice or voucher programs. Educational choice was first proposed by economist Milton Friedman in 1955. He promoted the idea that schools will be more efficient if operated through a market system.

4. What is the Problem We Are Trying to Solve? - Mr. Howe explained that there are several points of view regarding the quality of public schools. One point of view focuses on performance, as reflected through testing. The sharpest critics maintain that schools are not adequately educating students nor are they providing sufficient value for the money spent. He pointed out that the percent of the total state budget appropriated for education has dropped from 34.7 percent in FY 1994 to 31.8 percent in FY 2000. Another aspect of debate is over academic

standards. Some standards have already been established in Utah's schools. All school districts participate in the core curriculum assessment program. A third perspective on the issue is how to hold the public education system accountable. School districts must issue annual report cards to the public on a variety of outcome indicators.

Mr. Howe commented that Utah households and businesses make the highest effort of any state in terms of taxes and expenditures for education relative to total personal income. Yet despite the high effort for education, class sizes are large and per pupil expenditures are low. He noted that while most support the idea of accountability for performance, designing and implementing accountability systems pose many technical, ethical, and political problems. Careful attention must be paid to the cost, fairness, and level of public support of any accountability system.

Sen. Poulton said teachers have expressed to him that there are too many mandates that take them away from teaching the children. The education system is becoming much too complicated.

Mr. Wilson indicated the Education Interim Committee has identified some concerns they will be addressing this year. One concern is the mandates that have come from both the state and federal level. Oftentimes programs are mandated and eventually the funding is cut. He stated he would provide information from the interim committee to the task force as it becomes available.

Rep. Shurtliff stated the Legislature is hesitant to give adequate money to the districts to fund what needs to be done because it is not sure the money will be spent the way the Legislature thinks it should be spent.

Rep. Garn suggested the task force develop some guiding principles to follow during the review process. One of the first principles to consider is recognizing the good that teachers do, rewarding them for good performance, and giving them the flexibility needed to perform their job. Teachers, students, and parents all need to be accountable.

Ms. Ogden mentioned that the task force may need to deal with teacher preparation and whether or not they are being adequately prepared for the challenges they are facing in the classroom. There will also be many societal issues that need to be addressed.

Lt. Gov. Walker felt that principals should also be included on the list of those to be held accountable.

Rep. Alexander distributed information on the results of public school reform in Texas.

He stated that many materials are available that could be used to learn from. The task force should decide who will be in charge of education. He suggested the task force focus on local school boards as having primary accountability.

Ms. Kennedy remarked that funding is an essential aspect to the issue. Whatever will be required should be adequately funded on its own.

Rep. Rowan requested members write down what they feel the top three guiding principles for the task force should be. These suggestions should be faxed to Mr. Howe.

MOTION: Rep. Alexander moved that the task force have its assessments and recommendations ready by the end of the year to be put in place next year. If possible, the task force should be ready with accountability measures to be proposed during the next legislative session. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Burningham was absent during the vote.

5. Review of Proposed Meeting Dates - Sen. Stephenson stated the next meeting of the task force is scheduled for Monday, May 24. The members will meet at 8:00 a.m. at Edison Elementary School for a tour. After the tour, the task force will reconvene at the state capitol.

6. Task Force Rules of Process - Mr. Howe stated the task force is required to follow legislative rules established for interim committees. He distributed a copy of the rules and reviewed them with the members.

MOTION: Lt. Gov. Walker moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:05 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.