

**MINUTES OF THE**  
**Task Force on Learning Standards and Accountability in Public Education**  
October 25, 1999 - 8:00 a.m. - Room 405 State Capitol

**Members Present:**

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

**Members Absent:**

None

**Staff Present:**

Mr. Bryant R. Howe, Research Analyst  
Mr. James Wilson, Associate General Counsel  
Ms. Wendy Bangerter, 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. Task Force Business**

**2. Public Testimony -- School District Superintendents -** Darrell White, Davis School District; Darlene Robles, Salt Lake School District; Barry Newbold, Jordan School District; Steve Romnencamp, Granite School District; Richard Tranter, Murray School District; and Larry Shumway, Tooele School District addressed the task force to discuss district concerns and recommendations regarding the Conceptual Outline and to respond to the input received at the public hearings.

Supt. Robles described the efforts made in Washington Elementary to increase the basic test scores of their students. Students at this school have a high mobility rate. However, the teachers and students at this school, which was considered low-performing, has made great strides over the last three-years. She expressed concern for the suggestion in the conceptual outline to examine schools annually. Students benefit when they are allowed to remain in the same school for a longer period of time. Any time of grading of schools should be considered over several years, not annually. Recognition should be given to schools showing large percentages of growth. She noted that 94 percent of the first, second, and third-grade students that had been at the school for three years tested basic and above.

Supt. Newbold stated his support for standards and accountability. He stated that his concerns with the conceptual outline deal with the inadequacy of resources. That would be more demoralizing than helpful. In the Jordan District, it costs \$700,000 for a day of teacher inservice training. However, this money is not readily available.

Supt. White said that much of what the task force heard at the public hearing was directed at the overall public education situation, not just standards and assessment. Davis school district began a much more ambitious standards project that was passed by the Legislature in 1999. It has a language art standard and has first drafts on many other standards. The district will also examine the assessment that goes with these standards. The district's goal is to have standards in every class, grade level, and subject. This is essential. But the current standards are not usable for the high stakes system the task force is considering. The legislation passed during the 1999 Legislature will have tremendous impact, but time is needed to do it correctly. However, he felt the task force's plan "puts the cart before the horse" by setting arbitrary and meaningless goals; and the state should focus on getting the standards, benchmarks, and assessment done first.

Mr. White noted that the conceptual outline talks about labeling schools. However, labeling schools is counter productive. We need to have standards, we need to have assessments, but labels are not needed. In schools where there are large number of students who need intervention, there may be a need for new resources, be we are already doing most of this. The task force should remember that we stopped public hangings years ago. The task force should try to deal with this issue in a humane way. The arbitrarily developed consequences will never fit the complex situations that the school has to deal with. The only logical consequences will be developed at the local district level. The Utah State Office of Education needs time and resources to develop the standards and assessments. The task force should determine what interventions and resources will be needed to help the children meet the resources. Simply stating the standard will help 70 percent of the students, but the other 30 percent are still going to need help.

He stated one good idea would be to require school districts to develop plans for schools that are not performing and then make sure that those plans are followed. Then the schools will improve. Let's not follow the leader off the cliff. We do need standards and we do need assessments, but we do not need this plan.

Supt. Robles said that the Washington Elementary school had several factors that lead to its improvements and you can't isolate just one factor. She said a key factor was additional money from Anneberg foundation. Also, teachers in the Salt Lake City School District have been getting good pay raises, so we can expect them to gladly put in overtime. The school also has a good principal and the school board that gave flexibility in resource allocation. However, time is critical as are flexibility and resources. What is need now is more money to train in the upper grades at the school. Above all, it is counterproductive to label.

Supt. Richard Trantor, Murray School District told the task force that he used to be principal of Murray High School District. Prior to being selected as a Centennial School, the

school only had \$300 from the school board for inservice costs for 75 teachers. However, the Centennial Schools program gave the school the opportunity to look at weaknesses and strengths. The school took two years for research and was able through money from the Centennial School to address the weakness through workshops and inservice. The school looked at how the core curriculum was being taught and at test scores.

Mr. Trantor stated that the task force should give the autonomy and the responsibility to work within their districts to make a difference. Teachers are involved in the core curriculum and it is accepted as a good document. He felt resources should be spent in developing the core, then developing the standards and then developing the assessments that follow.

Supt. Ronnenkamp stated that he supports the focus on standards and accountability and that it is helpful to think and focus on these issues. However, it is important not to "get the cart before the horse." Most important are the standards and the assessment; this is the opportunity to look at the core and fine tune it by laying out clear expectations. Like the teachers at the public hearings, district superintendents are concerned with the task force's focus on consequences. They feel the task force should be focusing on other types of issues. He said that there are few bad teachers in public education and that the vast majority of teachers are working hard and doing a good job. It is important to remember that teacher morale is low and the timing of the task force's proposal could not be worse -- especially the focusing on consequences.

He also expressed concern with the labeling and identifying of who is failing. This is not the best motivation for schools. Another concern is the lack of focus on the resources. It is not known what this will cost. It is important to remember that the task force is shifting philosophy from a teaching accountability to a learning accountability. This is a major shift. When you hold teachers accountable for learning, this is a major shift in focus and as with all major changes, this takes time and must be done carefully.

Mr. Ronnencamp stated that schools do not have control over the "raw materials" coming into the schools and this can be very frustrating. Schools must refine the raw material. This comes back to resources and finding ways to get some extra help. There is a need for retooling, especially in teacher training. Unless we give teachers the tools and resources, teacher morale will decline even further. It will take time and resources to shift from "teaching accountability to "learning accountability."

Supt. Larry Shumway told the task force that he was just appointed as district superintendent last June. He stressed the need for local control. For many years schools were funded with entirely at the local level and controlled at the local level. However, over the last few decades, recognizing a need to equalize funding, there is now more control from the state and federal levels; most local school boards feel that they have lost control. While the task force does

not want to take over schools, the proposal takes the judgment about school quality away from local level and moves it to a state level. The task force's proposal contains a fixed set of impersonal rules that moves the question of the judgment of quality from the local to the state level. Local school boards have talented and committed members who understand the issues and should maintain these judgements.

Supt. White said that accountability will come when we communicate the standards and the result of those standards to help every child achieve these standards. However, the arbitrary labeling of a school is not productive. The Davis district is communicating to the families the content of the core curriculum in precise and clear language. It is doing this for every course and every grade level so that students and parents know what is expected.

Supt. Ronnenkamp said that under the current system, it's not the teacher or principal who set the standard, but it's the student, parent, and community. He emphasized that we must have clear statement of standards.

Supt. Newbold said that the task force should provide for the reporting of data and let the data speak for themselves. It is not a good idea to take individual pieces of data, and put them together and call it a standard. The state should not interpret the data and combine them for any community.

Supt. Robles said that she does not allow her schools to make excuses because of demographics. However, more time and resources are need. It takes time and money to really train the teachers, help the parents, and collaborate with outside agencies.

Rep. Alexander said that if the superintendents do not want labeling, it would be helpful for the task force to have some alternatives to consider.

Rep. Garn stated that the superintendents have all asked for more autonomy and local control, and said that then the results will occur. However, we have had local control of public schools for 150 years and the state is still struggling with standards, assessment, and lack of accountability. He asked the superintendents how much more time they need. The reason that the task force was formed and that it is discussing this issue is because it is lacking in the state's public schools.

Supt. Shumway responded that perhaps the issue is that we are not satisfied with the current standards and assessment. However, teachers are held accountable by school districts. District superintendents deal with difficult personnel issues on a regular basis. There is accountability but schools still need to do a better job. It is wrong to say that we currently don't

have accountability in our school system. Maybe the state needs a more relevant format for the Legislative level, but the state does have a good public school system.

Rep. Garn said that the task force has been told that some test scores are going down and that one-third of students are not reading at grade level. Supt. Shumway said that Utah is also below national averages on funding.

Supt. White stated that Utah has a broad and comprehensive school system that includes a wide array of curriculum and activities. However, the public schools are now moving into a new era. In the past, educators have resisted the establishment of clear standards believing that this leads to a restriction. He said that he supports standards and assessment of those standards. However, the task force should be careful that the heart and soul of the state's great education system is not lost. Technology now allows us to teach standards and to perform assessments. The schools have shifted positions and hopefully are in agreement with what the Legislature wants.

Supt. Robles said that she supports the Legislature's desire to really find out how students are performing and to move beyond "seat time." Schools should want to educate all students, no matter where they come from. However, schools do struggle with how to do this. The task force should step back from the proposal that is on the table and take the next year for further review and change, there is no need to rush. For many schools, the question on how to raise student performance is still not clear, given the dramatic demographic and societal trends that we are facing.

Supt. Ronnenkamp said that the public education system in Utah has served its citizens well for many years. However, there is now a shift towards focusing on national standards and this has led to focus on standardized tests. Utah has done well on these tests, but the more that Utah begins to mirror the rest of the country, the more this may change. The population in Utah's urban areas is beginning to more closely match the rest of the nation. The major shift that the state is making from teaching accountability to learning accountability will take time and resources. It is critical to focus on teacher training and retraining.

Supt. Tranter asked the task force to let the education community be more involved with the development of its recommendations. The state has considerable resources that the task force should use. Teachers are saying that they've had no input. The conference that the task force sponsored was excellent; however, many of the conference speakers said to go slow. The task force should rethink how it involves the education community in this process. Once there is ownership by the community, resistance will be reduced.

Rep. Garn said that there has been a lot of discussion on not labeling. However, parents often want to know how schools are. How should the task force reconcile these two conflicts?

Everything in our society is labeled, and unless they change, they don't last. Even Legislators are labeled by special interest groups. The task force needs to find some middle ground and get the information to the public on how our schools are doing.

Supt. White reminded the task force that during its 1999 session it enacted major accountability legislation that the schools are working to implement. This legislation represents a good middle ground position. The task force should not give arbitrary labels or impose arbitrary consequences. They should find new resources to help students who are struggling to meet the standards.

Supt. Shumway expressed concern about the proposal that would allow parents to send students to other schools. He asked how would this work in rural areas? There are no other schools of our choice.

Supt. Ronnenkamp said that timing is critical. Perhaps the task force should adopt some type of identification system now, but more needs to be in place before any labeling of schools and school districts takes place. More work is needed to develop the core curriculum, align the assessment with the core, and then find ways to improve teacher training. It is important to remember that the principal is the key. If you can find a productive, child centered school, you can almost always look to the principal. It will take time to reach that point.

Rep. Garn said that he is sensitive about funding issues. While the Legislature has been criticized for not adequately funding education, it is important to remember the unique demographic characteristics that the state must face. One out of every four of Utah's citizens are in the public schools. Forty-three percent of our state and local revenues go for public education. Rep. Garn stated that it is important to find a balance between those who pay taxes and those who consume. If the implementation of the task force's recommendations comes down to large increases in spending, it is likely that the Legislature will not approve. Overall, the Legislature does a very good job in funding public education. It is important to remember that the state's capacity is very limited.

Rep. Morgan asked about the effectiveness of district report cards. Supt Newbold responded that in the four years while he has been superintendent that no one has called to say that we have not had enough information.

### **3. Discussion of Comments Received at the Public Hearings**

The task force discussed the conceptual outline and the following issues were raised.

- C Too specific from the state level
- C People responded negatively to outline
- C Texas teacher noted their system has created enormous amount of competition - test skills are taught at the expense of core - pressure on teachers
- C Hearings indicated lack of buy-in - we are moving too fast. Need to train teachers first
- C Don't hold teachers accountable for things they cannot control, i.e., parents, community, students.
- C Teachers feel they are and want to be accountable to their students and parents.
- C Teachers are frustrated in general and looking for a place to vent.
- C Timing could be good because the focus from the Legislature is that we want to do more for education, not just put money in a huge pot (black hole).
- C Will get more buy-in if the money is there.
- C 2002 would be the first year of reporting, not grading.
- C Something firm needs to be done this year with continuous perfection.
- C How can teachers fulfil the essence of education and still focus on standards, assessment, and accountability?
- C People are not happy with the proposal
- C Pilot programs could be done in some districts
- C There is a need for rapid turn around of test results
- C Student by student focus.
- C There was support for standards and accountability
- C Provide time for teachers to make use of information ( professional development)
- C Include constructive responses

Kim Burningham distributed a list of his responses on school accountability:

- (a) accountability must be a part of an overall improvement plan;
- (b) core curriculum needs more refining;
- (c) assessment system must proceed aligned with core;
- (d) varied measurements;
- (e) soften or even eliminate all labels;
- (f) genuine intervention;
- (g) emphasize gain, not high-low;
- (h) fund professional development;
- (i) training for future teachers in the universities;
- (j) significant increase in total funding; and
- (k) proceed slowly

Ms. Ogden noted there has already been an increase in districts toward accountability.

#### **4. Task Force Discussion and Recommendations for Draft Legislation**

Ms. Kennedy said that the system in Texas has led to pressure and competition between teachers and schools. As a result, teachers spend a lot of time working on test skills and things that are going to be tested and neglect other things that are important. The task force should make sure that it does not create the same pressures and problems that they have in Texas.

Ms. Ogden said that many conference speakers emphasized that unless you have support from the education community, the system will fail. The responses that we received at the public hearings indicate that the task force is moving too quickly and too far. The task force should focus on developing standards and training the teachers, then the support and accountability will come automatically. Accountability is a three-legged stool that involves not just teachers, but also parents and students. Education is a reflection of society and society has some problems right now. One size does not fit all, and we should go slowly.

Ila Rose Fife stated that the task force received considerable testimony that teachers are already accountable. She said teachers feel they are already accountable to their students and parents, and the task force's perception that they were not accountable was hurtful. The task force should not focus on just test scores. There has been a groundswell of plans and ways to be accountable and to adopt standards. It is something that schools are already doing.

Rep. Rowan said that she felt that most teachers are frustrated. Their concerns were not aimed just at what the task force is doing. Teachers are looking for some place to vent and to someone who can possibly help them. She felt that the timing for the task force's proposal is excellent. Many members of the Legislature want to do more for education, but they don't want the money "going down the black hole." There is also frustration on the part of the Legislature in that it wants to do more, but also wanting some outcomes. There needs to be a linkage between the funding and some type of accountability system. In addition, the task force's proposal calls for at least three to four more years of preparation and planning before any type of designation labels are made.

Sen. Hale asked how the task force can promote this proposal and still further the "essence of education." While funding is a major issue, the public education community may not accept this document, even if it comes with large increases in funding. The task force should listen to the feedback from the public hearings and the public does not support this proposal. Another alternative might be to operate a few pilot programs and find ways to maybe be the way to go. There is a need for rapid turn around of test data and to see how effective are various teaching methods.

Ms. Ogden suggested that the task force could follow the process used for the Centennial Schools plan. Under this program, each school is required to have a school improvement plan that is first approved by the local district. Schools would set their own goals based on their own needs. The task force would probably find that teachers are tougher on themselves if they are allowed to define their own goals.

Sen. Poulton stated that while some have emphasized the importance of not embarrassing schools, the schools have a "gifted and talented" program that also labels. It is important for the task force to have some type of measuring system.

Lt. Governor Walker said that assessment is important for parents and for teachers to gauge success. Assessment is also needed to help determine where there are weaknesses and the progress that is being made, not just the overall goal.

Ms. Bonnie Morgan, Director, Curriculum Development, State Office of Education told the task force that attention must be paid to professional development. It is important that teachers know how to use assessment to inform instruction. Is the task force going to do anything to support the class room teacher with a high percentage of non-English speaking students? She said that assessment doesn't mean anything if you are not going to use it to inform instruction.

Rep. Rowan replied that while this is a critical issue, it should be left to the discretion of individual school districts on how to best address this need. Ms. Morgan said that more funding is needed for staff development.

Lt. Governor Walker said that the task force should recommend that funds be available to districts for training on assessments and teaching. Teachers need training on how to better the testing materials and how to help students who struggle with mastering the content standards. The task force needs to give an indication that funding will be available.

Mr. Burningham said that since many educators feel that they have not been a part of the task force's work, any time line for implementation should indicate how teachers will be involved.

Sen. Stephenson said that one option might be to just report the standards and not assign a label.

Rep. Garn said that the strongest objections seem to be against any type of grading of schools and school districts and that this needs to be revised.

**MOTION:** Rep. Garn moved to direct staff to draft legislation, following the conceptual outline as written, only eliminating the reference to grading or labeling schools, giving flexibility to the time line, including reference to professional development, and eliminating the left-column categories in Table 3.

Sen. Stephenson asked what would be reported under this motion. Rep. Garn replied that the indicators on Table 3 would be listed and that the task force should develop a "soft" approach to grading.

Lt. Governor Walker asked what is meant by "soft?" Does this mean to eliminate the grading system? Rep. Garn replied that his motion contemplates removing any reference to grading.

Sen. Stephenson said that the task force should consider collapsing everything into one category of reporting, and that the task force establish some threshold for schools that need additional help to meeting standards.

Lt. Governor Walker said that the task force's plan should recognize improvement. Rep. Garn said that this is included in his motion.

Rep. Garn said that it is important for the task force to have a draft bill to further discuss and refine at its next meeting. Any reference to grading would not be included in this draft bill, but other parts of the conceptual plan would be included.

Ms. Fife said that it would be helpful if the task force had an additional document that would help explain what is contained in the bill.

Rep. Rowan asked staff to prepare a table summarizing what is contained in the Legislation.

Rep. Shurtliff said that the task force is planning to discuss rewards and interventions at a later time. The most important steps that need to be taken now deal with the core curriculum, assessment, funding for teachers, and then looking at other issues. The task force needs to gain the support of the education community for this proposal. The information contained in Table 3, also needs to be debated.

Sen. Stephenson said that Rep. Garn's motion eliminates the grading levels in Table 3, and that only reporting would occur.

Rep. Shurtliff said that the task force should have focused its efforts on setting standards, improving assessment, and building support from the education community.

Rep. Rowan asked if it would be possible to have presented to the task force at its November 15, 1999 meeting a report on the evaluation of the core curriculum and assessment that is being conducted by WESTED.

Sen. Stephenson clarified that Rep. Garn's motion provides for reporting on the assessment tools and indicators described in Table 3. There are no goals or grading categories, only a type of designation for those schools that might need some additional help to reach some acceptable standard. He also asked that staff prepare a template that would describe how the reporting would be presented.

The motion passed unanimously.

Rep. Rowan asked the task force how long the next task force meeting should last. Rep. Garn suggested that the task force schedule an all day meeting, but work towards adjourning as early as possible.

## **7. Other Business**

**MOTION:** Sen. Poulton moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously at 3:37 p.m.

