

Meeting Minutes
Planning and Budgetary Processes Committee
Taxation and Budget Reform Commission
Senate Office Building, Room 37
Tallahassee, Florida
Friday, January 25, 2008
1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Committee members: Carlos Lacasa, Chair; Mark Bostick, Sandy D'Alemberte, Mike Hogan, Jacinta Mathis, Bob McKee, Les Miller, Jade Moore, Nancy Riley, Darryl Rouson, Greg Turbeville

Committee Members Present:

Sandy D'Alemberte
Mark Bostick (by phone)
Jacinta Mathis (by phone)
Bob McKee
Greg Turbeville
Carlos Lacasa, Chair

Members Excused:

Jade Moore
Mike Hogan
Les Miller
Nancy Riley
Darryl Rouson

Chair Lacasa called the meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. Staff called the roll and announced that the presence of a quorum.

The Chair indicated that there was only one item on the agenda and recognized Commissioner Turbeville to present his proposal. Commissioner Turbeville indicated that the proposal provides for 65 percent of school funding to be spent in the classroom, rather than on administration. He commented on the responses heard from citizens regarding property taxes and bureaucracy. Commissioner Turbeville commented that education is the top priority for spending in the state and the focus of his proposal is educational spending and higher student achievement.

Chair Lacasa had several questions regarding the proposal and similar initiatives. He inquired whether the Legislature had considered the 65 percent solution recently. Commissioner Turbeville responded that the Legislature had addressed the issue, but no legislation was passed. Chair Lacasa commented that the proposal may require more guidance to the Legislature to assist in defining the 65 percent level. Chair Lacasa asked Commissioner Turbeville if he had any information regarding the

progress of “Dollars to the Classroom,” an initiative that he worked with during his tenure in the Legislature which targeted classroom spending based on the performance of school districts compared to the mean across the state. He commented that if a school district was not performing to the mean, the school district had to redirect funds to the classroom of at least a percentage more than the prior year. Commissioner Turbeville indicated that he had not followed the progress of the initiative; however, he discussed the requirement that the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) review school district performance every four years.

Commissioner McKee inquired if there was a mechanism which indicates that 65 percent is the optimum number for classroom spending. He also asked if there was a particular model that was used to develop the 65 percent number. Commissioner Turbeville indicated that he did not know if there was a model, but that there were other states working with the percentage. Commissioner Turbeville emphasized that 65 percent was “just the floor” and that some school districts might want to provide 70 percent of school funding for classroom instruction. Commissioner McKee commented that the committee should be cautious when inserting a percentage or number in the State Constitution since the action may have unintended consequences. Commissioner Turbeville indicated that there was nothing magic regarding 65 percent, but the flexibility provided to the Legislature would not create any long-term problems.

Dr. Wayne Blanton, Executive Director of the Florida School Boards Association, commented that the association had a concern over including the percentage in the State Constitution. He also emphasized the importance of defining “classroom instruction.” Dr. Blanton indicated that the Legislature provides direction for public school spending through the General Appropriations Act. Commissioner D’Alemberte commented that funding for school transportation and food services should be excluded from the definition of “school funding.”

Commissioner Turbeville asked Dr. Blanton to explain the difference between 58 percent in New York and 58 percent in Florida. Dr. Blanton explained that the difference can be attributed to the size of school districts and transportation. Chair Lacasa asked Dr. Blanton if the class size amendment should be revisited. Dr. Blanton commented that the initiative should be revisited to give schools some flexibility because the state will not be able to afford the amendment over time. He continued with comments regarding the presentations made before the Legislature requesting some flexibility in addressing the class size amendment requirements. According to Dr. Blanton, the class size amendment, as written, will require the employment of at least an additional 6,000 teachers a year until implemented in 2012. He commented that the funds spent on the additional teachers could be better spent on academic programs if the schools are given some type of flexibility.

Chair Lacasa had a series of questions regarding teacher compensation, merit pay for the retention of teachers, and collective bargaining. He asked Dr. Blanton to discuss

the realities of teacher salaries and merit pay in the state. Dr. Blanton responded that Florida's teacher pay is below the mean for the United States and the association supports merit pay for highest achieving teachers. He also indicated that in 2007-2008, the Legislature appropriated \$147 million for merit pay and only ten or twelve districts have implemented the plan. The merit pay issue was part of the collective bargaining process and some districts did not want to negotiate merit pay. Chair Lacasa inquired whether the collective bargaining process was an obstruction to introducing more meritorious plans for teachers. Dr. Blanton indicated that collective bargaining was not hampering implementing teacher pay issues. Dr. Blanton commented that the key to merit pay is to include more in the base pay for teachers to reach the national mean. Chair Lacasa inquired whether teacher salaries should be mandated in the State Constitution. Dr. Blanton responded that the State Constitution could be amended to indicate that Florida's teacher pay should never be below the mean of the nation.

Ben Browning, Florida TaxWatch, indicated that the organization applauds the idea of designating a minimum amount of funding for classroom instruction and recommended increasing classroom spending as much as possible. However, he commented that TaxWatch has concerns regarding the vagueness of the language in the proposal. Mr. Browning indicated that TaxWatch was interested in working with the committee on the language to provide more definition for school funding.

Ron Myers, Attorney for the Florida Education Association (FEA), discussed the capped and excluded components of the definition for classroom instruction used by the National Center for Education Statistics, and the concerns regarding enshrining 65 percent or any number in the State Constitution. He explained that instructional support and librarians were not included in the definition and discussed a report from School Matters that indicated that there was no relationship between classroom spending and student achievement. Mr. Myers reiterated the comments from Dr. Blanton that the important issue is to increase the base salaries for teachers. He also recommended not including the 65 percentage in the State Constitution.

Commissioner Turbeville asked Mr. Myers if the FEA supported including the numbers included in the class size initiative in the State Constitution. Mr. Myers responded that the FEA did support including the numbers because the Legislature had not shown an effort to deal with overcrowded schools in Florida. He stated that the class size initiative, though expensive, has proven to be positive for education. Commissioner Turbeville asked if the numbers should be removed from the State Constitution. Mr. Myers did not agree that the numbers should be removed because the numbers related to the class size amendment were explicit. However, he interjected that there is no specific data which indicates that 65 percent or any percentage of spending is tied to student learning.

Commissioner D'Alemberte stated that there were three concerns with the proposal. These concerns are:

- The proposal indicates “all school funding” and school funding includes state, local and federal funding.
- Funding for transportation should be excluded from the 65 percent for the classroom.
- Funding for food services should be excluded.

The commissioner also inquired if the proposal excluded transportation, food service funding, and federal funding, all schools districts could achieve the 65 percent requirement. Mr. Myers agreed that it may be possible, with the exclusions, for school districts to achieve the requirement.

During debate on the proposal, Commissioner McKee indicated that he agreed with Commissioner Turbeville that there is a public perspective that too much money is spent on bureaucracy. He followed with comments that the concern appears to be not where the money goes but more of where the money should not go. Commissioner D’Alemberte expressed two issues: (1) that state and local funds be included in school funding, with the exclusion of federal funds and (2) transportation and food services be excluded from the definition of school funding. Chair Lacasa indicated that the proposal only included 5 lines, but he had a concern with including a specified number, such as 65 percent, in the State Constitution. The Chair suggested that Commissioner Turbeville continue to work on the issue and stated that he would like to see a designated teacher salary level included in the language. Commissioner Turbeville agreed to temporarily pass the proposal and work with staff to address the comments from the committee.

Chair Lacasa requested a quorum call to determine if there was significant representation to vote on the proposal. The Chair indicated that if there were only 5 issues presented for the ballot, Commissioner Turbeville’s proposal would be one that he would like to see on the ballot. The staff called the roll and a quorum was announced. Commissioner Turbeville closed on his proposal and the Chair entertained a motion to vote on the proposal or to temporarily pass the proposal. The motion was made and seconded to temporarily pass the proposal.

Commissioner D’Alemberte requested that the next agenda include representatives from The Florida School Board Association and the Florida Education Association to make recommendations for the 65 percent issue or other educational issues to enhance Commissioner Turbeville’s proposal.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

Any documents and audio recordings of the meeting are posted on the commission website at www.floridatbrc.org for further review.