

**Redding Consortium for Educational Equity
Funding and Governance Work Group
October 8, 2020 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.
DRAFT Meeting Minutes**

I. Welcome and Roll Call

Co-Chair of the Funding and Governance Work Group, Eugene Young, called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m., welcomed all in attendance and reviewed the expected norms of the virtual meeting. Work Group members posted their names in the Zoom chat for the roll call.

II. Recap of Breakout Discussion from 9/24 meeting

Representative Nnamdi Chukwuocha, Co-Chair, recapped the takeaways of the 9/24 discussion on referendum reform. Work Group members discussed that House Bill 129 (HB 129) is a logical space to start, referendum campaigns require significant effort in the present system, and tax increases should be on an equal playing field. Of concern, they discussed concerns about taking away people's voice and the bill being used as justification for state funding reductions. Alexis Wrease, Institute for Public Administration (IPA), provided a full review document from the breakout discussion, accessible [here](#).

Rep. Chukwuocha set the meeting objectives of deciding if HB 129 is a path forward and beginning to create a public engagement strategy.

III. Insights on HB 129

Rep. Earl Jaques of District 27 provided his insights on referendum reform and HB 129. He began by discussing House Substitute 1 for House Bill 238, which would allow districts to perform an optional, second unit count in January instead of just September. He hopes the bill gets taken up in the following legislative session.

Rep. Jaques originally brought forward HB 129 after noting that 43 states do not use a referendum system for operational money. He noted the difficulty of referenda being passed and some of the common reasons they do not pass. HB 129 originally received a lot of negative feedback, including how it is taking away people's vote on their taxes. He believes the voice then correctly falls to school board elections and holding board members accountable. He then reflected on how the bill could've been different given the negative feedback, such as adjusting the maximum percent increase or time interval of tax increases.

Rep. Chukwuocha asked if there are any concessions that can be made to HB 129 to address the specific concern of people's voice being taken away. Rep. Jaques believes the key is to stress that increases beyond the maximum increase are still subject to referendum, and that the more important vote is for the school board members who make the budget decisions. Tika Hartsock, Work Group Member, believes other avenues need to be considered as well, since the school board elections have always been an option that is not currently taken advantage of by community members. Rep. Jaques agreed.

Rep. Chukwuocha reiterated the concern that referendum reform might politicize the school board elections. Rep. Jaques said that school boards are already political, to a degree, and that a school board should still be able to raise small amounts of money for gradually increasing operational costs.

Rep. Chukwoacha asked what changes were made between House Bill 213 (HB 213) and HB 129. Rep. Jaques said very minor adjustments happened between the two bills related to the time intervals. He still got a lot of negative feedback, and said the biggest challenge moving forward will be determining how to frame the bill as a positive measure. Rep. Chukwoacha agreed, reiterating that the message and intent is one of equity and fairness for every student.

IV. Work Group Discussion – Proposed Next Steps

Work Group members had an open discussion on the following guided questions:

1. Do you think this Work Group should use the language in HB 129 as is and introduced it with a new number?
2. Do you think this Work Group should modify HB 129, and if so, what changes should be made?

Rep. Jaques said that one thing to think about is what percentage increases school boards should be able to do. He also suggested an incremental approach, where the board can authorize a 1% increase and then further increases can be authorized after seeing how the increase is utilized.

Jill Floore, Work Group Member, voiced how HB 129 is written to avoid the concern of the state shifting budget cuts to the local districts as a result of the bill, and that this point needs to be communicated.

Representative Mike Ramone said that three basic things can be done to HB 129: (1) Set a range of allowable percent increases during certain periods of time, (2) allow more autonomy for school boards to decide how money is spent, and (3) Set up a ratio for how much money can be invested into buildings (rather than building referendums) based upon the age and need for renovations and repairs. He framed the issue as one of agreeing on the exact math of what school boards should be allowed to do. He agreed that if people perceive this bill as removing their decision making influence, it is not going to pass.

Dan Shelton, Work Group Member, elaborated on Rep. Ramone's third point, saying that the current non-referendum cap for capital projects is too low for routine building maintenance, necessitating referendums. If the minor capital limit were raised such that buildings could be routinely maintained, there would be less major capital projects in the long run. The current system necessitates frequent capital projects as buildings fall apart and need to be rebuilt. Mike Ramone later agreed, adding that there is a stake in student achievement if students feel like they are in an inadequate facility compared to their peers in other districts.

Dan Shelton continued by noting that the 2% of CPI-W limit might not be sufficient for spikes in costs, such as recent healthcare increases. The fear is that voters will not approve any operational referenda in the future if boards have the ability to make increases, even if the limit makes it impossible to cover operational costs. He suggested a system similar to Pennsylvania, where there is a set rate of allowable increases, but the rate can be adjusted in years where costs have a notable increase. Chuck Longfellow, Work Group Member, added that different states and counties determine the percentage in different ways, and that the exact method depends on what the Assembly wants to put in the bill.

Sen. Laura Sturgeon, the Senate co-sponsor of HB 129, continues to support HB 129. She believes the efforts to pass a referendum takes away from the prime duty of educators to educate. She thinks the fear that future referenda for capital projects and larger operating budget increases won't pass is warranted, and that addressing that concern is an open question. She continues to

believe that referenda have an overall negative impact on students and educators. She suggested that the bill supporters need to have their arguments ready for dissenting opinions and engage in strong messaging that better communicates the negative effects of referenda on students.

Tika Hartsock, Work Group Member, echoed the sentiment that messaging is key. She said she understands why people think the bill is about taking their voices away and suggested finding a way to give them a place to voice their concerns other than referenda. Rep. Chukwoacha agreed, and said the messaging focus needs to be on the children.

Aaron Bass, Work Group Member, voiced his support HB 129, and echoed Rep. Jaques' opinion that school board elections are where the people's voices can be heard.

Senator Anthony Delcollo, Work Group Member, said that the schedule of school board elections can be reconsidered if politicization becomes an issue, such as having elections more frequently or having them outside of typical partisan election settings. He agrees that messaging needs to reflect that school board elections are where people's voices can be heard. Sen. Delcollo also believes the issue of reassessment needs to be fixed in conjunction with referendums. He agrees with Tika Hartsock's point that looking at other methods to address community input will be important. Tika added that these messaging and engagement strategies should be adopted from the onset and suggested a strategy of going to the voters, rather than expecting the voters to come to them like in a town hall.

V. Engagement Strategy

Eugene Young presented some of the key engagement strategies for referendum reform:

- Engagement needs to be a two-way discussion
- Work should be informed by community opinions
- The approach should be effectively communicated in a clear and concise way, including the importance of reform, the goals of reform, and the ultimate community impact.

He presented some examples of engagement, including town halls, one-page advertisements, social media, direct engagement with stakeholder groups, and a questionnaire. He then opened the discussion with the following guided questions:

1. What stakeholder groups should be involved, and who isn't currently represented?
2. What strategies would be most effective?
3. What information should be included?
4. What are the best methods to circulate communications to stakeholders?
5. Are there other methods that could be used?
6. Are you willing to talk with the stakeholder group you represent about referendum reform?
7. What are the action steps to carry out the engagement plan?

Sen. Anthony Delcollo commented on reaching stakeholder groups. He recommended reaching out to less-obvious stakeholder groups and groups without a direct stake in education, and communicating how education improvement positively affects other parts of the community that they do have a direct stake in.

Eugene Young mentioned a comment made in the chat by Kristin Dwyer, member of the public. They suggested going back into legislative committee meeting minutes to find what the original issues with the bill were and building a narrative around those issues.

Jill Floore said that engaging with realtors has been generally successful because they are directly involved with the community. She added that the attendees of this meeting reflect that there the parents and educators are the strongest stakeholder group.

Rep. Chukwuocha highlighted the importance of going to local community groups and appealing to them directly, as they are the root of the community.

Tika Hartsock said it would be beneficial if there were a requirement for districts to publish where any budget increases go to, in the style of an annual giving report for philanthropy. She said this kind of transparency would sway parents like herself to support referendum reform. Chuck Longfellow added that there are existing public tools such as the Open Data Portal as an avenue for this kind of transparency.

VI. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The Redding Consortium Full Body meeting is on October 22nd, 2020 from 5:00-7:00 pm, so there will be no meeting of the Funding & Governance Work Group. The next meeting of the Work Group will be November 5th, 2020 from 5:00-6:30 pm.

The Meeting adjourned at 6:12pm

In Attendance

Redding Consortium Members

Rep. Nnamdi Chukwoacha, Co-Chair
Eugene Young, Co-Chair
Aaron Bass
Sen. Anthony Delcollo
Jill Floore
Sec. Rick Geisenberger
Jason Hale
Tika Hartsock
Chuck Longfellow
Maria Matos
Dan Shelton
Mary Nash Wilson
Susan Bunting

Members of the Public

Gwen Angalet
James Berry
Caleb Curtiss
Kristin Dwyer
Lisa Edler
Helga Huntley
Earl Jaques
Jamie Johnstone
Jerome
Chris Kelly
Brendan Laux
Sarah McBride
Cimone Philpotts
Nicole Poore
Haley Qaissaunee
Rep. Mike Ramone
Mary Schorse
Kelly Sherretz
Sen. Laura Sturgeon
Alexis Wrease