

EXHIBIT B**MINUTES****LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION****Meeting****Wednesday, September 16, 2015**

The Legislative Task Force on Best Practices for Special Education met on Wednesday, September 16, 2015, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 130 of the State Capitol Building, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Members in Attendance

Senators Uvalde Lindsey, Chair; and Representative Tim Lemons, Vice Chair. **Non-legislative members:** Dr. Anne Butcher, Barbara Hunter-Cox, Renee Johnson, Sarah Moore, Bailey Perkins, Debra Poulin, Shirley Ann Renix, Dr. Bruce Smith, Tina Vineyard, Cindy Marie Weathers, Angela Winfield and Samuel Young.

Also in attendance: Representative DeAnn Vaught

Representative Lemons called the meeting to order.

Consideration to approve the Minutes of August 17, 2015. Senator Lindsey made the motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Dr. Butcher. Without objection, the motion was approved by the Committee. [EXHIBIT B]

Adequacy Highlights: Special Education

Ms. Nell Smith, Administrator, Policy Analysis and Research, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized and gave a brief overview of the Lakeview lawsuit and The Resource Allocation of Foundation Funding for Arkansas School Districts and Open-Enrollment Charter Schools Report **[EXHIBIT C-1]**. Ms. Smith said as a result of the lawsuit, every 2 years Policy Analysis and Research undertakes and facilitates the Adequacy Study, which is an 18-month long process of reports, and meetings. The reports explore issues and trends in student numbers, funding, district expenditures and relevant student achievement data.

Part of the study includes a survey of the 244 school district superintendents during which a random selection of 74 principles will also be interviewed. Beginning this year, a teacher survey will be conducted. The adequacy surveys will be conducted in October and if the task force members have suggestions regarding questions that it wishes to be considered they must be submitted quickly.

The Adequacy Study statute requires Policy Analysis and Research to review expenditures from special education funding and to complete a resource allocation review. Foundation funding covered about 75.7% of districts' total expenditures on special education teachers in 2012-2013. Districts also used other funding, including federal IDEA funds and state catastrophic funding to pay for special education teachers.

Ms. Smith briefly discussed the Matrix **(Handout 1)**. The matrix is used to calculate the per student foundation funding rate based on a school prototype with 500 students. Regarding special education funding, 2.9 full-time special education teachers are required. Senator Lindsey pointed out that there is a critical shortage of special education teachers. He asked does this mean that changes need to be made

as to how the matrix fund special education teachers to add more money in this area to increase the salary level to attract more teachers. Senator Lindsey also asked is this part of the task force's charge and does the numbers tell the task force what to do next. He encouraged task force members to do the following:

- determine the problem and the most critical piece to build a priority structure to decide where the task force is going in the next 2 to 5 months; and
- develop a matrix of things that need to change to make a difference for special needs children.

Senator Lindsey noted that all districts need the same ability to provide equal opportunity to every child. According to the Picus Odden and Associates new recommendations, 3.3 special education teachers should be funded per 500 students along with 3.3 special education aides. Ms. Smith noted that special education aides are not included in the current matrix and that it would cost \$237 per student or \$107 million to fund the recommended number of special education teachers and aides. Senator Lindsey stressed the importance of funding more than 2.9 special education teachers per 500 students and adding paraprofessionals. He said that if school districts and superintendents do not add additional special education teachers and aides, legislators will have to mandate it.

After a lengthy discussion, task force members expressed their concerns with the exorbitant amount of paperwork and the increased caseload that special education teachers are consumed with. Senator Lindsey asked committee staff to communicate with Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and Ms. Perkins to determine what can be done to reduce the amount of paperwork for special education teachers. With regards to data and paperwork, Ms. Perkins said it is important not to burden teachers down with paperwork, however, important documentation and data needs to be there to drive what is going on with the students.

It was suggested that limiting the student/teacher ratio would ensure that students get better service. Ms. Winfield reported that currently the maximum number of students per special education teacher is 25. In the matrix, special education teachers average annual salary is approximately \$47,000. Dr. Smith suggested the task force investigate programs that would allow special education aides to work towards being licensed/certified as special education teachers. Senator Lindsey asked Dr. Smith to lead the charge, working with Dr. Powell to investigate building a pipeline within special education to assist paraprofessionals/aides earn a degree.

In response to questions by Senator Lindsey regarding what changes will be made regarding the special education teachers shortage, **Dr. Brett Powell, Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE)**, was recognized and replied, the teacher shortages is a broad issue across the country, as many states are trying to tackle this issue. In the past 5 years data on enrollment in teacher education programs in Arkansas suggest that the numbers are declining every year. If changes are not made, the issue will only get worse. ADE sets the standards for licensure, teacher education programs and ADHE programs are aligned to those standards. ADE and ADHE are aware of the aforementioned issues and are working towards solutions to provide alternatives such as licensing arrangements and summer boot camps in colleges and universities throughout the state. There are several initiatives that are being discussed.

Senator Lindsey said beginning this fall, Henderson State and UCA will offer an undergraduate degree program in special education. Dr. Smith noted that UALR currently has a program in place.

Other Business

Senator Lindsey encouraged task force members to be change agents and to formulate their ideas and prioritize them for future agendas. He noted that, Mr. Young would be speaking with his teachers to

inquire about what changes they would recommend and Ms. Weathers would be speaking with her daughter's teachers to ask what type of assistance they may need.

Representative Lemons announced that Senator Stephanie Flowers extended an invitation to the task force members to attend a joint committee meeting of the House Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative & Military Affairs and Senate Children and Youth Committee to be held on October 6 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 171 of the State Capitol. The Honorable Judge Steven Teske, Clayton County, Georgia, Juvenile Justice Department will be on the agenda to address ISPs adopted by the committees dealing with the education of incarcerated youth and other reform issues.

Next Meeting Dates

The next Task Force meeting will be **Wednesday, October 7 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 130 of the State Capitol Building.**

With no further business, the task force adjourned at 2:38 PM.