



**House Select Committee on An Education System for North Carolina's Future
Monday, February 7, 2022 at 1:00 PM
Room 544 of the Legislative Office Building**

MINUTES

The House Select Committee on An Education System for North Carolina's Future met at 1:00 PM on February 7, 2022 in Room 544 of the Legislative Office Building. Representatives Blackwell, Farkas, Hunt, Hurley, Shepard, Torbett, Willis, and Zenger attended.

Representative John A. Torbett, Senior Chair, presided. Introduction of Sergeant-at-Arms.

Representative Torbett: We heard a lot of information at the last meeting. I thought, today, besides hearing from the Superintendent, we'd start getting a little idea about the current structure for public school funding and teacher compensation and benefits.

Eric Moore, Senior Fiscal Analyst, Fiscal Research Division gave a presentation on Public School Funding System (see attached and on committee website).

Representative Torbett: Did you say there were 35,000 allowables?

Eric Moore: There are 35,000 entries in the chart of accounts. It's all the different combinations of fund source program report code, purpose code, and object code. There are 35,000 combinations of those things that are currently allowed.

Representative Willis: On slide 13, you showed the matrix there for teacher calculations on that. We hear an awful lot about, especially recently, the K-3 realignment and the number of children within ratio for that and then that there wasn't appropriate funding then for the other classrooms. For example, 4 and 5 had to get much larger than that. So, is this the actual funding model that is used for, and can we confirm that for 4th and 5th grade that there is a 1 to 24 model?

Eric Moore: This is a much longer conversation, but I'll try to summarize briefly, but I'll be happy to give you whole lot more information. So, these are the allotment ratios that we use to generate the funding and the number of positions that a given district has access to. The other pieces that go along with that are average class size requirement and maximum class size requirements. In grades 4 up, the General Assembly has illuminated the average and max class size requirements, so a school district can have more than 24 students in their 4th grade class, if the distribution of students makes that more realistic or in case, they needed to pull money into other grades to better serve the students of those grades. The General Assembly left in place the average class size requirement for K-3 and then, over time phased it down to where it matched the allotment ratio. So, it was 3 students above the allotment ratio for years and what most school districts were doing, was being able to use some of the flexibility in that gap between the allotment ratio and the average class size to, since we have slightly larger K-3 classes, but then

be able to fund more teachers to fund program enhancement classes. So, these are your classes that cover art, music, pe, world languages and the like. In 2018-2, the General Assembly started phasing in a separate program enhancement teacher allotment, and at the same time ratcheted down the average classroom requirement to match these allotment ratios. So, now your average class size is supposed to match your allotment ratio in K-3, but you also have this other pot of funding, specific for program enhancement teachers.

Representative Blackwell: On the average teacher salary, that you showed on the chart, \$49,230.00, does that include such things as the increase that you get if you've the national board certification or if you are somebody grandfathered with masters, and does that allow for any allowance for bonuses that people might get for some reason?

Eric Moore: So, it is the average cost of the salary portion across all of those positions. If you have a bump for masters pay, if you have a bump for national board pay, all of those kinds of funds are baked into this overarching average, so that when we fund the positions in the next year, the money is sufficient to make sure we cover everyone across all the different steps of the salary schedule along with the supplements that they have. One off bonuses and those kinds of things aren't captured in there because they don't kind of become part of the base of the public schools funding in PRC001, because those things are funded independently, and only awarded to certain personnel, so they tend to be treated separately from this calculation. So, this calculation is only used at the state's level to make sure that we are setting aside sufficient funds to cover the average. Since we are talking about 70,000 positions, it helps make sure we cover a lot of variable costs across the state without the General Assembly having to come back and appropriate additional money for it. Bonuses and things like that are excluded because it's not part of building PRC001.

Representative Blackwell: So, a bonus that is based on student performance, is that considered something that is or is not included in this average.

Eric Moore: I do not believe it is included, because the performance bonuses have a separate budget line that exist as a particular amount that the General Assembly has set aside. So, if we were to budget it in here as well, we would be double budgeting that amount of money.

Representative Blackwell: So, the average \$49,230 that's here is something used to develop the state budget for the subsequent year, is not really an accurate reflection of what average teacher pay across this state would be if everything were included?

Eric Moore: Exactly, yes sir, because also along the same lines, this is really only average pay for the people, the teachers in those classroom teacher positions, the 70,000 positions. If you have teachers that are funded out of local funds or out of the other dollar allotments, their averages may be different, but those are pots of dollars that the school districts use flexibly, and they decide if they are going to fund a teacher out of them. We don't guarantee the salary for those positions like we guarantee the salary in classroom teacher position.

Representative Blackwell: In reducing the LEA's allotment to allow for schools that get a direct allotment, such as public charter schools, you also said that included a reduction for independent public schools. Can you tell us what independent public schools are that would be involved with that?

Eric Moore: So, the vast majority of the schools are charter schools. The other ones that are funded on essentially the same model are the sixish laboratory schools that are run by the UNC system, the innovative school district is funded on that model. DPI uses that model to calculate

and distribute the funding the restart schools, that are actually still part of the LEA's own school, but the funds get collapsed into a more flexible allotment for the restart schools. So, it is those kinds of schools that are also funded, more or less, on the same basis that a charter school is funded, but now there has been a proliferation of other categories, so, we thought we should probably mention that there are other independent public-school units as well.

Catherine Truitt, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Public Instruction gave a presentation on Operation Polaris – Navigating Students Toward a Brighter Future (see attached and on committee website).

Representative Shepard: Every now and then I get emails from people, that their kids graduate from high school, they think they are doing really well, they go out to the community college, they take some sort of entrance test, and they find out that they've got to take extra courses because they didn't score high enough after graduating from high school. Is that you are referring to as a credentials?

Superintendent Truitt: So, what those parents are talking about, is that when their child took an entrance test for the community college, they were told that either or both, their reading or math scores were not at the correct level to pursue credit bearing course work. Therefore, their child must take remedial education courses. You raise a very good question, because the truth is that remedial education courses do not lead to credits. What happens, and the community colleges can give you the best data on this, but an overwhelmingly large number of, first of all it's in the 60's, 60% of kids going to community college end up having to take remedial work. Maybe 5 years ago the community colleges set about changing the way they remediate students, but the truth is that the majority of students who must pursue remedial math or reading, don't ever make it through the programs. They get very discouraged, and they don't ever make it to credit bearing course work.

Representative Shepard: With that being said and done, I know this has been happening ever since I've been in Raleigh. Is there anything we can do to bridge that gap or try to correct what's going on with that situation? What I find is that there is a blame game going on. Community colleges require it, but then some in the K-12 education system, say, well they really don't need to have that. They are doing that to make more money.

Superintendent Truitt: That's a difficult question to answer, but I'm going to let the data do the talking. 67% of 8th graders in North Carolina, start high school not reading proficiently, and it's the same for math. If that many students are not reading and doing math proficiently when they graduate from high school, if they go off to either a 4 year or 2-year endeavor, we know from a paper presented to the board of governors at UNC back in 2017, that half of the students who drop out of the UNC system 4-year program, do so for academic reasons. The solution is something that we've already begun when you all signed the "Read to Achieve, Excellence in Public Schools Act" in April. That, in my opinion as an educator is the reason why we are in this situation. Before 4 years ago, we stopped teaching students to read with a phonics-based approach to early literacy instruction. We are righting that ship right now and I've got some data to show you that in a minute.

Representative Blackwell: In talking about shifting the accountability model away from achievement toward student growth, student growth in what?

Superintendent Truitt: I'm not suggesting that we shift away from, well I guess if we are kind of watering down the achievement piece so that we can add other measures, perhaps I am

suggesting that we are shifting away from accountability. I do think that growth is important and that it should be more important than just the 20% because, well, for a couple of reasons. We don't want schools and teachers to say, well I can't grow this group of students, they are too far behind. We also, don't want high flying schools to say, well, I can't grow these students, they are already scoring a 90. We still want to require academic growth, but couldn't we also define growth in other ways, as well. As, when students have to do projects for their CTE classes, that literally require a plan of action that a student is executing on, like a 4-H project, from the beginning of the semester till the end of the semester. Could there not be some way to highlight that, if not in an accountability model, then perhaps on a student's transcript, which I also believe should look different than it does.

Representative Blackwell: But, since you seem to be suggesting this shift, I'm trying to understand, when we talk about measuring growth, what in fact are we measuring? Is it test based, are we still talking about achievement, but rather than absolute achievement, we're talking about growth in achievement?

Superintendent Truitt: Growth, of course, is measured by EVOSS. Lots of people have different opinions about the extent to which EVOSS is the right way to effectively measure growth from a statistical standpoint. My complaint is not with EVOSS, as much as it is the low percentage of weighting that growth holds. I'm not advocating that we measure growth differently than we do right now, I'm just saying that perhaps it could count more in the weighting, or it could be a stand-alone grade, or more specifically, I'm saying it should be one of maybe 5 things that we measure, along with accountability.

Representative Blackwell: Under current policies or state law, is there something that presents a classroom teacher from giving multiple, what I'll call, low stake tests throughout the time that he or she is instructing students, and obtaining those results directly as they go through the year?

Superintendent Truitt: There is nothing that prevents them from doing their own formative assessments and I would hazard to guess that more teachers do that. It's not likely done in a way that looks the same as the teacher next door. We do have a pilot program that I am sure you are familiar with, I believe it is called NC Check-Ins, I think it has a new name now, the testing, there is a different name for it, but it's actually very similar to NC Check-Ins, that allows for multiple assessments to be given throughout the course of the course. We still do give the end of grade test and that's still what the grade is based on, so, whatever a teacher does, in terms of formative assessments is not part of that one and done test at the end of the year.

Representative Blackwell: Whatever the teacher does as a part of those formative assessments is theoretically to prepare for the one big test that comes at the end that measures what you learned that the teacher is measuring throughout the year. So, she shouldn't be surprised, should she?

Superintendent Truitt: What I would say is that the tests that we give at the end of the year are not good tests.

Representative Blackwell: Whose fault is that?

Superintendent Truitt: That goes back decades, when the group partnered with NC State and created our end of grade testing.

Representative Blackwell: Is ACT a bad test too?

Superintendent Truitt: I think the ACT does a good job at predicting college success for some students, but I certainly don't believe that every student in North Carolina should have to take the ACT. As someone who did not do well on the ACT, it's not always a good predictor.

Representative Willis: If I could respond really quickly to Representative Shepard, as a former member of the State Community College Board, the issues with those students coming in, has been known for quite some time. The number of students graduating with a diploma from our K-12 system and then going on to taking remedial math and English at the community college level is astounding. The bigger problem, concern, I have is that they have a system in place that helps identify these kids while they are still in K-12, and in some instances, our community colleges are reaching down into our high schools and helping those children take those remedial course work, so they are ready once they get to the community college system, but why is the community college system having to do that, more so than the responsibility being on our K-12 system is the question that I would pose for another day. I think that is something that certainly needs to be looked at. I agree with most of your presentation so far, in terms of accountability, the measurement system, the testing, and everything that we've got. As a parent of a kindergartner, an 8th grader, and a 9th grader, I've seen this for years. Your comment about the testing being the wrong testing, we spend 6 weeks at the end of pretty much every school calendar year, preparing for testing. Teachers have to stop at that point, the learning that they've done, pivot towards teaching to testing. A lot of the students that are catching up, maybe they've been behind, they're doing really well, the teachers are doing a phenomenal job with them, they have to stop. They have to shift to doing something else. Then they are giving a test, to your point, that is cumulative for the entire year in that point in time. Representative Blackwell had a great comment, and I live this in the pre-k world every day. We have assessments ongoing throughout the year, our teachers know exactly where the kids are, and they know that this child is ready to move on to the next piece. It needs to be the same way in our K-12 system, and it would be fairer to the teachers that are doing a great job in helping those children, because every child in that classroom is going to come in at a different point in time in terms of where they are at emotionally, where they are at educationally within each subject. They are going to have the best eyes and ears on where that child is in that growth and we have got to fix the accountability piece, because it is horribly broken. If we are handing a child a diploma, after graduating from the 12th grade and they don't have the skills to go get a job, we have failed that child, and that's where we're at. I think until we cumulatively sit down and agree to that, and get back to focusing on reading, writing, math, history, science, the basics that we need to help teach these children and prepare them for life beyond and a career, then we are having the wrong conversations. The one question I did want to ask, and you mentioned on the accountability and testing page about civic responsibility, I've gotten a number of calls in the last couple of weeks from different agencies, the Civil Air Patrol group, the Boy Scouts, they've lost access to be able to go in the schools over the last couple of years to help educate and recruit on what programs are available. This is a federally mandated program that DPI, as of 2015 law, says we have authority to kind of require the LEAs to do this. I know, physically, having other folks come in and out of schools has been a challenge, but there have to be alternate ways to resume or other things where they can present these opportunities to these families. The social emotional health and wellbeing and participation and the social piece that a lot of these schools are not affording these children these days can be made up through some of these programs. The kids that don't play sports, the kids that aren't involved in band or other extra curriculars, they need these opportunities, so I would today for your commitment on helping push that forward for LEAs across the state that they remember their responsibility in this regard and help those programs get those kids involved as well.

Superintendent Truitt: We will absolutely do that, and I would also point out that we have still have districts that are not allowing spectators at sporting events in our public schools. That all needs to be part of the same shift to allowing folks to come back in to be with our kids.

Representative Hurley: I am not crazy about percentages, I prefer numbers, actual students. I am very concerned about how they can't spell their names, write their names, and I know they are being taught, even the people doing passport applications are having to teach them how to write their name there, and it's embarrassing, I think for all of us, not to have our students know how to sign their name. I know we've got to get back to basics, reading, writing, and arithmetic. Universities are having trouble too with remediation. It's happening not just in community colleges, but in universities and I just feel like the curriculum that we are doing and I don't know all the curriculum and I know the boards make their decisions about what will be taught, but I know there are so many good things that worked years ago that would work great now, and you know phonics, and the parents should be able to help their students to their students do their math or whatever, because it keeps them involved and close. We need to look at that, because we need to go back, and we need to get our teachers being taught how to teach. It's gotten away from just the basics and critical thinking, yes, but they got to have the foundation before they can do critical thinking. So, anything you can do, and we're looking, and we're looking forward to hearing from other people and I know it's a big job, and it's gotten loose, and you've got to pull it back together. So, thank you for what you are doing, and I just feel like we just need to get back to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Representative Hunt: I just wanted to ask; you mentioned a name of a Botelle for kids. Can you tell us a little bit about what that is?

Superintendent Truitt: That is vendor that we have partnered with to actually do the leg work of going out into all 8 of our education regions and collecting feedback from educators, business owners, faith-based communities about what they feel the skills that they need to be able to have to be successful after high school. They are helping us put together the state- wide portrait of a graduate.

Representative Hunt: So, the things that you mentioned as being important, resilience, leadership, communication, those sound-like things that our social workers could help a lot within the schools. My sister is a school social worker here in Wake County, and I know that if we had more social workers, they could help even more. Maybe have some classes after school for children and help with these sorts of things, so I just want to push that idea as, you know, use folks that we already have in the schools, who know how to do this, but obviously increase their numbers.

Representative Shepard: You mentioned that all the students were required to take the ACT. I'm aware of a high school that has a lot of special needs students. As a matter of fact, all the county's special needs students go there. All of them are required to take the same test and it's so unfair to the school and to the principal, because their averages are brought down because these students are not prepared to take the ACT and these other tests. I think it needs to be stopped or done away with. I don't know what we can do to do that, but it's just something I wanted to bring up, because it is unfair to that school.

Superintendent Truitt: I don't disagree with you, Representative Shepard.

Continuation of Presentation (attached and on committee website).

Representative Willis: You mentioned earlier the GPA game that we're playing. As the parent of a freshman in high school now, and someone that has been actively involved in our community in education for a while, I've seen this firsthand. When I got a binder of materials for him to choose from, what he was going to need for his high school education. High school has become a micro version of the university system, at least in our district. It's trying to be everything to everyone, rather than focusing on, exactly your point, trying to create a student who has desirable skills who want to go out and get a career with or without a 4-year degree. I think, apologies to our friends in the UNC system, what a lot of folks are looking at now is an experience, rather than an education that is going to get them a higher career, unless you are an engineer or a doctor or a scientist that needs those additional hours. That maturing phase, within our educational system and university system, really can be done, learning on the job, through apprenticeships, through internships, through other things that's really going to set these students up for a better life beyond their educational time. I think we've got to figure out how, and I know it's a difficult conversation, because we look at what happens around the rest of the country, comparing our students to other states and if students want to go to school out of state, looking at their GPAs on that, but we have got to stop this GPA game, manipulating courses and classwork for students to be able to take a class that they have no interest in, because it's going to be an easy A, or it's going to help them bump up, or they can take an honors course in this or that, or they can take something has no interest to them whatsoever, rather than helping them prepare for life beyond high school. What are your thoughts, or what are you guys doing in terms of looking at that and what we can do here in North Carolina to stop playing that game?

Superintendent Truitt: That's a million-dollar question. I've faced it with my college age daughter already, I'm facing it right now with my junior, and I will face it with my seventh grader. I was told about 2 years ago that one of our flagship universities had said publicly that they wanted more well-rounded students. That message has not gotten to our families, to our counselors, and to our students. I don't even know if that is really true, because I believe that they are still weeding out with SAT, ACT scores, pre pandemic, as well as GPAs. I don't know what the answer is. I know that one of the things that we are looking at in my department to try to mitigate those, is to create a toolkit for counselors and a toolkit for parents, so that they can understand what the alternative pathways are the figures attached to those pathways, both in cost to get there and future earnings. I think that some parents have a fear that because they've been sold a bill of goods, that if their child doesn't go to college, they won't make it to the middle class. Through no fault of their own, they are kind of encouraging their children down this perhaps the American dream, as they see it, I don't know. We have to combat this with more information. Even high schools that have gotten rid of class ranking, those students are still playing the GPA game. I'd be happy to brainstorm with you.

Representative Blackwell: Some years ago, the General Assembly started a program that was modeled to some degree, after what I understood was a successful program coming out of Florida, to pay bonuses to high school, essentially CTE teachers, if their students at the end of a course, ended up with a credential of value. DPI was assigned the task, I think, doing some tiers, so that if you earned a credential that was industry recognized, of let's say greater value, you might get a larger bonus for that student. In light of what you have said here about the shortage of credentials and the needs for those, what is your view as to whether that program that we started is something that we should continue, needs changing, does it work, does it really not make a difference?

Superintendent Truitt: I would want to go back and look at exactly which credentials teachers are getting bonuses for. We had the CTE report that is coming to the JLEOC in a week or so, presented to the state board last week and I was pretty sad to see that the vast majority of credentials that are earning in North Carolina are Micro Soft Office credentials. That hasn't

changed. My seventh grader is in an elective called office productivity and I said to you like this class, and he said no we're learning power point, which I've been doing since elementary school. I actually said to our CTE directors this morning at their conference, legacy thinking around credentials that are not viable to our students need to go.

Representative Blackwell: I will simply add that DPI has it withing its abilities by setting what qualifies for a bonus and what doesn't, to shift that situation around. In the past, DPI has loved telling us that we had 285,000 people who got Microsoft credentials. I don't think, by any means, that is the credential that is needed of value.

Representative Zenger: It's one thing to have the credential, but it seems to me, the measurement is does it translate into a workforce job. Maybe the way we need to be measuring it, is more about job placement, you know that I am in the construction industry, and we need people who can do stuff. They are going to take them, but if they are credentialed, if they don't actually get in the workforce. I get calls from college graduates, saying how do I break into the construction industry? Maybe our measurement needs to be different.

Superintendent Truitt: Perhaps Chair Willis could comment on this. That data is very difficult to get. It's like burning glass data. I mean there's, the community colleges have, for years, paying good money to try and get workforce data. Where the kids go after they graduate. It is difficult to get, but I totally agree with you. We do know is how many students are successful in attaining a credential, we just don't know if they're getting a job.

Representative Blackwell: It was my understanding that when we started doing these bonuses for credentials that a major aspect of evaluating what was of value, was that there are industry recognized credentials that nationally, they have said, if you've got this credential, we as an industry agree, recognize it signifies something meaningful. If that's not the case, we need to find those things out. Where the problem comes in, I think, is that we have people in place in school systems, who are teaching things that they have taught for a long time and they can give them a credential, but if it is simply something that is passed on by the local folks in the local school system and it doesn't have some, beyond them, endorsement or recognition, I think that's where the challenge lies.

Representative Willis: I would just like to concur with Representative Blackwell and those credentials are well established and those are the ones that are being used, then I would say, even the community college system is having a problem graduating students for a welding program, because they were being hired mid program to go take a job because they needed the labor. Continued breaking down of the silos between pre-school, K-12, community college system, university system, the department of revenue for the state in seeing the big picture and the connectivity of that individual across from education to career and an actual solid taxpayer for the state of North Carolina. Our groups are too siloed, they don't share data, we lose that connectivity and so I think part of that needs to go much boarder on that discussion as well.

Superintendent Truitt: Continuation of Presentation (attached and on committee website).

Representative Hurley: Can you please get cursive writing in there so that will help them to read?

Superintendent Truitt: It is the law, so they should be doing it.

Superintendent Truitt: Continuation of Presentation (attached and on committee website).

Representative Torbett: Have the teaching schools bought into this as well?

Superintendent Truitt: President Hans has set that out as an expectation in the UNC system, yes. There are, I believe, 5 literacy programs from 5 colleges of education in the UNC system, who work with the system office, who are receiving this training and they will be taking it back to their respective colleges of education. Then Lenoir-Rhyne has done that in our private and independent colleges. It's definitely difficult to mandate that at the university level.

Representative Torbett: Is that something we can help with?

Superintendent Truitt: I would think so.

Representative Hunt: Superintendent Truitt, one of the things that I have heard a lot about from my teaching friends is the LETRS training that it's not based on teacher's schedules or availability, there have to be tech upgrades between classes, and teachers are just having a really hard time in Mecklenburg County, where I come from. I just wondered if you had any plans to have helpers, you know, I think TAs personally, would help tremendously with getting this done. I know that is not in your prevue to get more money for TAs in your budget, we could help with that, but I don't know if there is any other way, we can help teachers get through all this training.

Superintendent Truitt: LETRS training across our 115 LEAs, looks very different from place to place. Charlotte has chosen to do it differently than perhaps, Polk County or Carteret County. Some districts, especially depending on what cohort they were on, chose to get substitute teachers and then there was also money available for paying a stipend for teachers and whether or not a district chose to use that money, again, was up to them. I'm not sure exactly how Charlotte has implemented the legislation.

Representative Willis: You mentioned the LETRS training that was there and the integration and the number of preschool age teachers that have already been brought into that. As you look back now, at kind of the performance of our kids are and we focus so heavily on reading and the integration now with preschool within that, what could we look at or think about as we go forward in terms of the integration between pre-k and kindergarten and DPI, because obviously preschool is held primarily through DHHS and the department of childhood development, and then there is a lack of integration, really connectivity and visibility for those students coming out of that into where you guys are except for some of the NC pre-k programs specifically, but that is roughly not even half of our pre-k population coming to you. How do we get better visibility across though, should there be better integration, should DPI have better visibility or maybe some responsibility for that preschool, especially the older preschool piece?

Superintendent Truitt: I spend a lot of time hearing about whether or not students and children would be better served and their families, if pre-k, at large, as you mentioned NC pre-k is with DPI, but private daycare pre-k, which is a special designation, is under DHHS. Would students be better served if it resided solely with DPI. Especially as we start to refer to nationally, a lot of educators refer to the continuum as P-12, because we know what the results are when students have the pre-k experience versus when students don't. I don't the answer to that question right now, but what I will say is that the B-3 agency council had kind of stopped meeting over the last few years and since I came into office, we have been working very well with DHHS trying to be more cohesive. A lot of work at DPI and DHHS has gone into getting that council up and running again, so I'm hopeful there will be a little bit more seamless as you are mentioning.

Representative Willis: I would like to ask your opinion on, obviously it's been a very hot topic over the last 18 months or 24 months, really, around schools, mandates, reopening, those that are

still pushing masks and mandates and remote learning and that and what you guys have seen from a data perspective. Obviously, I represent Union County, who coming out of this, as every other school district in the state has been impacted by this, but I will say that Union County has been the leader in terms of reopening, in terms of our ability to try to push the envelope on keeping our kids in school, keeping them in front of their teachers, where they best learn and with the lost mitigation that we continue to talk about and how we do that, is there a point of view or perspective from DPI across the state? Union County, basically, as of today, is back to normal, in terms of we are no longer forcing healthy kids to stay home. We have been mask optional for this. Our test scores and our students have, are now the number 1 performing school district in the state. I think that speaks for itself. What can we do to help other school districts in other regions across the state to help them insure, cause I know these kids are not going to learn and recover from learning, unless they are in school and continuing to send healthy kids home and force them through quarantines when, you know vaccines and other options are available to them, it's just not, I think from my perspective, it's not the right approach and so I'm just curious as to how DPI can help with that as we move forward?

Superintendent Truitt: Right now, in our state about 26 or 27 out of our 115 LEAs are currently not requiring masks. The remainder of those districts do require masks and are implementing control measures by law that involve quarantining, isolation, and excluding children. I would and did ask the question of DHHS, at last week's state board of education meeting, when they reported to us, that we need to start seeing what the hospitalization rates for children are. I don't know what they are, but I do now that last week there were 140 children hospitalized due to covid across the state. What DHHS could not tell me is whether those were students who were in the hospital for a reason other than covid and then they got tested while they were there and it turned out they had covid, or whether they had gone to the hospital with covid symptoms. I think for me, the question is, at what point do we begin to live with covid. This is why I mentioned the assistant superintendent in a large district, who spoke to the school board to encourage 2-to-4-year olds to start masking so that they would be prepared in kindergarten. That to me is not the kind of thinking that I think parent's want right now. I'm starting to hear from parents in a way that I didn't use to regarding masking and quarantining in schools. What I have a lot of parents tell me is that it is mainly with the little children, not the teenagers so much, it's the little one's whose parents are not concerned. I think that there are just a lot of unanswered questions right now. The goal cannot be zero covid, that's not at the table, we all know that. Anecdotally, what I hear is that when children get covid, it's like having a cold. If that's not true, then tell me. We cannot continue to exclude healthy children from being in class. We know what the consequences have been, both from an academic and a mental health standpoint, from students being out of the classroom. The Department of Health and Human Services owes it to the local health directors, to their local boards of education, who have the ability to vote on whether or not students should be masking. That's a matter of local control. I'm not seeing data that tells me that just because the community has a substantial number of covid cases, that that equates to the need to continue to exclude children from school.

Representative Torbett: Thank you Superintendent for spending some of your time today. We will continue our dialog in an effort to do whatever we can to have the best absolute system for the next 100 years for the people of North Carolina. We are tracking some things and I'm afraid we are going to be greatly dismayed when the actual findings from mental health impact of covid come out, specifically, directed at our children, and just my own personal opinion, the quicker that we can get back to something that is somewhat similar to what was a pre-covid norm, I think it will best help offset some of those negative impacts on the mental health of everyone. I think we all have been impacted to some degree. Those findings are trying to be calculated as we speak. If you all remember the first meeting, I asked for thoughts that if you could interject or change in the system today to have a better system, a system that not looks back but looks

forward for the next 100 years, what would that be, and you came up with some great ideas. You've heard comments today. If you would, for your homework, kind of refresh your memory, go back and listen to the commentary and jot down some things. Oh wow, she said this and maybe if we fix this, it will help that. There is going to be a test, an end of committee test, an EOC. I'm teasing. I have some news for you also. We all know parents are concerned throughout our state of North Carolina, as well they should be, always, just covid has brought a heightened awareness to their educational needs, because they have been witness to some of the educational process their children have via them not being in school and having to work with them at home and also using online utilization of classroom. That being said, what we are going to do is start taking our committee out to hear those. So first, we're going to go over next week real quick and we probably will not have time to finish that today with 10 minutes, but we will find a slot necessary to accommodate whatever time you need remaining. The next meeting, we are going to hear from the Lt. Governor and I also, I believe, we're going to hear from Eric Davis, the School Board Chairman, and then perhaps take some additional time to finish your presentation, which is very needy. That will be in 2 weeks. The meeting after that we are going to be going to Randolph County and Representative Hurley is going to help us set that up and find suitable accommodations and that will be sent to you. 2 weeks after that, I believe we are going to Union County and Representative Willis is going to help us with that. 2 weeks after that, we'll be going to the best county in the state of North Carolina, which is Gaston County. They do some things about school safety and professional help with the kids in the classroom as far as just whatever the child may need for their mental health. Then the 2 weeks after that we're already lining up to go to Carteret County to hear some special things that Carteret's been doing as well. Hopefully when we hear not only for the presentations of the first hour of these committee meetings from the different schools to kind of capture those things, they may be doing good, maybe doing better than some of the others. Then, the second hour of that we'll be hearing from citizen comments, and we'll run about an hour worth of that. We'll have 45 minutes of presentations, 15 minutes question and answer, then an hour of citizen comments. We want to hear from our parents, our students, and our teachers across the state of North Carolina as to what we can, if we had the opportunity, which we do, to build a better educational system for the next 100 years, what would it look like? Looking forward to that?

There was a suggestion to build a new system, we have to look first at what the federal requirements are that we do as a state. I've asked the team to kind of put all that together and we'll be hearing what that is as well. We don't want to leave that out. A lot of that comes with funding, it's like, if you do this, you get that.

Representative Blackwell: When the staff is discussing the federal requirements, we are sometimes told that we can't or must do certain things because of federal requirements. It's also my observation that frequently in the controlling federal rules, policies, whatever, there are provisions for waivers and exceptions and so forth. I think it is important when you are reviewing what we are required to do, that we understand what we may be in position if someone could be persuaded to do it, to seek amendments, waivers, rather than just taking it lying down.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50pm .

Representative John A. Torbett, Senior Chair
Presiding

Viddia Torbett, Committee Clerk