

Governor's Education Excellence Commission
December 15, 2020
Capitol Boardroom
10:00 AM-11:00 AM

Commission Members in attendance: Governor Herbert, Governor-elect Cox, David Woolstenhulme, Harris Simmons, Clay Christensen, Sydnee Dickson, Mark Huntsman, Heidi Mathews, Pam Perlich, Ann Millner, Jani Iwamoto, Steve Waldrip, Melissa Garff Ballard, Alex Hume, Bill Crim, Jacey Skinner, Peter Reichard, Mary Wohlforath, Dixie Garrison, Nubia Pena, McKay Jensen, John Arthur, DeLaina Tonks, Kinberlee Carlile, Tracy Gruber, Theresa Creel, Lexi Cunningham.

Commission Members excused: Lyle Hillyard, Laney Benedict, Ruth Watkins

Commission Members absent: Stephanie Pitcher, Clint Betts

Pat Jones chaired the meeting.

A. Welcome - Governor Herbert

B. Approval of minutes from August 19, 2020 meeting

Mark Huntsman made the motion to approve the minutes. Senator Iwamoto seconded the motion, all approved.

C. Speaker - John Arthur 2020-2021 Teacher of the Year

John Arthur took this opportunity to answer common questions he gets about being a teacher in a pandemic.

Q: What is it like to be the best teacher in the worst year ever?

A: If I could pick any year to be teacher of the year I would pick this one because teachers dedicate their lives to public service. Never again will that service mean more than it does right now.

Q: How are you doing?

A: I am making it work. Salt Lake school district only opened with online options. I cycle small groups of students through my classroom that have IEPs, ESL, or otherwise need the in school teacher interaction while the majority of my class learns online each day. Oddly I feel more of a connection to my students this year because the only way I can connect with some students and make sure they have what they need is to go see them in their homes.

Q: What is it like teaching in a pandemic?

A: It is like the TV show M.A.S.H. There are equal parts comedy and drama. There are professionals working at the top of their game in the most challenging of circumstances. Bonds of friendship are formed in struggle. Everyone is always scrambling, but a positive scramble because every little thing done is a service to the cause; in my case it's my students' education, their health, and their families well being.

Q: What one word would you use to describe teaching in 2020?

A: Heroic. Every teacher that used to teach in bell bottoms and is now teaching over zoom is heroic. Every teacher that is teaching while bouncing their baby on their knee is heroic. We are flexing muscles we never knew we had before, we are overcoming obstacles we have never seen before - This is heroic.

Q: How are teachers holding up?

A: As well as can be expected. We are on a hero's journey, we are always exhausted, feeling that with every new trial we might not make it, but we just keep trying.

Q: What should our top priority be right now?

A: Investing in human capital. Take every teacher and student by the hand and never let go. We can't afford to have any more students drop out or teachers quit. We need to treat teachers as a precious resource. It will be hard to convince anyone to become a teacher in the next few years so anything we can do to make teaching not just admirable but affordable and attractive as a profession is needed.

Q: What gives you hope?

A: This pandemic is our chance, when the system is so malleable, to deliver on the promises we always talk about but haven't been able to deliver on.

- Attract and retain teachers more reflective of the student population
- Encourage more teachers of color by using Grow Your Own Educator, and scholarship programs.
- Keep more kids in the building by getting rid of policies that acknowledge kids of color, disability, or LGBTQ as mistakes.
- Improve practices to be more culturally relevant. Acknowledge and celebrate different culture's contributions to society.
- Right now be kind, we are all doing the best we can and trying to survive. Then let's figure out how to thrive once this is over.

D. Accomplishments presentation - Tami Pyfer, Former Education Policy Advisor
Tami gave a presentation that is available as an attachment on this site.

10 accomplishments of the Commission over the years:

1. Unite and focus on what needs to be done
2. P.A.C.E. plan (Prepare, Access, Complete, Economic Success)
3. PACE report card
4. Education Roadmap
5. KEEP testing (Kindergarten Entry and Exit Profile)
6. Reintroduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act giving more control to our state and decreasing federal oversight.
7. Talent Ready Utah, aligns Public and Higher Ed with the workforce needs
8. Unified budget priorities
9. Elevated funding for programs providing school counselors and mental health support. \$16 million the first year, \$26 million in ongoing funds.
10. Historic collaboration and investment in education. Education funding was prioritized, and approved, then the pandemic hit. We found out we can work together to get there now, it can be done.

E. Self introduction of the new Senior Advisor of Education - Brittney Cummins
Brittney expressed her gratitude for this new position and the opportunities she has had that have led her here and that will help her build upon the foundation laid by this commission.

F. Looking ahead remarks - Governor-elect Cox

Governor-elect Cox has taken the approach with the start of his administration to question everything to find ways to make improvements. He will be talking to commission members to get feedback on ways to improve on education. He has two main focuses:

1. Make Teaching a destination occupation. He doesn't want people with a life passion to teach to find a career elsewhere because there isn't any money in it or the joy has been taken out of it.
2. Every kid in the state gets a high quality education by giving educational equity to rural and multicultural areas as well as the rest of the state.

G. Closing remarks Governor Herbert

The Commission adjourned.

Note: This was the final meeting of the Governor's Education Excellence Commission. No further meetings are scheduled.