

QUALITY EDUCATION COUNCIL 2010 REPORT

Minority Report submitted by Senator Rosemary McAuliffe

I appreciate all the hard work that has gone into developing the Quality Education Council (QEC) recommendations and report. Education is our paramount duty in this State and we must continue to make progress in fully implementing the new education reform efforts begun last session.

The key to ensuring that our reform efforts are moving forward is the adoption of a baseline prototypical school funding formula in this next legislative session and the funding for the transition costs associated with transferring from our current allocation system to the new system. I fully support this QEC recommendation in order to keep our state moving forward on meeting the goals set forth in House Bill 2261.

While I strongly support many of the goals expressed within the full QEC report, there are a few recommendations I would like the QEC/Legislature to consider for Legislative action in 2010. While continual progress must be made, meaningful and systematic education reform must be carefully implemented to assure the education system has the capacity and financial support for a comprehensive package of reform. I look forward to the Compensation and Levy Workgroups completing their tasks. I support the QEC recommendation for the work of the Compensation Working Group to begin immediately, but I believe the collaborative process with the Office of Financial Management convening the Working Group collaboratively with the staff of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) should be maintained. The first capacity report from OSPI is not due until December 1, 2010. The information from the working groups and OSPI will help guide our recommendations and enable us to promote a holistic and complete education reform package. There are two working groups established in Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2261 that have not even begun to meet and we will not have their reports until much later.

My greatest concerns are with the following specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Student Transportation

Despite the economic climate we faced last session, and that we continue to face, we established an aggressive timeline for implementing a new Pupil Transportation funding formula in statute. I cannot at this time support moving up the implementation date for that new funding formula. I will continue to support necessity of meeting goals of the current timeline outlined in statute but at this time I believe we must prioritize directing limited state funds to the classroom before giving it to infrastructure.

Recommendation 2: Early Learning

I strongly support early learning programs for young children and especially for young, at-risk children. However, I am uncomfortable including the recommendation to make a Program of Early Learning for at-risk children part of the definition of Basic Education until we understand all the ramifications of such an act.

Four senators, including myself, requested a formal opinion from the Attorney General on some of the legal implications of such a decision last March. The Office of the Attorney General testified before the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee that this decision presents many complex legal issues. The formal opinion was only recently completed and neither the QEC nor the Legislature has had the opportunity to review and fully discuss the findings. I believe it would be premature of this body to move forward with a recommendation to include early learning in the definition of Basic Education without a full discussion regarding the Attorney General opinion.

The Department of Early Learning and OSPI have recommended that a voluntary universal preschool program for 3- and 4-year olds be created as part of Basic Education. The QEC should focus a significant portion of its work in the next year on developing the specifics and timeline for how the state can implement such a program in order to achieve that end goal.

Recommendation 12: Programs to assist Struggling Students and English Language Learners

I support a review of these programs to ensure that the best practices for program delivery and funding can be implemented across Washington. My only concern is the minimal role that the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (AGOAC) appear to play in guiding the QEC's work. I submitted the following language to the QEC members to consider as an additional amendment:

“The QEC in partnership with the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee and in consultation with OSPI's Bilingual and Civil Rights Offices shall examine program delivery reforms and basic-education funding methods for the LAP and Bilingual Programs and report back to the Legislature by December 2010.”

The additional language is important because I believe it is essential that the AGOAC have a much more active role than merely providing input. It is important that the QEC work in partnership with the AGOAC as we address the programs to assist struggling students and English Language Learners. The AGOAC has current research that can contribute to the work of the QEC.

Additional recommendation to be included regarding funding for Basic Education:

Over the last few months I have sought input from our educators, parents and students regarding what are their goals for education reform. Despite these difficult economic times, I have heard teachers, parents, principals and superintendents across the entire State say that they want us to continue to move forward on education reform. However, they want us to move forward on this reform together.

Additionally, they have all stressed a need for a complete plan that addresses the inequities first while also dealing with the issue of securing stable and fair funding for basic education now and in the future. I agree. The QEC needs to be bold and address all of these issues and we must do so in a united and meaningful way. Any steps we recommend for education reform must also include recommendations for the funding of those steps.

There are many issues left untouched or only partially discussed in this report, most significant of which may be how we are going to pay for these reforms. In the report from the Funding Formula Technical Working Group there is a discussion of possible sources of revenue to support increases in basic education funding allocations. The QEC did not have the opportunity to begin discussing these options. I would like to include a recommendation in this report that the QEC have a full discussion of these and potentially other revenue source options in 2010.

I look forward to continuing my work with the QEC and the countless others involved in this education journey. I am confident all our hard work will lift us to our goal of complete education reform.