



**Vermont Financial Literacy Commission**  
November 20, 2017

**Vermont Financial Literacy Commission Members Present:**

Beth Pearce, Co-Chair, Vermont State Treasurer  
John Pelletier, Co-Chair, Champlain College  
Courtney Poquette, Winooski High School  
Linda Tarr-Whelan, Tarr-Whelan Associates  
Mary Niebling, Capstone Community Action (phone)  
Mark Perrin, State Board of Education  
Sabina Haskell, Vermont Student Assistance Corp.  
Lisa Falcone, United Way  
Thomas Leavitt, Northfield Savings Bank

**Also Present:**

Dylan Giambatista, Vermont State Treasurer's Office  
Thea Wurzburg, Vermont State Treasurer's Office

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Mr. Pelletier, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. The meeting was held in the Community Conference Room at VSAC, 10 E. Allen Street, Winooski.

**Item 1: Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Pelletier presented the October 17, 2017 draft meeting minutes. Ms. Tarr-Whelan moved adoption of the minutes. A roll call vote was taken to accommodate attendance by phone, which was unanimously approved by those voting. Ms. Haskell abstained, noting she did not attend the October meeting.

**Item 2: Review 2017 Recommendations and Progress to Date**

Mr. Giambatista stated that Ms. Pearce had a schedule conflict and would join the meeting by phone as soon as she was available. Likewise, Ms. Haskell explained that she would only be able to stay for part of the meeting due to a meeting conflict.

In a follow up to the Commission's October meeting with Agency of Education (AOE) Secretary Rebecca Holcombe, Ms. Tarr-Whelan asked when the State Board of Education (SBE) would next meet. Ms. Perrin said that the meeting was scheduled for December 13, 2017. He noted that the December meeting would constitute discussion and review, and that the SBE would likely vote on financial literacy standards at its January 2018 meeting.

Mr. Pelletier asked if Commission members thought it would be beneficial to attend the December SBE meeting. Mr. Perrin shared his perspective that stakeholder feedback would be valuable to the SBE as options are reviewed.

Mr. Perrin revisited the Commission's October 17 meeting and asked if Mr. Pelletier, or another Commission member, could provide state-specific examples of data collection methodologies used by other state education systems. Mr. Pelletier shared state examples, including those undertaken by Utah, Missouri and Maryland.

Mr. Pelletier highlighted methodologies by which Maryland surveys graduates to determine how students access personal finance coursework in high school. Ms. Tarr-Whelan requested that Mr. Pelletier share Maryland's compliance efforts with Mr. Perrin for presentation to AOE. Mr. Pelletier agreed to prepare materials for Mr. Perrin and AOE.

Ms. Poquette updated the Commission on recent developments at Winooski High School, in which school administrators had designated a French class offering to be interchangeable with a personal finance graduation requirement, starting with the class of 2020. Ms. Poquette expressed concern that the absence of robust statewide personal finance requirements might cause more schools to weaken or shy away from providing financial literacy course offerings.

Mr. Pelletier echoed Ms. Poquette's frustration and explained that AOE's website no longer contained references to personal finance requirements due to ADA compliance concerns. He reiterated his concern that a lack of clear guidance could confuse school administrators as they weigh curriculum development and adoption of graduation requirements.

Citing the Winooski High School development, Ms. Tarr-Whelan suggested that Ms. Poquette document the school's decision-making process for consideration by the SBE at its December meeting. Ms. Poquette agreed.

Ms. Haskell departed, whereupon the Commission continued its agenda.

### **Item 3: 2018 Legislative Session Requests**

Mr. Pelletier presented the "progress to date" chart contained on pages 9 and 10 of the agenda materials. He noted his intent to break down the Commission's work so it could be clearly presented in their 2018 report to the Governor and General Assembly.

Ms. Niebling noted the Governor's November 16 press conference in which the Administration and Treasurer's Office highlighted the start of a new interagency Financial Literacy Working

Group, which was based on the Commission's 2017 report recommendations. She asked about how the Working Group process would work and whether the State process would include a broader stakeholder process.

Mr. Giambatista shared information about the Working Group and explained that the Treasurer's Office and Department of Financial Regulation were in the process of collecting and reviewing feedback from State agencies and departments. He indicated that the Treasurer and Commissioner Pieciak intend to convene a dialogue following their review.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan asked if the Working Group had any requirement to report its progress to the Commission. Mr. Giambatista reported that the Memorandum of Understanding executed by the Treasurer's Office and Department of Financial Regulation did not designate an oversight role for the Commission, but that the Treasurer's Office generally intended to share the information. Ms. Tarr-Whelan expressed that the Commission may want to continue beyond its contemplated July 2018 sunset to provide oversight of such initiatives.

The Commission discussed its future. Mr. Pelletier praised the work of the Commission. He noted, however, that while he was supportive of continuing a collaborative personal finance education effort, he had mixed views about whether the Commission was the most effective model to lead and coordinate future action.

Ms. Niebling stated her preference to extend the Commission beyond its July 2018 sunset. She provided an assessment of the Commission's ongoing progress, noting that there still remained many areas of adult financial literacy for which the Commission could add value.

Ms. Niebling asked what level of state expenditure or administrative costs the Commission carried. Mr. Giambatista noted that statute provides per diems shall be paid to members who request travel reimbursements, and that the Treasurer's Office allocates a portion of staff time to support the Commission's activities. A general discussion followed.

Ms. Niebling asked whether states other than Vermont had similar initiatives that might serve as a model to continue financial literacy discussions beyond July 2018. Mr. Pelletier provided several examples of other state personal finance education initiatives, including the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Washington. He shared that some government-led efforts were more effective than others.

Ms. Niebling asked Mr. Pelletier if he could provide an analysis of different state models. Mr. Pelletier agreed to circulate information for future consideration.

Ms. Niebling asked for clarification on why the General Assembly had added a sunset provision to the Commission when it convened the panel in 2015. Mr. Pelletier noted that the Commission had not requested a sunset, but that the General Assembly had added one. Mr. Giambatista explained that legislative appropriators often look at potential costs, including per diems and staff support, when weighing the creation of commissions and committees.

Mr. Perrin noted the Commission's progress to date and advocated that a one- or two-year extension might be worthwhile. He noted the SBE's continued deliberation over personal finance standards as evidence to support the Commission's continued existence. Mr. Pelletier suggested that it might be wise to seek an extension through the 2019-2020 biennium. Ms. Niebling entertained that there might be an option for less frequent meetings.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan conjectured that the creation of the Financial Literacy Commission Fund suggested that the General Assembly had acted to enable a long-term process to continue and coordinate outreach efforts for Vermonters.

Ms. Poquette reflected on her experience as a teacher who advocates for, and delivers, robust personal finance curriculum. She shared reservations about discontinuing the Commission's work when there are recent examples of schools struggling to adopt stronger financial literacy course options for students.

Mr. Leavitt, who arrived late due to inclement weather, shared that he had recently presented information about financial literacy standards to the Governor. He expressed to the Governor that adopting national standards would be beneficial.

Ms. Pearce joined the meeting via phone.

Mr. Leavitt analyzed the Commission's progress to date and the state of initiatives in the areas of K-12, higher education, and adult personal finance. He noted that recent deliberations by the SBE made him ponder whether the Commission's ongoing advocacy role was necessary beyond July 2018. Mr. Leavitt cautioned that any continuation of the Commission's work should be undertaken with thoughtful consideration of resource and time constraints.

#### **Item 4: 2018 Legislative Report/Update Development**

The Commission discussed next steps for the legislative session. Ms. Pearce inquired about whether there was a consensus opinion about the Commission's July 2018 sunset. Mr. Pelletier summarized the discussion thus far.

Ms. Niebling said that she thought there were many reasons to consider extending the Commission beyond its July 2018 sunset. Ms. Tarr-Whelan noted the importance of guiding work to implement a financial literacy outreach campaign. She further noted that the State Working Group may require oversight and guidance.

Ms. Pearce praised the Commission's progress to date. She noted the creation of new programs, initiatives, and campaigns to expand Vermonters' access to personal finance education. Ms. Pearce stated that the Treasurer's Office was committed to these efforts.

Ms. Pearce shared her philosophy of committees and commissions, explaining that many panels spark helpful conversations that propel new policy efficiencies and innovation. She provided examples of how a panel might hand off its work to permanent partners to transition from a temporary panel-led exercise to a permanent stakeholder-led initiative.

Ms. Pearce said that the Commission had time to weigh its options. Ms. Niebling generally agreed that it might be possible to transition some of the Commission's work to other community partners. Ms. Tarr-Whelan suggested that policy changes at the federal and state level might warrant a lengthier discussion as the Commission explores its future.

The Commission discussed its reporting requirements for the legislative session. Mr. Leavitt reviewed the infographic drafts enclosed on pages 11-13 of the meeting agenda and recommended that the Commission finalize a set of graphics for its report. He suggested that the current infographics, which compile 2017 report findings, should be supplemented by a data set documenting progress and next steps. Ms. Tarr-Whelan echoed Mr. Leavitt's concept. Commission members agreed.

The Commission discussed process for authoring its 2018 report. It was agreed that infographics should be developed to augment a short narrative and a chart describing the 2017 recommendations and next steps.

The Commission began reviewing the "progress to date" chart. Mr. Pelletier noted that Recommendations 1 through 3 all would be impacted by the SBE's decision about whether to update financial literacy education standards.

Ms. Poquette expressed her hope that a stakeholder initiative could bring about development of model Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs) and Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) that would provide educators with a template to provide personal finance learning opportunities in the classroom. Mr. Pelletier and Mr. Leavitt echoed that a private entity or organization might be able to drive the development of such curriculum.

Ms. Pearce stated that transitioning K-12 work to an entity outside of the Commission was consistent with her approach of moving from an empaneled body to next steps. Mr. Leavitt agreed with Ms. Pearce.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan recalled that the Commission had previously entertained an approach whereby grants would be made to local school districts and educators who want to provide financial literacy coursework in the classroom. Ms. Pearce cautioned about resource constraints and stated that she could not support any unfunded educational mandates. Ms. Pearce further said that any conversation about delivering curriculum to schools should involve both employers and employees.

The Commission discussed testimony provided by AOE Secretary Holcombe at its October 17 meeting. Ms. Pearce noted that AOE was conducting a "crosswalk" process to review if personal finance education could be incorporated into existing curriculum standards. The Commission agreed that this finding should be indicated in future drafts of the "progress to date" chart.

Mr. Pelletier indicated that he had participated in a conversation with the Vermont Business Roundtable to ascertain whether personal finance could be a criterion in its Public School Medallion program. Ms. Pearce suggested that other stakeholders, such as Vermont Businesses

for Social Responsibility, might also be interested to support initiatives to promote the teaching of personal finance education.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan supported the approach of transitioning K-12 financial literacy efforts by partnering with community and private organizations to enhance model curriculum. Ms. Pearce agreed and again noted that such an effort was consistent with her approach of moving from an empaneled body to additional steps forward.

Mr. Pelletier reviewed Recommendation 5 and shared information about the Vermont Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program Fund Advisory Committee. He noted that the original Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program did not provide funding and that the Advisory Committee was prepared to recommend a pilot program to experiment with alternate options.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan suggested that the Vermont Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program Fund Advisory Committee should make a legislative recommendation. Ms. Pearce agreed. Ms. Niebling suggested that the Commission could support the position of the Advisory Committee. Commission members concurred with Ms. Niebling's suggested approach.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan reviewed Recommendations 6 through 8 and stated that Ms. Haskell should take the lead on crafting final recommendations in the area of higher education. Ms. Pearce noted ongoing VSAC initiatives to increase awareness of the cost of post-secondary education.

Mr. Pelletier suggested that PLPs might be one place where high school educators could discuss the cost of higher education with students. Ms. Poquette agreed, sharing an example of a recent classroom interaction with a student who is evaluating college costs in his PLP program.

The Commission reviewed Recommendations 9 through 14. A broad conversation followed about workplace delivery of financial literacy.

Mr. Giambatista shared examples of different saving toolkits available to employers to help employees develop their financial sophistication. Ms. Pearce noted that the Treasurer's Office is in the process of implementing the Green Mountain Secure Retirement Plan, which was recently enacted into law. She indicated that outreach was already underway to connect with employers and employees as the savings plan is developed.

Ms. Niebling acknowledged the importance and effectiveness of workplace campaigns. She provided examples of the ways in which community-based groups are working to bring personal finance learning opportunities into more Vermonter workplaces. Ms. Niebling praised Ms. Falcone's work with the Working Bridges program and other resources available through Prosperity Now.

Ms. Falcone provided data about the small percentage of Vermonters who have developed emergency funds. Ms. Falcone noted that many Vermonters work paycheck to paycheck and are focused on trying to reach a place of financial stability. She said that the Commission's discussion is a broader topic than just saving for retirement.

Mr. Giambatista agreed that financial wellness is a broad conversation, noting recent research that supports the concept of overall workplace wellness. Ms. Niebling and Mr. Leavitt agreed that the workplace is a vital place to encourage financial wellness.

Mr. Perrin gave perspective on his experience running a business. He indicated that the Commission's discussions had persuaded him that the work is critically important to the well-being of Vermonters and the state's economic future.

Ms. Pearce echoed Mr. Perrin. She provided an example of increasing enrollments in the Vermont-ABLE program and detailed how developing an action plan can drive policy goals forward. Mr. Perrin agreed that using the Commission's time to move policy would be a productive approach.

Ms. Niebling stated that the Commission should continue its work to develop a more complete understanding of how the financial health of Vermont workers connects to the financial well-being of the state. Mr. Leavitt concurred and noted the importance of focusing on ongoing initiatives to maximize their impact and improve outcomes.

Ms. Pearce and Mr. Pelletier summarized next steps. Ms. Pearce asked Mr. Giambatista to reconvene the adult working group to draft Recommendations 10 through 14. Additionally, Mr. Pelletier asked that the drafting committee who authored the 2017 Commission report work together to finalize materials for submission to the Governor and General Assembly in January 2018.

#### **Item 5: Public Comment**

No public comment was given.

#### **Item 6: Adjournment**

Ms. Tarr-Whelan made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Poquette seconded. Ms. Pearce adjourned the meeting at 4:07 p.m.