



DRAFT – Not yet approved by the commission.

Vermont Financial Literacy Commission

October 17, 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
Lisa Falcone, United Way of Northwest Vermont
Linda Tarr-Whelan, Tarr-Whelan Associates
Mary Niebling, Capstone Community Action (phone)
Mark Perrin, State Board of Education
Scott Giles, Vermont Student Assistance Corp.
Thomas Leavitt, Northfield Savings Bank
Yvonne Garand, Vermont State Employees Credit Union

Also Present:

Dylan Giambatista, Vermont State Treasurer's Office
Andrea Heller, Opportunities Credit Union

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Pelletier, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:04 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 September 19, 2017 draft meeting minutes. Mr. Perrin recommended a technical edit. The Commission approved the suggestion. Ms. Tarr-Whelan moved approval of the minutes. Ms. Falcone seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken to accommodate attendance by phone, which was unanimously approved by those voting. Ms. Pearce abstained, citing that she was not at the September 19 meeting.

Item 2: Education standards and State workgroup update

Mr. Pelletier asked Mr. Giambatista to provide an update on the memorandum of understanding that had been executed by the Vermont State Treasurer's Office and Department of Financial

Regulation. Mr. Giambatista indicated that a memorandum of understanding had been executed in September and that staff was collaborating to generate an inventory of existing State financial literacy initiatives.

Mr. Pelletier noted that Vermont Secretary of the Agency of Education (AOE), Rebecca Holcombe, had accepted the Commission's invitation to testify on the status of the State Board of Education's deliberations to update the State's personal finance education standards. Citing that she could not attend the September 19 meeting, Ms. Pearce inquired about the goal of inviting Ms. Holcombe before the Commission to discuss state education standards.

Ms. Pearce indicated her continued support of the Commission's 2017 report recommendation to "[u]pdate Vermont's existing education standards on personal economics and career choices to reflect highly regarded national and international financial literacy standards." She clarified that the State Treasurer's Office did not intend to create any new mandates.

Mr. Pelletier and Ms. Tarr-Whelan reviewed the September meeting discussion and consensus decision to invite Ms. Holcombe to testify before the Commission. Mr. Pelletier read aloud from an Agency of education document that described the standards that will be reviewed by the State Board of Education at a November or December meeting. The definitions of "standards" and "framework" were discussed.

Mr. Leavitt noted that the Commission was hoping to encourage the continuation of standards, as previously stated in the 2017 Commission report. Ms. Tarr-Whelan noted the importance of carefully selecting words that are used to discuss education requirements. Misuse of a term of art, she suggested, can sometimes cause confusion. The Commission agreed.

The Commission discussed the handout developed by Ms. Haskell, Mr. Leavitt, Mr. Pelletier, Ms. Poquette and Ms. Tarr-Whelan.

Noting that Ms. Holcombe had not yet arrived, Mr. Leavitt asked whether the Commission should discuss its plan for the remainder of the year. Ms. Tarr-Whelan expressed interest to have a lengthier discussion about what role the Commission should take to promote a financial health campaign. Ms. Niebling strongly support development of a financial health campaign with accompanying outreach events.

Ms. Pearce referenced the Money Smart Child program, which was a partnership between the State Treasurer's Office and People's United Bank. She shared research that suggested engaging parents in financial literacy discussions was critically important.

Ms. Holcombe joined the meeting at 2:28 p.m., whereupon the Commission ended its planning discussion and continued the agenda.

Item 3: Secretary Rebecca Holcombe

Mr. Pelletier introduced Ms. Holcombe. Mr. Leavitt explained the Commission's interest in personal finance graduation requirements, presenting information about the Commission's 2017 report recommendations and its advocacy to date.

Mr. Leavitt provided background on the Commission's findings, as outlined on the "Discussion Summary" handout. He noted that only 22% of Vermonters reported that they participated in financial education in school, college or the workforce. Mr. Leavitt furnished statistics about personal finance education delivery systems available on the national level.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan noted the findings of a Vermont Works for Woman taskforce that identified attainment gaps in the financial education of Vermont women. She said that it was the Commission's position that existing personal finance education standards should remain in place and, at a minimum, should be robust.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan cited the 2017 Commission report recommendation to "[u]pdate Vermont's existing education standards on personal economics and career choices to reflect highly regarded national and international financial literacy standards" as the Commission's primary goal. She stated that the Commission wanted to partner with the AOE to achieve shared goals.

Ms. Poquette presented information about her own high school education experience. She explained that she first received classroom-based personal finance education from a social studies teacher. Ms. Poquette noted that, as an educator, she frequently receives student feedback in support of making personal finance education broadly available in Vermont schools.

Ms. Poquette shared preliminary survey data that found 22% of Vermont high schools require personal finance education, while an additional 50% offer a financial literacy elective course.

Ms. Poquette provided an update on the data exhibit describing high school offerings in Vermont. She noted that, after additional research, it was confirmed that Concord should be removed from the list, as it had closed. She explained that Lake Region offers personal finance within their personal wellness program. Further, Proctor staff indicated to Ms. Poquette that personal finance classes that they used to offer had been cut due to budgeting and staffing changes.

Ms. Poquette gave descriptions of reputable free personal finance education curricula. She highlighted several examples, including resources provided by the Jump\$tart Coalition and Next Gen Personal Finance. She also shared examples of the summer institute educator training available through Champlain College's Center for Financial Literacy.

Ms. Poquette described the success she has had in the classroom incorporating personal finance concepts into students' personalized learning plans (PLPs). She expressed optimism that personally applicable financial education could be offered by schools in a low-cost manner that would not burden teachers.

Ms. Poquette cited the 12 schools that, in addition to Winooski High School, currently incorporate personal finance graduation requirements, and indicated her willingness to work with

other educators currently teaching personal finance to develop a proficiency based graduation requirement prototype that would help more schools in offering personal finance education in Vermont classrooms. She noted the existence of a clearinghouse already available on teachfinlit.org.

Ms. Poquette acknowledged the potential of utilizing public/private partnerships to achieve success. She further noted that Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative already offered financial literacy courses online to high school students

Ms. Tarr-Whelan shared that a variety of educators, in different classroom environments teaching numerous disciplines, are currently delivering personal finance education. Ms. Poquette agreed, explaining that personal finance concepts could be taught in a broad array of subject areas.

Mr. Perrin noted that the Commission's recommendations had not, to his knowledge, been reviewed by the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), Vermont Principals' Association (VPA), and Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA). He acknowledged the challenge of implementing initiatives viewed as "mandates," and requested feedback from the Secretary on how the Commission could successfully increase the number of schools offering personal finance education in Vermont classrooms.

Ms. Holcombe said that the AOE has a significant resource challenge. She noted that there has been a 40% reduction in General Fund resources available to the AOE as it seeks to achieve its mission of providing high quality education to all students.

Ms. Holcombe provided background on the AOE's and State Board of Education's process to update Vermont's Education Quality Standards. She explained that the State Board of Education has been working through the process and is nearing completion.

Ms. Holcombe noted that, over the years, the Common Core and other guidance supplanted past standards. She said that the AOE is analyzing existing standards to review how additional personal finance requirements could be incorporated to ensure that the requirements remain robust. The goal of the AOE is ensuring that there are not duplicative standards in different knowledge areas of education standards approved by the State Board of Education.

Ms. Holcombe shared that, notwithstanding unforeseen scheduling challenges, that the AOE will present personal finance standards recommendations to the State Board of Education at its December meeting.

Mr. Pelletier reiterated his hope that robust personal finance education standards would be continued to be taught in all Vermont schools and, ideally, strengthened. He gave the example of the State of Rhode Island, where personal finance education standards were approved but were only made voluntary, thereby weakening their application.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan concurred with Mr. Pelletier's statement that the standards would ideally be made more robust. She noted her participation as a member of the 2014 Financial Literacy

Taskforce, and that that group had achieved a unanimous recommendation to improve personal finance standards that currently apply to all students and all schools in Vermont. She said that her goal was to ensure a sustained effort to incorporate personal finance education in the classroom.

Ms. Holcombe stated that the AOE was preparing a recommendation for the State Board of Education. She indicated that AOE staff was reviewing model standards published by the Jump\$tart Coalition and the Council for Economic Education. The AOE is undertaking a “crosswalk” to determine whether there would be duplication with other standards that have already been adopted by the State Board of Education in other knowledge areas (e.g. mathematics and social studies).

Ms. Holcombe noted that recent policy changes and modification to State laws impact educators as they work to deliver content to kids. She cautioned that additional new mandates could add to the tasks educators undertake, limiting their classroom time.

Mr. Perrin echoed Ms. Holcombe and said that he was cognizant of the local control education delivery system that exists. He stated his preference that local education systems oversee the implementation of delivering new personal finance education to kids. Ms. Holcombe agreed, but suggested that extensive new mandates could require additional funding.

Mr. Pelletier explained the difference between voluntary standards and standards where local school districts dictate how programming is delivered. Ms. Holcombe noted that the system that exists requires local delivery and local buy in for successful implementation.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan asked how the Commission could be a helpful partner to achieve their shared goals of delivering robust personal finance education in the classroom. Ms. Holcombe indicated a preference for programs that provide turnkey, off-the-shelf materials for curriculum and student instruction.

Ms. Pearce noted that she was pleased that free, broadly available curriculum options continue to grow for educators and parents. She cautioned against a mandated approach, noting Vermont’s education delivery system. She said that, ideally, personal finance education would be incorporated as part of college and career readiness preparation.

Ms. Holcombe recapped the chronology of approving more robust personal finance standards. The first step is for the AOE to conclude its research and to make a formal recommendation to the State Board of Education. After standards are adopted, she said that the second step would be continuous evaluations at the local level. She noted that the AOE facilitates a survey of Vermont schools on a 3-year schedule.

Mr. Leavitt inquired about the process the AOE undertakes to collect data from Vermont schools. Ms. Holcombe explained the process in greater detail.

Ms. Garand asked whether Vermont’s tapestry of small school systems was an impediment to achieving the scale required to deliver personal finance education in an equitable fashion. Ms.

Holcombe noted that the thrust for unifying schools was to achieve the economies of scale necessary to educate kids.

Ms. Holcombe stated that achieving financial well-being is a much broader process of learning than lessons delivered in schools. She elaborated that the standards present an opportunity to show educators what steps can be taken to help students attain financial proficiency.

Mr. Pelletier asked whether there were initiatives outside of the AOE to enhance opportunities for learning personal finance skills in Vermont schools. He suggested that it might be helpful to form an educator workgroup to develop materials for use in classrooms. Ms. Holcombe noted the importance of student interest to drive education options and offerings.

Ms. Tarr-Whelan shared information about the Working Group that has begun collecting an inventory of personal finance education projects within State government. She expressed optimism that the Working Group might identify additional resources that could be used to advance financial literacy education.

Ms. Poquette asked whether the AOE preferred the Jump\$tart Coalition standards or the National Council for Economic Education's standards. Ms. Holcombe said that the AOE was currently reviewing both options. Ms. Poquette offered feedback in preference for the Jump\$tart standards, noting that Next Gen Personal Finance had tied its curriculum to their recommendations.

Mr. Pelletier asked whether the Commission should perform outreach to members of the State Board of Education. Ms. Holcombe noted that the State Board of Education had a busy schedule under Act 46 and Act 49 requirements.

Ms. Pearce acknowledged the funding challenges school systems face. She expressed optimism that creative, non-mandatory approaches would help the buildout of personal finance programs in Vermont schools. She thanked Ms. Holcombe for reviewing the standards and for weighing the best approach to ensuring Vermont kids achieve financial well-being.

Mr. Pelletier suggested that there may be opportunities to partner with Vermont financial institutions and community organizations to supplement State efforts to sustain and make personal finance education in Vermont's schools more robust.

Mr. Leavitt echoed Mr. Pelletier's comments and asked whether the AOE had any suggestions on supplemental activities that could be helpful. Ms. Holcombe said that there may be a role for private foundations to provide additional resources and supplemental materials for the instruction of personal finance education.

The Commission thanked Ms. Holcombe for her time.

Item 4: Public Comment

Mr. Pelletier acknowledged Andrea Heller of Opportunities Credit Union, who provided public comment. She emphasized the importance of incorporating personal finance education into school curriculum, noting that financial well-being is a lifelong process.

Ms. Holcombe shared some comments in response to Ms. Heller, whereupon Ms. Pearce shared data describing the percentage of federal financial aid forms completed at Vermont high schools. Mr. Giles provided additional explanation to Ms. Pearce's comments, noting the importance of partnerships and existing resources, including the AOE's support, to increase the number of Vermont students completing FAFSA forms.

Item 6: Adjournment

Ms. Niebling made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Falcone seconded. Ms. Pearce adjourned the meeting at 3:33 p.m.