



MINUTES

Area Education Agency Task Force

Monday, December 9, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Chris Cournoyer, Co-chairperson
Senator Molly Donahue
Senator Lynn Evans

Representative Brent Siegrist, Co-chairperson
Representative Tracy Ehlert [by teleconference]
Representative Henry Stone

Public Members:

Josh Bowar [by teleconference]
Andrea Carlson
Pam Gronau
Patricia Hunt
Robin Maas
Adam Magliari
Corey Seymour

Jane Dufoe, Governor's Office
Thomas Mayes, Department of Education
Cindy Yelick, Heartland Area Education Agency

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I. Procedural Business

Call to Order and Adjournment. The meeting of the Area Education Agency (AEA) Task Force was called to order by temporary Co-chairperson Cournoyer at 10:04 a.m., Monday, December 9, 2024, in Room 103 of the State Capitol, Des Moines. The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Election of Permanent Co-chairpersons. Members of the task force unanimously elected temporary Co-chairpersons Cournoyer and Siegrist as permanent Co-chairpersons.

Adoption of Rules. Members of the task force unanimously adopted the proposed rules.

Opening Remarks. The members of the task force made brief introductory remarks.

II. Task Force Discussion

The task force began by discussing how to improve the outcomes of students who utilize services provided by AEA's. Task force members mentioned concerns related to the reduction of AEA staff. Ms. Cindy Yelick indicated that several issues have led to AEA employees looking for employment elsewhere.

Ms. Pam Gronau expressed concerns related to the needs of children not being met under the current system and indicated more staff training and resources were needed. Task force members discussed the need for equality of services across school districts of varying sizes. Task force members also discussed the changes to AEA funding made by 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612. Ms. Robin Maas reminded the task force that AEA's help all students, not just students participating in special education.

Task force members discussed concerns related to how small school districts will be financially affected by 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612. Task force members also discussed the importance of staff members building close relationships with students who utilize the services provided by AEA's and the importance of local control of special education programs.

Task force members discussed the information they may need to create appropriate recommendations, including information related to the resources available to school districts, school district needs, core services provided by AEA's, staffing levels at AEA's, how AEA's expend moneys, and special education achievement gaps. Ms. Andrea Carlson discussed issues related to comparing special education achievement gaps with students in other states. Mr. Thomas Mayes discussed data that the Department of Education collects and analyzes.

Task force members discussed compensation paid to the administrators of AEA's, the core services provided by AEA's, how to best fund several services provided by AEA's, and the cost of professional development services. Ms. Yelick explained how AEA's share the services of several different types of employees. Mr. Adam Magliari expressed concerns related to how smaller school districts will be financially affected by 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612, in the years ahead.

In terms of the crisis response services provided by AEA's, task force members discussed how school districts and AEA's coordinate to provide these services to students. Task force members also discussed training for the mental health professionals who provide such services.

Task force members next discussed media services provided by AEA's. Ms. Yelick indicated that the AEA's have taken action to consolidate the media services into four different media centers. Senator Evans explained how AEA's have historically shared responsibilities related to media services.



Task force members also discussed cooperative purchasing. Co-chairperson Siegrist explained how cooperative purchasing helps school districts save money. Ms. Jane Dufoe pointed out that, in terms of purchasing, school districts can also utilize master agreements negotiated by the Department of Administrative Services.

Co-chairperson Cournoyer then provided background information to the task force related to the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006, and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Task force members discussed the importance of these laws in providing students with a pathway to fields related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Task force members discussed special education equipment, the real property and facilities utilized by each AEA, the media services, educational services, and special education services provided by AEAs, and the accreditation of AEAs. Mr. Mayes explained the Department of Education's current rulemaking as such rulemaking relates to AEA accreditation.

Next, task force members discussed what services AEAs should provide. Task force members expressed the need for information related to services AEAs already provide and the costs of those services. Ms. Yelick discussed information that will soon be provided in a report to the Department of Education. Task force members discussed the needs of smaller school districts and how to ensure such school districts have the resources to provide necessary services. Task force members expressed concerns related to litigation expenses if smaller school districts are not able to provide required services. Task force members also discussed when, and under what circumstances, children are referred to out-of-state entities for services.

Task force members then discussed accountability measures applicable to the AEAs, including the new role the Department of Education plays in monitoring certain aspects of AEA operations pursuant to 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612. Ms. Patricia Hunt expressed concerns related to added layers of departmental staff compared to the resources provided to classroom teachers. Mr. Mayes explained that the Department of Education's goal is to create better communication and a more workable system for schools.

Task force members discussed the timeline for modification to AEA staffing numbers. This discussion included the transition of responsibilities related to the oversight of AEAs and the task force's need for additional information related to AEA and Department of Education employees.

There was a motion for the task force to adopt a recommendation that the funding provisions of 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612, be delayed for one year. That motion was defeated.

III. Recommendations

The voting members of the task force recommended all of the following:

1. a. That each AEA be required to provide the members of the task force with all of the information requested during discussions on or before February 1, 2025, or as soon as possible after that date. This information includes all of the following:

- (1) An estimate of the number of recent job losses that are likely to be permanent.
- (2) A detailed description of the core services and other services provided by the AEA, including costs of each service and which school districts purchased each service.
- (3) Information related to the number of families who utilize services within the AEA's facilities.



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(4) A description of how 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612, will impact funding provisions after July 1, 2025. The description must specify which services will be limited or lost.

(5) Information related to the growth of administrative costs by fiscal year.

(6) Information related to the number of individuals employed by job classification.

(7) A detailed description of expenditures and budgeting, including administrative costs.

(8) Information related to the job duties of each employee.

b. That the Department of Education be required to provide the members of the task force with all of the information requested during discussions on or before February 1, 2025, or as soon as possible after that date. This information includes all of the following:

(1) A description of the training that is required to become a para-educator.

(2) Information related to the special education achievement gap in this state compared to the special education achievement gap in other states.

(3) Information related to the expenditures from the moneys appropriated to the Department of Education pursuant to 2024 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2443, section 1.

(4) A description of the services school districts have determined to be the essential services provided by AEAs.

(5) Information related to the amounts of moneys each school district in this state spends on special education services, including federal funds, and how these amounts compare to school districts in other states.

(6) A description of the duties for each new job position with the Department of Education created pursuant to 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2612.

2. That the members of the task force be authorized to meet, in some form, on or before February 28, 2025, to examine the information that was provided by the AEAs and the Department of Education and to submit additional recommendations to the General Assembly after such meeting.

IV. Materials Filed with the Legislative Services Agency

Materials were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are filed with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the "Committee Documents" link on the committee's Internet site accessible at the following address: www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?ga=90&session=2&groupID=41009