

Governor's Commission on School Construction – Meeting Summary

Date: January 17, 2025
Location: Via Zoom and Room 500, Burton Cross Office Building, Augusta, Maine
Time: 1-3:30 p.m.

Key Topics

Upcoming Commission Activities
Discuss/Identify Preliminary Key Areas of Focus

Presenters

Finance Subcommittee (leads: Abigail Cram and Chelsey Fortin-Trimble)
Design/Construction Subcommittee (lead: Scott Brown)
Policy Subcommittee (lead: Laura Cyr)

Attending

Governor's Office. Joseph Marro (Zoom)
Commission Members. Pender Makin (Maine DOE Commissioner)[Zoom], Valerie Landry (Chair)[Zoom], Jenny Boyden (Zoom), Elaine Clark (Zoom), Fern Desjardins, Roy Gott (Zoom), Christopher Howell (Zoom), Anthony Jaccarino (Zoom), Jane McCall, Justin Poirier (Zoom), and Rhonda Sperrey
DOE Staff. Daniel Chuhta (Zoom), Abigail Cram (Zoom), Laura Cyr, Chelsey Fortin-Trimble, Paula Gravelle (Zoom) Chloe Teboe (Zoom)
Other Attendees. Robbie Feinberg (MSMA)[Zoom], David Hill (WGME), and Patricia Lech (MEPRI)[Zoom]

Action Items

- On their own time, Commission members will review the recent report by MEPRI pertaining to school construction.
- The Design/Construction, Finance, and Policy Subcommittees will continue meeting at a regular cadence of approximately once per week, as the Commission's work continues.
- The Maine DOE is developing a list of potential schools for Commission members to visit and will schedule visits soon. Ideally, two or more Commission members will be present at each visit, and teachers and students may be involved. The Commission will develop a list of questions and topics to be discussed at each of these convenings.
- The Maine DOE has developed a document to monitor the submission of questions/comments from the Commission webpage and will share with Commission members.
- The next Commission meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 21, 2025, from 1-3:30 p.m.

Discussion

Review of Superintendents Focus Group Meeting – Commissioner Pender Makin

In her recap of the Superintendent's Focus Group Meeting on January 10, 2025, Commissioner Makin indicated the summary of the January 10 meeting would be posted to the Commission webpage shortly. Themes from that meeting that emerged included an interest from superintendents in establishing an independent authority; the use of a sliding scale to determine State funding based on a community's economic need and potential local appropriations; incentivization of school consolidation and operations and maintenance (O+M); advocating for a standardization of school systems for technical and workforce

support over time; exploring the public-private partnership (P3) model used in locations such as Prince George's County Public Schools; and creating a dedicated tax for school construction.

Finance Subcommittee Update – Abigail Cram and Chelsey Fortin-Trimble

Finance Subcommittee leads Abigail Cram and Chelsey Fortin-Trimble provided an update following the Subcommittee's initial meeting. Participating Commission members include: Jenny Boyden, Elaine Clark, Christopher Howell, and Anthony Jaccarino. Priorities include:

- Reviewing local appropriation contributions.
- Determining the scope of responsibility for an independent authority and potential public-private partnerships (P3).
- Meeting with subject-matter experts to gain insight. One example includes meeting with a tax policy expert to inquire about a dedicated tax to address the debt ceiling.
- Focusing on efficiency.
- Incentivizing O+M and incentivizing the maintenance plan, as well as applying “checks and balances” to ensure follow-through with the plan.
- Ensuring there are options for funding that meet the range of needs within our diverse state (urban vs. rural).

Design/Construction Subcommittee Update – Scott Brown

Design/Construction Subcommittee lead Scott Brown provided an update following the Subcommittee's initial meeting. Participating Commission members include: Fern Desjardins, Art Dudley, Roy Gott, Jane McCall. Priorities include:

- Aligning the Subcommittee's work with current Maine DOE work occurring with architects, engineers, etc. to revise building standards and guidelines (due in June of 2025).
- Highlighting energy efficiency, as nearly 70% of schools in Maine still use oil as their major source of energy.
- Devising ways to be more competitive with cost.
- Focusing on addressing the significant demand and unique changes to special education needs in school and providing space to support those students.
- Recognizing a significant enrollment decline at certain schools and the impact that has on schools and students.
- Addressing safety and compliance concerns.
- Considering standardized design elements – to reduce cost, standardize systems across schools, and address how the schools of tomorrow look different from the schools of today.

Policy Subcommittee Update – Laura Cyr

Policy Subcommittee lead Laura Cyr provided an update following the Subcommittee's initial meeting. Participating Commission members include: Anthony Jaccarino, Justin Poirier, and Rhonda Sperrey. Priorities include:

- Reviewing policies from other states where school construction efforts are going well.

- Building off the work of the Commission as a whole, as well as off of other Subcommittee information.
- Determining what aspect of a best practice Maine is hoping to emulate, while recognizing there is no single solution to solve this issue.
- Recognizing certain areas with Maine statutes may need to be modified/updated.
- Deciding what elements of an independent authority may be useful.
- Considering the provision of technical assistance or professional development for superintendents for construction.

General Comments - All

(Note: Comments do not necessarily reflect agreement among Commission members but rather topics or questions raised by one or more members or staff for future discussion, clarification, or analysis.)

Commission members expressed interest in:

- Consideration of thoughtfully-designed prototypes (not “cookie-cutter”) for elementary, middle, and high school new school construction efforts.
- Ensuring schools are places where students can become engaged (in a time when they’re often distracted by technology).
- Increasing transparency around funding regarding expectations for community contribution.
- Considering a partnership with higher education institutions to invest in facilities.
- Keeping in mind the importance of meeting the needs of a diverse group of students.
- Recognizing that consolidation can present a challenge when presented to a community.
- Considering how to combine both practical and visionary measures.

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 21, 2025, from 1-3:30 p.m. at location TBD.