

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 20, 2016

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Mortimer, Vice Chairman Thayn, Senators Nonini, Patrick, Souza, Den Hartog, Anthon, Buckner-Webb and Ward-Engelking

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: Chairman Mortimer called the Education Committee (Committee) meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

PRESENTATION: **Sherri Ybarra**, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) introduced Jennifer Poon, Director of Innovation Lab Networks, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO); Stephen Bowen, Strategic Initiative Director, CCSSO; and Michelle Clement Taylor, School Choice Coordinator, SDE, to present information on Mastery Based Education (MBE). She explained that they will be giving an overview of MBE. **Superintendent Ybarra** said she hopes this presentation will give the Committee the ability to understand the concept as seen in action through this demonstration.

Stephen Bowen explained his position with the CCSSO and how he supports the work of United States Department of Education (USDE). He started the presentation by playing a video to illustrate MBE to the Committee . He said as the State Commissioner of Education for Maine, he saw the need to improve students' test scores and viewed MBE as a way to improve student learning. He explained the process that Maine used to implement this program and spoke of the successes and difficulties. He stated there were barriers to the program from parents as well as from legislative and regulatory agencies. But as the program has grown it's become clear that MBE is a useful educational tool. **Mr. Bowen** stated that as a director with CCSSO, he is now taking those lessons and sharing them with other states.

Jennifer Poon spoke about the lessons learned through implementation of MBE. She stated this is a very new program and methodology. She also detailed how the learning program aligns with state standards. It is performance-based learning. She explained that successful states implement state policies, practice and structures to move MBE forward. **Ms. Poon** outlined the grading process and said that students must master a level in a topic before moving to the next level of that topic. She shared reports from other states as to why MBE is compelling.

The presentation concluded with a video showing students in "Flight Academy" in Maine. The students in the video explained their pathways to learning. **Mr. Bowen** referred the Committee members to Maine's Department of Education's website to view more videos that explain the processes of MBE. (attachment 1).

Senator Souza stated that at one time the education trend was standardized learning, and MBE breaks that. She asked why there are two different models. **Mr. Bowen** explained that the No Child Left Behind policy put testing as the priority to measure learning success. The good thing from that policy was educators could see the gaps in learning; the bad thing was students would disengage. He explained that in order to get all children to a higher level of education, a new way of learning needed to be developed.

Senator Patrick asked how much labor time is necessary to accomplish this program. **Mr. Bowen** said it does take a lot of time to create each student's personalized education plan. He explained the merits of students learning at their own pace and how it has resulted in the reduction of special education classes.

Vice Chairman Thayn stated that he went to Maine to see this in action. He indicated that he noticed students, who were typically slow learners reengage in learning when they had their own learning plan. He reported to the committee what a typical classroom setting looked like and how the lessons were taught. **Vice Chairman Thayn** expressed his concern regarding the time necessary for teachers to initiate this program with individual students and wondered if that would lessen over time and experience.

Mr. Bowen said that to build the new program does take time. He explained how Maine selected the districts in which to start the program and detailed the processes and procedures to implement the program.

Ms. Poon said the teachers she worked with indicated it was time consuming to develop. She added that there were teachers who said they were finally able to teach as they had hoped to teach; and others said they were dissatisfied with this method and left the profession.

Senator Anthon asked if there is any empirical data regarding how this correlates with the teaching style at the college level. **Mr. Bowen** said the method is not far enough along. He explained higher education is interested in this program and is contemplating how to use this model. Students that have learned in a competency-based model will gravitate to institutions of higher education with that same model.

Ms. Poon said there is research that addressed personalized learning in middle-school students who go on to a traditional high school. She explained the results found these students are able to navigate the traditional system better because they have learned to be their own advocates.

Senator Ward-Engelking asked how MBE dovetails with the competency tests that expect students to be at the same place at the same time. **Mr. Bowen** replied New Hampshire is working on state accountability assessments. They are working with the USDE to remedy that issue. He explained the steps they are taking to comply.

Senator Den Hartog asked how students progress through the grade levels. **Mr. Bowen** said in MBE there are no such things as grade levels. He said students are grouped in buildings by age; he gave an example of how their day might be structured.

Michelle Clement Taylor, School Choice Coordinator, SDE, explained the process the Kuna Middle School Synergy Program used to implement MBE.

Senator Buckner-Webb asked how student maturity levels are factored in with MBE and how the teacher ratio will change. **Ms. Poon** replied that successful programs deal with student social and emotional development through advisory programs in order to set safe spaces. She said the students are clustered in buildings by development levels. She explained a MBE classroom is not a typical one, and the definition of a teacher is different. **Mr. Bowen** explained the job of the teacher in MBE has changed from deliverer of content to the connector of content.

Vice Chairman Thayn stated there is a distrust factor that needs to be overcome with MBE. He believes that once parents are familiar with this they will understand that MBE is more rigorous than traditional education.

Senator Souza asked how honor students are acknowledged for their outstanding performance. **Ms. Poon** said the MBE grade system replaces the "A-F" system with a numerical "1-4" system. She explained how the numbers correlate to the letters and the mastery system.

Senator Anthon asked if there are hard deadlines for students work to be turned in. **Mr. Bowen** said students must be kept on track and demonstrate that they are making sufficient progress. **Ms. Poon** stated there are deadlines set for students to achieve mastery.

Senator Anthon asked if there has been any feedback from employers. **Mr. Bowen** said the current feedback from employers is the current system has not prepared them for the work environment. The guiding principles of MBE; practical problem solver, effective communicators, are better transferable into the workplace.

Chairman Mortimer asked where in Idaho MBE is taking place. **Superintendent Ybarra** explained she is working to show the concept of MBE in action. She listed the people the SDE have brought in to work on webinars to educate superintendents and others about MBE.

Michelle Clement Taylor stated she chaired the MBE committee for the State. She said that more than 160 people wanted to participate. The members who are using MBE came from across the state from almost every region. She relayed to the Committee the successes and the surprise outcome of fewer student disciplinary and dropout issues. She explained the majority of the professional-technical programs are competency or mastery based. Direction from the Legislature with House Bill 110 from 2015 laid out the groundwork. Many schools are feeling the support to move in the MBE direction even if they are not selected to be the pilot programs.

Chairman Mortimer asked how the state would achieve a comprehensive system of support and asked for an explanation of what that might look like. **Ms. Poon** said districts need to have the following in place: 1.) data platforms to track student knowledge and progression; 2.) ability to track and monitor the pace of student learning; 3.) robust access to curricular resources; and 4.) school structures for support. **Mr. Bowen** said social services that schools provide must also be taken into consideration in the plan.

Chairman Mortimer thanked the presenters for sharing their expertise.

ADJOURNED: There being no more business, **Chairman Mortimer** adjourned the Committee at 4:37 p.m.

Senator Dean M. Mortimer
Chair

LeAnn Mohr
Secretary