

**Task Force for Improving Education  
Structural Change and Technology Subcommittee  
August 1, 2013**

Present (in person or via conference call): Representative Reed DeMordaunt, Anne Ritter, Roger Brown, Mike Lanza, Ken Edmunds, Cindy Wilson, Superintendent Tom Luna, Mike Caldwell

Rep. DeMordaunt began the meeting by telling the group that he'd like to schedule an additional meeting on Monday, August 5, 2013 at 10:00 am to further discuss Strategy 2: Autonomy and Accountability. His sense is that there still needs to be more discussion before recommendations will be reached. He began the discussion by asking the group whether there was consensus that there's a link between autonomy and accountability. There was silence, which the group took to mean affirmation.

Rep. DeMordaunt then asked the subcommittee what barriers exist to teachers having autonomy to make decisions about what they teach in their classroom. Anne Ritter suggested textbook adoption is a structural barrier, because districts adopt textbooks, not teachers. Cindy Wilson suggested high stakes testing and senior projects may be barriers, because they take time away from curricular teaching if they aren't aligned to standards. She said the level of autonomy a teacher has in the classroom varies from school-to-school and principal-to-principal, but the most effective teaching happens in classrooms where teachers have high levels of autonomy.

Mike Caldwell suggested time for planning and collaboration and a lack of resources are barriers to teachers doing their best work. Superintendent Luna agreed that you can have a system that offers a lot of autonomy, but if a teacher doesn't have the time to collaborate and prepare, they won't be able to take advantage of the autonomy offered to them. Instead, they are forced into a routine, which doesn't allow them to stop and analyze things differently. He also agreed that there is a correlation between autonomy and accountability. When you start removing autonomy, you have micro-management.

Superintendent Luna also suggested that high stakes tests are tools that are used to measure accountability, in order to give an appropriate level of autonomy. As long as schools are getting the necessary, wanted results, then there should be far more autonomy for that school. If they're not getting results, then there should be less autonomy.

Mike Lanza suggested a system of rewards where districts gain more autonomy for achieving results. Superintendent Luna pointed out that the Five Star Rating System is at least trying to get there. If a school is rated as a four- or five-star school, there's minimal oversight from the state. A one- or two-star school has more oversight and assistance from the state.

Rep. DeMordaunt referenced a question Ms. Wilson posted on Edmodo about why a number of schools are appealing their star rating. Superintendent Luna responded that there are two reasons the number of appeals have gone up. First, this is only the second year of the star rating system, which has created questions as people learn more about how it applies. Second, prior to the star rating system accountability was only based on one measure—proficiency on the ISAT. Under the star rating system, we have multiple measures, which took the number of possible appeals and multiplied it by the number of measurements. The star ratings for the 2012-2013 school year will be released in the next couple of days.

Ken Edmunds remarked that we want teachers and schools to have greater autonomy, but only if they meet certain outcomes. If they're trying to meet the outcomes, doesn't that take away autonomy by default?

Ms. Wilson commented that she doesn't have a problem with testing, as long as the tests measure the right things. They must be aligned. Rep. DeMordaunt suggested the Idaho Core Standards will help with that.

Rep. DeMordaunt refocused the group and asked if there were other structural impediments to autonomy in the classroom. Ms. Ritter commented that the shift to Idaho Core Standards and the shift to technology may help with technology adoption barriers. Ms. Wilson said the trend away from traditional textbooks may create another structural barrier, which is time to gather resources to use in the classroom. Back to Mike Caldwell's point, time and preparation may be an impediment.

Rep. DeMordaunt then asked the group what structural barriers to autonomy exist at the leadership level. Superintendent Luna answered that the funding formula doesn't focus on the right things if the subcommittee wants to recommend mastery, but we currently fund on attendance.

Ms. Ritter answered that funding given as a line item versus discretionary is a structural barrier for districts. If you want to give districts the maximum amount of autonomy, funding would be distributed in a lump sum and districts would be allowed to try spending it in different way to meet their needs.

Superintendent Luna noted that the subcommittee discussed the autonomy a principal has in selecting staff in their school at the last meeting. You can only hold a person accountable for what they have control over, and hiring staff is something that a principal should have control over. Rep. DeMordaunt asked what the impediment was to this happening. Ms. Ritter responded that principals have input on hiring and firing decisions, but the firing is done by the district, because teachers are district employees and there are due process requirements. Principals are not involved in inter-district transfers.

Ms. Wilson said principals need time to get into classrooms and know what's happening there. A teacher who has misbehaved can be fired, but a principal has to have the time to document what's been happening in the classroom. Most people that go into teaching want to be in the occupation. The support from the district is to help them be the best teacher they can be. At the end of that support, the district can let them go. She asked if the structure could be changed so that a school or department could help mentor a teacher. Hiring and firing decisions shouldn't be made at the department level, but fellow teachers in a department can mentor. Roger Brown interjected that the other subcommittee is having a fairly detailed discussion about mentoring. Ms. Ritter suggested if the other subcommittee is talking about mentoring, this subcommittee could just make a recommendation about the need for time and resources to support mentoring.

Another possible barrier that Ms. Wilson brought up is the resources for teachers to go to conferences or visit other schools and bring back new ideas.

Rep. DeMordaunt then asked what the barriers are to parental autonomy. What is standing in the way of parents making choices about their child's education? Why don't parents have the right to choose their child's teacher? Why are impediments to parents being involved? Ms. Ritter suggested parents may not feel welcome. Ms. Wilson said she appreciates parents being involved in her classroom and has

found that back-to-school nights help get parents involved, because they become comfortable in the classroom.

Ms. Ritter commented that many parents aren't available during the day. Rep. DeMordaunt commented that they may be available during the day through avenues like email, but that may not be the right way. Either way, there has to be a role for parents to play. It would have a dramatic impact across our system if parents were more involved in their child's education. The group then discussed whether lack of parent involvement was a family dynamic or due to some like a lack of outreach or socio-economics.

Superintendent Luna pointed out the group was talking about parental involvement, which isn't necessarily the same as parental autonomy. To him, parental autonomy is parental choice. When you give parents choices, they become more involved, because they feel more empowered. Their needs aren't just being heard, they're also being met.

Ms. Ritter clarified that if we say parental choice comes with accountability, we have to specify that taxpayer funded parental choice comes with accountability. Not all parental choices have accountability from the state.

Rep. DeMordaunt asked Superintendent Luna what the difference was between parental involvement and parental autonomy. Superintendent Luna said when the group talked about autonomy for teachers and leaders, they talked about flexibility to make choices. Parental autonomy is also about flexibility to make choices.

Ms. Ritter asked Rep. DeMordaunt what he envisioned as a meaningful role for parents. Rep. DeMordaunt responded that he'd like a way for parents to decide who teaches their kids. Parents want the best teachers for the children, and as a natural consequence, schools will respond to the demand to provide the best.

Mr. Lanza commented that the students who have engaged parents generally do well and have more choices or resources at their disposal. Engaged parents will take advantage of any options. However, students who have unengaged parents may not benefit from choice. He asked what can be done to help those parents become engaged.

Ms. Ritter commented that there are other practical considerations, like transportation, that keep parents from taking advantage of choice.

Superintendent Luna said parental input on teacher evaluations empower parents. Local school districts and principals have to be allowed to decide how much weight to give that input. Additionally, districts want more autonomy from the state, schools want more autonomy from the district, and teachers want more autonomy from the school. We all want more autonomy from whoever is above us, but we hesitate to give autonomy to those below us. We have to get away from that.

Ken Edmunds posed the question, "How long do we wait for results?" His fear is that people will try to reject any change two or three years down the road when we may not see results for closer to a decade.

Rep. DeMordaunt said that was a good way to close, since it brings the group back full circle to the accountability discussion. Today's discussion was focused on autonomy. If we truly believe in

autonomy, we have to have it “up and down the food chain.” More discussion is needed on the parent’s role. The next meeting will be on Monday, August 5, 2013.