

Public Education Funding Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2026

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting

The Public Education Funding Commission (PEFC) meeting was held on March 16, 2026, with the following members in attendance:

Cindy Marten, Ruth Ann Miller, Ann Visalli, Laura Sturgeon, Kim Williams, Senator Buckson, Taylor Hawk, Susan Brown, Kevin Long, David Tull, Jason Hale, Emily Falcon, Nick Johnson, Rachel Valentin, Jose Aviles Rivera, Evelyn Edney, April Albury-Harmon, Katherine Miro, Karen Ewing, Heather Hitchens, Cassie Queen, Sarah Celestin, Helen Anderson, Jennifer Fuqua, Britney Mumford, Gary Henry, Madeleine Bayard, Meedra Surratte, Marcus Wright, Lisa Lawson, Tyler Gunter

Also participating were Sarah Barzee, WestEd, and Michael Griffith, Learning Policy Institute (LPI).

[Audio Recording of Meeting](#)

Welcome/Introductions

Chair Sturgeon opened the meeting and invited Anna Sullivan from WestEd to conduct a verbal roll call. A quorum was confirmed and the meeting was called to order.

Approval of December 8, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The Chair requested a motion to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2025 meeting. Marcus Wright motioned to approve and Britney Mumford seconded the motion. All members were in favor and the motion carried.

New Business

Chair Sturgeon reported that, following the initial three public engagement sessions, two additional sessions were held to ensure broader geographic representation: one in Seaford to engage western Sussex County and one in Red Clay to engage communities in northern New Castle County. Notes were taken at all sessions and community feedback was documented and shared back Commission members.

Materials from these public meetings have been shared on the PEFC website, including a recorded presentation, slide deck, FAQs, and a one-page overview summarizing the Commission's work and key messages. Chair Sturgeon encouraged Commission members to review and utilize these materials when engaging with their respective constituencies (e.g., community groups, families, educators, and union representatives). Feedback on the materials is welcomed and may be directed to Chair Sturgeon, or to Sarah Barzee (sbarzee@wested.org) or Anna Sullivan (asulliv@wested.org) from WestEd for further refinement.

The Chair then introduced Mike Griffith to provide an overview of ongoing work related to local property tax funding and its role in supporting school finance.

Local Funding and Property Tax

Griffith explained that under Delaware's current system of property reassessment (every five years), local revenue growth is uneven resulting in multiple years where funding does not keep pace with inflation, followed by significant increases that may create taxpayer "sticker shock."

The working group is exploring options to enable more consistent annual revenue growth, including allowing property tax rates to increase annually at or near the rate of inflation, with voter approval required for increases above a defined cap. This approach is intended to smooth revenue growth over time while maintaining safeguards.

Griffith also noted that most states reassess property more frequently and often incorporate caps and voter approval thresholds, as well as “circuit breaker” programs (tax credits or caps) to mitigate impacts on vulnerable populations such as low-income households, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

The discussion emphasized that local revenue policies must be closely aligned with equalization strategies to address disparities in property wealth across districts. Considerations include setting appropriate caps, ensuring adequate support for lower-wealth communities, and addressing implications for charter schools.

Finally, Griffith noted that additional design considerations—such as limits on district reserve funds—are part of the broader policy discussion, which is expected to continue into a future phase of the Commission’s work.

Commission members engaged in discussion following the presentation, raising considerations related to the timing and sequencing of local funding reforms in relation to reassessment, the importance of stability and predictability for taxpayers and districts, and the potential impacts on different communities.

The discussion also highlighted the relationship between local revenue policies and equalization, the need for a phased in approach and transparency in recommendations that will be delivered in a report to the General Assembly, and the language and timeline of proposed legislation.

Working Group Update and Timeline

Griffith then provided an update on the Technical Working Group’s progress from December through March, noting continued work across key topics, including equalization, tiered student funding, hold harmless provisions, and local funding reform.

The Working Group recommended maintaining the current equalization formula in the near term due to ongoing data concerns, with modernization of the formula to be addressed in Phase 2. Additional Phase 2 work will include development of tiered funding approaches for multilingual learners, low-income students, and other high-need student groups. The group also affirmed a “hold harmless” approach, ensuring no local education agency experiences a decrease in total state funding during initial implementation, with provisions continuing until Phase 2 is fully implemented.

Regarding local funding, the Working Group reached general agreement that districts should have authority to increase operating revenue annually to address cost increases, while maintaining voter approval requirements for larger tax increases and capital expenses. Further detailed recommendations will be developed in Phase 2.

A phased implementation approach was outlined:

- **2026:** Legislative authorization, development of statutory changes, and preparation for implementation.

- **2027 (Phase 1):** Initial rollout of the hybrid funding model, including streamlined funding structures and initial student-based weights.
- **2028 (Phase 2):** Implementation of equalization, expanded and tiered student funding categories, and continued refinement of the model.

Overall, the approach reflects a multi-year implementation strategy with Phase 1 establishing the core model and Phase 2 addressing more complex elements requiring additional exploration and discussion.

Update on the Legislative Process and Timelines

The Chair then provided an overview of the legislative pathway required to implement the Commission’s recommendations, noting that the education funding formula is codified in state law and will require corresponding code changes. Work is underway with legislative and Department of Education attorneys to identify and draft the necessary statutory revisions.

Consistent with the phased approach outlined in the presentation, proposed legislation during the 2026 legislative session will focus on enabling Phase 1 implementation, including authorizing the Department of Education to begin necessary system updates and preparation for the new funding model.

Additionally, proposed legislation will seek to formalize the continuation of the Public Education Funding Commission as an ongoing body to monitor implementation, evaluate outcomes, and recommend future refinements to the funding formula.

Comprehensive statutory revisions to fully implement the hybrid funding model are anticipated in the 2027 legislative session, aligned with Phase 2 of implementation. Commissioners and the public will have opportunities to review and provide public comment on proposed legislation through the standard legislative process.

Commission members engaged in discussion regarding the legislative approach, implementation timeline, and clarity of the proposed funding model. The conversation emphasized the need for clear communication of impacts, understanding of phased implementation, and transparency around funding levels and future appropriations.

Review of Draft Voting Actions

Sarah Barzee previewed five draft recommendations for consideration by the Commission, noting that the exact motion language is included in Slides 14–18 and was previously shared with members for review in advance of the meeting. The proposed motions are as follows:

1. Hybrid Funding Model

- The Commission recommends a multi-year phase-in approach to implement a hybrid funding model that blends elements of the current system with a weighted, needs-based approach, with weights in the following categories:
 1. Special education
 2. Multilingual learners
 3. Low income
 4. Career and technical education

2. Hold Harmless

- The Commission recommends that LEAs are held harmless from any loss of state funding related to the implementation of the hybrid model until such time that Phase 2 of the formula is fully implemented and funded.

3. **Local Funding Reform**

- The Commission recommends that in Phase one, districts should have authority to increase operating revenue annually to cover cost increases.
- Districts would continue to have the ability to seek voter approval for local property tax increases, capital costs, and other expenses above annual operating increases.
- Additionally, the Commission further recommends further work in Phase two to develop more detailed recommendations related to local funding reform across all LEAs.

4. **Extension of the PEFC**

- The Commission recommends that the Public Education Funding Commission, established through House Concurrent Resolution 201, be reestablished to continue to develop recommendations and support ongoing improvements to the public education funding system in Delaware.

5. **Equalization**

- The Commission recommends continuing to freeze the equalization formula at Fiscal Year 2009 levels.
- Additionally, the Commission recommends modernizing the equalization formula in Phase 2.

Commission members were invited to review the draft language and submit feedback by March 23rd. Feedback will be incorporated and brought back to the Technical Working Group in advance of a planned vote at the April 27th meeting.

Public Comment

The commission heard public comment from Donna Johnson-Geist, Erin Bryan, Greg Lindner, Kendall Massett, Christopher Stahl, Tobi Omotoso, Amy Dalrymple, Blair Catlin Brown, and Jenny Howard.

Adjournment

Senator Sturgeon noted that the commission would reconvene on April 27, 2026 from 4:00-6:00 virtually. Marcus Wright moved to adjourn, and Tyler Gunter seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Anna Sullivan for WestEd

Updated on 3.30.2026