

Remarks by Lt. Governor Jack Dalrymple
To the Interim Education Committee 6/9/2008
Regarding Progress of the Commission on Education Improvement

- Thank you, legislators, for the great achievement of SB2200.
- This Bill was a great piece of education finance reform, avoiding years of court time leading nowhere. One area of vulnerability was the possibility of a very property – poor district, with no outside income, spending at a level 35% below the state average. That weakness is now gone.
- Today, we do have a reasonably equitable school finance system, and in my opinion we do have sufficient funding in every school district to provide an “adequate” education for every child.
- However, we did agree as part of the settlement agreement ending the lawsuit that we would study in depth this question of adequacy, and see if we could arrive at some better consensus of what that is.
- We have brought in some outside experts to help us with this discussion. Allen Odden and Larry Picus of Lawrence O. Picus and Associates are probably the most recognized, most experienced advisors in the country on the topic.
- It’s very important to recognize that the determination of “adequacy” is very subjective. Every person in this room could study the question and come up with a completely unique and different opinion from everyone else. There is no absolute answer to the question of adequacy. It’s better to think of it as a debate that never ends.
- Odden and Picus believe that a school district can provide an “adequate” education if it combines a certain quantity of resources with a certain education program strategy and thereby has the capability to “double” the performance of its students from current levels. This doubling of performance would be defined as eventually doubling the percentage of students in the schools district that score “Proficient” or “Advanced” on the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP test.
- In the course of their study Odden and Picus will define the exact quantity of resources required by producing an average dollar cost per student to do the job. This dollar figure will match a specific set of policy choices regarding the staffing, compensation, operating, capital, equipment, and all other costs associated with the operation of various sized school districts expected to produce an “adequate” education. I will return to mentioning some of the new

and different policy choices for North Dakota that will be included in their cost analysis.

- Thus far, the Commission has not discussed the value or relevancy of the Odden and Picus opinion of “adequacy”. We will wait for them to present their final report before we begin to pick it apart. Certainly any school district that has the tools to double student performance is in very good shape. However, it does raise some obvious questions such as, “How does a school district double performance if over 50% of their students are already testing “Proficient” or “Advanced”? Also, does the fact that Odden and Picus have been commissioned in other states to study specifically the doubling of student performance create a bias in their work to define an “adequate” education in North Dakota?
- The Commission has taken the attitude that the Odden and Picus study is an opportunity to evaluate and discuss a wide range of ideas that may be significant in improving the quality of K-12 education in North Dakota. If the Commission can reach consensus on a model for K-12 education that combines their own ideas with the best ideas of outside experts, then they feel they will have provided the greatest service to the legislature, the ultimate policy makers for the state. That model will in the end recommend a price tag and a distribution formula to the Governor and the Legislature. The Governor, of course, has already indicated his willingness to provide a budget recommendation of \$300 million in new funding for K-12 education and local school mill levy reduction.

There are several areas that could be considered “good news” in the preliminary report:

- 1) Odden and Picus consider the per student funding approach and factor system to be equitable and adequate provided the factors are correct and complete and the base amount is appropriate.
- 2) The Equity Payment is a proper solution for districts within adequate local tax base.
- 3) Our special education funding formula is similar to the current “best practices” recommendations across the country.
- 4) Most funding recommendations of Odden and Picus are similar to current funding policies and practices in North Dakota.

Some of the elements of the Odden and Picus Funding model that go beyond our current K-12 education program and will be included in their cost per student include the following:

- 1) Every elementary school should have an average class size of no more than 18 students.
- 2) Specialist teachers should total 20% of the number of core teachers in elementary and middle schools and 50% of the number of core teachers in high schools.
- 3) There should be the equivalent of one full-time instructional coach in every school district of 185 ADM and proportionately more in larger districts.
- 4) Tutors that are certified teachers should be provided at the rate of one FTE tutor for every 100 at-risk students. "At – risk" is defined as a student qualifying for free or reduced fee lunch programs. Studies show that this measure is statistically very accurate in predicting problems with student performance.
- 5) The factor for ELL students should reflect the full cost of educating these students.
- 6) An extended-day program should be included in the extra help strategies, and an additional factor used of 0.135 for each at-risk student.
- 7) An expanded summer school program should be implemented to help students struggling to meet academic requirements. An extra factor of 0.135 should be applied to each at-risk student.
- 8) The number of school counselors should be expanded throughout the State to one for every 250 ADM from one for every 450 ADM. An additional counselor should be added for every 100 at-risk students.
- 9) Teacher aides should be provided at the rate of 2.0 aides for a 432 ADM elementary and middle school, and 3.0 aides for a 576 ADM high school.
- 10) Teacher professional development should be expanded from 2 days to 10 days of intensive training institutes.
- 11) On site coaching for all teacher should be provided
- 12) Collaborative work among teachers should be conducted during planning and preparation periods.
- 13) Funds should be provided to cover the costs of formative assessment tools.
- 14) Mathematics performance drops in higher grades. Looking at state tests, at the 4th grade 90% of all students score at or above proficiency, dropping to 65% for 8th grade, and 57% for 11th grade. This needs to be addressed and mathematics curriculum is the place to start.
- 15) Formative assessments are needed, as well as summative assessments that determine definitively that North Dakota high school graduates are "Ready for College" and "Ready for Work."

Next steps for the Commission include the following:

- 1) Receive and analyze the final Odden and Picus report due on July 31 including the Pro Forma Cost per student.
- 2) Bring discussions to a conclusive agreement on the Commission as to the validity of the consultant's recommendations or policy recommendations generated by the Commission itself.

- 3) Review all current formula factors for accuracy as to actual costs.
- 4) Review all complaints received regarding the unfairness of or issues related by any formula driven policy.
- 5) Review the mechanics of the Governor's proposal for school district mill levy reduction delivered through the per student payment, including any potential policy questions that need to be addressed by the legislators.
- 6) Study the possibility of a third phase of formula reform that would include full integration of the per student payment with all equity provisions, thereby achieving complete simplification as well as equity and adequacy.