

# Forum Processes and Methodology

## **Background for Facilitators**

Planning for all eight (8) West Virginia Voice Education Forums and onsite facilitation for seven (7) of the eight (8) Education Reform Forums was conducted by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), an internationally recognized non-profit organization with decades of experience helping citizens and leaders collaborate to solve complex problems (<https://www.cbi.org/>). Staff members are experts in facilitation, mediation, capacity building, citizen engagement, and organizational strategy and development. CBI helps organizations build collaboration on significant social, environmental, and economic challenges. This is done by assisting in the development of good processes, remaining neutral on the substantive issues and working equally on behalf of all stakeholders. The mission of CBI is to empower stakeholders, both public and private, government and community, to resolve issues, reach better more durable agreements, and build stronger relationships.

The eighth forum, which was added to the original schedule, was facilitated by Dr. Carla Warren, Ed.D., and National Board Certified Teacher. Dr. Warren is the special assistant to the West Virginia Superintendent of Schools. She has more than 30 years of education experience, including 20 years as a classroom teacher. She holds a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction as well as an endorsement in Program Evaluation.

## **West Virginia's Voice Education Forum Goals**

The West Virginia Voices Education Forum addressed three goals. First, the forums provided an overview of the key issues under consideration as part of the ongoing education reform discussions in West Virginia. Second, the forums shared current educational research on effective ways to raise student achievement. And lastly, the forums invited discussion from all stakeholders to gather input and feedback regarding the perspectives and priorities surrounding key issues, as well as ideas and options for ways to improve the educational outcomes and student achievement in West Virginia.

## **West Virginia's Voice Education Forum Representation**

The Education Reform Forums welcomed input and feedback from all stakeholders both public and private. Forty-six West Virginia counties were represented at the forums. Audience makeup varied at the eight (8) forum locations but were representative of elected officials; those serving in various advocate roles; parents; caregivers and legal guardians; school employees including teachers, administrators, service personnel and support staff; students; alumni of West Virginia schools; members of higher education representatives; and community members.

## Forum Participation

The eight Education Reform Forums were attended by approximately 1600 participants.

County	School	Approximate # of Participants
Cabell	Cabell Midland High School	260
McDowell	Mount View High School	140
Kanawha	Capital High School	300
Raleigh	Woodrow Wilson High School	150
Wood	Blennerhassett Middle School	185
Harrison	Robert C. Byrd High School	260
Ohio	Wheeling Park High School	160
Morgan	Berkeley Springs High School	175

The WV Legislative body was well represented at the forums. Approximately 90 legislators made 118 legislative appearances at the eight forum locations.

Below is a breakdown of representation for participants who preregistered on the West Virginia Department of Education website for the forums. Note that many participants self-identified in more than one category. In this case, participants were counted in each area in which they self-identified. An additional column was added to show participants who identified as both educators/ service personnel and parents.

Location	Cabell Midland High School	Mount View High School	Capitol High School	Woodrow Wilson High School	Blennerhassett Middle School	Robert C. Byrd High School	Wheeling Park High School	Berkeley Springs High School	Total Preregistrants
Teachers Administrators Superintendents Cooks Custodians Administrative Staff	97	66	110	100	53	224	120	86	<b>856</b>
Parents Grandparents Legal Guadians	50	16	48	26	29	53	55	49	<b>326</b>
Community Members Taxpayers	26	7	35	17	34	44	31	41	<b>235</b>
Board Members Legislators Advocates Educational Agencies Behavioral Therapist School Nurse Social Worker Retired Educator Graduate Student Higher Education Staff Clergy Media Law Enforcement Business Owners Future Educators Other	31	20	33	16	18	52	28	29	<b>227</b>
Those who identified as educators/service personnel AND parents/grandparents/legal guardians	28	10	22	17	12	35	21	22	<b>167</b>
<b>Total*</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>1,338</b>

*\*Note: Some respondents identified in more than one category so rows will not add to the sum.*

## ***West Virginia's Voice Education Forum Structure***

Each forum started in a whole group setting in the school auditorium. The county superintendent welcomed the attendees followed by the facilitator identifying her role, the goals for the forum, rules of engagement, and acknowledging the various stakeholder groups present. West Virginia State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Steven L. Paine acknowledged the legislative members from both the West Virginia Senate and West Virginia House of Delegates who were present, briefly discussed the key legislative proposals which have been discussed previously, and shared four research-based strategies identified by leading educational experts to increase student achievement including, but not limited to, funding opportunities, instructional quality, school choice and innovation, and social emotional supports. Dr. Paine invited participants to share their ideas to make sure their voices were a part of the discussion to shape education reform in West Virginia. This allowed for the opportunity to include their perspectives and priorities on key education issues and to share ideas for ways to improve the educational outcomes and student achievement in the state.

## ***Roundtable Process for West Virginia's Voice Education Forums***

Once participants were dismissed from the whole group introduction and overview in the auditorium, they adjourned to the small group setting which was located in the school cafeteria and/or classrooms. Participants selected a topic choice and joined a table where space was available. Multiple tables were provided for each topic area depending on the number of attendees.

Participants were invited to engage in three rounds of small group discussions of their choosing. Discussions were 25 minutes each in length. Topic areas included funding opportunities, instructional quality, school choice and innovation, and social emotional supports. Facilitators for each round table discussion were volunteers from the West Virginia Department of Education. The role of the table facilitator was to allow all members the opportunity to engage in the conversation, allow the sharing of ideas between members of the group, and respond to the question prompts. The three prompts inquired:

- “What do you like about these policy ideas, and why?”
- “What concerns do you have about them, and why? How could they be improved?”
- “What other suggestions do you have for addressing the topic to help improve educational outcomes and student achievement in West Virginia?”

These same prompts were mirrored on the color-coded comment cards enabling participants to provide written feedback.

Comment cards were made available to participants in the small group setting and at a central location for those who chose not to participate in the small group discussion. Attendees were invited to be as involved in the process as they chose. The four-topic area comment cards included policy ideas related to the topic area. Participants were invited to rank the level of agreement for each policy idea under the identified topic area.

An additional comment card was available for participants to share any additional feedback, perspectives, ideas, or concerns that did not fit under the four defined topics and subtopics. Participants were apprised that all input was to be treated equally regardless of the format in which it was submitted.

## ***West Virginia's Voice Education Forum Protocol***

During the whole group setting at each forum, general ground rules, as well as more specific norms for the small group discussions, were established. Participants were invited to participate as little or as much as they chose throughout the evening. No individual was required to engage in any facet of the evening. Attendees could join zero, one, two, or three of the small group discussions. They were invited to complete and submit as much or as little of the written feedback on the provided comment card(s) and contribute at any point in the evening. State-level leaders, policy makers and those serving in advocate roles were asked to operate in listening mode throughout the forum. All attendees were asked to refrain from interrupting small group discussions in which they were not participating.

## ***Comment Card Summary***

The eight West Virginia's Voices Education Reform Forum's process produced a total of 2367 participant comment cards (Table 1). In all, comments were received from participants in 46 of the 55 West Virginia counties (Table 2).

Note that forum participants had the discretion to answer, or not to answer, any of the open-ended or multiple-choice questions posed on the comment cards. As a result, numerous partially completed cards were collected. For example, some participants provided no written commentary about what they like or have concerns about a policy but completed all multiple-choice questions. Others provided extensive commentary but no multiple-choice answers. Though several hundred comment cards were collected across each policy topic, the data available for analysis across the policy questions was uneven.

Table 1. Number Education Reform Community Forum comment cards by county and policy idea.

Location of Forum	Funding Opportunities	Instructional Quality	School Choice And Innovation	Social Emotional Supports	Total
No Location Listed	18	6	16	9	49
Beckley • Woodrow Wilson HS 03/21/2019	37	71	80	79	267
Berkeley Springs • Berkeley Spring HS 04/03/2019	52	68	76	54	250
Charleston • Capital HS 03/20/2019	40	104	123	105	372
Clarksburg • Robert C. Byrd HS 04/01/2019	69	84	97	94	344
Ona • Cabell Midland HS 03/18/2019	59	66	98	78	301
Parkersburg • Blennerhassett MS 03/25/2019	61	80	100	87	328
Welch • Mount View HS 03/19/2019	31	63	73	62	229
Wheeling • Wheeling Park HS 04/02/2019	29	67	75	56	227
<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>2,367</b>

Table 2. Number Education Reform Community Forum comment cards by county and policy idea.

District	Funding Opportunities	Instructional Quality	School Choice And Innovation	Social Emotional Supports	Total
Barbour	2	3	4	3	12
Berkeley	19	21	29	19	88
Boone	4	4	6	2	16
Braxton	1	0	0	1	2
Brooke	4	4	4	3	15
Cabell	24	44	57	46	171
Calhoun	1	1	0	0	2
Clay	0	3	1	3	7
Doddridge	0	0	0	0	0
Fayette	6	7	4	10	27
Gilmer	0	0	0	0	0
Grant	0	0	0	0	0
Greenbrier	0	1	2	1	4
Hampshire	3	2	4	2	11
Hancock	2	6	6	6	20

District	Funding Opportunities	Instructional Quality	School Choice And Innovation	Social Emotional Supports	Total
Hardy	0	0	0	0	0
Harrison	33	36	47	37	153
Jackson	9	4	10	7	30
Jefferson	7	6	9	6	28
Kanawha	31	71	89	75	266
Lewis	5	2	6	5	18
Lincoln	2	3	4	4	13
Logan	0	0	0	0	0
Marion	5	13	10	10	38
Marshall	7	10	13	11	41
Mason	10	4	13	11	38
Mercer	7	19	22	22	70
Mineral	2	3	2	0	7
Mingo	0	0	0	0	0
Monongalia	6	8	9	9	32
Monroe	5	0	4	4	13
Morgan	19	26	25	22	92
McDowell	21	42	49	45	157
Nicholas	1	0	2	2	5
Ohio	11	36	40	29	116
Pendleton	0	0	0	0	0
Pleasants	10	5	9	5	29
Pocahontas	0	0	1	0	1
Preston	0	0	0	0	0
Putnam	14	12	16	13	55
Raleigh	13	32	30	29	104
Randolph	1	2	2	1	6
Ritchie	1	2	4	4	11
Roane	3	2	3	3	11
Summers	2	1	2	1	6
Taylor	3	4	6	4	17
Tucker	0	0	0	0	0
Tyler	0	2	2	3	7
Upshur	4	1	3	2	10

District	Funding Opportunities	Instructional Quality	School Choice And Innovation	Social Emotional Supports	Total
Wayne	8	4	8	5	25
Webster	0	0	1	0	1
Wetzel	0	2	2	2	6
Wirt	1	1	3	3	8
Wood	32	58	61	55	206
Wyoming	2	11	12	10	35
No County Listed	55	91	102	89	337
<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>2,367</b>

### *West Virginia's Voice Education Forum Methodology*

The approach to data collection for the eight forums was both quantitative and qualitative in design. The qualitative design methodology placed emphasis on gathering information from participants regarding policy ideas and research-based strategies for increasing student achievement and improving education in West Virginia. The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) collected both written (comment cards) and verbal (roundtable discussions) input from forum participants. The quantitative approach asked participants to express their level of agreement with policy ideas for each of the four topic areas via five-point Likert scale questions on the comment cards.

Approximately 1,600 people participated in the forums. They submitted nearly 2000 total comment cards and participated in approximately 600 roundtable discussions on the four policy areas of funding opportunities, instructional quality, school choice and innovation, social emotional supports, and other ideas.

Handwritten comment cards from the eight education forum meetings were electronically entered to facilitate ease of data analysis. Across the eight locations, there were individual comment cards for each of the four policy areas and other ideas. For the four policy areas, three questions were asked to obtain respondents' feelings regarding favorable and unfavorable opinions related to policy ideas presented during the deliberations of WV Senate Bill 451 (2019), as well as other proposals to help improve student outcomes in West Virginia.

The goal of the qualitative analyses was to summarize feedback on policy proposals and insight on the educational experiences from a diverse group of stakeholders across West Virginia. To assist with the process of aligning individual comments with specific policy topics (through a process known as thematic analysis), multiple methodologies were used. First, responses were "tagged" with one or more policy topics using keyword/phrase searches through a computer-assisted process. Using a computer-assisted process as part of the analysis helps to minimize issues that would be associated with relying strictly on human readers with large volumes of open-ended responses.



It is important to clarify that the first-step of the analysis was “computer-assisted” because it was meant to cull information from the large number of responses to help human readers synthesize findings when reading through respondents’ comments. That is, it was intended to be part of the process and not necessarily the outcome itself.

Following this step, multiple groups of readers read through the full set of comments for each policy area (for example, Social Emotional Supports) to gather emerging trends as to the sentiment and in-depth feedback of the specific proposal (for example, Student Support Personnel). A lead person for each group was tasked with reviewing and synthesizing the findings into narrative form. For a given policy area, subsequent groups of quality control readers separately read through both the comments and the overall report findings to confirm alignment between the report’s conclusions and recommendations and the comment card input. This two-step process was designed to bolster the validity of the findings.

Qualitative analysis of the roundtable discussions also played a key role in developing the department’s findings. Discussion facilitators submitted written notes from each roundtable group. These notes aimed to capture both the sentiment around policy proposals and the reasoning beyond those sentiments. After the completion of the forums, the facilitators participated in semi-structured discussion groups for each of the four policy areas. The collected written notes and group discussions provided additional context and nuance to the findings from the written comments.

Quantitative information culled from the Likert-scale questions acted as an additional validity check for the discussion group reflection and comment card review.

### ***West Virginia’s Voice Education Forum Facilitator Notes Themes***

Facilitators for each round table discussion were volunteers from the West Virginia Department of Education. The role of the table facilitator was to help elicit views and perspectives of the participants in the group and assist them to have useful and coherent conversations about the questions posed. This included helping to make sure everyone at the table had the chance to speak beyond the “talking points” to more core interests and concerns, and to ensure participants treated each other respectfully. The three prompts inquired “What do you like about these policy ideas, and why? What concerns do you have about them, and why? How could they be improved? and What other suggestions do you have for addressing the topic to help improve educational outcomes and student achievement in West Virginia?” These same prompts were mirrored on the color-coded comment cards enabling participants to provide written feedback.

Approximately seventy-two (72) WVDE staff members served as table facilitators throughout the eight (8) forums. The facilitators provided written summary notes (not word-for-word notes) of key themes and main points of the discussion from the guided questions for each round they facilitated. The facilitator notes were sorted and coded in order to identify emergent themes.

To triangulate the qualitative data reaped from these round table discussions, four focus groups were conducted – one for each of the four topic areas of funding, instructional quality, school choice and innovation, and social emotional supports. These focus groups were conducted shortly after the last forum and were composed of staff who facilitated each specific topic area during the forum. The planned discussions were intended to elicit perceptions about the topic. Unlike interviews, which usually occur with an individual, the focus groups allowed members of the group to interact with each other during the discussion and consider the ideas and perspectives of other members (DeVault, 2018).