Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission Meeting Minutes

February 6, 2025
9:00-10:00am

Virtual Meeting

Commission Member Attendees: Adam Cummings, Danielle Cox, Del. Karen Simpson, Del. Elizabeth Embry, Gordon Pack, Jamel Freeman, Karen Jones, Judge Marc DeSimone, Mary Gable, Meredith Conde, Renee Yarbough-Williams for Del. Cheryl Pasteur, Dr. Stephen Steurer
Other Attendees: Ainsley Moench, Adrienne Maxwell, Alyssa Fieo, Anne Bocchini Pack, Arinze Ifekauche, Diana Bailey, Ian Genove, John Feaster III, John Griffin, Judith Lichtenberg, Lindsey McCullough, Micah Ferguson, Rose Dailey, Zakiya Lee

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I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am.

II. Discussion on minutes from December 5th, 2024

The Commission did not reach a quorum, so the minutes were not approved. There were no comments on the minutes.

III. Discussion of Commission goals and processes

A. Overview of goals and processes documents

Dr. Stephen Steurer went over the Goals and Processes and Structure of Commission and Advisory Stakeholder Group documents. The Commission will meet to oversee all activities. The Advisory Stakeholder Group will be the workgroup, looking at data, requesting data, and coming up with recommendations to put forth to the Commission for discussion and approval. An interim report must be completed by June 1, 2025.

The Advisory Stakeholder Group has broken into three workgroups that have started meeting: Adult Basic Education, General Education Development, and Special Education; Higher Education; and Career Technology and Workforce Development. These groups have been meeting and will meet monthly, and the Advisory Stakeholder Group will meet every two weeks.

Alyssa Fieo asked if the group would be discussing House Bill 877 as it extends the timeline for the Commission. Dr. Stephen Steurer replied that the Commission would be discussing that later in the agenda.

B. Report back from State Director of Correctional Institution Interviews

Dr. Steurer went over the interviews he and Ainsley Moench had with five state directors of correctional education (California, Oregon, North Carolina, Texas, and Ohio). The conversations centered around barriers and support to administering correctional education, suggestions about the best model to deliver correctional education and their organizational models. Both Texas and Ohio have a school district model.

California and North Carolina have a superintendent of schools, and their correctional education programming is situated high up in their division of programs. In Oregon, colleges provide most of the correctional education and are coordinated by an office in the Department of Corrections.

Each state felt that having a leadership position high up in their Department of Corrections was essential in making education a priority for the agency. All agencies are struggling with correctional officer and teacher staffing.

Ainsley Moench summarized that the two biggest issues the other states are experiencing are staffing and space, which are also reflected in the Commission's workgroup discussions, and the two biggest successes were having the education department located high up in the Department of Corrections, as well as having technology that incarcerated individuals can easily access.

Dr. Stephen Steurer added that professional development was also mentioned as making a difference in the quality of education incarcerated individuals receive. Technology has progressed to make internet usage more secure, so there are not as many safety issues with providing incarcerated individuals access to technology. Additionally, states are not replacing teachers with technology; instead, they are integrating technology with existing teaching.

Gordon Pack acknowledged that technology is often updated and is costly. He requested that the Commission find out what updated technology would cost to implement. Danielle Cox responded that she had already priced it out. Increased technology would require a segmented education WiFi network. Currently, colleges use laptops that are connected to the college's network. Bowie State is piloting using the Origin LMS network. Setting up a segmented WiFi network would cost approximately $12 million. $10 million would go towards the network, and the rest would support staffing.

Dr. Stephen Steurer discussed funding. Some states utilize public school funding for correctional education. Other sources include adult education, the Perkins Act, or federal funding.

Dr. Stephen Steurer mentioned that Ohio and California have laptops for their incarcerated students, but they are unable to take them back to their cells. The states are working on installing Wi-Fi in libraries and day centers so students can work on them at a variety of locations.

Anne Bocchinni Pack asked if the laptops that Maryland incarcerated students have are available to GED and workforce programming as well as higher education students. Danielle Cox replied that GED and workforce programming students do not have laptops, but have access to educational materials on their tablets. There are competing tablet vendors for education and other uses.

With a quorum reached, the Commission voted to approve the December 5th meeting minutes.

C. Scheduling correctional institution visits and public forums

Ainsley Moench said that they were working to schedule visits to correctional institutions sometime during April and May. The Commission must host public forums, and those will be conducted during June at each of Maryland's major geographic areas: the Eastern Shore, Central Maryland, Western Maryland, and Southern Maryland.

Dr. Stephen Steurer added that the Commission has had a request from the Lifer's group at Roxbury Correctional Institution to talk, so one of the visits will be held at RCI. Danielle Cox commented that RCI would be a good place to visit, as it has been suffering from shutdowns due to correctional officer shortages.

D. Letter to Director Ruschelle Reuben on data requests

Dr. Stephen Steurer discussed a letter that the Commission workgroups sent to the Department of Labor containing requests for data that each workgroup felt was necessary to complete their work. These requests included the number of incarcerated students who passed the GED test with college-ready scores, the number of students on waiting lists for academic or workforce programming per institution, the number of incarcerated individuals who already have a GED, the monthly number of special education students served, the number of school closures, number of library visits, and LASI requests (legal questions).

John Feaster III discussed the data request, saying that some of the information is easy to obtain, but some of the information is complex, hosted in different locations, and would be difficult to get. The Department is as transparent as possible with their data, but data can sometimes be politicized. The Department should be able to get the Commission all of the information requested.

IV. Discussion of ASG workgroup meetings

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg said that the Advisory Stakeholder Group divided into three workgroups: Adult Basic Education, General Education Development, and Special Education; Higher Education; and Career Technology and Workforce Development. Dr. Stephen Steurer mentioned that the notes and recordings are available for all workgroups.

V. Discussion of HB 877

Dr. Stephen Steurer went over the bill. The bill's purpose is to extend the time for the submission of the interim and final report for the Commission, extending the length of time of the Commission. The Commission may suggest legislative changes to the prison education system and perhaps would take on the role of monitoring the implementation of the legislation, though that purview is not currently in the bill. The Commission will continue operating on the current timeline unless the bill passes.

Alyssa Fieo asked what the goal of giving the Commission more time would be.

Ian Genove, Del. Amprey's Chief of Staff, answered that the goal was to give the Commission adequate time to complete their work. The Delegate is open to altering or withdrawing the bill if the Commission feels that the bill does not reflect the Commission's needs. At some point, the Delegate may want to

introduce a bill to give the Commission new duties or responsibilities, but that would be up to the Commission if they would like to pursue it.

Dr. Stephen Steurer gave an example of the juvenile justice system, which took a look at their education system and created a school district for juveniles in the system. The Commission may do something similar. As for the interim and final report, the interim report will be brief but give updates on what the Commission works on. The final report will be more fleshed out with specific recommendations.

Danielle Cox offered that the Commission may not want to take a full five years, but also should not rush the work within a short time frame. Three years may be a good length of time.

Danielle Cox also discussed Pell Grant implementation. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services has a stakeholder group that approves all of the applications for colleges that come behind the fence. Colleges that are currently behind the fence as a second chance Pell program must reapply through the Department of Education. The approval process is extensive and takes about a year and a half. Additionally, DPSCS is working on a data system as required by Pell through Smart Sheets to track college students. College students are also able to apply for FASFA online.

Ian Genove thanked the Commission for their work and said he would take back this information to Del. Amprey.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:04 am.