Higher Education Workgroup

Meeting Minutes

February 27, 2025
1pm-2pm

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Ainsley Moench, Amanda Owens, Andrea Cantora, Christian Gant, Danielle Cox, Emily Hainze, Gordon Pack, John Feaster III, John Griffin, Judith Lichtenberg, Karen Jones, Katy Ryan, Meredith Conde, Rose Dailey, Stephen Steurer

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I. Agenda Item

Dr. Andrea Cantora welcomed everyone. She announced that at the last meeting, the group decided to focus on three core issues: funding, space, and incentives.

Dr. Andrea Cantora began talking about using state aid for incarcerated students. Pell Grants do not cover the full cost of tuition, and programs cannot rely solely on federal funding.

Danielle Cox talked about the financial difficulties that colleges face in providing education to incarcerated students. For example, an incarcerated student may originally reside in Baltimore City, but be incarcerated in ECI. Thus, they are charged an out-of-county rate for community college. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if students who are incarcerated at ECI for years can claim they are a resident of that county, and Danielle Cox responded that they cannot. Danielle Cox talked about working with the Maryland Higher Education Commission to codify incarcerated students' ability to receive state aid, and they hope to work it out during the interim and submit the bill on behalf of an agency in August or September.

Andrea Cantora asked if the conversation was around adding language to explicitly allow incarcerated students access to existing scholarships or to create specific funding for incarcerated students to access.

Danielle Cox answered that they are unsure of that yet. If a specific funding category is created, budget restraints may prevent the bill from passing. However, there may be political backlash if incarcerated students are explicitly allowed to access existing state aid, as there may be an impression that they are taking away resources from other students.

Dr. Stephen Steurer asked how much money is available for state student aid. Dr. Andrea Cantora replied she did not know, and there have been conversations with MHEC to create a tuition waiver program like those made for homeless students or students in the foster care system. Dr. Stephen Steurer indicated he would like to talk to someone at MHEC about this issue.

Christian Gant asked if DPSCS has an internal grant operation. Danielle Cox answered that there is no funding from the state specifically for higher education, so any additional funding other than what comes from DPSCS comes from grant funding. There is someone who forwards eligible grants to DPSCS directors, but Danielle has to write the grant application. Christian Gant replied that it might be worth looking into hiring a grant writer who could procure grants and essentially fund their own position. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg commented that might be difficult, as there is no guarantee that they will get grant money. Danielle Cox added that the application process is not what makes grants difficult; administering and managing the grants requires additional capacity.

John Griffin asked if there is any private investing opportunities for higher education programs, such as the Thrive for Life program. Danielle Cox responded that there's no private investment specifically towards higher education in prison in Maryland.

Andrea Cantora reoriented the group to discuss funding specifically for continuing higher education programs and starting new programs. Grants are often used for capacity building and not sustained funding, and require lots of time and energy to manage. John Feaster III added that often, grants cap the amount of funding they allow for administrative costs, and since no grants are guaranteed, it's difficult to retain grant administrators.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if tuition costs could be negotiated. Meredith Conde answered that at Goucher, tuition costs are reduced for GPEP students. However, there are still faculty and supply costs. Dr. Andrea Cantora replied that similarly, it costs about $10,000 per student to be in the Second Chance Program for operational costs.

John Feaster III said that on the non-credit side of higher education (such as with certificates or training), conversations about cost revolve around the cost-per-person, but at a certain level, the operating costs are covered and it costs the same regardless of the number of students. Danielle Cox agreed that programs cannot operate without a certain number of students, but if you go above a certain number of students, adding extra students is a negligible cost. Dr. Stephen Steurer added that with more students comes an increased need for space.

Dr. Andrea Cantora added that in order for students to obtain Pell Grants, they have to be charged a certain amount of tuition.

John Feaster III mentioned that when it comes to additional space, the need for additional space could be minimized with the addition of new technology.

Danielle Cox said that she applied for a $12 million grant that would allow DPSCS to cover Wi-Fi for every single school in prison in the state, as well as three computer technicians to operate the network. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if that means students will have full access to Wi-Fi. Danielle Cox answered yes. Currently, the tablets run off of cellular, which is expensive for DPSCS. Moving to Wi-Fi would lower the cost by half. The Wi-Fi network would be segmented, and all of the colleges and workforce

classes could connect to the Wi-Fi. The grant would also cover new laptops for the students and teachers to take back and forth from the housing unit and the school, eliminating the need for study hall sessions.

John Feaster III added that it would help the primary and secondary education classes as well since they would not have to make a decision between working and going to school.

Andrea Cantora asked if this grant would provide the infrastructure and startup costs, but after two years, the colleges would have to pay the cost of maintaining the technology. Danielle Cox answered that after two years, colleges would have to pay $299 per student, which would be difficult for colleges to cover.

Dr. Stephen Steurer asked what the status of the grant was. Danielle Cox said that she received the grant to cover the first two years of the network for the colleges, but additional funds are likely not going to happen due to the cuts in the federal government.

Dr. Stephen Steurer said that during the visits to correctional facilities, the Commission would look at the possibility of using different spaces for higher education programming, as there may be some underutilized space. He asked what times the evening college programs run. Danielle Cox responded that the evening programs run 2-9, which is when the most space is available as day programming has finished.

Dr. Stephen Steurer mentioned that in the past, pre-release students were able to go to the UMBC campus. Danielle Cox responded that students would have to be on minimum security to do that, and most college programs are run at medium and maximum security facilities.

Ainsley Moench asked if incarcerated students are eligible for scholarships, and wondered what the next steps for the workgroup would be.

John Griffin said that from ECI's perspective, staffing is going to be the critical issue, as officers have to feel like they have enough people to cover it. There are staffing issues at DPSCS that prevent programming from taking place. Danielle Cox agreed but mentioned that evening programs often get shut down less as there is more coverage.

Karen Jones said that from her perspective, there are lots of spaces in the women's prison that could be utilized for programming.

Dr. Andrea Cantora mentioned it would be interesting to have snapshots of each facility to identify potential spaces for programming. She also mentioned that technology is not always required to teach a class. Next time, the group could start with talking about space and technology and then incentives.

The group began discussing the data received from the Department of Labor.

Dr. Andrea Cantora said that the major piece of information that will guide the higher education conversation is how many incarcerated individuals have a GED, but the Department of Labor did not have that information.

Dr. Stephen Steurer said that the information received is more relevant to the other workgroups, and Danielle Cox would be providing more information about the number of GEDs. Rough data indicates that between 2014 to 2024, 50,000 people came in without a GED and have gone through the system, and only

about 10% of that population obtained a GED while incarcerated. He and Ainsley Moench have also sent out a survey to correctional education directors to ask where they obtain their funding from. He then asked John Feaster III when the data that remained to be formatted would be formatted and sent to the Commission.

John Feaster III responded that it's a reasonable question, but compiling the data takes a long time and a lot of manpower. Additionally, the Department of Labor is struggling with everything happening at the federal government.

The workgroup discussed when to meet next to accommodate everyone's schedules, and agreed to work out a date offline.

The meeting adjourned at 2:02pm.