ABE/GED/SPED

Meeting Minutes

May 9, 2025
10am-11am

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Ainsley Moench, Alyssa Fieo, Anne Bocchini Pack, Del. Cheryl Pasteur, Christian Gant, Danielle Cox, Jamel Freeman, John Feaster III, Judith Lichtenberg, Ruschelle Reuben, Stephen Steurer

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I. Welcome

Dr. Stephen Steurer called the meeting to order at 10:03 am and announced that this meeting would go over the various issues raised over the months for the June interim report.

Alyssa Fieo brought up the issue of accommodations, stating that she would like to know the process for requesting accommodations and if this may be a reason for the low number of students with disabilities who pass the GED. Additionally, she would like to see in the interim report a mention of how some students enter the system with a high number of high school credits and have to start over to get a GED. Del. Cheryl Pasteur agreed that she would like to see mention of GEDs versus high school diplomas in the interim report, and students with disabilities are entitled to accommodations under the law. Del. Cheryl Pasteur and Alyssa Fieo agreed to work together to write up this issue for the report.

Dr. Stephen Steurer said that the plan for the interim report is to have each workgroup agree on a set of issues they have discussed throughout their work, write up a short issue description, and put the issues and issues descriptions to the Commission for approval. The ABE/GED/SPED workgroup will meet one additional time in April, and members discussed potential dates.

Alyssa Fieo asked if the Commission had received the new manual on special education policies, and John Feaster III said he would follow up on providing it.

John Feaster III suggested editing the interim report to reflect that the number of GED completions is not currently affecting the ability of individuals to enter a postsecondary education program, as there are more students on the waitlist for the programs than there are currently spots. He questioned if the significant barriers that exist for GED completion make it not possible to reach pre-pandemic levels of GED completion. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if that was because of changes to the GED test itself, and John Feaster III replied that there are a lot of factors that impede GED completion, including the level of preparation one receives before incarceration, technological literacy, and the lack of program capacity.

Dr. Stephen Steurer brought up that postsecondary education capacity may improve in the future. Judith Lichtenberg clarified that John Feaster III's statement was about the fact that lower GED completion rates were not the reason the higher education programs were bigger or smaller. John Feaster III emphasized that lower levels of GED completion are not, in his opinion, contributing to hindering entry to post-secondary education. Stephen Steurer acknowledged the point and stated the importance of getting the accurate information and putting the words as intended. John Feaster III stressed the need for accuracy to prevent legislators from focusing on less significant issues.

Danielle Cox added that postsecondary education programs would grow from 300 to 600 spots available in the next year. She suggested changing the wording to say "may hinder futher programming."

Anne Bocchini Pack shared her experience that the lack of GED completions are currently hindering job opportunities that would benefit incarcerated individuals, and the document should reflect that experience. Dr. Stephen Steurer Stephen Steurer pointed out that there is a section on mandatory education which addresses some of these issues. John Feaster III clarified he was only concerned about the wording around including post-secondary education, and the group agreed on new wording that emphasized that GED completion is needed for various types of programs.

The group began talking about the mandatory education policy.