

Steering Group of the Vermont Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education
Tuesday, November 24, 2020 - 3:00pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Members: Briar Alpert, Heather Bouchey, Sarah Buxton, Megan Cluver, Joyce Judy

Others: Sally Johnstone, Dennis Jones, Joyce Manchester, Brian Prescott, Michael Thomas, Candace Williams

Minutes:

I. Debrief from 11/23/20 Select Committee Meeting

Heather: Pleasantly surprised that it seemed the Select Committee is on the same page. The report is in good shape and we've addressed some key questions and issues. The labor task force's report is interesting and coincided well with some of the report's recommendations.

Briar: NCHEMS solidified a lot of content that included a lot of decisions and scenarios. No one took tremendous offense to anything in the report. Additional decisions about the path, details, structure and cost remain but for the most part, there was no strong disagreement.

Sarah: It's coming together but worried about the silence of some key players. We should have a more robust conversation around the administrative unification and the options. Coming to agreement about some of the low hanging fruit would make sense. Couldn't believe UVM didn't weigh in on the proposed areas of collaboration. It would be meaningful if they did to demonstrate alignment within the public postsecondary education system. There remain more questions than agreement statements about affordability and finance aspects of the report. Hope that members closer to this subject will weigh in.

Joyce: In terms of presentation, it would be helpful to highlight major pieces in an executive summary. There are some points of agreement on big picture elements but need for additional conversation on the details. For example, what are the pros and cons on the work study program? Additionally, NCHEMS could share the pro and cons and examples of success for the service corporation model, as well as a potential student-centered collaboration with UVM. We need to have a more robust conversation about the affordability standard.

Brian: Our first task before 12/4 is to create an executive summary. I share some of Sarah's concerns about silence meaning assent. Does the affordability standard need to be a centerpiece of the draft submitted on 12/4? Should some pieces be removed recognizing that we have more opportunities to flush them out later on? Are Select Committee members co-signers to the draft?

Heather: I don't know that it's worth our time to chase down people who aren't participating.

Sarah: Especially for VSC representatives, we want to be able to signal appropriately that recommendations are sound and won't shift. UVM should proactively articulate how they'll be a part of the solution.

Heather: NCHEMS, is this something you've been seeing all along or a symptom of the quick turnaround?

Brian: From a distance, I'm encouraged by the overlap in the problem diagnoses by various groups and there's a thread of shared solutions running through different groups' recommendations. That said, there's ample space for disagreement about online learning, institution identity, etc. that we should be attentive to.

Joyce: Is it possible to survey the Select Committee before Monday to verify the level of consensus? Perhaps corresponding to the areas of focus for the executive summary?

Brian: We'd need NEBHE's help and what if we find there's more disagreement than expected?

Brian: I think there's danger in a survey. But the executive summary could be a vehicle to garner additional feedback and lay out future decision points. If people don't respond, after ample chance, perhaps they don't feel strongly.

Sarah: If we don't have strong consensus, we name the topics that need additional attention. We could then approach the appropriations committees for their impressions on what needs to be prioritized in the remaining months.

Dennis: Our sense of the timeline is that something needs to put out early on for the governor and legislature to address things related to the state budget. We do need more information on a number of other aspects for the analysis and narrative. A standalone conversation on affordability may be warranted.

Sarah: The legislature needs to grapple with affordability in a general sense because of comparisons that can be drawn to the elite four year institutions.

Brian: There are real benefits to addressing affordability in terms of generating new enrollments.

Joyce: In terms of access, we do have to think about cost. We suffer from a low college going rate and we can't dismiss the barrier that costs present. If we're thinking about this as an economic development strategy, it can't be ignored and we need to use this opportunity.

Sarah: We have an opportunity to move from talking about subsidized education to the employers' skin in the game.

Sarah: Is the vision keeping students in Vermont? I've gotten the sense that some people are threatened by VSC functioning as a workforce development arm.

Briar: To Heather's point, I hear that while VSC is training graduates to meet job requirements, a liberal arts foundation is paramount to everyone's success. You've said that clearly.

Sarah: It'll be useful to state that CTE and adult education will be addressed down the line.

Dennis: When does that need to get signaled?

Sarah: February might be okay. AOE and DOL will be having conversations in January about the inaugural address and mentions there.

Heather: I've gotten the impression it's not a shared area of interest. The governor was a CTE instructor, so that could be a way to hook his interest. This is one of the most sophisticated interim legislative reports.

Brian: There is a concern about unfunded mandates. The report includes notions about things the state should pay for that it doesn't, including adult CTE.

Heather: It'd be helpful to show how other states structure adult CTE.

Joyce Manchester: The legislature will receive the governor's budget in late January. It doesn't hurt to present ideas early. JFO would like to be in touch with NCHEMS about the budget process.

II. Next steps

III. Public comments and questions

- a. Members of the public, please share comments and questions at highercommittee@leg.state.vt.us
- b. *Please be advised that with few exceptions, any submitted documents are open to the public*

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Williams
New England Board of Higher Education