

Vermont Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education
Monday, December 14, 2020 - 3:30pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Members: Briar Alpert, Sen. Baruth, Heather Bouchey, Sarah Buxton, Megan Cluver, Daniel Daley, Suresh Garimella, Scott Giles, Steve Gordon, Rep. James, Joyce Judy, Sandy Mayotte, Devin Tingle, Jeff Weld, Sophie Zdatny

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

Minutes:

I. Discussion of reactions to the 12/4 report from stakeholders and/or the public

Dan Daley on faculty concerns:

- CCV retaining a separate accreditation
- Expansion of Chancellor's Office
- Consideration of graduate programs

Sophie Zdatny: The Board of Trustees is concerned about the transferability of credit and will be addressing it in an upcoming meeting.

Sen. Baruth received emails that echoed the reactions Dan heard, as well as some that voiced skepticism about the savings of unifying. Sen. Baruth shared the report with his Senate colleagues with a cover letter to frame the financial aspects. Sen. Balint assigned it to the caucus to read and Sen. Baruth added it as priority for legislation.

Rep. James reports that the document was distributed and discussed in the democratic caucus as of priority for the next session. There's some discussion of a cross-committee task force to ensure the work moves forward without siloes. Rep. James will compile additional feedback. Constituents from the Northeast Kingdom appear relieved. One respondent cautioned basing positive financial projections based on enrollments.

Steven Gordon shared the report with his colleagues who work with CCV and VTC. Their primary concerns relate to nimbleness and they were happy to see CCV's treatment.

Jeff Weld notes that people will look to the media for a synopsis. Eventually, beating the headlines may be a challenge. We could consider releasing talking points for the media. Some concerns he's heard is that it doesn't go far enough.

Scott Giles heard

- Some surprise about the size of the structural deficit

- More information about the risk associated with traveling down a path to sustainability based on savings and enrollment growth

Suresh adds that Scott articulated concerns well. What if the funding doesn't come through? Will the efficiencies projections be parsed out?

II. Focus areas for NCHEMS and the Select Committee to cover ahead of the February report

- The outline will be fleshed out
- Where and how to address adult career and technical and basic education
- Affordability
- Earn and learn programming
- Finding the line between NCHEMS charge and that of the VSC Board

Joyce Judy agrees that issues related to residency and campus use is not in the purview of the Select Committee, although statements about the foot print of the system are appropriate.

Sen. Baruth agrees in the sense that he doesn't believe the Select Committee needs to include that depth of detail but sympathizes with the reader who may need help conceptualizing others' ideas on the topic. Additionally, should the report delve into a Plan B?

Dan Daley agrees with Joyce and thinks that the institutions should broach their missions and program duplications and resizing will happen naturally. But frameworks for considering collaboration will be helpful.

Briar returns to Sen. Baruth comment to share that the consensus of the Steering Group was that the best plan for the system's sustainability should be the priority regardless of the resource needs.

Rep. James suggests including some quantification of the cost of inaction. The economic impact and ROI cases could be beefed up. Rep. James is concerned that Plan B would become the answer. On the other hand, there would be no blue print in the case that the legislature cannot fund Plan A.

Sen. Baruth says that if we don't submit a Plan B, we should have our eyes open about the responses or pushback.

Sandy Mayotte asks that if this report doesn't garner support, where would this leave the state and more importantly youth and disadvantaged adults?

Sophie Zdatny shares that the Board is worried about being left where they were last April – run out of time and money to appropriately address the longterm sustainability of the system.

Dennis Jones reframes the question: If level-funded, what are the recommendations for squaring the circle?

Joyce Judy notes that the Steering Group was concerned the legislature would revert to Plan B. If it's not possible, it's up to the VSC Board, legislature and Governor to set the resources and see what can be done. A compromise is laying out the best plan, as well as the cost of inaction.

Briar believes it is incumbent on the Select Committee to provide more detail about the cost efficiencies and reduction, if moving down this path.

Steven Gordon commends the report as a framework for a plan. It's up to Sophie's team to manage the implementation and details.

Sandy agrees with Steve.

III. Update on stakeholder engagement activities

Candace outlines the Phase II focus groups that will take place prior to February 3, 2021 and will include:

- Employers and Business & Industry Representatives
- Community Leaders
- Workforce & Economic Development Leaders
- Students and individual detached for postsecondary education
- Other Education & Training Organization Representatives

IV. Next steps

V. Public comments and questions

- a. Members of the public, please share comments and questions at higheredcommittee@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