

Steering Group of the Vermont Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education
Tuesday, February 2, 2021 - 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, Candace Williams

Minutes:

NCHEMS has been talking with various legislative committees about the Select Committee's work since the last meeting.

Joyce: The legislature has been responsive and engaged. Sen. Baruth and Rep. James are very committed to the charge and working with their colleagues on this effort.

I. Discussion of report revisions

- Recommendations are now all embedded in the Executive Summary
- New language around urgency
- Substituting outline language with prose
- Changes to the enrollment section
- Revisions to affordability section
- Added new recommendation re: adult CTE
- Added new section on implementation steps
- Taking a look at the clarity of the state investment tables

Megan: On the affordability standard, point 6, it says that every Vermont institution should be affordable to Vermonters. Or flip it, every Vermonter should have affordable access to a Vermont institution. It would put UVM in a different light.

Briar: In the latter meaning, every Vermonter should have affordable access to *a* Vermont institution but not all institutions. Affordability is an issue at UVM, as well, and while there are great efforts to ensure Vermonters attend at an affordable cost, they are not 100% successful.

Dennis: That creates a possibility where low income Vermonters are shuttled off to another low cost institution and are precluded from access to the flagship. In most states, the policy is to make all public institutions affordable.

Sarah: Providing a transparent way to compare institutions' affordability apples to apples allows the legislature to better decide how to support affordability goals.

Dennis: In other states that use this metric, they bake in an expectation of borrowing at the research universities due to presumed earnings premiums.

Brian: A confusing element for readers was the discussion of the standard as a mechanism for distributing state aid. This was untangled in the revised version of the report to provide an agnostic tool to the legislature to guide decisions on allocations and policy. A borrowing expectation could be baked in. The legislators seem to be basing decisions off of incremental budgeting decisions, which doesn't help policymakers zero in on the outcome or impacts of those investments.

Sarah: The charge seems to suggest affordability of the VSC to Vermont students but it may make sense to broadening the recommendation so that the options presented to Vermonters can be assessed by the legislature.

Joyce: The current form takes a middle of the road approach to the policy discussion about what institutions are affordable to which Vermonters.

Briar: From a moral perspective, I like the idea that any Vermont can attend any Vermont institution they are admitted to without burdening them on cost. Due to the charge, it makes sense to contain the recommendation to the VSC.

Dennis: It's useful for legislators to know the size of the affordability gap – how short they are falling in achieving access. It doesn't require increased funding but presents a reality.

Sarah: That should be a preliminary statement or Briar's statement on moral value.

Megan: Looking at out-migration and jobs of the future pushes the reader as degree-generation as a path to a job. The past 9 months have shifted the outlook for jobs and created an environment where certificates and skills gain more traction. It could be problematic if policymakers focus too much on degrees, rather than on credentials that are skills-based and stackable.

Joyce: The jury's out

Dennis: History shows that large employers are the first to adapt new talent recruitment strategies but Vermont is a state of small employers

Megan: I've thought that the system would focus on the 60,000 Vermonters without degrees. I worry that the legislature would hone in on that and establish metrics on degree outcomes

Sally: We should add a caveat on job projections that acknowledges growth of skills-based credentials

Sarah: If we could use the term of art, “industry recognized credentials of value”, that would help align with existing state policy and partner work.

Briar: The focus groups called for boldness and action. To that end, would we be well served by providing more detail and accountability relative to cost reductions and the timeframe to accomplish those?

Dennis: There is language on yearly funding depending on previous year cost savings.

Megan: It would help to provide the Board guidance on how fast or slow these actions should be undertaken, more specificity on the timeframe.

Sally: We’ve seen the administrative service unification take just a year.

Dennis/Briar: It could take longer but we should share expectations of realistic timelines wherever possible.

Joyce: Parameters and charges to specific stakeholders to enact timelines would make sense.

Dennis: Consider that the Select Committee limiting the functions of the Board and other decision makers.

II. Expectations for 2/12/21 report submission

Joyce: Focus on the executive summary and make sure it contains the most critical parts of the report.

Sarah: Heard a lot of opportunity, in the structure/reorientation of the VSC, to serve employer needs and open access to more adult learners. Increasingly, employers are a customer to be serve to the end of upskilling workers and tap into a new source of revenue.

III. 2/8/21 Select Committee meeting agenda

Joyce: The summary of changes helps direct attention to certain areas.

IV. Summary of focus groups’ themes and feedback

High level summary can be viewed [here](#).

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*

No public comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Williams

New England Board of Higher Education