

Minutes of the Graduation Task Force Meeting July 22, 2009

BE IT REMEMBERED, That the Graduation Rate Task Force met in a regular meeting in the Board Room of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning in Jackson, Mississippi at 10:30 a.m. and pursuant to, written notice were mailed to each member of the Task Force dated July 9, 2009. Those members attending the July 22, 2009 meeting of the Task Force were:

Members of the Task Force

Dr. Hank Bounds, Commissioner of Higher Education, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Representative Cecil Brown, Chairman, Education Committee, MS House of Representatives
Representative Kelvin Buck, Chairman, Universities and Colleges, MS House of Representatives
Ms. Kami Bumgarner, Board Member, State Board of Education
Dr. Eric Clark – Executive Director, State Board of Community and Junior Colleges
Mr. Johnny Franklin, Education Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor
Dr. Aubrey K. Lucas – Interim Commissioner, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Mr. Mike Mulvihill, Interim Deputy Superintendent, MS Department of Education
Dr. George Ross, President, represented by Dr. Edward Vaughn, Alcorn State University
Dr. Martha Saunders, President, University of Southern Mississippi

Others:

Ms. Bridget Breithaupt, Administrative Assistant, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Dr. Jim Borsig, Assistant Commissioner for External Relations, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Mr. Jim Hood, Senior Statistical Analyst, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Dr. Lynn J. House, Assistant Commissioner of Academic and Student Affairs, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Ms. Mitzy Johnson, Assistant Executive Director for Research and Planning State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Susan Lee, Director of P-16 Initiatives, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Ms. Pearl Pennington, Director of Student Affairs, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Dr. Fiona Qualls, Associate Executive Director for Programs, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Al Rankins, Direction of Academic Affairs, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Mr. Kell Smith, Communications Director, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Reginald Sykes, Assistant Commissioner of Community and Junior College Relations, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Ms. Deborah West, Associate Executive Director for Workforce, Career & Technical State Board for Community and Junior Colleges

1. Welcome and Introductions by Dr. Aubrey K. Lucas

Dr. Lucas called the meeting to order and introduced the members of the Task Force.

2. Roll Call

Dr. Lucas asked all members of the Task Force to be certain to sign in as present.

3. Opening Remarks

Dr. Hank Bounds made opening remarks and gave an overview of the work of the Task Force.

4. Overview of Enabling Legislation

Dr. Jim Borsig reviewed the enabling legislation, the membership, administrative and financial arrangements, method to reimburse travel, authorize expenses, and the public policy objectives contained in the legislation.

Dr. Borsig called attention to these four points:

1. Task Force shall compile data, study and report on measures that may be taken to improve graduation rates in the universities, community and junior colleges;
2. The Commissioner of Higher Education shall provide appropriate staff to assist the Task Force with carry out its duties;
3. Before December 31, 2009, the Task Force shall submit to the Legislature and the Governor a written report of its findings and recommendations on measures to improve graduation rates in universities, community and junior colleges;
4. Upon presentation of the report, the Task Force shall be dissolved.

Comments by Members of the Task Force on the Enabling Legislation

Representative Cecil Brown, author of HB 488:

This process began in K-12 four or five years ago. K-12 talks about drop outs, but not in IHLs or CJs. There are at least two issues surrounding the whole idea of increasing the number of graduates: the economic issues and the impact it has on our state. The bigger issue is the social issue, the question of fairness. Students don't enroll with the idea they are not going to graduate; they want to carve out a career. They want to obtain a diploma or a certificate. Along the way, at least half of them don't do that. We are never going to graduate everyone. Some of those we can't do anything about, but we can do better. We can offer a better opportunity for success. That's what this is really about. The economic impact will follow that. Make sure every student is given the support and opportunity they need to succeed. We fall down; this is not an indictment. It's about improving on providing the opportunities to do better. If we are doing our best, it will be OK, but I believe we can do better. It is important that we do better. That is the genesis of this legislation. Representative Buck is the Chairman of the Universities and Colleges Committee and is also deeply involved in K-12 issues. I am thrilled to see him take over as Chairman of the Universities and Colleges Committee.

Representative Kelvin Buck:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here. The urgency and importance of what we are doing is great. I see 62 % of our budget going to education. It seems logical and reasonable to go to the next level and try and keep the whole pattern of looking at our education system from beginning to end and trying to get the maximum amount out of the investment that we are putting in. I think that one of the keys is getting a good start at the collegiate level. Sometimes that means that students may need to get that start at a community college. We need to do whatever it takes to get them on a good solid foundation. We are prepared to be supportive of that. I have a son entering an IHL this year. I know the key for him will be getting a good start that first year. I look forward to exploring the opportunities to see what we can do in this area.

5. Election of Co-Chairs

Dr. Hank Bounds:

Now the Task Force is to elect officers. The Commissioner's office is committed to ensuring that all logistics are taken care of for the work of the Task Force.

Representative Cecil Brown recommends the Task Force have co-chairmen. I suggest the Chairmen of the Universities and Colleges Committees from the House of Representatives and the Senate serve as Co-chairs of the Task Force: Senator Doug Davis and Representative Kelvin Buck

Upon the Motion of Representative Cecil Brown, seconded by Mr. Johnny Franklin, Senator Doug Davis and Representative Kelvin Buck unanimously selected to serve as Co-chairs of the Task Force.

Dr. Hank Bounds:

If I may, before I turn over the meeting over to Chairman Buck, I would like to suggest the following actions be considered by the Task Force. The enabling legislation requires that the Task Force approve all travel.

Upon the motion of Dr. Bounds, seconded by Mike Mulvihill, all travel required for all called and special meetings is hereby approved by the Task Force. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Bounds also recommended expanding the membership of the Task Force. Three specific areas should be considered for representation:

- 1) The executive director or designee from the Mississippi Department of Mental Health.
- 2) Two Community and Junior College presidents.
- 3) The president and chief executive officer of the Mississippi Economic Council or designee to represent the business community

Dr. Eric Clark recommended the chairs of the three boards be authorized to also name designees. Dr. Bounds amended his motion to include Dr. Clark's recommendation.

4) The presidents or chairs of the three education boards are authorized to name a designee.

Upon the motion of Dr. Bounds, seconded by Chairman Buck, the motion was approved unanimously.

6. Educational Attainment and Graduation Rates

Dr. Hank Bounds introduced Dr. Jimmy Clarke. Dr. Clarke is the executive director of the ACT Center for College and Career Success.

Summary of Dr. Jimmy Clarke's Remarks

My purpose today is to put today's conversation into context. For the last nine months, I have been serving as state team advisor to Mississippi's MOA (Making Opportunity Affordable) team. This has given me an opportunity to work with IHLs, CJs, and the Governor's office, so I encourage you to please consider me an outsider for providing expertise, but also as an insider as I do have firsthand knowledge of many of the problems you face.

For the first time in decades, the United States postsecondary education community is operating with a national agenda. President Obama, in his February 24, 2009 address to the Joint Sessions of Congress, implored "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training" as a means by which to meet a new goal, that "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world."

This call to action and the establishment of a specific education attainment goal for the nation echoes similar calls by others. For example, the Lumina Foundation recently identified their 'Big Goal' to significantly increase postsecondary education attainment as having 60 percent of Americans hold high-quality, two- or four-year college degrees and credentials by 2025. Likewise, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has set an ambitious goal for the nation to double the number of young people who earn a postsecondary degree or certificate with value in the marketplace by the time they reach age 26.

The bottom line – more education attainment is needed in this country. I would suggest that Mississippi would do well to follow this sentiment.

Data (presented in the power point) indicates the United States has an older population with proportionately more degrees than most industrialized countries, but educational attainment among younger workers has shown no increase – unlike most other industrialized nations.

In addition to international competition, data indicates there is a shrinking U.S. middle class as the lifetime earning value of a college degree has increased substantially since 1975, while the lifetime earnings of persons with a high school degree have stayed flat. There is a gap being created.

What does this mean in terms of effort needed to meet the President's goal? Obviously there is quite a steep slope to get us ahead of other countries. Overall, an additional 150,000 degrees need to be secured each year by 2020. Significant costs and resources are involved. The United States and Mississippi must also consider the emerging demographic realities as plans are made to meet the goal. Between now and 2025, there will be significant changes in the population of persons 25-44 in terms of race and ethnicity. Mississippi will have a decline in the white population with a slight increase in Hispanic and African American populations.

Mississippi, like the United States, has an achievement gap – the difference in the educational success and attainment of white and African American ethnic groups. Mississippi shows significant differences between these two groups which means reaching increased education attainment levels will be difficult as it will necessitate being much more successful with populations we have been historically less successful in educating. Mississippi, however, is not alone. In fact, you are not in as bad a shape as some states are - those with much greater demographic changes in their young adult populations.

The other side of this discussion has to do with state budgets and deficits. The bottom line is that the current economic downturn is not going to resolve itself quickly. Economists are projecting that we can expect state budgets to stay in gap mode (between 4 and 7 percent deficits) all the way to 2013 – Mississippi is projected for 7% or more. States won't have the opportunity or be able to provide increased resources. So what are the options?

These circumstances call for serious discussions of efficiencies and effectiveness. One must also begin to discuss the dreaded "p word" – productivity. We dread it – makes us sound more like production instead of academics. Some states, however, have been engaged in this effort for some time. Maryland is probably the state people point to most often as the state with a focus on these issue as they have worked on efficiencies in both the academic and business sides of postsecondary operations.

Mississippi's IHL has an efficiencies committee, so you are probably a little ahead of the game nationally. In addition, the Lumina Foundation has been working with states to develop a better understanding of productivity opportunities and to pilot efficiency efforts. Mississippi is one of eleven states selected to receive a one-year, Learning Year grant and is in competition for a larger four-year grant.

Three specific goals have been identified by the Lumina Foundation:

1. Recast state financial systems that reward completion and graduation.
2. Increase the cost effectiveness of academic programs and administration. Many models exist to address cost effectiveness, but many are controversial. No matter what you do, I encourage you to engage faculty in this conversation. Your success will be impacted by this inclusion.
3. Create new models of delivery. Mississippi is taking the lead using the approach of the National Center for Academic Transformation and considering ways to join forces between IHLs and CJsCs to provide a system for the delivery of developmental math, one of the most serious concerns across the country.

Any discussion regarding the attainment of these three goals has to have at forefront of the conversation an understanding that solutions must:

1. Maintain access
2. Maintain affordability, and
3. Maintain quality

A number of strategies have been suggested to assist in meeting the goals of increasing educational attainment. In the short-term these strategies include:

- a. Reallocating faculty time to courses and away from admin activity/ non-sponsored research;
- b. Increased collaboration with other institutions; sharing of programs and services;
- c. Make sure students receive all financial aid for which they are eligible;
- d. Conducting research that documents the use of resources and documents performance;
- e. Allocating resources to support student services to enhance retention; and
- f. Engaging faculty in redesign and student success issues.

Long term strategies include:

- a. Academic preparation. College and work readiness is terribly important. There are currently national discussions occurring that may lead to the adoption of a set of common core standards for high school graduation.
- b. Early outreach efforts - getting underrepresented populations into post secondary education;
- c. Focusing on developmental education – particularly the effective use of technology in developmental education;
- d. Understanding the importance of adult learners. Attainment goals can't be met without reengaging the current adult population workforce; and
- e. Developing longitudinal data systems. Accurate reporting is critical. There are lots of questions about how to look at data.

Regardless of what strategies you employ, there are some absolutes:

- 1) Cooperation. Progress happens when heads of agencies talk regularly, exchange concerns, and find common ground.
- 2) Cooperation between public and non-public providers must be investigated.
- 3) The needs of the business community, regional economic development needs, and identified labor market needs all should be considered as strategies are developed.
- 4) Institutions must consider moving away from competitive recruitment strategies and move toward student centered "success" strategies.
- 5) A strong, clear public agenda for postsecondary education must be developed. Each state must decide what they want to accomplish and then determine how the institutions can contribute to meeting the goals.
- 6) Progress must be measured.

Comments of Task Force Members to Dr. Clarke's Presentation

Dr. Eric Clark:

I appreciate many things said. I would like to ask the group to keep a few things in mind as we move forward. We are passionately interested in getting more folks with credentials. We have a lot of conversation about this all the time.

I would ask you all to remember some of the points Dr. Jimmy Clarke made. You just can't use the same yard stick to measure CJC and IHL students. Statistically, CJC students tend to be older, not as well prepared academically, they tend not to be enrolled full time, tend to be working, and tend to have families. The traditional student model just doesn't apply very well at the CJC level. They have to stop out – go back to work to be able to get money to complete. We are all over this conversation at our CJCs, but it's statistically a different population – the same yard stick just won't work.

Dr. Jimmy Clarke:

I would echo those comments. What needs to happen – this group has to have a conversation on how to appropriately measure not just the CJCs, but also HBCUs, regional institutions, research institutions, etc. Every step of the way, you have to be very considerate and concerned about the yard stick measure. You have to come to understand how each institution will be measured to meet their goals.

Dr. Eric Clark:

Many come to CJC with just wanting a specific skill, not a degree.

Representative Kelvin Buck:

You have given us an appreciation of the complexity of the challenge. At the end of the day, we are talking about quality of life, not just graduation rates. Knowledge and skill based productivity is what we are looking for at the end of the day. With that said, I would like to hear from others in the room.

Dr. Hank Bounds:

What you will see is that we are going to ask you to think about some of the things that Dr. Clarke brought up. This is the thirty thousand foot view. We will get in the weeds about the issues and understanding what they are. A green sheet provides you with some proposed dates for future meetings and times. This is not the final answer, just something to react to. Dr. Clarke, we would appreciate any thought on other items that need to be added here. The bulleted points for meetings are some of the things we will need to address across time. If there are others to be added, please provide us that feedback; you may not be ready to do that today, but after reflection, we would appreciate your feedback. Jim (Borsig) will be point of contact – email or call him with those items.

7. Organizational Issues

Dr. Borsig reviewed the work plan and pointed out the August meeting will focus on a data presentation to understand where Mississippi stands. The MOA Learning Year grant will fund the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to provide this analysis, as well as the expenses of one of their senior analysts to make this presentation.

The September and October meetings will focus on specific methods to improve student outcomes. Successful programs within Mississippi's IHL and CJC institutions will be presented, as well as successful programs from within the sixteen Southern Region Education Board (SREB) states.

Two articles are included in your packet.

Chairman Kelvin Buck:

We need to try and get some direction on this meeting schedule.

Dr. Martha Saunders:

I sat on this similar taskforces in two other states. A lot of this is not new to me. What we have always concluded is that our students aren't succeeding for three reasons:

1. They are not prepared.
2. They do not enough money.
3. They meander in their purpose.

Let's not chew too much on what the problem is, but focus on the solutions. We don't have to reinvent the wheel – many have had these conversations. One size does not fit all – we are different enough among the IHLs.

At the end of the day, in other studies I have been a part of, it all boils down to individual campus commitment. If campuses have commitment, students will succeed – it can be imposed with a carrot or with a stick.

There must be strong incentive among institutions to change these things.

Chairman Kelvin Buck:

Are there any other comments from members of the Task Force?

Mr. Johnny Franklin:

I have a general comment. I don't care how you define completer and non-completer. Any way you look at it at any of the levels, we have a real issue with what happens to those people who don't complete, whether it is baccalaureate degree or a certificate of value. What becomes most critical is the quality of life issue for them, their community, and the state of Mississippi. Mississippians who enter the workforce without training don't fair as well as those who have completed. We have a tremendous piece of our population who are not even in the workforce. Without certificates or education, these citizens become wards of society instead of contributors to society.

We have to get more through the pipeline so they can hold jobs and be paid a meaningful wage to support families. We have a real issue with people. We don't have an enrollment problem. It is a completion problem. We need these students to earn a degree or certificate that allows them to make a decent living.

First: We need to consider older learners who were not successful the first time. We can better use the scarce resources if we get them through the first time. We have many citizen's who find it difficult to go back into the education system once they have families and other responsibilities.

Second: When you really look at where Mississippi is going, where the whole country is headed with a decline in revenue, how do we look at bigger things? How do we combine that with what Lumina is doing to enhance the work that we are doing, if we can get that grant? How can we learn how to better deal with declining resources.

Dr. Jimmy Clarke:

I am not certain that a two million dollar grant alone will offer enough to do what is necessary. 2020 is not a long way away. Completers that will start first grade this fall. They will already be a part of a process that hasn't produced enough. You have to think systemic, transformational change, a very difficult thing to swallow in the post secondary world. We haven't changed our structure since the first GI bill; yet, no longer does a high school diploma get you a middle class job. Those jobs just aren't in America anymore. Lack of understanding by the public at large, by state elected leaders, as well as the business community must be examined and responded to.

With that said, if this Task Force can establish a clear understanding and specific expectations, then give the IHL and CJC institutions some incentives, you will have had the right discussion in terms of deciding what needs to happen:

1. Set the Goal
2. Determine the measures
3. Continue to measure
4. Make hard decisions

Chairman Buck:

I am told lunch is ready, so its time to wrap up and then eat. The deadline for the Task Force report is December 31, 2009, so we have three or four meetings to come up with the report and any recommendations for legislation. We need to confirm the meeting time.

Dr. Eric Clark:

Does 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday work? This avoids a conflict for some of the members with a standing meeting the morning of every fourth Wednesday of the month.

Chairman Buck:

That time works for me. I recommend we meet at the IHL Board room at 1:00 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of the month for August, September, and October, as well as Wednesday, December 2, 2009.

Upon the motion of Representative Buck, seconded by Dr. Eric Clark the motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hank Bounds:

I think it is appropriate to spend some time away from this meeting and then provide Jim (Borsig) with feedback about what future meetings should look like, add or subtract meetings along the way, etc. It is important to go back to colleagues and get feedback/thoughts to make certain we have the right agenda to be productive.

Additional Comments

Chairman Brown:

I would like to point out on the chart (pie chart) that data is self reported data from the census. It is wrong. There is no way that 22% of our population has less than a high school degree. I would argue that the same thing happens with the college/professional degree. There is no way that only 18% of our population has a graduate degree. Don't be fooled by this data. The Census data is just worthless to me. I just don't believe that this data is accurate.

Dr. Jimmy Clarke:

I do agree that it is going to be important to understand all the different places where data exist. You can make it say whatever you want it to say. You will have to conclude what represents the most accurate presentation of the data.

Chairman Kelvin Buck:

It has been suggested that we can continue to discuss over lunch.

The meeting stood adjourned at 12:25 p.m.