MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Commonwealth Connections Academy Midtown Harrisburg Drop-in Center
1426 N. Third Street
Harrisburg, PA 17102

November 12, 2014

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Larry Wittig at 2:15 p.m.

Attending:

Carol Aichele	Maureen Lally-Green (via phone)	Justin Reynolds
Jay Badams	Donald LeCompte	Colleen Sheehan
James Barker (via phone)	Francis Michelini (via phone)	Craig Snider
James Grandon	Jonathan Peri	A. Lee Williams
Kirk Hallett	Mollie Phillips (via phone)	Larry Wittig

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 10, 2014 meeting of the Council of Higher Education were approved on a **Peri/Williams** motion.

COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Mr. Larry Wittig, Chairman of the State Board of Education, opened the meeting of the Council of Higher Education and thanked Commonwealth Connections Academy for hosting today's meeting. Mr. Wittig introduced CEO Dr. Maurice Flurie.

Dr. Maurice Flurie, CEO of Commonwealth Connections Academy, made the following remarks:

- The Harrisburg Family Service Center is one of two unique Service Centers in that it serves some students face-to-face on a regular basis in the Drop-in Center. Drop-in Centers are purely voluntary. The Harrisburg Drop-in Center serves approximately 75 students; the Philadelphia Drop-in Center serves approximately 170 students. The Drop-in Centers also have video streaming to make them accessible to students across the state.
- Commonwealth Connections Academy began in 2003-04 with 8 teachers and 380 students. Today, there are just fewer than 9,100 students and just under 500 employees. Growth is attributed to the unique way the Academy talks to parents; the Academy views itself as a family service organization with expertise in education, emphasizing the importance of family involvement in educational decisions.
- Commonwealth Connections Academy currently serves students in 62 counties in Pennsylvania, and 480 of the state's 500 school districts. The fastest-growing area is far

western Pennsylvania along the Ohio border, up to Erie. Ethnic demographic of the student population is similar to that of Pennsylvania. The student population is also approximately 20% special education – students who have a learning support need or an ADA accommodation.

- Another challenge the Academy faces is growth. Last year, 4,100 of the students enrolled were new to the school. What differentiates Commonwealth Connections Academy from many cyber charter schools is that 75-80% of enrolled students return year after year. Last year's graduating class was approximately 700 students; this year's graduating class will be approximately 900 students.
- Cyber education is face-to-face instruction virtually. There are webcams so that the students can see their teachers, the teacher can communicate digitally with the student, whether it be face-to-face via the camera, or whether they can edit work digitally on a smart board screen and send it directly back to the student. The teachers that come to Commonwealth Connections Academy from a traditional teaching environment find the greatest shock is how well they get to know their students, which seems to be counterintuitive in the seemingly impersonal virtual environment. The key is the amount of one-on-one contact maintained with the student and parents, which is unique to this particular learning environment.
- Commonwealth Connections Academy takes service seriously. 55% of students qualify for free and reduced lunches, illustrating the tremendous needs of students in poverty. Commonwealth Connections Academy developed a department called the Family Services Division, staffed by 70 full- and part-time employees whose job is to help the families engage the school's environment. These include parent mentors, family involvement coordinators; and the CCA Cares Program, which provides food and clothing to the families in the greatest need. This program uses a "teaching to fish" approach, requiring beneficiaries to participate in a financial management class, and nutrition classes. Several hundred families are served yearly, all by private donations; no public dollars are used in the CCA Cares initiative.
- Commonwealth Connections Academy's school performance profile rating is 52.4%. Reasons for this include that 4,000 of the students are new to the school. Commonwealth Connections Academy did research into student performance and found that the longer a student stays enrolled, the better they performed. Compared to school districts that Commonwealth Connections Academy's students predominantly come from, Commonwealth Connections Academy's students do very well.

REPORT OF THE ACTING DEPUTY SECRETARY HIGHER EDUCATION

Ms. Theresa Barnaby, Acting Deputy Secretary, provided the following report:

Rural Regional College

The fiscal code passed in July included language providing for the establishment of a rural regional college to serve an area of the commonwealth that does not have access to community college services. The college will have the authority to award associate degrees, certificates and diplomas. So that the college can begin operation as soon as possible, the board of trustees will

contract with an existing institution of higher education to provide courses for the service region. Once the college is established and able to operate independently, it will transition away from the initial partner and operate as a traditional college.

The legislation provided four duties that the Secretary is to carry out to establish the college. Dr. Dumaresq initially had to identify a nonprofit organization to assist her in designating the region to be served by the college. She named the Education Consortium of the Upper Allegheny (ECUA) to assist her in her other duties. The ECUA is a nonprofit currently receiving a community education council grant to provide educational opportunities in an 11-county region in Northwest Pennsylvania. In consultation with ECUA, the Secretary designated the following counties to make up the college's service area:

Cameron	McKean
Crawford	Potter
Elk	Venango
Erie	Warren
Forest	

Once the service area was established, the Secretary was required to confer with the nonprofit and jointly appoint individuals to serve as the board of trustees for the college. That process was completed at the beginning of this month.

The next step to be completed is for the Secretary to convene an initial meeting of the board. This will be held on December 2. Following that meeting, the board will have one year to submit a college plan to the Secretary outlining the operation of the college. The college is considered to be established when the Secretary approves the college plan. The language in statute does provide the State Board of Education with the authority to promulgate regulations for the operation of this college, should you so choose. The fiscal code included $1.2 Million in the Regional Community College Services line item for the operation of the rural regional college. Once the college plan is approved and the college is established, this money will be released to the board of trustees.

Student Teacher Assessment

The Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality (BSLTQ) is in the process of recommending a new assessment for student teaching to the Secretary of Education. Currently PDE accepts a "430" form that requires programs to assess the performance of their educator candidates in practical experience. We have several goals including to select an assessment that is consistent with the revised Educator Effectiveness system. The BSLTQ will be piloting a new student teaching assessment in near future. In February, 2014, the BSLTQ issued a Request for Information (RFI) to invite vendors to submit information regarding available third part assessment tools.

The term 'third-party assessment tool' is used to describe an assessment that relies on evaluators outside of the program at the higher education institution. The two companies that currently offer a third party student teaching tool are:

- Educational Testing Services (ETS); *Praxis* Performance Assessment for Teachers (PPAT) and
- Pearson; edTPA™

The BSLTQ has encouraged teacher preparation programs to pilot both student teaching assessment tools over the 2014-2015 academic year. Some preparation programs and associations have shown an interest in developing a tool that meets the same parameters of the RFI. BSLTQ will be performing additional research to identify national trends on the use of a third-party student teaching assessment. A great deal of work must be done before we are ready to make a decision on a recommendation. BSLTQ will keep the Board apprised of the process and the outcome.

Teacher Certification

House Bill 1816 – House Bill 1816 was signed by the Governor on October 22, 2014. It included a provision that will require colleges and universities to require students to pass the basic skills test prior to admission to a teacher preparation program. Students must pass basic skills tests to qualify for teacher certification and some students complete their preparation program only to find that they cannot pass the basic skills test. This new legislation will protect students from using time and money to pursue a preparation program if they cannot pass the basic skills test.

House Bill 1816 also includes a provision that exempts education specialists in post-baccalaureate programs from taking the basic skills tests. Students pursuing instructional certificates in baccalaureate programs have been exempt from the basic skills test. This legislation extends that exemption to education specialist, including school counselors, nurses and psychologists.

Higher Education Course Scheduling Preference for Veterans Act

The Higher Education Course Scheduling Preference for Veterans Act (Act 46 of 2014) requires Pennsylvania community colleges, state system universities and state-related universities to provide veteran students with course scheduling preference. The Act applies to any student who has been discharged or released from the U.S. Armed Forces under conditions other than dishonorable and has been admitted to a public institution. The student also must reside in the commonwealth while enrolled.

As of November 10, all 32 required institutions had established and implemented policies pursuant to the guidelines developed by PDE. The public institutions had until November 10, 2014, to comply.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools

This is the first year that institutions of higher education (IHEs) are eligible to participate in U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) initiative, and PDE's Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education (OPHE) has taken advantage of this opportunity and joined our Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) counterparts. The aim of ED-

GRS is to inspire schools, districts and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to strive for 21st century excellence by recognizing schools that:

1. Reduce environmental impact and costs;
2. Improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and
3. Provide environmental education, which teaches many disciplines, and is especially good at effectively incorporating STEM, civic skills, and green career pathways

OPHE's application is available along with OESE's on PDE's homepage through the Pathways to Green Schools link. A joint Penn*Link was released mid-October and a kick-off communication was sent out to our Higher Education leaders as well. Applications are due to PDE by December 8, 2014, and nominations due to U.S. Department of Ed by February 1, 2015.

American College Application Campaign

Pennsylvania's pilot year with American College Application Campaign (ACAC) is underway. ACAC is a national effort to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students pursuing a college degree or other higher education credential. The primary purpose of this effort is to help high school seniors navigate the complex college admissions process and ensure they apply to at least one postsecondary institution. The effort occurs during the school day, with a focus on students who might not otherwise apply to college. PDE staff has prepared by attending convening's, and the America Council on Education (ACE) has hosted trainings for our participating high schools' ACAC coordinators as well. Pennsylvania's College Application Week will be November 10-14, 2014, with each of our 12 confirmed schools holding their "Application Day" one day during that week. ACE will be volunteering at a handful of these locations, as well as PDE staff if schedules permit.

GED Grandfathering

The Division of Adult Education rolled out the grandfathering process in mid-May. As of the morning of October 31, 2014, 3664 individuals had submitted requests to have their 2002 Series GED test scores reviewed for eligibility. 2181 of those have one or more test scores that meet the criteria. At that point, 49 individuals had successfully earned their Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma under the grandfathering process.

The grandfathering option is available to current Commonwealth residents who have qualifying scores from 2002 Series GED tests taken in any state. The program will be in place through December 31, 2015.

ANNUAL ACT 101 PROGRAM REPORT BY PHEAA

Ms. Christine Zuzack, Vice President of State Grants and Special Programs, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, provided the following report:

- Participating institutions use Act 101 funds to provide services to educationally and economically disadvantaged students to help them succeed in higher education.

- Since 2007-08, annual funding for the Act 101 program has decreased 76% from $9.32 million to $2.26 million.
- For 2013-14, there are 35 participating programs at 33 institutions, and 4,187 students participating.
- The 70.88% first-year retention rate for Act 101 students from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 exceeded the national average rate of 65.8%.
- Act 101 students also earned a higher cumulative GPA in remedial courses (2.55) compared to the general undergraduate population (2.18).
- College-level course completion rates are very similar for Act 101 students (90.45%) and the general undergraduate population (91.59%).
- Act 101 students received $85 million in student financial aid ($54.4 million for grants, waivers, and scholarships; $1.3 million for student employment; and $29.3 million for student loans). This equates to $20,295 in financial aid per student.
- The programs themselves have flexibility in how they establish their programs and the types of service they offer, but all offer mentoring, academic advising, tutoring support, opportunities for field trips and educational experiences; some of the programs also offer summer bridge programs.
- Each of the programs also has an advisory board comprised of a wide constituency of community members, academic, administrative, students and parents.
- In the 2015-16 budget transmittal, PHEAA has requested a 5% increase from the Governor's Budget Office.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sally Winterton, President of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (PAC-TE), introduced PAC-TE's president-elect Dr. Kevin Zook, Dean of Education at Holy Family University. Ms. Winterton also addressed the Board with PAC-TE's comments on the Deputy Secretary's Report related to the pre-service teacher assessment. Ms. Winterton stated that for nearly two years, PAC-TE members have shared their concerns regarding PDE's move to a third-party assessment system. Three weeks ago at the PAC-TE Teacher Education Assembly, representatives from Pearson and ETS presented their products to PAC-TE members; following the presentation PAC-TE members shared their concerns during a debriefing session with Deputy Secretary Barnaby and Dr. Christina Baumer of PDE. Ms. Winterton reported that there are a variety of issues regarding the third-party assessment that concern teacher educators, which have been raised by the nearly 90 teacher preparation institutions across the Commonwealth and approximately 300 PAC-TE members who provided feedback following the two presentations.

Ms. Winterton concluded by saying that in light of the serious concerns highlighted the PAC-TE executive committee welcomes the opportunity to discuss further their concerns with the Council of Higher Education and the entire Board of Education, and working with PDE.

Council Chair Jim Grandon thanked Ms. Winterton for her remarks and stated that her concerns would be answered at a later time. Ms. Barnaby added that PDE has already informed the vendors that they will have a work group, the purpose of which will be to function as an advisory group, which will begin meeting after the first of the year. This work group will have

input into the process, whether it's to create another product or to decide which assessment to choose. All of that information will be provided to the State Board.

Board member Jonathan Peri observed that it has not been the tradition of the Board to respond to public comment, but that he is glad to hear that PDE is aligned with the notion of working collaboratively, and stated that he concurs with both PAC-TE and the Department that the collaboration should occur.

ACTION ITEMS

There were no action items.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Grandon updated the Board on the status of the Community College Survey presented to the Board in September 2014. The survey has been transmitted to all 14 community colleges in the Commonwealth with a request for the institutions to submit their responses no later than December 19. Mr. Grandon hopes that this time frame will provide the Council the opportunity to review the feedback received from the colleges at the January meeting as the next step in crafting a white paper to be submitted for the Council's consideration in the spring. At the same time, the Council is also awaiting responses from the colleges' board staff with work to compile a profile of each community college to serve as a supplement to the white paper.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Stephanie Jones

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant