



**Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner
Advisory Committee Meeting
Creating a More Prosperous Economy in Rhode Island
August 26, 2021 9:00 AM
Rhode Island Nursing Education Center
350 Eddy Street Providence, RI 02903**

MEETING MINUTES

The advisory committee meeting began at 9 AM with welcome remarks from Committee Co-Chairs Robert A. Weygand, Vice President of Administration and Finance, College Unbound; Former Lieutenant Governor and U.S. House member and Beverly Ledbetter, Esq. Chair of the Board of Directors for the Rhode Island Urban League; Former Vice President and General Counsel, Brown University.

At 9:25 AM Dr. Shannon Gilkey, Commissioner of Postsecondary Education reported about the state of higher education in Rhode Island. Commissioner Gilkey spoke about the 70 thousand students who are arriving on Rhode Island College campuses over the next week vaccinated, masked, and attending in-person classes. He thanked attendees for coming to the in-person gathering to aid the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and the state of Rhode Island in how we consider our higher education system to provide equitable opportunities to all Rhode Islanders and to help close critical gaps in our state's pipeline of talent. Commissioner Gilkey stated that there is a connection between postsecondary education and the benefits it bestows on state economies. He stated that the goals for the committee meetings were to build a new coalition of Rhode Islanders with a collective vision for how our higher education system is central to meeting the state's needs; a foundation for a state-coordinated, locally owned agenda; and an inclusive partnership to execute this vision in the foreseeable future. Commissioner Gilkey challenged the group to think about the traditional ways of viewing "college," higher education, and the definition of "student"; blur the intersections of K-12 education, workforce training, and higher education; and keep in the forefront the Rhode Island community, business, citizen, and the collective state - not a single program, organization, or college when considering higher education.

At 9:50 AM Dr. Anthony Carnevale, Director and Research Professor, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce gave a framing presentation on economic trends and workforce needs. Dr. Carnevale spoke about the changing economic and education landscape. He reported that the 2008 economic recession and the COVID-19 pandemic recession have caused long-term economic scarring for higher education students and their career trajectories. He stated that since the 1980s, higher education, and training have become the most well-traveled path to economic success for individuals and the postsecondary system has also become the capstone to an education system that exacerbates race and class privilege across generations.

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Dr. Carnevale spoke about the value of education and that before the 1990s, a high school degree was usually enough to earn a well-paying job and economic independence by age 25. This has shifted to 30 in today's society. Higher education and training have become more powerful over time, but their value is more complicated. One must evaluate the benefits of occupational training versus general skills from a liberal arts education. He referenced that Rhode Island will have 76,000 job vacancies by the end of 2021. 72 percent of jobs in RI will require postsecondary education by 2030. 16 percent of RI jobs will require graduate degrees, 1 point above the national average. 11 percent of jobs will require an Associate Degree, compared to a national average of 16 percent. Approximately 23 percent of RI jobs will only require a high school degree. Human talent is increasingly valued, which is a positive trend in a capitalist system. He stated that there are increasing differences in race and class that are surviving across generations. A child from a low-income family in American who has high test scores has a 31 percent chance of graduating from a 4-year college and getting a good job by age 28. A child with low test scores from a high-income family has a 71 percent chance of graduating from a 4-year college and getting a good job by age 28. He concluded that education is powerful, and as such, has become the biggest gear wheel in race and class inequality.

At 10:45 AM Amy Grzybowski, Executive Director, Rhode Island Higher Education & Industry Centers; Acting Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Board and Sarah Blusiewicz, Assistant Director of Workforce Development Services at Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training Provided a presentation on workforce development in Rhode Island. The presentation focused on strengthening the alignment between workforce development opportunities and the current needs of regional employers. They shared that over 100,000 Rhode Islanders were displaced from their jobs due to COVID-19 and 47 percent of the working-age population did not have any credential beyond a high school diploma or GED, which means that there are significant numbers of people who would benefit from reskilling or upskilling through workforce training programs. Back to Work RI is one strategy the state has used to help thousands of Rhode Islanders return to work in sustainable, strategic roles by hiring qualified Rhode Islanders based on skill and competency rather than traditional higher education credentials. State leaders should work together to make recommendations on changes needed to ensure that workforce training programs are making adjustments to reflect current economic needs. This group should include institutions of higher education (IHEs), employers, and other workforce leaders. They also shared that giving students exposure to workforce training opportunities earlier in the education continuum so that they can understand all the possible postsecondary education pathways is essential. State leaders should consider options to integrate workforce development concepts into K-12 curricula. This could include creating partnerships between job training providers and K-12 leaders to hold events such as career fairs, internship experiences, and paid learning experiences. Early exposure to career opportunities can also create a talent pipeline of students who have been developing networks among regional employers - which could keep students in state after they attain a degree or credential. They shared that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the wide range of needs faced by today's higher education student population, including students who participate in job training programs. Creating a culture of care and sustaining postsecondary institution's services that were expanded during the pandemic are critical steps that can help students complete their programs. Virtual technology can allow more students and staff to access resources, it is important to continue to provide in-person support services in addition to virtual options to ensure access to all students. Adult learners have needs that are different from other students, such as the need for flexible course schedules and childcare service options, and these needs

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must be supported to allow adult learners opportunities for skill development and further education. In the 2020-21 Academic Year, over \$6 million in financial aid was left on the table by Rhode Island residents due to not filling out the FAFSA, since many were not aware of their eligibility for this aid. It is not enough to rely on a student to locate the resources they need, IHEs and state leaders should create processes that connect students to a multitude of resources. Advisory Committee members suggested the creation of a one-stop-shop and website that compiles all various resources available for students. Since there is no one-size-fits-all resource for students, leaders must be willing to listen to what resources students need, rather than telling students the resources they should use. Committee members expressed the need to be on the ground in communities to truly understand the resources students need.

At 11:30 AM participants went into seven (7) small groups in a breakout session to discuss the importance of career training within the postsecondary education landscape and how to better support workforce training programs. At the end of the breakout session, each group reported out policy priorities and actionable items. There were seven (7) small groups and they reported out the following priorities and actionable items:

Group 1: Make sure that there is adult readiness; Transferability of skills; Promoting equity with adults; Coordination between employers; Longitudinal data system

Group 2: Making sure we provide wraparound services; Address the other educational determinants (aka opportunity gaps); Integrating K-12 and workforce development; The power that immigrants bring to Rhode Island

Group 3: A more holistic approach to education aka liberal arts; Ability to think clearly; Stacking credentials and a tighter grip on the adult education component; Wraparound student services and the holistic student approach; Underfunding of secondary education institutions makes access less accessible; Community College

Group 4: Need to make training programs and higher education much more relevant and reflective; Paid work-based learning experiences; There is lots of good work happening but how do we connect the students to the resources; Communications problem - turning this stuff into two-way conversations; Not spending enough time in the communities and town halls of emerging communities; Early opportunities for RI to explore what their opportunities are, earlier we expose pathways the better off we will be breaking down silos

Group 5: Perceived legitimacy of credentials from other countries

Group 6: Access, Equity, and Opportunity; Gap exists for people to move up the ladder in their workplace; Needs to be more employer networks and connections; Also ensuring that we break down requirements such as bachelors' required

Group 7: Pathways - connect the dots; Partnerships; Populations; Postsecondary ed Development; Need to keep talent in the state to drive the economy and more education programs aligning their curriculum

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There was then a full group discussion led by Beverly Ledbetter, to review the common features of policy priorities and action items identified in the small groups and to allow OPC Advisory Committee members to provide additional feedback and context. She shared that access seemed to be prevalent in the report-outs by the small groups. She also indicated that wrap-around student services and resources, like transportation and a need for educating people where they were common themes. She stated that there needs to be a strategic use of funds to invest in people. Committee member Linda Katz stated that building wrap-around student services and taking a bigger look at how we support adults in postsecondary education need to be a priority. Commissioner Gilkey shared that last year 6 million dollars in financial aid was left on the table by Rhode Islanders. Council members shared that we must get a handle on the K-12 student population to understand them better. We must also determine wraparound services – to and with whom and where.

The meeting continued at 12:45 PM with a panel presentation on credential pathways and current work in Rhode Island. The panel included Dr. Tammy Vargas Warner, Assistant Commissioner of Postsecondary Academic and Student Affairs, Tekla E. Moquin, Executive Director, Division of Workforce Partnerships, CCRI, and Jenifer R. Giroux, Associate Vice President, Professional Studies and Continuing Education, Rhode Island College

Dr. Warner provided opening remarks about college degrees and credentials and certificates and indicated that the discussion will discuss credentials that are not equally included in federal reporting, academic transcripts, etc. She stated that these make it difficult to account for educational levels and also make it difficult to determine what is needed. One of the strategies as an agency is to develop a road map for 70 percent of its people to earn a credential by 2025. She shared that we must increase the production of degrees and also increase the production of other types of credentials including credential stacking.

AVP Jenifer Giroux discussed bridging partnerships (progressive Latino, etc) and shared that all workforce learning programs have an experimental learning portion of the curriculum. She spoke about the Bachelor of Professional Studies - degree completion program designed for adults and credit for prior learning.

Director Moquin spoke about opportunities to earn credits and stack them into degree programs. She shared that 4,000 students a year were served with an additional 22,000 served through career services and transportation. She provided examples of General Dynamics/Electric Boat as sites for expanding your educational tracks to earn a degree while also continuing work. She shared that many programs are designed in a way that we tell people what they need. It is important to capture data from families at the schools and learn what those services that are needed are.

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At 1:30 PM the participants went into seven (7) small groups in a breakout session to brainstorm specific strategies that can be used to expand access and strengthen short-term and stackable credentials. At the end of the breakout session, there were seven (7) small groups and they reported the following strategies:

Group 1: Credential translation - making sure noncredit courses becoming credit-bearing; Translating things such as military experience; Conversations; Capacity - funding, staffing, FTE, all the things at the end of the day that make it work or not work; Public system is sometimes bulky and takes a little while to move on things.

Group 2: Credentials tie to value based on direct wage progression; Always they should bear credits and reciprocity; WHY NOT convene the state agencies that have licensure and talk through what's beneficial for the condo my and for the state; Once we have defined these credential values then we can move; Young people "don't care what you know until they know that you care".

Group 3: Data - lack of standardized data requests and reporting in state higher education; Difficult to compare data when not standardized; Are we truly investing in the data being collected and is it used to improve or change programs; State leaders roles in identifying credentials of value; Ensuring people of Rhode Island have access to these credentials; Credentials of value versus credentials of economic value; Training intensives to let people in these programs to get experience.

Group 4: (Spent a lot of time unpacking the definition of credential of value) Value for whom?; To whatever extent, avoid a one and done pathways – keep students engaged and the opportunity to participate further; Cautions that there needs to be enough oversight and ensure that a "credentials" market does not necessarily pop up similar to for-profit; Data piece - Need predictable and sustainable funding; Competing for state dollars does allow us to compare programs and which ones are being successful.

Group 5: Getting the information out there and educating the public what all these words mean and what this new world is; WhatsApp, TikTok; Looking at CO-OPs as a model; People with like skills who could come together and be able to share in a business, profits, and risk pulls; Making sure credentials aren't just leading to entry-level jobs.

Group 6: We need to ensure credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses are on transcripts so that it creates a relationship between the student and SCND students and tracking where they go; Need for robust longitudinal data; More community endgame to truly understand what the community needs.

Group 7: Credit-bearing - should be a connection tying these credentials to credits; National best practices that can contribute to this; Counseling - help understand career path; Curriculum-employer validated; Care- wraparound services, pandemic taught us helping people overcoming barriers.

At 2:30 PM there was a full group discussion led by Co-Chair Bob Weygand about the common features of policy priorities identified in the small groups and a discussion by OPC Advisory Committee members. Co-Chair Weygand asked the group how will we discuss credentialing and

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curriculum credit? Are credentials being driven by the workforce and the employer? Who do we give the authority to define what is credit-bearing and what is not to impact change? He shared that historically, academics has decided that something is a degree that they want to be developed and the school does. The members discussed that we now have to determine what happens when something isn't a course, like translating experiences abroad and where that information should be held. If policies are being developed and the people aren't in the room that are being impacted by that decision you lose the opportunity to keep students enrolled and on the pathway to completion. Further discussion took place about workforce development and higher education coming together. Some discussion took place about higher education not giving credit to things that they don't provide, and they thought that lived experiences should count towards degrees. Apprenticeship programs were cited as an example of this. Commissioner Gilkey spoke about Indiana's prior learning assessment clearinghouse and how things are coordinated across different groups. He shared that longitudinal data is critically important in the coordination between various groups that are involved.

The 2nd meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on Friday, September 24th from 9 AM – 3 PM at the Rhode Island Nursing Education Center. The meeting adjourned at 3 PM.