Meeting of the Council on Postsecondary Education
Wednesday, January 5, 2022, 5:30 PM

Community College of Rhode Island
Knight Campus Room #4090
400 East Avenue, Warwick, RI 02886

Meeting Minutes

Chair Timothy DelGiudice called this meeting to order at 5:34 PM, and acknowledged that a quorum was present.

Council on Postsecondary Education members present:

Timothy DelGiudice, Chair, Council on Postsecondary Education
Barbara Cottam, Chair, Board of Education
Dennis Duffy
Rachelle Green Arrived at 5:40 PM
Thomas Izzo
Michael Mello

Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC) staff present:

Shannon Gilkey, Ed.D., Commissioner
Anne Marie Coleman, Director of Labor Relations
Ronald Cavallaro, Esq., General Counsel
Tammy Warner, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner, Academic and Student Affairs
Susan Mansolillo, CFO
Amy Grzybowski, Executive Director, Westerly Education Center
Catherine McConnell, Director of Strategic Initiatives
Beth Bailey, Director of Communications

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) participant:
Meghan Hughes, President

Rhode Island College (RIC) participant:
Helen Tate, Provost
1. Acceptance of the Agenda

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion that the Council on Postsecondary Education accept the agenda for the meeting of January 5, 2022.

On a motion duly made by Michael Mello and seconded by Dennis Duffy, it was:

VOTED: THAT  The Council on Postsecondary Education accept the agenda for the meeting of January 5, 2022.

VOTE:  5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS:  Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Thomas Izzo, and Michael Mello

NAYS:  0

ABSTAINS:  0

2. Approval of the Minutes

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion that the Council on Postsecondary Education approve the minutes of the meetings that took place on December 15, 2021, as presented.

On a motion duly made by Michael Mello and seconded by Dennis Duffy, it was:

VOTED: THAT  The Council on Postsecondary Education approve the minutes of the meetings that took place on December 15, 2021.

VOTE:  5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS:  Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Thomas Izzo, and Michael Mello.

NAYS:  0

ABSTAINS:  0

3. Reports from the Chairs

A. Council on Postsecondary Education – Updates and issues affecting local and national higher education.
B. Board of Education – Updates and issues affecting local and national PK-20 education.

Chair DelGiudice shared that communications were received from both the Community College of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College regarding the opening of both institutions for the next semester, and the decision made by the presidents in consultation with members of the Council, Chair Cottam, and the college communities. The campuses are opening on schedule on January 18 and they will be fully operational, however, some classes, with a few exceptions, will be remote for a while. Rhode Island College will stay remote until February 7, 2022, and the Community College of Rhode Island until February 14, 2022.

Chair DelGiudice noted that with the infection rate and situation that we are in this is not an easy decision to make, and there was a lot of thought and a lot of careful deliberation going into that process. Going forward, it will be continuously monitored and evaluated daily. He also noted that there is a great deal of confidence for the administration of both the institutions to deliver robust programming to all the students and that the Council is here to support.

4. Report from the Commissioner

Commissioner Gilkey stated that he is deferring his time to the presentations being given for Prepare RI and the Strategic Plan.

5. Discussion Items

A. Discussion regarding the PrepareRI Plan

Chair DelGiudice introduced Catherine McConnell, Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner.

Director McConnell shared that PrepareRI is an interagency (RIDE, GWB, and OPC) initiative partnering with employers and communities to support youth in Rhode Island, and it is aimed at closing the gap between school and employment. It began in 2017 with a $2 million New Skills for Youth Grant from JP Morgan Chase, which Rhode Island was one of only ten states to win.

The initiative focuses on ensuring that all students in Rhode Island are college and career-ready by ensuring that all students have the opportunity to explore many options and that they are gaining expertise through career and technical education, dual enrollment, and work-based learning. They will be informed about the different options that exist so they can make informed decisions.
The original program, PrepareRI 1.0, was completed in 2020 and led to an increase of 39% in CTE enrollment, a 131% increase in dual enrollment, and an increase of 470% in computer sciences courses, among other accomplishments.

The initiative is now moving forward with PrepareRI 2.0. The team has done a lot of work moving forward, including listening tours and stakeholder conversations, and applied the feedback. Director McConnell offered to meet with any Council member if they would like to provide additional feedback.

Chair DelGiudice thanked Director McConnell and acknowledged the interagency collaboration. Senator Izzo inquired if the 39 districts have been included in the conversation and if they have identified that they can work with students as the PrepareRI 2.0 plan requires. Spencer Sherman from RIDE shared that the 2.0 plan is at the early stages of receiving feedback.

Senator Izzo also asked whether there is an impact on learning and overall knowledge due to a shift from hands-on learning to computerized delivery. Commissioner Gilkey shared that there are applications of career and technical education that incorporate both technology and hands-on learning. He also shared that the Prepare RI framework helps interagency training merge with the higher education system of delivery. Dennis Duffy stated that it would be helpful to define what the role of the commissioner and the office of the postsecondary education will be with PrepareRI. There was further discussion about the interagency coordination and conversations that are continuing about roles and responsibilities.

B. Discussion regarding the RIOPC Strategic Plan

Commissioner Gilkey stated that there are three main areas of the plan: process, scope, and systems approach. In March 2021, a meeting-the-moment agenda was created. Meetings took place with local leaders and an advisory committee was formed comprised of 40 public and private leaders and institutions to help guide the Office of Postsecondary Education in thinking about the strategic plan. Commissioner Gilkey stated that higher education can be a central part of the State of Rhode Island’s response to the challenges we will face over the next five years. He stated that the approach that we want to use moving forward, is establishing effective systems when thinking about getting 52.9% of our population to 70% or beyond.

He shared that there are systems of workforce development across K-12, higher education, and the economy. They can be improved upon to ensure there is system alignment between labor, economic development, and higher education and research. The strategic plan is a systems approach for higher education, knowing that higher education has to play a critical role in moving our state forward, given the pandemic and the economy. He stated that we want Rhode Island to be the leader in understanding, developing, and implementing effective systems across K-12, higher education, and commerce to ensure we are competitive nationally and globally.
Executive Director Kimberly Bright provided an overview of the draft of the RIOPC Strategic Plan. The OPC Advisory committee meetings and recommendations helped to shape the strategic plan. In December the draft plan was shared with the institutions and now it is being shared with the Council. The goal is to discuss the draft plan today and have it adopted by the Council and Board of Education next month.

The Council is being asked to provide feedback and guidance on the draft specifically on the areas of mission as an agency, theory of action or how the work can get done, values as an organization, and where the priorities should lie regarding setting ambitious but attainable goals. Executive Director Bright shared that specific work plans will be created to meet the priorities and objectives of the strategic plan. She shared that the mission has been revised to reflect a change in focus from the Board of Education and the Council to a focus on the student through the guidance of the board and council. She noted that language was added for the goals of the postsecondary system including making it high quality, equitable, accessible, and aligned to the PK-12 system and the economy.

There was a discussion about some language choices in the draft. It was recommended that perhaps some stronger choices could be made with words. It was also noted that there seems to be a shift in the focus of the current draft mission to be broader and to include workforce training. Executive Director Bright and the Commissioner indicated that all the feedback and comments provided by Council members would be considered, and that individual meetings would be offered for further feedback.

President Hughes spoke about the relationship with the Westerly Education Center and stated that nationally high performing community colleges are doing this same thing and it is an amazing opportunity for CCRI, one that they remain very eager to continue doing well.

Executive Director Bright explained that the agency priorities for the next five years are equity, affordability, adult success, alignment with the state's workforce and economic development priorities, and secondary to postsecondary transitions. She shared some highlights from each of the priorities.

Executive Director Bright indicated that the next steps for the Strategic Plan are to make revisions based on Council feedback, to bring the Strategic Plan back to Council at a special meeting for adoption in February, and then bring it to the Board of Education for adoption. Once this is done, the work plans will be developed and then the work begins for the fiscal year beginning in July 2022.

Chair DelGiudice encouraged OPC to reach out to each Council member to set up meetings to provide feedback.

C. Discussion regarding an amendment to the Council’s COVID-19 Vaccinations of Students Policy
Chair DelGiudice share that pursuant to the Council procedure for amending and approving policies, the proposed amendments to both the Council’s COVID-19 Vaccinations of Students Policy and the Council’s COVID-19 Vaccination of Council Non-Classified Employees Policy will be discussed at this meeting and then be an action item and voted upon at a special meeting to be scheduled. He then called upon General Counsel Ronald Cavallaro.

General Counsel Cavallaro shared that when the Council approved its COVID-19 Vaccinations of Students Policy back in September, it acknowledged that the policy and the practices at the colleges may need to be modified and amended based upon future developments with the pandemic.

Due to the introduction of the variants and the rise in cases in Rhode Island, the CDC and the Rhode Island Department of Health have recommended that individuals receive a booster in addition to the vaccination. As such, this proposed amendment, the red line changes, modify the policy to include the requirement of a booster shot. The timeframe in the original policy for requiring vaccinations is now changed to the start of the spring 2022 semester. Language is also added at the end of the policy authorizing the Commissioner to modify both policies, the students’ and non-classified employees’ policies, based upon changes with COVID-19 and the pandemic.

D. Discussion regarding an amendment to the Council’s COVID-19 Vaccination of Council Non-Classified Employees Policy

General Counsel Cavallaro shared that the same situation applies to the proposed amendment to the COVID-19 Vaccination of Council Non-Classified Employees Policy, which also requires a booster shot. The amendment, the red-lined changes in the policy, have some blank areas for dates to be filled in based upon Council’s approval. There is also language added authorizing the Commissioner, as needed, to modify the policy based on changes with COVID-19 and the pandemic.

Chair DelGiudice reiterated that a vote would be taken at the next Council meeting to approve these changes, and asked Council members to reach out to General Counsel Cavallaro with any other comments.

6. Executive Session

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion that the Council on Postsecondary Education enter Executive Session.

On a motion duly made by Rachelle and seconded by Michael Mello, it was:

VOTED: THAT The Council on Postsecondary Education enter into Executive Session for the following items:

A. Discussion regarding collective bargaining – all
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bargaining units, pursuant to R.I.G.L. §42-46-5(a)(2).

B. Discussion regarding potential litigation, pursuant to R.I.G.L. §42-46-5(a)(2).

VOTE: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, and Michael Mello.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The Council entered Executive Session at 7:00 PM.

The Council reconvened in Open Session at 7:25 PM.

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion that the Council on Postsecondary Education seal the minutes of the Executive Session held on January 5, 2022.

On a motion duly made by Michael Mello and seconded by Dennis Duffy, it was:

VOTED: THAT The Council on Postsecondary Education seal the minutes of the Executive Session held on January 5, 2022.

VOTE: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, and Michael Mello.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. Next Meeting

Chair DelGiudice stated that there would be one or two special meetings happening that council members would be notified and the Board of Education meeting will be held on
February 2, 2022.

8. Adjourn

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

On a motion duly made by Rachelle Green and seconded by Michael Mello, it was:

VOTED: THAT The Council on Postsecondary Education adjourn the meeting of January 5, 2022.

VOTE: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, and Michael Mello.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM.