

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Minutes**

The February 27, 2018 meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was held in the 21st Floor Conference Room, One Ashburton Place, Boston, Massachusetts.

SPC Members Present: J.D. La Rock
Fernando Reimers
Paul Toner
Commissioner Carlos E. Santiago, ex-officio, non-voting member

Other BHE Members Present: Secretary of Education's designee, Tom Moreau

Department Staff Present: Winifred Hagan; Ashley Wisneski, Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Patricia Marshall, Kate Flanagan Copans

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Fernando Reimers called the meeting to order at 12:24 p.m. and invited SPC members in attendance to make brief introductions.

II. MINUTES

Chair Reimers brought forth a motion to accept the minutes of the January 16, 2018 SPC meeting. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously by all SPC members present.

III. REMARKS AND REPORTS

A. Committee Chair's Remarks

Chair Reimers made brief introductory remarks and thanked everyone in attendance, including the campus guests. He remarked that the Strategic Planning Guidelines which intend that the work of the campuses will have some synergy with statewide goals, will be addressed. In their first iteration, BHE asked the campuses to be inclusive of the broad goals of the Vision Project. Chair Reimers continue that today's conversation will be helpful to take stock of where we are, how the process is working, and whether or not we are doing better in achieving statewide goals, or is there a need for further revision.

B. Commissioner's Remarks

The Commissioner began his remarks by expressing appreciation for the SPC convening today to have this conversation despite there being no Strategic Plans to approve. He noted that there were campus representatives in attendance today to participate in this conversation and that when the BHE first began this process, they included the campuses and encouraged their participation in order to have an open process. He noted that the intent is to have the presidents, of which there are so many new ones in the last year, to have a conversation about the mission and values of their institutions. He continued that the BHE process is very open and includes three Touch Points. However, the transition from Touch Point III and beyond perhaps needs more guidance. The further in-depth discussion with campus leadership and the Secretary of Education is similar to the conversation between the Commissioner and campus presidents during the presidential evaluation process. He noted that there is a post BHE process that is less public; there are not open meetings with the campuses after Touch Point III. He remarked that he sees changes down the road if tuition retention comes to be, but there should be more clarity here; there are strategic planning and operational issues which are things that campuses might not be able to discuss in a public setting, but there are ways we could tweak the guidelines to make ensure the campuses are getting the right guidance from the board.

SPC Chair Reimers asked a clarifying question regarding the post BHE action conversations the campus has with the Secretary of Education: are these distinct processes since the SOE has his own approval? The Commissioner responded that they are distinct processes but not decoupled.

IV. Discussion

Board member Toner began the discussion by stating that whatever process the BHE is following should not be too different from what the Secretary's office wants, so we are not setting false expectations. He continued that he thinks all the presentations have been thoughtful and deep, but asked if the BHE should have a standardized rubric every campus could follow so they should have some understanding what an executive summary should look like. He remarked that he struggles with the guidance the SPC gives them, wanting the campuses to be put on the right path but still retaining some autonomy.

Commissioner Santiago asked the Secretary's designee Tom Moreau to comment about post board action, noting that campuses often have to come back with more information so we can infer that we are not giving them the proper guidance.

Mr. Moreau responded that he did participate in a lot of those post board conversations, and that he was struck by the information the campus leaders could provide that the Secretary was asking for that was more operational in scope. He asked if there are more details that we could

ask for that would not be cookie cutter. He then referenced page five of the 2017-2018 Revised Campus Strategic Planning Guidelines and Procedures document, remarking that the section on goals is really loaded. He remarked that the activity seems to be happening on the campuses even if it is not getting reflected in the plans, and asked how we can spell this out with more clarity.

Board member La Rock remarked that he thinks there is a middle ground where the BHE can provide more structure without being instructive. He continued that during the process of developing North Shore Community College's (NSCC) plan, he sought to achieve a plan that a reasonable observer would say that this campus has been thoughtful about the important things: academic outcomes, core business metrics, some articulations of a vision, and the articulation of some sort of campus identity. Further, thinking about the role of a state board and doing things that support both system-ness and uniqueness, he likes what makes our campuses distinctive. He remarked that it is important intelligence for the BHE to come up with a statewide strategy to celebrate what makes our individual campuses unique; he remarked that he could tell you what that is for a handful of campuses but not all, and he's someone who is paying attention. He remarked that he believes there is a disconnect between the documents the SPC gets but what is actually happening on the ground, and that there is some opaqueness that requires the SPC too much to unpack. LaRock indicated his opinion that it is not efficient and leads campuses to feel that the BHE is criticizing them, which they're not, they just want more information. He concluded that he thinks this is a case to have more articulation on what we require.

SPC Chair Reimers then invited the campus representatives in attendance to provide feedback.

Framingham State University President Javier Cevallos remarked that the challenge that they have is the difference between strategic plans and the operational plans. The Strategic Plan is where we want to go, and it has glossy marketing materials. The second level is the operational plan, which is how the campuses are going to make this all work, which also entails the big goals of the DHE. He made an analogy of using GPS to drive, and sometimes there are traffic detours necessary once you hit the road; he does not want to include all of the potential detours in a public document.

Chair Reimers remarked that the role of the BHE is to engage with the campuses at the level of strategy more than the level of operations, which he agrees with, but noted that he has a different view of strategy than just marketing, specifically, knowing what programs campuses you want to open and close how it fits in with the overall plan. He asked the SPC if they have a similar understanding, and are not entirely interested in an operational document.

Board member Toner remarked that he wants to see some serious thoughtfulness, but does not need to see all the nuts and bolts.

Chair Gabrieli remarked that the SPC should ensure that the planning process creates a moment in time to seize, and that if the board does not accelerate the rate in which we ask the hard questions, we are going to find ourselves further adrift. He continued that drifting on curated autopilot is a bad strategy, and that we need to find strategy that says here are our broad goals. He remarked that he wants to challenge campuses, and have a moment of honest discussion. From a board point of view, Gabrieli wants to give leaders a chance to say here are

some challenges and where are we going to be in 3-5 years. He remarked that the plans the SPC has been getting feel too safe and too comfortable.

Board member La Rock remarked that on his campus, they are very explicit about aligning our Strategic Plan to their presidential evaluation. He continued that their Strategic Plan is essentially five goals that can be devolved into yearly goals and that are easily evaluated. That alignment has led his campus to understand that the challenges faced are deep, and it provides a sense of urgency that they have got to work harder, course correct or try a new strategy; it is a useful way in which the whole process works from strategic to tactical to evaluation and accountability.

Board member Reimers remarked that he sees strategic planning as an opportunity for the leadership team to cement a legacy rather than chart a new course. He then remarked on the proliferation of degrees, mounting student debt and the development of a three-year degree baccalaureate program as response to that, which he would love to see.

Chair Gabrieli cited Bristol Community College's Strategic Plan as an example, which included a very modest enrollment increase. He remarked that there should be a consideration of bigger and bolder change if you see storm clouds. He remarked that if campuses are not asking these questions during the planning process, when would they ever ask them? He wants to consider a change that gives campuses an opportunity to ask these hard and challenging questions.

Northern Essex Community College President Lane Glenn remarked that everything he has heard is compelling, but asked if we trying to make one with everything. The practical use of these plans on the campuses is becoming very difficult, and he cited an example of how they just gently retired one of the goals in their plan on external affairs; the reason why is because of their upcoming capital campaign. He stated that the campuses need to retain some flexibility to be responsive. He remarked that there is something enticing about a template, but noted that the process also serves as leadership development on their campuses with their staff. He also asked to have consideration of staffing limitations, noting there is just one person on his campus with planning in their title.

Ellen Kennedy, President of Berkshire Community College remarked that BCC's plan was grandfathered in prior to the Guidelines and it is a one page document that campus leadership saw as a framework; their interpretation of a Strategic Plan is different from the BHE's expectations. She continued that she would encourage the BHE to decouple the vision from the operations, as campus presidents are experiencing frustration, and to give the presidents some understanding because they have to get buy-in from the faculty and campus community. She remarked that the presidents are keenly aware of the financial implications of every decision made.

David Podell, President of MassBay Community College remarked that his campus is presently at Touch Point II, and he agrees with President Kennedy that if campuses included everything it would be a behemoth, noting that campuses are already thoughtful about their plans. He continued that his campus did some SWAT analysis after their last meeting, and noted that what the BHE is seeing through their plans is just the surface, and an "iceberg" underlies their plans.

Salem State University Provost David Silva remarked that his campus just completed what he termed “Touch Point IV”¹ with the Secretary of Ed and his staff and noted his surprise because he thought they were done. He remarked that the Secretary was skeptical about some of their goals but their plan was aspirational. He continued that there remains some uncertainty about what is still required and if they even have an approved plan or not after their conversation with the Secretary. This leaves campuses with a lack of clarity.

Mr. Moreau responded by giving some historical information about the role of the Secretary and its statutory requirements and authority over plans, which started in 2008, noting their other thing they do is coordinate budget requests. He continued that the review at the end of the process is within the Secretary’s statutory authority, and the intent was to avoid having the campuses go through this process twice with both the BHE and the Secretary. He then cited some examples of SSU’s conversation with Secretary Peyser and how it was fascinating and productive, remarking that he thinks it still should happen. He continued that there is a lot of running room in these Guidelines and maybe there is too much, noting that these important conversations are happening but just not getting reflected in the plans for some reason.

Board member Toner suggested giving of a list of requirements needed to be included in all plans.

BHE Chair Gabrieli remarked that he is concerned about too much disconnect, and asked if there is a consequence to not having an approved plan. He asked, what if the BHE were able to say here are a limited number of questions for which we need to have a crisp answers? As an example, how are we going to mitigate the growing cost of higher education? It is a huge weight on us, even if it may be beyond the purview of this board. He asked, can we still have a structured process with Touch Points that allows for individuality, but still have a list of crucial questions that determine the overall focus and strategy of the state that we will need some answers to. He also remarked that he understands the frustration regarding post a BHE approval conversation with the Secretary.

Chair Reimers remarked that the SPC should not call it “Touch Point IV” because it is a separate and distinct process; the work of the BHE board is not concerned with all the operational matters, and should let the Secretary keep doing that.

Board member La Rock remarked that he thinks that the BHE can do better in articulating their own master vision, noting that this conversation occurs in bits and pieces but it is not clear to the campuses. He continued that MGL Ch 15A does require the BHE to have a statewide master plan, an articulation of key questions that is memorialized and not ad-hoc that campuses can look to with respect to their own campus conditions.

Commissioner Santiago remarked, “the first step to recovery is to admit you have a problem.” He continued that last week, all of the campuses received guidance on presidential evaluations. He stated that he does think a statewide strategic framework does exist; there are three major goals that we are working towards, and we additionally do come out with something from the BHE retreat that provides guidance to the campuses. He remarked that he does not think this is

¹ There is no Touch Point IV in the Guidelines

an insurmountable problem, and the BHE should acknowledge that there will be another level of approval with the Secretary so campuses can prepare for it.

Board member Toner remarked that earlier feedback noted that both campuses and the DHE do not have sufficient staff, so perhaps there could be some resource sharing to both save costs and bring some degree of commonality.

Board member La Rock left at 1:33 p.m.

Chair Reimers remarked that this discussion has been helpful and thanked the SPC and campus guests for their participation. There being no further discussion, he called for a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 1:34 p.m.