



**Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.**  
State Superintendent of Schools

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**MSDE Digital Learning Advisory  
Stakeholders Committee Meeting**

**March 19, 2021  
Virtual Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

Council Members in Attendance: Dr. Carol A. Williamson (Chairperson), Ms. Donna Baker, Ms. Carol Beck, Mr. Brad Engel, Dr. Julie Evans, Ms. Marquita Friday, Ms. Anna Gannon, Ms. Robin Hopkins, Ms. Yasmine Juhar, Ms. Marsye Kaplan, Mr. Scott Nichols, Ms. Rebecca Penserio, Dr. Peggy Pugh, Ms. Nina Riggs, Ms. Kelly Ruby, Ms. Leann Schubert, Ms. Amy Shepler, Ms. Susan Spinnato, Ms. Tonya Sweat, Ms. LaTanya Taylor, and Mr. Jonathan Turner

MSDE Staff in Attendance: Ms. Val Emrich, Mr. Shane J. McCormick, and Ms. Erin Senior

Members Not in Attendance: Mr. Brian Beaubien, Mr. Brian Dulay, Dr. Colleen Eisenbeiser, Dr. Joey Jones, Mr. Andrew Moore, II, Dr. Gina Solano, Mr. John Tompkins, and Dr. Christine Welch

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m. when a quorum was established.

**Welcome & Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Carol Williamson, chairperson, welcomed the members and reviewed the activities during the previous meeting and the members reviewed the meeting minutes from the February 11, 2021 meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Ms. Tonya Sweat and was seconded by Ms. Leann Schubert. A roll call of the members was made to approve the minutes.

Roll Call Vote: 21 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstained. The motion carried.

Dr. Williamson reviewed the meeting agenda with the members and the topics that would be discussed. Dr. Williamson shared that several resources had been added to the hybrid teaching and learning resource page that had been created and posted on the MSDE website. These resources have been provided by staff from local school systems (LSS), but additional resources are welcomed to provide as much information and guidance as possible.

## **Maryland Blueprint Update**

Dr. Williamson discussed the Blueprint for Maryland's Education, also known as the Kirwan Bill. Dr. Williamson shared that the Maryland General Assembly voted to override the Governor's veto of the initial legislation that was passed during the 2020 General Assembly, but that adjustments to the original legislation submitted during the 2021 General Assembly are ongoing. A hearing on the bill took place on March 15, 2021; the legislature is planning to increase funding for digital devices among other initiatives. Dr. Williamson shared that the State Board will receive a presentation on broadband connectivity during its meeting on March 23, 2021. Broadband connectivity has been an ongoing issue in bridging the digital divide for students across the State.

Dr. Williamson discussed additional components of the Blueprint through amendment legislation, including modifications to the timeline of administration of State assessments, and the proposed accountability implementation board, which would sit above the State Board of Education. The legislation also proposes setting up a Board to oversee the federally funded Perkins Grant, and allocating funds to provide additional tutoring and after school services, funding towards a summer school component, services to address student trauma, and strategies to address learning loss.

Ms. Anna Gannon asked whether the summer school component in the legislation was written in the context of the previous legislation and will be adjusted, or if it would be implemented as originally written in summer 2021 if the legislation passes. Dr. Williamson stated her interpretation was that it would still go into effect in summer 2021, but that she would inquire to confirm if that was accurate. Dr. Williamson stated that several LSSs have indicated they would be offering some form of summer programming to address learning loss, but that summer programming would not be required for every student. A copy of the legislation would be shared with the members at the conclusion of the meeting.

## **2021 General Assembly-Legislative Update**

Ms. Val Emrich, MSDE staff, provided an update on virtual learning-focused legislation filed in the 2021 General Assembly. *HB 1376* contains several components and a hearing was held March 17, 2021. The legislation would require the MSDE to establish a state-wide learning management system (LMS) and hire a staff member to oversee the LMS. The legislation would require the MSDE to expand computer and internet security for virtual education. County boards of education would be required to annually publish information regarding virtual learning offerings within their systems.

Ms. Emrich provided an update regarding *SB 966*, which would authorize the MSDE to make a procurement on an expedited basis with the approval of the State Board, authorize virtual schools to operate on a year-round basis, require the MSDE to issue a request for proposal (RFP) for a state-wide platform to provide virtual education, and to award a contract for the platform. Ms. Kelly Ruby raised concerns with the proposal of the MSDE providing a state-wide learning platform given that LSSs utilize their own resources. Ms. Emrich stated that the language in the

legislation was very vague; the interpretation of the MSDE staff was that this language refers to the LMS.

Ms. Carol Beck clarified for the members that the Department of Legislative Services posts fiscal notes for each piece of legislation, which contain more detailed information regarding the fiscal or policy impact of the legislation. The members were directed to the online link to the fiscal note for *HB 1376* found on the Maryland General Assembly's website. The fiscal note for *SB 966* had not been posted at the time of the meeting.

### **ESSER & MSDE's Learning Management System**

Ms. Emrich shared with the members that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) had been established between the MSDE and Maryland Public Television (MPT) for online course development using ESSER funds. The courses offered through this MOU would include courses for students in several content areas, and nine educator modules to align with student courses. Ms. Marquita Friday spoke to the members about the use of ESSER funding and youth apprenticeship programs, including students participating in the world language apprenticeship program. Dr. Williamson shared that with each allocation of ESSER funds, ninety percent of funds are allocated to LSSs and the remaining ten percent are available as set aside funds. The remaining funds are being allocated to focus on specific areas, including social and emotional learning initiatives, initiatives to address learning loss, etc.

Ms. Emrich reviewed the MSDE LMS that had been approved by the Board of Public Works, which approved the selection of Canvas. The LMS would provide six educator professional learning courses, online and blended facilitator training, an external evaluation of course development and piloting of courses, and expanded accessibility review capabilities. Dr. Peggy Pugh spoke to the needs of LSSs for guidance in applying for subsequent ESSER funding.

Ms. Emrich reviewed some of the features offered by Canvas with the members and the benefits of these features. The members were informed that they would break into groups to discuss the ways that LSSs could use the State LMS, focusing on issues such as economies of scale.

The members broke into groups at 9:47 a.m. The full committee reconvened at 10:01 a.m.

Ms. Gannon shared on behalf of group three. Some LSSs currently utilize Canvas, and were able to discuss the benefits of Canvas. The group discussed some of the benefits of a state-wide LMS, such as the building of a module to complete a course for renewal of teacher certification, and allowing professional learning to be housed in one location. The group felt that a state-wide LMS would allow for LSSs to share content and increase collaboration between LSSs in a shared location. The group felt that LSSs already utilizing Canvas would be able to provide training and direct assistance to other LSSs.

The group identified some potential concerns with a state-wide LMS, including the need to learn a new system. However, the group also felt there were opportunities to entice LSSs to join the LMS, including potential cost savings.

Ms. Leann Schubert presented on behalf of group two. The group felt that a state-wide LMS would be beneficial to smaller LSSs, but might not be as valuable to larger LSSs. The group felt that utilizing a state-wide LMS would create a repository for MSDE committees, save costs down the road, and house resources in one location to assist all LSSs.

Ms. Amy Shepler presented on behalf of group one. The group identified the potential value in offering professional development opportunities across the State. The group also identified potential cost savings for LSSs to join a state-wide LMS. The group also discussed opportunities to create state-wide groups to allow students across LSSs to collaborate on a variety of topics, including issues of diversity and equity.

Ms. Sweat spoke to the parent perspective of the benefit of a state-wide LMS, stating that having a shared system could make transitioning student records between LSSs much easier. Ms. Marsye Kaplan echoed the sentiments of Ms. Sweat, stating that within the special education community there are some LSSs for which transferring student IEP and other records is easier, but for which transferring between other districts is more difficult. Ms. Gannon stated that Canvas offers several sides to their online portal, such as separate sides for parents, students, etc. Ms. Gannon asked whether there would be a process for LSSs already utilizing Canvas to transition their subscription to the state-wide LMS; Dr. Williamson stated that the issue would have to be researched further.

### **Future Ready Support**

The members were asked for their feedback on utilizing ESSER funding to implement the Future Ready Schools (FRS) framework. The members were asked to consider two components of implementation: readiness and self-reflection, and LSS plan (gears) and implementation. Ms. Ruby stated that considerations will be different across the State, as some LSSs are most likely beyond the readiness and self-reflection component and are ready to plan and implement, while others are not. Ms. Emrich reminded the members of the FRS framework and the use of the gear components utilized in the self-reflection.

Ms. Sweat spoke to the potential of LSSs utilizing the FRS framework to self-reflect on lessons learned during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically pertaining to long-term learning loss and other critical areas. Ms. Emrich stated that Dr. Pugh had mentioned during a previous meeting utilizing a consultant during the self-reflection process; Ms. Emrich stated that LSSs would be able to utilize ESSER funding towards applicable consulting fees.

### **Expanding Cross District Opportunities**

Ms. Erin Senior, MSDE staff, reviewed broadcast learning and broadcast learning scenarios with the members. The members were asked to consider opportunities to expand cross-district virtual learning opportunities, including broadcast learning. The members were asked to consider some of the potential benefits and things that would need to be considered. Ms. Schubert expressed her approval for establishing cross-district opportunities. Ms. Senior stated that if the committee is interested in pursuing this idea further that a subcommittee might need to be formed to discuss and identify considerations for implementation.

Ms. Nina Riggs stated that at the onset of the pandemic many inequalities were discovered or exacerbated, which broadcast learning could help to remediate. However, connectivity and accessibility in certain districts and communities would need to be remedied. Ms. Schubert stated that certain content areas, such as foreign languages, are difficult to staff and still require some form of in-person instruction. Ms. Gannon stated that consideration should be given to whether opportunities are being given to lower performing or at-risk student populations, or only to higher performing students or higher level courses such as gifted and talented (GT) or advanced placement (AP) courses. Ms. Gannon stated that potential offerings, while well-intentioned, could inadvertently exacerbate existing academic disparities and inequalities.

Ms. Emrich clarified that current offerings of broadcast learning have focused on areas and content of need, specifically courses that do not have the necessary number of staff to facilitate. Ms. Sweat expressed some reservations due to the discrepancies in curriculum between LSSs, noting that curriculum and pedagogies vary between districts. Ms. Senior agreed with the sentiments expressed by Ms. Sweat, and stated that a subcommittee formed to review cross-district broadcast opportunities would have to consider these issues. Ms. Susan Spinnato stated that certain courses would be easier to integrate into a broadcast learning environment, such as certain foreign languages, but that others would be more difficult.

Ms. Senior stated that any member that would be interested in volunteering to participate in a subcommittee focused on cross-district opportunities to further discuss this topic should email her.

### **Next Steps and Adjournment**

Dr. Williamson thanked the members for their contributions and for their attendance. The members were reminded that the next meeting will be Friday, April 16, 2021. The members were also informed that the May meeting date had been changed and will be held Thursday, May 20, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 a.m.