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State Superintendent of Schools

**MSDE Digital Learning Advisory
Stakeholders Committee Meeting**

**January 6, 2020
Maryland Department of Information Technology
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD**

Meeting Minutes

Council Members in Attendance: Dr. Carol A. Williamson (Chairperson), Ms. Donna Baker, Mr. Brian Beaubien, Ms. Nancy Cahlink-Seidler, Mr. Brad Engel, Dr. Julie Evans, Ms. Anna Gannon, Dr. Joey Jones, Ms. Marsye Kaplan, Ms. Rebecca Pensero, Mr. Marshall Pike, Dr. Peggy Pugh, Ms. Nina Riggs, Ms. Kelly Ruby, Ms. Leeann Schubert, Ms. Tonya Sweat, and Mr. John Tompkins

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

Members not in Attendance: Dr. Gina Solano

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. and a quorum was established.

Welcome & Introductions

Dr. Carol Williamson, chairperson, welcomed the members and provided an overview of the purpose of the committee. The committee was established by the State Board of Education based on the input of State Board members who had an interest in digital and online learning. Dr. Williamson discussed previous presentations made before the State Board on digital learning which led to the establishment of the Digital Learning Advisory Stakeholders Committee.

The members exchanged introductions, professional affiliations, and level of understanding of online learning. Dr. Williamson shared that the committee staff aimed to invite a diverse group of individuals in terms of experience, professional backgrounds, and geographical representation through the State to serve on the committee.

The members reviewed the materials provided in the meeting packets. All meeting materials would also be provided to the members electronically. Ms. Val Emrich, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) staff, directed the members to the MSDE Blackboard site where meeting materials would be stored and shared. Ms. Emrich provided an overview of the Blackboard site, and content that would be shared.

Committee Purpose

Dr. Williamson shared that the State Board established the committee to increase the awareness of digital learning opportunities in the State, enhance the equitable distribution of online learning opportunities across the State, enhance college and career readiness opportunities, and enhance educational delivery options. The goals for the committee, established by the State Board, can be categorized into short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. The committee will be responsible for looking into the four established goals and identifying short-term outcomes that can be reasonably achieved.

Ms. Jacqueline LaFiandra, Office of the Attorney General, provided the members with an overview of the *Maryland Open Meetings Act*. Ms. LaFiandra shared that the *Maryland Open Meetings Act* requires that business be conducted in public and be made open to the public. The members were informed that email communication is subject to provisions under the law, and that repeated communications between the members could violate the requirements of holding an open meeting.

Ms. LaFiandra reviewed the functions of the committee that would and would not fall under the law. Functions that would not fall under the law would be any legal or judicial decision-making, and other administrative functions of the committee. The members were provided examples that would allow for a public meeting to be closed; the members would need to vote to approve closing a public meeting to adjourn to private session.

The members were informed that members of the public are allowed to attend a public meeting, but public comment is not allowed unless voted on and approved by the committee. Notice of any public meeting must be posted in advance with the date, time, and location of the meeting, as well as a meeting agenda. Ms. LaFiandra reviewed with the members the investigation process of a reported violation of the *Open Meetings Act*, and procedures that exist to address violations of the law, including civil litigation. Ms. LaFiandra shared that the Office of the Attorney General website has a page dedicated to the *Maryland Open Meetings Act* and the *Public Information Act*.

Establishment of Committee Norms and Practices

Dr. Williamson discussed the norms and practices of the House Bill (HB) 245 Student Data Privacy Council, and applying similar norms and practices to govern the operations of the committee. These norms and practices would include language regarding attendance, allowing for a substitute representative if a member is unable to attend, and holding a meeting virtually in lieu of an in-person meeting.

The members were asked for input on holding virtual meetings. Ms. Anna Gannon expressed it would be beneficial to have a virtual option in the event of inclement weather; Dr. Williamson shared that the committee would discuss an inclement weather policy. Ms. Erin Senior, MSDE staff, shared with the members that future meetings would involve breaking out into subgroups, which would be difficult to facilitate via a virtual meeting. Dr. Williamson shared that language

regarding representation and virtual meetings would be incorporated into a draft of norms and practices.

The members discussed an inclement weather policy. Dr. Williamson shared that the committee is under the timeline of the State Board and its members to prepare its recommendations. The members discussed the benefits and drawbacks of establishing alternate dates in the event of inclement weather.

Overview and Discussion of Maryland's Digital Learning Program

The members received an overview of the digital learning committee presentation provided to the State Board of Education. The committee was established in July 2018 to explore existing and new opportunities for online learning in the State of Maryland. The committee included two State Board members, the State Board student member, and MSDE staff. Ten meetings were held between October 2018 and September 2019.

Ms. Emrich provided an overview of the legislation that the committee reviewed; copies of the legislation were provided in the meeting handouts and are available to the members in the Blackboard site. This includes Senate Bill (SB) 461, which pertains to accessibility in primary and secondary school online courses and services, and COMAR regulations pertaining to the purchasing of accessible digital and online services.

Ms. Senior clarified that accessibility pertains to students with learning disabilities, and not making services generally accessible to the public. Dr. Williamson asked the members if it would be beneficial to have a student participate in the committee meetings; the members agreed it would be beneficial. Ms. Tonya Sweat recommended having a student in grades 8-12 as well as a student at the collegiate level.

Ms. Emrich discussed the activities of the committee in reviewing legislative history, Maryland practices, and national reports. Through the work of the committee, the State Board of Education established four objectives to guide the work of the full Digital Learning Advisory Stakeholders Committee. Ms. Senior provided an overview to the members of the definitions of key terms that were provided to the full State Board.

Ms. Senior shared that online learning is defined through COMAR as eighty percent or more of instruction that is conducted online, where the teacher and student are separated by distance, time, or both, and where two-way communication is required between teacher and student. Ms. Nancy Cahlink-Seidler asked if the committee would discuss online accreditation processes at the local levels; Ms. Senior shared the committee would consider online accreditation. Mr. Brian Beaubien discussed the accreditation process in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

Ms. Senior provided definitions of blended learning, virtual schools, and broadcast learning. Schools must have a Maryland certified teacher in that content facilitating the course synchronously a minimum of 21% of the time in order for the course to be blended. Approval of the State Superintendent of Schools is required to establish a virtual school.

Dr. Williamson discussed the observations of the committee, which included the establishment of the Maryland Advisory Council for Virtual Learning (MACVL) to address online learning in Maryland, and the development of a feasibility report. After reviewing the possibility of requiring an online line course as a graduation requirement, the MACVL's feasibility report, with input from LSSs, recommended an online experience with accountability would be a more viable option. Ms. Senior shared the data that was presented to the State Board of Education from school year 2017-2018 on the utilization of online and blended courses and enrollments in Maryland schools.

Ms. Senior shared data on the average cost (per student, per semester) of using an outside vendor. MSDE has developed an online learning curriculum, which also carries a cost per student per semester. Vendors are charged to conduct an MSDE review of content. Ms. Senior provided data on broadcast learning in the State. The members discussed examples of broadcast learning platforms across the State, and the benefits and limitations of current platforms.

The members received information on the pathways available for virtual schools in the State. An application process has been established based on existing regulations; final approval of an application is made by the State Superintendent of Schools. The members discussed current virtual learning mediums used in local school systems (LSS) across the State, including those used to make up time lost on snow dates, and the benefits and limitations of current platforms.

Ms. Emrich discussed a student access grant for students with medical conditions which allows for public schools to purchase technology to allow students with medical conditions to participate in classrooms remotely. The members received a video presentation on robot remote technology utilized to allow students to participate remotely.

Ms. Senior provided an overview of the roles and responsibilities of MSDE, LSSs and schools in the digital learning process, and current staffing and support. MSDE serves as a contact and resource to LSS staff, but staffing and personnel decisions are made at the local levels. Mr. Brad Engel discussed credit recovery as it pertains to virtual learning, and that the committee should consider credit recovery as it moves forward. Ms. Senior discussed some of the requirements currently in place regarding credit recovery under virtual and digital learning regulations.

Dr. Williamson shared with the members that because of the interests of the State Board members that the committee has tremendous opportunities in its recommendations. Dr. Williamson discussed next steps of the committee. The committee has secured support of the State Board of Education, which included conducting an MSDE review and evaluation of short-term recommendations and gaining implementation feedback and convening a committee of stakeholders to consider recommendations for implementation.

Digital Learning Work Group Suggestions

The members reviewed the draft of the suggested committee objectives provided in the PowerPoint presentation. Dr. Williamson shared that the objectives were synthesized to be able to present to the State Board of Education; the full list of objectives and recommendations will be shared during the next meeting.

The members will breakout into four subcommittees during future meetings to address each of the four objectives. Ms. Senior stated she would send the members a survey asking them to identify on which subgroup they prefer to serve. Ms. Senior reviewed one of the four objectives and some of the suggested short-term, mid-term, and long-term activities that could meet each objective. Suggested activities to increase awareness of Maryland digital opportunities include tapping social media avenues, designing editable marketing documents for Points of Contact to share with schools, students, and parents, and setting up a direct communication vehicle to Maryland educators.

Dr. Williamson tasked the members to consider which subgroup they would like to serve on; the members were asked to discuss in small groups any information that would be beneficial during future meetings. Ms. Sweat stated she would be interested in hearing from human resources officials about addressing digital learning staffing needs. Dr. Williamson shared that the committee would discuss building capacity of digital learning facilitators during a future meeting. Dr. Julie Evans shared from her experience that the online digital teaching experience has been beneficial to teachers in terms of teaching retention.

Ms. Kelly Ruby stated she would be interested in learning what LSSs are doing and what has proven to be successful and expressed an interest in hearing from professionals in the information technology (IT) field. Dr. Williamson stated that the staff can invite an IT representative to serve on the committee. Ms. Marsye Kaplan expressed an interest in learning about the guidelines for home instruction. Ms. Senior recommended that the members share with committee staff content areas they would be interested in learning more about during future meetings.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.