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State Superintendent of Schools

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**MSDE Digital Learning Advisory  
Stakeholders Committee Meeting**

**February 18, 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, Dr. Colleen Eisenbeiser, Mr. Brad Engel, Dr. Julie Evans, Ms. Anna Gannon, Dr. Joey Jones, Ms. Marsye Kaplan, Ms. Rebecca Penser, Mr. Marshall Pike, Dr. Peggy Pugh, Ms. Nina Riggs, Ms. Kelly Ruby, Ms. Leeann Schubert, Dr. Diallo Sessoms (on behalf of Dr. Gina Solano), Ms. Amy Shepler, Ms. Tonya Sweat, Mr. John Tompkins, and Dr. Christine Welch

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

Members Not in Attendance: Ms. Nancy Cahlink-Seidler

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and a quorum was established.

**Welcome, Introductions & Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Carol Williamson, chairperson, welcomed the members and discussed the mission and purpose of the meeting. Dr. Williamson shared that the committee is still seeking a college student and a K-12 student to serve on the committee; if a student cannot be found the committee will consider hosting a student panel during a future meeting date. The members exchanged introductions and professional affiliations.

The members reviewed the minutes from the January 6, 2020, meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Dr. Peggy Pugh and seconded by Ms. Marsye Kaplan; the motion carried. The members reviewed the committee's purpose and objectives, as established by the State Board of Education.

**Establishment of Norms & Practices**

The members reviewed the proposed norms and practices to govern the actions and activities of the committee. The proposed norms and practices were that members should come prepared for each meeting, including reading distributed materials prior to each meeting and to be prepared to

represent their respective organizations. The members should be respectful of other members and should stay engaged throughout each meeting. The members discussed the proposed norms and practices and were asked to provide additional feedback. Ms. Tonya Sweat recommended amending language on ignoring all phone calls and emails to ignore transient calls or emails.

### **Reflections on Online & Blended Learning**

Ms. Erin Senior, MSDE staff, reviewed technical definitions of digital learning in the State of Maryland, including a blended course, online course, vendor/course provider, original online course credit, and credit recovery online course credit. The members were asked to discuss and identify characteristics of a successful online student. Characteristics that the members identified were time management, navigation through the system, basic computer skills, and effective communication.

Ms. Senior reviewed characteristics of successful students in online learning programs, including that they are independent learners, highly motivated, have strong management skills, and are interested in online learning. The members discussed online credit recovery and the importance of not creating barriers for students, and to understand why students were unable to pass the course the first time. The members were directed to a document with links to resources on online learning provided in the meeting materials.

Ms. Senior reviewed data on student enrollment in online and blended courses for school years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. The members were asked to not distribute the provided data outside of the committee. Ms. Senior reviewed data collection processes and timelines; data is self-reported by local school systems' (LSS) online points of contact. It was noted that the data are not complete because enrollment data are not always up to date at the local level. The total student enrollment in online courses and in blended courses increased between school years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

Mr. Marshall Pike asked if exit surveys had been conducted among participants to identify potential roadblocks. Ms. Senior stated that some LSSs conduct surveys, but that no survey is conducted at the State level; creating and distributing a State level survey has been discussed. Ms. Sweat asked if data were collected on success rates; Ms. Senior said that data are collected at the local levels but that no data has been requested from LSSs. Dr. Diallo Sessoms asked if data were collected on the most frequent courses completed; Ms. Senior stated that many students complete advanced placement (AP) courses online.

The members were directed to a table of student enrollment data in online AP courses in school years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Dr. Williamson stated that the State Board of Education is interested in digital and online learning in part based on enrollment data in courses such as AP courses.

Ms. Senior reviewed the approved online course providers in the State of Maryland; currently there are eleven different course providers in the State. Dr. Sessoms asked how vendors are selected to provide services; Ms. Senior reviewed the approval process with the members. The approval process involves both a pre- and post-review. All credit-bearing courses must be

approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). All courses are required to meet accessibility standards for students with disabilities. Ms. Senior directed the members to information on MSDE course options; MSDE provided courses in both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years.

Ms. Senior reviewed online learning recommendations established from collaboration with LSSs. These recommendations include assigning a mentor/coach to students, incorporation of time into school schedule, enrolling students in one semester at a time, and ensuring parent and student buy-in.

### **Online Facilitation Activity**

The members broke into small groups to identify techniques and practices that online facilitators utilize to ensure student success.

Ms. Val Emrich, MSDE staff, reviewed techniques discussed by committee staff and by the members. These techniques include setting clear goals, ground rules, and expectations, which include establishing norms, setting course policies, and communicating time requirements. Ms. Anna Gannon discussed discrepancies over time requirements for online courses. The members discussed the importance of having excellent communication skills and actively engaging students. Ms. Amy Shepler asked about accessibility issues and security parameters with vendors at the local level; Dr. Williamson shared that the Student Data Privacy Council will be looking into the issue further during its meetings.

The members discussed issues related to accessibility and availability in online instruction. Mr. Pike stated that students need to be made aware of office hours and instructor availability; several members discussed their experiences as an online facilitator and creating availability for students. Dr. Colleen Eisenbeiser stated that students need to be made aware from the beginning of when they can expect feedback from the course instructor. The members agreed that instructors need to build and maintain positive relationships with students, as would be expected in a traditional classroom setting.

The members recessed for break and small group activity at 10:52 a.m. The members were asked to identify roadblocks to implementation of online learning in the State of Maryland. The meeting reconvened at 11:06 a.m.

### **Communicating with Stakeholders**

Ms. Emrich introduced Dr. Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow, to facilitate a presentation on communicating with stakeholders. Dr. Evans shared with the members that the presentation would be made available via the committee's eCommunity site, and that it could be distributed and shared. Dr. Evans shared the mission of Project Tomorrow and discussed the Speak Up Research Project. The project was established in 2003 and develops and provides education stakeholders online surveys to collect feedback from their stakeholders. Surveys are designed for all stakeholders, such as K-12 students, educators, community members, etc. Dr. Evans

shared that over 5.7 million education stakeholders have participated since the establishment of the project.

Dr. Evans discussed key trends found through the project. These trends include the increased role of social media and mobile applications, that educators are becoming more proficient in using digital and social tools to support productivity, principals want teachers to become more proficient with digital and social tools, and that stakeholders have different expectations for tangible outcomes of digital learning.

Dr. Evans provided data collected through the project which has found that the use of digital and social applications and sites has exploded nationally. Additionally, while a majority of teachers say they use social media to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, many teachers have not integrated social media tools into instruction on a weekly basis, and many teachers are not interested in learning about using social media tools to communicate with students and parents. The project has found that parents want communication and engagement to be convenient, want communication and engagement to be personalized but not standardized, and want it to be pushed but do not want to have to search for it.

Dr. Evans shared data and findings regarding differences in digital and social media use among parents and students disaggregated by age, and how parents prefer to receive information. Data collected among Maryland students in grades 6-8 found that many students use social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat all the time or often, but that most do not use Facebook or Twitter. Dr. Evans shared that preliminary data among high school students nationwide found that most students prefer to receive updates from their school or school district via the school website, Instagram post, Twitter post or YouTube video, or Snapchat. The project in summary found that teachers need additional support to understand the value of social media tools in supporting parent and student engagement, and not just colleague interactions.

Dr. Evans reviewed the importance of creating effective messages for K-12 stakeholders. The project found that parents overwhelmingly believe that the effective use of technology is extremely important or important to student success. The members received information on general recommendations to parents and teachers on the value proposition of using online and digital resources. Ms. Schubert asked if there had been any pushback from parents regarding the use of screen time. Dr. Evans stated that screen time is a constant concern among parents. Dr. Evans shared that the messaging to teachers about the value of digital and online learning in instruction needs to focus on both the teacher's personal value proposition as well as the student's value proposition.

Ms. Gannon asked about the survey collection methods used to distribute the survey, specifically in low-income schools and communities. Dr. Evans shared that the survey is available to all students and discussed the various distribution methods.

The members were asked to submit their responses to roadblocks to implementation and to submit to the committee staff. The members' responses would be compiled and distributed during the March meeting.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:59 a.m.