



State of Connecticut

The Connecticut General Assembly

The Planning Commission for Higher Education Student Financial Aid Working Group

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James Maroney, Chairman

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 29, 2015

10:30 a.m., Room 1E

The meeting was called to order by James Maroney at 10:35 a.m.

The following commission members/designees/guests were present: James Maroney, Jen Widness, Michelle Cochran, Julie Savino, March French, Kerry Kelley, Judy Resnick, Heather Hamilton, Wayne Locust, Mona Lucas, Roberta Willis, Greg DeSantis, Jeanette Weldon and Gregg Haddad.

James Maroney addressed the members.

Members introduced themselves.

Sarah Pingel, Policy Analyst, The Education Commission of The States gave a presentation on ["Redesigning State Financial Aid: Principles to guide state aid policymaking."](#)

Roberta Willis thanked Sarah for her presentation and went on to explain that Connecticut has recently gone through a strategic planning process and the goals from that process have been passed into state statute. She went on to say that the group is trying to align the state's goals for higher education with how the state does financial aid. Roberta asked for Sarah's thoughts concerning part time students.

Sarah Pingel replied that they have seen several states across the country double down on the idea that full time students are the most successful in higher education because the way we measure success is completion. She went on to say that in Indiana they have started a push for students to be in at least 12 – 15 credit hours to qualify for the full amount of state aid and are showing some great early state gains. ECS has been interpreting those results with caution because they don't take the reality that some students don't complete their degree in 4-6 years. Sarah said that those gains have not been controlled for things like student income background, student academic preparation or the age of the student. Other states take a more flexible approach in determining their award amount. She continued to say that in Illinois they follow a pattern similar to the Pell Grant, and that Indiana is

setting up its direct from high school to college students for success through this program, which is exclusive of adult learners and those coming back to college later in life.

Judy Resnick asked if in addition to prorating credit hours if there are other approaches that Sarah has seen that work with the older returning student population.

Sarah Pingel replied that ECS has not seen it specific to adult populations.

Jen Widness asked how they align the concept of student centered versus aligning with state goals.

Sarah Pingel responded that she doesn't see the student centered goal and the state goal as contradictory, that if you think about the student first, setting them up for success, that should directly feed into the goal that the state has for state funded financial aid. She went on to say that if those aren't meshing there is probably a larger misalignment in terms of the state goal and the types of students being considered.

Wayne Locust asked for clarification regarding states' roles in determining Pell eligibility.

Sarah Pingel apologized for any confusion and stated that Pell grants are determined completely through the free application for federal student aid. She went on to say that she thinks she may have drawn a parallel between Pell eligibility and how states determine eligibility for their grants.

Michelle Cochran asked if Sarah had come across any states with a summer tier for their grant population.

Sarah Pingel answered that there are two states that do allow for summer eligibility in two different ways. She went on to say that Illinois does it a lot like Pell and that in Indiana they've defined it as 30 credit hours per academic year.

Julie Savino asked Sarah if she has seen any of those states deal with accelerated programs which would help the adult population who have work and family needs.

Sarah Pingel replied that was a conversation that took place when they were crafting the Timely and Flexible Principle but she hasn't seen specific state action on this so there is no example to provide.

James Maroney inquired about what Colorado did with their career and technical with regard to allocating money for certificate programs, and how they define "high need certificate programs."

Sarah Pingel responded that in Colorado they did not specifically target high needs certificates, just all programs that are less than an academic year in length, and the measure just passed in the last session, so no students have gone through the process.

Jen Widness asked how other states deal with the issue of cost of attendance.

Sarah Pingel asked Jen to clarify if she meant how it is set.

Jeni Widness asked what the trend is.

Sarah Pingel said that most states in 2014 most of the expenditures that states had for state aid went into programs that defined financial need as cost minus EFC, so in the new measure it is specifically indexed to an EFC threshold and only about 11% of the expenditures that were made in 2014 state aid indexed eligibility in that way – most states define it as need.

Julie Savino inquired if any statistics include the unfunded subsidiary for students.

Sarah Pingel responded that states have taken different approaches towards this and that there is no national data that she is aware of.

Greg DeSantis asked if states have looked at the timing of the allocation of funds.

Sarah Pingel replied that they are writing a paper on that and that some states are thinking about it.

James Maroney asked if there are any other states where state grant programs are administered by an agency.

Sarah Pingel said that it is a common approach across the country.

James Maroney asked if California has a needs based and a merit based component.

Sarah Pingel responded that it is primarily a needs based program.

James Maroney asked if any states were using tax incentives to encourage private companies to donate to foundations to increase the amount of scholarships that are available for local students.

Sarah Pingel said that one county in Colorado gives a property tax credit to people who donate to a scholarship for local students. The Colorado legislature will be proposing a bill in the upcoming session that will provide state matches to private donations to a scholarship fund.

Jen Widness asked how states have aligned with their state goals.

Sarah Pingel responded that it has been a heavy lift across the states and that Minnesota has done the most work. She continued that Minnesota appointed a commission to look at a performance basis for their state financial aid and to look at specific criteria about institutions that would play into decisions about eligibility for state aid – nothing has been enacted.

Michelle Cochran asked how states have implemented award durations.

Sarah Pingel indicated that some states are doing it, so the state would tell the student when they are done and in other states it is an instructional responsibility.

James Maroney asked if any states are looking at tax incentives to get companies to help pay down student debt.

Sarah Pingel said that she hasn't seen incentives for companies but some states have looked at it on the state income tax for individuals.

James Maroney asked if ECS has any grant money to assist Connecticut or has other resources Connecticut can use.

Sarah Pingel commented that it is her hope that this is the start of the conversation with the Connecticut and that ECS will support Connecticut in the process.

Roberta Willis said that the goal for the working group is to make recommendations to the legislature by the start of session in February. She went on to ask Sarah what should be the working group's next step.

Sarah Pingel said that she would encourage them to continue looking at adult students and private institutions.

Judy Resnick asked if Sarah would be able to help them with a change in tax policy for the corporate sector.

Sarah Pingel responded that she would look into this.

Roberta Willis asked the representatives from the institutions to comment on spreading financial aid out over the calendar year.

Mona Lucas replied UConn utilizes their full allocation in the fall and spring and there is nothing left for the summer.

Greg DeSantis responded that most likely community colleges would be interested in helping student to persist through the summer, but like UConn, they have spent all the money in the fall and spring.

Michelle Cochran commented that the independents have a very large non-traditional population and that a summer tier would be helpful.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.