

## MINUTES

### **Land of Sky P20 Council: Joint Executive Committee & Steering Committee**

January 20, 2023: 10-11 AM

#### **Present:**

Dr. Michael Dempsey, Dr. Mark Dickerson, Dr. Joseph Fox (Contractor), Dr. John Gossett, Dr. Laura Leatherwood, Dr. Gene Loflin, Greg Lowe, Dr. Jeff Moorhouse (Guest), Emily Nicholson (Staff), Nathan Ramsey, Dr. William Sederburg

#### **Minutes:**

- Mrs. Nicholson started the meeting. Mr. Lowe welcomed attendees and then passed facilitation back to Mrs. Nicholson.
- Mrs. Nicholson shared the agenda on her screen and informed attendees that they needed to allocate the most time to the policy priority review agenda item, and she would move the committee toward addressing that item early in the meeting if necessary.
- Mrs. Nicholson provided brief updates about having orientated the two new/replacement members of the P20 Council: Dr. Rob Jackson and Dr. Kimberly van Noort. She said she had not yet been able to meet with Rod Honeycutt, the Interim County Manager for Madison County, and she welcomed assistance with connecting with him from the committee members. Mrs. Nicholson asked whether there were any questions about those updates. Dr. Sederburg said he would be meeting with Dr. van Noort next week and asked Mrs. Nicholson whether he should mention anything in particular regarding P20, and Mrs. Nicholson replied that she was confident that Dr. van Noort had been thoroughly informed and was supportive of participating in P20.
- Mrs. Nicholson moved to the second agenda item and provided a brief update about the possibility of requiring FAFSA completion for graduation. She reminded the committee that making such a decision was outside of their authority, and the local superintendents, who do have such authority, would be convening on February 10th for their monthly meeting. She indicated she would be requesting from the facilitator of that meeting, Jan Webster, a brief time slot to speak to the five superintendents to discuss the idea of FAFSA completion as a graduation requirement. Mrs. Nicholson shared that she had already mentioned it to Dr. Jackson when she had met with him, and he had told Mrs. Nicholson about the upcoming meeting of the superintendents and proposed that they could discuss it at that time in order to assess their perspectives. Mrs. Nicholson shared background information about discussions between Mr. Ramsey and a representative from myFutureNC and about myFutureNC having changed its stance more than once on whether it includes FAFSA completion as a graduation requirement as one of its policy priorities. These changes have led to the decision being delegated to LEAs. She opened the discussion to the committee.

- Mr. Dempsey asked who all would be at that superintendents' meeting, and Mrs. Nicholson replied that it would just be the five local superintendents.
- Mrs. Nicholson moved to the next agenda item. She updated the committee about grant funds received from the JMBE and identified two of the intended expenditures for those funds: a PR firm and a new full-time staff position. She requested recommendations from the committee for PR firms. Mr. Lowe asked for more details about the type of work the PR firm would be doing, and Dr. Fox explained the need to get messaging for P20 out to stakeholders, and he contrasted messaging to marketing. He connected the need for sustainability of the P20 Council to effective messaging to recruit, engage, and retain stakeholders. Mr. Lowe asked how much had been earmarked as a budget for the PR firm, and Mrs. Nicholson and Dr. Fox both indicated they did not recall exactly and thought it was either \$5,000 or \$15,000. Dr. Leatherwood stated that \$5,000 would be too low for a PR firm, and Mrs. Nicholson said she had just confirmed the budget was \$15,000. Dr. Fox agreed that it was likely too low, and he indicated they could potentially pull from other budget categories, such as the broader marketing budget.
- Mr. Dickerson asked whether staff had looked into PR associations, and Mrs. Nicholson said they had not and said it was a good idea to do so. Dr. Fox said they had hoped to receive recommendations from the committee for PR firms they had already worked with and which already knew the needs of the region. Mr. Dickerson said he would check with the association to get a recommendation. Dr. Loflin asked Mr. Ramsey who they had used previously for marketing and PR work, and Mr. Ramsey shared the names of several firms they had used in the past including JB Media, Erica Allison at Formation PR, Amplified Media, and Integrative. Dr. Dempsey also offered to connect Mrs. Nicholson with Integrative.
- Mrs. Nicholson moved the committee to discuss the Community Engagement and Data Management position and requested their input on the job description. She said she had received \$35,000 from Duke Energy and additional funds from the DOL grant, so that the position could be funded for three years. Dr. Fox remarked that the job description seemed to describe enough for two different positions and shared his concern that they might struggle to find qualified candidates. Mrs. Nicholson said they would be offering a competitive salary by combining funds from different sources. Dr. Fox voiced an additional concern that it would be unlikely to find one person with skill sets in both data analysis and community engagement. He suggested the position might need to be split into two if a single qualified candidate cannot be found, and Dr. Loflin agreed and said the job description seemed to be describing a combination of an assistant director and an office manager.
- Dr. Loflin asked for confirmation that the position could be supported for three years, and Mrs. Nicholson assured him that the funds would be available, in part because some would be coming from the DOL grant. Mrs. Nicholson informed the committee that she would not be able to post the job opening until she receives the grant funds from DOL.

- Mrs. Nicholson moved to the next agenda item: the discussion of policy priorities. She gave a brief overview of the process to-date of developing policy priorities to bring to the full P20 Council, and explained the desire to have alignment between this committee and the Policy Action Team regarding which policy priorities would be elevated to the full Council.
- Mrs. Nicholson shared on her screen the policy priorities and strategies for Early Childhood that the Policy Action Team had selected. She explained the format of the document and pointed out the alignment with other organizations across the state. She stated the goal of having a brief final document with no more than three policy priorities for each Strategic Direction. Dr. Fox briefly reiterated the need to differentiate between policies and strategies.
- Mr. Lowe indicated he would defer to the subject matter experts in education, and he asked for clarification of whether the intention was to support other organizations' efforts to advocate for specific policies or whether the intention was to advocate for the Council's own distinct policy priorities. Dr. Fox summarized some of the historical work that had been done in the Strategic Plan and the original workgroups, which had identified specific policy issues at the state or federal level that were barriers to the Strategic Directions and Strategic Goals in the Strategic Plan for the region. He said they had also realized they would have more leverage by aligning with other organizations with similar policy priorities, and he explained the decision to elevate the chosen policy priorities to myFutureNC for advocacy at the state level and also to local/regional elected officials to stress local/regional needs. Dr. Fox and Mrs. Nicholson both provided additional details on the steps in the three-year process that had led to the creation of the current lists of policy priorities and strategies.
- Mr. Lowe voiced that the platform seemed aggressive and expressed his concern that it could be unrealistic, in part based on his experiences with the challenges in trying to alter healthcare policies. Dr. Fox agreed with that concern and suggested the committee could decide to choose just one of the three policies. Dr. Leatherwood agreed that the chosen policy priorities seemed daunting and recommended the committee consider what would actually be attainable and effective locally.
- Dr. Loflin shared details from his past work on the policy priorities for Early Education, including that the team had prepared cost estimates for several components (e.g., expanding to full-day, expanding to year-round, and providing pay at parity with teachers), and each one had been \$1-2 million just for the region, which would be beyond the capabilities of local funding sources. He highlighted some of the projects through the Buncombe Partnership for Children, and he stated that state-level policy change would be necessary to actually make significant improvements in NC Pre-K. He suggested indicating which policy/policies specifically would need to be changed.
- Dr. Fox reiterated that this committee had the discretion to decide not to recommend the chosen policy priorities if they thought doing so would not be effective. He asked the committee what they would recommend instead in order to move the needle on the Strategic Directions. Dr. Loflin advocated for selecting at least one policy priority that would address state-level barriers that

inhibit the growth of NC Pre-K. Mr. Ramsey typed in the chat to agree that changing state policy was quite difficult and to recommend they focus locally, where they have more control.

- Mrs. Nicholson solicited input from Dr. Sederburg and Dr. Dempsey, both members of the Policy Action Team. Dr. Dempsey agreed with Mr. Ramsey's comments and said that the Council should be supporting efforts of other organizations who were already doing the advocacy work.
- Mrs. Nicholson expressed her belief that a policy brief from this Council, jointly signed by its thirty-plus members who represent four counties, would be unique in its regional and unified representation and would have unprecedented power for advocacy with legislators.
- Mrs. Nicholson switched to sharing on her screen the policy priorities and strategies that the Policy Action Team had selected for K-12. Dr. Dempsey asked for confirmation that the intent of this agenda item was for the committee to decide in this meeting which of the policies and strategies they would recommend for the full Council to review, and Mrs. Nicholson concurred.
- Mr. Ramsey commented in the chat to highlight some local, innovative programs, including the effort to expand nursing slots, and to agree with the importance of the counties working in unison. Dr. Leatherwood stated her opinion that the current slate of proposed policy priorities and strategies was too much and needed to be pared back significantly. She proposed instead an incremental approach that focuses on a single policy at a time, and once accomplished, then moves to work on another policy. Dr. Fox remarked this was exactly the type of discussion that needed to happen today. Dr. Loflin suggested identifying the one most important thing to work on with the state and the one most important thing to work on locally for each of the four Strategic Directions.
- Mrs. Nicholson said the information would be condensed for presentation to the P20 Council and would include only the highlighted policy priorities and strategies as well as the information about local initiatives. She also said the Council would be provided with brief and concise advocacy information to use with legislators.
- Dr. Dempsey asked for clarification, and Mrs. Nicholson explained that the P20 Council would be tasked with making the final cut on which policy priorities and strategies to include in the final policy brief, and the Policy Action Team would then be tasked with putting those into a coherent policy brief document that included details on local initiatives currently in place to work toward those goals. She cited the example of Henderson Smart Start, which used local/regional funds to provide flexibility in eligibility such that parents who are looking for work are eligible for their children to participate in their programs, which is currently not an option under the state's rules that require parents to already be working in order to be eligible. Dr. Dempsey expressed his strong support for simplifying the information before it is given to the Council.
- Mrs. Nicholson agreed that the logical next step would be to clean up the documents, which had already been the intention, so that the information can be presented to the P20 Council for their final vote.

- Dr. Sederburg asked whether there would be a joint proposal presented to the state legislature for the current legislative session. Mrs. Nicholson said that the goal was to have the policy brief finished in time to be presented for the short session. Dr. Fox stated that this group is probably the only collaborative in the state that has progressed this far in preparing a regional policy brief. He said that the committee could decide to choose only the policy priorities and strategies that aligned with those of myFutureNC, as indicated in the documents. Mrs. Nicholson asserted that leveraging the alignment of other organizations could be highly influential with legislators, in part because they represent the recommendations of subject-matter experts.
- Mrs. Nicholson indicated that she needed this committee to give her their input on the policy priorities and strategies that the Policy Action Team had selected so that the committee's recommendations can be passed on to the full P20 Council at their upcoming meeting. Dr. Fox recommended that the committee just pull the policy priorities to present to the Council and ask them to assess whether they are realistic or whether they need to be restated to reflect local needs. Dr. Dempsey, Mr. Lowe, and Dr. Dickerson all agreed. Dr. Dempsey requested that Mrs. Nicholson send the simplified, condensed version of the proposed policy priorities to this committee for their final review before it is provided to the P20 Council.
- Dr. Loflin advocated strongly for adding wording to the community college section for increased salaries, and Dr. Dempsey concurred and said it also needed to be included for the state university system. Mrs. Nicholson said she would send the committee a link to a Google form to solicit their comments and feedback.
- There was no more discussion on that item, so Mrs. Nicholson moved on to introducing Dr. Jeff Moorhouse, who had been observing the meeting and who would be starting a ten-county P20 Council based out of Eastern Tennessee State University. Dr. Moorhouse thanked the committee for allowing him to observe and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to see the work in action.
- Mrs. Nicholson moved on to the final agenda item, and she began sharing on her screen the report that contained data visualizations of the comparisons of the 2020 and 2022 county profiles from myFutureNC. She said that the report was not only for this committee but also for stakeholders in general and that the data track the region's progress toward their 2030 goals.
- Mrs. Nicholson and Mr. Lowe both moved to end the meeting and asked whether there were any final questions. Dr. Sederburg mentioned that he had been in touch with representatives at the Kresge Foundation and informed the committee about an upcoming meeting, to which they would all be invited, in the next month with the president of the foundation. Mrs. Nicholson and Mr. Lowe thanked committee members for attending and ended the meeting.

**Next Meeting Date:** Friday, Feb 17, 2023 from 10-11 AM