

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

January 24, 2024
10:00 a.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Wednesday, January 24, 2024 in the 7th floor boardroom in the Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building (200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201). The meeting was also livestreamed (and recorded), and some Commissioners joined virtually.

Commission members present:

Catherine J. “Cassie” Motz, Chair	Rebecca Taber Staehelin
Chike Aguh, Vice Chair	Sheila D. Thompson, Ph.D.
Mickey L. Burnim, Ph.D.	Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.
Charlene Mickens Dukes, Ed.D.	Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.
Barbara Kerr Howe	Cierra M. Robinson, Student Commissioner
Ray Serrano, Ph.D.	

Staff members present:

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.	Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D.
Anthony Reiner	Soma Kedia
Lyndsay Silva, D.P.A.	Kimberly Smith Ward
Derrick Coley	Rhonda Wardlaw
Daniel Schuster	Barbara Schmertz, Ph.D.
Al Dorsett	Deborah Ing
Eliza Kritz	Trish Gordon McCown
Yuxin Lin, Ph.D.	

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Motz** at approximately 10:01 a.m. A meeting quorum was established with all eleven (11) members present.

Chair’s Remarks

Chair Motz welcomed and thanked everyone for attending today’s meeting. She reported that the U. S. Department of Education had a soft launch of the new FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in late December. Mr. Al Dorsett, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, is to be commended for his work and leadership, despite challenges posed by the new form. Additionally, the Program Approval Process Workgroup voted on final recommendations (23 total) this past Friday. She thanked Dr. Rai and Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant

Secretary for Academic Affairs, for their work. Lastly, **Chair Motz** expressed her condolences on the recent passing of Dr. Rai's mother in India.

Acting Secretary's Remarks

Acting Secretary Rai thanked everyone for their expressions of condolences on his mother's passing. He then gave an overview of the agenda.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Commission Minutes Approval

There was a motion by **Commissioner Howe** and a second by **Commissioner Wormack** for the approval of the September 13, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

There was a motion by **Vice Chair Aguh** and a second by **Commissioner Howe** for the approval of the September 13, 2023 closed session minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

There was a motion by **Commissioner Howe** and a second by **Commissioner Burnim** for the approval of the October 25, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Finance Policy – FY 2026 Community College Construction Grant Program: State and Local Cost-Sharing Formula – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Daniel Schuster, Finance Policy Analyst, to present this item. The Community College Construction Grant Program provides State assistance for the construction and improvement of facilities at community colleges. This grant funds the construction of major new facilities, renovation of existing facilities, and improvements to campus infrastructure.

The level of State participation in capital projects for the community colleges is determined by two criteria: the portion of the project that meets the space eligibility requirements for State support, and the State and local cost-sharing formula prescribed in statute and calculated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). MSDE uses this cost-sharing formula to calculate the State's share in providing financial assistance for public education. The formula is based on a current expense calculation that considers the enrollment of students in elementary and secondary schools and county wealth (e.g., net taxable income, the assessed valuation of real property, and the assessed value of personal property).

Based on this cost-sharing formula, the State contributes between 50 percent and 70 percent of the eligible costs of a project for single-county-operated community colleges and 75 percent of the eligible costs of a project for regional community colleges. (Baltimore City Community

College does not participate, as it is considered an agency of the State.) There were no questions for Mr. Schuster.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – FAFSA/One App and Related Communications Updates – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Al Dorsett, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, to present this item. Mr. Dorsett reported that since the debut of the improved FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form, there have been some challenges. He shared a presentation, including a demonstration of the new MHEC One-App (for students who are ineligible to complete the FAFSA), and he discussed ways in which MHEC was handling these issues. The Commissioners asked questions about Mr. Dorsett’s presentation.

Department of Academic Affairs – Biannual Report on Private Career Schools: Actions for July 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023 – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, who asked Ms. Trish Gordon McCown, Director of Academic Affairs, to present this item. Ms. McCown provided an overview of actions concerning three (3) new schools, one (1) new program, approvals of change of location, an approval of change of ownership, certificate renewals, three (3) school approvals withdrawn, and training provider questionnaires.

Department of Academic Affairs – Report on Institutions of Higher Education Institution Review: Actions for July 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023 – Information Item

Ms. McCown provided an overview of actions concerning in-state institution actions, out-of-state institution actions, out-of-state online registration actions, NC-SARA actions, religious exempt actions, collegiate complaints, Title IX reimbursements, and institutional accreditation visits.

Department of Academic Affairs – FY 2023 Fourth Quarter Report on VA Education Benefits: MD SAA Actions for July 1, 2023 – September 30, 2023 – Information Item

Ms. McCown provided an overview of the Maryland State Approving Agency’s actions concerning program actions, other actions, visits to facilities, technical assistance activities, an outreach activity, and liaison activities.

Department of Academic Affairs – Report on Institutions of Higher Education Program Review: Actions Biannual Report (July 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023) – Information Item

Ms. McCown provided an overview of actions concerning program objections, new degree programs, new certificate programs, new areas of concentration, substantial modifications to existing programs, non-substantial modifications to existing programs, withdrawn proposals, institutional program partnerships, and one (1) proposal not approved or recommended.

Department of Academic Affairs – Updates on Student Transfer in Maryland – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Dow who presented this item. Dr. Dow reported that MHEC will be sending a request to institutions soon for updates on their implementation plans. Institutions will have 4 weeks to submit and share about the challenges they face. She will report back in February or March. Additionally, MHEC will be convening a small workgroup to discuss the specifics of a data collection and how to make it meaningful. **Acting Secretary Rai** spoke about MHEC's partnership with Aspen Institute in their transfer initiatives. The Commissioners asked questions about the information that was shared.

Department of Academic Affairs – Overview of Recommendations by the Program Approval Process Workgroup – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Dow who gave an overview of the recommendations by the Program Approval Process Workgroup. There are 8 sections of the recommendations:

- 1) Operational Missions
- 2) State Plan of Higher Education and State Workforce Development Needs
- 3) Letter of Intent
- 4) Collaborative Grant Fund
- 5) Program Approval Objection Process
- 6) Unreasonable Duplication in Graduate Programs Analysis
- 7) Criteria for a Full Program Review of a Substantial Modification to an Existing Program
- 8) Analysis of Recommendations and Advisory Committee

The Commissioners asked questions about the recommendations.

Department of Academic Affairs – Office of Research and Policy Analysis – 2023 Performance Accountability Report – Action Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Barbara Schmertz, Director of the Office of Research & Policy Analysis, who asked Dr. Yuxin Lin, Associate Director of the Office of Research & Policy Analysis, to present this item. Dr. Lin shared a PowerPoint presentation. The annual Performance Accountability Report (PAR) serves as an important mechanism by which public colleges and universities in Maryland are held accountable. Through a performance accountability plan, institutions are required to establish and maintain performance standards and use metrics to assess their effectiveness in tackling institutional and statewide higher education goals. Every year, the governing board of each public institution of higher education is required to submit a written report to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) on the institution's progress in attaining the objectives in the performance accountability plan. This summative statewide report includes highlights from Maryland's public institutions' submissions for the 2022-2023 academic year reporting cycle.

The 2022-2023 Performance Accountability Report summarizes institutions' progress toward the three key goals of the 2022 State Plan for Higher Education. In summary, the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic on undergraduate enrollment of Maryland higher education universities and colleges has diminished. For public four-year institutions, the undergraduate enrollment and enrollment of minority students have recovered slowly. Student retention rates decreased but are still on track to meet the institutional benchmarks. However, some concerning patterns of inequity in student success outcomes and graduation are observed. Community colleges show promising progress toward maintaining and increasing high school enrollments (dual enrollment and early/middle college). The labor market outcomes for community college graduates has improved from the last reporting cycle. However, community colleges still face challenges in meeting benchmarks of credit and non-credit enrollments. Academic achievement gaps still exist for underrepresented students; the gaps in graduation-transfer rates among minority groups widened for some community colleges after the pandemic.

Last year, the Commission raised some concerns about inequities in student success and how institutions hold themselves accountable to equitably achieve the objectives of the Maryland State Plan for Higher Education. Therefore, the Commission requested that institutions deepen the discussion on issues of equity in their narrative report submissions for the 2023 PAR; institutions provided responses to questions tied to: 1) how institutions identify long-term equity gaps; and 2) how institutions measure their long-term equity gaps.

In short, institutions noted that gaps in student success, such as retention and graduation mostly occur for racially or socioeconomically underrepresented students. The equity gaps are usually identified by disaggregated data and campus climate surveys. Offices of institutional research usually play a central role in collecting and disseminating the data. The findings on equity gap analyses are usually shared within an institution's community, which includes administration, staff, faculty, and students. Most institutions set benchmarks to eliminate the equity gaps and implement various interventions to improve the equity. The full performance accountability report provides a more detailed summary of the institutions' responses.

In the coming year, MHEC will continue to partner with institutions to make sure students in Maryland receive high-quality postsecondary education consistently. MHEC will be evaluating important workforce trends and developing new completion goals to replace the 55% by 2025 goal. These conversations and initiatives will be developed with an explicit eye towards inequities specific to access and success in higher education. Institutions will need to be more strategic to access and success in higher education. Institutions will need to be far more strategic in supporting students who enroll to fulfill their commitment to student success.

Dr. Lin recommended that the Maryland Higher Education Commission approve the 2023 Performance Accountability Report and ask the Acting Secretary to forward it to the Governor and the General Assembly as required by law. The Commissioners asked questions about Dr. Lin's presentation. **Commissioner Howe** made a motion to approve the recommendation, and **Commissioner Thompson** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Vote for Closed Session to Discuss a Personnel Matter

Chair Motz asked for a motion to enter into a closed session to discuss a personnel matter. **Commissioner Howe** made the motion, and **Commissioner Burnim** seconded the motion. **Chair Motz** called the roll:

Aguh – Yes
Wormack – Yes
Williams – Yes
Burnim – Yes
Howe – Yes
Serrano – Yes
Thompson – Yes
Robinson – Yes
Dukes – Yes
Motz – Yes

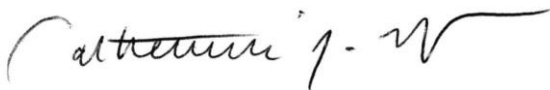
The motion passed unanimously. The Commissioners entered into a closed session at approximately 12:45 PM.

The Commissioners re-entered into the open session at approximately 1:03 PM.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Aguh made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and **Commissioner Howe** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:04 PM.

Approved by the Commission:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine J. Motz", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair