

Maine Compact for Higher Education

Board of Directors Meeting August 6, 2009 FAME, Augusta

Minutes

Board members present: Wendy Ault, Alan Burton, Mary Cathcart, Laird Covey, Joseph Foley, Joyce Hedlund, Martha Johnston, Meredith Jones, Danny MacDonald, Kent Peterson, Derek Pierce, Colleen Quint, Chris Rector, Peggy Rotundo, and Theodore Scontras (by phone).

Guests and Staff present: Henry Bourgeois; Dianne Heino; Larinda Meade, College Transitions program director; Lisa Plimpton, Mitchell Institute; and Elaine Tsai, Bowdon College intern.

Minutes and Financials. Chairman Joseph Foley opened the meeting at 9:40 a.m. and asked the board to review and approve the minutes of the last meeting. The board,

Voted, on a motion by Ms. Cathcart, seconded by Mr. MacDonald, to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2009 board of directors meeting. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Bourgeois reviewed the financial statements for the period ending June 30, 2009. He noted that revenues and expenditures are on target. The Compact has just received a grant of \$20,000 from the Maine Community Foundation, as part of their three-year, \$50,000 commitment to the organization, which is not reflected on these financials because it was received in July. Mr. Foley thanked Ms. Jones for the Community Foundation's support of the Compact. The board,

Voted, on a motion by Mr. Peterson, seconded by Mr. Rector, to approve the June 30, 2009 financial statements. The vote was unanimous.

Compact strategic assessment - background. Mr. Foley explained that today's meeting would be focused on the Compact's strategic assessment. He summarized the background:

- In February, the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education invited the Compact to consider some type of organizational consolidation. This led to a joint meeting of our executive committees.
- At its last meeting on May 8, the Compact's board discussed the Coalition's invitation, and decided that before we consider new organizational arrangements, we should first decide what we want to accomplish the next few years. An ad hoc 'Compact Alternatives' working group, composed of Wendy Ault, Ron Bancroft, Alan Burton, Joe Foley and Colleen Quint, was appointed and met a couple of times to frame the strategy process.
- The strategic assessment will address four questions, with the aim of preparing a new multi-year business plan by year-end:
 - What has the Compact accomplished the last five years?
 - How has the environment changed?
 - What do we want to accomplish the next 5 years? What's our mission and goal?
 - How should we organize to get the job done -- including which organizations, if any, with whom we should partner?

Mr. Foley explained that, today, we want to have a conversation about the first two sets of questions. We are not planning to vote on these items, or make firm decisions today. Rather, we want to have a full discussion and give everyone a chance to express themselves. At the end of today's meeting, we will take a few minutes to set the agenda for our next board meeting on September 18.

Compact Accomplishments & Missed Opportunities. Mr. Foley asked each board member to comment on what he/she considered the Compact's most significant accomplishment the last 5 years, and its most significant failure or missed opportunity. A summary of responses follows. Note, the numbers indicate the number of responses; some members mentioned more than one achievement.

Accomplishments were clustered in two types of achievement -- programs and awareness building-
coordination – each receiving about the same level of support:

- a. Many members said the Compact-supported programs were our biggest accomplishment:
 - College Transitions program. (5)
 - Alford Scholarship Foundation. (5)
 - Early College program. (4)
 - Employer initiative. (2)

- b. And, two-thirds of the members present (10) indicated that the biggest accomplishment is that the Compact is a focal point for higher education...and keeps higher education on the front burner, by:
 - providing structure to the higher education debate;
 - helping raise public awareness of the importance of higher education;
 - serving as a forum for interested parties to come together; and
 - establishing direction for improvement efforts.

Missed Opportunities were numerous, with six areas receiving attention:

- a. Higher education strategy (3):
 - o We lack a higher education strategy.
 - o There is no coherent plan for investing in higher education over the long-term, which makes it difficult to advocate for short-term solutions.
 - o There is no comprehensive inventory of what/who is working on the common goal of increasing the number of citizens with college degrees.

- b. Policy advocacy (3):
 - o The Compact should have pushed to get higher education to the top of the Legislative agenda.
 - o There is no unified vision/voice for higher education at the Legislature; the Compact should act as a regular and visible advocate and strategic vision for higher education. We should align higher education to a public agenda.
 - o The Compact's Legislative advocacy has been as a 'defender' of its programs, e.g. College Transitions, not as a 'champion' of higher education.

- c. Promotion & marketing of higher education (3):
 - o What's needed is a cohesive and coherent marketing campaign for higher education; maybe we should replicate ASF's social marketing campaign approach.
 - o There is a continuing need to increase everyone's expectations about attending college.
 - o Higher education/economic development/job creation ideas are too abstract; 'keeping our kids in the state' is a simple theme that seems to resonate with everyone, and we should use it.

- d. Scholarship support (3):
 - o We were unable to secure funding for the needs-based scholarship program.

- e. Business engagement (3):
 - o There needs to be a broader engagement of the business community and employers, to support the Compact's goals and objectives.
 - o Private sector participation on the board is low.
 - o Make a stronger connection between education attainment and economic development.

- f. Non-degree credentials (3):
 - o We need to recognize/value non-degree certificates/credentials.
 - o We fail to recognize that postsecondary achievements include certificates, not just BAs.

Other comments about the Compact, prompted by the discussion of achievements and missed opportunities:

- The Compact's goal is the right goal, as several members noted. And, the Compact's goal is consistent with the goal of the President, the Lumina Foundation, and other authorities. The question is, what does it take to get there? What seems most effective for the Compact is a combination of programs and public policy.
- The Compact's identity is unclear outside a small circle; promotion of what the Compact is doing/accomplishing is lacking. The Compact should be a more unified and stronger voice for higher education.
- The Compact should discuss whether its focus should be on the 'demand' side of the problem (i.e. increasing public/student demand for higher education), or on the 'supply' side of the problem (i.e. building the capacity of the higher education systems/programs). Most of our work the last five years, by design, has been on the demand side.
- The Alford Scholarship Foundation adds visibility and credibility to the Compact. It is an extraordinary asset for Maine and the Compact, and we should keep that relationship and commitment.
- Mentoring students may be a way to engage the employer community and achieve our goal; MBNA was referenced as a model program.
- The Compact has not inspired community action...we should promote public policy that inspires local action.
- Do we need to broaden or become narrower in our approach?

Conversations with education leaders. Mr. Foley reported on conversations we had recently with Richard Pattenau, John Fitzsimmons and Susan Gendron about our strategic assessment; Ms. Quint, Ms. Jones and Mr. Bourgeois attended some of the sessions. The conversations were informative and will continue as the strategy process advances. Some of the points of discussion follow:

- Ms. Gendron and the Department of Education are very committed to college readiness as the goal of their work, and will continue its focus on standards and assessment toward that goal.
- Ms. Gendron suggested that the Compact should support the transitions students make, especially from high school to college. She also suggested that we work on the policy side of the issue, not the program side.
- Mr. Fitzsimmons and Mr. Pattenau described the serious lack of investment in campus infrastructure improvements and maintenance, and suggested the Compact might work with them on alternative long-term infrastructure investment strategies that have proved successful in Maine and other states.
- Mr. Pattenau suggested, in a later conversation, that the Compact should strengthen the case for an educated workforce, and might consider shifting its mission from 'champion of higher education' to 'champion of an educated workforce'.
- The Compact should sharpen its focus on higher education, and work with the Systems to identify intermediate benchmarks to achieve the Compact's 2020 goal, e.g. completion rates.
- The Compact should conduct a major celebratory event that promotes excellence in higher education, and recognizes effective business leadership, faculty accomplishments, etc.

Indicators of Higher Education Attainment. Ms. Plimpton briefly summarized key points in the new Indicators report, which she prepared with the assistance of Ms. Tsai and another intern:

- The first indicator, which is the Compact's primary goal, shows a 2% increase in the percentage of working-age adults who have earned a two-year degree or more, bringing the latest percentage to 39% compared with the New England average of 46%.
- The several indicators focusing on preparation for college are trending in the right direction, except for student borrowing which ranks Maine the eighth highest in the country in the amount of debt students have when they graduate from college.

Board members had reactions and suggestions:

- Given our current rate of progress toward our attainment goal, we will not achieve the goal by 2020 as planned...we are moving forward, just not fast enough.
- Indicator 12 – which shows that 73% of all students attending postsecondary institutions in Maine attend public two or four-year colleges – argues for narrowing our focus to the two public Systems.
- It's a struggle to determine which bars (in the Indicator Report) we have moved, if any.
- Two members suggested that this information would be very valuable on a community basis, so local leaders could determine their rankings on a number of indicators, trend the findings over several years, and compare themselves to other communities.

How has the environment changed? Several members described changes that are impacting education attainment:

- a. High unemployment has increased demand for college courses, particularly at community colleges. And, more high school students are applying for community college enrollment as a result of financial pressures at home and increased tuition.
- b. More students are attending public colleges because they cannot afford private institutions.
- c. Employers are cutting costs, especially in the 'training and education' categories, making it more difficult for adults to continue their education and training.
- d. The state budget will likely be very constrained for at least four more years, resulting in limited support for higher education institutions or scholarships.
- e. The President's outspoken support for higher education may have a significant impact on general awareness and subsequent support.
- f. Others commented on the impact of the Federal Stimulus funds, the health care reform debate, the University of Maine Systems Task Force reports and recommendations, and financial access (or the lack thereof).

Regarding the next board meeting, one member asked if we should invite students to talk with us about their concerns. Ms. Quint indicated that her organization is planning to survey Mitchell Institute scholars later this fall, and would be glad to report relevant findings to the Compact. Mr. Foley and others agreed with this alternative and thanked Ms. Quint for her help.

Postsecondary retention and persistence issues was discussed, and Ms. Ault briefly explained the significant, long-term investment the MELMAC Education Foundation is making in 19 Maine higher education institutions to address this problem. Ms. Ault offered to present some of her initial findings to the board.

Board members agreed that this conversation about environment changes should continue at the next meeting, possibly with an outside speaker.

Mr. Foley thanked the board for a thoughtful and positive discussion. He adjourned the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted: Henry Bourgeois, Compact Executive Director, August 14, 2009