CDILL Committee Meeting Notes – August 28, 2018

Committee One: Lifelong Learning

In attendance: Jean Eddy, Renier Moquete, Marjorie Ringrose, Juan Vega, Michelle Weise

By phone: David Cedrone, Oz Mondejar

Committee Two: Programmatic Aspects of Lifelong Learning

In attendance: Jennifer Davis-Carey, James Peyser, Sanjay Sarma

By phone: Susan Cicco, Joe Fuller, Laurie Leshin

Committee Three: Institutional Partners in the Massachusetts System

In attendance: Joanna Dowling, Michael Horn, Don Kilburn, Michael London, Pat Meservey, Christina Royal, Mary Sarris

Learners: Opportunity Youth and Working Adults

Committee One spent time discussing whether opportunity youth were an appropriate population to include in the Commission's target populations for a system of lifelong learning. Opportunity youth (those out of school and out of work, between the ages of 19-24), are one of the hardest to serve and do not have a single discrete set of challenges. Foundations are investing in solutions to serving this group, but it may not make sense from a state standpoint. They considered whether focusing on adult workers facing job obsolescence would be a better initial focus. Committees Two and Three considered the inclusion of opportunity youth and felt that while the challenges to serving this population are great, we should be keeping them in mind as we continue to design the lifelong learning system so that the on-ramps and off-ramps that are created work for them, as well. There was general consensus that in-person mentor supports are crucial for supporting opportunity youth, even as digital solutions may be easy for them to adopt and can support relationships. One commissioner from Committee Three suggested having a segmentation strategy where there were different approaches starting with the learner – one for opportunity youth and one for frontline/entry-level workers. In general it seemed that a focus that included a broader population than those with some college, no degree was appropriate and also necessary given the ambition of the Governor in convening this Commission.

Committee Two discussed the challenge that learners who have remedial learning needs have when they enter community college or state universities. J.D. described a survey of applicants to North Shore CC who did not end up enrolling in the college. It turned out that most didn't choose to go to another institution, but ended up not seeking any further education. Most were already working (mostly low-wage jobs) and cost and convenience were the biggest barriers they cited to continuing with their education. Another group with challenges are people educated in other countries whose degrees aren't recognized here or who have to learn English to succeed in the labor market.

Related to support services, there was discussion about how much money this part of successful programs costs and how Guild is working with Disney on this and Inside Track at Strada. How do people choose among support providers? Could learners have access to a trusted advisor like a GPS to guide them through the digital learning model? Some questions may be solved through technological solutions

(i.e. chat bots), but not all. Perhaps technology could help learners connect to real experts. Digital solutions do not solve problems for trauma affected learners.

Role for Coordinating Entity

When describing what the role of the "middleware" player or coordinating entity should be, each committee saw the role as a connector, convener, facilitator and curator of different aspects of the system and the diverse players that exist. There was discussion across all of the committees related to the lack of standardization and transferability that currently exists in the digital learning space and the need for it. One committee member noted that there are lots of programs (non-profit, for-profit, etc.) in existence with some overlap or similarities, but very different outcomes. Another suggested that the coordinating entity should set standards – that the "gene pool" of programs offering credentials is wide. The coordinating entity should not be a regulator, but an endorser and perhaps funder of new tools that lead to the next phase in development of a lifelong learning system. The coordinating entity should not impose additional controls (like accreditation) that dissuade traditional educational institutions from innovating. Committee Three discussed the coordinating entity determining the key skills needed by employers and inviting a diverse set of providers to offer programs to meet that need, which would eventually be curated by the coordinating entity. Additionally, they discussed making sure that the knowledge and skills taught would be portable for learners across companies.

Funding

One commissioner noted that when discussing funding we often don't take into account the large amount of money spent by employers on learning and development or talent and development within their organizations. These resources could be deployed in more efficacious and transferable ways for both the employer and the learner. Committee Two discussed the possibility of using tax incentives or credits to incent educational institutions, employers and learners to partake in a new program model. The idea of "challenge grants" administered by the coordinating entity or state was also raised. This was received favorably particularly because it would be a new set of funding that may attract new thinking, rather than using already allocated, slim resources that institutions depend on to fund existing programs. Committee Three came up with some additional ideas outside of current funding streams (such as WIOA, DOL apprenticeship grant funding, GI Bill), agreeing that funding for this system needs to include new sources. One commissioner described income share models as renewable learning funds where cities and foundations invest resources with the agreement that the learner will pay back a share of those resources if they successfully earn a credential and get a job. Commissioners in Committee Three also considered tax credits as useful to encourage employers and learners to participate in apprenticeships. The idea of opening up the state scholarship program to fund programs under a new model was met with some skepticism. Some commissioners said that if it was set up with an appropriate transition time to allow institutions that rely on MassGrant and other state financial aid funds to adjust, that it could work.

Role of Employers

It was emphasized throughout the committees that employers need to be at the forefront, driving the bus. Committee One discussed how best to create employer driven solutions without becoming so customized that the solutions aren't transferable to other companies within an industry. The Boston Health Care Careers Consortium was mentioned as an example of a collaborative body that shares learning related to training and education challenges and opportunities so that no one institution has to start from scratch. In Committee Two we heard that proven outcomes are important to companies. We may need a few early adopting key companies to be case studies that would encourage other employers to participate. We are in a particular moment economically (tight labor market) where employers are more likely to come to the table to participate in solutions to solve their talent needs. Committee Three discussed the success that regional employer driven sector strategies have had in meeting specific employer needs, specifically in advanced manufacturing, using the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium, Precision Manufacturing Regional Alliance Project (Hampden County REB) and MACWIC/Quinsigamond CC partnership as examples. These regional partnerships have successfully brought companies, training providers, educators and the workforce system together to meet the talent needs of businesses. One commissioner emphasized the limitations that digital or online learning has for her company. Several commissioners discussed the importance of hands-on learning or hybrid online/work-based learning approaches.

In terms of understand what employers' needs are, one commissioner thought this was best looked at as a data science problem – using job posting data would be the best and most efficient way to understand the skills in demand by specific companies in specific regions. Wayne Skipper and Concentric Sky have worked on understanding the most in-demand badges using a similar method. Innovate+Educate is working with Tufts Medical Center to do competency based hiring.

Role for Higher Education and Focus on Degrees or Credentials

The role for higher education institutions could be to tap into and engage their alumni networks and offer lifelong learning options. Many community colleges already have programs that could fit into a lifelong learning model. To the extent that the commission's work leads to incentivizing public higher educational institutions to try new things and experiment, that is a good thing.

The question of whether we should focus on degrees or credentials received a variety of answers across the committees. Committee One was more interested in looking at non-degree, employer validated credentials. Committee Two had some commissioners state that it was essential to develop programs that at the very least could lead to degrees, to help incentivize helping those without degrees to get them, and other commissioners who believed that traditional colleges and universities are like "Avis in an Uber world," and that relying solely on the signaling strength of the BA will not be enough. There was a discussion of a both/and model where credentials could articulate to credit if necessary. Committee Three discussed the limitations that some alternative credentials have with employers—many employers don't recognize them. Some commissioners said that industry-recognized credentials are often rigorous and could be considered for credit.

Policy Challenges

Some of the broader policy challenges that were raised in Committee Three include the time frame for academic program approvals within college and then by DHE--it can take a few years for public institutions where private institutions have fewer hurdles, and the time and resources needed for accreditation. If industry practitioners could be used as online instructors that would also help scale up some programs. One commissioner suggested creating a system by which programs could be fast-tracked if they could prove strong job placement outcomes. Another commissioner said that the report should not limit the discussion of policy challenges to the state level. There are federal barriers, as well, and the state could be a facilitator for innovation and change.

Other models to learn from

A commissioner in Committee one mentioned leveraging some successful programs currently underway to get to the scale we're looking for, such as McKinsey's Generation and Re-Generation social responsibility initiatives that are currently underway in 7 countries. In this way, McKinsey is tackling both opportunity youth and adult populations. Boise State's Gordon Jones (originally from MIT's College of Innovation and Design) has been working on employer driven stackable credentials, using open educational resources. If non-traditional models like these were validated by the state and employers saw they could redesign them to customize them for their needs with the help of a coordinating entity, this could be useful.

Report Considerations

In Committee One J.D. described themes that need to be captured in the report including an end to credentialism, a better way to support employers using their internal training dollars to maximum effect, and cross company transferability for coordinated skills training/education. We need companies to articulate what lifelong learning means for them, in order to meet their needs. In Committee Three one commissioner suggested that having specific examples of how a challenge grant could be used to fund this kind of innovation would be useful in the report.