

# MISSISSIPPI POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BOARD



IHL Executive Offices, Room 218  
3825 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, MS 39211

Zoom:

<https://itsmsgov.zoom.us/j/81709111187?pwd=RzZ6NXpwUTZBcFh0aTkwZzlHYkFVUT09>

Password: 852233

Teleconference: 1-888-822-7517, Access code: 2791682#

February 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

## **Strategic Planning Committee – Meeting 4**

### **MINUTES**

**BE IT REMEMBERED**, that the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board held a strategic planning meeting on Monday, February 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. Due to recommendations from the Mississippi State Department of Health for social distancing due to the coronavirus, members of the Board participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom or teleconference. Members of the media and public were invited to attend the meeting in Room 218 of the Education and Research Center, 3825 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, Mississippi, 39211 or via teleconference or Zoom.

The following member(s) participated via Zoom or teleconference:

- Debbi Braswell, MAICU appointee
- Ben Burnett, MAICU appointee
- Barney Daly, Lt. Governor's appointee
- Tyrone Jackson, MCCB Institutional appointee
- Mark Keenum, IHL Institutional appointee
- Ann Lamar, IHL Board appointee
- Dolly Marascalco, MCCB appointee
- Sharon Ross, Governor's appointee
- Jim Turcotte, Governor's appointee and Chairman

The following member(s) did not participate:

- Rep. Mac Huddleston, Advisory Member, Chairman, House Universities and Colleges Committee
- Sen. Rita Parks, Advisory Member, Chairman, Senate Universities and Colleges Committee

Also in attendance remotely were:

- Terry Bland, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, Itawamba Community College
- Garry Jones, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, East MS Community College
- Nicole Patrick, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, MS University for Women
- Letherio Ziegler, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, MS Valley State University
- David Williamson, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, University of Southern MS
- Laura Diven-Brown, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, University of MS
- Paul McKinney, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, MS State University
- Isabelle Higbee, Advisory Committee of Aid Directors, Millsaps
- Kim Gallaspy, Asst. Commissioner for Government Relations, IHL
- Meg Harris, Assistant Director of Operations, Student Financial Aid
- Andrea Mayfield, Executive Director, MCCB
- Molly Minta, Reporter, *Mississippi Today*
- Jennifer Rogers, Director of Student Financial Aid and Postsecondary Director
- Apryll Washington, Assistant Director of Policy and Planning, Student Financial Aid

**Item 1:** The meeting was called to order by Chairman Turcotte.

**Item 2:** The following individuals serve as directors of financial aid for their respective institutions. These individuals were invited by Chairman Turcotte to serve as an ad-hoc advisory committee to assist the Board in developing a recommendation for redesigning the state's aid programs:

- Terry Bland, Itawamba Community College
- Garry Jones, East Mississippi Community College
- Nicole Patrick, Mississippi University for Women
- Letherio Ziegler, Mississippi Valley State University
- David Williamson, University of Southern Mississippi
- Laura Diven-Brown, University of Mississippi
- Paul McKinney, Mississippi State University
- Isabelle Higbee, Millsaps College

**Item 3:** On motion by Ms. Braswell and seconded by Dr. Keenum, all Board Members legally present and participating voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the third Strategic Planning Committee meeting held on December 17, 2020 as originally drafted.

**Item 4:** Ms. Rogers updated the Board about ACT Superscores. The Board voted in summer 2020 to accept ACT Superscores for state aid for eligibility, and the decision increased the SFA FY22 budget request by about \$4.1 million. Since then, ACT has delayed publication of ACT Superscores. Because the Board's policy is to accept only "official" ACT Superscores published by ACT, the Office has no way to accept the Superscores. In addition, the Legislature has responded to the Board's decision to accept Superscores by proposing Legislation to take the decision out of the Board's hands. Senator Briggs Hopson, Chairman of Appropriations, introduced SB 2547, which passed through the Senate, to raise the ACT score for MTAG from 15 to 17 and for MESG from 29 to 30. The ACT score required for HELP would remain at 20 but must come from a single test administration. It would be very difficult to administer

programs if Superscores could be accepted for some programs but not for others. Since Superscores are not available and the Legislature has expressed dissatisfaction over the Board's decision to accept Superscores, does the Board wish to consider rolling back the decision?

Daly: Is there any reason why we can't wait to see if the scores become available or the Senate bill passes?

Rogers: The Board can wait or act now.

Turcotte: The Board felt the country was moving in the direction of accepting Superscores and MS would be out of sync if we didn't.

Marascalco: I am not in favor of this decision to accept Superscores, because we can't afford it.

Keenum: The IHL Board has already voted to accept and embrace Superscores, so a decision not to accept Superscores would put us out of sync with IHL.

Mayfield: Yes, MCCB and IHL are accepting Superscores for admissions and placement purposes, but the Board needs to consider this from a wholistic standpoint. The state cannot afford to accept the Superscores due to the budget pressure.

Jackson: The community college presidents have taken the position to support not using Superscores for state aid because of the budget.

Rogers: If we leave the decision in place, but we don't get Superscores until very late in the year, that creates a lot of confusion for students and creates administrative upheaval.

Turcotte: I think if we move forward with the One Grant proposal, we can recommend something that fits into the budget even with Superscores.

Rogers: Agreed, but that doesn't solve the problem for the current year.

Keenum: Will it change how you award if you get Superscores or don't get Superscores?

Rogers: No, we will either use the highest score or the Superscores, whichever we have available at the time we start to make awards. And we have budgeted for Superscores in our request, should they become available.

Marascalco: We can't count on the Legislature for fully funding the request.

Turcotte: Whether we do it now or later, everyone will go to Superscores. Everyone in the country is going to Superscores and we will be left behind if we do not. I think we should move on to discuss a new program design instead of this Superscore question.

Braswell: Is it possible to accept the Superscores to the extent they are available?

Rogers: That is where we are now, because the policy is very clear that we will not be calculating scores.

Braswell: I agree with Turcotte that Mississippi will be left behind if we don't accept Superscores.

Mayfield: But what if the Legislature doesn't fund the additional cost of the Superscores?

Turcotte: We will prorate and we certainly don't want to do that.

Keenum: Hate to turn back on the decision after a few months just because we are now concerned about the impact on the budget. That is something we considered when the original decision was made and the potential cost was built into the budget. I propose we table the conversation and move forward with our strategic planning conversation.

Rogers: We do not need a motion for staying the course. A motion is only needed if we are to reverse the decision.

Turcotte: Does anyone wish to propose a motion?

Jackson: I move that the Board reverse the decision to accept Superscores for state aid eligibility and revisit for FY23.

Marascalco: I was not on the Board when the original decision was made, so I feel torn about seconding the motion.

Turcotte: Hearing no second, we will move forward.

Ross: I probably should have asked this earlier, but if the country is embracing Superscores, how is everyone else addressing this problem?

Rogers: Remember there is a difference between accepting Superscores for admission and placement and accepting Superscores for scholarships and state aid. Although many local institutions have chosen to accept Superscores for admissions, they will have to choose separately to accept Superscores for Institutional scholarships, and they will always have the ability to raise the scores they award. As a state, we don't have any flexibility. Also, remember that most states, aside from some Southern states, do not award state aid on the basis of merit. They do not use ACT scores in their determination of who receives aid, so this is of no consequence. Some states also are SAT states, not ACT states. If a state uses ACT scores to determine aid eligibility, they are in the same situation as we are in and will have to make a determination about accepting or not accepting Superscores for state aid purposes. Using ACT scores for aid determination, however, is not the norm nationally. But, no, ACT is not publishing Superscores for anyone at this time. Some institutions may be choosing to calculate their own Superscores.

**Item 5:** Dr. Turcotte introduces the idea of developing a proposal for “one grant,” using the model developed in 2018 as a starting point for development. He outlined three assumptions for consideration: 1) Any new proposal should not be expected to exceed the cost of the existing programs; 2) The programs provide the greatest possible access for the most students; and 3) The proposal blends need and merit. Dr. Turcotte invites comments:

Keenum: Like the idea of marrying need and merit. The 2018 proposal seemed too heavily focused on need.

Daly: Has the “one grant” been used in other states? Will it be phased in?

Turcotte: We would prefer to do everything at once, but will have to work with the Legislature on that.

Rogers: There are no two grant programs in any two states that are exactly alike, but the 2018 proposal was loosely based on a new “performance-based” scholarship that came out of Indiana's recent state aid redesign.

Diven-Brown: One-grant model appeals for its simplicity and transparency. We realized three years ago that we are trying to serve many competing interests. Because of the high level of need in the state, we did think it was important to build in a need component. We also discussed the desire to serve the large and ever-growing nontraditional population in the state that has never been served before. Is that population still a priority?

Turcotte: The Board has not fully discussed who fits where in the priority order, but, yes, they are important.

Higbee: The goal in 2018 and now should be simplification. The difficulty comes in trying to serve three very different populations between the publics, privates, and two-years. The current grid looks complicated but is actually pretty straightforward. More than anything, it would need marketing,

McKinney: The 2018 proposal does probably need some work, but one good thing about it is that it removed the merit and income cliffs. We really need to smooth out those cliffs.

Braswell: During the 2018 meeting, we kept the Legislative purpose of state aid in mind as the mission. That purpose to provide affordable access to as many Mississippi students as possible. That is why we were so focused on those cliffs. But it may cost more money if we want to touch more lives. We will have to weigh that tradeoff.

Turcotte: I would like to charge the advisory committee of financial aid directors to go work on a proposal without our interference.

Williamson: The 2018 model is a good starting point, but it definitely needs to be simplified. Agree with Mayfield that we may need caps on HELP or any need-based aid program. Plugged USM population into 2018 model and would be able to award more students, even though some students may receive less aid.

Rogers: In the 2018 model, we plugged in actual state aid recipients and applicants. Nearly every institution would have received more money, even if the money was going to different students. My biggest question at this time is how important to the Board is the consideration of part-time students.

Keenum: My priority would be full-time students, but I think the answer will likely be driven by the budget. I would like the advisory committee to come back to the Board to tell us how much a "one grant" plan would cost for the existing population and how much to add in additional populations, such as part-time.

Marascalco: I think we definitely do need to consider part-time students and not put them at the bottom of the priority list. We need to consider working parents and others who need to work while they are in school.

Rogers: Patrick posted a question for the Board about whether there are other priorities of the Board that the committee needs to be aware of? In response, just keep in mind that the Board is very aware of the cliffs for both need and merit. A HELP student receives a tremendously generous award, but someone making just \$1 over the income threshold may only qualify for a \$500 MTAG award. HELP award may be too high and escalates exponentially due to the number of qualifiers and the increasing cost of tuition.

Keenum: Consider asking the Legislature to somehow index the value of the awards, so that the awards maintain purchasing power, but the total cost doesn't escalate too quickly. Appropriations would grow, but in a measured way over time.

Braswell: I don't think we need to expect the SFA appropriation to stay the same and expect to serve ever more students. Can we ask for more money if we are serving more students over time?

Turcotte: Yes, we should ask for what we need to serve the most students as effectively as possible.

**Item 6:** Dr. Turcotte asked the advisory committee of financial aid directors to meet separately to discuss recommendations, considering the following priorities and assumptions: 1) maintain roughly the same budget; 2) serve as many students as possible; 3) maintain a blend of need and merit; 4) smooth the cliffs; 5) determine the costs of serving both full-time and part-time learners. Once the committee has some data and recommendations, they will bring those back before the full Board.

Marascalco: Is there something we or the Legislature can do to stop students from getting their state aid and never going to class? The money should be paid directly to the school and only given to students if they are actually going to school.

Rogers: First, all financial aid, both federal and state, is paid directly to the school. After the student's direct expenses (tuition, room, board, etc.) are paid, if there is money left over, the school will write a check to the student in the form of a refund that can be used on other educational expenses. But aid jumping, as you're describing, does not happen with state aid. State aid is disbursed only after the add/drop period concludes, so we know for a fact the student is actually enrolled and attending classes. The student must also enroll in and complete 15 hours and maintain a specific GPA, which we check every semester. So, even if a student receives aid for one semester and then drops out, they cannot get aid again without first re-establishing full-time, continuous enrollment (i.e. enroll without the benefit of aid for at least one semester) and pull up the GPA before regaining aid eligibility.

McKinney: The federal government cracked down on "Pell-jumpers" several years ago. Just as with state aid, we work very hard to crack down on fraud.

Jones: With the pandemic, we are able to adjust incomes that have been reduced due to job-loss. We may end up seeing more students qualify for HELP over the next couple of years, because of those income changes. We need to be ready for that.

Bland: We are going to have to balance the difference in expenses between two-years and four-years. That is why we had the two tiers in the matrix.

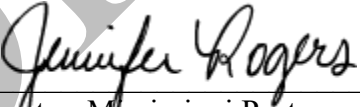
Higbee: Any time you have an aid system, you will have those that abuse the system, but for the most part, most Mississippi students use the aid as it was designed.

Diven-Brown: What defines merit?

Turcotte: We'd like the committee to make a recommendation about how we *should* define merit.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Dr. Turcotte declared the meeting adjourned.

  
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Director, Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial  
Assistance Board