

# MISSISSIPPI POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BOARD



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

February 12, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

## **Strategic Planning Committee – Meeting 1**

### **Minutes**

The Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board held a strategic planning meeting on Wednesday, February 12, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. 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.

The following members participated in person:

- Debbi Braswell, MAICU appointee
- Lee Bush, MCCB appointee
- Louanne Langston, MCCB Institutional appointee
- Sharon Ross, Governor's appointee
- Jim Turcotte, Governor's appointee and Chairman

The following members participated via teleconference:

- Ben Burnett, MAICU appointee
- Mark Keenum, IHL Institutional appointee

The following members did not participate:

- Mack Grubbs, Lt. Governor's appointee
- Ann Lamar, IHL Board appointee

Also in attendance were:

- Beverly Jackson, Database Administrator/Senior Analyst
- Jennifer Rogers, Director of Student Financial Aid and Postsecondary Director
- Apryll Washington, Assistant Director Policy and Planning, Student Financial Aid

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Turcotte.

The Board discussed the deficit budget situation for FY 2020. The Board took no formal action but asked Student Financial Aid (SFA) to withhold spring disbursements until the Legislature confirms a deficit appropriation will be made. After confirmation is received, the Office will revisit the discussion with the Board to determine how best to disburse funds.

## Opening Remarks

Chairman Turcotte provided opening remarks to explain why the Board has scheduled a series of strategic planning meetings.

## Discussion of Strategic Planning Process and Objectives

Chairman Turcotte asked the Board about their concerns and areas of interest. The following list of topics for further discussion and consideration emerged:

1. *One grant program to simplify our programs.* The current program offerings are confusing. There are certain programs that parents and schools believe are funded, but they are not funded. The idea of one grant with graduated awards has previously been discussed by the financial aid directors, and a one-grant model was recommended by the financial aid directors to legislators during the 2018-2019 state aid task force meetings. Under a one-grant model, the level of award can be determined by classification, GPA, ACT score, enrollment intensity, etc. There are many options.
2. *Forward funding and transparent funding.* Because of the state aid application and budget cycles, funding is uncertain at the time when families need a financial guarantee in order to make college-going decisions. Forward funding financial aid would require two years of appropriations in the first year of implementation but would tremendously increase transparency and reliability. If forward funding is not an option, the Board should consider not requesting deficit funds, and pro-rate from the beginning of the year to avoid the confusion and stress of spring pro-ration.
3. *Shift aid to cover true costs to reduce refunds.* The value of aid varies by sector, because the sector costs vary. Perhaps award amounts should be adjusted to better account for the direct cost variations by sector. For example, HELP awards full tuition. When stacked with Pell at a two-year college, this may result in a sizable refund for the student to cover indirect costs, whereas when stacked with Pell at a four-year college, the student may still lack the means to cover the full direct cost.
4. *Review other states programs.* There is a desire to ensure aid programs are available to help keep resident students in state, especially the best and brightest students for whom there is the most competition. Additional research should be completed to review merit programs like MESG in neighboring states.
5. *Smooth out the aid cliff.* When you look at an image of who receives aid and who does not, the general picture shows a cliff for students from lower middle and middle-income families who do not qualify for need-based aid and for students with ACT scores of 24-28 who may not qualify for merit-based aid. A graduated award scale would be much better compared to the current “cliff.”
6. *Define aid packaging data for the Legislature.* The issue of aid packages arose during the 2018-2019 State Aid Task Force meetings. The legislators who participated in the

meetings asked SFA to tell them where the gaps are. While SFA can speak in generalities, currently SFA has no way of knowing how much aid (grants/loans/work study, etc.) each student receives (institutional, federal, and private). Therefore, it is hard to really determine where the gaps are and if the gaps vary by sector and by institution. The legislators asked SFA to collect this information. A collection effort was made in spring 2019, but not all schools participated. The Board discussed other ways of solving this problem. There is a large amount of data currently available to assist the Board to determine where there are gaps. Board can use current cost of attendance, institutional scholarship amounts, and FAFSA information to help determine the gaps. If a data collection process is created to formally collect this information, Mr. Ivo Burnett with the MS Community College Board has created a similar file for reporting student level data for athletes. The Board could potentially build off this reporting tool to determine aid for all students.

7. *Determine the purpose of state aid.* The Board should consider what it believes to be the purpose of state aid. The Board should then explore this with legislators. Additionally, the Board should gauge the Legislature's appetite for changing state aid.

### Next Steps

Rogers will email about a second meeting in March.

The following items will be included in the agenda for the March planning meeting:

- Minutes from Strategic Planning Meeting 1
- Rogers will present a brief history of Student Financial Aid to inform and frame the current discussion. The presentation will include information about grants and loans.
- Rogers will provide the Board with information from the previous director's meetings and State Aid Task Force meetings.
- Identify additional areas of focus for the board.