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Postsecondary Inclusive Education Advisory Council

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

1:00-3:00 p.m.

Claiborne Building
Iowa Room, 1st Floor
1201 N 3rd Street
Baton Rouge, LA

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Kim Hunter Reed called the meeting of the Postsecondary Inclusive Education Advisory Council to order at 1:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Kim Langlois called the roll, and a quorum was established.

Members Present	Affiliation
Dr. Kim Hunter Reed	Commissioner of Higher Education
Melisa Bayham	LA Rehabilitation Services
Dr. Gerlinde Beckers	Office of the Governor
Dr. Mary Breaud	Office of the Governor
Dr. Dan Bureau	LSU System
Amy Deaville	LA Developmental Disabilities Council
Gerald "Mitch" Dillon	LA Developmental Disabilities Council
Katherine Granier	Special School District
Dr. Jeannine Kahn	UL System
Johnny Manela	LA Developmental Disabilities Council
Dennis Shields	Southern University System
Dr. Willie Smith	LCTCS
Brittany Soden	House Committee on Education
Members Absent	Affiliation
Dr. Caroline Jurisich	Senate Committee on Education

Commissioner Reed thanked all the members of the Council for attending and asked that they introduce themselves and provide some insight as to how they got involved in this work or what makes them excited to be part of it.

REVIEW OF ACT 682 OF 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Commissioner Reed introduced Senator Gerald Boudreaux to provide an overview of the goals and intentions of Act 682 and the Advisory Council.

Senator Boudreaux thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He explained that during the pandemic he met with students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette who were excited about the program, and he was inspired. He was approached by Bambi Polozola to create legislation similar to that used in Florida. He explained that when he served in Parks and Recreation in Lafayette, he was fortunate to bring the special needs community into their recreation offerings, and that it was important to him to continue that work. He explained that the legislation creates a fund to provide more access and opportunities to this population, and that the role of the Council is to bring advocacy and education to the Legislature on its mission and objectives, which are to grow the program, justify the need and raise awareness.

Commissioner Reed thanked Senator Boudreaux for his leadership and commitment to this work. She then explained that the fund had been created and provided with \$1 million in funding to expand programs or support existing programs; this Council was charged to determine how to do that. She advised the Council that the new law mandates that in February of each year the Council must provide a report, including specified contents, to the Senate Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Finance, the House Committee on Education, and the House Committee on Appropriations.

STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

Dr. Reed advised the Council that in this item members would hear information on four inclusive education programs from across the institutions. She noted that Dr. Jurisich from ULL was unable to attend the meeting and would present at the September meeting.

Dr. Gerlinde Beckers, Southeastern Louisiana University, provided a brief presentation on the Southeastern Lions Connected Program. Dr. Beckers advised that goals are to help students develop skills to become successful. The program includes both a two- and four-year program and each program is individualized to the student and offers vocational opportunities.

Commissioner Reed asked whether the students are staying on campus. Dr. Beckers replied that the program does not have housing due to a campus shortage, but if housing is needed the program has reciprocal relationships with other programs in the state.

Ms. Granier asked whether there are any exceptions for students who are entering the program. Dr. Beckers explained that programs are accredited by the US Department of Education; its definition for intellectual disabilities is very open, so the programs do not exclude anyone from entry.

Dr. Mary Breaud, Nicholls State University, presented to the Council with information on the Nicholls Bridge to Independence program. She explained that Nicholls offer two pathways: a degree pathway for those with autism and a certificate pathway for students with intellectual disabilities. The program's goal is to provide students with a meaningful college experience and preparation for independent living and gainful employment.

Commissioner Reed asked how program staff assist students in selecting a program of study. Dr. Breaud replied that the first freshman course helps students develop their interests. In addition, students attend a preview day, where staff can get a feel for a student's interests. She also explained the diversified internship program, which allows students an the opportunity to develop a wide variety of skills, which they then use to build a binder to assist them in applying for jobs.

Mr. Mitch Dillon, LA Developmental Disabilities Council, shared his experience during his time enrolled in the Nicholls Bridge to Independence Program and stated that his favorite part of the program was spending time with his friends.

Ms. Brittany Soden, LSU-Alexandria, presented an overview of the campus's new SPERO program, which will be starting on Monday. She informed the Council that, prior to SPERO's creation, there were no inclusive programs in north Louisiana. She shared a video showing students from the first inaugural class receiving their acceptance letters.

Ms. Roxane West, RBW Consulting, provided information related to a two-phase program to be piloted this year at McNeese and SOWELA. She advised that she is working with Calcasieu Parish schools to build a program in partnership with those two institutions. She advised that the goal is to provide educational opportunities outside of the typical high school experience for students who do not have access to such educational communities, with a focus on the population of 18- to 22-year-old students with disabilities. She also advised the Council on the challenges presented when creating a program, such as funding, parental support, and changing the mindset of faculty and staff at postsecondary institutions.

DISCUSSION OF NEXT STEPS

Dr. Reed thanked all the presenters for providing insight on the great work being done to create inclusive environments on our campuses.

Commissioner Reed asked Dr. Beckers to provide information about the Alliance, including what members are doing, what they need, and the challenges and opportunities. Dr. Beckers responded that the Alliance began in 2019 with two goals: to create one new program and to generate funding. She advised that the partners are currently entering year four and have provided technical assistance to other programs and visited other campuses to help facilitate program development. She advised the Council that members are in need of resources and support to grow. Ms. Amy Deaville, LA Developmental Disabilities Council, commented that the Alliance has had success getting programs operational and offer excellent technical assistance.

Commissioner Reed advised that it would be helpful to have an inventory of programs currently operating in Louisiana as well as of institutions interested in starting programs so the Council can understand the scope of the interest to inform the goal of creating a statewide plan.

Senator Boudreaux responded that the purpose of the bill is to enhance what the Alliance has started and to gauge the need across the entire state.

Southern University System President Dennis Shields asked if there is a geographic gap in programs within the state. Dr. Beckers responded that most of the programs are in the southern part of the state, although Grambling has expressed interest. She added that no HBCU in the country has a program. Ms. West added that she believes that there is a partnership between Caddo Parish Schools and SUSLA.

Commissioner Reed asked BRCC Chancellor Dr. Willie Smith for insight from LCTCS. Dr. Smith advised that he was aware of the program at BPCC, but was not sure if BRCC was a member of the Alliance. Dr. Beckers confirmed that BRCC is part of the Alliance. He also advised the Council that SOWELA is working on a partnership with McNeese State University, and that there are several institutions that want to be involved in creating a program.

Dr. Dan Bureau was asked for LSU's perspective on the work. Dr. Bureau responded that he would bring this discussion back to campus and looked forward to working with everyone.

Commissioner Reed asked Mr. Johnny Manela, LA Developmental Disabilities Council, to speak from his perspective as a parent of a student who was involved in a program. Mr. Manela explained that his family was very involved in their son's development and that, when he was in tenth grade, they began thinking about his future. He noted that, as they became more involved in this community, they learned that there was a definite need and that one of the biggest challenges for families from low economic backgrounds was affording tuition.

Dr. Bureau asked if the Council is more interested in pipelines to opportunities in postsecondary education or students who are currently in postsecondary education. Dr. Beckers responded that there are there two tracks, but these are rooted in certificate-based programs. Ms. Soden added that at the end of the SPERO program the students receive a certificate, not a degree, to show that they have skills to enter the workforce.

Dr. Breaud commented that the Council should consider programs that are certified through the U.S. Department of Education, to ensure that there is a framework of requirements. Commissioner Reed added that the Council should build on current federal guidelines.

Ms. West added that it would be powerful for a leader from a district be invited as a guest, to build awareness would be helpful of the programs and the need.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Commissioner Reed advised the Council that the legislation calls for members of the Council to elect a chair and vice-chair. She opened the floor for nominations.

Dr. Breaud nominated Dr. Beckers for Chair. Commissioner Reed seconded the nomination. Dr. Beckers accepted the role of Chair and the motion carried. Commissioner Reed advised the Council that she or Dr. Tristan Denley would be happy to support the Council in the vice chair role, in order to provide Board of Regents support.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

NEXT STEPS & ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Reed asked Senator Boudreaux if he had any closing remarks. Senator Boudreaux once again thanked the members of the Council and stressed that the fund could be grown through awareness, education, and inclusiveness.

Commissioner Reed announced the next scheduled meetings of the Council in September and October.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.