

Maine Compact for Higher Education

Board of Directors Meeting

October 15, 2007

Senator Inn, Augusta

Minutes

Board members present: Mary Cathcart, Laird Covey, John Diamond, Joseph Foley, Shepard Harris, Joyce Hedlund, Laurie Lachance, Derek Pierce, Lynn Ploof-Davis, Colleen Quint, Rep. Christopher Rector, Senator Margaret Rotundo, George Spann, Mila Tappan, and John Witherspoon.

Guests and Staff present: Melanie Arsenault, director of the Employer Initiative for the Maine Development Foundation; Henry Bourgeois; Dianne Heino; and Martha Johnston, director of Education Products and Relationships for the Finance Authority of Maine

Joseph Foley, chair of the board, opened the meeting at 9:35 a.m.

Minutes of the June 5, 2007 board meeting. Mr. Foley asked the board members if they had any changes to the minutes of the last board meeting. No corrections were suggested. The board:

Voted, on a motion by Ms. Quint, seconded by Mr. Rector, to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2007 Board of Directors meeting. The vote was unanimous.

Many Flags/One Campus. Mr. Foley asked Mr. Rector to describe the Many Flags initiative. Mr. Rector explained that the concept has evolved over the last four years to the following vision:

Many Flags/One Campus is a unique technical and higher education concept for the Midcoast and its Island communities that promotes efficiency by combining into one virtual presence and physical location the programs, degrees, students, faculty, staff, classrooms, labs, technology infrastructure and administrative functions from the following institutions that provide vocational/technical training, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees and graduate degrees: the Midcoast School of Technology; Kennebec Valley Community College; University of Maine Orono – Hutchinson Center; the University College at Thomaston; and a Marine Systems Center of Excellence in cooperation with the Maine Community College System and private marine trade training resources in Maine. In addition, this robust learning environment will be an exceptional campus location for a high performing regional Midcoast High School, with a focus on integrated applied learning, career and technical education, and early college/dual enrollment opportunities.

Mr. Rector asked the board to consider endorsing the Many Flags concept and approach. He and other board members explained that the Many Flags effort was consistent with the Compact's vision and approach.

The board decided to place the item on the November board agenda and invite Mr. Rector and his colleagues to explain the concept in more detail.

Bond Issues. Mr. Diamond asked the board for its endorsement of the two higher education-related bond issues on this November's ballot – Number 2 is a \$55 million research and development bond, and Number 3 is a \$43 million capital improvement fund for the University and Community College Systems. Members were enthusiastic in their support of these bond issues, and the board:

Voted, on a motion by Mr. Witherspoon, seconded by Ms. Quint, to endorse passage of bond issues numbers 2 and 3. The vote was unanimous.

Endorsement of the bond issues, and consideration of the Many Flags endorsement (above), prompted a discussion of the criteria the board uses to make such decisions. Recalling that criteria had been proposed two years ago, Mr. Bourgeois was asked to report on them at the next meeting.

Symposium. Mr. Bourgeois referred the members to the Symposium Notes and Evaluation Report. Mr. Foley and other board members were very pleased with the high attendance and the larger than usual

number of business people who participated. The only disappointment expressed was the lack of press coverage.

Members speculated that the large attendance, particularly by business people, may have been due to several factors: southern Maine location of the event, the theme that focused on the connection between worker education attainment and economic growth, or the support of the Portland Region Chamber of Commerce in promoting the event among their members.

The board asked Mr. Bourgeois to survey the attendees about their attendance motivations and use that information to select next year's venue and theme.

Program Update. Mr. Bourgeois briefly updated the board on the status of the Compact's initiatives. The members focused on two strategies:

- a. Early College. Ms. Quint reported that the funding support for the Mitchell Institute's "Access College Early (ACE)" program has ended, forcing a termination of the program. However, additional support is being sought to continue it.

The Mitchell Institute will publish a major statewide study of Early College in December.

Ms. Rotundo explained that state government continues to appropriate funds for the Early Studies program that supports dual enrollment at Maine's Community Colleges and Universities. In response to a question from Mr. Spann, Ms. Rotundo explained that the state funds were not available to students attending private colleges.

Several board members expressed confusion about the various programs. It was suggested that we needed a succinct, user-friendly description of the numerous early college initiatives, and a list of which high schools and colleges/universities offered which programs. Such a list could be placed on the Compact's website with links to numerous other sites.

- The board asked Mr. Bourgeois to try to prepare such a description.

- b. Employer Initiative. Ms. Arsenault briefly summarized the status of the program, reporting that the Advisory Committee will reconvene on November 28.
- The board invited Ms. Arsenault to brief them more fully at the November Compact meeting.

Fund Raising Plan. Mr. Foley outlined plans to raise funds to support the Compact's core operation for the next three years. He estimated that \$160,000 is needed each of the next three years to maintain the same level of work as the last three years. Mr. Foley thanked Hank Schmelzer who volunteered to work with he and Henry on this project. Their initial focus will be conversations with current and former funders.

Scholarship Program. Mr. Bourgeois suggested that the Compact needed to decide how to proceed with its fifth action strategy – the scholarship initiative. That is, whether to repeat last year's approach – seek a substantial increase from state government in the Maine State Grant Program (MSGP), or pursue another tact.

To help frame the discussion, he reported on three new developments that will provide additional revenue to students in financial need:

- Opportunity Maine is a new state law, enacted last spring, that will provide a state income tax credit for student loan payments made by degree earners who live, work and pay taxes in Maine following graduation.
- The Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund is another new state law, with funding estimated at \$3 million, to provide skill training and education in high demand, high wage jobs. The target employee would be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and relatively low skilled.
- The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 is a new Federal Law that, among other provisions, cuts interest rates in half on subsidized student loans over the next four years, and increases the Federal Pell grant from the current maximum of \$4,050 per year to \$5,400 per year over the next five years.

Ms. Tappan and Mr. Witherspoon noted that, although the increased Federal support was significant, it may result in less support for students from middle-income families, and more support for students from the lowest income levels.

Ms. Tappan said that in her experience, reinforced by the recent Barriers report, the lowest income students' primary barrier is not financial, but an attitude and experience barrier expressed as 'Can I do it?' Financial aid is available for low income students; they need hands-on assistance, counseling and support to show them that they can succeed. Middle-income students have the most difficulty finding financial support. For these reasons, Ms. Tappan supports enhancing the MSGP. Mr. Spann agreed and noted that, in his experience, the MSGP is a national model – it is extremely efficient, accommodates students' choices about public and private, and in-state and out-of-state colleges.

Regarding Opportunity Maine, it was noted that the long-term financial obligation for the program is unclear and potentially huge, and with finite state government resources, the increasing financial obligations of Opportunity Maine may impact funding for other higher education initiatives.

Mr. Bourgeois presented another approach for consideration, articulated recently by the MCF staff – promote the creation and expansion of local education foundations whose resources, in part, may provide scholarship support to local high school graduates to enable them to go to college. These local education foundations are funded primarily by private contributions from individuals and organizations. Still in the 'brainstorming stage' this initiative could provide technical support, training, best practices and encouragement to: create local education foundations where they do not exist; increase the contributions received by local foundations; help local foundations prepare multi-year strategies including scholarship criteria; and improve the return on the investments of local foundations.

The board was intrigued with this idea and encouraged Mr. Bourgeois to pursue it. There was consensus that additional support for the MSGP should also be pursued in this next session of the Legislature.

Mr. Foley thanked the board and adjourned the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Henry Bourgeois,
Compact Executive Director
October 17, 2007