



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

**MSDE Digital Learning Advisory
Stakeholders Committee Meeting**

**February 11, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

Council Members in Attendance: Dr. Carol A. Williamson (Chairperson), Ms. Donna Baker, Mr. Brian Beaubien, Ms. Carol Beck, Dr. Colleen Eisenbeiser, Mr. Brad Engel, Dr. Julie Evans, Ms. Anna Gannon, Ms. Robin Hopkins, Ms. Yasmine Juhar, Ms. Marsye Kaplan, Mr. Andrew Moore, II, Ms. Rebecca Pensero, Dr. Peggy Pugh, Ms. Nina Riggs, Ms. Leeann Schubert, Ms. Susan Spinnato, Ms. Tonya Sweat, Ms. LaTanya Taylor, Mr. John Tompkins, Mr. Jonathan Turner, and Dr. Christine Welch

MSDE Staff in Attendance: Ms. Val Emrich, Mr. Shane J. McCormick, Ms. Erin Senior, and Ms. Laia Tiderman

Members Not in Attendance: Mr. Brian Dulay, Ms. Marquita Friday, Dr. Joey Jones, Mr. Scott Nichols, Ms. Kelly Ruby, Ms. Amy Shepler, Dr. Gina Solano

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. when a quorum was established.

Welcome & Approval of Minutes

Dr. Carol Williamson, chairperson, welcomed the members and the members reviewed the meeting minutes from the January 15, 2021 meeting. Ms. Tonya Sweat asked that the minutes be amended to reflect that she voted to approve the December 11, 2020, meeting minutes that were approved during the course of the January 15, 2021 meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Ms. Anna Gannon and seconded by Ms. Tonya Sweat.

Roll Call Vote: 21 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstained. Members absent from the vote: Ms. Yasmine Juhar. The motion carried.

Dr. Williamson reviewed the meeting agenda with the members and the topics that would be discussed during the meeting. Dr. Williamson shared that the Board of Education Virtual Learning Work Group has been very impressed with the contributions of the committee as a whole and the contributions of the three subcommittees.

Technology Subcommittee Update

Ms. Val Emrich introduced Ms. Laia Tiderman, MSDE staff, to present on the technology survey that was facilitated by the MSDE, in collaboration with the Public State Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM). A workgroup had been established to develop the state-wide survey; the purpose of the survey was to identify and quantify technology-related gaps within local school systems (LSS) across the State. The survey was distributed to all LSS assistant superintendents across all twenty-four LSSs in the State of Maryland, in addition to the SEED School of Maryland.

Ms. Tiderman shared that the final survey included 109 questions that covered eight topic areas. The first topic area focused on student digital learning devices; the survey found that sixteen LSSs reported having 90-100% of their student enrollment that had been issued a system-provided digital device. Ms. Tiderman clarified that this figure did not represent the number of students that did not have a device or are actively using a system-issued device in lieu of their own personal devices. The survey asked LSSs to identify obstacles to student digital learning device distribution, and about the implementation of a 1:1 student-to-device ratio plan. Thirteen LSSs indicated they had full implementation of a 1:1 student-to-device ratio plan.

Ms. Anna Gannon asked whether it was explicitly asked in the survey among students that were using personal devices what type of device they were using, such as a computer compared to a mobile device. Ms. Tiderman stated that based on feedback from the workgroup that LSSs know attendance and engagement, but that they do not always know what type of device is being utilized. Ms. Gannon asked further clarifying questions on device usage and tracking by LSSs, and referenced application usage issues with smart devices.

Ms. Tiderman discussed the second topic that focused on continuity of learning. The survey found that the three biggest obstacles to continuity of learning were connectivity, lack of IT staff, and the need for replacement digital devices when devices are damaged or for other issues. LSSs were asked what measures they had taken to resolve these issues, how LSS minimize distractions to continuity of learning, and how LSSs ensure continuity of learning in the absence of a device. Ms. Gannon asked whether there was a question asked about partnerships between LSSs and outside organizations to ensure local internet connectivity; Ms. Tiderman stated the subject would be covered in another section of the survey.

Ms. Tiderman discussed the third topic that focused on sustainability. The survey found that LSSs face three primary challenges to sustainability: fiscal challenges, planning challenges, and staffing challenges. Ms. Tiderman discussed the fourth topic that focused on digital access and connectivity. The survey found that nine LSSs estimated that 90-100% of their student populations had access to a sufficient connection for remote learning for the 2020-2021 school year. LSSs were asked how they address lack of access and connectivity; twenty-four LSSs reported providing students and families with a hotspot.

Ms. Tiderman discussed the fifth topic that focused on staff digital devices and distribution. Sixteen LSSs reported universal access for staff to digital devices, while some reported making devices available by request or by actual school. LSSs were asked to identify devices and

resources that would help to support staff to be successful in a hybrid or remote learning environment; LSSs identified a need for devices such as cameras, microphones, etc.

Ms. Tiderman discussed the sixth topic that focused on professional development. LSSs were asked about the frequency of professional development for teachers. Eleven LSSs reported offering self-service or as-needed training. LSSs were asked about teacher participation in professional development at least once during the 2020-2021 school year; sixteen LSSs reported that all teachers participated in professional development opportunities on using digital tools.

Ms. Tiderman discussed the seventh topic that focused on digital platforms and tools to identify what learning management systems and tools that LSSs have been using. The majority of LSSs indicated using platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom. Ms. Tiderman discussed the eighth topic that focused on supporting vulnerable students, and what obstacles and successes that LSSs have had in trying to support these student populations. Common successes included the environment, increased confidence, relationship building, and flexibility. Ms. Gannon asked if a question was asked about when professional development was offered and in what format; Ms. Tiderman stated that data was not collected.

Ms. Gannon asked a follow-up question on if questions were asked about if professional development opportunities were made available to support staff or administrators and not just teachers; Ms. Emrich stated from her perspective that professional development was made available on a self-service level. Mr. Andrew Moore responded in the meeting chat that data on self-service professional development was collected as needed.

Discussion: Technology Survey & Findings

Dr. Williamson clarified to the members that a follow-up survey would have to be administered because the survey was distributed at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, and that circumstances may have changed dramatically in the months since. Dr. Williamson asked the members about their perceptions of the levels of access for students and staff based on the information collected from the survey. Ms. Tonya Sweat stated that the issue of sustainability needs to be addressed, and that LSSs will need the funding to sustain a digital learning environment. Ms. Sweat also stated that there were outstanding issues with economic disparities for students securing connectivity.

Ms. Leann Schubert echoed the concerns of Ms. Sweat regarding the exacerbation of economic disparities for student populations. Dr. Peggy Pugh stated that access to devices is not as prevalent of an issue for some LSSs, but that is not universal to all LSSs, and that devices do not resolve issues pertaining to connectivity and securing funding to address connectivity issues. Dr. Williamson stated that sustainability was also an issue about which the Board of Education Virtual Learning Work Group is concerned.

Ms. Gannon asked for clarification on what type of obligation the MSDE and the US Department of Education have to ensure equitable access to connectivity, and discussed further complications due to lack of connectivity and equitable access for underrepresented student populations and students in poverty. Dr. Williamson clarified that the MSDE has limitations on issues related to

connectivity due to the local control structure of the State that delegates certain decisions to LSSs and local counties, but that the committee can be and has been a critical voice in identifying these issues and advocating through various channels to remediate. Ms. Tiderman stated that agendas and priorities vary depending on the stakeholders, and that in the development of the survey the priorities of the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) and the General Assembly were different compared to the priorities of LSSs.

Mr. Moore stated that in terms of connectivity and broadband access it is beyond the scope of the MSDE, and that it is on local county governments to address infrastructure issues. Mr. Moore also stated that grants can be of benefit but are short-term solutions and not sufficient for long-term funding. Mr. Jonathan Turner discussed funds available through Title IV, Part A to increase infrastructure, including devices and connectivity, and that these funds could be valuable to LSSs to address existing issues.

RFI Subcommittee

Ms. Erin Senior, MSDE staff, discussed the activities of the Request for Information (RFI) subcommittee, which was responsible for reviewing videos submitted by vendors in response to the RFI that was posted in December 2020. Ms. Senior reported that the subcommittee found it difficult to complete feedback for all of the submissions, as many submissions were similar, not innovative, or offered little to differentiate between other vendors. The subcommittee members felt that LSSs can do more for students than can be provided by a vendor facilitator or program.

Ms. Senior shared that the subcommittee members developed a set of recommendations to move forward. The members recommended creating a list of “think abouts” and questions to guide LSS discussions and planning regarding virtual schools. The members recommended adding these “think abouts” to the existing virtual school/blended program proposal guidelines, and sharing the revised guidelines with LSS stakeholders. Ms. Senior shared that the subcommittee would reconvene to develop the list and disseminate to the full committee.

Ms. Gannon asked in the meeting chat feature if it was possible for the MSDE to bring together educators from across the State to develop their own digital program. Ms. Senior stated that this was an idea that could be looked into further.

Hybrid Teaching and Learning Subcommittee

Ms. Senior presented on the recent activities of the Hybrid Teaching and Learning Subcommittee. Through the feedback of the full committee and the discussions of the subcommittee, a web page has been created that will share technical definitions and resources on hybrid teaching and learning. These resources include links to articles about hybrid teaching and learning, resources from LSSs, and other valuable best practices. Ms. Emrich directed the members to a link to the page, which can be found on the homepage of the MSDE website. The members were informed that any submissions to be posted on the page would have to be vetted for content and any privacy considerations.

Discussion: Vision and Mission

Ms. Emrich directed the members to the revised draft vision and mission statements. Both statements had been revised based on the feedback of the committee members and the Board of Education Work Group members. The members were directed to the changes and revisions within both statements.

Discussion: Legislation

Ms. Emrich highlighted legislation that has been filed to this point in the General Assembly of Maryland during the 2021 Legislative Session. Ms. Emrich emphasized to the members that the MSDE does not take positions on legislation, but completes agency explanations of impact for each piece of legislation. Legislation that has been filed to this point includes legislation that pertains to in-person instruction and services, virtual public charter schools, and LSS virtual school requirements. Ms. Carol Beck discussed particulars regarding House Bill (HB) 665-Virtual Public Charter Schools. A virtual school feasibility study (HB 1104) has also been filed. Ms. Emrich provided an overview of key provisions of each piece of legislation.

Ms. Emrich stated that another legislative update would be provided during the March 2021 meeting. The members discussed and asked questions regarding the bills already filed. Ms. Gannon asked for clarification on HB 998-In-Person Instruction and Services, and whether the bill was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Emrich stated that from her understanding the bill was in response to the pandemic; Ms. Senior stated that the bill would only be in effect for the 2021-2022 school year.

Next Steps and Adjournment

Dr. Williamson reiterated that another legislative update would be provided during the next committee meeting. Dr. Williamson stated that the committee would return to the discussion of the Future Ready Schools (FRS) framework, which the committee was unable to discuss during today's meeting. Dr. Williamson asked the members for other items to discuss during its next meeting. Ms. Gannon asked if during the legislative update that an update on the override of the Governor's veto the Blueprint for Education be included as well; Dr. Williamson stated this would be included in the legislative update.

The members were reminded that the next meeting will be held Friday, March 19, 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:58 a.m.