Planning Meeting Input and Strategic Planning Process

At the State Board Planning Meeting held September 15-16, 2021, System Office staff facilitated strategic planning exercises to gain State Board insights about the NC Community College System and its vision for the future. Summaries of input are listed below.

Exercise One: Modified SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

System Office staff gathered board members' anonymous, individual input via index cards when asked to consider the overall North Carolina Community College System's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Themes from the input are provided below.

STRENGTHS

- Trusted (good reputation) and engaged – *listed by multiple board members*
    - Trusted by local communities, state leaders, and the business community
    - "We are deeply embedded in communities across NC, in many cases we are [their] backbone"
- Strong track record
    - Allocating resources (funding formula)
    - Legislative advocacy
    - Tracking performance and compliance
    - Supporting colleges that are struggling to produce positive outcomes for students
    - Pivoting to more online learning solutions
    - "Good established platform for the future"
- Motivated, dedicated staff, faculty, boards, and leadership team (at state and local levels)
- Programming strengths
    - Variety is a strength in and of itself
    - Certain programs are particularly strong (such as short-term workforce/nursing)
    - Helping the Adult Learner
- Community colleges are avenues to opportunity and equality
    - Low cost/high value education
    - Solution to college debt problem

WEAKNESSES

- Marketing (e.g., inadequate amount of marketing, funding shortage, need marketing to specific groups or for specific programs)
- Guidance from high school to community college (need to improve)
- Inefficient delivery of credentials
- Low completion rate of students

- Lack of knowledge or data…
  - to understand where we are losing students to other North Carolina institutions
  - about community colleges' benefit to the community
- Not tapping board fully (Board governance and development)
- Staff/leadership turnover; new leadership of local colleges and System Office
- Need for relationship building /engagement strategy
  - Strengthen with General Assembly, K-12 education, higher education, industry)

OPPORTUNITIES

- A growing economy and population, partnerships with business/industry
  - NCCCS is positioned to capture an influx of students by continuing and accelerating collaboration efforts with industry/industry and education agencies
  - Promote programs for high-demand careers as NC recovers from the pandemic
- Expand partnerships (in addition to business/industry) – various groups cited: public schools; higher education/4-year institutions (leverage relationship with UNC System); NC Community Colleges Foundation; NC General Assembly
- Programming opportunities – various opportunities exist to…
  - reduce college debt for most NC families or create "escape velocity" for segment of the population sometimes forgotten/ignored
  - increase pathways (and enrollment) and achievement of credentials
  - grow small businesses by expanding Small Business Center outreach
- Opportunities to use data to be more effective – e.g., improve data for short-term workforce credentialing; identify "leaks" in the pipeline by demographic to develop targeted strategies for student success; identify where investment is most needed
- Marketing to increase enrollment – overall need, plus ideas of segmented marketing, capitalizing on community colleges as the most cost-effective way to a better life
- Opportunities with new SBCC and Foundation – new energy, improved Board governance/oversight; activate Foundation
- Funding from COVID – unprecedented cash infusion

THREATS

- Declining enrollment and/or declining student population
  (2/3 of respondents cited as a threat)
- Overall population changes/challenges to rural areas
- Staffing issues, including low pay at community colleges, staff retention difficulties
  (half of respondents cited at least one of these as a threat)
- Resources – concerns and questions
  - Overdependence on General Assembly funding; inability to increase budgets
  - Does the funding formula support strategic allocation of funds to either mitigate risk or leverage opportunities?

- Silos/need for greater unity and collaboration
  - Colleges vs. System Office; credential (workforce continuing education) vs. curriculum courses
  - "Looking at the great 58 as a confederation rather than a SYSTEM"
  - Disconnect with local community college boards
- Economy/COVID issues
- Learning deficits of incoming students
- Student needs—
  - Lack of resources to address childcare/other non-tuition expenses
  - Learning deficits of incoming students
- Perception of community colleges ("lack of brand equity/lack of cachet")
- Competitors cited as threats
  - Variety cited: e.g., for-profit privates; four-year universities and industry moving into short-term workforce training (where community colleges have typically been dominant)

Exercise Two: Visioning Exercises

State Board members were divided into three breakout groups, each facilitated by a System Office vice president, to engage in small-group discussions about President Stith's three pillars. The three pillars envision a North Carolina Community College System that is…

- The first choice in affordable and accessible education
- Leading North Carolina's economic recovery and sustained growth
- A national model for diversity and inclusion

Below is a synthesis of the comments provided in the three discussions of each topic, capturing what success would look like for each of the pillars. Where time allowed the groups to continue discussions, they ventured into discussing what the needs are related to each pillar.

<u>First Choice in Affordable & Accessible Education</u>

- First choice
  - Positive perceptions of community colleges among prospective students/family
    - Valued educational service (not seen as inferior) …
    - College communities where students are welcomed, find their niche, are supported/guided, and have opportunities to engage
  - Flexible at local college level to meet community's specific needs…
  - But also enough System standardization (e.g., financial aid) so students know what to expect from any community college and understand the power of reliable transfer to universities, etc.
  - Quality instruction and staffing (need competitive pay)

- o One board member noted that we are already first choice in certain vocations and areas of healthcare.
- Affordable = …
  - o Low cost or "free community college"
  - o Widespread *awareness* that CC education is affordable (or free) and how to get financial help (affordability doesn't help if not known or not clear how to get aid)
- Accessible –
  - o Address barriers to getting to instruction – childcare, transportation, broadband, language barriers… even food and housing
  - o Close proximity to prospective students
  - o Offer mode of instruction desired (online, hybrid, blended), flexible hours
  - o Address challenges in rural areas that lack resources
  - o Overcome students' fear factor *[point borrowed from D&I conversation, but fits in a definition of general access, too]*

Needs cited related to this pillar:
- Marketing/sales (reassess)
- Involve staff and board members in initiatives
- Consider staff levels
- Develop solutions - transportation/childcare/broadband/other barriers for students
- More career coaches and educated counselors
- Strong local leadership/professional development for newer presidents

<u>Lead North Carolina's Economic Recovery & Sustained Growth</u>

- The NC Community College System would be seen as the education and training provider of choice by business and industry.
- The public's mindset about community colleges (the stigma) would be replaced by the knowledge that community colleges are the most viable choice for those wanting to retool, reskill, and move up in their careers.
- Community colleges are at the table when the state is working to recruit new industry, and are the reason companies choose North Carolina.
- Small Business Centers are better known and provide increased service levels, especially with business counseling.
- Community colleges partner more with younger students to promote careers and education/training paths.

National Model for Diversity and Inclusion

- Board members suggested as a first order of business defining the scope of "diversity and inclusion." This term is not yet defined for the strategic planning process, and board members had different definitions in mind. There was general agreement that a major focus would be respecting/including people of color and fostering a culture of acceptance for all differences. Board members in the discussion groups also asked about or suggested people with disabilities, first-generation college students, immigrants, and older people (55+). This is a topic that will require additional discussion.

- Remove roadblocks that get in the way of success for a more diverse Community College System– culture, language (bilingual signs), and student access barriers that fall heavily on diverse students, and which also came up in the discussion on accessibility.

- Success would be realized when campuses (and the System Office and governance boards) reflect the diversity of the overall population. Success might be measured by the diversity of students, instructors, staff, boards of trustees, the System Office, State Board of Community Colleges, and contractors.

- It was suggested that the work on diversity and inclusion start with students who don't feel like they have a place on our campus or don't know what they need to in order to be successful. Success would be realized with a culture that embraces differences overall and seeks to engage students in various ways.

Strategic Planning Process

One of the State Board of Community Colleges' major duties is adoption of a system-wide strategic plan for the NC Community College System to guide System thinking into the future. The anticipated uses of the three- to four-year strategic plan that will be developed for review in 2022 are as follows:

- Define SBCC priorities and drive changes to policies
- Inform System budget and legislative priorities
- Promote a clear and consistent message about North Carolina's community colleges
- Promote System accountability
- Inspire our community college "family" and promote cohesion

There are six major phases envisioned for the strategic planning process:

I. Define plan scope, process, and key stakeholders
II. Engage in environmental scanning
    a. Collect input from stakeholders (meetings, surveys, etc.)
    b. Review research
III. Convene planning teams to draft plan language
IV. Develop full draft plan; SBCC to review and adopt
V. Publish, disseminate, implement plan
VI. Adjust plan as needed as a "living plan"

The Strategic Planning Committee of the State Board will provide input and be apprised of plan development progress throughout the planning process, and it will offer initial feedback on the draft strategic plan prior to its review by the full Board.

The estimated timeline for the strategic planning process is shown on the next page.

NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES
CREATING SUCCESS

Estimated Timeline – NCCCS Strategic Planning Process

2021

| Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | 2022 | Feb | Mar | Apr | May |

Plan scoping

Collecting input and doing research

Building and convening planning teams

Plan drafting and review

Publication design, dissemination

2022