

State Board of Education Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

DATE: May 9, 2025

TO: Dr. Kate Shaw, Executive Director, State Board of Higher Education

FROM: Karen Molchanow, Executive Director, State Board of Education

SUBJECT: Recommendations Pertaining to the Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities for Higher Education

By creating the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE), the Pennsylvania General Assembly recognized that the Commonwealth's higher education sector needs more attention. The Pennsylvania State Board of Education (Board) agrees that the economic health of Pennsylvania and the quality of life for Pennsylvania residents will benefit from raising the postsecondary educational attainment of more of our residents. The Board supports the mission of the SBHE to provide leadership, coordination, capacity building, and advocacy to Pennsylvania's higher education institutions.

At its public meeting on May 8, 2025, the Board adopted recommendations pertaining to the delineation of roles and responsibilities related to higher education. These recommendations were informed by sentiments shared by members of the Board's Higher Education Transfer of Authority Committee (committee) following the committee's consultation with representatives of the SBHE. By way of this memo, I am transmitting these recommendations to the SBHE for its consideration.

The Board recommends the following pertaining to the transfer of powers and duties related to higher education in Article XXVI-B of the Public School Code and to the collaborative relationship that should be established between the Board and the SBHE:

- The requirements for the Council of Higher Education (Council) to develop a Master Plan for Higher Education and for the Board to adopt a Master Plan for Higher Education upon recommendation by the Council should be relinquished. Alternatively, the strategic plan for higher education that is developed by the SBHE should be presented to the Board for acceptance as part of a Comprehensive Master Plan for Education in the Commonwealth PreK-16 that would consist both of the SBHE's strategic plan and the Board's Master Plan for Basic Education.
- In relinquishing the requirements for the Council and the Board to adopt a Master Plan for Higher Education, the authority to require the submission

of long-range plans from all public and private institutions of higher education established in section 2603-B(d)(9) of the School Code should be transferred to the SBHE. At present, the School Code requires these long-range plans to be reviewed in the development of a Master Plan for Higher Education. These long-range plans should be utilized by the SBHE to inform its strategic plan on higher education and to inform a Comprehensive Master Plan for Education in the Commonwealth PreK-16.

- The following powers and duties held by the Council of Higher Education under section 2604-B(c) of the School Code should be transferred to the SBHE:
 - The power to develop standards for the approval of colleges and universities for the granting of degrees and certificates.
 - The power to develop standards for all higher education building projects involving the use of State funds or the funds of any Commonwealth instrumentality.
- The power held by the Council of Higher Education under section 2604-B(c)(4) of the School Code to conduct research studies and to formulate policy proposals in all areas pertaining to higher education in this Commonwealth should be transferred to the SBHE with the following exceptions:
 - Responsibility to conduct research and to formulate policy proposals related to educator preparation and educator certification, related to technical institutes, and related to public postsecondary career and technical education should remain under the jurisdiction of the Board.
- The power held by the Council of Higher Education under section 2604-B(c)(4) of the School Code to investigate programs should be retained for the Council to employ at its discretion.
- Section 2603-B(d)(4)(i-iii) of the School Code establishes the authority and duties of the Board related to the receipt and administration of federal funding for the development of academic facilities. These duties, insofar as they pertain to higher education only, should be carried out either by the SBHE or by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- The following powers held by the Board under section 2603-B of the School Code should be transferred to the SBHE. In executing this transfer, the Board should retain the right to review the alignment of

policies established under this authority with the Comprehensive Master Plan for Education in the Commonwealth PreK-16.

- The power to adopt policies under which the Secretary of Education shall approve or disapprove any action of a state-owned university, community college or State-related or State-aided college or university in establishing additional branches or campuses, or in discontinuing branches or campuses
 - The power to adopt policies under which the Secretary of Education shall approve or disapprove any action of a State-owned university, community college or State-related or State-aided college or university in establishing new professional schools or upper division programs by two-year institutions.
 - The power to adopt policies under which the Secretary of Education shall approve or disapprove applications by two-year institutions to become four-year institutions.
 - The power to adopt policies under which the Secretary of Education shall approve or disapprove the request of any private institutions of higher education for admission to State-related or State-aided status, or for eligibility for other State financial support.
- The authority held by the Board in section 2603-B(d)(9.1) to adopt policies encouraging the inclusion of trauma-informed approaches in professional education curriculum in all public and private institutions of higher education in this Commonwealth issuing degrees to individuals who may desire to teach in the schools of this Commonwealth should remain under the authority of the Board. Likewise, the responsibility established in section 2603-B(j) to consult with the Professional Standards and Practices Commission on matters pertaining to teacher certification, professional practice, accreditation of educator preparation programs, and long-range plans affecting these areas should be retained by the Board. Each of these responsibilities is related to the broader authority that should be retained by the Board to formulate policy proposals related to educator preparation and education certification.
 - A mechanism should be established to facilitate regular communication and collaboration between the Board and the SBHE.
 - The Board should retain authority to recommend improvements for underserved students in terms of access, progression, and completion of postsecondary education.

cc: Thomas Howell, Esq.
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