

Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission Meeting Minutes

January 8, 2026

10am-11am

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Gordon Pack, Karen Esterque, Del. Elizabeth Embry, Dr. Stephen Steurer, Timothy Stock, Christian Gant, Dr. Andrea Cantora, John Feaster III, Judith Lichtenberg, Jocelyn Nolasco, Anne Bocchini Pack, Charles Adams, Amanda Owens, Danielle Cox, Adam Cummings, Marc DeSimone, Jessica Johnson, Richard Gibson, Del. Cheryl Pasteur, Jamel Freeman, Zakiya Lee, Mary Gable, Del. Karen Simpson, Benjamin Mourad

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am.

A. Approval of December meeting minutes

The December meeting minutes were approved.

B. Announcement of future meeting dates

Ainsley Moench announced the meeting dates for 2026.

C. Legislative session meeting time change

Ainsley Moench announced that the February and March meetings will begin at 9am, not 10am, to accommodate the legislative session.

D. Report update

Ainsley Moench updated that the annual report was still under review.

E. Report on Licensing and Certificate of Completion letters

Dr. Stephen Steurer discussed a formal letter sent to the Department of Labor requesting information on the number of licenses denied due to criminal history by June 30th to support the Commission's recommendation on licensing issues faced by incarcerated individuals upon release. John Feaster III confirmed that they had spoken with Commissioner Dove and that the Department of Labor plans to respond and comply with the request.

Dr. Stephen Stuerer discussed a second letter sent to Acting Director Jessica Johnson and Assistant State Superintendent Mary Gable requesting an update on the approval of the Certificate of Completion process. Jessica Johnson noted that a Certificate of Completion differs from a high school diploma and specifically supports students with intellectual disabilities who are on a certificate track under their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Mary Gable confirmed that while MSDE typically provides a certificate of attendance for special education students, she will investigate the status of the Certificate of Completion process. Jessica Johnson confirmed she would be able to send an update.

II. Future Activities

A. Commission and Stakeholder groups prioritizing recommendations

Dr. Andrea Cantora reported that the Higher Education work group is meeting soon to discuss priorities for the year, noting the group has only four recommendations, two of which overlap regarding access to state financial aid and scholarships for incarcerated learners. Del. Elizabeth Embry and Delegate Cheryl Pasteur confirmed they are moving forward with drafting bills based on these two recommendations. Dr. Andrea Cantora also shared that the USM received a \$4 million grant from Ascendium Education for a four-year, statewide effort that aligns with recommendation number four. Dr. Stephen Steurer noted that the Commission can recommend, but not propose, legislation, and the Delegates on the Commission took the initiative to draft bills based on the recommendations.

Anne Bocchini Pack reported on the Career Technology and Workforce Development workgroup, stating that the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist program is a long-standing program with a high employment success rate. There is a bill proposed to create a sustainable funding source for the program. The next recommendation regarded creating a pilot program for work-based learning community apprenticeships. The final recommendation was not to allow licensing boards the ability to restrict licensing based on criminal history unless it was relevant to the job, as the current process is opaque. Del. Cheryl Pasteur affirmed that she was working on a bill regarding Certified Peer Recovery Specialist funding.

Del. Karen Simpson mentioned that there was a new committee created in the House called the Government, Labor, and Elections committee, and some legislation relevant to the Commission may be heard there. Dr. Stephen Steurer suggested a meeting with the Delegates to discuss what impact this might have on relevant legislation.

Dr. Stephen Steurer discussed the ABE/GED/SPED work group's recommendations, noting that Labor is already working on a data dashboard, which aligns with recommendations one and two. Recommendation three involves assessing alternative school board models, and Danielle Cox offered her support in her new

role as incoming president-elect of the Correctional Education Association's National Council for Education Directors in getting information on other correctional education models.

Anne Bocchini Pack described the fiscal mapping project, recommendation five, as taking stock of current funding for correctional education across various silos to assess stability and identify duplication or gaps. She emphasized that this project is critical for strategic planning, resource allocation, and seeking outside grant funding, especially given the current budget deficit.

Danielle Cox provided an update from DPSCS, announcing the approval of a contract for a Learning Management System (LMS) in all colleges, and adding 325 Chromebooks for students to use in housing units and schools.

Jessica Johnson added that virtual instruction is working successfully at RCI.

Timothy Stock introduced himself as a new member of the Higher Education workgroup and a volunteer educator for the debate team at ECI. He emphasized the importance of humanistic education alongside traditional academic education and addressing critical challenges in facilities like ECI.

Adam Cummings updated the Commission on the Ombudsman's Office, stating that the Office hired a data and technology manager who reviews education data, and noted the Office is also in the process of hiring a second formerly incarcerated individual as an Assistant Ombudsman.

Dr. Stephen Steurer thanked everyone for their participation.

III. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:59am.