

Executive Director's Report to the Commission
7 August 2014

Thank you, Gen. Finan. It is a pleasure to welcome you all back after our summer hiatus.

We reunite during what is, for our students and teachers and staff across our 33 public institutions and our 20+ independent schools, an annual rite of renewal, enthusiasm, and pure joy.

Can any of us forget that first day when we set foot on campus and thought: Wow, my life is really changing now!

If you have the chance in the next week or two, I would encourage you to contact the president of a college or university near you, and ask if you can attend its matriculation ceremonies, its residence hall picnics, or its freshman reading groups.

Or just go into the dorm laundry rooms, visit the gym, sit in the coffee shop or the library, read hallway bulletin boards, or pretend to be a parent on move-in day.

However you choose to do it, you will re-discover the incredible experience of modern college life that renews your enthusiasm and sense of purpose for your service as a Commissioner to this great state.

As you will recall, our previous meeting on June 5 coincided with the last official day of the General Assembly.

Julie Carullo has been unexpectedly called away this week on family issues, but you have previously received her extensive wrap-up report on the session.

Although no conference committee was required to approve the FY15 budget, a similar committee of three House and three Senate members was unable to broker a compromise to resolve the Clemson Enterprise Act and the University of Charleston bill.

As you know, two weeks ago we received a proposed new mission statement from the College of Charleston that would also result in a sector change, moving from a four-year comprehensive university to a research university.

I have had a number of conversations with President McConnell about this, and we have shared with you many of the letters and documents that have been exchanged.

Approvals of mission changes and sector changes are—by law since 1996—designated responsibilities of the Commission.

The last time a mission and sector change happened was in 2002, and none of you were here at that time.

So we're doing a brief refresher course on SC's history of mission and sector realignment at the start of the CAAL meeting this afternoon.

We will not focus on the particulars of any individual request or decision—either past or present—but we will look at the processes that the Commission has followed, its evolving authority to do so, and the current environment in which your decisions will be made.

I personally believe the College of Charleston proposal has merit. I would expect it to move through your review process at a reasonable pace. I would think it likely that it will be on the full Commission agenda by November. These will be issues for you to consider this afternoon.

I have just concluded my summer meetings with the presidents of our ten four-year universities and two of our three research universities, plus the head of our technical college system.

The primary focus of these discussions was the upcoming FY16 budget proposals and structural realignment, although we covered a lot of other terrain, as well.

You will remember that we scrapped the traditional two-day August marathon in favor of direct conversations with presidents about their budget plans, priorities, and strategies.

It's still a work in progress, but I think we have had some productive conversations.

I will bring the results of those discussions to our September retreat, as you map out your strategic agenda, budget request, and legislative strategy for the upcoming year.

At your places this morning you will find the 35th edition of the CHE *Statistical Abstract*. It is a fundamental resource that provides hard data about our institutions and their students. I particularly like the ten-year trend data that gives context to those numbers.

Also at your places this morning is a smaller publication by the SREB called *South Carolina: Taking Stock and Pushing Forward*.

SREB prepares such an analysis for each of its sixteen member states. They provide a comparative framework for assessing South Carolina's educational progress from pre-kindergarten through college.

As you may recall, SREB is the only one of the four regional compacts in the U.S. that is dedicated to both K-12 and post-secondary education.

We can therefore look not just at student performance in higher education, but we can examine the quality of the pipeline that brings students to the doors of our colleges and universities.

Just to note a few highlights, If you turn to

- page 7: SC has more kids under 18 living in poverty than either regional or national average, which complicates any educational effort;
- page 10-13: there are widening gaps between SC cohorts and regional/national cohorts in 4th grade reading and math proficiency, but slightly narrowing gaps in 8th grade, so something positive seems to be happening during those difficult middle school years;
- page 17: SC has a high school graduation rate 5% lower than the national average, but
- page 22: our college-going rates are 4-5% higher than either regional or national averages

I don't want to read too much into these summary statistics, but they help us understand the parameters of the challenges we face, the progress we're making, and the places where we may need to strengthen our efforts.

Next month we won't conduct a regular meeting, but we will gather on the lovely campus of Clemson University to hold our annual strategic planning retreat.

We have much work to do—assessing the results of the past year's efforts, reviewing our new opportunities, and setting targets for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my report.