



Meeting of the South Carolina Commission
on Higher Education
Committee on Strategic Planning and Accountability (CSPA)
2:00 p.m., December 2, 2025, via Zoom Webinar

Members

Commissioner Doug Snyder (Chair)
Commissioner Dino Teppara (Vice Chair)

Commissioner Gene Fant
Commissioner Mark Masters
Commissioner Mick Zais

Members Excused

Commissioner Amy Bigham

Commission Staff Present

Jeff Perez
Laura Belcher
Shardai Figgures
DJ Holland
Marianna Manic

Angela Peters
Noah Perry
Elizabeth Robinson
Chariti Spann
Mark Swart

Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Snyder called the meeting of the Committee on Strategic Planning and Accountability (CSPA) to order at 2:00 p.m. Ms. Belcher introduced the Commissioners, confirmed the presence of a quorum, and announced that the meeting was being conducted in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Snyder requested consideration of the CSPA meeting agenda. Commissioner Masters motioned to approve the agenda as presented, and Commissioner Teppara seconded the motion. The agenda was approved unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes: November 4, 2025

Chair Snyder presented the draft minutes of the November 4, 2025, meeting and invited any additions or corrections. Commissioner Masters motioned to approve the minutes as presented, and Commissioner Teppara seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.



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Chair's Report

Chair Snyder reminded the Committee that the agency's mission, values, and initiatives have already been established and explained that the Committee is now moving into a deeper phase of work focused on developing metrics aligned with specific initiatives. Chair Snyder emphasized that the Strategic Plan is intended to be a living document and noted that the Committee's timeline anticipates completion of detailed metrics by June 30, 2026.

CHE Metrics Discussion: Accountability

Chair Snyder recognized Commissioner Masters to present on the Accountability initiatives and related metrics developed in collaboration with staff. Commissioner Masters thanked President Perez and Ms. Belcher for meeting with him to review the Accountability initiatives and to discuss appropriate metrics. He indicated that Committee members had received a one-page summary of the proposed metrics and noted that he had followed up with staff to express appreciation for their time and collaboration.

Expand Monitoring and Reporting

Commissioner Masters explained that the most challenging initiative to address was the first Accountability initiative originally titled "Expand Monitoring and Reporting." He noted that the Commission currently produces a substantial number of reports, including standard required reports and historical reports. Given the volume of existing reporting, Commissioner Masters stated that the term "expand" did not accurately reflect the initiative. Instead, he observed that the Commission's primary challenge is not producing additional reports, but rather effectively leveraging and synthesizing the data already collected.

Commissioner Masters proposed revising the initiative language to replace "expand" with either "utilize" or "refine," explaining that the intent is to better use existing data to strengthen CHE's capacity to evaluate institutional performance and publish transparent, comparative information. President Perez explained that using the term "expand" implies growth in reporting volume, whereas the objective is to strengthen internal and external accountability by refining reporting practices rather than increasing them.

Commissioner Masters then reviewed proposed metrics for this initiative, including establishing a common minimum set of performance goals for institutions. He noted that historical benchmarks already exist and could be reviewed and adapted. Commissioner Masters emphasized the need for key performance indicators that provide a comprehensive analysis of existing reports, such as the Statistical Abstract, and questioned whether current data products are being used cohesively to assess institutional performance and inform action.

Committee members discussed the need to integrate and cross-analyze existing datasets, potentially using information technology resources, rather than generating new reporting burdens. Commissioner Masters reiterated that the initiative should focus on refining current monitoring and reporting processes to highlight system strengths and weaknesses and to support data-driven decision-making.

Chair Snyder opened the floor for discussion on revising the initiative language. Committee members expressed support for revisiting wording. Chair Snyder expressed a preference for the term "refine" rather than "utilize," emphasizing that the Commission is actively refining its oversight processes. President Perez informed the Committee that the term "operational" was added to the initiative language, as well.

Chair Snyder summarized the proposed revised initiative language as follows:

"Refine monitoring and reporting to strengthen CHE's capacity to evaluate institutional operational performance and publish transparent, comparative data."

Commissioner Zais motioned to recommend the revised initiative language to the full Commission and Commissioner Fant seconded. Chair Snyder called for the vote and the motion passed unanimously. Chair Snyder noted that the Committee would forward a recommendation to the full Commission to revise the initiative wording accordingly.

Commissioner Masters then provided an overview of the remaining Accountability initiatives and associated metric concepts:

Improve Stakeholder Responsiveness

Commissioner Masters explained that this initiative focuses on enhancing communication and service to policymakers, institutions, and the public through timely and clear engagement. He stated that proposed metrics include tracking the number and completion rate of stakeholder requests, internal response times, departmental responsibility, and percentage of requests addressed within established timeframes. Commissioners emphasized that measuring responsiveness signals its importance, recognizes staff performance, and supports continuous improvement. Commissioners also noted that responsiveness applies both to CHE staff and to institutions' timely submission of required data.

Fulfill Statutory Responsibilities

Commissioner Masters explained that this initiative emphasizes full compliance with all legal mandates. He stated that proposed metrics include tracking completion of statutory requirements against a predefined calendar and schedule. Commissioner Masters noted that such tracking supports accountability, resource planning, and identification of systemic challenges affecting compliance.

Committee members agreed that these initiatives and metrics should be understood as two-way accountability measures, addressing both CHE operations and institutional responsibilities.

Chair Snyder thanked Commissioner Masters and staff for their work, noting that the proposed metrics provide a strong foundation for organizing extensive data and improving accountability across the system.

Higher Education System

Chair Snyder introduced the next agenda item, a discussion of the higher education system, and recognized Commissioner Fant to present remarks.

Commissioner Fant provided an overview of his observations, noting that recent developments in the Florida public higher education system offered a useful comparison. He explained that Florida had conducted a systemwide program review that identified more than 200 underperforming degree programs and resulted in the announced elimination of at least 18 academic programs. Commissioner Fant stated that this process mirrored recent discussions undertaken by the Commission and demonstrated the impact of pairing data collection with meaningful analysis and public reporting.

Commissioner Fant framed the discussion around the appropriate role of the Commission, distinguishing between governance and coordination. He observed that historically, the Commission has responded to requests and collected extensive reports but has largely functioned as a repository or publishing outlet, with limited evaluation, feedback, or follow-through. As an example, he cited the Statistical Abstract, noting that while it contains substantial information and requires significant staff and institutional effort, it is rarely synthesized or used to drive action.

Commissioner Fant emphasized that the Commission already possesses sufficient statutory authority; however, its effectiveness has often depended on individual personalities rather than on institutionalized, proactive processes. He noted that changes in leadership and political conditions have limited continuity and underscored the opportunity to embed metrics, analysis, and accountability throughout the organization so that the Commission's work is not personality-driven but systemically grounded.

He further stated that although the Commission does not have authority to close academic programs, it does have the authority to analyze, evaluate, and publicize data. Commissioner Fant described this as a form of "soft authority,"

whereby transparent reporting and public dissemination of findings can influence legislative decision-making, public understanding, and institutional action. He explained that public reporting can also support institutional leaders by providing an external basis for difficult decisions.

Commissioner Fant highlighted the importance of shifting the Commission's role from passive reporting to active coordination, including synthesizing data, issuing public-facing analyses, and making recommendations that can guide institutions and policymakers. He stressed that accountability, transparency, and influence must be embedded throughout the Commission's culture—from staff to commissioners—and not limited to periodic meetings.

Commissioner Fant also noted the emergence of a new accreditor with which South Carolina institutions, including the University of South Carolina, will engage. Commissioner Fant stated that this presents an opportunity for the Commission to act as a strong partner in advancing quality standards by providing data and analyses that institutions can use to meet accreditation requirements more efficiently.

Commissioner Fant concluded by encouraging Committee members to reflect on these ideas in advance of the full Commission meeting, emphasizing that the Commission's "bully pulpit" has historically been underutilized and that the Commission must determine how assertively it wishes to use its voice.

Several Committee members expressed strong agreement with Commissioner Fant's remarks. Commissioners emphasized the importance of issuing clear, concise press releases to highlight significant findings, noting that legislators and the public are unlikely to review lengthy reports but do respond to focused, accessible information presented through traditional and digital media. Commissioners also discussed the necessity of distilling complex data into key issues that attract attention and support informed decision-making.

The discussion further emphasized that transparency requires reporting both positive and negative findings. Commissioner Zais acknowledged that reporting unfavorable data may generate criticism or resistance but agreed that it is an indicator of relevance and effectiveness. The Committee affirmed that the Commission's mission requires reporting positive and negative outcomes to ensure public trust and accountability.

Chair Snyder summarized the discussion by identifying recurring themes, including refining and analyzing data, publicizing findings with clarity and consistency, asserting relevance, and supporting long-term decision-making. Chair Snyder also noted that accountability is closely linked to relevance and that the Commission's work must be both credible and visible.

External Studies Update

Chair Snyder recognized Ms. Belcher to provide updates on external studies and oversight activities.

Ms. Belcher reported progress in responding to recommendations from the Inspector General, noting that work remains on five recommendations, with anticipated completion in mid to late 2026.

Ms. Belcher also provided an update on recommendations from the House Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee. She reported that of the 18 assigned recommendations, 10 have been completed, and eight remain in progress. She explained that most remaining items are expected to be completed by early next year, with final items anticipated by the end of the year. Ms. Belcher indicated that a formal status update would be submitted to the House Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee the following day. She also noted that ongoing tracking and regular communication have been well received by Oversight Committee staff.

President Perez added that recent discussions with the Chair of the House Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee were positive and that no concerns were raised regarding the Commission's progress or responsiveness.

Chair Snyder requested that a summary of this progress be prepared for the upcoming full Commission meeting to highlight continued advancement and adherence to established timelines.

Accountability Update

Ms. Belcher provided an accountability update, noting that several major reports were completed in November, including the Program Productivity Report, Scholarship Projections Methodology Report, Longitudinal Data Report, and final annual financial reporting submissions. She said that data were also received from institutions related to fall enrollment and outstanding student debt.

Ms. Belcher explained the annual accountability reporting process, noting that the agency submits its report in September and that the Department of Administration finalizes and publishes the report on the General Assembly's website. She indicated that publication of the most recent report is anticipated within the next month.

Ms. Belcher further explained that, given the length and complexity of the annual accountability report, sections of the report will be reviewed with the Committee over the next several meetings. She said that this approach is intended to familiarize Committee members with the report structure and content so they can provide timely feedback during future reporting cycles.

Chair Snyder clarified that while the Committee does not formally approve the report, this review process will strengthen oversight and ensure awareness of key accountability measures prior to submission in future years.

Other Business

There was no other business to consider.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Snyder thanked staff and Committee members for their continued dedication and detailed work on accountability and system improvement. Upon hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

