

Senate Education Committee Meeting

**Official Minutes
151st General Assembly
First Session**

**Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 21, 2021
10:00 a.m.
Virtual Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Attendance

Committee Members:

Present:

Senator Laura Sturgeon	Laura.Sturgeon@delaware.gov	302-744-4135
Senator Elizabeth Lockman	Elizabeth.Lockman@delaware.gov	302-744-4168
Senator Colin Bonini	Colin.Bonini@delaware.gov	302-744-4169
Senator David Sokola	David.Sokola@delaware.gov	302-744-4139
Senator Bryan Townsend	Bryan.Townsend@delaware.gov	302-744-4165
Senator Ernesto Lopez	Ernesto.Lopez@delaware.gov	302-744-4136

Staff:

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Tony Allen	Delaware State Univeristy	Tallen@desu.edu

Agenda:

SB 12

SB 95

Senator Sturgeon convened the meeting at 10:05 a.m. and conducted a roll call.

Senator Lockman motioned to accept the previous meeting's minutes of March 31, 2021, and **Senator Sokola** seconded the motion.

The Committee approved the meeting's minutes of March 31, 2021.

I. SB 12 – Sen. Poore – AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO EDUCATION AND THE DELAWARE STUDENT EXCELLENCE EQUALS DEGREE ACT.

Synopsis: The purpose of this act is to open up The Delaware Student Excellence Equals Degree Act (SEED Act) to adult Delaware residents, who are not recent high school graduates. Currently, about 56% of Delawareans age 25-64 lack a post-secondary degree. This expansion of the SEED grant program will encourage adult learners to return to school to enhance their knowledge and skills and increase their job opportunities. Adult individuals with a high school diploma or less education were significantly impacted by Covid-19-related job loss. This legislation can help to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on those adults. Tennessee has instituted a similar program called the Tennessee Reconnect Act.

Senator Poore, the Prime Sponsor of the legislation, provided a synopsis. SB 12 will help hundreds of Delawareans get back on their feet so they can build a brighter future for their families. Senator Poore believes this could be one of the most impactful bills passed this year. This bill can dramatically improve the lives of people hit hardest by COVID-19's economic impact. This is accomplished by leveraging an existing state program that has a proven successful track record at lifting young people and putting them on a path to prosperity and success. The Student Excellence Equals Degree (SEED) program has helped over 13,000 local high school graduates earn college credits at Delaware Technical Community College (Deltech). Eligibility for the SEED program is limited to recent graduates with a 2.5 GPA or higher and no previous felony convictions. The goal of the original SEED program is to help students who have the aptitude for a college education but struggle with paying for those courses. The program is not just for high school students who need help right now. Delaware has set awful new records for

unemployment during this Pandemic. For many, the economy is finally picking back up allowing people are getting back to work, but for some their old jobs will never return. That is why it is critical to expand the SEED program to reach adults who would benefit most from learning new job skills. This is an economic development strategy as much as it is a direct relief to our constituents who are impacted by COVID. Senator Poore mentioned she did not know who she wanted to be at 17 but was fortunate enough to find her path at Deltech and did not have to accumulate student debt in the process. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many Delawareans. This bill seeks to lift people by giving them the tools needed to improve their lives and earn more income over time. SB 12 would expand SEED eligibility in the following ways. This bill will eliminate the provisions requiring students to enroll in college immediately after high school to receive the SEED scholarship. SEED plus will include all credit or noncredit programs leading to the award of recognized academic credentials or an Associate's degree at Deltech. The bill would also expand college eligibility to 10 semesters, which will give Delawareans more time to complete their education. Senate Amendment 1 was added to clarify that funding can be used towards a recipient's junior year of their Bachelor's degree. The purpose of this legislation is to help adults go back to school to earn a credential or Associate's degree so they can reenter the workforce as quickly as realistically possible. SEED plus will expand eligibility to include individuals with GEDs or Delaware state Board of Education endorsement secondary credentials. This legislation also expands scholarship eligibility to include individuals previously convicted of nonviolent felonies and solely drug-related felonies. Like the original SEED program, SEED plus would be a last-dollar scholarship meaning state funding would only be used to fill the gap between federal aid and the full cost of tuition. Senator Poore is very proud of this legislation and its broad bi-partisan support and welcomed any questions.

Senator Sturgeon, Co-Sponsor of the bill, commended Senator Poore on the legislation. It is Senator Sturgeon's favorite piece of legislation this session. When Senator Sturgeon taught, she had many students who did not know what they wanted to do following graduation. Limiting the SEED scholarship to those who recently graduated high school created unfortunate circumstances for those students not ready to commit to attending higher education. Several years later those students, who determined what they wanted to do, were no longer eligible for the SEED scholarship. A lot of people who could have used the scholarship were missed. This legislation closes that gap at a time when people are retooling their skills and learning new skills to reenter the workforce. This acknowledges that not all high school seniors know what they want to do in life. This correlates with what we know about brain development, the trajectory of young people's lives, and the fact that adults are going back now many years later. Senator Sturgeon is proud to be a Co-Sponsor of the bill. Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Sokola.

Senator Sokola commented he received a credential at 60 years old and knows what it is like to go through a transition. There was a tool in the box that was a source of funding for Senator Sokola. This legislation will help many that do not have that same

source through their previous employer. Senator Sokola supports the bill. He asked to clarify the numbers presented in the bill's synopsis, which states "about 56% of Delawareans age 25-64 lack a post-secondary degree". What is the number that lacks a post-secondary degree that does have a credential of some sort?

Senator Poore clarified that the 56% includes credentialing. Also, 41.4% of Delaware residents ages 25-64 possessed a secondary credential compared to 51.3% nationally.

Senator Sokola stated that Delaware has work to do and thanked Senator Poore for her effort in this area.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Lockman.

Senator Lockman, Co-Sponsor of the bill, thanked Senator Poore. There is so much common sense in the bill. Senator Lockman works, as an instructor, with SEED students and sees a lot of what Senator Sturgeon described. There are many moments in life when you need to step back from education, particularly for some students whether it might be family things occurring and going directly into school is an inhibitor. A lot of students could benefit from the SEED program so it is logical to add that flexibility and opportunity in there as well as focusing some of the restrictions in terms of the felonies. This is a fantastic expansion of a successful program. Senator Lockman noted there is not a fiscal note yet but asked what the potential impact might be for people.

Senator Poore confirmed a fiscal note is currently being drafted. Original numbers, without junior year, were roughly about 1 to 1.5 million in total. The program will probably run because we did have to include keeping the integrity of the original SEED bill which allows juniors to get at least that third year in will roughly run close to 3 million.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Bonini.

Senator Bonini asked how does the current third-year junior work and how would that work with the new bill amendment. Have the other institutions of higher education weighed in on this proposal?

Senator Poore stated that line 140 discusses the 10 continuous semesters. In the workforce today there are people taking care of their families especially when they go back to school at an older age, not 17 necessarily. Although I do not want to discredit those young people who are taking care of their families as well. People may start and have to take a break or they may not be able to get to the point of going back to school full time because of things taking place in their family. The scholarship is extended to allow someone to go back part-time. The amendment kept with the of the original SEED bill which states on line 145 to 146 the grant money towards their junior year and/or pursuing an equivalent number of credits equal to what is otherwise their junior year of

higher education. This allows a student who has not exceeded their SEED dollars to continue. Perhaps a student started at a credential because they had a GED and were not technically eligible to go into the Associate's program. That student may start in the credentialing program and are layering it with the SEED dollars. Notably, this scholarship is the last resort dollars, meaning students are applying for the FAFSA and anything else they can get. We have had this conversation right now with the University of Delaware regarding their Associates and Arts program is roughly about \$4,375 and the fiscal note purposefully used a higher number to average that out of what it would cost. Importantly, students may have funds left to roll into their junior year.

Senator Bonini asked are students able to stop and start again. If a student does not meet the requirements of attending class, what happens? Does that portion of the money a student accessed disappear? Or if a student reapplies later, will they get to re-up with that?

Senator Poore stated yes students do. Senator Poore requested Brian Shirey to provide comments.

Senator Bonini repeated his questions for Brian Shirey.

Brian Shirey, General Counsel to Delaware Technical Community College, stated currently if someone stops, they lose their SEED eligibility because SEED requires them to maintain full-time enrollment. Under the proposed bill, students would have the ability to have one gap year and it would not affect their scholarship. There is also a provision that would allow the institutions to grant exceptions if someone needed more than one year based on military service, personal hardship, medical condition, and voluntary service. But they are book-ended by the 10 semesters, so if a student takes a gap year, they lose eligibility for funding for that year. For example, if a student attends year one takes off year two, they will only be eligible for years three, four, and five. They will not get another four more years; they will only get three more years.

Senator Bonini asked the current state of SEED if someone receives the third year of credits does that mean to receive a four-year degree, they ideally would be transferring out of Deltech to get a Bachelor's at some other institution.

Brian Shirey stated that is correct.

Senator Sturgeon asked if students have to be enrolled full-time to be eligible under the new bill.

Brian Shirey stated the new bill requires initial full-time if a student is in an Associate's degree program but it does not require them to maintain full-time status. So one could go full time and not complete, as long as they are still enrolled they are eligible for SEED but are limited to those 10 semesters.

Senator Sturgeon stated that is a good thing since many people want to go back and get credentialing but cannot necessarily do it full time if they have other obligations. Maybe working a job while trying to get new skills for a better job. Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Bonini.

Senator Bonini stated a lot of students are not ready to go to high school and do not get the skills they need. Deltech offers remedial training to lots of students and Senator Bonini believes it is a great way to prepare students. Does SEED cover those remedial types of classes that students, or in this case adult learners who have some gaps in their education, might need?

Brian Shirey stated yes it currently covers that for the first time but does not cover any courses that are repeated.

Senator Sturgeon commented it is wonderful how the program is being expanded to be more flexible. Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Paradee.

Senator Paradee supports this bill and thinks it is a fantastic piece of legislation. This reflects the reality of today that some students coming out of high school have family commitments or issues and are not quite ready to decide where to go in life. Senator Paradee is a father of a 26 and 23 year old who when they were 17 or 18 years old were not sure about their future. Even from Senator Paradee's experience, he was not sure exactly what he wanted to do. Senator Paradee is supportive of this legislation and the mission of Deltech where he has been a volunteer for 10-12 years.

Senator Sturgeon opened up to public comment and recognized Robert Overmiller.

Robert Overmiller is in full support of the legislation. The Governor's Advisory Council supports the legislation and wants an opportunity to review it. They will be providing a letter to the legislators as a status of support for the bill.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Pamela Ridgeway.

Pamela Ridgeway, Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Talent with Christiana Care, stated Christiana Care supports the SEED plus expansion bill put forth. When Pamela Ridgeway thinks about the bill the terms that come to mind are access, equity, and opportunity. That is something that we are completely aligned with. This will help remove so many systemic barriers for individuals, many of which you have covered today in your comments. We are excited about this and committed to having a diverse workforce. The expansion of this bill will open up health care opportunities for individuals. Christiana Care to say we stand firmly behind this bill.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Betsy Jones.

Betsy Jones, Director of Adult Education in the Polytech School District, commends the sponsors of this bill are seeking to create access for adult learners. Providing access to high-quality credential programs is something we are passionate about at Polytech and is something we have excelled at since 1974. Not only do we specialize in providing these opportunities for adult learners but more specifically we provide equitable access for all learners as 88% of those we serve to identify as low income. At the post-secondary level, we specialize in noncredit certificate-based programs we work closely with industry partners to ensure the training we offer is needed and sustainable employment for our graduates. While the expansion under SB 12 will provide adult learners attended Deltech the ability to attend tuition-free, our programs will continue to require tuition. One of the most common barriers to success is the cost of tuition. This is why we strive to maintain lower than average tuition rates and aggressively seek financial assistance and grant opportunities for the benefit of all 2,700 students we serve annually. Our programs are exceptional and make a profound impact on the community we serve. We are truly a local provider. An overwhelming majority of our students live within 10 to 15 miles of our campus. Our programs are industry and labor market-driven and 90% of our students complete the program they are enrolled in on schedule ready for employment. I believe expanding access to non-credit programming is commendable, I fear that excluding the technical school districts that serve adult learners the bill the way it is currently written falls short of providing its intent of equitable use for adult learners. Our technical schools for adult learners are a valuable resource and were created to provide programs leading to the recognizing credentials. We share your desire to provide this essential educational opportunity. Adult education is not just what we do it is who we are. The adult state-wide technical school districts need to be included. Betsy Jones asked that serious consideration be given to amending this bill to include the adult learner programs in the technical school districts statewide.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Kristin Dwyer.

Kristin Dwyer, Delaware State Education Association, supports SB 12 and thanked senator Poore for bringing it forward. This legislation is a natural, relevant, next step to expand access and opportunity for the SEED scholarship to all Delawareans. College is expensive and the longer you put it off the harder it is to achieve. The difference is for household expenses at 18 are very different for those household obligations they acquire as they get older. To find a way for a working adult to carve out the 10s of 1,000s of dollars to attend a Delaware university could be an insurmountable obstacle for many. It is no secret there is a teacher shortage in Delaware. If it were not for the alternative routes to certification programs that assist adults who want to become teachers later in life we would be at a more critical juncture. According to the 2020 report on high needs students loans repayment program the average student debt among educators in Delaware is \$50,000 for a four-year degree. This legislation could be a stepping stone to an ARTC program or even to a four-year teaching degree. Lastly, I am hoping with the passage of SB 12 earning a degree later in life is the norm and not

the exception. At DSEA we acknowledge that success is different for every child. SB 12 affirms that notion and creates opportunities and access for students that may not be able to attend a Delaware college or university directly after high school.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Mike Brickner.

Mike Brickner, Executive Director of the ACLU of Delaware, stated the ACLU of Delaware supports the bill and the Senator's efforts to expand the SEED program which can help those without post-secondary degrees access education and training opportunities. Importantly, SB 12 allows some people with felony convictions to obtain these grants. Access to employment, education, and housing are some of the largest barriers for returning citizens. SB 12 will help open the door for some Delawareans. As we know, the legal system has a disparate impact on black and low-income people and this change will make the SEED program more effective for targeting those in most need of assistance. One area we would like to see SB 12 strengthened in the future is fully repelling the prohibition for people with felony convictions receiving the SEED grant. People who have had contact with the justice system are more likely to recidivate when they do have access to opportunities and that remains true for those convicted of violent offenses. Delaware officials have begun to do much over the last few years to address the state's mass incarceration system and the systemic racism that it perpetuates. Part of that work is to recognize that every person is worthy of a second chance and that each of us is better than our worst actions. Providing SEED opportunities for all Delawareans regardless of past felony convictions, elected officials would help to ensure all those who have successfully rehabilitated can stay on track towards successful and vibrant lives. We fully support SB 12 and look forward to working with you in the future to make this bill stronger.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Matt Payne.

Matt Payne, Computer Aide Incorporated, supports SB 12. CAI is a group interested in looking at the local talent and to add to the company. We hire a lot of high school graduates as well as college graduates we also hire people in their senior year of high school to work part-time. A number of those individuals desire to go to college, but still need to work to support their families. I fully support SB 12 as it is stated today but would also like some further consideration for potentially have people start the program part-time and are working full time.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Linda Eklund.

Linda Eklund, Director of Adult Education in Sussex Tech School District, appreciated the time to weigh in on SB 12. Sussex Tech has provided high-quality industry-driven programming in Sussex county for over 56 years. We offer noncredit certificate-based programs in skilled trades and health field that is based on county employer needs and that lead to good jobs that pay well and, in many cases, do not

require a long term enrollment commitment, our adult learners need to earn a life-sustaining wage and not be stuck in minimum wage or part-time jobs. They may also need a secondary credential which can be earned in the gross high school or GED prep classes that are co-located with CTE programming at our adult technical programs statewide. We are proud to provide equitable access for all learners inclusive of all diverse populations. For instance, in Sussex county, we provide training and career on-ramps for many ESL or ELL who seek better employment opportunities. Over 45% of the students we serve program-wide are ELL and 90% of all Sussex tech adult learners identify as low income 65% are between the ages of 25 and 64. The adults impacted by SB 12 are exactly who we specialize in serving. The presented bill afforded 10 consecutive semesters at Deltech or the University of Delaware. Our adult training is short-term and produces job-ready adults quickly and at a reasonable cost. We have proven year after year that we are an excellent return on investment and have excellent completion rates. We seek grant funds whenever possible to keep cost affordable and keep our programs at maximum efficiency all while meeting performance-based targets and standards year after year. Please consider why we wouldn't be considered in this bill if it will help increase opportunities for the same adult population we serve and at a reasonable cost. I have devoted my entire career to Delaware and have served adult learners for 35 of my 40 years. Many of you have seen me speak at legislation and our adult education meet and greet event at legislative hall where we have brought adult learners to tell you their stories and share the significant impact that adult education had on their lives. I could continue on the purpose-driven work we do for adults at the county VoTech school districts. I know many of you know that Sussex tech adult programs are exceptional and make a vital contribution to the Sussex community. Expanding access to noncredit programming is commendable but I am concerned and fearful that by excluding the technical school adult programs this bill will reduce the educational opportunities for adult learners and especially for ELLs in Sussex county. Increased access to adult job training will only help provide more skilled workers to the workforce and ultimately help Delaware's economy. COVID-19 has only increased the need to highlight the value of a trained workforce. Thank you for your work in securing the funding for this and am requesting the serious consideration be given to amending this bill to include providing access to SEED tuition for students attending noncredit adult post-secondary programs in a technical school district statewide. Again consider why we would not be included knowing our track record.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Poore.

Senator Poore was appreciative of all public comments and believes that SEED has helped ensure people succeed. Expanding SEED is the most impactful way to do that because it is an existing program and already has the foundation to do that. This legislation focuses on scaling up and increasing eligibility for an existing program. It is not intended to capture every workforce development in the state and this initiative does not prevent the state from continuing to invest in other workforce development programs like the ones offered by the VoTech school districts. Certainly not inhibiting

that by any means. We already know there is currently funding in our budget for Elevate Delaware which is a bill circulating. We also know that programs at some of the VoTech schools and also making comparisons we do not want to take away from what they are doing but when you align them out may have 26 programs in one of the VoTech and currently only having 10 matching at Deltech so again this is not form prohibits those from doing something or increasing it.

Dustyn Thompson provided written testimony which is attached at the end of this document.

SB 12 – Reported out of the Committee – 4= Favorable 2= on its Merits 0= Unfavorable

II. SB 95 – Sen. Paradee – AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO THE INSPIRE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.

Synopsis: This bill will provide Delaware students with strong academic credentials and a demonstrated commitment to volunteer public service to receive scholarship monies sufficient to cover the full cost of tuition at Delaware State University. The intent of this bill is to increase the number of students in Delaware who not only attend the University but who successfully complete degree programs.

Senator Paradee, Prime Sponsor of the legislation, provided a synopsis. The financial situation of a young person's family should not be the determining factor of whether or not that young person attends college. SB 95 helps to make the dream of getting a college degree more accessible to young Delawareans who have proven their desire and willingness to succeed in the classroom. SB 95 will expand the Delaware Inspire program so it will cover the entire cost of tuition. The Inspire program is only limited to cover the amount that would be received by a similar SEED scholar recipient. The annual SEED scholarship is \$3,600 which is a little bit more than half of what DSU tuition is. This legislation essentially increases the amount of the Inspire scholarship annual amount by approximately \$3,400 per year per student. Senator Paradee is a supporter of Deltech And the SEED program but, it seems rather arbitrary to tie the Inspire award amount to the SEED program. For instance, the Governor's recommended budget is nearly \$13 million in scholarship money this year marked for scholarships at the University of Delaware. Those scholarships are not tied to or limited to SEED or Inspire scholarships. It is very important that those students who receive scholarship dollars are personally invested and committed, so one point in terms of the eligibility requirements is they still require students to graduate from Delaware high school and enroll at DSU immediately. Following high school they must maintain a 2.75 GPA or higher and that they go through the FASFA program. They must demonstrate good conduct while at Delaware State University and complete 10 hours of service work each semester. This bill is not just created to help students, this is also a bill to increase economic development. It is important to note that DSU has a \$266 million impact on the Delaware economy each

year. As a part of the Inspire program each year students have contributed 125,000 hours of community service in Delaware. They are participating in local events that benefit the local community. This program has been successful in creating opportunities. Approximately 37% of those involved in the Inspire program are first generation college students. As we know DSU is a historically black university with a student body of primarily minority individuals. We are working to lift those young people up and put them into jobs such as engineering or medicine. The Inspire students are maintaining a GPA of 3.81, which is outstanding and the retention rate is 85.2%. Senator Paradee acknowledged other people who were involved in the scholarship effort and mentioned the efforts of Dr. Harry Williamson and Dr. Tony Allen. They were involved and essential in creating the Inspire program and helping to expand it. Senator Paradee mentioned two good friends of his who were involved in starting the Inspire program that is Senator Brian Bushweller and Daryl Scott. Senator Paradee corresponded with Senator Brian Bushweller that morning and read his message into the record. He was unable to participate in Inspire conversation that morning and appreciated the invitation. He fully supports the bill that fleshes out the scholarship That representative Daryl Scott and he originally sponsored. He encourages this enactment into law. Sincerely yours Senator Brian Bushweller. Senator Paradee also read in the formal statement by former representative Daryl Scott. All members of the Senate education committee Thank you for hearing Senate Bill 95. This bill ensures that Delaware high school graduates with the record of academic achievement and commitment to public service have the financial means to finish their college education without the crushing debt Delaware students face upon their graduation from college. This bill delivers on the promise Senator Bushweller and he thought to provide with House Bill 399 145th General Assembly. Representative Scott stated it was a rewarding situations to see Inspires students receive their college degree. This bill will change lives in a real and meaningful way, not only for the recipient but for their family and generations to follow. Thank you again for introducing the bill and hearing it today. I urge members to voted it out of committee. Senator Paradee offered Dr. Tony Allen the opportunity to speak on the bill.

Tony Allen, President of Delaware State University, thanked Senator Paradee and wanted to highlight the impact the scholarship has on DSU students. Delaware has many DSU students attend the university for a quality college experience. But they are also coming to change the economic trajectory for themselves, their families, and their communities. In exchange, we afford them a high-quality education but also demand they give back in college and subsequent life. The Inspire program has been an area for that particular ethic. We have 2,500 Inspire students that represent 125,000 volunteer service hours. Over that time their retention rate is upwards of 77% and as you may know, the first-year retention is indicative of graduation rates which for Inspire students is about 67%. when you put that all together and look at the kind of experiences, they are coming from as Senator Paradee noted 40% are first-generation college students, and about half are low-income. We are talking about students who are changing their trajectory and in-kind they will serve the Delaware community more broadly. I do want

to thank Senator Bushweller for his efforts over his tenure at Delaware State University and certainly his effort with perspective to Inspire as well as my predecessor Dr. Williams who started the program for us and Dr. Mishoe who built on it. The notion that we would have the opportunity to fully fund Delaware students at DSU given who we are and where we are going is a game-changer for us. It will increase the capacity for us up to about 20% and will increasing build capacity for more students with different backgrounds to look at and consider DSU.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Bonini.

Senator Bonini stated he is not a big spender and questions what the impact looks like when the state government gets involved. I have had disagreements with colleagues over the years on spending but I am a supporter from the beginning of the Inspire scholarship because the research shows if you can get those young people on campuses and plug in the odds of those students completing goes up dramatically. I think the Inspire scholarship has been an unrivaled unmitigated success and we should reward success. I want to thank Senator Paradee for bringing forward the bill and would like to be a Co-Sponsor.

Senator Paradee welcomed Senator Bonini's support of the legislation. There was a miscommunication in circulating the bill. The bill was put out last night for circulation and Senator Paradee welcomed any sponsorship from any members of the committee and other members of the senate or house of representatives that might be listening.

Senator Sturgeon asked this would expand the current scholarship program to four years, what are the current eligibility requirements for the scholarship program, and do the requirements change.

Senator Paradee stated the program is already a four-year program but in the terms of qualifications they do not change. They still have to graduate from a Delaware high school with a 2.75 GPA, go straight to DSU, apply for FAFSA funding, demonstrate good conduct, and volunteer service. This makes a big difference, specifically in Dover.

Senator Sturgeon thanked Senator Paradee for the clarification and asked that this bill increases the amount so it covers the full tuition of four years rather than an amount determined by other programs.

Senator Paradee said yes and that this is not only an investment in our young people but also in our local community and economy. These are dollars that are going back into the economy being spent on salaries for professors and materials for the campus. All of that is going back and rippling through the economy creating economic growth.

Senator Sturgeon mentioned it is interesting the committee is hearing two bills that increase current scholarship programs. Senator Poore's bill also helps the economy.

Both bills are an improvement for education and economic development in Delaware. Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Lockman.

Senator Lockman was excited to see this bill and stated it is a fantastic opportunity to help our students. Delaware State University is doing great things and it is great to hear how they are helping to advance our students. This bill is an easy one to get behind. She enthusiastically asked to be a sponsor of the bill. Senator Lockman asked how many students would be helped in continuing their education at DSU if this bill passes.

Tony Allen stated the first-year retention is indicative of graduation rates. The first-year retention over the life of Inspire has been about 77% and yielded 67% graduation rates for Inspire students. Some students lose Inspire eligibility but continue at DSU and yield a loss rate of about 5%.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Lopez.

Senator Lopez stated this is one of the best education committee meetings that he has been a part of because it is addressing the times and challenges that we are facing. Tremendously thankful for both Senator Paradee and Senator Poore on the legislation. Senator Lopez looks forward to co-sponsoring both legislation. The best thing about these two pieces of legislation is they not only benefit our students but are a realization of the investments we are making on all three of the major institutions in Delaware. The support of the SEED students will end up as UD graduates. Support for our DSU students is going to be DSU graduates. Thanked everyone for their involvement and the collaborative efforts by the institutions are what makes them the premier institutions in the nation. Today we are meeting those economic concerns head-on.

Senator Sturgeon requested to be a Co-Sponsor of the legislation. Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Townsend.

Senator Townsend thanked everyone for their efforts. Agree with Senator Bonini about the research surrounding this effort and will be reaching out to him about other initiatives where there are good data. That is the best way to be making policy. He thanked Dr. Allen and his team for the work and success they are having. Also, he thanked Senator Paradee for his work on this and continuing Senator Bushweller's work and making an investment in DSU.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Poore.

Senator Poore stated the finest moment on the Joint Finance Committee was being the motion to carry Senator Bushweller's efforts of expanding the Inspire program, so this is very important to her. She is in full support of this legislation and is very proud of DSU's work. President Allen and his predecessors have done great work. This is about

accessibility and has the power to have more buying power in the state. Those that go higher up in education have the power to do more.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Senator Sokola.

Senator Sokola stated he spent time with Dr. Allen last week at the airport. There has been tremendous work done at DSU. The partnership with United Airlines last week will put Delaware on the map. Senator Sokola requested to be a Co-Sponsor of the legislation and suggested Dr. Allen comment on the events from the previous week.

Tony Allen stated the efforts are helped by Senator Sokola and Representative Heffernan with their Higher Education Economic Development fund. As you may know, we were flying our aviation program with planes from the 1970s and were concerned with the FAA shutting them down. Also, DSU produces the most pilots of color than any other place in the country. The General Assembly afforded them the chance to buy new planes which would double the program over the next five to seven years. Some people have taken notice specifically United Airlines which committed to training 5,000 pilots over the next five years, half of whom will be women and people of color. We are their first HBU partnership. The most heartwarming part of last week was we had nine alumni who are pilots today wearing full uniform talking to the existing students about what this means for them. Dr. Allen has a deep respect for the General Assembly and the colleagues for your investment just three years ago which has produced substantive results across the country.

Senator Paradee added that the placement rate for that program is 100%.

Tony Allen said it is 100% for the last 20 years.

Senator Paradee said it is understandable why United and other freight carriers are taking notice with a 100% placement rate is shows the quality of the program.

Senator Sturgeon asked to take a tour of the program. Senator Sturgeon was previously a Pan Am flight attendant. It is great DSU has updated the planes they work with. Senator Sturgeon opened up to public comment and recognized Robert Overmiller.

Robert Overmiller supports the legislation. The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizen also supports the legislation and will send out a letter of a document once the legislation is reviewed.

Senator Sturgeon recognized Ardavia Lee.

Ardavia Lee, a DSU student, is an active student and recipient of the Delaware State Inspire scholarship. This scholarship has reduced her financial burden tenfold. After experiencing a family death she worked multiple jobs to attend college as well as

working while being a full-time student. This allowed her to breathe while receiving an education and hopefully one day she will be able to help students who need financial aid to reach their goal in higher education.

SB 95 – Reported out of the Committee – 5= Favorable 1= on its Merits 0= Unfavorable

Senator Lopez motioned and **Senator Lockman** second to adjourn the meeting.

Senator Sturgeon adjourned to the meeting at 11:23 a.m.

Hello, my name is Dustyn Thompson and I serve on the Delaware United Policy Committee. We would like to submit a comment in favor of SB 12. Delaware United has long supported expanding the SEED program as a platform point since our formation in 2015.

It is estimated that within the next decade, over 70% of job opportunities in the employment market will require some degree of formal education.

Far too many individuals who have lived in Delaware for years, who attended Delaware high schools, but for whatever reason were not able to go straight to college have been unable to take advantage of this wonderful program to step into the workforce of today. The lack of financial opportunity has forced countless individuals to remain in low-wage employment, stuck in a cycle of just focusing on surviving.

Unfortunately, with the surge of unemployment due to the pandemic, many of these low-wage jobs have disappeared, and it is not clear how many will be returning.

By increasing access to the SEED Program by opening it up to those who were not previously able to attend college or go through a certificate program who now are needing to in order to find employment, we can help reduce the impact of the pandemic in Delaware.

This expansion in particular will help meet individuals where they are and deal with the realities of life and the needs of those who could use the program the most. Grades in high school are not the sole determinant of success in obtaining a certificate or degree, especially as a returning adult. Nor is whether or not you have interacted with the criminal legal system. What those barriers accomplish is perpetuating a system of haves and have nots.

That is why we are extraordinarily happy to see this bill come before the committee today and hope you vote it out and support it on the floor.