



EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING

Virtual Teams Meeting

July 17, 2020

9:30 A.M.

MINUTES

Roll Call and Introductions

Board Vice Chair Jim Zylstra called the meeting of the Educational Communications Board to order at 9:35 A.M and noted that Dr. Wegenke, Board Chair, was scheduled to attend today's meeting but was not yet connected to the Teams meeting. A roll call attendance of Board Members was taken and Dr. Wegenke arrived during the roll call.

Board Members Present:

Jose Delgado
Niles Berman
Chris Patton (DOA Secretary Joel Brennan designee)
Jose Delgado
Jim Zylstra (WTCS President Morna Foy designee), Vice-Chair
Alyssa Kenney
Leah Lechleiter-Luke
Eileen Littig
Senator Luther Olsen
Tara Senter
Kurt Kiefer (DPI Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor designee)
Rolf Wegenke, Ph.D., Chair
Bohdan Zachary

Absent:

Representative Dave Considine
Heather LaRoi (UW System President Ray Cross designee)
Senator Fred Risser
Representative Pat Snyder



Approval of Minutes from the April 24, 2020 ECB Board Meeting

Eileen Littig moved, seconded by Senator Luther Olsen, to approve the April 24, 2020 meeting minutes. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

AGENDA ITEM 1. Report of the Board Chair

Dr. Wegenke apologized for the technical difficulties which prevented him from connecting at the start of the meeting and thanked Mr. Zylstra for ensuring the meeting stayed on schedule. Dr. Wegenke noted that his report was limited to expressing how proud he is of the ECB and its employees who have continued to work and maintain important communications equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Wegenke also recognized Marta Bechtol, and noted that her appointment to the Broadband Access Task Force is very positive recognition of the ECB's work as well as Ms. Bechtol's role as a policy maker.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Board Chair report.

AGENDA ITEM 2. Report of the Executive Director

Dr. Wegenke introduced Marta Bechtol, ECB Executive Director, and reminded board members that a copy of the Executive Director's report was included in the board packet distributed in advance of today's meeting.

Ms. Bechtol provided an update on the agency's operations during the public health emergency. Ms. Bechtol reported that ECB will continue with minimal on-site staffing while most employees continue to telecommute. Following guidance from the State, Ms. Bechtol reported the agency will remain in this mode in order to protect the health and safety of staff until it is determined safe to enter Phase II of the Badger Bounce Back plan.

Ms. Bechtol noted that an exemption has been granted by the Department of Administration for staff to deliver and record audio without a mask while working in radio production studios at regional broadcast centers.

Ms. Bechtol continued her report by highlighting some accomplishments by the agency and identified how those activities were related to the ECB Strategic Plan.

In the area of Direction I: "Strengthen the impact, reach and performance of the ECB to better serve all the citizens of Wisconsin..." Ms. Bechtol reported \$2.3 million in funding for new transmitters at WLEF in Park Falls, WHRM in Wausau and WHWC in Menomonie was approved by the State Building Commission on May 20th, and an FCC construction permit is in place to have these projects completed by the end of summer 2021. Ms. Bechtol added that new transmitters at these sites will be more energy efficient and increase signal strength.



Ms. Bechtol reported that power increases for transmitters at WHLA in La Crosse and WPNE in the Green Bay area were completed on July 10th and 15th. Ms. Bechtol reminded the Board that transmitters at these sites were replaced during the FCC repack process, and increased power will improve and expand signal strength at these locations.

In the area of Directive II: “Assure the responsible use of resources to carry out the work of the ECB,” Ms. Bechtol noted that the ECB Engineering Division has added a Regional Technical Manager position, and organized the state into four regions rather than three. Ms. Bechtol reported that this change will better balance managerial functions and give employees in each region more direct contact with the Regional Manager. Ms. Bechtol added that travel and overtime expenses have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the addition of a fourth region and Regional Technical Manager will help reduce those expenses.

Ms. Bechtol provided an update on the Federal Budget regarding funding for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB). Ms. Bechtol reported that the House Appropriations Committee approved CPB’s budget request in its entirety last week, and it will move to the Senate Appropriations Committee next week. Ms. Bechtol noted that the budget will not be finalized until November but she and Gene Purcell have met virtually with Wisconsin legislators who serve on the Appropriations Committees and they expressed support for the CPB budget request. Ms. Bechtol added that CPB is forward funded, and the budget request in committee now would take effect in 2023.

Ms. Bechtol thanked Bohdan Zachary and the engineering staff at Milwaukee PBS for their assistance during inclement weather during the past few weeks. Ms. Bechtol reported that during recent storms, it was not possible for PBS programming to be acquired by satellite in the Madison area but thankfully Milwaukee PBS was able to acquire and share that programming with the ECB in Madison via a fiber interconnect.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Executive Director report.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Rural Broadband Update, Marta Bechtol

Marta Bechtol shared that earlier in the week, both she and Kurt Kiefer were appointed to the Governor’s Broadband Access Task Force. Ms. Bechtol reported that both ECB and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) have been discussing broadband access issues with stakeholders for over a year, and the Task Force will be a natural continuation of those discussions with a broader group of stakeholders. Ms. Bechtol reported that she and Mr. Kiefer will be meeting next week with the Kristy Nieto of the Public Service Commission, working to develop a service agreement template for internet service providers to establish connectivity for low income households that include K – 12 students. Ms. Bechtol added ECB is currently working with a provider in Florence, WI that will utilize the ECB Tower in Fence, WI to establish internet access to rural households in the area.



Kurt Kiefer reiterated Ms. Bechtol's comments regarding the Broadband Access Task Force and added that DPI estimates there are over 40,000 K-12 students in Wisconsin without access to reliable, high-speed internet. Mr. Kiefer noted that eliminating that disparity is a critical priority for DPI.

Dr. Wegenke congratulated Kurt Kiefer for his appointment to the Broadband Access Task Force as a DPI representative thanked him for representing ECB as well.

Senator Luther Olsen shared that he was contacted by an internet service provider called Bug Tussel who is interested in working with schools in rural parts of Wisconsin to establish internet service by utilizing cell towers. Senator Olsen asked if Ms. Bechtol or Mr. Kiefer were familiar with this type of provider and wondered if they were part of the rural broadband discussion. Kurt Kiefer responded that DPI is working with over three dozen internet service providers including satellite and wireless internet providers and were scheduled to meet with Bug Tussel next Monday.

Niles Berman shared that rural electric cooperatives are a good example of public/private partnerships that helped bring electricity to rural areas and wondered if those organizations or that type of model of long term infrastructure investments are part of the rural broadband discussion. Kurt Kiefer replied they are indeed involved and that connectivity in rural areas is a high priority for those organizations.

There were no additional questions or comments from board members.

AGENDA ITEM 4. K – 12 Education Initiatives during the COVID-19 quarantine
PBS Wisconsin Education, Alyssa Tsagong
PBS Wisconsin, Jon Miskowski
Wisconsin Public Radio, Mike Crane

Marta Bechtol introduced Alyssa Tsagong, PBS Wisconsin Education; Jon Miskowski, PBS Wisconsin; and Mike Crane, WPR to share with the Board activities related to K-12 education that were initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alyssa Tsagong reviewed several activities to promote and distribute educational media at PBS Wisconsin Education that have taken place since the pandemic. Ms. Tsagong shared a PowerPoint presentation that included screenshots of PBS At-Home Learning resources, programming schedules and statistics related to viewers and internet sessions.

Ms. Tsagong reported that PBS Education staff began working from home on March 16th. Ms. Tsagong reported that within days, PBS Wisconsin Education distributed information to help parents and teachers locate digital learning tools made available through PBS and PBS Wisconsin. Ms. Tsagong reported that PBS Wisconsin partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, to support at-home learning for students and families by



broadcasting a new weekday television schedule of educational programming with digital resources that align with Wisconsin's state academic standards. Ms. Tsagong reported that PBS Wisconsin Education launched weekly "Educator Connection Live!" webinars to introduce Wisconsin educators to digital teaching resources to assist with distance learning, as well as a teacher-only "a.k.a. Teacher" Facebook group designed to connect Wisconsin educators and foster discussion about the unique challenges teachers face. Ms. Tsagong reported that during March and April, there were significant web traffic increases to PBS Learning Media, PBS Wisconsin KIDS, and PBS Wisconsin Education sites and 33,858 total views of the At-Home Learning schedule livestream. Ms. Tsagong displayed an activity book for children that was a collaboration between PBS Wisconsin Education and the Department of Public Instruction. Ms. Tsagong reported that 30,000 books have been distributed to 295 public libraries throughout the state.

Jon Miskowski shared a PowerPoint presentation which highlighted the growing use of public media during the COVID-19 pandemic from March through May. Mr. Miskowski displayed a chart that showed large increases in the use of digital content including over 2.5 million views of PBS Wisconsin At-Home Learning programming, and over 1.5 million content views on social media. Mr. Miskowski noted that while most viewers may not have noticed any changes to what they see on television or online, PBS Wisconsin engineers have done a remarkable job to accommodate staff who are telecommuting.

Mike Crane reported that a majority of WPR employees have been working from home since March 13th. Mr. Crane thanked the ECB Board of Directors for supporting infrastructure improvements that have made it possible for broadcasters to work remotely. Mr. Crane discussed the long history of educational programming at WPR such as "Ranger Mac," "Let's Sing," "Let's Draw," and "Wisconsin School of the Air." Mr. Crane noted that since most WPR listeners are adults, emphasis has been given to share information and resources for parents to help keep children safe, learning and engaged at home. Mr. Crane noted this included coverage of creative resources for online learning; gardening and outdoor adventures for kids and families; and helping kids deal with anxiety and trauma. Mr. Crane reported that WPR's "WHYsconsin" website, which solicits online questions from listeners, received over 2100 questions during the spring related to COVID-19 representing a 1500% increase in questions submitted. Mr. Crane announced that WPR, in conjunction with PBS Wisconsin Education, launched an hour long program for kids on Friday mornings called "The Explorers' Club" featuring children's authors, artists, scientists, and others including popular PBS personalities. Mr. Crane noted that the "Explorer's Club" has presented a great opportunity for student enrichment for both children and adults.

There were no questions or comments.



AGENDA ITEM 5. PBS Wisconsin and WPR Racial Justice Initiatives,
Jon Miskowski, PBS Wisconsin,
Mike Crane, Wisconsin Public Radio

Jon Miskowski and Mike Crane continued speaking to update the Board on coverage of racial justice issues and related initiatives in response to the death of George Floyd and protests that followed in Madison and around the state.

Jon Miskowski shared that PBS Wisconsin has devoted significant coverage related to the death of George Floyd as well as the protests and riots that followed. In addition to news coverage, Mr. Miskowski indicated that PBS Wisconsin has assembled an online collection of 135 items focused on racial justice, including educational resources and documentaries. Mr. Miskowski reported that PBS Wisconsin made over 60 programming changes since the death of George Floyd to present documentaries and reports in response to viewer interest. Mr. Miskowski reported that PBS Wisconsin is currently producing a virtual reality project to capture 3-D images of the artwork that has emerged on the store fronts of State Street in Madison following riots, including statements from the artists. Mr. Miskowski also reported that Angela Fitzgerald (“Wisconsin Life” Host) and the PBS News and Public Affairs team is producing a digital series titled “Courageous Conversations” featuring interviews about race and related issues.

Mike Crane shared that WPR reporters have covered all aspects of the protests in Madison and throughout the state, as well as bigger issues behind the public response. Mr. Crane reported that topics covered include the expansion of police funding in Wisconsin communities, policing in public schools, how to talk to children about race, and raising black children in Wisconsin. Mr. Crane noted that WPR has a long history of covering racial justice issues in Wisconsin, as was documented recently when WTMJ in Milwaukee featured a story which highlighted how Wisconsin Public Media can positively impact individuals and communities. Mr. Crane noted that WPR has more work to do in the areas of equity, diversity and inclusion; and WPR’s commitment to report on those issues has always been and will remain strong.

There were no questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 6. Budget Presentation and Financial Reports

Marta Bechtol introduced Aimee Wright, ECB Finance Director, to update the Board on the ECB’s annual budget, and answer questions regarding the Financial Reports which had been distributed to board members in advance of today’s meeting.

Ms. Wright reviewed the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget and results, the FY 2021 budget and changes from the previous fiscal year, plans for improvement in FY 2021, and new expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Ms. Wright reported that ECB Spent 93.34% of its budget in FY 2020 as compared to 91.45% in FY 2019. Ms. Wright highlighted several areas of success including reducing carryover encumbrances to \$82,000 in FY 2020 compared to \$340,000 in FY 2019, utilizing 93.5% of payroll budget in FY 2020 compared to 80.4% in FY 2019 as a result of being more fully staffed. The Engineering Division has developed a maintenance and replacement cycling plan for each transmitter site to better plan maintenance, purchasing and parts budgets.

Ms. Wright identified several areas of improvement for the ECB FY21 budget including: underspent utilities, administrative and business services; increasing the budget for interconnect services; and remodeling purchases postponed in FY2020 will now be incurred in FY 2021.

Ms. Wright reviewed details of the FY 2021 budget which represents a 3% increase from FY 2020. Ms. Wright added that most state agencies were asked to lapse 5% of their GPR budgets earlier this spring but ECB was exempted from this lapse due to its size and mission.

Ms. Wright reviewed expenses incurred by the ECB related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Wright reported that ECB has spent \$49,000 to date on COVID-related expenses including: \$11,000 on salaries and fringe benefits of staff working as contact tracers for the Division of Health Services (DHS); \$5000 for cleaning supplies and personal protection equipment; with the remainder spent on telecommuting accommodations such as computer equipment and I.T. staff wages for installing necessary equipment and related technology to work from home. Ms. Wright added that the payroll expenses for ECB staff who worked as contact tracers would be reimbursed through DHS.

Niles Berman asked Ms. Wright if revenue projections from underwriting and donations are included in FY2021 budget. Ms. Wright responded that the budget she presented today only includes Chapter 20 appropriations as determined by the Governor and Legislature; the agency works with our partners at Wisconsin Public Media to determine those projections separately.

There were no further questions or comments.

AGENDA ITEM 7. Questions/Comments from Board Members

Dr. Wegenke reminded trustees of the Wisconsin Public Broadcasting Foundation they would be meeting immediately following the ECB Board of Directors.

There were no further questions or comments.



Educational Communications Board

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AGENDA ITEM 8. Adjournment

Senator Luther Olsen moved, seconded by Dr. Wegenke to adjourn. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Dr. Wegenke announced the meeting adjourned at 10:50 A.M.