Themes of the Week:

The House and Senate are wrapping up their October session days and after this week, the chambers will not be back in together until November 18th, with the House coming in after Veterans Day.

State Happenings

Hearings and Committee Schedules
Both the House and Senate have some hearings and meetings scheduled on various topics. We will monitor these and make sure to update you on those relevant to higher education.

Bills on the Move
The Senate amended HB 49 (Brown) with some important provisions and the bill now: allows for financial literacy to count for one credit in a secondary school, restores school safety officer abilities, extends the Public Higher Education Funding Commission due date to November 2020 and includes language to ensure that students have applied for applicable state and federal aid in order to be eligible for the Foster Care Tuition Waiver passed in June (the institutions will now be the payer of last resort). This bill now goes to the House for concurrence and, if passed as is, will go straight to the Governor’s desk for signature.

The House passed HB 1786 (Sainato) which creates the First Responder Loan Forgiveness Program that allows for up to $16,000 in loan forgiveness for first responders who have graduated after enactment of the legislation, and has a federally insured loan, and has
attended an institution of higher education in a program as approved by PHEAA. The program is limited to funds appropriated by the General Assembly. This legislation now heads to the Senate.

Public Higher Education Funding Commission Holds First Hearing
Last week, the Commission held its first informational hearing in Harrisburg. The appointees heard from Patricia Landis, of PDE, Schott Boelscher, HCM Strategies and Dr. Kate Shaw, Research for Action. PDE gave a brief overview of higher education in the Commonwealth and then the other testifiers discussed Outcome Based Funding (OBF). They testified that although many states employ this type of funding model, the level to which they have implemented varies greatly. It seems like in order to implement this for the public institutions would need to decide on the goals for higher education and then look at other factors to emphasize. In addition, there would need to be a review of data currently available vs. new data needed. At this point, the Commission is still looking at all ways of funding and plan to hold the next meeting possibly in early December.

Federal Happenings

HEA Reauthorization
The House and Senate continue to disagree on the approach for the reauthorization. The House is pushing for a vote on the Representative Scott legislation in the next few weeks, as opposed to the original plan, which was a vote by the end of this month. It remains unclear what will happen if and when the House bill reaches the Senate. Senator Alexander would still like a comprehensive solution and it remains up in the air if agreement can be reached on one or even a smaller bill.

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