The New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund Board of Directors conference call meeting was convened on May 8, 2015 at the office of the New Jersey Higher Education - Educational Opportunity Fund, Trenton, New Jersey.

Welcome and Call to Order/Open Public Meetings Statement – Dr. Nannette Wright - the Chairperson of the EOF Board welcomed all of the Board members who were able to participate in the conference call meeting. The date time and location were provide to the Office of the Secretary of State and posted on the agency’s website in compliance with the Open Public Meeting laws. She stated that there was only one item on the agenda which was the adoption of the EOF Program Progress Report. Board members were also asked to identify themselves before speaking, since this was a conference call meeting.

Additionally, Dr. Wright shared that our EOF Board member, Ms. Susan Grierson, recently submitted her resignation from the Board to the Governor’s Office.

Board members present - The following Board members participated in the conference call: Anthony Falcone, Betsy Garlatti, Franklin Moore, Lisa Pantel and, Dr. Nannette Wright. The Board members absent were: Ms. Ivette Santiago-Green, Ms. Saara Marte, Mr. Nacovin Norman and Mr. Bader Qarmout.

Resolution 17:15 Adoption of EOF Program Progress Report- Dr. Wright expressed her hope that all of the Board members had an opportunity to read the EOF Program Progress Report. To begin the discussion of the report, she called on Ms. Bennerson to provide an overview of it.

Ms. Bennerson remarked that the EOF Program Progress report details the state of the program for the 2012/2013 academic year (the most recent available data) and highlights EOF program outcomes with regard to program enrollment, student academic progress, retention and graduation outcomes, program funding trends (including the current fiscal year 2015), and financial assistance to EOF students. In addition, the report looked at national survey data collected in 2010 by the Education Trust/Education Delivery Institute in Washington, DC to compare NJ EOF student performance to the success rates of students with similar profiles in 15 other states. The comparative data provided by the Institute ranks NJ EOF outcomes first when
compared with 6-year graduation rates for low-income students enrolled in public 4-year colleges in the other 15 states. The report also contains recommendations from New Jersey’s Secretary of Higher Education, key among those are:

“The program is a wise investment for New Jersey through its ability to break the cycle of poverty for many families and offer a chance to attain economic success through college degree attainment” and,

“The program should be expanded and strengthened.”

On the whole, the Board members expressed their pleasure with the report, and particularly cited the student success stories as a great addition to the data provided. A few Board members requested clarification of the comparison of the NJ EOF program’s 6-year graduation rate data to the 15 other states.

Ms. Pantel wondered if it would be appropriate to add a more expressed statement indicating (for legislators and others quickly reading through the report) how many states have EOF programs, but that there are only 15 states that report data to which we can compare NJ EOF. The report gives the impression that there are many other states with greater success, however, NJ is only comparing its opportunity programs to those 15 states.

Dr. Wright agreed with Ms. Pantel’s interpretation of that section of the report and her recommendation to add a clarifying statement.

Ms. Bennerson informed Board members that the 15 other states referenced in the report are states that are part of the Educational Delivery Institute’s data base. This data base provides a comparison of first generation, low-income students who receive a PELL grant and should not necessarily be assumed that the states where they attended college have an opportunity program equivalent to EOF. The only other state among the 15 listed that has an educational opportunity program is New York and the information for New York only includes their programs that are part of the New York City university system.

Ms. Pantel asked if there a way to clarify the comparison so that others reading the report will understand what NJ is comparing itself to when making the statement that “we are the nation’s most comprehensive and successful program”.

Ms. Bennerson shared with Board members that they are probably correct. However, the progress report went through an extensive vetting process and we can make recommendations
for changes for future reports, but at this point she lacked the authority to make changes to the content of this report.

Ms. Pantel indicated that she was attempting to put herself in the mindset of a donor who lacks familiarity with the EOF program reading the report. She suggested that if the report has to remain “as is” perhaps it could include an introduction or cover letter that would make that comparison clearer.

Ms. Hodges stated that she believes the reason the staff is not able to make changes to the report is because the program is severely understaffed. She also stated that she agrees that the data requires clarification particularly if the Secretary of Higher Education moves in the direction of increasing visibility for the program as she suggested at the last Board meeting. In order to accomplish that the program requires recent comprehensive data and currently there is no one on staff to perform that task.

Ms. Pantel added that the report has to be credible in order to secure additional funds and she is not suggesting that we secure additional data if the comparative data in the report is the best available at this time. Ms. Bennerson added that if you want to do a national comparison of the outcomes of first generation, low-income student who receive Pell grant funding then this is the best information currently available. She also interjected that the staff could certainly prepare a cover letter for the Board’s consideration with a clearer explanation of that data.

Mr. Falcone added that it is a tremendous report. He also indicated that initially he was confused by the 15 state comparison information under the footnote, in the executive summary, and agrees with Ms. Pantel’s suggestions. However, on the whole the report looks very good and if the program needs to keep that information in the report this year fine. But he suggested that perhaps next year we can clarify that information or delete it, because he is not sure if it helps or hurts the program.

Mr. Falcone offered the motion to approve Resolution 17:15 Adoption of the EOF Program Progress Report. Dr. Wright seconded the motion. Ms. Bennerson elaborated that the resolution also calls for the Board to forward copies of the report to the Governor and State Legislature encouraging them to restore funding to the EOF program during their deliberations on the FY 2016 State Appropriations Act. With the Board’s approval the report would also be sent to the college presidents to thank them for their continued support of the program. The motion was unanimously approved.
Ms. Bennerson also clarified with the Board members that the letters attached to Resolution 17:15 were fine, but that the staff needed to prepare an additional cover letter for potential outside funding sources that explains the 15 state comparison data.

**Old Business**-Ms. Pantel asked if the programs could provide the Board with anecdotal information about what happened to the class of 2015 EOF graduates, as she would like to be able to respond to questions from former Governor Kean and Senator Tom Kean regarding the career pursuits of EOF graduates.

Ms. Bennerson responded that EOF directors were sent a request to provide that information as well as summer program schedules by June 18, 2015. She also pointed out that many programs will not be able to provide a clear indication of their graduates’ future endeavors by that date because it is too soon for most students to have secured employment or finalize personal plans. She added that she may have to poll program directors again, but whatever information is gleaned will be shared with the Board at the next meeting.

**New Business** - Ms. Pantel inquired about the Fund’s timeline to impact the FY 2016 appropriation process if the intent is to share the report with legislators. Ms. Bennerson informed Board members that her goal is to transmit the report to the Governor and legislators early next week. All of the legislative hearings on the FY 2016 budget have been concluded. The legislature is currently working on their version of the FY 2016 appropriations bill and she guessed that in early June the legislative leadership will begin their negotiations with the Department of Treasury and the Governor’s Office to develop a final appropriation bill. She added her belief that there is still sufficient time to influence the budget process for FY 2016 because the deliberations are ongoing. The “elephant in the room” is the pension case that is currently in the supreme courts. What we’ve heard about restoring funding for the program has been positive and the report will only help solidify those feelings for the legislators.

Adjournment- A motion for adjournment was unanimously approved at 10:45 a.m.