

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**  
**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS ADVISORY COUNCIL**

November 29, 2022  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The November 29, 2022 meeting of the Academic Affairs & Student Success Advisory Council was held remotely, via the web-conference platform Zoom.

**Meeting Minutes**

Advisory Council Members Present	AA&SS Chair Patty Eppinger; Judy Pagliuca; Paul Toner; Secretary of Education Designee Tom Moreau; Commissioner Noe Ortega
Other BHE Members Present	Bill Walczak; UMass Student Segmental Advisor, Andrew Whitcomb; State University Student Advisor, Robert Huttig
Committee Members Absent	BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli
Department Staff Present	Georgiana Chevry; Keith Connors; Loyd Joseph; Allison Little; Clantha McCurdy; Constantia (Dena) Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Amanda Robbins

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Academic Affairs & Student Success (AA&SS) Advisory Council (AC) Chair Patty Eppinger called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. Roll call attendance of council members was taken (see attendance roster reflected above).

**II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes from the October 4, 2022, meeting of the AA&SS AC were unanimously approved through a roll call vote after informing members of a technical amendment to the minutes to reflect member Bill Walczak present as a Board of Higher (BHE) member and not as an AC member.

**III. REMARKS**

**A. Chair's Remarks**

AA&SS AC Chair Eppinger began the meeting by welcoming everyone and she invited the Department of Higher Education's (DHE) Senior Deputy Commissioner and Interim Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Clantha McCurdy, to provide some remarks.

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy shared that the day's agenda is reflective of the Board's commitment to the Equity Agenda with presentations on Basic Needs Security (BNS) and Civic learning and Engagement. She then provided an update on two significant initiatives that the BHE approved at its final meeting last year - *The Framework for Support Services for Student Success* and *The Strategic Plan for Racial Equity* – saying the DHE staff were working towards implementation and that she would keep members updated.

## **B. Commissioner's Remarks**

AA&SS AC Chair Eppinger thanked Dr. McCurdy. She then welcomed Commissioner Ortega to his first official AA&SS AC meeting. Commissioner Ortega began his remarks by expressing his appreciation for the reception he has received since starting in his new role. He then shared that he has spent much of his time getting to know and to meet with Board Members, our public campuses and, most importantly, students.

Commissioner Ortega continued and said students voiced issues related to mental health struggles connected to the pandemic and belonging, as well as concerns about being academically prepared to meet the challenges that come with successfully navigating a post-secondary attainment process and being prepared for college-level coursework. He said the conversations with the students and others have helped inform his thinking of the mission of public higher education in the Commonwealth and the role our institutions play in educating students who historically have been underrepresented.

AA&SS AC Chair Eppinger thanked Commissioner Ortega and then turned the meeting to Assistant Commissioner for Academic Policy & Student Success and Chief of Staff Elena Quiroz-Livanis.

## **IV. PRESENTATIONS**

*List of documents used:*

[Basic Needs PowerPoint Presentation](#)

[Civic Learning PowerPoint Presentation](#)

### **Basic Needs Security**

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis welcomed Commissioner Ortega and Advisory Council members. She noted that DHE staff would be presenting on efforts related to Basic Needs Security (BNS) and Civic Learning and Engagement in response to requests from the AC at its October meetings.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis began the presentation by showing the how work intended to address BNS was embedded in the *Strategic Plan for Racial Equity*, specifically within the context of the Plan's strategy to Increase Access to Higher Education for Students of Color. She then introduced Allison Little, Assistant Commissioner for P-16 Alignment & Outreach.

Assistant Commissioner Little first provided context for the BNS initiative and spoke about Massachusetts students' needs and challenges, including housing insecurity and homelessness; food insecurity; anxiety and depression; trauma; the need for childcare; and the need for transportation. In 2019, 43% of Massachusetts post-secondary students experienced housing insecurity and 37% of postsecondary students in Commonwealth have experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days. Assistant Commissioner Little detailed the holistic approach of the initiative with partnerships as a one of its key components. The partnerships include a multitude of other MA state agencies with a concentration on those assisting with housing, food, and mental health. The partnerships also include those from the private and non-profit sectors and well as from other states where sharing technical assistance and effective practices were planned.

Associate Director of Basic Needs Policy and Programs, Georgiana Chevy, then spoke about a new housing scholarship program. Associate Director Chevy shared that the housing scholarship program uses available university dormitories to provide stable housing for homeless students and is supported through funding by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), as well as the Department of Housing and Community Development and the DHE. The housing scholarships started in 2018 with 20 student recipients and currently supports 72 students. The scholarship covers year-round campus housing and a meal plan. She said that EOHHS covers any need not met through the scholarship. In addition, Liberty Mutual contributed \$100,000 for exit stipends for students who have successfully completed their degree. The stipends ensure the students successfully transition to the next phase of their lives, whether it be transferring to one of our four-year institutions from a community college or into the workplace.

Sarah Ripton, Framingham State University's (FSU) single point of contact (SPOC) for BSN initiatives on campus spoke next, providing examples of the good work underway in this area. Ms. Ripton stated that she has oversight of FSU's Rams Resource Center, which helps ensure students have access to their basic needs. She introduced Gerald Fernandez who was a sophomore at FSU who earned a Moving to College scholarship. Mr. Fernandez is studying to become an accountant and spoke about the importance of access to spaces such as the Rams Resource Center. He shared his gratitude for Ms. Ripton and talked about the support he has also received from his peers at FSU.

Associate Directory Chevy thanked Ms. Ripton and Mr. Gonzalez for their leadership and partnership. She then turned the presentation to Loyd Joseph, DHE AmeriCorps Campus Compact VISTA, who spoke about a campaign for making students aware of BNS-related supports. Associate Director Chevy then spoke about the food program, which received \$2.7 million through America Rescue Plan ACT federal grants with the funding supporting 13 of our community colleges under the Community College Campus Hunger program. She noted that \$1 million also went to UMass and state university campuses allowing them to expand their resource centers/food pantries.

Assistant Commissioner Little provided details on the resources for addressing behavioral mental health. She shared that the DHE received \$4 million from the legislature through the FY23 budget for campus grants. The DHE allocated \$2 million of those funds towards community colleges grants and \$2 million for the state universities. All 15 community colleges submitted proposals and received awards projected to serve 32,000 students. Six of the nine state universities responded with a projection of serving over 40,000 students.

Next, DHE Campus Safety Advisor Amanda Robbins spoke of the intersectionality of the BNS work on student behavioral mental health with the campus safety and violence prevention work that she supports, coordinates, and advances in partnership with the campuses, including her work with Title IX coordinators and campus police. She described the interdisciplinary Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Teams (BTAM) used on all of our campuses to help identify and assess students who may pose a threat to self or others. She explained how the BTAM teams call for a strong mental health component to help identify, refer, and provide help to students. In addition, DHE Campus Safety Advisor discussed the impact of sexual violence on student mental health and discussed her work coordinating funding and training opportunities with segmental representatives. Finally, Ms. Robbins discussed the DHE's partnerships with private higher education institutions through the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts (AICUM), including a recent symposium on behavioral health hosted by AICUM and attended by over 100 leaders from across public and private higher education institutions. The presentation concluded with future plans of the BNS initiative and a sharing of the resources used in the presentation.

AC Chair Eppinger thanked DHE staff for the presentation, noting that she was impressed with the pooling of resources and how the system seemed so approachable for students so that they knew how to access the resources. She then invited member questions.

Member Pagliuca asked if the resources discussed cover the total cost of living for students who received the housing scholarship. Associate Director Chevy responded, stating that while the students were charged the full rate, the costs were sustained by the institution. Member Pagliuca stated that she imagines the collected data on the students who avail themselves of the housing scholarship will reveal the students have persistence because they are closer to all the other services, which then also benefits the institution and its goals. Sarah Ripton, Coordinator of Student Supports at Framingham State, agreed.

State University Student Advisor, Robert Huttig, offered comments, stating that he agreed awareness was an important aspect of the success of the BNS initiative, and that this was also a focus of the Student Advisory Council (SAC). Further, he said that the SAC was working towards making BNS the focus of its annual community building day. Student Advisor Huttig also mentioned that Salem State University recently held an event that included a food patty tour to destigmatize its use. Local state representatives were invited, and personal testimonies were given, making the day a success. He asked how the initiative as addressing

the needs of those students 25 years or older because he heard they were not eligible for some services. Assistant Commissioner Little responded by confirming that the housing scholarship is available to those students; however, these students are not eligible for youth service providers and the case managers. She said the BNS team is aware of other resources on campuses that could provide this support and that the team would work on making those connections.

## **Civic Learning and Engagement**

The Director for Civic Learning and Engagement, Dr. John Reiff, delivered the presentation with the assistance of Cynthia Lynch, Executive Director of Salem State's Center for Civic Engagement from the Frederick E. Berry Institute of Politics. The presentation focused on the connections between civic learning and racial equity.

Dr. Reiff began by providing background information and shared he would be speaking about efforts at the campus-, segment-, and system-level. He shared that Massachusetts was a leader in civic learning, as evidenced in the drafting of the New Undergraduate Experience which embedded this work in its core. The presentation highlighted the restructuring of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) in support of the Equity Agenda. Director Reiff discussed in some detail three HEIF projects with roots in civic learning and engagement funded under the newly restructured HEIF grant.

One HEIF project involved Salem State, Fitchburg State, and Worcester State and focused on diversifying the faculty to create pathways toward equity. The goals of this project were to be accomplished through the elevation of community engagement as a measure in faculty evaluation for promotion. UMass Amherst leveraged a second HEIF grant to develop resources for faculty development around anti-racist community engaged teaching. A third HEIF grant was awarded to UMass Dartmouth, who partnered with the New England Equity and Engagement Consortium, on an initiative that focused on the skills that students need for informed and effective participation in a multiracial democracy.

Dr. Reiff turned the presentation over to Salem State Director Lynch. Director Lynch highlighted the importance of HEIF funding in sparking innovation at the campus level. She spoke of the alignment of the work with the DHE Equity Agenda and its relationship to civic engagement and the public good with a substantial portion of the work rooted in anti-racist community-engaged teaching building on students' cultural wealth. She concluded by sharing the faculty professional development that arose out of the work.

Dr. Reiff thanked Dr. Lynch and then continued to discuss a pilot that was recently launched in collaboration with 15 community colleges. Each community college was granted funding for up to five students to participate in civic engagement internships paid for through financial aid, at a rate of \$20 per hour, for up to 150 hours. He said the objective was to provide community college students internships at community-based nonprofits or government agencies for learning civic engagement skills without having to worry about earning money. He said the three-year pilot included the development of curriculum by the

participating community colleges in a certificate in Community Leadership. The curriculum focuses on knowledge and skills needed for students working to solve problems in the communities where they live. Seven community colleges applied for and were accepted for the first year.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Co-Chair Eppinger asked about how the community colleges were working together to develop the certificate. Director Reiff stated that each institution is modeling their curriculum after a national model and noted that the faculty are convened and work together in this space.

A request was then made to share the articles discussed during the presentation. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis agreed and also committed to inviting Advisory Council to the March Symposium on Anti-Racist Community Engagement.

**V. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.