



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board.

Before I begin my general remarks, I want to take a moment to thank the higher education stakeholders who have worked so hard to make MassReconnect a reality. I want to share some specific data from my college that helps illustrate how successful it has been. From Fall 2023 when MassReconnect began to the previous fall, overall headcount at the Mount grew by 366 (12.1%). New student headcount was up 30.6% (an increase of 410 heads). Students of color increased by 22.6% for a total of 1,324 students of color. Our spring increase is even more impressive. This spring, overall headcount grew by 645 (24.2%) over spring 2023 at 3,315. Spring 2024 headcount was also ahead of fall 2023 (3,313) marking the first instance on record since at least 2005 where spring headcount exceeded the preceding fall. New, first-time degree seeking freshmen headcount nearly doubled, up 94 (96.9%) over spring 2023. Students of color comprise 41% of the spring 2024 population. Enrollment of students of color increased by 318 (32.4%), reaching an all-time record.

Some fun facts regarding our Spring 2024 cohort: 64.4% of new first-time degree-seeking students were 25+ years old and a change from prior years. 70.8% of new transfer-in students were 25+ years old and a change from prior years. 41% of the Spring 2024 student body are student of color which is a large change from 37% last spring. 73.2% of students this term are enrolled part-time. 58.6% of students are first-generation. There are 583 dual enrollment students, a 24.8% increase over last spring.

The program has excited the community and gotten people talking more about community colleges – as drivers of equity and workforce development, as the places of second chances and career advancements. The simplicity of MassReconnect has been an important component of our work over the last eight months: the ability to tell prospective students that if you are over 25, a Massachusetts resident, and do not already have a degree, then you can go to a community college for free, full-stop, has been an incredibly powerful message to the residents of the Commonwealth.

With the establishment of MassReconnect, I want to publicly acknowledge the people on our campuses who have made it a success: our financial aid and enrollment teams, our faculty and

student support staff have been working non-stop – truly, non-stop – and I want to say, on behalf of myself and my fellow presidents: thank you.

In addition to the continued roll-out of MassReconnect, the Free Community College advisory committee continues to work on finalizing the report due to the legislature next month. The report outlines a robust set of recommendations that are sustainable and would make great strides towards making community college attainable for students across the state.

As we wait for the House to release their FY25 budget, we continue to advocate for additional items of critical importance to the community colleges, several of which President Douglas mentioned in February, including an \$18 million investment in the SUCCESS program and \$24 million for MassReconnect. In addition, we hope to see funding for STEM Starter Academy restored to \$4.75 million to fund this important work, which supports a diverse body of students earning STEM certificates and degrees who go on to transfer to a 4-year STEM programs and/or enter the workforce.

There are two additional items I want to mention today:

First, we are in full support of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance proposal to use \$125 million in Fair Share revenue to support capital investments on university and community college campuses to address the substantial backlog in deferred maintenance. This has been a persistent challenge on our campuses, and we are excited not only by the proposed funding but by the additional borrowing capacity it would leverage. Our students deserve to learn in buildings that are modern, clean, and meet their educational goals, and the existing facilities often do not meet that standard.

Second, we are seeking to establish our colleges' Workforce Education and Training Fund as a separate line item. Established with one-time funds in FY22, ETF supports high-demand workforce training programs at our community colleges that align with regional labor market blueprints. ETF has trained nearly 3,200 students in healthcare, education, information technology, and more. We are advocating to add the ETF as a separate line item at \$12 million, which would allow us to train an additional 2,100 students per year, at no cost to them, for high demand jobs in the Commonwealth. It's most important to note that the programs covered by ETF, due to the duration of the programs, are not financial aid eligible, meaning that without ETF, students must cover the full cost of training out-of-pocket.

Thank you again for the chance to talk about what's happening at our colleges, and I am happy to take any questions you might have.