

State University Report to the Board of Higher Education
October 20, 2020

OUTLINE AND DRAFT COMMENTS FOR SU SEGMENTAL REPORT

- I. **Good morning** Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, I thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System. I also would like to extend my thanks to this board, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and his department, our colleagues at the community colleges, UMass and at AICUM, for all working together to manage through the COVID crisis. Although we have a long way to go, I am grateful to all for our work together and hopeful that we can put 2020 behind us very soon.

- II. Later this morning you will hear a report by EY Parthenon on the Financial Monitoring Project work underway across both the state universities and community colleges. Presidents Maloney and Clark will be participating in that discussion. As you know, through a collaborative effort and with the support of this Board and the Department of Higher Education, our campuses have been working with EY Parthenon on a systematic Financial Monitoring Project to analyze and advise us on key indicators of fiscal health; to assess options for our campuses to manage through the COVID pandemic crisis, both in the short term as well as assessing more long term strategies; and to make recommendations to strengthen and streamline fiscal reporting and management processes across twenty-four member campus system.

This board received a preliminary report at your last meeting and our campuses continued the work with Parthenon through the summer and into the fall. We have been exploring cost and value optimization strategies that would benefit individual institutions and the system, as a whole. I look forward to the report and discussion. Collectively, our public higher education institutions serve over 200,000 students and

contribute to the state's innovation economy with over 90% of our students staying in the Commonwealth, many graduating with degrees in high demand fields such as life sciences, engineering, and healthcare. My colleagues and I stand ready to continue our work to effectively and efficiently fulfil the mission of our institutions and public higher education in the Commonwealth.

- III. I commend this board on your efforts to improve Board operations through a series of discussions about logistics and best practices for high performing public boards. I understand that there are some specific issues being discussed and I, on behalf of my state university presidential colleagues, would like to share some of our thoughts on some operational and structural issues under consideration.
- Our state universities see great value in the committee structure of the Board of Higher Education. Statutory authority and obligations of the board such as degree granting, as well as revocation of degree granting authority for higher education institutions, new program approvals, campus strategic planning, MSCBA bonding and spending approvals, and financial oversight of our public institutions are just a few of the many areas this board works with and for our campuses. The BHE committees offer us an opportunity to work, in public view, with board members and department professionals on matters of interest and importance to our campuses.

We recognize that the pandemic has created challenges for all of us and understand the need to have suspended committee meetings since March, but we believe there is great value in a transparent committee process. To eliminate the board's committee structure is a dangerous precedent to set. Higher Education is a creature of process, of an iterative process, that results in better decision-making that will be eliminated by removing committee work. Further, we believe that eliminating committee meetings undermines the deliberative process of decision-making that is informed by collaboration between the higher education professionals on our campuses and at the DHE. As you consider the board's structure and operations to maximize your impact on higher education in the Commonwealth, the state universities ask

that the BHE return to the committee process that is designed to contribute to inclusive, informed, and effective policy making.

- “And to not sound self-serving,” I would also like to stress the importance of allowing segmental member presentations before this board. These presentations are neither a burden nor perfunctory for us, but actually allow us to share information from our campuses that we hope helps to guide and inform board decisions. I’d also ask that the board keep these presentations at the beginning of the meeting, for the same reason we value the board’s committee structure in that it allows board members to hear from your campuses before final decisions are made. Thank you for your consideration of these two items.

IV. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you Mr. Chairman, the members of this board, Commissioner Santiago, and Secretary Peyser for your advocacy as Governor Baker developed his revised FY21 spending plan. As you know by now, Governor Baker prioritized higher education in his budget and level funded most higher ed accounts, including our campus line items. We understand that these are extraordinarily challenging times for our Commonwealth. The Governor’s leadership on recommending level funding of our state appropriations will help us fulfill our mission to offer pathways to high-quality post-secondary educational opportunities to our Commonwealth’s residents. My colleagues and I ask that you pass along to Governor Baker our gratitude and appreciation for his efforts to preserve Massachusetts public higher education.

But the work is not done. The Governor’s recommendations now go to the legislature for consideration. We would ask that we all continue our advocacy for level appropriations for our campuses through the legislative process. The state universities Council of Presidents has partnered with the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) on a joint advocacy strategy. The MSCA and, the faculty they represent, have asked our campus boards to adopt an advocacy resolution articulating the critical need to support our state universities. Our

boards fully support this resolution and have either adopted or are in the process of adopting it. I take this opportunity to submit for the record, a copy of the MSCA Faculty Union resolution, and ask that you consider joining with us in our advocacy effort.

On behalf of our entire state university system, I also want to go on the record in opposition to the divisive, hate filled, and discriminatory Executive Order on Affirmative Action, signed by President Trump, intended to strip away protections against race, gender, sexual preference and religious bias. I submit for the record a letter from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities that our council fully endorses. We ask this board to consider publicly denouncing this destructive Executive Order.

- V. Moving on to some very positive news, each of our nine-member state university campuses has operationalized COVID safety protocols through our individual campus COVID plans. Collectively we have installed plexiglass shields in public spaces as well as in many campus offices; we have provided our campus community members face masks, hand sanitizers, touchless door openers, enhanced cleaning and sanitizing policies in an effort to students, faculty, and staff; we have provided trainings on ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19; posted signage on campus reminding people of social distance and building entry/exit paths; purchased sanitizing fogging devices to sanitize classrooms, offices, restrooms, and other common areas; established remote, online, distance, and blended learning environments that de-densify classrooms and campuses; mandated meal plans for students living on campus so if they are required to quarantine or isolate we can provide them with meals, and; and limited residence hall occupancy to single rooms only.

Moreover, each campus has partnered with the Broad Institute this fall to implement testing and tracing protocols for students, faculty, and staff at a cost to us of \$10 million. We have administered nearly 30,000 tests across 9 institutions and our average positive rate of .16% is a

testament to the work we are doing to educate our students on COVID prevention and our commitment to enforce state guidelines for limiting the spread through campus agreements and our student conduct policies to ensure we do our part to preserve the health of the Commonwealth

- VI.** I am proud of the work we have done over the past few months to manage through the COVID crisis, but, I am even more proud of our work over the years to offer quality and affordable pathways to post-secondary education to our Massachusetts citizenry. Your state universities are mission driven to serve traditionally underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations. Our nine campuses, strategically located across the Commonwealth, offer bachelor and master degrees with the average price of around \$11,000 per year for commuting Massachusetts residents. With a majority of our students coming from Massachusetts public high schools and gateway cities, many face barriers to success. These challenges are amplified for first-generation students and students of color, resulting in lower retention and graduation rates than their peers. These achievement gaps are well documented. At the state universities, in concert with this board's Equity Agenda, we are aggressively focused on addressing these equity and achievement gaps.

We believe that providing access to public higher education institutions for traditionally under served populations is a social justice and economic justice issue. The best and, in most cases the only, chance for social and economic mobility of our citizenry is through public higher education. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, data show the median salary for bachelors-degree holders is \$64,896; while for someone with a high school education, it is \$38,792. As lawmakers at all levels focus on social justice issues and reforms, we must also recognize that economic justice and economic mobility go hand in hand with such reforms. If we are serious about racial, social and economic justice, our Commonwealth will ensure the viability of our public higher education system.

VII. Thank you for allowing me this time to share an update from our state universities. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.