

Massachusetts Community Colleges, Council of Presidents
Dr. Ellen Kennedy, President Berkshire Community College
Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
Tuesday, December 15, 2020

President Mabry sends his regrets, and on behalf of the Massachusetts Community Colleges extends best wishes for a healthy, safe, and peaceful end to 2020. What a special honor to be sharing this opportunity to address you with my good friend and Berkshire partner, MCLA President Jamie Birge.

We are also proud of Kaitlin Marotta and Lindzie White from Cape Cod Community College, representing all our Community Colleges, for speaking to you today about the recent effort to change state law to provide flexibility to enrollment requirements for Student Trustee. We were happy to support this effort and believe this great outcome will continue the Commissioner's and Board's focus on the Equity Agenda.

We are all continuing to watch the devastating impacts of COVID-19 play out in the lives of Massachusetts residents and people across the country. And many of our community college students are disproportionately hurting in this crisis.

- We know that they are facing employment issues
- We know that they are facing food and housing deficits
- We know that they are helping their children with school while trying to complete their own courses
- We know that they are balancing the constant uncertainty of the pandemic all while trying to stay safe

Last week, analysis by CCRC out of Columbia University confirms what we have long suspected: the equity gaps are deepening. According to the data, low-income community college students are twice as likely to cancel their plans for college than students from high-income households.

“As of October, more than 40 percent of households reported that a community college student is canceling their plans. Another 15 percent are taking fewer courses or switching programs. Students who are also parents and those who have lost work since March are also much more likely to cancel their plans.”

These students are the future workforce of the Commonwealth and we need them back in the classroom.

We all face some difficult months ahead, but as we saw in the Fall, the community colleges' decision to go remote early helped faculty and students prepare for the challenge in front of them. It ensured that our institutions could provide our high-quality instruction and services effectively in a remote setting. And despite the change, we are proud to still serve our critical role as a community hub for Massachusetts residents in all regions of the Commonwealth. Our campuses are still supporting local needs for food and housing and security while many are also partnering to directly support the fight against covid-19 through Testing and offering space for shelters. Our Nursing and Allied Health students are on the frontlines and will this week be vaccinating health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities.

We are confident that our collective decision to continue these mostly remote operations into the Spring semester will help our students and faculty succeed, especially given the grim short-term outlook for this winter. We are, however, still optimistic about the future. In fact, in the spring and the upcoming year, vaccine distribution and a stabilization of the pandemic could provide more opportunities for campus repopulation and students enrolling to complete a program geared toward their career goals.

There is no doubt that the lost revenue due to COVID-19 has made a significant impact that has caused many difficult and challenging decisions. Nevertheless, my fellow Community College Presidents and I are appreciative of the support of the Baker-Polito Administration and the effort by the Massachusetts Legislature to produce a strong and stable FY21 Budget. They ensured that community colleges can continue doing the important work of educating a diverse group of over 136,000 students and training the Commonwealth's future workforce.

We are grateful that the Governor and Legislature provided our institutions with level funding— in addition to making targeted and strategic investments in the colleges and in our students. We are especially excited about the \$7 million included for the SUCCESS Fund, called "SUCCESS" for "Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services)", which would provide targeted investments in wrap-around supports and services. We are looking forward to implementing this program using proven models to improve student outcomes, especially during these challenging times.

Our work is essential to the Commonwealth's economic recovery; and because budgets are statements of values, we are grateful to receive the Legislature's support as we move ahead. As we now quickly pivot toward the system's needs for FY22, we also want to publicly support the Board of Higher Education's Recommendations for the upcoming year. We look forward to working together with the Board, the Department, and our higher ed colleagues to advocate for further investments into equity and success in public higher education.

And despite the importance of state policy and state funding, I would be remiss to not mention the optimism we share for the incoming Biden-Harris Administration. In particular, the greatest advocate for community colleges will be living in the White House, future First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden. Her experience in a community college classroom was and will continue to be an asset to the White House and the nation. She has often claimed that teaching is not just what she does, it is *who she is*. This is a historic perspective to have in the White House, and we know that President-elect Biden is already sold on the importance of community colleges to opportunity, equity, and workforce development.

In the new year, we must all begin planning for how we come back to campus. For example, with vaccine distribution plans rolling out as we meet, we hope that health care students and faculty will be vaccinated in the first round so that we can keep this critical pipeline open and not delay getting students fully trained and out in the field. Also, we hope that all our faculty, staff, and students are not far behind so that as soon as possible we can return safely to campus.

And as we go forward, we will build on the technologies and skills we have learned:

- There will be more online courses
- There will be more virtual support services
- We will use these technologies and skills to better serve our students

Massachusetts' 15 community colleges help people gain skills and get back to work and more importantly, we provide hope and a path to a better life for so many in this great Commonwealth. Without hope, without a path, people get lost and that is not what any of us on this Zoom Room want to see. We must be resolute, we must be creative, and we must stay focused on the common good as we develop the plans and policies that will help every person in our Commonwealth live to their full potential and enhance their ability to be a critically productive and engaged citizen.

Thank you.

Ellen Kennedy