

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

NO.: BHE 21-41

BOARD DATE: March 23, 2021

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION RESOLUTION ON GUIDING PRINCIPLES
RELATED TO SAFELY REPOPULATING COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE FALL
OF 2021**

WHEREAS within the context of current enrollment challenges experienced throughout the higher education sector, the Community College segment in particular has faced some of the most significant enrollment downturns this academic year, with the losses greatest among first-time students from the most economically disadvantaged and racially minoritized populations;

WHEREAS the Commonwealth's Community Colleges serve the largest and most diverse student population within the public higher education system, welcoming students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as students at different points in their educational trajectories and students with diverse learning styles;

WHEREAS the Board of Higher Education (the Board), working by and through its executive agency, the Department of Higher Education (the Department), is responsible for analyzing the present and future goals, needs and requirements of the public higher education system and, where appropriate, establishing coordination between and among institutions;

WHEREAS in furtherance of the Board's statutory, coordinating role the Board recognizes and seeks to support the important work of our 15 Community Colleges to provide the most welcoming, appropriate and effective approaches to serving their students as the state of emergency is anticipated to be lifted and pandemic recovery proceeds;

WHEREAS the Board, the Department and the Community Colleges all acknowledge the uncertainties on key public health factors and embrace the need to communicate broadly, timely and transparently to enrolled and admitted students, as well as students who have paused their educational pursuits and non-traditional adult learners who have never enrolled, that the doors to opportunity are wide open in formats that meet students' needs, preferences and strengths;

THEREFORE, based on collaborative discussions with and feedback from Community College leadership and in service of our Equity Agenda goals, we recognize and advance the following Guiding Principles for safely repopulating the Community College segment this Fall 2021:

- 1) The Board, the Department, and the Community Colleges commit to prioritizing the safety of students, faculty and staff by, first and foremost, following Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines; and
- 2) The Board and the Department commit to supporting the Community Colleges by advocating for and helping to shape sector-specific policies and guidance, such as mandatory minimum spacing in classrooms; the Board and Department further commit to supporting this work as expeditiously and collaboratively as possible, and will seek to include the voices of key stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, administrators, operations experts, college governance, and collective bargaining); and
- 3) The Community Colleges commit to being as flexible as possible in course scheduling and operations, adjusting to meet the challenges of an evolving public health landscape; and
- 4) The Community Colleges will continue to prioritize critical on-ground labs in allied health and nursing, advanced sciences, career technical programs, and other clinical and

practicum-oriented classes, particularly for students who need these experiences to complete their degrees; and

- 5) The Community Colleges will continue to offer high-quality teaching and learning through course modalities designed to serve multiple populations, including traditional students, post-traditional working adults, first-generation and immigrant students, student parents, students with disabilities, and other key profiles; and
- 6) Responding to student demand for in-person, on-line, and hybrid courses, all students who want or need an in-person learning experience, either full-time or part-time, will have a robust set of affordable and accessible options across all degree programs at all Community Colleges, especially for first-year students; and
- 7) The Board and the Department encourage the Community College segment to continue to rapidly refine, expand and evolve their online, remote, and hybrid offerings that show promise to recapture enrollment and to offer students, especially working adults and experienced students, both now and in the future, a more flexible and affordable, high-quality route to the skills, credentials and degrees they pursue; and
- 8) The Community Colleges commit to reaching out to and re-engaging students who discontinued their studies due to difficulties with online, remote and hybrid learning modalities implemented due to the pandemic; and
- 9) The Board and Department commit to advocating on behalf of the Community Colleges to obtain the resources necessary to safely re-populate their campuses in the Fall of 2021.

VOTED: Motion adopted by BHE on 3/23/2021.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A § 9(c) and (u)

Contact: Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner