

## BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

November 17, 2021

3:00 p.m.

Livestreamed, via Zoom

### Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) Executive Committee was held virtually on Wednesday, November 17, 2021, on the web-conference platform Zoom.

#### **The following Board Members were present:**

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Patty Eppinger

Shelia Harrity

Bill Walczak

#### **Absent:**

Veronica Conforme

Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m. and announced that this meeting is being held remotely and in accordance with relevant amendments to the Open Meeting Law. Chair Gabrieli announced that the meeting is being livestreamed via Zoom and recorded, and members of the public who signed up for public comment would be allowed to join the Zoom meeting to provide comment. Chair Gabrieli then took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

### **II. DISCUSSION**

#### List of Documents Used

Executive Committee Alignment Lab

Chair Gabrieli reported that the group has a single item on the agenda, which is to discuss the development of the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. He followed by setting the context of the meeting and informing the Executive Committee that Deloitte would share their findings from the initial environmental scan, but first address how the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity fits into the BHE’s work on the New Undergraduate Experience (NUE). Chair Gabrieli stated the main purpose for bringing Board members together for this Special Executive Committee Meeting is to determine how best to involve and advise the Board of a plan when it meets in December.

He closed by commenting that as the Equity work becomes more visible across the state, support from college campuses, the legislature, and community would be needed to achieve the goals of racial Equity. Chair Gabrieli turned the meeting over to Commissioner Santiago to open the discussion.

Commissioner Santiago thanked Chair Gabrieli and those joining the meeting. He stressed the importance of today's session but first recapped his experiences last week after attending the SHEEO Conference held in Washington, D.C where discovered our work around Equity in Massachusetts was referenced by several speakers. He observed that the Equity work initiated in Massachusetts is different from that of other states, due to the critical elements of using a system-wide approach and focusing on underserved students, predominantly students of color. Commissioner Santiago stated that underserved communities represent the most significant gaps where interventions are needed to ensure students have the opportunities to succeed. He added that the policies implemented since the Equity Agenda was launched in 2018 benefit all students. In addition, he commented on the need for a cultural change in the Department on the approach to degree audits and the institutions in their approach on focusing on issues that impact student persistence. Commissioner Santiago turned it over to Deloitte Lead Engagement Partner Keyanna Conner to introduce the team and help lead us to the next section of the agenda.

Ms. Conner thanked the Commissioner and the committee members for the opportunity to meet today, introduced herself as the lead engagement partner for the project, and then introduced members of her team as follows: Higher Education Advisor: Virginia Fraser; Project Executive: Glenn Davidson; Project Manager: Andrea Mazzocco; and Project Team Members: Kate McVey and Mike Vermeland. Ms. Conner noted that Chief of Staff Elena Quiroz-Livanis would be presenting some slides and will help facilitate more discussion. But first, Commissioner Santiago was asked to begin by reviewing the objectives of today's meeting.

Commissioner Santiago shared the three objectives for today's meeting as follows:

1. to explore the context of the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity and how it fits into the ecosystem of the DHE priorities;
2. discuss and align what the plan will and will not address and the significant components of the strategic plan; and
3. to preview the findings from the environmental scan conducted by Deloitte to form the development of the strategic plan.

Chief of Staff Elena Quiroz-Livanis followed by presenting slides and commentary on how the Strategic Plan fits into the work of the Board and Department by taking a step back to provide an Equity Agenda overview. Ms. Quiroz-Livanis commented that in partnership with the Lumina Foundation as a TIE (Talent Innovation and Equity) state, an agreement was made to develop a ten-year plan for racial equity.

She stated that one of the many questions often asked is whether the Strategic Plan for Racial

Equity initiated in 2018 is the same as the Five-Year Master Plan described in the statute. She stated that it was not the same, but explained how the two are intended to be interrelated. Ms. Quiroz-Livanis continued by introducing the key elements of the Equity Agenda as: the Policy Audit; Student Experience; Data and Evidence; Community of Practice; and Sustained Transformation. She highlighted the significance of each one and emphasized that today's discussion would focus on Sustained Transformation in detail. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis acknowledged the Policy Audit work of Patty Eppinger as Co-Chair of the New Undergraduate Experience (NUE) Steering Committee. Chair Gabrieli asked if there were four elements instead of the five displayed by the slides. Ms. Quiroz-Livanis confirmed that all five are interrelated, representing different buckets of work under the broader umbrella of the Equity Agenda. She then turned to Deloitte's Lead Engagement Partner, Keyanna Conner, to continue the discussion.

Ms. Conner opened by providing a refresher on the input to the Strategic Planning Process. She reported that gathering stakeholder input from across the system and leveraging the work done by the NUE were used to develop the plan. She updated the group on the Environmental Scan completed by Deloitte. Ms. Conner stated the scan analyzed both system and institution-wide data, stakeholder feedback through a systemized survey, and also included interviews and focus groups. Ms. Conner next outlined steps for the New Year to include Strategy Lab Sessions with both the Executive and Steering Committees and representatives from all three segments to help draft the strategic plan. She highlighted the differences between the NUE Report and the 10-year Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. She concluded by displaying a slide listing the NUE Reports' focus areas before turning it over to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the next part of the presentation.

Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis reported on the FY22 policy priorities established by the Board at its annual retreat in September. She commented on five components-- MASSGrant Plus, Early College, SAT Optional Pilot, Strategic Finance, and Developmental Education-- and their potential addition to the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. She stated the SAT Optional Pilot program would be discussed at the Academic Affairs and Student Success Advisory Council (AA&SS) meeting in December and shared the Executive Committee's commitment to regularly presenting these topics to the Board. Ms. Livanis- Quiroz reminded the Committee that priorities are subject to change every fiscal year during the BHE's Annual Retreats. She turned to Deloitte's Keyanna Conner and the Executive Committee to facilitate discussion about the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

Chair Gabrieli commented that the priorities need to be defined more expansively and more often than a single fiscal year. He stated that something to the effect of eliminating unmet need might be a more appropriate title to replace "MASSGrant Plus" as a priority because a different approach to Strategic Finance is necessary to better assist students. He suggested that setting the goals in place for two to four years and a vision for accomplishment might be more helpful to the Board. Chief of Elena Quiroz-Livanis agreed and said most of the projects could not be fully realized in a single fiscal year and that the Board could reconsider its main priorities annually. Deloitte's Keyanna Conner stated that the group's Strategy Lab Sessions would help clarify goals and timelines.

Executive Committee Member Sheila Harrity asked how students are retained once in college. Ms. Conner assured the group that the NUE Report identified retention as an opportunity for improvement and it would be a component of the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. She continued that Deloitte's full Environmental Scan set for release in December would provide more insight.

Chair Gabrieli commented on the importance of the Board making decisions on what they are prioritizing based on recommendations made by the Executive Committee. Commissioner Santiago stated the NUE Report would be presented to the Board in January, after campus representatives have submitted their feedback. Ms. Quiroz-Livanis noted two ways the NUE Report organized recommendations: Short-term, mid-term, long-term; and by authority, at the Board-, Department-, or institutional-level. Executive Committee Eppinger asked Chair Gabrieli to clarify his concerns. Chair Gabrieli stated he would like to differentiate between what the Board receives, endorses, and prioritizes. Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou provided insight by stating that this can and is addressed in the motion language. When reports or policy initiatives are advanced the motion are drafted to specify what the Board "accepts, or receives." She defined "accept" as an endorsement of the contents; the Board's "receipt" of a report does not endorse the contents, and typically signals that the Board or the Commissioner will engage in further study or analysis. Deloitte Lead Partner Keyanna Conner reassured the Committee that all concerns would be addressed during the Strategy Labs in January to align everyone to the Strategic Plan's key focus areas. She turned to Deloitte Project Manager, Andrea Mazzocco, to begin discussing the Environmental Scan.

Ms. Mazzocco identified data analysis, the system-wide survey, interviews, focus groups, and the trustee survey as the data sources that would shape the Environmental Scan. She provided an overview of the findings, commented that the system is not serving Black or Latinx students well, and noted the lack of diversity among faculty, staff, and the Board of Higher Education. She added the importance of resource allocation as another key finding and recognized the racial equity work already happening at institutions. For the next presentation segment, Ms. Mazzocco turned to Deloitte's Project Team Lead, Mike Vermeland.

Mr. Vermeland discussed the findings of the application, acceptance, and enrollment rates across different student groups. He the results show progress but that public institutions fail to retain and graduate Black and Latinx students at the same rate as they do their White peers. Mr. Vermeland turned to Deloitte Project Team Lead, Kate McVey, to discuss the Diversification of the system. She stated that the findings showed a lack of diversity among full-time and adjunct faculty. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis commented that the higher education results are like diversity issues in the K through 12 levels of education. Deloitte's Project Manager, Andrea Mazzocco, returned to discuss sense of belonging among students, staff, and faculty members. She stated the findings varied little among students but showed a significant shift among Black staff and faculty at institutions with feelings of not belonging for these groups being higher than other races. She continued that the findings displayed some skepticism about the racial equity work and the potential of being divisive. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis commented that the results confirm the need to focus on quantitative and qualitative data to fully understand institutional and student. Deloitte's Project Executive, Glen Davidson, discussed the importance

of resources and continued education. He stated that stakeholders raised concerns about limited funding received by state institutions which impacts their ability to drive racial equity, and stakeholders also identified the need for more equitable distribution of funds between publicly-funded institutions.

Deloitte's Massachusetts & Higher Education Advisor, Virginia Fraser, concluded the presentation by summarizing the racial equity strengths based on interviews and focus groups. She stated that the focus groups viewed programs such as Early College and Targeted Financial Aid, building relationships, and data-driven means to get outcomes as ways to measure success over time. Ms. Fraser shared the Steering Committee would soon meet for its kick-off and two strategy labs. She stated the group would then draft the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity and will hold a series of 15 Strategic Plan review sessions to finalize the plan. Ms. Fraser opened to the discussion for questions.

### **III. Q & A DISCUSSION**

Member Patty Eppinger commented that the support pipeline to assist students is encouraging. Commissioner Carlos Santiago agreed and provided commentary on the Community College segment's funding for their SUCCESS programs. He stated that understanding what works best, the capacity to move initiatives around support services, and professional development as critical components of the strategic planning process.

Chair Gabrieli asked what role the Board would play on the Steering Committee and Strategy Lab Sessions. Commissioner Santiago recalled an earlier conversation where Chair Gabrieli shared his interest in co-chairing the Steering Committee and recommended that members of the Executive Committee also serve on the group. Chair Gabrieli suggested it was worth continuing that conversation. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis commented that at least one of the review sessions would be with the Board and that it would be essential to provide updates throughout the process.

Member Bill Walczak asked if the Strategic Plan would include budgeting for achieving goals and a timeline. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis stated that more discussion is needed, that there were other areas of work being led by the work dedicated to strategic financing of public higher education.

Chair Gabrieli stated that he would not co-Chair the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Steering Committee. As Advisory Council Chairs, he suggested Bill Walczak, Veronica Conforme, and Patty Eppinger might be more appropriate, if available. Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou cautioned against adding too many BHE members on the Steering Committee (e.g., adding a quorum, or adding all members of a committee) due to Open Meeting Law concerns. She offered to connect with Chair Gabrieli offline to explore other ways to engage the Board. Chair Gabrieli agreed to check in offline. He concluded by stating he would reach out to the group about selecting Board members for the Committee.

**IV. OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Carlos E. Santiago  
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*