

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

June 12, 2023
2:30 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

The June 12, 2023 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) was held virtually on the web-conference platform Zoom.

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:	Chair Chris Gabrieli; Bill Walczak; Veronica Conforme; Patty Eppinger; Alex Cortez; and Commissioner Noe Ortega (non-voting, ex officio).
Others BHE Members Present:	Mary Burns; Robert Huttig (non-voting State University Segmental Advisor).
Department Staff Present:	Constantia Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Jose Luis Santos.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 2:36 p.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster).

II. DISCUSSION

List of Material's Used
BHE Motions 23-50 through 23-66
Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Target-Setting

Chair Gabrieli proposed a motion to approve minutes. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the motion to approve the minutes from the Executive Committee meeting held on May 1, 2023 was approved by all members present by roll call vote, with one abstention (Member Eppinger abstained). Chair Gabrieli reviewed the items on the agenda stating that there were several core function motions. Including: five Letters of Intent; four Commonwealth Honors Program renewals; two strategic plan requests for

approval. In addition, the Department staff will offer two presentations- one on the Mass Reconnect program; and another on setting targets the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-50 Approval of Letter of Intent of Fitchburg State University to Award the Master of Science in Construction Management and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Committee member Cortez noted that in the past, such motions would include language instructing institutions to provide status reports on the newly approved programs after graduation of the first cohort. He suggested resuming that practice, adding that he would like more insight on the outcome of newly approved programs. Committee member Walczak agreed that it would be helpful to review these decisions down the line, to understand whether the approved program is working or not. Chair Gabrieli commented that this was a legitimate topic that could be further discussed at the retreat and asked the Commissioner if this could be added to the retreat's agenda. Commissioner Ortega agreed. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou added that agreed that this would be a good retreat topic discussion within the context of reviewing and renewing the charges for each advisory council; she suggested that this could fall within the Strategic Planning Advisory Council charge or the Academic Affairs and Student Success Council charge or both—noting that whether an institution is meeting its goals is relevant not just to program performance (a one-off review), but also to strategic planning both for the institution and for the system. Board member Mary Burns added that University of Massachusetts is constantly reviewing programs and when they add a new program, they try to take one away that is not working.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-50. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to introduce *BHE 23-51 Approval of Letter of Intent of Greenfield Community College to Award the Associate of Science on Human Services and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Chair Gabrieli asked for further information on the intended human services jobs and practicality for students. Greenfield Community College's (GCC) Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Success, Chet Jordan, responded that the institution is reviewing their academic programs at large, and have reduced and/or realigned their total portfolio by forty percent over the past two years (in terms of the number of programs being offered). He added that the human services field was identified as an area of need in terms of employment, and GCC wants to make sure their students are well-prepared to enter the variety of jobs that are available with the degree in Human Services while making sure they are preparing their students to be able to efficiently transfer into bachelor's degree programs in their area. He also added

that when students specialize in Human Services in liberal arts, they do not simply receive a degree in Human Services; GCC believes that the social capital is enormously valuable and they want to memorialize that.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-51. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-51 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 25-52 Approval of Letter of Intent of Mount Wachusett Community College to Award the Associate of Science in Paramedicine and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Chair Gabrieli commented that he appreciated the precision of the proposal and found the veterans alignments interesting. Committee member Walczak spoke about the importance of planning, as well as decisions regarding how they are going to achieve their goals for having a workforce that is not a traveler's workforce. He added that it would be a good idea to match up with what the needs are of our communities and community health system.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-52. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 23-52 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 25-53 Approval of Letter of Intent of Salem State University to Award the Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and Spanish and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Chair Gabrieli acknowledged that Salem State University is on the verge of becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). He asked about the specific implications of combining the two bachelors' degrees. Salem State University's Provost, David Silva, responded that the idea to create this combined program is to ensure that the students' experience is fully integrated. The students can pursue a double major, but the double major has no guarantee that the two disciplines will ever intersect with one another; this combined program guarantees that intersection.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-53. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 23-53 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-54 Approval of Letter of Intent of the University of Massachusetts Amherst to Award the Master of Health Administration and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Committee member Walczak asked if this is a new program, as it was surprising the institution did not already offer it. The University of Massachusetts Amherst's Department Chair, Elizabeth Bertone Johnson responded that this is a

completely new program; this is a companion program to the graduate programs offered in Health Policy and Management, and the program will be offered completely online.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-54. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-54 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-55 Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-50 through 23-54 on a Consent Agenda*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-55. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-55 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli then introduced the next series of motions—BHE 23-56 through 23-59—which renew the participation of the following four institutions in the Commonwealth’s Honors program:

- BHE 23-56 Renewal of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in the Commonwealth Honors Program;
- BHE 23-57 Renewal of Quinsigamond Community College in the Commonwealth Honors Program;
- BHE 23-58 Renewal of Roxbury Community College in the Commonwealth Honors Program; and
- BHE 23-59 Renewal of Springfield Technical Community College in the Commonwealth Honors Program.

Chair Gabrieli suggested bundling all four motions for both approval and for placement on a consent agenda via BHE Motion 23-60. Hearing no objections, Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motions 23-56 through 23-59 were bundled and approved, and were approved for placement on a consent agenda (BHE Motion 23-60) by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli turned to the final set of motions which involved strategic plan approvals. He began by introducing *BHE 23-61 Approval of Massachusetts Maritime Academy Special Mission Strategic Plan Renewal 2023-2028*. Committee member Eppinger commented that this was an excellent plan that really helped her understand Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) better. Committee member Cortez agreed

with Committee member Eppinger. MMA President Francis McDonald provided a timeline of the process stating the institution first received special mission institution approval in 2004. He continued by advising that this strategic plan renewal started last year with a retreat with senior leadership, and thereafter was presented to the Board of Trustees. From there, it was presented to the "All University Committee." After revising the plan, the institution began working with Department of Higher Education staff. President McDonald highlighted the following two initiatives referenced in the plan: MMA work advancing DEI, and the Equity Agenda. President McDonald also commended MMA's Provost, Captain Bridgid Pavilonis, for her work in experiential education. He expressed his excitement to support the workforce needs of the Commonwealth.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-61. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-61 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-62 Approval of Springfield Technical Community College Strategic Plan*. Chair Gabrieli expressed interest in hearing more about the institution's goal to elevate its technical mission. Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) President John Cook noted that this will be the institution's first strategic plan since 2015. President Cook continued by stating that he believes STCC has a special mission with carrying "technical" in their name, and the institution found that they need to precisely state and better elevate their technical purpose in their strategic plan, which they have done.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-62. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-62 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-63 Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-61 and 23-62 on a Consent Agenda*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-63. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-62 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

MOTION TO AMEND THE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION'S ADMISSIONS STANDARDS FOR STATE UNIVERSITIES AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADOPTING A TEST OPTIONAL POLICY

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 23-64 Motion to amend the BHE's Admissions Standards for State Universities and the University of Massachusetts for the Purpose of Adopting a Test Optional Policy*, which essentially seeks to establish an SAT Optional policy. Co-Chair Eppinger stated that the Academic Affairs and Student Success Advisory Council (AA&SS) they have been reviewing this issue since 2021, and staff have worked to create a plan that would be more equitable. She stated there is evidence demonstrating the GPAs are a better indication of student success than the SAT test scores. Co-Chair Eppinger continued by informing the committee members that the purpose of this amendment is to allow students who have a 3.0 GPA or better to become eligible for admission in one of the Massachusetts state universities, including a UMass institution. Students with a GPA below 3.0 can be admitted through special admissions if the GPA is above 2.0; these students can be admitted because of exceptional recommendations, improving grades, and special talents. If the student chooses to submit test scores, they can be eligible for admission under the current sliding scale based on their GPA. Committee member Walczak advised that he did not remember if all four-year colleges and universities are a part of this. DHE's Assistant Director for Access & Success Strategies and Program Approval, Daniel Hay, responded that prior to the pandemic, nine four-year undergraduate institutions transitioned to SAT Optional; during the pandemic, the remaining four institutions transitioned as well.

Committee member Cortez expressed concern over what SAT optional will do to selective institutions, as students with high scores will be more likely to submit their tests scores than students with low tests score; this could cause institutions to become more selective towards students with higher test scores and could cause more inequity. Committee member Cortez also voiced his concern on the discretion around individual programs still able to use test scores and asked the two following questions: what is the SAT optional policy really solving if institutions can still exhaust their discretion to use test scores for certain programs; and what is the SAT optional policy really doing for allowing more equitable access to the programs if students still submit scores for a program? Mr. Hay responded that industry standards say that the lower the acceptance rate, the more selective and competitive it is, which could make more institutions appear to be more selective for the reason of there being more applications, but a similar number of students will still be accepted. Mr. Hay also spoke on institutions appearing to have higher test scores and stated that he does not believe that would be the case, but it is something they would have to observe over time. He added that they crafted the policy in a way that was responsive to the concerns raised by the individual institutions.

Commissioner Ortega noted that during the AA&SS Advisory Council meetings members discussed the importance of thinking about ongoing efforts to meet the

educational attainment goals of the state, but also the ideas around closing the gaps. Commissioner Ortega also spoke about this being the beginning of how to think about this comprehensively and think about it within the context of the new admissions environment in the country. Board member Burns added that for UMass, half of the campuses require the SATs, but the University is leaning in the direction of making it test optional.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-64. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-64 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to introduce *BHE 23-65 Approval of the Community College and State University Funding Formula Allocations for FY2024*. DHE's Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance, Joe Wallerstein, provided a high-level summary of the motion. He stated that the motion is an unintended consequence of the delays that they experienced with the distribution of funds under the current approach with the funding formula. The motion confirms that there is no change to the underlying methodology that was most recently approved. The motion delegates authority to the Commissioner over the summer to allocate the funds; by doing this now and at this point of the year, it helps to improve operations and budget development for the campuses. It also helps institutions with their cashflow and removes an unnecessary procedural delay in getting campuses new, appropriated money. Chair Gabrieli asked if FAAP intends to review the funding formula over the next year. Committee member Conforme confirmed an interest in having the FAAP advisory council review the funding formula in the upcoming fiscal year. She asked if the motion is for the expediency over the summer. Mr. Wallerstein answered that she is correct, and continued by adding that it separates the votes on the methodology and allocations. He added that it would allow the Department to promptly allocate FY24 funds once the budget is finalized, presumably in July.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-65. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-65 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced the final motion, *BHE 23-66 Establishment of an Investment Committee for the 403(B) Supplemental Retirement Plan*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-66. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-66 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to Advisory Council updates and asked the AA&SS Advisory Council Chair Eppinger, for an update on the council's June 6, 2023 meeting. Chair Eppinger shared that they discussed two issues: the SAT optional policy amendment, and Department staff's report on student behavioral and mental health. She advised that eighty-three percent of students nationally report that a mental health issue is affecting their schoolwork. Chair Eppinger also spoke about the barriers for accessing care, noting a shortage in access to mental and behavioral health professionals. She reported that institutions are exploring ways to innovate and intermediate the process to get students the help they need. She also spoke about funds recently appropriated by the legislature to conduct a feasibility study to explore the creation of a central resource for the students, for either intensive outpatient programs or shared inpatient programs.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

Chair Gabrieli advised that there are two presentations: Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Target-Setting and Mass Reconnect. Commissioner Ortega introduced the first presentation on the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. He acknowledged the work of the Department's Research and Planning team and noted that he was impressed with the infrastructure that was established to ensure all voices were represented in the development of the plan, and he thanked all who were involved for their work.

DHE's Associate Commissioner for Research and Planning, Mario Delci, presented the *Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Target-Setting* PowerPoint presentation. He provided an overview of the plan, and reported the completion of established targets for six out of the nine metrics in partnership with the public higher education institutions. Associate Commissioner Delci noted that the following three major plans received by the BHE are interconnected in terms of how they will be accomplished: the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity, the Framework for Strategic Public Higher Education Financing, and the Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success. He spoke on the key metrics being categorized in the three following areas: Access, Early Momentum, and Long-Term Outcomes. He also spoke about applying "Targeted Universalism" which sets the same aspirational target for all subgroups, and seeks to eliminate equity gaps in the outcomes.

Associate Commissioner Delci continued by discussing the process for setting targets for the metrics by using forecasting methods to see where they will be in 2033 if they stick to the status quo. He added that the DHE and the Data Council proposed aspirational targets for each metric, and provided disaggregated data of racial/ethnic

subgroups and their 2033 universal target. He ended the presentation by discussing and defining the three remaining metrics for which targets have not been established: Enrollment, Sense of Belonging, and Social and Economic Mobility. He stated that there are plans to continue to engage metric working groups, with the intention of seeking BHE approval for additional metrics and target definitions in the fall of 2024.

Next, Commissioner Ortega introduced the DHE's Senior Deputy Commissioner for Access & Student Financial Assistance Clantha McCurdy, for the second presentation on the Mass Reconnect program. Commissioner Ortega provided an overview of the program and informed Committee members of the Department's involvement and collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges (MACC) in developing the programmatic guidelines. Commissioner Ortega advised that this program would provide individuals who are twenty-five years or older an opportunity to obtain their associates degree free of cost from one of the Commonwealth's 15 community colleges, and although the FY2023 budget has not been finalized yet, the Department wants to be prepared to launch this program in the fall.

Dr. McCurdy advised that they have spent a fair amount of time outlining and drafting the guidelines for the program, in partnership with MACC. In addition, they are working with a communications consultant to develop a communication strategy that seeks to ensure targeted outreach to the potential, eligible population while also making sure they are including diversity, and students who have not finished or have not attended community college due to the cost. Once the budget is finalized, they will be able to launch this outreach and communications strategy, which includes press releases, a landing page on the website, paid social media recommendations, and sending emails to any student who completed a FAFSA application and has indicated community college as an education choice. Mass Reconnect will be awarded as a last dollar scholarship, after all federal and state aid is considered. Dr. McCurdy concluded by stating that there will be workshops and trainings for the community college professionals administering the program, including financial aid administrators.

Commissioner Ortega stated that his goal in including this item on the agenda was to help keep committee members apprised on the status of Mass Reconnect. He also said that the Department was working with the institutional leaders to develop ways to be more proactive in encouraging students to enroll or return to college.

Committee member Cortez stated that there are over forty million people in the country who have not completed their degree; he spoke of the importance of making sure there is a pathway that can accommodate them when they work part-time or full-time.

Commissioner Ortega added that the program is targeting the new traditional student, particularly in the community college segment. He also added that they are trying to figure out how they get the system to meet students where they are, to make sure the provisions of learning and access points are aligned to students' contemporary needs.

IV. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.