

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

June 20, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Livestreamed, via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held virtually on Tuesday, June 20, 2023, via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Mary Burns

Ann Christensen

Alex Cortez

Patty Eppinger

Paul Mattera

Paul Toner

Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Bill Walczak

Robert Huttig, non-voting Student Advisor, State University segment

Andrew Whitcomb, non-voting Student Advisor, UMass segment

Noe Ortega, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

The following Board Members were absent:

Veronica Conforme

Travis Lawrence, voting Student Member, Community College segment

Judy Pagliuca

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. Department of Higher Education (DHE or Department) Chief of Staff Elena Quiroz-Livanis took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair Gabrieli reported that the Board did not receive requests for public comment.

III. WELCOME

Chair Gabrieli welcomed the Board to the final BHE meeting of the academic and fiscal year and briefly reviewed the items to be discussed on the agenda. The Chair recognized Holyoke Community College President Dr. Christina Royal on her retirement and acknowledged that she was unable to join the meeting as she was participating in ceremonies to honor the passing of Dr. David Bartley, who was a Holyoke Community College President for 30 years and also served the Commonwealth as Speaker of the House and Secretary of Administration and Finance.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion to bundle and accept the minutes from the BHE meetings held on March 28, 2023 and May 9, 2023. With no further discussion, the motion proceeded to a roll call vote and passed unanimously by all members present, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

V. REMARKS & REPORTS

A. Chair's Remarks

Chair Gabrieli stated that the DHE had undergone a demanding year in 2022, which involved the crucial initiative of selecting, and appointing a new Commissioner. Then in 2023, there was a transition at the gubernatorial level and across the executive branch. Chair Gabrieli emphasized that one of the Board's primary responsibilities is to task the Commissioner with positioning the organization to effectively leverage the state's position for optimizing strategic investments. He acknowledged the Governor's substantial dedication to higher education as outlined in her FY24 budget proposal. He stated that all three budget proposals, the Governor's and that of the House and Senate, represent opportunities for the Department and the campuses to enhance student success.

B. Commissioner's Remarks

Commissioner Ortega deferred his remarks to the end of the meeting during his end of year presentation.

C. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education's (EOE) Remarks

Secretary Patrick Tutwiler reported that the Executive Office of Education is closely monitoring the Supreme Court's anticipated decision on race as a factor in college admissions. He hopes the Court will align with previous decisions, but the Commonwealth is preparing for potential outcomes. Massachusetts has convened an Advisory Council for Advancing Representation in Education, which will advise the administration on ensuring inclusivity for all students, especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

D. Reports from Presidents

State University Segmental Report

[*For a copy of President Keenan's full remarks, please see:*](#)

President John Keenan of Salem State University opened his remarks by acknowledging Dr. Barley's passing, the cosponsor of Chapter 766, which provided educational opportunities for disabled students in Massachusetts.

President Keenan shared that, collectively, the Massachusetts State Universities celebrated nearly 10,000 graduates this year, a record, and for the first time since the pandemic began, they filled their graduation arenas. The graduates successfully navigated the challenges of earning an academic degree while pivoting during the pandemic. Summers remain busy on State University campuses, with summer classes in session and orientation programs for newly admitted students. He reported that enrollment is stabilizing, with several campuses increasing enrollment from the decreases experienced during the pandemic. President Keenan stated that the State University council of presidents (CoP) is optimistic about the progress of State Universities in Massachusetts despite lagging transfers. Admissions teams are working hard to attract new students and make educational opportunities accessible to students in the region. Retention remains a top priority for employees on all campuses.

The State University CoP held an end-of-year retreat at Massachusetts Maritime Academy, where they discussed areas of interest to students and campuses, such as the MassGrant, student mental health and safety capital construction projects, cybersecurity, and funding of collective bargaining agreements.

He reported that Salem State University was positioned to become Massachusetts' first four-year public university designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution and talked about the importance of serving diverse student populations. President Keenan concluded his report by stating the State University CoP is committed to being an active partner and forming a united front with the administration and public

and private higher education partners to ensure all students continue to see themselves as valued members of their campus communities.

Community College Segmental Report

[For a copy of President Vander Hooven's full remarks, please see:](#)

President James Vander Hoover of Mount Wachusett Community College began his remarks by expressing his excitement to serve as the Chair of the Community College Council of Presidents (CoP) for the upcoming year, representing over 100,000 students, faculty, staff, and his fellow presidents. He thanked President David Podell from Massachusetts Bay Community College for his service as the outgoing Chair of the Community College CoP.

He continued his remarks by discussing the potential investments made in the fiscal budget and highlighted \$14 million for SUCCESS and \$17 million for Early College and Dual Enrollment. President Vander Hooven reported that the Senate budget includes \$15 million in funding for free community college for all residents of the Commonwealth. The budget also includes funding for free community college for nursing students, which is crucial for addressing the workforce shortage. He also discussed and expressed support for the provisions that expanded access to financial aid and in-state tuition rates to undocumented students who meet specific eligibility criteria.

President Vander Hooven then reminded the Board of President Podell's appeal for quick passage of guidelines for MassReconnect to enable the proper implementation at the local level. He discussed concerns around marketing and outreach and the role of the community colleges and the role Department, citing the need for fiscal resources at each of the institutions to support this aspect of the program.

Lastly, President Vander Hooven concluded his remarks by emphasizing the need to address the underpayment of faculty and professional staff, particularly in fields like nursing and health sciences. This problem of underpayment is not limited by subject or geography but is prevalent across all institutions. He asked the Board to consider these initiatives and the barriers created by low faculty and professional staff compensation, particularly in the community.

Before turning to the next agenda item, Commissioner Ortega indicated that he wanted to respond to some of the comments offered and said he wanted to provide a preview some of the budget and policy updates he anticipated sharing later during the meeting. He recollected a series of events, including the good news that the MassReconnect program appeared in all three versions of the budget. He confirmed the shared desire to ensure the investment was maximized. Commissioner Ortega discussed conversations with partners at the Executive Office of Education about the needs of the specific student population, adults over the age of 25, and how to market not just MassReconnect but financial aid opportunities more broadly. He also talked about how the Department was positioning itself to support implementation of the program and identify ways to collaborate with the community colleges. Commissioner Ortega identified that what was being elevated was a conversation around the

engagement of stakeholders. He continued that conversations about the design of new and evolving financial aid programs, which historically did not include the distribution of funds to institutions, were ongoing. Commissioner Ortega stated that he wanted to further understand what that precedent would mean, but also amplified the need for investments for institutions and identified SUCCESS as an example. He added that strategic and targeted enrollment outreach could be another space for collaboration, noting President Vander Hooven's comments that absent resources for operational support it would be difficult to successfully target and recruit students during implementation. He reminded the Board of the intentionality behind the Strategic Higher Education Finance framework in coupling investments from families and students and investments in institutions, and how that need was being elevated during the discussion.

Board Member Walczak remarked on the difficulty of implementing a new financial aid program over the summer with little time before the start of the Fall semester. He echoed President Vander Hooven's comments on need to support local community college recruitment efforts. Commissioner Ortega acknowledged Board Member Walczak's points and said one question the BHE will have to contend with, potentially during the retreat, is how to address operational needs at the institutional level if the only increased investments are in financial aid. Chair Gabrieli commented on the excitement of having a program such as MassReconnect and talked about efforts in Michigan and Tennessee, which are known for their statewide recruitment efforts and the need to use strategies that have demonstrated positive outcomes. Chair Gabrieli emphasized the importance of a unified approach in order to successfully implement the new program.

Board Member Mattera asked whether funding for the program included for marketing. Chair Gabrieli said that the line item did include language for student support services and marketing, but did not stipulate what the allocations and disbursements would look like. He added that the discussions around strategic higher education finance and promise programs went beyond technical financial access to also consider inclusion of new populations and increasing opportunities.

Commissioner Ortega identified the financial aid policy conversation as a potential lever to position the system of public higher education to better serve learners who would be disproportionately negatively impacted by the Supreme Court decision on race-conscious admissions. It is important to have a systemwide conversation, that includes the universities, on how, and if, they will be resourced to support new learners as access is broaden access through financial aid redesign. Chair Gabrieli thanked everyone for the robust discussion and said he looked forward to celebrating the program's many successes.

E. Report from Student Advisory Council

UMass Segmental Advisor Alex Whitcomb led the Student Advisory Council (SAC) report in BHE Student Member Travis Lawrence's absence. He reported that the SAC has been working with Commissioner Ortega and Secretary Tutwiler to promote student success with appreciation for their commitment. The SAC has worked on raising awareness about student mental health, supporting a hunger-free campus

initiative, and establishing a relationship with US Secretary of Education Miguel Cordona. Mr. Whitcomb reported that the terms of Travis Lawrence and Robert Huttig, who served the Community College and State University segments, would end this summer.

The results of the SAC election were announced, including new SAC Chair and BHE Student Member Cindy Mack from Bridgewater State University and BHE Segmental Advisor Sarah Alzate-Perez from Middlesex Community College.

VI. ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORTS

A. Academic Affairs & Student Success

Academic Affairs and Student Success Advisory Council (AA&SS) Co-Chair Patty Eppinger reported that the AA&SS Advisory Council met and received updates on two initiatives: Behavioral and Mental health and the SAT Optional policy.

Co-Chair, Patty Eppinger reported that they discussed students' escalating behavioral and mental health issues, exacerbated during to the COVID-19 pandemic. National studies show 83% of students shared how these health issues regularly impact their schoolwork, but obtaining resources has been challenging. ARPA funds provided \$5 million in FY22 for various services, including training and telehealth opportunities. In FY23, an additional \$4 million was provided for 73,000 students. There is potential for FY24 funding of over \$8.7 million identified in the Governor's budget and the Senate budget. The DHE also received \$150,000 for a feasibility study to consider a central resource to help students and provide intensive outpatient and inpatient services for students in crisis. The study is expected to end by the end of this year, with more information becoming available in 2024. Co-Chair Eppinger and Chair Gabrieli agreed it was best to provide more context on the SAT optional proposal when the motion comes before the Board later in the meeting. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to the next item of the agenda.

VII. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS & MOTIONS

List of Documents Used

[BHE 23-55](#) Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-50 through 23-54 on a Consent Agenda

[BHE 23-50](#)

[BHE 23-51](#)

[BHE 23-52](#)

[BHE 23-53](#)

[BHE 23-54](#)

[BHE 23-60](#) Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-56 through 23-59 on a Consent Agenda

[BHE 23-56](#)

[BHE 23-57](#)

[BHE 23-58](#)

[BHE 23-59](#)

[BHE 23-63](#) Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-61 through 23-62 on a Consent Agenda

BHE 23-61

[Massachusetts Maritime Academy Special Mission Plan 2023-2028](#)

BHE 23-62

[Approval of Springfield Technical Community College Strategic Plan](#)

[Attachment A](#)

[Attachment B](#)

[Attachment C](#)

[Attachment D](#)

[Attachment E](#)

[BHE 23-61](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-55**, *Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-50 through 23-54 on a Consent Agenda*. The motion includes five institutional Letters of Intent (LOIs) from Fitchburg State University (FSU), Greenfield Community College (GCC), Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), Salem State University (SSU), and UMass Amherst, respectively, to offer new programs. Chair Gabrieli reported that Member Alex Cortez questioned future Department program monitoring and other follow-up requirements during the last Executive Committee meeting. The Board agreed to address this topic at the upcoming retreat, considering it a reasonable question. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-55 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Absent during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-55 APPROVAL OF BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS 23-50 THROUGH 23-54 ON A CONSENT AGENDA

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education approves the following motions on a consent agenda:

- 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

- BHE 23-51 Approval of Letter of Intent of Greenfield Community College to Award the Associate of Science in Human Services and Authorization for Fast Track Review

- BHE 23-52 Approval of Letter of Intent of Mount Wachusett Community College to Award the Associate of Science in Paramedicine and Authorization for Fast Track Review

- BHE 23-53 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

- 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

Authority Article III, Section 6, By-Laws

Contact Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D., Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning & Public Program Approval

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-60**, *Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-56 through 23-59 on a Consent Agenda*. Chair Gabrieli moved BHE 23-60, a bundled, consent agenda motion which seeks of approval of BHE motions 23-56 through 23-59, which include requests for renewals of Commonwealth Honors Program participation from the following four institutions: Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA); Quinsigamond Community College (QCC); Roxbury Community College (RCC); and Springfield Technical Community College (STCC). Co-Chair Patty Eppinger confirmed an extensive review of Commonwealth Honors guidelines occurred during the last academic year by Academic Affairs and Student Success colleagues Keith Connors, former Deputy Commissioner Patricia Marshall, and Interim Deputy Commissioner Clantha McCurdy. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-60 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Absent during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-60 APPROVAL OF BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS 23-56 THROUGH 23-59 ON A CONSENT AGENDA

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education approves the following motions on a consent agenda:

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.

BHE 23-59 Renewal of Springfield Technical Community College in the Commonwealth Honors Program.

Authority Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in March 2022; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D., Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning & Public Program Approval
Keith Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-63**, *Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-61 and 23-62 on a Consent Agenda*. The bundled consent agenda motion includes the Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) Special Mission Strategic Plan Renewal 2023-2028, and Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) Strategic Plan approval on a Consent Agenda.

Chair Gabrieli noted that strategic plans undergo staff vetting. After consulting with the two institutions' presidents during the Executive Committee meeting, the Committee voted to move them to the Board for final approval. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-63 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present for the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Abstained
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-63 APPROVAL OF BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS 23-61 THROUGH 23-62 ON A CONSENT AGENDA

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education approves the following motions on a consent agenda:

BHE 23-61 Approval of Massachusetts Maritime Academy Special Mission Strategic Plan Renewal 2023-2028

BHE 23-62 Approval of Springfield Technical Community College Strategic Plan.

Authority Article III, Section 6, By-Laws.

Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D., Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning & Public Program Approval

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-64**, *Motion of 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 asked AA&SS Co-Chair Patty Eppinger to summarize the motion. Co-Chair Eppinger reported that AA&SS Council and Board have discussed the potential of a test-optional policy in Massachusetts universities. The increase in students opting not to submit test scores, particularly for students of color, is seen as a significant issue for equity. Students would generally, no longer be

required to submit standardized test scores for admission, with some exceptions. For example, programs such as those in the STEM fields may require standardized scores, but institutions would make these determinations in collaboration with the DHE. Co-Chair Eppinger turned to Chair Gabrieli to proceed with the discussion. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-64 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-64 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

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby amends its admissions standards to adopt the following test optional admissions standard for the purpose of approving admissions policies at all four-year, undergraduate public institutions in the Commonwealth. As described in the attached document, the BHE’s test optional admissions standard includes, specifically, the following elements:

- Effective for the 2023 application cycle (for Fall 2024 entry and beyond), the submission of standardized test scores will not be required for first year applicants to be considered eligible for admission to Massachusetts State Universities or University of Massachusetts institutions;
- Individual institutions may opt-in to requiring standardized test scores on a program-by-program basis, following DHE approval; and
- In accordance with the admissions practices of each individual institution, students may themselves choose to submit test scores for consideration.

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, §§ 9(c) and 9(h)); and Chapter 75, §§ 1, 1A(h), and 2
Contact: Dr. Clantha McCurdy, Senior Deputy Commissioner & Interim Chief Academic Officer

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-65**, *Approval of the Community College and State University Funding Allocations for FY2024*.

Chair Gabrieli stated that the funding formula for college performance has been in place for some time without a comprehensive review. Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration & Finance Joe Wallerstein recommends applying metrics at the right time, ensuring colleges receive appropriated budget money in the current year. The prior approach led to colleges receiving money later in the fiscal year, limiting their use. Chair Gabrieli added that improving the legislature's resources and formula for colleges can enhance their ability to utilize available resources and create more effective incentives for desired performance from our institutions. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-65 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-65 APPROVAL OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND STATE UNIVERSITY FUNDING FORMULA ALLOCATION FOR FY2024

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education hereby affirms the Community College and State University funding formula methodology for FY24 and delegates to the Commissioner the authority to allocate the FY24 funds during the summer months, subject to the enactment FY24 GAA appropriations 7066-1400 and 7100-4000.

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, § 9(dd); M.G.L. c. 15A, §15B; Line item 7066-1400 of section 2 of Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014; Line items 7066-1400 and 7100-4000. Section 2 of Chapter 126 of the Acts of 2022.

Contact: Joe Wallerstein, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-66**, *Establishment of an Investment Committee for the 403(B) Supplemental Retirement Plan*. Chair Gabrieli opened the floor for questions from the Board. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-66 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

**BHE 23-66 ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INVESTMENT COMMITTEE FOR THE 403(B)
SUPPLEMENTAL RETIREMENT PLAN**

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby approves the Committee Charter (Attachment A) establishing a Department of Higher Education Retirement Plan Investment Committee specifically for administration of the 403(b) Supplemental Retirement Plan (the Committee Charter), as well as the Investment Policy Statement (Attachment B) by which the Committee and its administration of the 403(b) plan shall be guided.

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, Sections 6, 18A, and 40; 610 CMR 11

Contact: Joe Wallerstein, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration & Finance
Richard Nunes, Director, Retirement Plans Group

VIII. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

List of Documents Used

[BHE 23-67](#)

[BHE 23-68](#)

[SPRE Metrics and Targets Overview for BHE Executive Committee](#)

[BHE 23-69](#)

[BHE 23-70](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-67**, *Approval of Massachusetts State College Building Authority Refunding Revenue Bonds State University Program*. Chair Gabrieli asked Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance Joe Wallerstein to summarize the motion. Mr. Wallerstein stated that the motion's approval would allow the Massachusetts State College Building Authority (MSCBA) to refund existing bonds, potentially saving the State Universities significant money over long-term payments. He turned to Chair Gabrieli to open the meeting for questions.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-67 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present during the vote.
- Secretary Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

**BHE 23-67 APPROVAL OF MASSACHUSETTS STATE COLLEGE BUILDING AUTHORITY
REFUNDING REVENUE BONDS STATE UNIVERSITY PROGRAM**

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education (Board) hereby amends BHE 20-08 to authorize the Massachusetts State College Building Authority (the "Authority") to issue one or more series of refunding bonds for the purpose of refunding all or a portion of the Authority's outstanding bonds issued to finance or refinance projects at state universities in order to achieve debt service savings and provide for the costs of issuance of the refunding bonds.

The Board further authorizes and directs the Commissioner, in the name and on behalf of the Board, to approve in writing the issuance by said Authority of bonds for such refunding purpose, and to do all acts and things and to execute and deliver any and all documents, certificates and other instruments necessary or desirable in connection with the issuance of such refunding bonds, including, without limitation, an amended and restated contract with the Authority and a continuing disclosure agreement with the Authority.

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 4, 6, and 9; Chapter 703 of the Acts of 1963, sections 1-3, et seq., as amended; BHE 20-08.

Contact: Joe Wallerstein, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-68**, *Approval of Targets for Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Metrics*. Chair Gabrieli stated that the Board received a Strategic Plan for Racial Equity last year. The Plan encompasses various ideas and strategies to effectively address the current disparities and enhance the assistance offered to historically marginalized communities. The plan's primary emphasis was on specific targets without considering whether they were present. This issue is why the metrics presented in the current version are important. As the plan evolves, ongoing discussions will surround additional targets. Chair Gabrieli then turned to Commissioner Ortega to provide additional context and to introduce the motion.

Commissioner Ortega acknowledged the commitment to involve the entire system in the identification of metrics and goals for the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. He stated that upon his initial engagement with the work, he attended a meeting in which representatives of all three segments actively engaged in discourse and promoting the progression of metrics. Commissioner Ortega agreed with Chair Gabrieli's statement regarding the work's relevance to a consistent improvement noticed across all designated entities and stated that this is of considerable significance as it represents the initiation of developing early metrics. Additionally, it allows the Board to facilitate and maintain the incorporation of more accurate information about the substance of strategic plans established by organizations, as well as the approaches by which it may guarantee their adherence to the attainment of predetermined goals. Commissioner Ortega turned to Associate Commissioner of Research and Planning Mario Delci to begin his presentation.

Associate Commissioner Delci offered a PowerPoint presentation and reported that while metrics have been established to set targets for six objectives, further efforts are required to address the intricacies associated with enrollment, sense of belonging, and socioeconomic mobility. His team will reevaluate these aspects during the fall of fiscal year 2024. Associate Commissioner Delci reminded the Board that the report originates from the DHE's Office of Research & Planning, responsible for implementing the metrics that support the objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. This process was carried out through collaboration and consultation with the DHE Data Council, which comprises data owners from various Community Colleges, State Universities, UMass Campuses, and the UMass President's Office. The long-term goal is to mitigate racial disparities by comprehensively addressing all relevant metrics by 2033. Deputy Commissioner Delci turned to the Board for questions.

Chair Gabrieli commented that our determination system-wide should be to reverse the negative and sideway gains and increase the positive ones to balance outcomes. Student Advisor Robert Huttig asked about strategies to address the sense of belonging metric in terms of engaging higher student participation. Associate Commissioner Delci responded that it could entail bringing in expert advice to

consult on resources to improve outreach to students and their responses. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis suggested that we connect with the Student Advisory Council to understand any burdens to completion and what can be done to enhance survey responsiveness.

Member Ann Christensen asked about campus receptivity to the plan and about efforts to measuring outcomes related to employment. Associate Commissioner Delci responded that the campuses were receptive to the Plan and that he hoped to present on mobility metrics in the future, eventually seeking Board approval. Chair Gabrieli pointed out that Member Christensen raised a valid point and that economic outcomes are more about goal setting and asking the questions of how we know if a particular program will yield the best results for students, which brings to account how the Board and campuses can commit to creating a culture to ensure the goals that they set become the actual experiences for graduating students. Board Member Alex Cortez added that the Board should consider economic outcomes and the data needed to make the right decisions as an agenda item for the next BHE Retreat. Board Member Walczak commented that it's not just about setting our goals but also about other aspects of the education system and their goals in preparing students for college readiness. Chair Gabrieli stated that college readiness is why access to Early College is valuable in providing students an opportunity to be ready.

On a motion duly made and is seconded, BHE 23-68 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-68 APPROVAL OF TARGETS FOR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RACIAL EQUITY METRICS

VOTED: In furtherance of *BHE Motion 22-68 Receipt of the Statewide Strategic Plan for Racial Equity*, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) approves the attached system- and segment-level targets, developed in collaboration with the public higher education system, for the following goals:

- On-time credit accumulation rate
- Gateway course completion rate
- Persistence rate

- Community college student four-year college transfer rate
- Degree completion after transfer rate
- Systemwide degree completion rate

The Board thanks members of the Data Council for their work in developing these targets.

Further, the BHE charges the Commissioner to complete and report back to the BHE for approval, target-setting for the three additional goals of the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity no later than Fall 2024:

- Enrollment
- Sense of belonging
- Socioeconomic mobility

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, §§6 and 9 (c), and (u); BHE 19-03.

Contact: Mario Delci, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner of Research and Planning

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-69**, *FY2024 Meeting Schedule*. Chair Gabrieli opened the floor for questions from the Board. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-69 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes
- Secretary Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-69 F2024 MEETING SCHEDULE

VOTED: That the Board of Higher Education approve the schedule of regular board meetings for Fiscal Year 2024, as presented by the Commissioner.

Authority G.L. c. 15A, § 4(f); By-Laws of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, Articles II and III.

Contact: Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, a motion to approve **BHE 23-70**, *Summer Delegation of Authority*. Chair Gabrieli reassured Board members that if in his judgment they needed to be convened for an action requiring their attention over the summer months, he would notify them. He opened the floor for questions from the Board. Without further discussion, Chair Gabrieli turned to Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis for the vote.

On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 23-70 was approved by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Paul Toner – Not present during the vote.
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 23-70 SUMMER DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

VOTED: The Board of Higher Education delegates to the Commissioner, ex officio, until the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board its authority to take such action, in consultation with and upon the advice of the Chair or Vice Chair of the Board, as is deemed necessary or desirable.

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 6

Contact: Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

IX. PRESENTATIONS

A. Commissioner’s End of Year Report

List of Documents Used

[Commissioner's End of Year Report](#)

Chair Gabrieli turned to the final agenda item, the *Commissioner's End of Year Report*. Commissioner Ortega stated that his end-of-the-year report is a collaborative effort created with his team. He highlighted the Department's dedicated efforts in strategizing the smooth transition of a new commissioner and ensuring the continuity of their work. Commissioner Ortega intends to focus his report on people, places, and policies, representing the scenarios he encountered during his tenure this year.

Commissioner Ortega reported that he visited 26 of the 29 public campuses in Massachusetts to understand the institutions and their unique practices. He shared pictures of his encounters, including warm welcomes from institutional leaders and staff administrations and the richness of rituals that come with each institution. Commissioner Ortega highlighted the importance of addressing human capital shortages in high-demand occupations, such as healthcare and nursing, and how the Department can advocate for increased resources and investments. Visits to the institutions provided valuable insights into how to produce innovative solutions for these shortages. Commissioner Ortega also engaged with students to understand their expectations and needs.

Commissioner Ortega worked closely with new champions for public higher education, such as Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, who focused on elevating the importance of public higher education and its role in civic learning and democratic engagement. He discussed the proposed investments in public higher education, including a significant investments for expanding access to financial aid. The Governor's budget proposal included funding for MassReconnect, Early College, SUCCESS, and other key programs. These investments are aligned with the Strategic Higher Education Finance principles and aim to address challenges in recruiting new students and broadening access to historically underserved students. He elaborated on the earlier conversation and the Department's role in working with external partners to develop guidelines and provide other resources around policy and program design and implementation. Further, the focus must go beyond access and also consider needs to ensure successful completion.

Commissioner Ortega stated capacity building is also being prioritized, with new entrants joining the Department to build talent and align with strategic priorities. The goal is to serve the Commonwealth while creating conditions for institutions to succeed. Commissioner Ortega concluded his remarks and opened the discussion for questions.

Student Advisor Andrew Whitcomb asked if the Commissioner had something he wanted to highlight that hit home for him during his campus visits with students. Commissioner Ortega responded that during a meeting with students at MassArt, they raised concerns about issues such as food and housing insecurity. They also raised the question of how some resources, such as art supplies and sewing materials, are routinely replenished, which made him question the traditional notion of what it takes to

be a student in a contemporary context. He also noted how institutions highlighted allowing students to borrow materials for job interviews and internships, yet why are those materials not considered necessary resources for students to succeed? Commissioner Ortega urged the BHE to consider the contemporary context during their retreat.

Chair Gabrieli complimented the Commissioner's ability to quickly turn slides into a narrative and bring things together under his point on policy. He reiterated the Commissioner's authority for policy implementation in areas such as MassReconnect and emphasized the importance of executing them within the given parameters.

XI. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Gabrieli adjourned the meeting at 12:40 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Noe Ortega, Ph.D.
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*