



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Delivered by David Podell, President, MassBay Community College
Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

March 28, 2023

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to recognize the Secretary and Commissioner who have hit the ground running since coming on board in their respective roles, visiting campuses and joining with our public higher education partners at events across the state. On behalf of my community college colleagues: thank you both for your enthusiasm and vision. We look forward to the work we'll accomplish together.

At the Board's last meeting, the Board's FY24 budget recommendations were discussed, and I am pleased to see many of those provisions included in the Governor's budget. As has been noted, Governor Healey's first budget makes dramatic investments to public higher education – those of us at community colleges are thrilled by her proposals.

First, we support the H1 funding of \$18 million for the community college SUCCESS Fund. Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services – otherwise known as SUCCESS – was created specifically for Massachusetts community colleges to invest in wraparound supports and services using proven models to improve outcomes for students facing barriers. Designed to support economically disadvantaged students, first-generation students, minoritized students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ students, our SUCCESS programs are making a marked difference in student outcomes. Due to historical barriers, many of these students have struggled to complete their coursework, re-enroll, graduate, and/or transfer to a four-year institution. However, the SUCCESS program has yielded a 16-percentage point advantage in one-year persistence when comparing

participants with comparable non-participating peers. Persistence rates from fall 2021 to fall 2022 exceeded those of comparable peers for every subgroup examined. We are thrilled with how this work is progressing and are greatly appreciative of our campus teams who are carrying out the work of this important and successful initiative.

Additionally, we are pleased to see funding in the Governor's budget proposal that would mitigate the need for community colleges to increase their fees for FY24. While our community colleges are already the least expensive option in the Massachusetts public higher education system, our colleges have kept their fees at or near pre-pandemic levels to promote access for students. Built into the Governor's funding is approximately \$12 million for community colleges that, combined with the other funding for base budgets, mitigates the need for fee increases at all community colleges for the upcoming fiscal year.

In addition to the many strong investments put forth in House 1, our community colleges are also seeking to add a separate \$15 million line item to continue the work of the Education and Training Fund (ETF), which is currently supporting high-demand workforce training programs at our community colleges that align with regional labor market blueprints. In December of 2021, the Legislature provided our colleges with one-time funding to support this important work. The ETF has, since September, trained more than 300 students in healthcare, education, manufacturing, information technology, and cybersecurity, as well as other fields. We estimate the current round of funding through ETF will ultimately train 1,500 students, and we hope to see a continuation of funding to support our workforce training. This is, and has been, the only funding to specifically support short-term and non-credit training that meets employer demand for high-skill jobs.

Finally, the community colleges are supportive of, and excited by, the Governor's MassReconnect proposal which sets aside \$20 million to cover tuition, fees, books, and supplies for adults over 25 who do not already have a college degree. With 1.8 million eligible residents – and more than 700,000 residents who already have some college credit – we believe MassReconnect will be a significant and important workforce driver in Massachusetts. Since the Governor's announcement, we have received two questions most frequently: first, is \$20 million enough money and second, why age 25+?

The answers to those questions are inextricably linked. In Michigan, which launched a similar program several years back, 38% of students who came in in the first year cost the state \$0; their total state investment was comparable to what the Governor has put forth. Additionally, the majority of community college students are Pell-eligible; after 25, the FAFSA no longer considers a student's family's financial contribution in calculating financial aid; thus, setting the minimum age at 25 maximizes the Federal

dollars available. And, on a practical level, we know that students who come to our community colleges later on tend to be more successful – they have, in many cases, attended other institutions that didn't work for them, went to work, raised their families, or a combination of all of these, and have decided that the path forward to a better-paying job is through their education. We believe that MassReconnect is well poised to make a dramatic difference for students across the Commonwealth.

While we do believe that MassReconnect is the right first step towards making community college more accessible for more students, we are committed to furthering the discussion around how Massachusetts can sustainably support a broader program for all residents of the Commonwealth. In the meantime, we look forward to working with the Secretary and the Department on guidelines for the program and its statewide implementation.

We are additionally supportive of an increase in Dual Enrollment and Early College funding and level funding for STEM Starter Academy and EEC Provider Opportunities.

Thank you all for your time this morning. We look forward to working with you throughout the budget process to help strengthen public higher education opportunities in the Commonwealth.