



**MA Department of Higher Education Board Meeting
December 11, 2018
Roxbury Community College**

Once again, Greetings:

- Chair Gabrieli,
- Secretary Peyser,
- Commissioner Santiago, and
- Members of the Board of Higher Education

Thank you for being here at Roxbury Community College.

I now speak on behalf of the Community Colleges Council of Presidents to address the proposed budget and changes in developmental mathematics, and to address our efforts to advocate for students at the federal level.

In my remarks earlier, I spoke about the importance of experiential learning at RCC. Considering this, on behalf of the Community College Presidents, I voice support for the budget allocation that supports student internships at the State Universities.

We also appreciate the attention that the Board of Higher Education has given to many of our priorities – specifically, collective bargaining costs and student financial aid. As you know, if the full cost of our collective bargaining agreements, is not covered, the impacts of any other funding increases are greatly diluted. We also appreciate the continued focus on the MassGrant Plus program to provide critical financial assistance to community college students. At RCC, 77% of our students qualify for the highest level of financial assistance. Given that all of our colleges serve many students with this challenge, we applaud all efforts to prevent cost barriers that thwart their success. We thank you for your attention to these items in the FY2020 Budget discussion.

As you discuss changes to developmental education know that the Council of Community Colleges greatly appreciates the work of DHE staff in leading and enabling us to advance students, as quickly as possible through the developmental sequence of courses.

You might be familiar with a body of thought about higher education described in papers like *Cooling Out Function of Higher Education* and books such as *The Diverted Dream* that presumed that the true function of higher education is to determine which students were worthy

of the limited opportunities for economic advancement and prosperity available with degree completion. Through the series of assignments, exams, and courses, students were either encouraged to complete their degree or encouraged to drop out. Even if you are not familiar within this view of higher education - You may have heard the familiar story told in orientations across higher education – look to your left and to your right – at least one of you will not be here to graduate four years from now....

The work of the Department signals a change in the underlying belief that only a select group of students can be expected to graduate. It has challenged us examine our underlying assumptions about learning and to change long-standing practices that stymied student success and that cost students' time, money, and often the self-confidence and motivation to continue their studies. I look forward, with great expectations, to seeing the results of our collective efforts.

Last, the community college presidents will continue to focus on strengthening collaborations and support across segments. This will be a constant theme throughout 2019, as we work together for the betterment of all students of higher education in Massachusetts.

Recently, the community college presidents have used our collective voice to address potential changes by the federal government that could greatly impact students. We have addressed proposed changes in gender identity, immigration, and to Title 9. And in February, when many of us will attend a national conference for community colleges in Washington DC, we will take the opportunity to meet with current and newly elected legislators to continue to advocate for our students and speak out on behalf of equity and inclusion.

Thank you all for meeting here at RCC, and on behalf of my fellow community college presidents, we look forward to once again working closely with the Board, Commissioner Santiago, and our higher education partners to: improve student outcomes; advance economic and social mobility; foster an inclusive community; and support the future workforce of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Valerie Roberson, President Roxbury Community College &
Chair, Community College Council of Presidents