

State University Report to the Board of Higher Education  
June 22, 2020

Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education, on behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, I thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

I am happy to share with you that the state university presidents have selected Jaimie Birge, President of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, to chair the State University Council of Presidents next year, so this will be my last report as chair. I have enjoyed my time representing the State University System. I know that President Birge is looking forward to building upon our successes over the past year and work with you, our community college partners, UMass and other higher education stakeholders to strengthen partnerships. I would like to offer a special thank you to my colleague Pat Gentile, I have enjoyed working with her over the past few years and wish her well on her retirement. I'm sure there are many good things to come.

In this final report, I am pleased to share with the board that all nine of the state universities are working towards campus specific plans for a return to some in-classroom instruction and on-campus life for the fall semester. While all state university campuses moved from a largely in-person classroom experiences to almost exclusively remote classes last March, we are now all developing plans to return to face-to-face coursework beginning in September. Our campuses, in concert with our faculty who are essential to the operation of our institutions, are developing plans for welcoming students back to campus.

Additionally, our localized union leadership has been involved in the overall planning process. These plans prioritize the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff, while providing us the opportunity to continue offering high-quality, affordable pathways to baccalaureate and masters level degrees. We will continue to work with Commissioner Santiago, Secretary Peyser, the state Department of Public Health and the Governor's task force on Reopening the Commonwealth, on the further development and implementation of our plans for the fall semester.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges in every aspect of our lives and we are all working on ways to manage through the crisis. While consumed by addressing the crisis, it is easy to forget that at a board meeting a few months ago, I was sharing some early data on key metrics in support of the board's equity agenda. I am proud to report that your state universities continue to make progress on these key metrics and, prior to COVID-19, our universities were on pace to exceed the progress of the 2019-2020 academic year.

The state universities continue to see success with the retention rates of our students, closing of achievement gaps, creating pathways for more first-time, full-time high school graduates, students of color, and first-generation college goers, which has resulted in the graduation rate of our system being on track to graduate nearly 12,000 students this year; a significant increase from just four years ago when we graduated around 10,000 students. We will continue to work hard on these fronts and I know demonstrate improvement in the years ahead.

Last, but certain not least, I want to reinforce the state universities commitment to anti-racism. Each of our campuses declare that we are committed to maintaining safe and healthy learning, living, and working environments, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment and as a Council of State University Presidents state unequivocally that Black Lives Matter.

We are proud to go on the record to state that we are committed to disrupting hate, bias, ignorance, intolerance and violence whenever and were ever we encounter it. Our promise to those on our campuses is that we will redouble our efforts to provide you a culturally sustaining and anti-racist environment where all are committed to racial equity and social justice. We stand by our commitment to the state's Equity Agenda, which recognizes the racial disparities in student outcomes and calls for a greater need to support and ensure the success of students of color.

Last Friday marked the 155th anniversary of Juneteenth and it served as a reminder to all of us that we still have a long way to go. On behalf of my colleagues, we applaud, admire, support and join with all those who are protesting in demand for change now. I ask this board to join us in this fight. Thank you.