

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**  
**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS ADVISORY COUNCIL**

January 31, 2023  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The January 31, 2023, meeting of the Academic Affairs & Student Success Advisory Council was held remotely, via the web-conference platform Zoom.

**Meeting Minutes**

Advisory Council Members Present	Co-Chair Patty Eppinger; Paul Toner; Secretary of Education Designee Robert LePage; Commissioner Noe Ortega; Student Segmental Advisor, Andrew Whitcomb
Other BHE Members Present	None
Advisory Council Members Absent	BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli
Department Staff Present	Alison Connolly; Keith Connors; David Cedrone; Allison Little; Clantha McCurdy; Constantia (Dena) Papanikolaou; Stephanie Perez

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Academic Affairs & Student Success (AA&SS) Advisory Council Co-Chair Patty Eppinger called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. Roll call attendance of committee members was taken (see attendance roster reflected above).

**II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes from the November 29, 2022, meeting of the AA&SS Advisory Council were unanimously approved through a roll call vote.

**III. REMARKS**

**A. Chair's Remarks**

AA&SS Advisory Council Co-Chair Eppinger welcomed everyone and reviewed the agenda. She stated that Commissioner Ortega would be joining shortly and, in the interim, invited Senior Deputy Commissioner and Interim Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Clantha McCurdy, to provide remarks.

## **B. Commissioner's Remarks**

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy began by offering regrets from Chief of Staff, Elena Quiroz-Livanis, who was unable to join today's meeting. She then provided brief synopses of the planned presentations.

## **IV. PRESENTATIONS**

*List of documents used:*

[Financial Aid Resources – Teacher Education](#)

[STEM Starter Academy Program Review](#)

### **Resources for Teacher Education Program Students**

Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy introduced the presentation. She informed members that Massachusetts received a \$15M appropriation in the state FY23 budget to address teacher shortages and said the DHE was channeling those funds into two new developing programs – the Tomorrow's Teacher Scholarship and the Teacher Loan Forgiveness. Before going into details on those programs, she said the presentation would provide an overview of currently available resources supporting student and teacher education programs. Those resources include the MassTeach program, Early Childhood Educator Scholarship, and the Paraprofessional Teacher Preparation Grant. The first couple of slides provided context to the growing teacher shortage and the challenges for producing teachers. These challenges included the high and growing costs for securing a teaching degree, the high demand across the country for qualified teachers, and retention. She then turned the meeting over to Allison Little, Assistant Commissioner for P-16 Alignment & Outreach, to begin the review of existing programs.

Assistant Commissioner Little began by reviewing the MassTeach program. MassTeach was created to address the large student/teacher diversity gap. Current data shows 40% of Massachusetts students identify as non-white compared to 8% of teachers. MassTeach seeks to close this gap by attracting and graduating more people of color into the teaching profession. Program strategies to achieve this objective include \$20K to \$30 in scholarship funds, targeted advising and high touch supports. MassTeach currently has nine scholars, including three who have graduated, and that the program exists in seven of our 15 community colleges.

Next DHE staff member, Stephanie Perez, Senior Program Manager, provided details about the Early Childhood Educator Scholarship and the Paraprofessional Teacher Preparation Grant. She shared that the purpose of the Early Childhood Educator Scholarship is to increase the quality and availability of teachers and care providers working with young children and youth in inclusive settings including the infant, toddler, preschool, and school age programs. The program initially started with an appropriation of \$1M growing to \$5M in the past year. Eligible students for scholarships are those employed for at least six months at a minimum of 20 hours per week as an educator or provider in an Early Education and Care program or out of school time program. Students do have to be enrolled in a certificate, associate's, or bachelor's program to be eligible. The scholarship range is anywhere from \$250 to \$500 per credit and a

maximum award value of \$2,250 to \$4,500 per term. Applicants may receive scholarships to assist with the cost of no more than three courses and a maximum of 11 credits per semester. The student commitment post degree ranges anywhere from six months to two years depending on the amount of funding received. The annual cost of the of the program ranges from \$1.6 to \$2.6 annually

Senior Program Manager Perez next reviewed the Paraprofessional Teacher Preparation Grant. This grant provides financial assistance to Mass residents who are currently employed as paraprofessionals in the Massachusetts Public School system and are seeking to become certified as full-time teachers. Program eligibility requires students employed for a minimum of two years, for 20 hours per week, in the public school system as paraprofessionals. Exemptions to this rule are allowed for students working in a high need discipline such as math, science, foreign language, and bilingual education. Students accepted into the program must enroll in a full or part-time undergraduate degree program approved by DESE that leads to licensure. Grant funds are awarded based on a per credit rate, ranging from \$250 to \$625, and \$4,000 to \$7,500 per academic year, depending on the type of institution (two or four year). Successful program participants are obligated to serve between two to four years as a full-time teacher depending on the number of semesters the student received in funding.

Following the review of the current teacher education support programs, Co-Chair Eppinger asked what the communication plan looked like for promoting these programs. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy responded saying both the DHE and campuses promoted the programs through their websites, press releases and through workshops with high school counselors and financial aid administrators. Promotion also occurs during the new application process. Assistant Commissioner Little added that MassTeach is promoted on the DHE website, through STEM Starter Academy and through word-of-mouth especially by recent graduates of the program. Member Toner asked if the programs were promoted through the Superintendents Association. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy responded saying she didn't believe the program was promoted regularly through that association but added that the DHE regularly communicated with school districts. Further, she pointed out that eligible applicants for both the Early Childhood Educator and the Paraprofessional grants require current work status in the field making it easy to communicate the possibilities to the target audience.

Following the questions, Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy presented information on the Tomorrow's Teacher Scholarship, which she said would be followed by a presentation on the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program. Both initiatives received combined funding of \$15 million – with \$7.5M going to each. The purpose of the Tomorrow's Teacher Scholarship program is to help diversify the teaching profession by attracting and encouraging underrepresented students from both high school and college to become licensed to teach in the public school system. The program is targeted to launch in the 2023-2024 school year and is being designed to include such elements as service-obligated scholarship, enrollment in a full-time undergraduate program or a post bachelorette course of study that meets the certification requirements for licensure, acceptance to teach in a public school system for one year for each year of scholarship assistance, employment as a teacher of record within 12 months of degree completion or the

completion of post-baccalaureate coursework, scholarship assistance determined annually of up to \$25,000 per year for a maximum of four years.

Next, Alison Connolly, Senior Associate Director for Student Financial Assistance provided the details of the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program. She said the program purpose is to assist the diverse population of qualified Massachusetts K through 12 public school teachers with loan repayment. Qualified applicants are students with a bachelor's degree at one of Massachusetts' public higher institutions after January 1, 2020, who still have outstanding educational debt, and are now teachers committed to work for four years in a school district or a paraprofessional in any other position that requires a license. As the program grows, priority will go to educators working in school districts with higher shares of students who are designated as low income.

Assistant Commissioner Little concluded the presentation by reviewing the planned efforts for promoting the two new initiatives. She said research shows teaching is currently not a highly desirable career so the success of the new programs center on changing the perception of teaching as a career. To help with this media effort, the DHE issued an RFP seeking advertising vendors. The RFP highlighted the DHE Equity Agenda to make clear the selected vendor needed to present a strong plan that reached all students, especially minoritized students. Of the four proposals received, the DHE chose a vendor called C+C. The attractive attributes of C+C as the chosen vendor included its long-term vision; its strong linkages to its promotional campaign to the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity; its interest for differentiating the Tomorrow's Teacher Scholarship program from the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program; its use of clear, simple messaging; its use of key calendar dates to the campaign's advantage; its plan to create an engaging landing page and, lastly, its plan to highlight real, relatable stories to help potential students see themselves. C+C will use part of the budget to secure paid and earned media. It will also use key performance indicators to measure success to help it determine what avenues of the public awareness campaigns for both scholarship and loan forgiveness are successful. Senior Deputy Commissioner McCurdy then took over the reins and asked if the members had any questions.

Co-Chair Eppinger and Student Segmental Advisor, Andrew Whitcomb, praised the two new initiatives and the positive impact they see the initiatives having on future students. Commissioner Ortega arrived around this time, and Co-Chair Eppinger invited the Commissioner to share some remarks. Commissioner Ortega took the opportunity to thank DHE staff for their devotion to the presented work. The meeting then turned to the next presentation on the STEM Starter Academy.

### **STEM Starter Academy Program Review**

Associate Commissioner for Workforce Development David Cedrone began with an overview, explaining the presentation included background information, program impact and outcomes, and the program's value to the ecosystem for recruiting, preparing, retaining and graduating a diverse body of students earning STEM degrees and certificates. He informed members that STEM Starter Academy (SSA) was in its 10th year of implementation and had engaged more than 31,000 students across the Commonwealth's 15 public Community Colleges.

Associate Commissioner Cedrone highlighted the three major design pillars that underlie SSA: 1) Implementation at Scale, 2) Local Innovation and 3) Robust Evaluation. He shared that it was his goal from the start to implement the program at scale to allow for systemic change. To that end, the program was launched to include all 15 Community Colleges at once. From the beginning, the program functioned as an operating system that encouraged local innovation in recognition of the differences among each campus while also providing the DHE the ability to aggregate best practices and share them across the system. He also spoke about the importance of a comprehensive evaluation system. UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) was retained early in the process as the evaluator and has proven to be an important partner for helping to define and identify success. This success is seen by the strong outcomes. Not only has the project served 31,000 students, but because these students are tracked by individual student ID's, the data shows 9,500 of these students have earned degrees or certificates, and 2,700 students transferred to four-year institutions. The demographics of these students show 51% have been students of color, 54% have been women, 35% have been age 25+, and 56% have been part-time. Within these percentages he pointed out that Black students participating in SSA have earned STEM certificates and degrees at 3.2 times the rate of their similar peers. Latinx students at 2.4 times the rate of their peers and women at 2.1 times. This data represents statistically significant results.

Associate Commissioner Cedrone turned the presentation to Assistant Commissioner Little who showed how SSA Aligns with DHE Equity Agenda and Framework for Student Success. These connections occur by providing students with a sense of belonging helped by SSA staff who act as case managers supporting students through their academic journey. SSA staff assistance runs the gamut from assisting with student's basic needs (*i.e.*, housing or food), to emotional and academic supports. Assistant Commissioner Little also spoke about the strength of the learning community among the 15 Community College participants.

The presentation concluded with Associate Commissioner Cedrone reviewing some SSA program highlights, including what it means to bring a program to scale and to have a roadmap for implementing other BHE initiatives in the promotion of the Equity Agenda. He also made the point that SSA was a system of support at its most basic level where each campus partner has the flexibility to implement supports best attuned to the needs of its students. SSA has proven it knows how to retain students and pull them back when something happens all the while keeping them progressing onto a successful transfer to a four-year program or entry into the workforce.

Co-Chair Eppinger thanked Associate Commissioner's Cedrone and Little for the presentation and praised them for creating such a formidable and successful program. She expressed particular admiration for the creation of the sustained network of partner campuses for sharing challenges and best practices. Associate Commissioner Cedrone agreed with this observation and said he and Assistant Commissioner Little often say that other than the student outcome data demonstrating that students are succeeding, the next most satisfying success is the creation of the learning community among the campus partners.

**V. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:24 a.m.