



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

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

Thank you for the chance this morning to bring you updates from our 15 community colleges. We've had a great start to the academic year, and I'm excited to tell you about some of the work we have underway.

I'm happy to see these meetings returning to in-person, being held at our public colleges. While the hybrid meeting model affords us an important and critical level of flexibility, there is an energy and excitement that comes with being on a college campus that can't be replicated through Zoom. I'd like to thank my colleague, Luis Pedraja, for hosting the BHE meeting today.

Before I get started, I'd like to take a moment for some welcomes.

First, please join me in welcoming Dr. George Timmons as President of Holyoke Community College. President Timmons has been with Holyoke since July and has hit the ground running – he's been a great addition to the community colleges and I hope you all have a chance to work with him in the near future.

Next, the Department has recently introduced some new folks who we look forward to working with: **Matthew Cole**, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, Finance & Operations; **Michael Dannenberg**, Deputy Commissioner for Policy; **Nicole Giambusso**, Director of Strategic Communications; and **Dr. Richard Riccardi**, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success.

Finally, welcome to your new Board members, **Danielle Allen**, **Harneen Chernow** and **Dr. Christina Royal**. On a personal note, many of you know that Christina most recently served as the President of Holyoke Community College – she preceded my arrival in Massachusetts by one year, and I am pleased to have the chance to continue working with her. You have been a great friend and mentor to me. Welcome Danielle, Harneen, and Christina!

Much has happened since the Board's last meeting in June. Most notably, the FY24 state budget was signed into law, and with it, historic significant investments in public higher education in the Commonwealth.

In August, we gathered at Northern Essex Community College to celebrate the tuition equity law that makes **undocumented students who meet specific criteria eligible for in-state tuition**

and state financial aid. Later that week, at MassBay Community College, **we celebrated the launch of MassReconnect** which makes community college free for students 25 and older who have not already earned a degree. With the passage of these two provisions, our colleges have opened the doors to students who believed that a college degree was out of reach, and we are excited by the opportunity to partner with the Department to operationalize these programs.

I'm thrilled to say that MassReconnect has already made a dramatic impact on our campuses. Over the summer, we ran a campaign to do outreach to students who started at a community college but did not finish – this garnered an additional 1,500 students across the 15 community colleges to re-enroll for this fall. Additional marketing is underway by our institutions, and we are encouraged by early anecdotal information coming from the colleges. MassReconnect, coupled with the investment in our student success funding – are demonstrating clear and positive impacts for enrollment, retention, and completion.

While we are anxious to see the data for the first semester of MassReconnect, I would respectfully ask that any analysis includes those students who came to a community college because of the program, but for whom other sources of financial aid covered their costs – in essence, the MassReconnect students who did not cost the colleges MassReconnect-specific dollars. The narrative and simplicity of MassReconnect has been a powerful tool to get lower-income students into classrooms to start or complete their degree.

We're also continuing to partner with the Department to roll out **free community college for nursing students**. We hear every day how dire the nursing shortage is in Massachusetts, and we're excited to see this barrier lifted for students pursuing their nursing careers. That said, it is important to note that funding students in this area does not dramatically increase enrollment. Our colleges, along with the other segments of public higher education, consistently struggle to expand the nursing pipeline because of limitations relating to clinical placements and faculty availability. We applaud any effort to examine these challenges and, ideally, expand the nursing pipeline statewide.

We are also appreciative of the recently announced MassGrant Plus Expansion and the increased access it provides for students under 25 at our colleges. Further, we are eager to participate in the process of financial aid redesign and we look forward to engaging with the Department on this important work.

Looking ahead, we are pleased to support the sentiments outlined by the Board for the FY25 budget request. Specifically, we would ask that SUCCESS funding be increased to \$18 million to meet the expected demand for coaches, and that MassReconnect be expanded to cover any returning students, new students, and continue to provide monies for capacity building at each college.

Also looking ahead, this Friday marks the legislatively-set deadline for the delivery of a draft report on how to implement **Free Community College for all**. The community colleges hired the Boston Consulting Group to help with the analysis and recommendations that will be included in the report. This work was informed by a 24 member advisory committee that included a representative from the DHE and EOE, for which we are most appreciative. In the months ahead, we hope to work with legislative leaders to further discuss the details as to how to get a universally-free community college model that is both sustainable and stable for the Commonwealth and colleges alike.

While we are deeply pleased to discuss all of the good things that are happening at our colleges, the last several months have been challenging on our campuses while our faculty and professional staff waited for their long-overdue raises dating back to 2020. My colleagues and I

are grateful that the supplemental budget passed before the holidays, but even with that addressed, I would again like to note for the Board that our faculty salaries remain dramatically lower than they need to be to attract and retain quality staff. Without our faculty and staff, we cannot execute on any of the exciting initiatives that are underway and on the horizon and the student experience is significantly lessened. Increasing access to community colleges to boost the workforce only works if our colleges can sustain our own workers.

We are grateful for the chance to talk about what's happening at our colleges, and I am happy to take any questions you might have.