

2/2/21 State University Segmental Report to the Board of Higher Education

OUTLINE COMMENTS FOR SU SEGMENTAL REPORT

- I. **Good morning** Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

- II. Thank you to the DHE and EOE:
 - I begin this morning, similar to the way I started my presentation to the Board in December, by thanking the Board of Higher Education, Commissioner Santiago and Secretary Peyser for the support given to our State Universities throughout the pandemic.

 - The Council of Presidents wishes to extend our sincere appreciation to the committed staff of the Department of Higher Education and Executive Office who have been working closely with our campuses in an effort to help us manage the challenges facing our institutions and the 50,000 students we serve.

 - Specifically, I want to acknowledge Under Secretary Ann Reale, Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Dena Papanikolaou, and Tom Simard for the dedication, responsiveness, expertise and professionalism they have offered to all of us over the past year. Their help and support, along with the entire DHE and EOE teams, has been invaluable. On behalf of my colleagues, thank you.

- III. COVID Report:
 - Our nine campuses have all started welcoming students back to classes for the spring semester. Our institutions will continue to offer a mix of in-person on-campus instruction and online remote learning and work options to our campus communities. Following CDC, DPH and DHE guidance, all of our campuses are also offering students an

opportunity for residential on-campus student housing. We are doing our best to deliver a safe and meaningful educational experience to the students attending our nine state universities.

- In accordance with state guidance and, in collaboration with public health experts, each state university updated and operationalized their COVID-19 return plans with a primary focus on the health and safety of our students and the workforce needed to support their educational and health needs.
- The planning and preparation we did last summer and throughout the fall to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by employing a variety of safety protocols clearly worked as our average COVID positivity rate was below 1% across our system.
- Our updated return plans for this semester build upon those successful practices and not only meet but exceed federal and state guidance for higher education institutions.
- We are all confident that our campuses will have a successful spring semester.

IV. State Budget:

- At your December meeting, the State Universities Council of Presidents went on record in support of the Department of Higher Education's FY22 budget recommendations. Those recommendations embraced expansion of state support that align with the board's equity agenda.
- Before I go further, I would like to preface my remarks by saying that the council of presidents recognizes the unique budget process the state was forced into due to the pandemic. We recognize that while Governor Baker and his budget writers were preparing a revised H:2 budget proposal to submit to the legislature, they were, at the same

time also preparing their FY22 state spending plan. We understand that developing both spending plans could not consider legislative actions on the FY21 budget and that the final FY21 budget might not align with the Administration's FY22 recommendations.

- Saying that, the Legislature increased certain line items over the Governor's December budget recommendations and I would like to take a moment this morning to discuss two specific line items.
- In the Governor's revised FY21 spending, the State Universities Funding Formula account was eliminated. This account is the only mechanism in the state budget that supports our efforts, through a performance-based funding formula, to offer high-quality and affordable post-secondary educational pathways for Massachusetts residents. The legislature funded this account and included \$5.5m in the final FY21 General Appropriations Act. Governor Baker's FY22 spending plan, released last week, does not include this item.
- Moreover, a major concern for us is that the Governor's FY22 budget recommendations does not include the amortized funds approved by the legislature in FY21. Without amortizing those funds, the H:1 budget recommendations amount to a \$5.5m reduction for our state universities. We ask this board and the department to join with us in our legislative advocacy efforts in the House and Senate.
- Additionally, another area of increased spending by the legislature was in the state's financial aid line item. The legislature added \$14m to the state's financial aid account. Because the final budget wasn't passed until just a few weeks ago, and these new dollars cannot be applied retroactively, about half of the \$14m dollars will be applied to help students in the upcoming fall semester.
- I know that increased state support for student financial aid is a priority of this board and goes directly to the heart of the board's equity agenda. We are grateful to the legislature for their significant

increase in financial aid and we are committed to continuing to work with this board for increased state financial aid for Massachusetts students.

V. Value of Public Higher Education

- Despite the challenges of COVID-19, and its subsequent impact on budgets, the Commonwealth's State Universities have maintained our focus on providing a high-quality, public education for our students. Our success at recruiting and educating students from under-represented populations contributes to the development of a diverse workforce in the Commonwealth and fills the existing talent gap.
- Your State Universities make it possible for students from lower income backgrounds to have access to a life-changing education. At MCLA, for example, 20% of our students come from families earning less than \$20k a year but go on to get high paying jobs. We are breaking a cycle of poverty for 100s of students a year. What mission could be more noble than this?
- We are all aware of the well documented jobs gap facing Massachusetts. Some recent data show there are upwards of 80,000 jobs, requiring a post-secondary education, going unfilled in our state's businesses. Our Massachusetts state universities are mission driven to provide pathways to four-year and masters level programs, specifically in underrepresented communities. Without question, the best and in most cases, the only pathway for social and economic mobility, is through our public colleges and universities.
- And aside from our work to offer Massachusetts residents high-quality post-secondary degree pathways, your State Universities are among the largest employers in our communities and are a source of millions of dollars in economic activity.
- The state universities are grateful for the support from the BHE and the Governor so that we can continue to advance the common good for Massachusetts.

VI. Vaccine Distribution:

- On behalf of my colleagues, I respectfully request that this board go on record in support of our request to prioritize the higher education workforce in the state's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan.
- As you know, the current vaccine plan includes a majority of higher education employees in Phase 3 Group 2; the last group in the state's inoculation plan.
- The original vaccine distribution scheduled envisioned that COVID-19 vaccinations would be made available for those in Phase 3 sometime in early spring. However, due in large part to an inadequate and disjointed federal response to vaccine distribution, those timelines are no longer feasible.
- We are happy to see that the vaccination schedule developed by the Massachusetts Vaccine Advisory Group includes the Early Education and Care and the K-12 workforce in the next priority group for COVID-19 vaccine distributions (Phase 2).
- We believe that postsecondary educators and staff should be included, with other Massachusetts educators, in Phase 2.
- Because the original plan to have COVID vaccines available to everyone in the Commonwealth by spring is no longer feasible, we are concerned that our employees will not be adequately vaccinated prior to the start of the fall semester.
- Prioritizing our workforce prior to the fall semester is a critical component of fulfilling our mission to offer high-quality, affordable pathways to a post-secondary degree for Massachusetts residents.
- In a letter last week to Secretary Sudders and Secretary Peyser, our Council of Presidents joined with the leaders of the Massachusetts State College Association, the Association of Professional Administrators and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, urging that the higher education workforce be prioritized, along with all other Massachusetts educators, in Phase 2.
- I submit to the board that letter and ask you to join us in calling for our workforce to be prioritized in the COVID-19 vaccine distribution

schedule.

VII. Conclusion ---

VIII. Thank you for allowing me this time to share an update from our state universities. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.