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MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Higher Education

**Commissioner of Higher Education  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Boston, MA**

*The policy of the Commonwealth is to provide, foster, and support institutions of public higher education that are of the highest quality, responsive to the academic, technical and economic needs of the Commonwealth and its citizens, and accountable to its citizens.*

## **THE SEARCH**

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education seeks a creative, collaborative, and tested leader to serve as the next Commissioner of Higher Education. The Commissioner is an advocate for the Commonwealth's public colleges and universities and works to strengthen the impact, accessibility, and quality of higher education in Massachusetts.

The Commissioner is appointed by the Board with the approval of the Massachusetts Secretary of Education, and works cooperatively with the Board, the Executive Office of Education, the leaders of the Commonwealth's 29 public colleges and universities, the President of the University of Massachusetts system, state legislators, and leaders in the local, regional, and business communities. He or she also collaborates with the Commissioner of Early Education and Care and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop and continue cross-sector initiatives to ensure that residents of Massachusetts have the best chance to reach their fullest potential. Finally, the Commissioner fosters and sustains academic and operational collaborative efforts with the state's 88 private, not-for-profit institutions of higher learning.

The Commissioner is the executive and administrative head of the Department of Higher Education, which encompasses a staff of 70 in two locations and, in 2014, had an annual budget of \$147.4 million, including \$92 million for financial aid. Together, the Commissioner, the Board, and Department staff work to carry out the statutory authority of the Board and identify strategies and policies that serve higher education institutions and their students.

With the support and involvement of all of these partners and stakeholders, the next Commissioner will have the opportunity to build on successes of recent years, supporting the development of innovative strategies and programs, and ensuring value and accountability. He or she will be able to leverage the collective resources of Massachusetts' outstanding higher education institutions to deliver the best educational opportunities for students in the Commonwealth.

The Board of Higher Education has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important search. All inquiries, nominations, and applications with cover letters may be submitted to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

## **PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE COMMONWEALTH**

Massachusetts public higher education has a distinguished past and a trajectory that points to continued, significant growth and accomplishments. The public colleges and universities of the state serve over 300,000 students and are committed to continuous improvement and accountability in all aspects of teaching and learning.

Public higher education in Massachusetts is made up of 29 campuses divided into three segments: 15 community colleges, nine state universities, and the five campuses of the University of Massachusetts system. In addition to the physical campuses, all three segments are involved in online education, using technology to expand their offerings and reach while managing costs. Each community college and state university has its own Board of Trustees; the University of Massachusetts system has a President and a Board of Trustees.

This model promotes a level of campus autonomy and flexibility that would otherwise be absent in a more centralized arrangement, and is one of the distinctive features of the higher education landscape in the Commonwealth. Another distinguishing characteristic is the robustness of private, not-for-profit higher education; Massachusetts independent colleges and universities--many of which are ranked as the best in the nation--educate an estimated 350,000 students. Indeed, Massachusetts is the only state that educates more college students in the independent sector than in the public sector.

Among Massachusetts high school students, seventy percent of those who attend college in-state attend one of the public institutions, and the majority of those graduating work and live in the state after receiving their diplomas. Average costs for full-time students range from around \$5,000 yearly at community colleges, to \$8,500 at state universities, to \$12,000 at the University of Massachusetts campuses, exclusive of room and board. Of the nearly 24,000 workers at community colleges and state universities, approximately 15,000 belong to unions. Almost 11,000 UMass employees (not including student workers) are part of 41 bargaining units, representing 62% of the workforce.

Taken as a whole, higher education is a powerful transmitter of social and communal values, an engine of workforce development, and a significant contributor to the state economy. Its direct and indirect impact on the civic fabric of the Commonwealth is profound and wide-ranging.

### ***Community Colleges***

The fifteen Community Colleges serve over 190,000 students, accounting for over half of all undergraduate credit enrollments in public higher education. They offer open access to high quality, affordable academic programs, including associate degree and certificate programs, and serve the highest percentage of low-income students in higher education (36% of all Pell recipients in the state are enrolled in community colleges). The colleges are committed to excellence in teaching and learning; they provide developmental coursework, academic preparation for transfer to four-year institutions, career preparation for entry into high-demand occupational fields, and lifelong learning opportunities. Over the past five years, over 19,000 students of the community colleges have continued their education at a Massachusetts state university or the University of Massachusetts.

### ***State Universities***

Six comprehensive state universities in Massachusetts (Bridgewater State University, Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Salem State University, Westfield State University, and Worcester State University) and three specialized colleges (Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Massachusetts Maritime Academy) emphasize excellence in teaching, habits of lifelong learning, and vibrant campus life. Over 50,000 students attend the state universities; they are strategically located to facilitate access to baccalaureate and master's degree programs for Commonwealth residents. Each university has a distinctive academic focus based upon its established strengths and regional and state needs, and each university serves as a leader and resource for the community, contributing to the region's cultural, environmental, and economic development.

### ***The University of Massachusetts System (UMass)***

The University of Massachusetts Office of the President, located in Boston, oversees campuses in Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell; a medical school in Worcester; and UMass Online. UMass is the Commonwealth's public research university and enrolls about 73,000 students; UMass Online's 140 degree and certificate programs serve about 63,500 students, two-thirds of whom are unique online enrollees and not part of the campus-based traditional population. The University's mission is to provide an affordable and accessible education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world. In 2013, research expenditures for the system were close to \$600 million, and the University was 32nd in the world among universities granted U.S. patents. Currently, the University of Massachusetts is among the top 100 universities in the world and the top public university in New England, according to the Times Higher Education World University rankings. UMass is one of two university systems nationwide to have all campuses represented in the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification, a system for measuring the service provided by universities to their communities.

## **OVERSIGHT OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS**

In 2008, an Executive Office of Education was created, with the goal of providing a more seamless delivery of education from birth through higher education in the Commonwealth.

Today, the Executive Office of Education is headed by Secretary of Education James Peyser and contains three departments, each with its own Commissioner and Board: the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Higher Education. The Secretary, reporting directly to the Governor, serves as a single, responsible authority within the state's coordinated, comprehensive education system. The policies, initiatives, and day-to-day activities executed by each department are led and managed by its Commissioner and overseen by its Board.

The Board of Higher Education is a statutorily-created agency responsible for "defining the mission of and coordinating the state's system of higher education." At the beginning of each academic year, the Board establishes priorities to guide its work and that of the Department. These priorities are informed by contributions from the Executive Office of Education and the Secretary, the presidents of the community colleges and state universities, the president of the University of Massachusetts system, and the staff of the Department of Higher Education and the Commissioner, as well as the opinions of the members of the Board. The Department's activities also include overseeing program approval of all public higher education institutions, out-of-state higher education institutions, and private higher education institutions chartered after 1943; working with campus financial officers on modeling, budgeting, financing, and capital planning; providing financial aid services, information, and state funds to students; and working with campuses on presidential searches and evaluations.

The Commissioner and the Board of Higher Education work primarily with the community colleges and the state universities; the University of Massachusetts system has statutory autonomy. That said, it should be noted that each of the community colleges and state universities--as well as the University of Massachusetts system--have their own boards (the Secretary of Education is a member of the University of Massachusetts board), with a wide range of responsibilities and authority. Thus organizational and programmatic oversight of higher education in the Commonwealth is distributed across a wide range of entities, with significant institutional independence, requiring cooperation and communication among the parties.

For more information, see:

- <http://www.mass.gov/edu/>
- <http://www.mass.edu/home.asp>
- <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter15A/Section4>
- <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter75>
- <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter15A/Section22>
- <http://www.mass.edu/bhe/higheredauthority.asp>

## **CURRENT STRATEGIC INITIATIVES**

In recent years, the Board and Department of Higher Education have moved beyond performing their statutorily-defined responsibilities toward a more active and strategic approach with respect to higher education. At the same time, the community colleges, state universities, and University of Massachusetts system have themselves developed strategic initiatives in service to their

students. Overall, efforts on behalf of public higher education have seen increased emphasis on accountability, efficiency, and teacher quality.

For the Board and Department, the primary accountability instrument has been *The Vision Project*, which was introduced by Commissioner Richard Freeland in 2010 and which called for Massachusetts to assume leadership in public education among the states. *The Vision Project* identified seven key areas for concerted and sustained attention: college participation, college completion, student learning, workforce alignment, education of an active and informed citizenry, elimination of disparities, and research that drives economic activity. The guiding premise of *The Vision Project* is that the social and economic health of the Commonwealth is inextricably linked to the high quality of its workforce and the robustness of its research output, and that higher education institutions play a central role in the production of both. More recently, the Department has focused on boosting college completion rates, closing achievement gaps, and attracting and graduating more students from underserved populations.

The campuses have been important partners and drivers in many of the elements of *The Vision Project*; they have also independently developed their own strategic initiatives and accountability instruments. UMass has its own accountability report, *UMass Performance*, and is focused on: college completion; new approaches to teaching and learning; expanding the STEM pipeline; addressing workforce needs; closing achievement gaps; strengthening pathways for underrepresented populations; and improving efficiency in both administrative and academic areas. Many of these thematic emphases are also found at the community colleges and state universities; in addition, there have been concerted efforts to: advance teacher preparation through work with regional school districts, preparing new educators and supporting the professional development of current teachers (pre-K through post-secondary school); prepare the STEM workforce, including in the healthcare arena; support and boost regional economic development; and pursue collaboration and efficiency through cost containment, collective procurements, and risk management.

Lastly, much attention has been paid to additional initiatives that cross the pre-K, elementary and secondary school, and higher education sectors. These include the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

For more information, see:

- <http://www.mass.edu/visionproject/vision.asp>
- <http://www.massachusetts.edu/umassperformance>
- <http://www.mass.edu/strategic/home.asp>
- <http://www.mass.edu/foradmin/home.asp>

## **ROLE OF THE COMMISSIONER**

The Commissioner occupies a singular and highly visible position, at the nexus of educational, executive, legislative, and community leadership--each with distinct cultures, practices, and processes, and with significant influence on higher education outcomes. Given this, the role requires extensive outreach and collaboration, founded upon credibility and trust. The

Commissioner routinely meets and/or talks with the presidents of the community colleges and state universities; the members of the Board and the staff of the Department of Higher Education; the Executive Office of Education; the Commissioners of the other education sectors and the President of the University of Massachusetts system; members of the Legislature, in particular the chairs of the Joint Committee on Higher Education; business and community leaders throughout the state; and counterparts in other states who are similarly tasked with advancing higher education.

Together they must identify, define, conceptualize, develop, implement, and execute innovative approaches that will redound to the maximum benefit of Massachusetts residents. These are substantive conversations that require concentrated attention and persistence in tackling some of the most challenging issues and structures in public higher education. The Commissioner will be the champion, confidant, co-author, communicator, and loyal critic of ideas, noting topics of convergence, apprehending obstacles, and maximizing and optimizing results.

### **KEY OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES**

The Commissioner's overarching challenge is to carry out statutory authority, provide strategic vision, expert theoretical and practical knowledge, principled leadership, and effective direction in an environment that is rapidly shifting and largely decentralized. The Commissioner's overarching opportunity derives from the fact that the campuses under the oversight of the Board of Higher Education play a unique role in educational achievement and attainment. Their role extends beyond the borders of their campuses, and points to collaboration and connections with other public colleges and universities, high schools, the business community, and employers. This is an opportunity for innovative leadership, at a pivotal moment: with a new Governor, a new Secretary of Education, and transitions in the Board of Education and at the colleges and universities, new ideas, themes, and approaches may be brought to bear on behalf of higher education in the Commonwealth.

The Board of Higher Education, the Department, and partners and stakeholders will look to the Commissioner to:

#### ***Help more students achieve college degrees, secure meaningful employment, and lead satisfying and fulfilling lives of accomplishment***

The next Commissioner will be the leader in efforts to boost completion rates and close persistent gaps by working collaboratively to ensure readiness, contain costs, promote affordability, and attract more students from underserved populations. He or she must take steps to maintain the integrity of the mission of public higher education and the educational process--to provide accessible, affordable, relevant, and rigorous programs that meet changing individual and societal needs for education and employment.

#### ***Leverage the visibility of the office so that higher education is at the forefront of the public consciousness***

Although the state made notable increases to higher education funding in each of the last two budget cycles, the level of support is not what it was in the early 2000s, and the demand for

need-based aid has not been met. The Commissioner must serve as a public advocate for greater resources, innovative solutions, and fruitful collaborations that will advance higher education. There has been good progress in raising graduation rates and closing achievement gaps; existing partnerships with the business community have been highly successful, as have cross-sector initiatives in educator preparedness and college readiness. The Commissioner should continue to highlight these and other accomplishments, be a forceful voice for the power of public higher education, and galvanize support for its continued progress.

***Support the independent achievements of the community colleges and state universities, while continuing to work with them to identify common opportunities for enhanced effectiveness***

Massachusetts public higher education follows a federated model, one that is reinforced by the specific curricular emphases and autonomous boards of the colleges and universities. At the same time, the institutions have a shared purpose--to deliver high-quality education that is accessible and meaningful, and that will lead to future success. The Commissioner must simultaneously support the individual efforts of the institutions to serve their student bodies, and encourage and locate possibilities for impact that are mutually beneficial and that will provide students with greater coherence and flexibility.

***Work creatively and collaboratively with partners, stakeholders, and constituents in service to Massachusetts residents***

At a time of increased public scrutiny, significant budgetary challenges, and economic constraints, the Commissioner must be enterprising and highly collaborative. He or she must make the most of the resources available--public goodwill, expertise on the campuses, unions, the partnership of private colleges and universities, active interest of community and business leaders, and fellow public servants--and work cooperatively to devise creative, efficient, and effective approaches, including innovative modes of delivery. The Commissioner should also strive, with his or her fellow Commissioners of the pre-K and K-12 sectors, to enhance alignment and integration of early, elementary and secondary, and higher education.

***Lead and inspire the Department of Higher Education***

The Department of Higher Education is thriving and diverse, with dedicated professionals whose responsibilities and levels of activity can exert significant centrifugal force on the agency. The Commissioner will ensure that communication is clear and strong, that efforts are well-coordinated within the office and with other entities and offices responsible for higher education. He or she will support the staff and build connections within the Department, thereby maximizing the impact, productivity, and effectiveness of the organization.

## **QUALIFICATIONS & CHARACTERISTICS**

The scope, impact, and demands of this role require a strategic thinker and proven leader whose passion, imagination, commitment, intelligence, mental flexibility, discipline, and persistence will set an example and earn the respect of all who work with him or her. Among the qualifications, skills, and experiences desirable for the role, she or he will bring many of the following:

***Knowledge of public higher education, higher education systems, and national trends:*** A strong grasp of the salient issues, success drivers, and challenges of public higher education; an awareness of the constraints and pressures faced by leaders of public colleges and universities. Substantial professional administrative experience and success in public higher education and/or a fluent and credible working knowledge. Appreciation for the relevance and importance of the independent higher education sector to the education and culture of the Commonwealth. Deep understanding of or experience with higher education systems and types. Familiarity with national conversations about higher education. An ability to place the state's issues within the national context and recognize how higher education in the state can be advanced by different approaches.

***Understanding of state government structures:*** Familiarity with state government; understanding of the political process. Demonstrated effectiveness in working within governmental structures. Capacity to understand the political culture of the Commonwealth and the context in which public higher education is advanced in Massachusetts. Ability to partner with leaders in state and local government to serve the residents of the state. Familiarity with the process of policy creation, decision making, and state budget cycles.

***Poised and charismatic leadership:*** The ability to communicate, influence, persuade, and inspire. A flexible and imaginative outlook. Evidence of skill in adapting to particular settings, integrating one's viewpoints with others, and influencing; aptitude for situational leadership. A talent for making complex issues understandable and urgent; an unerring instinct for knowing when to push and when to defer; an aptitude for building bridges and rapport. An empathetic, collegial, trustworthy, and enthusiastic presence, one that earns respect and encourages the cultivation of committed partnerships and alliances.

***Demonstrated success in devising resourceful and imaginative solutions:*** Creativity, imagination, an appetite for innovation and change, an enterprising spirit. Demonstrated results in navigating bureaucracies; commitment to finding new solutions and pathways to success. Capacity for developing new ways of thinking about public higher education; ability to leverage resources and rally individuals of greater political or economic power.

***Organizational sophistication and managerial talent:*** Demonstrated abilities to oversee a complex organization, managing people, plans, projects, and budgets. A management style that is transparent, accessible, collaborative, and supportive; one that conveys a sense of engagement and an appetite for information, without verging into micromanagement. An intentional focus on ongoing effectiveness and efficiency. A motivating and sympathetic presence. Experience with boards. An ability to exercise facilitative leadership as well as active leadership, and an awareness of which would be most effective in a particular context.

***Personal qualities.*** Commitment to the transformational power of higher education to the individual and to society. Dedication to public service, social justice, diversity, and equity. Passion and idealism married with steadiness and pragmatism; patience, collegiality, courtesy, tact. Personal and professional integrity as befitting a public servant. An appetite for challenges and hard work; a sensibility that goes past mere tolerance of messiness, welcoming complications and ambiguity. Optimism, resilience, discipline, and flexibility.

***Professional preparation and achievement.*** Terminal degree or the equivalent. Demonstrated success in roles of similar scope, scale, and responsibility.

**TO APPLY**

All inquiries, nominations/referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be sent electronically to:

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Katie Rockman, Senior Associate  
Isaacson, Miller  
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Boston, MA 02210  
[www.imsearch.com/5346](http://www.imsearch.com/5346)

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Equal opportunity shall be provided for all applicants on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or veteran status.*