

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**  
**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 22-67

**BOARD DATE:** June 21, 2022

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**RECEIPT OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) receives *the Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success* (the "Framework") from the Student Success Committee, comprised of a group of nine members including representatives primarily from the Department of Higher Education (DHE), the Executive Office of Education (EOE), and the State Universities and Community Colleges.

The Board thanks the members of the Student Success Committee, the Deloitte Consulting Group, the public community college and state university presidents and their appointed leadership teams, faculty and students, and all community stakeholders who have contributed to developing this Framework since November of 2021.

The Board endorses the goals and objectives of this Framework and directs the Commissioner to: support the institutions of public higher education in developing their own plans and priorities for implementation; make specific systemwide policy recommendations to the BHE; and provide periodic updates to the Board on the status of this work, including an initial update no later than June 2023. Further, the Board directs the Commissioner to recommend systemwide or sector-specific goals and targets to the BHE, in partnership with the institutions of public higher education by June 2023.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by BHE 6/21/2022.

Authority: M.G.L. c. 15A, §§6 and 9 (b), (c), (f) and (u); BHE 19-03.

Contact: Clantha McCurdy, Ph.D., Senior Deputy Commissioner, Access and Student Financial Assistance

## ***Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success***

### **Background**

For the past two years, the DHE has concentrated its efforts on a strategic framework focused on equity. With an overhaul of policies, programs and initiatives through an equity lens, the overarching goal is for the public higher education system to enhance economic and social mobility for all citizens, particularly racially minoritized students. The four major goals identified by the DHE in its Equity Agenda are:

- Goal 1: Sixty percent of working-age Massachusetts residents ages 25–64 will hold an associate degree or higher and an additional 10% of the population will hold a high-quality credential by 2030.
- Goal 2: Forty-three percent of African American and 32% of Latinx Massachusetts residents ages 25–64 will hold an associate degree or higher by 2024.
- Goal 3: By 2030, the rate at which the Massachusetts public higher education system graduates African American and Latinx students will increase to 51% and 50% respectively, outpacing the current rate of increase by 10%.
- Goal 4: DHE will also track and report on racial gaps in first-year success metrics incorporated into PMRS, including completion of college-level math and English in the first year, on-time credit accumulation, and persistence to a second year of postsecondary education.

With a specific focus on Goals 1,2 and 3, and with the design and implementation of a Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success, the Department of Higher Education (DHE) seeks to increase graduation rates at all fifteen public community colleges and the nine state universities for racially minoritized and low-income students. Through a cache of innovative and inclusive support services, the DHE specifically aims explicitly to assist community colleges and state universities in executing comprehensive, evidence-based services and programs with proven effectiveness in promoting student success, that are also scalable and sustainable.

The Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success is fully aligned with the DHE Equity Agenda, and the concurrently developed Strategic Plan for Racial Equity, which is intended to open doors of opportunity for racially minoritized populations – by significantly raising the enrollment, persistence, program completion and long-term success outcomes among these students. In this manner, the DHE sought to create a Framework that would support the enhancement and implementation of services that are proven to positively impact the college experience of low-income students and students of color.

### **Approach and Stakeholder Engagement**

The Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success (“The Framework”) was designed through a multi-phased approach that included a current state analysis of student support structures and practices at the nine state universities and fifteen community colleges, a comprehensive environmental scan of peer higher education systems and an extensive analysis of data from the DHE HEIRS database, 214 campus files, and IPEDS data from across the Commonwealth and peer states. The Deloitte team engaged nearly 300 stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff, students, and national higher education leaders through interviews and focus groups to help inform the current state analysis. Key components of

the Framework emerged out of this assessment and were socialized through an iterative process of feedback that re-engaged a smaller but broad subset of the original 300 stakeholders, specifically campus leaders, faculty and staff.

Guiding principles, recommendations and implementation pathways were drafted and similarly socialized with 12 stakeholder review sessions that included BHE, DHE, and campus administrators, faculty and staff resulting in the final framework presented herein.

#### Alignment with Equity Agenda and the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity

The Framework aligns with the Equity Agenda; thus, both the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity team and the Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success team have worked collaboratively to ensure alignment between these documents. Both initiatives are highly concerned with success for students of color to include access, persistence, graduation, and meaningfully gainful post-graduation career outcomes. In addition, both have priorities and recommendations that are aligned, with the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity being more far-reaching and the Framework focused on support services.

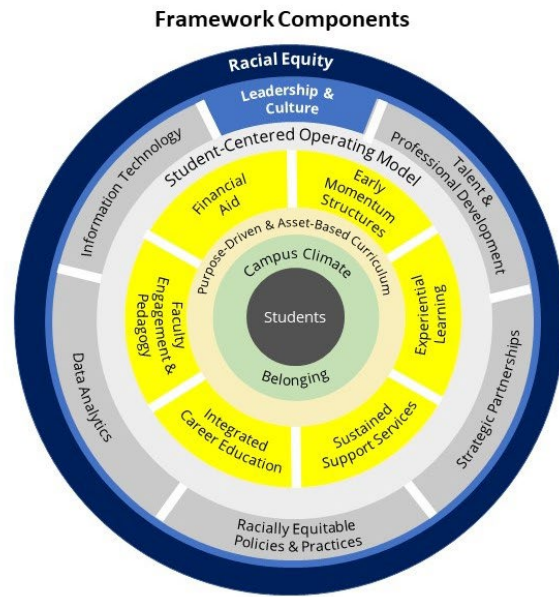
More specifically, the Framework was designed to align with the Equity Agenda's goals and Equity Principles in that the planning and implementing for the Framework contains structures, processes and policies that enhance the tracking and reporting of first-year success metrics for completion of college-level courses, as well as increasing persistence and graduation rates for students of color. The Strategic Framework is designed to also align with the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity in order that the student support structures are designed and enhanced with an equity lens and intentionality towards eliminating racial disparities for students of color while taking into consideration intersecting variables that correlate with lower success rates (e.g., student from lower-income families), and the diversity of learner type present throughout the Commonwealth (i.e., post-traditional, part-time learners vs. traditional, full-time learner).

#### **Framework for Student Success for Student Support Services**

##### Components

The conceptual model of the Framework is comprised of framework components that are meant to be *holistic* and *comprehensive* and are intended to enhance the systems and coordination of support services that surround students and enable their success. The Framework is designed with the *students* at the center as decisions, adoption and implementation of the framework should be guided in the best interest of students and their success. Below is a brief overview of the components of the Framework, which are broken down into three complementary and interdependent elements: 1) Framework Foundations, 2) Operating Capacities, and 3) Holistic Student Supports.

- Framework Foundations** wrap around the framework as all encompassing and through which all components within that circle are considered.
- Operating capacities** support the interventions and enable them to operate in an environment that cultivates a student-center operating model.
- Holistic Student Supports** are student-facing programs and services designed to improve student outcomes and support students as they engage in a purpose-driven curriculum.



The framework is grounded in *Framework Foundations* that wrap around the Framework and the student and help to inform the operationalization and implementation of the Framework while enabling the success of the *operating capacities* and the *holistic student supports*.

Framework Foundations	
Racial Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing a system of student-ready institutions that provide affordable access to equitable and racially just higher education, recognize the cultural wealth of students of color, and transforming programs, policies, and practices to be anti-racist, equity minded, and responsive to the needs of students of color.<sup>i</sup></li> </ul>
Leadership & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaders define culture through their tone and nomenclature, through their priorities and the metrics they gather as well as the accountability structures they deploy.</li> <li>Leadership sets the prioritization and intention of campus programs. Aligning campus resources and budget to a long-term and sustainable vision aimed at closing racial gaps in student success will help reduce initiative fatigue born from recurring niche programs and leadership agenda changes.</li> </ul>
Student-Centered Operating Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reimagining student support services to provide a seamless and integrated educational experience where students’ career goals are aligned with the curriculum and support services are unavoidable, available and connected.</li> </ul>
Purpose-Driven Asset-Based Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic pathways and curriculum maps that align degree and credential requirements with a student’s career goals that are designed to recognize the cultural wealth of students of color and prepare students to fulfill their potential.<sup>i</sup></li> </ul>
Campus Climate & Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the system and its institutions are promoting a culturally sustainable and safe campus climate for all students to thrive with particular attention to students of color. Cultivating inclusive environments that promote a sense of belonging for students socially, academically, as well as inside and out of the classroom.<sup>ii</sup> Prioritizing culturally sensitive and responsive policing via Campus Safety.</li> </ul>

The *operating capacities* are structures that support the *holistic student supports* and enable them to operate in an environment that cultivates a *student-centered operating model*.

Operating Capacities	
Leadership & Culture	Higher education leaders across the Commonwealth impact the institutional culture around student

	success through their priorities, strategic vision, and resource allocation.
Racially Equitable Policies & Practices	Policies and practices affecting academic probation and persistence, financial aid, inclusion and access to resources and similar should be evaluated with an equity lens.
Strategic Partnerships	Relationships between institutions and with community partners help to serve students education and career goals and support them in persistence through their educational journey.
Talent & Professional Development	Training to improve competence / effectiveness for all employees with an emphasis on developing cultural competencies, and awareness of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.
Data Analytics	Collection and utilization of disaggregated data with the intention to help drive data-informed decision making on campuses involves Institutional Research departments as well as leadership across campus valuing and prioritizing data.
Information Technology	Software utilized by the institution to collaborate, communicate, and report information among all parts of the campus, and between campuses. Infrastructure enhancements to support an increasingly remote student engagement culture.

The *holistic student supports* are those student-facing programs and services that are designed to improve student outcomes and support students as they engage in their *purpose-driven curriculum*.

Holistic Student Supports	
Early Momentum Structures	Programs that provide opportunities for students to connect with institutional support services, resources and / or accumulate credits either prior to their first semester and / or early in their educational journey.
Experiential Learning	Opportunities for students to align curricular and co-curricular experiences that provide opportunities for students to apply concepts and explore potential career interests.
Sustained Support Services	Services offered throughout the student journey that are intentionally designed to address academic and personal needs of students and provide a seamless connection to those resources.
Integrated Career Education	Designing curriculum and advising services with an integrated approach to career exploration and development of professional skills that allows for a more purpose-driven and efficient academic journey.
Faculty Engagement & Pedagogy	Structurally embedded opportunities for faculty to engage with students, formally and informally. Design equity-minded pedagogy that is culturally responsive and trauma-informed.
Financial Aid	Identifying opportunities to address student's financial needs by examining policies and procedures that act as barriers to accessing aid, as well as leveraging campus and community resources to meet cost of living and educational expenses.

### Guiding Principles

The Framework and recommendations are informed by a set of *guiding principles* that are a set of high-level aspirations serving to align recommendations and guide the design and implementation of future iterations of the Framework. Institutions across the Commonwealth have unique structures and/or communities they serve, however the guiding principles provide a consistent model for system alignment. In addition, the guiding principles serve as a compass for which decisions can be made to evaluate future student success opportunities with respect to the Framework. These principles were derived with input from the comprehensive stakeholder interviews, focus groups and review sessions. The guiding principles are:

Racially Equitable	Promoting racial equity through the design and implementation of holistic support services using an asset-based approach that support students of color intellectually, mentally, socially, and physically and celebrates the strengths, assets and cultural wealth they bring to the educational experiences and institutions across the Commonwealth. <sup>ii</sup>
Collaborative	Sharing data, best practices, aligning curricula for ease of transfer and resource sharing will create a system dedicated to collective student success.
Data-Informed	Leverage, duplicate and expand upon exemplar institutions with a mature state of data literacy and capabilities. Focus on disaggregated data capture and utilization with sharing of best practices so

	institutions at a lower-level of maturity in this area can accelerate their development.
Flexible	Institutions may differ in the unique communities they serve, organizational structures, and access to resources. Institutions can adopt and move toward a shared framework of support services for student success while also being responsive to community needs, unique cultures and resources through Individualized approaches.
Scalable	Shift from pilot programs and models that serve a limited number of students to intentionally designing programs and services for large scale impact. This includes ensuring resources, infrastructure and processes are in place to scale programs and services that have proven to promote student success.
Sustainable	Designing and implementing holistic support services with long range intentionality and having a plan to provide long-term financial resources, staffing and infrastructure with iterative and continuous improvement as an integral part of any sustained effort.
Student Aligned	Policies, processes and support services must align with the needs and lifestyles of emerging student populations inclusive of students of color, low-income students, post-traditional and part-time students.
Community Integrated	The system and its institutions work with and for their surrounding communities in order to build trust, provide and leverage services to improve student outcomes and offer programs congruent with local labor markets. The institution seeks guidance and support from community leaders during change processes.

## Recommendations

The following set of fifteen recommendations are intended to operationalize the Framework in supporting student success, particularly for students of color and low-income students, within the Massachusetts community colleges and state universities. Many of these recommendations build upon existing and ongoing effort at the DHE and individual campuses.

1	Expand one-stop models of student support to create seamless service delivery with essential student-facing functions of the student experience from matriculation to graduation.
2	Explore utilization of a shared services model for essential support functions that can be institutionally agnostic, such as mental health counseling, academic tutoring for English and math, library and writing support services and career education in order to improve access and efficiency of support services among regional hubs of institutions.
3	Expand peer-to-peer support systems and race-conscious cohort-based programming to foster a sense of connection and belonging to the campus community.
4	Expand single point of contact, case management models, and provide sustained proactive outreach to students via their primary points of contact.
5	Integrate faculty into the support services with early warning systems, shared data, case management meetings, and a combined faculty and professional advising model.
6	Integrate career education and related services into curriculum and early advising while enhancing experiential learning opportunities aimed at career and academic alignment. Work with institutions and students to understand which career development tool(s) are most helpful and could be developed and customized as a shared service.
7	Expand the use of meta-majors to ensure that once career aspirations and academic programs are aligned, a clear curricular pathway with flexible options exists for students.
8	Enhance collaboration, resource sharing, and transfer pathways between institutions by expanding and establishing new regional hubs.
9	Streamline financial aid programs and administration while expanding financial aid resources to meet unmet need to cover total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books, supplies, room and board).
10	Continue to provide and expand upon existing holistic supports for basic need assistance for transportation, housing, food, and childcare in alignment with the recommendations from the Basic Needs Security (BNS) Advisory Committee.
11	Expand co-requisite model for college-level English and math and eliminate the use of standardized tests for assessment and placement. Improve Developmental Education with equity-minded practices in line with the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.
12	Support the intended scaling of Early College programming by building administrative capacity. Use existing and proposed funding to enhance support services with proactive advising and academic support.

13	Evaluate and ensure that equitable system-wide academic and administrative policies and practices are culturally sensitive and responsive.
14	Integrate professional development opportunities into the talent experience of all faculty, staff and administrators that are designed and implemented with an anti-racist, socially just, holistic, and equity-minded lens, focusing on developing cultural competencies and awareness of student success structures.
15	Ensure all campuses have Centers of Teaching and Learning that engage faculty in dialogue and development of culturally responsive and trauma-informed teaching practices. Encourage these campus centers to collaborate across regions or system-wide.

The full Framework document includes a current state assessment relative to each recommendation, detailed action steps for each recommendation divided into DHE/State Implementation Support as well as Campus Action Steps, metrics of success and future state best practices relative to each recommendation.

### **Implementation Pathways**

The Framework recommendations have been grouped into the following five implementation pathways to allow the DHE/State and campuses to prioritize recommendations based on a broader strategic theme that may align and/or resonate more with existing effort and resources at the campus level.

It should be noted that the pathways are not meant to be choices that limit the implementation of the Framework, as all of the pathways are important to successfully implement the Framework. However, time and resources may dictate that a limited set of pathways are pursued first, and subsequent pathways pursued thereafter. The five implementation pathways are listed below, followed by a table with indicators for alignment between the recommendations and each of those pathways.

- A. *Create a Data Enhanced Student Success Ecosystem* - Prioritizes implementing recommendations that leverage data collection and reporting, as well as builds institutional capacities and system capabilities.
- B. *Cultivate Campus Climate & Belonging* - Prioritizes implementing recommendations with an intentional focus on those that will enhance the campus climate and improve students' sense of belonging.
- C. *Focus on Talent & Professional Development* - Prioritizes implementing recommendations connected to improving hiring practices and professional development to improve student success.
- D. *Expand Access and Accelerate Early Momentum* - Prioritizes implementing recommendations that promote access and services and programs that foster academic momentum and likelihood for completion.
- E. *Strengthen Institutional Connections with Communities* - Prioritizes implementing recommendations focused on fostering partnerships and realize the interdependence of campuses and their communities.

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
Recommendation	Create a Data Enhanced Student Success Ecosystem	Cultivate Campus Climate & Belonging	Focus on Talent & Professional Development	Expand Access and Accelerate Early Momentum	Strengthen Institutional Connections with Communities
1: One-Stop	✓	✓			
2: Shared Services					✓
3: Peer & Cohort		✓			✓
4: Case Management	✓	✓			
5: Integrate Faculty	✓		✓		
6: Career Education			✓	✓	✓
7: Meta-Majors				✓	✓
8: Regional Hubs	✓	✓		✓	✓
9: Financial Aid		✓		✓	✓
10: Basic Needs		✓		✓	✓
11: Co-Requisite				✓	
12: Early College	✓			✓	✓
13: Policies & Practices	✓	✓	✓		
14: Professional Development		✓	✓		
15: Teaching & Learning		✓	✓		

The full Framework document includes a maturity scale for each of the implementation pathways that enables campuses to conduct a self-assessment regarding where they are in the scale of maturity and should inspire conversations around how to advance along that scale.

## Closing

Much work has already been done throughout the Commonwealth to expand educational opportunities and increasing student success, persistence and completion for all students, particularly students of color. The worthy and aggressive goals of the Equity Agenda require bold and well-coordinated effort and support of students in scalable and sustainable ways. Through the design and implementation of the Strategic Framework for Support Services for Student Success the DHE seeks to increase graduation rates at all fifteen public community colleges and the nine state universities for racially minoritized and low-income students. The Framework components, recommendations and implementation pathways are designed to provide the community colleges and state universities with a cache of innovative strategies and inclusive support services to execute comprehensive, evidence-based services and programs with proven effectiveness in promoting student success guided by common principles and state support. The Framework was intentionally designed to align with the DHE Equity Agenda and Strategic Plan for Racial Equity, which are urgent priorities that aim to eliminate racial disparities in the Massachusetts public higher education system and drive access, persistence and success for students of color.

The support of the BHE is vital to advancing the adoption and implementation of the Framework and its recommendations. The BHE will support the DHE and individual institutions in their work to actualize, improve and expand support services to promote the Commonwealth’s educational access and attainment goals. The progress and success of this initiative must be an iterative, collaborative, and inclusive process that keeps the students at the center and continues to be a priority for the BHE, DHE, EOE and individual campuses.



<sup>i</sup> Draft of Massachusetts Department of Higher Education Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. February 25, 2022

<sup>ii</sup> The New Undergraduate Experience: A Vision for Dismantling Barriers, Recognizing Students' Cultural Wealth, and Achieving Racial Equity in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts. January 14, 2022.