



COP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education

Middlesex Community College
May 1, 2018

Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education, on behalf of the Council of Presidents, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

Bargaining:

I am happy to report that management and the unions have come to an agreement with the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) and the Administrative Professionals Association (APA) on our collectively bargained contracts.

Ratification votes are scheduled in the coming weeks for both units. As you know, we are still in negotiation with the state-wide AFSCME union leaders for a three year successor agreement. DGCE negotiations have reached impasse, and is headed for mediation and fact finding.

The state-wide MSCA bargaining units met last week and invited me to offer welcoming remarks, and offered me an opportunity to present the public higher education messaging and advocacy document Ellen and I presented to the board in January.

Rowan University:

Last month, at the suggestion of President Gentile from North Shore Community, President Keenan and I representing the state universities, along with Presidents Kennedy and Gentile representing the community colleges, led a team from the Massachusetts state universities and community colleges to Rowan University in New Jersey.

Rowan University is a public comprehensive four-year university located in southern New Jersey near Philadelphia. In 2014, Rowan University entered into a "Premier Partnership" with Gloucester Community College which is located approximately seven miles away from Rowan. As part of this agreement, Gloucester Community College was renamed Rowan College Gloucester County, but remained as a separate and independent campus.

As part of this new partnership, Rowan College Gloucester County students were afforded the opportunity for conditional acceptance to Rowan University; joint counseling and advising; waived transfer and application fees; and discounts on tuition for certain programs. In 2015, this premier partnership was extended to Burlington County Community College, and like Gloucester, retained its independent autonomy.

As a result of this partnership, Rowan has seen full-time undergraduate enrollment grow by 25 percent, with much of that growth attributed to the “Premier Partnerships” while all three colleges remaining separate and independent. My fellow presidents and I were impressed by the level of integration between the community colleges and the Rowan University. It is important to point out that this partnership was developed organically, not through a forced state mandate, but through the dedicated partnership among the campuses. Due to the regional importance of each of those institutions, retaining New Jersey students is important for the regional economy in that part of New Jersey.

Like Massachusetts, New Jersey has a similar decentralized system of public higher education, and demographic trends in K-12 that cause alarm for the future grown. Looking at the enrollment challenges based upon demographics here in Massachusetts, fostering partnerships like the one we saw at Rowan University in New Jersey will be essential to growing the number of college graduates in this current demographic environment.

I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the collaborative work already underway among our 29 public college, such as 2 + 2 programs, 3 + 2 programs with the Commonwealth’s public law school, the Commonwealth Commitment, and ASN to BSN articulation agreements for our public nursing students, just to name a few.

Consolidation:

The question of the size and scope of our decentralized public higher education system in Massachusetts has once again entered into the public debate. Many of you may have seen State Representative Jay Kaufman’s letter to the editor in last Friday’s Boston Globe. What the Representative did not mention in his op-ed is the shortage of educated workers in the Commonwealth, particularly in our Gateway Cities located outside of Boston. Each of our public colleges and universities have strong connections with the regional economies of Massachusetts, and are located in, or have developed strong partnerships with, one or more of our Commonwealth’s Gateway Cities.

With 70 percent of Massachusetts high school graduates attending one of our 29 public colleges, and an overwhelming majority of our graduates staying, working and contributing to the economy here in Massachusetts, the state should not be looking to disinvest or consolidate campus, they should increase investments so our public colleges can expand opportunities for all students.

Most public higher education students don't have the luxury of attending college far from home or across state lines. A majority of our public higher ed students do not live on campus, as they have jobs and family responsibilities to attend to. Because our campuses are located in every corner of the Commonwealth, closing or consolidating campuses will only make it harder for our Massachusetts students, particularly, African-American, Latino and low-income students, to earn a degree.

In addition, in light of the ongoing debate in Connecticut with the forced consolidation of the 12 community college campuses and the Connecticut State University system, decisions of this magnitude cannot be made without looking towards our regional accrediting agency. As you may have heard, NEASC, upon review of the Connecticut consolidation plan, determined that it was "not realistic". Significant changes to public higher education institutions cannot be made in a vacuum.

Meeting Workforce Needs:

The State Universities are dedicated to meeting regional economic needs by partnering with businesses and local governments and equipping our students with the strong analytical, technological and communications skills that surveys demonstrate are in demand by CEOs across industries. They are also dedicated to enriching the quality of life of our communities by offering stimulating cultural and intellectual experiences and supporting local schools and other organizations. Each of the State Universities are important to the economic vitality of the regions where they are located.

As the Massachusetts economy grows, the State Universities continue to find ways to support the ever-changing workforce needs. The future growth of the Massachusetts' economy is tied to the expansion of certain critical industries, including science, high technology, biotechnology, healthcare, business and finance, education and the creative economy. The innovation economy in Massachusetts is fueled by the expansion of these industries and will be critically dependent on the availability of workers with the right skills, knowledge and experience.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to present the state university segmental report to you this morning. I am happy to answer any questions.