



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Delivered by David Podell, President, MassBay Community College
Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

October 19, 2021

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago, and members of the Board.

First, I want to give a warm welcome to Dr. Rick Hopper, Interim President of Greenfield Community College. He takes over for Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernández who departed in August. We offer our best wishes to Dr. Salomon-Fernández for her work at Greenfield and wish her well in her next endeavors.

I'd also like to welcome our three newest community college Presidents: Ray DiPasquale at Massasoit, Phil Sisson at Middlesex, and Dr. Bill Heineman at North Shore.

Fall semester is well underway on our campuses. As you all know, the pandemic has created challenges for our community college students, whose lives, jobs, and studies have been disproportionately impacted. Please bear in mind that many of our students have multiple responsibilities: some are parents, most are working one or more jobs. Each community colleges continues to make sure those students are being supported to the extent possible. Some have been forced to choose between school and working to pay the rent and feed their families. We are concerned about those who opted not to come to or return to community college because their lives were too disrupted by COVID.

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All of our colleges are offering a variety of course modalities this fall, something that we expect to continue into spring and beyond. We are listening to the students and planning accordingly, while also doing our best to maintain a safe learning environment.

Toward that end, last month, we announced last month a vaccine mandate at our 15 community colleges which will go into effect this January. All employees must be vaccinated; students who wish to access campus for any reason must also be vaccinated. Our colleges have hosted vaccine clinics, provided information on accessing vaccines, and supported the Commonwealth's efforts to boost our vaccination rates.

I'm also excited to provide an update on the work being done on our campuses through the SUCCESS Fund. I first want to thank the DHE and Commissioner Santiago for their work in facilitating this project. Our campus leaders have done an outstanding job in an extremely tight time frame to build programs out that we feel will make a significant impact on student success outcomes for historically underrepresented student groups. I am grateful to my colleagues Lane Glenn at Northern Essex who is serving as Chair of the SUCCESS Steering Committee, and to Phil Sisson at Middlesex who is taking the lead on establishing short- and long-term statewide professional development activities for the SUCCESS network.

To build on the good work that's already being done, we are excited to announce that we've hired Lutful Khan to serve as the Senior Project Director of SUCCESS. He comes to us with extensive experience at CUNY. Lutful started yesterday, and we welcome him to our system as he leads this important work.

Additionally, I am pleased to note that all fifteen presidents and all fifteen of our Board Chairs submitted testimony in support of legislation establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative. With 42 to 56% of community college students in Massachusetts reporting food insecurity, we believe that this legislation would provide additional supports to our institutions that are already doing amazing work to support our students' basic needs.

I would be remiss if I didn't make mention of America's College Promise proposal for free community college. We are encouraged that conversations are happening around the value of community colleges, and are greatly supportive of the concept of free community college – it is long overdue that everyone understands the opportunities community colleges provide and their positive impact on our students. That said, the legislation as written calls for implementing a median tuition rate. In states where the average tuition and fees exceed that rate, such as Massachusetts, states would be required to increase their contribution to meet the free-tuition obligation. In Massachusetts, that would represent a 17% increase.

Again, we are very excited at the idea of a free community college proposal and look forward to continued conversations about how the proposal can benefit everyone.

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Finally, a few words on STEM: you may be surprised by the depth of the community colleges' commitment to STEM. The STEM Starter Academy, supported by the state, with its focus on recruitment of underrepresented students and support of them, has been a bedrock on which student success in STEM rests. At MassBay, our most outstanding STEM programs are biotech, in which we have had 23 students receive the prestigious Goldwater Scholarships, in which our specialty is in plant-based treatment of disease, and cybersecurity: MassBay has the state's first and only A.S. Degree in Cybersecurity, and at any one time we have 100 students in our certificate and associate degree programs in cybersecurity. The CyberSecurity program recently received a \$600,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to create a Center for Cybersecurity Education.

Thank you for your time today, and for your support of public higher education in Massachusetts.

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