

## BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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October 20, 2020

10:00 a.m.

### Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) was held virtually on Tuesday, October 20, 2020 on the web-conference platform Zoom.

#### **The following Board Members were present:**

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Sheila Harrity, Vice Chair

Ann Christensen

Veronica Conforme

Alex Cortez

Patty Eppinger

Paul Mattera

JD La Rock

Bob LePage, Designee for Secretary of EOE

Judy Pagliuca

Mike O'Brien

Paul Toner

Charles Bianchi, Student Member, [Community College segment](#) ~~State University segment~~

Jorgo Gushi, non-voting Student Advisor, [State University segment](#)

~~Community College segment~~ Kush Patel, non-voting Student Advisor, UMASS segment

Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

#### **The following Board Members were absent:**

None

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. and announced that this meeting is being held remotely and in accordance with Governor Baker's recent Executive Order which suspended certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law for the purpose of authorizing public bodies to allow remote participation by all members while the state of emergency is in effect. Chair Gabrieli announced that Board members and select Department of Higher Education (DHE or “the Department”) staff would be participating remotely, via Zoom; that the meeting is being livestreamed and recorded; and that members of the public who signed up for public comment would be allowed to join the Zoom meeting to provide comment. DHE Chief of Staff,

Elena Quiroz-Livanis, then took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

## II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair Gabrieli reported that there were three requests to address the Board during the public participation period and asked that remarks be kept to three minutes. Chair Gabrieli then welcomed Massachusetts Inspector General Glenn Cunha who is appearing before the Board to offer comment and support of the Board's new trustee training guidelines and framework.

**Inspector General, Glenn Cunha** thanked the Board and the Department for the opportunity to participate today. He referenced the motion and presentation on the agenda regarding the recently passed trustee training law, and thanked Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou and Department staff for their partnership on this project. He provided the Board with background information, stating that law was very important to his office, and that it arose out of their investigation into the former Westfield State University President Dobelle. His office investigated and found several inappropriate expenditures made by President Dobelle and authorized by the Westfield State board, including extravagant international travel unrelated to public business on taxpayer money. Inspector General Cunha continued, indicating that after a detailed investigation his office put out a public report, in which it was determined that the local board did not exercise appropriate supervision and oversight over the president, basically "rubber stamping" expenditure requests without engaging in appropriate inquiry. From that experience, his office initiated a bill in 2014 which sought to mandate trustee training; that bill was finally enacted in November 2019. In the interim, his office worked with Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou and the Department to offer voluntary professional development opportunities to trustees on topics that included: fraud prevention, fiduciary duty, public finance, open meeting law, public meeting law, and public records law. Although participation was higher than expected, reach was limited, and the new law will address that by making these trainings mandatory. Inspector General Cunha concluded by stating that his office was supportive of the guidelines and the framework that is before the Board for approval today. He confirmed that his office worked with the Department to develop the training curriculum referenced in the guidelines, as required under the new law, and he thanked the Department and the Board for their support.

Next, **Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) Vice President Maria Hegbloom** offered public comment on the need for increased advocacy in public higher education funding in our state. Ms. Hegbloom identified several issues caused by the pandemic to which higher education has had to adapt—such as the need to offer remote (Zoom) classrooms and online student services, and figuring out how to keep our students safe, learning and moving forward toward their goals during this turbulent time. Ms. Hegbloom also identified several issues that were not caused by the pandemic but were either illuminated or exacerbated by COVID-19—including racial inequalities, growing income inequality, and increasing student debt. She stated that these problems "cannot be fixed with face masks or social distancing," but suggested that access to debt-free, high quality public higher education, and adequately funding our public colleges and universities are the keys to addressing many of the inequalities that plague our state.

Ms. Hegbloom added that the equity agenda declared by the Department is commendable, but without a real commitment to increasing the funding to our public colleges and universities, it will only ever be a placebo. A declaration of values does not feed a family, pay for Wi-Fi, and cover the cost of maintaining public buildings or buy lab equipment. They do not cover the rising cost of tuition and fees, childcare or rent. We know that access to debt free public higher education carries with it opportunities for economic and social mobility, intellectual growth and civic engagement. Ms. Hegbloom concluded by asking the Board to stand with public educators and public administrators across the state- along with students, families and all of those committed to a more equitable future for Massachusetts-- and to push elected officials to fund the public colleges and universities that our Commonwealth deserves.

**Max Page, Vice President of MA Teachers Association (MTA)** spoke next. He stated that the MTA represents 117,000 educators, including 18,000 staff and faculty of our 29 colleges and universities. He began by recognizing the faculty, administrators and staff-- including the librarian and dorm staff, the health care workers, lab managers, and food service personnel-- who are the bedrock of the public higher education system, and thanking them for heroic work to maintain the safety of learning on our campuses during the COVID-19 crisis. Mr. Page described the Board as a "peoples board" and offered his suggestions and expectations of what it means to be a peoples board. Within that context, Mr. Page's suggested that the Board should have met over the summer to engage in legislative advocacy; questioned whether the Board should have hired an outside firm to assess the financial direction of public colleges and universities, particularly if such analyses were to be used to demand furloughs, layoffs and program cuts; suggested that the Board should engage in legislative advocacy; and suggested the Board should support institutions such as Salem State to help ensure they are adequately funded to support its students, staff and faculty. Mr. Page emphasized the need for legislative advocacy, asking the Board to support the passage of the Cherish Act. He said that that there is no Equity Agenda without achieving debt free public higher education, and fair work places for adjuncts and the rest of our staff. Mr. Page stated that the MTA membership was pleased that Governor Baker responded to member activism and proposed a level funding budget, which is the bare minimum. He stated that their legislative advocacy continues and they are sending thousands of letters to legislators to make public higher education a top priority in this budget.

### **III. WELCOME**

### **IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion to accept minutes of the last Board meeting, which was held on June 22, 2020. The motion was duly moved and seconded; with no discussion the motion proceeded to a roll call vote and passed as follows:

- Charles Bianchi – Abstain
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme– No vote<sup>i</sup>

- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

## **V. REMARKS & REPORTS**

### **A. Chairman's Remarks**

Chair Gabrieli commended the Community Colleges and State Universities, local boards, staff, faculty and everyone involved who worked towards starting the academic year successfully during a period of tremendous uncertainty. He thanked the Commissioner and Department staff for continuing to operate seamlessly in a virtual environment and shared how impressed and grateful he was.

Chair Gabrieli spoke about the listening tour he organized to hear directly from Board members about their reflections on Board service, structure, and strategy. He said that he and the Commissioner had the opportunity to schedule three out of the four meetings and that they will soon meet with student members to hear directly from them. Chair Gabrieli said he learned a lot from the conversations and was appreciative of Board members taking the time to share their thoughts. Questions that were raised during the listening tour focused on how the Board acts in a time of both acute and chronic challenges to the public higher education system. He continued that many of the members of the Board had questions about the ultimate authority they held and how to speak to the strategic dimension of how public higher education can meet its important goals in this state. The existence of the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Board and local institutional boards does not abdicate the BHE's responsibility to advance specific initiatives that create system authenticity. Chair Gabrieli commented that he and the Commissioner have committed to returning to the Board with proposals and structures that reflect the conversations during the listening tour. One immediate response was that for the first time, Department staff prerecorded presentations on motions in order to allow for more discussion time during the meeting.

Chair Gabrieli also thanked everyone involved with efforts to review the fiscal health of public institutions, including Commissioner Santiago, Deputy Commissioner Tom Simard, the campuses, and EY-Parthenon. He remarked that while this particular effort had taken a lot of time, good work continues in many other areas. As a Board, our powers are much greater when they are pursued in partnership. Chair Gabrieli concluded that standing alone we are limited in reach, but our working together with state institutions enables a stronger stand for public higher education in Massachusetts.

## **B. Commissioner's Remarks**

Commissioner Santiago acknowledged the presidents and representatives from the state university and community college executive offices in attendance. He stated that much had occurred since the last meeting and he hoped his recent bi-weekly briefs had been informative and useful. He shared his willingness to keep the Board apprised of the Department's work through this vehicle should they desire the bi-weekly briefings to continue. He shared how he marveled at the progress the staff in the Department had made in such extraordinary advances in different areas under very challenging circumstances.

Commissioner Santiago commented on the modification to today's Board meeting presentations, which included pre-recorded videos, and said he hopes to continue to provide the information needed to allow members to make informed decisions. The goal is to utilize meeting time to focus on the larger strategic issues. He concluded that all had received the video materials and written documents and how it is incumbent upon members of the Board to review the materials beforehand as it makes it easier in terms of facilitating conversations. He added that campus representatives will be available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Santiago shared decisions made pursuant to his summer authority, as delegated by the Board. All decisions were made in consultation with Chair Gabrieli, as required. The summer action included two Commonwealth Honors Program approvals at Bridgewater State University and Fitchburg State University. The DHE revoked degree granting authority from 17 institutions who either ceased operation or no longer needed BHE authorization because of SARA. He also approved Bristol Community College's mission statement, and a minor amendment to the State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement in light of new regulations. In addition, he approved letters of intent for the following degree programs: a Master's of Liberal Studies at Salem State University; an Associate of Science in Computer Science at Mount Wachusett Community College; and a Master's of Art and Spiritual Ordination at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Changes were also made to the Community College and State University Affirmative Action/ Equal Opportunity plans, as required by the U.S. Department of Education's new Title IX regulations which went into effect on August 14, 2020. The DHE worked with counsel for the Community Colleges and the State Universities to ensure appropriate and timely revisions to those plans. Finally, a series of Massachusetts State Colleges Building Authority (MSCBA) rent certificate and budget amendments were approved.

The Commissioner provided an update regarding institutional response to COVID-19. In general, the higher education institutions responded well to the semester's reopening. This appraisal applies to both the national and local college context. He observed that institutions' reopening plans that are aligned with guidelines backed by scientific evidence seem to be progressing well, and with the exception to some off-campus activities the reopenings have been secure for their students. Massachusetts Community Colleges have moved to fully remote learning, with the exception of a minimal number of classes, such as labs and clinics, which are

taught in person. State Universities have repopulated their residence halls and classrooms cautiously and deliberately to reduce density while allowing for limited in-person instruction. Each of the UMass campuses has plans in place based on local needs and conditions. Independent institutions reflect a broad range of plans ranging from fully remote to repopulation and in-person approaches. Commissioner Santiago added that robust testing has been an essential component of all reopening plans and it is encouraging to see that positive COVID-19 rates have been low. He shared that robust communication, information sharing, and coordination have helped, and acknowledged the Executive Office of Education and the Department of Public Health in their efforts. He said that all institutions are now engaging in planning for the spring semester. The DHE will continue to plan for the essentials and conditions, as warranted.

### **C. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education's (EOE) Remarks**

EOE Secretary Peyser's designee for today's Board meeting, Bob LePage, who serves as EOE's Assistant Secretary for Career Education, offered remarks on behalf of the Secretary. He stated that the quality and commitment of higher education in responding to COVID-19 and supporting students during this difficult time was impressive. EOE Secretary Designee LePage shared that October 19 marked the beginning of STEM Week. He invited others to inform both current and future students about the opportunities in the Commonwealth and recognize the work that our schools and institutions of higher education do in STEM to fuel the state's economy. He concluded that the collaboration with industry is what separates us from other states in building high quality pathways for the success of students. Finally, he reiterated support of STEM week and advocating for students in the Commonwealth about the great opportunities available.

### **D. Report from Presidents**

#### Community College Segmental Report

*For a copy of President Mabry's full remarks, please see:*

<https://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/documents/2020-06-23%20Report%20from%20CC%20Presidents.pdf>

Middlesex Community College President James Mabry thanked Chair Gabrieli, the Board, Commissioner Santiago, and DHE staff for the opportunity to share updates on behalf of the Massachusetts Community Colleges. President Mabry stated the 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges currently serve almost 136,000 students a year in credit and non-credit courses which represents almost half of all undergraduate students in public higher education. Community Colleges serve diverse cities and towns across the Commonwealth and without them, large numbers of low-income, first generation, and students of color would not have access to higher education and the skills they need to help power the economy.

He stated that in this era of high unemployment and uncertainty, the Community Colleges' role

is even more essential for students seeking affordable high-quality instruction that provides clear pathways to jobs and careers. From short-term credentials that will get them quickly into the workforce or critical courses that transfer to a university, Community Colleges provide a local pathway to greater success. He also shared that the colleges serve as community hubs, integral to the fabric of regions and localities throughout Massachusetts. President Mabry recognized that the Massachusetts economy runs on brain power, and to meet the needs of the future, residents of the Commonwealth will need to increase access to postsecondary education. To meet this vision of equity and long-term economic development, he stated the Commonwealth must realize how integral the Community Colleges are to providing the most affordable high-quality instruction, especially for historically underrepresented student populations. Using the equity lens to focus efforts and investment will show that the greatest impact on the economic health of our state with the greatest return on investment for students comes through investing in public education at all levels.

He stated the COVID-19 pandemic has led the Community College presidents to collaborate more than ever. Throughout the spring and early summer, they met, online, five days a week and now meet virtually on a weekly basis. It has helped them to unite and align their efforts.

Massachusetts STEM Week will be celebrated by showcasing the pivotal role the Community Colleges play in STEM education. The STEM Starter Academies have been tremendously successful programs, serving thousands of students each year, building awareness for STEM careers, closing achievement gaps, and almost doubling student success rates.

President Mabry also thanked the Baker Administration for recent dispersal of funds through the Governor's discretionary Fund. The federal CARES Act will provide critically needed investments to support COVID-19 related expenses as well as emergency financial aid resources for many needy students. And last week, the Governor's revised FY21 Budget recommendation was an important step toward a sound and stable budget that our public institutions will depend on. Even with "level-funding," colleges are still facing a fiscal crunch. Community Colleges have always done an incredible job of providing a high-quality education with the most affordable price tag in the state; all while operating on shoestring budgets that are the result of historic underfunding. Those resources are laser-focused on the teaching, learning, and economic development that is needed to support the state and its residents. President Mabry concluded by thanking everyone for the opportunity to support public higher education in Massachusetts.

#### State University Segmental Report

*For a copy of President Birge's full remarks, please see:*

<https://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/documents/2020-10-20%20Report%20from%20SU%20Presidents.pdf>

President James Birge acknowledged the Commissioner, Chair Gabrieli, and members of the Board. He thanked the Department, Secretary Peyser, colleagues at the Community Colleges,

UMass and at AICUM, for all working together with the State Universities to manage through the COVID crisis.

He stated that later during the meeting, Board members will hear a report by EY-Parthenon on the financial monitoring project underway across both the State Universities and Community Colleges. Presidents Maloney and Clark will be participating in that discussion. Through a collaborative effort and with the support of this Board and the Department, our campuses have been working with EY-Parthenon on a systematic financial monitoring project to analyze and advise on key indicators of fiscal health; to assess options for our campuses to manage through the COVID pandemic crisis, both in the short term as well as assessing more long term strategies; and to make recommendations to strengthen and streamline fiscal reporting and management processes across the twenty-four member campus system.

President Birge commended the Board on its efforts to improve Board operations through a series of discussions about logistics and best practices for high performing public boards. The State Universities see great value in the committee structure of the Board of Higher Education. Higher Education is a creature of process, of an iterative process, that results in better decision-making. Eliminating committee meetings undermines the deliberative process of decision-making that is informed by collaboration between the higher education professionals on our campuses and at the DHE. As the Board considers revising its structure and operations to maximize its impact on higher education in the Commonwealth, the State Universities ask that the BHE return to the committee process that is designed to contribute to inclusive, informed, and effective policy making.

President Birge then thanked the Board, Commissioner Santiago, and Secretary Peyser for their advocacy as Governor Baker developed his revised FY21 budget recommendations. Governor Baker prioritized higher education in his budget and level funded most higher education accounts, including our campus line items. The Governor's leadership on recommending level funding of our state appropriations will help us fulfill our mission to offer pathways to high-quality post-secondary educational opportunities to our Commonwealth's residents.

The State Universities Council of Presidents has partnered with the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) on a joint advocacy strategy. The MSCA and, the faculty they represent, have asked our campus boards to adopt an advocacy resolution articulating the critical need to support our State Universities. Our boards fully support this resolution and have either adopted or are in the process of adopting it. I take this opportunity to submit for the record, a copy of the MSCA Faculty Union resolution, and ask the Board to consider joining the State Universities in their advocacy.

On behalf of the entire State University system, President Birge stated their opposition to the divisive, hate filled, and discriminatory Executive Order on Race and Sex Stereotyping, signed by President Trump, intended to strip away protections against race, gender, sexual preference and religious bias. I submit for the record a letter from the American Association of State Colleges and

Universities that our council fully endorses. We ask this Board to consider publicly denouncing this destructive Executive Order.

President Birge shared that the nine-member State University campuses have operationalized COVID safety protocols through their individual campus COVID plans. The State Universities have administered nearly 30,000 tests and the average positivity rate of .16%. He said this is a testament to the work the segment is doing to educate students on COVID prevention, and their commitment to enforcing state health and safety guidelines, through campus agreements, student conduct policies and the like, to help preserve the health of the Commonwealth

At the conclusion of remarks from the Commissioner's Council of Presidents, Chair Gabrieli asked if Board members had any questions or comments. Segmental Advisor Jorgo Gushi commented on President Mabry's statements concerning Community Colleges and thanked him for reminding the Board that Community Colleges are the local pathway to greater success and is the core of the workforce.

Board Member Judy Pagliuca thanked the presidents and acknowledged the expressed frustration with Board members' limited opportunities to participate in advocacy for higher education and expressed her desire to learn more about what she and the Board can do during these fiscally tight times. Board Member Judy Pagliuca also expressed concern about student mental health, and asked what the Board or the Department could do in this area. Presidents Birge and Mabry shared the types of supports currently available to faculty, staff, and students. Commissioner Santiago indicated that he would follow up separately with Board Member Pagliuca on this topic to discuss Department initiatives and involvement.

Board Member Paul Mattera shared that as a member of both the BHE and Salem State Board, he did not believe the Department and its campuses were not doing enough to advocate for additional funding. In prior meetings, the BHE passed resolutions and spending plans urging the legislature to act and to increase public funding for higher education. There has been an extraordinary amount of good work being done to point out the dire financial condition that public higher education is in. We are aware that we cannot balance our budgets by cutting away to prosperity. There is more work to be done, but the campuses and the Board are responsible for advocating about the need for additional funding for public higher education in the Commonwealth.

#### **E. Report from Student Advisory Council**

Student Board Member Charles Bianchi thanked the Commissioner, the Chair and the Board for the opportunity to update them on Student Advisory Council work; he introduced Jorgo Gushi as the Community College Segmental Advisor and Student Advisory Chair, and Kush Patel as the UMass Segmental Advisor and a current student trustee at UMASS Boston. The Student Advisory Council has met twice to discuss the strategic plan for this academic year, the student trustee full-time academic requirement, and continuing the work in support of the Equity

Agenda. Despite the obstacles created by COVID-19, SAC wants to help move the Equity Agenda forward. He then asked Segmental Advisors Gushi and Patel if they had any comments to add.

Student Segmental Advisor Gushi expressed his gratitude to be on the Board in an advisory non-voting capacity representing students enrolled in the 15 Community Colleges. He shared that the Student Advisory Council is striving to ensure the further implementation of the Equity Agenda regardless of the challenges of COVID-19. The biggest equity-related concern is the full-time requirement for student trustees. According to state statute, a student trustee must be a full-time undergraduate student. Over two-thirds of Community College students are part-time, and as such they are excluded from the right to run for the position of the student trustee. Mr. Gushi stated that a disproportionate number part-timers are from diverse backgrounds making this an issue about equity and representation. The SAC is now moving forward and calling upon the legislature to change the statute and allow part-time students to serve on local boards of trustees.

Student Segmental Advisor Kush Patel followed and also expressed his gratitude for able to continue to serve on the Board in this advisory capacity. He commented that UMass has initiated a campaign to increase student voting in partnership with local and national organizations. Segmental Advisor Patel commented on budgeting for higher education and stated that students should not have to worry about whether the state is going to fund their education. During this time of uncertainty, the investment into higher education is more important than ever. He added that students of the Commonwealth and their education need to be the priority. The student trustees will continue to advocate and talk to legislators to make sure that all public higher education institutions are level-funded.

## **VI. MOTIONS**

### List of Documents Used

BHE Motions 21-28 through 21-33

Links to Videos accessible before the meeting:

- [BHE 21-28](#)
- [BHE 21-29 through BHE 21-31](#)
- [BHE 21-32](#)
- [BHE 21-33](#)

Chair Gabrieli proceeded with the next section of the agenda. He commented on the new procedures used for this month's Board meeting, noting that pre-recorded presentations on all motions were made available to Board members before today's meeting. The intention was to inform and facilitate the process. He reviewed how the Board would move through the motions, starting with the four Academic Affairs motions—one letter of intent and three strategic plans—and then turn to the remaining motion on the BHE's trustee training framework, followed by the Early College resolution. He then turned it over to Commissioner Santiago for remarks.

Commissioner Santiago commented on the strategic planning motions, focusing on the process. He noted that members of the strategic planning committee have reviewed those documents and provided Touch Point II feedback. The three strategic plans have been approved by the respective local boards of trustees as well. He highlighted two requirements in the BHE approval guidelines, noting that all strategic plans must exhibit significant participation from the institution’s community, and must speak to system-wide issues. In addition, the guidelines require metrics following performance measurement review and, more recently, we ask campuses to respond to COVID-19 concerns. The Commissioner stated that institutional representatives are available to answer questions.

There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote on the first motion, BHE 21-28 which seeks approval of UMass’ Letter of Intent (LOI) to award the Bachelor of Arts in Digital Media and the authorization of fast-track review under BHE procedures. BHE Motion 21-28 was duly made and seconded, and passed unanimously, as follows:.

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity: Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Secretary Peyser – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

**BHE-21-28: APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL TO AWARD THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN DIGITAL MEDIA AND AUTHORIZATION FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of the University of Massachusetts Lowell to award the Bachelor of Arts in Digital Media and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and authority pursuant to the to make a final determination on degree granting Fast Track review protocol.

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-29: Approval of Bristol Community*

*College's Strategic Plan.* The motion was moved and seconded.

BHE Member Judy Pagliuca commented that although increased enrollment appeared to be the result of most strategic plans, due to contingencies present in a declining enrollment environment, she inquired whether the Board or DHE would be stress-testing any of the assumptions and recommendations that the strategic planning groups are doing at the various intuitions. Commissioner Santiago responded that the DHE approves the plans, but does not review details of the implementation. It entrusts the institutions to implement them along with their local boards. Institutions also do the stress-testing and revise their numbers as circumstances change.

Cape Cod Community College President John Cox shared that the institution had an increase in terms of their credit hours and FTE count for the first time in a decade. The main efforts are being put into retention and completion of current students.

Worcester State University (WSU) President Barry Maloney responded in agreement to the retention and completion efforts of students at WSU being the primary focus. Commissioner Santiago shared that the Strategic Plan guidelines are adjusted frequently and welcomed feedback from the Board for future updates.

There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote on BHE 21-29. The motion, having been duly moved and seconded, was passed with one abstention as follows:

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity - Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Abstain
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

Secretary of Education Designee Bob LePage noted, for the record, that he would be abstaining on the strategic planning motions, as is customary, because under law the plans are forwarded to the Secretary for approval.

**BHE 21-29 APPROVAL OF BRISTOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S STRATEGIC PLAN**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Bristol Community College Strategic Plan and authorizes the Commissioner to forward the same to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-30: Approval of Cape Cod Community College's Strategic Plan*. The motion was moved and seconded. There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion passed with one abstention as follows:

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Abstain
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

**BHE 21-30 APPROVAL OF CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S STRATEGIC PLAN**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Cape Cod Community College Strategic Plan and authorizes the Commissioner to forward the same to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-31: Approval of Worcester State University's Strategic Plan*. The motion was moved and seconded. There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion passed with one abstention as follows:

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Abstain

- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

**BHE 21-31 APPROVAL OF WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Worcester State University Strategic Plan and authorizes the Commissioner to forward the same to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-32: Approval of Trustee Training Implementation Guidelines and Framework*. The motion was moved and seconded. Chair Gabrieli thanked Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou and her team for their time and direction in proceeding with the proposal. He also noted his agreement with the data collection and analysis approach proposed for year 1 implementation for the private higher education trustee training requirements. There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion passed with one abstention as follows:

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity- Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Abstain
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

**BHE 21-32 APPROVAL OF TRUSTEE TRAINING IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES AND FRAMEWORK**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby approves the attached Trustee Training Implementation Guidelines and Framework (Attachment A), which establish minimum expectations and requirements in furtherance of the Commonwealth's trustee training program, as required pursuant to M.G.L. c. 15A, § 45 for members of boards of trustees of public higher education institutions, and as required pursuant to c.

M.G.L. c. 69, § 31B(e) for members  
of boards of trustees for private higher  
education institutions.

The BHE delegates to the Commissioner the authority to move forward with  
implementing the Commonwealth's mandatory trustee training program as  
substantially set forth in the Trustee Training Implementation Guidelines and  
Framework (Attachment A). The Commissioner shall provide periodic  
updates on the status of implementation.

Finally, Chair Gabrieli turned to the last motion on the agenda and asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-33: Resolution on Early College Funding*. The motion was made and duly seconded. BHE Member Judy Pagliuca asked if processes would be in place to ensure there is no adverse selection in terms of the funding. Her understanding is that funding for early access goes to the colleges. If someone who wants to study science which is more expensive due to the labs, are institutions only permitted to offer early access courses that are less expensive or need more funding rather than to offer the full breath of courses available in their college.

Chair Gabrieli responded that the designations made by the staffs of the Department of Higher Education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Executive Office of Education include specific pathways and equitable access requirements. Many of them are STEM oriented and all of the credits are intended to be transferable to colleges as strength of the MASS Transfer program.

There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion passed unanimously as follows:.

- Charles Bianchi – Yes
- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity- Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

**BHE 21-33 RESOLUTION ON EARLY COLLEGE FUNDING**

**VOTED:** In recognition of the progress and initial success of the Early College

Initiative, and consistent with discussions which took place during the September 30, 2020 meeting of the Early College Joint Committee, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) intends to recommend for Fiscal Year 2022 that the Department of Higher Education's Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Program (CDEP) line item (7066-0019) include \$6.4 million for use by institutions of higher education participating in the Early College Initiative to meet the costs of college courses offered to students in designated Early College programs across the Commonwealth. Provided further, that the BHE recognizes that the final CDEP line item may also include expanded funding for other uses such as Dual Enrollment, above and beyond the \$6.4 million allocation for use to support the Early College Initiative.

## VII. DISCUSSION

### A. Update on Evidence Based Policymaking

Chair Gabrieli briefly acknowledged the  [Presentation PowerPoint](#) and [Presentation Video](#) which was made available to Board members prior to the meeting on evidence-based policymaking. He stated that this committee would be in furtherance of the mandate the Board voted to proceed on during its February 2020 meeting (BHE 20-05). A joint meeting with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on this topic is expected to convene in January 2021. Chair Gabrieli then proceeded to the next section of the agenda.

## VIII. PRESENTATIONS

*List of Documents used during the meeting:*

- [Tableau Presentation entitled 2020 Enrollment at Massachusetts Public Colleges and Universities: A Report from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, October 20, 2020](#)
- [Massachusetts Public Higher Education Financial Assessment Project](#) (PowerPoint)

### A. Preliminary Report on Massachusetts Public College and University Enrollment

Commissioner Santiago introduced the presentation by thanking Jonathan Keller, Sarah Mealey and Mario Delci for their work on the enrollment report. He stated that this is an annual reporting process, which includes a preliminary enrollment report at the October Board meeting with the latest enrollment information on the MA campuses. The Commissioner observed that students of color were more likely to have changed their plans due to issues surrounding COVID-19.

Senior Associate Commissioner Jonathan Keller opened his presentation by thanking Chair Gabrieli, Commissioner Santiago and the Board. He provided an overview of the data concerning the 25-year trend in year-to-year enrollment changes from one fall to the next fall. He stated the greatest year-to-year change occurred in the most recent year, 2020. It is

important to notice that there have been ongoing enrollment declines for the past several years that are primarily associated with demographic shifts in the Commonwealth's population. However, the most recent and unprecedented enrollment decline suggests a strong impact from the current COVID-19 pandemic. He continued by providing a segmental level view, which showed the greatest volatility in Community College enrollment trends. Community Colleges also appeared to have the most significant impact from the pandemic on enrollments, which were at the at the lowest reported level in the past 25 years.

State Universities had a less significant downturn in enrollments. For the UMass campuses (Amherst, Boston, Lowell), enrollments remained at or near the highest enrollment levels ever, with UMass Dartmouth being the exception. He shared that campuses were surveyed to provide their explanation on enrollment due to the impact of COVID-19. The most commonly mentioned reason was student personal finances, housing and food insecurity. Others included frustration with a lack of student life, unstable internet resources, dissatisfaction with distance learning, childcare and decisions to set aside enrollment until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Keller commented how institutions were losing lower income students and students of color due to the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities. He concluded that in turn it would have a significant impact on the Equity Agenda, while also noting the long-term impact on public higher education.

#### **B. Massachusetts Public Higher Education Financial Assessment Project**

*The presentation for the meeting can be viewed here:*

<https://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/documents/2020-10-20%20MA%20Public%20HigherEd%20Financial%20Health%20Assesment.pdf>

The Commissioner introduced the next topic, and the presenter, Mr. Haven Ladd from EY-Parthenon. Mr. Ladd thanked Jonathan Keller and his team for setting the stage on enrollment. He also thanked all the CFOs and Presidents of the Community Colleges and State Universities for their collaboration in the project. Mr. Ladd stated that the underlying purpose of the presentation is to discuss the impact of enrollment on the financial health on State Universities and Community Colleges.

At the outset, he noted that since a full-time equivalent basis is an easier direct translation into revenue as a metric, numbers are shown on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis as opposed to a head count basis. Next, he provided an overview of three areas to be discussed: 1) Recent Massachusetts Higher Education Context: National enrollment and headcount based on clearinghouse data; 2) Updated FY21 Observation: Implications on the financial health on Community Colleges and State Universities; 3) Next Steps: the next steps for the EY-Parthenon project moving forward.

Mr. Ladd commented that based on the data shared, 10 Community Colleges and 4 State Universities are at their 25 year low in terms of enrollment. Many are down in both first-time

degree seekers and in some cases full-time enrollment. However, the financial health of these institutions in aggregate is better in part due their summer enrollment. He shared the overall demographics by region for the Commonwealth, the Northeast and the United States and concluded that in aggregate, higher education will experience a 7% decline between FY21 and FY30 in the number of high school graduates. Overall COVID-19 has placed increased pressure on enrollment and the financial health of institutions. Campuses have counteracted these pressures by proactively implementing spending solutions and shifting some of the burden to students by increasing tuition & fees. When the effects of COVID-19 were placed into context in terms of institutional responses, all displayed a financial impact.

Mr. Ladd shared that majority of the Community Colleges have partially opened their campuses for lab requirements, with most remote learning for other courses through the spring. All State Universities have opened dormitories, but at reduced density. He noted the hybrid model utilized by Community Colleges resulted in 5% in-person learning, as compared to the approximately 15-25% in-person learning at the State Universities for the Fall term. COVID testing is being conducted at both the Community Colleges and the State Universities in accordance with public health guidance. He also noted additional pressures and constraints on adult students with school age children who also have remote learning needs, combined with limited childcare options, the lack of adequate broadband access, and persistent public health concerns.

Mr. Ladd categorized how undergraduate enrollment has declined from a national perspective as of October 15, 2020 compared to October 15, 2019. In aggregate undergraduate 2-year public college enrollment is down 9.4%, while enrollment for first time degree seekers at 2-year public colleges is down by 23%. Enrollment for first time degree seekers at 4-year colleges is down 1.4% nationwide and down by 14% for first time degree seekers. UMASS is not included in the results. He stated the age group of 30+ represented the greatest decline in enrollment at public 2-year colleges reaching 30%. Many of the students face financial pressures or the challenges of adequate childcare for school aged children being taught remotely. The age group of 21-24 represented the greatest decline in enrollment at 4-year colleges reaching 40%. Many of the students have either deferred enrollment or have decided to drop out altogether.

Mr. Ladd proceeded to share about the key indicators of fiscal health on a FTE (Full-time enrollment) basis. He stated the FY21 aggregate decline in FTE is down 10.8% for Community Colleges. State Universities are down 7.3%. The estimates are based on how many students have shown up as of October 15, 2020 and the expectations of how many of these institutions of how many students will continue to show up over the coming months and into the spring semester compared to FY20.

Mr. Ladd returned to the observations made in June FY20 regarding a pessimistic scenario depleting reserves by 50% for both State Universities and Community Colleges. A pessimistic scenario includes a significant decline in enrollment, which has largely played out as of October FY21. A substantial decline in state appropriations is also included, but appropriations have yet

to be finalized as of October FY20. The pessimistic scenario did not include changes to the payroll and budget of each institution. As of October, FY20 campuses have taken action to contain costs and manage liquidity in order to proactively manage their fiscal health.

Mr. Ladd shared the FY20 data for Community Colleges and State Universities in terms of undergraduate fall FTE and operating expenses. The 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges display an enrollment of ~45k and an operating budget of ~\$732m. The 9 State Universities display an enrollment of ~34K and an operating budget of ~\$827m. Ladd stated the \$7.3 m is the estimated net cash flow for the Community Colleges system for FY21 as they expected it in June. When they were setting their budget for FY21, they expected there would be a slight positive impact on cash. However between June and October, two substantial negative and two positive things occurred. Ladd stated that on the negative side, in aggregate Community Colleges have reported slightly lower revenues in tuition, grants and fees of \$5.3m. They are planning for state appropriation to be down by \$30m. In planning for FY21, they have implemented a cost savings of \$20m in their budget. They have also implanted a reduction in debt service and capital spending by \$1.7m. The net result of these changes is that relative to the June expected as reported forecast of \$7.3m across the Community College system, they are now looking at a decrease of \$6.3m as of October FY21.

Mr. Ladd outlined a series of scenarios first observed at the June board meeting. He reiterated the broad scenarios included as reported, a base case, a downside case and a pessimistic case. Each scenario entailed moving a number of different levers by including enrollment projections, state appropriations, cost reductions and other external factors. For purposes of this report, Parthenon has chosen to move only the state appropriations lever because budgets are largely set and enrollment is unknown for the spring semester. Based on the data shown, Ladd commented that the aggregate month of liquidity on hand for October 2020 stays relatively flat. Even if state appropriations decline by 5 or 10%, the aggregate number of months of available liquidity at Community Colleges still stays above the 3 month threshold. Ladd concluded that on this level in aggregate Community Colleges look okay.

In the updated analysis, Mr. Ladd noted that all Community Colleges end FY21 with positive liquidity, though some have a <3 month buffer. Mr. Ladd discussed the same scenario by breaking them out by individual institutions. He recapped the June 2020 analysis displaying 5 institutions that would have fallen below the 3 month threshold of liquidity on hand for some to all of the year. As reported in October 2020, there would be 4 institutions that fall below having enough liquidity to be above that 3 month threshold. He concluded that cash shortfalls are typically closer to the beginning of the fiscal year and close to the end of the fiscal year.

With regard to the State Universities, Mr. Ladd indicated that, similar to the Community Colleges observation, the \$31m displayed is the estimated net deficit for the State University system for FY21 as they expected it in June. Residential life and housing has been lower than expected by \$25m. The institutions in aggregate are assuming an \$11m reduction in state appropriations, \$7m reduction in grants and auxiliary revenue and a modest increase in capital

spending of \$6m. Ladd shared the positive sides for the State Universities as being the MSCDA debt restructuring which passed during the summer at \$39.4m this year, Tuition and fee revenue being slightly higher than expected at \$14m and \$9m in budgeted cost savings. He concluded that system wide State Universities would lose \$17.6m in cash compared to \$31m in cash.

Mr. Ladd outlined an analysis of State Universities utilizing a 6 month threshold to depict the aggregate amount of available liquidity. The 6 month threshold is consistent with how much cash those State Universities have generally held in the balance sheet to pay their various bills. It is also reflective of the higher fixed cost structure of State Universities and higher debt. He concluded that in aggregate the State University system stays above the 6 month threshold.

Mr. Ladd discussed the same scenario by breaking them out by individual institutions. He recapped the June 2020 analysis displaying 4 State Universities that would have fallen below the 6 month threshold of liquidity on hand for some to all of the year. As reported in October 2020, there would be 3 State Universities that fall below having enough liquidity to be above that 6 month threshold. He concluded that in aggregate, both State Universities and Community Colleges are fiscally healthy because they have made cost reduction measures throughout the budgeting process. However it does not imply that each institution is equally healthy.

With regard to next steps, Mr. Ladd highlighted the need to work closely with campuses to understand how to manage through potential adverse scenarios and financial challenges. He concluded that the presentation is a preliminary indication of fiscal health for FY21. From the perspective of Parthenon as consultants, it is not as bad as expected. The reason for this is the individual actions of the institutions over course of the summer. Parthenon will continue to work with institutions in higher risk categories that dip below liquidity standards to help identify mitigation plans that work for them individually. It will also work to identify strategies that might be available for all of the institutions to reduce some of their expenditure and increase fiscal resiliency moving forward. He stated that a revised update from further budgetary actions over the course of the fall as well as spring enrollment expectations and state appropriations would be available in December. Lastly, he commented on plans to be developed in conjunction with the DHE on how to continue support of campuses in need of additional financial or budgetary support through FY21 and FY22. Mr. Ladd then turned to Chair Gabrieli for questions.

Chair Gabrieli thanked the campuses for their work done in concert with Jonathan Keller and his team. He commented on EY-Parthenon's analysis as being a great comfort, and provided Governor Baker's budget recommendations are adopted by the legislature, public campuses are well positioned to be fiscally solid this year given the adjustments each has made. He affirmed the Board and Department's commitment based on this work is to address campuses that have the highest risks. He concluded that an additional goal of this work entails working with Deputy Commissioner Tom Simard and a team to monitor institutions proactively on a sustained basis. Chair Gabrieli then turned to the Presidents for their observations, comments or questions.

Bridgewater State University President Fred Clark thanked Chair Gabrieli and the Board for all of the presentations. He emphasized the importance of the Governor's budget, and how even at level funding, deficits remain. As an example, President Clark shared Bridgewater State's deficit for this fiscal year as \$33m. He further stated that level funding does not account for enrollment reductions, residence hall de-densification or COVID-19 costs. However, level funding reduced his fiscal year deficit to \$25m, and his net to \$7.5m. President Clark continued to share how FY22 should be the main focus since State Universities will not be able to lean on the past MSCBA debt restructuring.

Worcester State University President Barry Maloney thanked Commissioner Santiago and the Board for providing tools and strategies toward supporting the long-term fiscal health of public institutions. He stated that the institutions overall are well-run and well-managed. President Maloney also commented on the need for greater technology for both students and faculty. Lastly, he addressed the costs of COVID-19 and necessary funding support as institutions move into FY22.

Berkshire Community College President Ellen Kennedy shared how important it was to see Jonathan Keller's data along with EY-Parthenon's. She commented on the presentations being both sobering and powerful. She also highlighted the importance of the legislature's approval of the Governor's budget. President Kennedy concluded by observing that the financial stewardship in both sectors of public higher education have been critical to ensuring that institutions continue to meet the needs of faculty, students and the communities they serve.

Middlesex Community College President James Mabry thanked Jonathan Keller and his team in working out the enrollment data. He commented that when looking at the 25 year data we must realize that in the middle of the last recession there was a big jump in the increase for Community Colleges. He also stated that Community Colleges will take another one of those recession jumps but it remains unclear if it will occur during this recession. President Mabry concluded that the overall data on school population decline has many local differentials to it. The 25 communities that are served by Middlesex Community College's two campuses barely see any decline through 2030 when looking at the K-12 population. President Mabry concluded that there is no lack of demand and no lack of need for higher education in the Commonwealth. If we are going to serve our students and empower this economy, getting those students back in their education and helping them stay on track to fulfill their dreams, is really our mission.

Chair Gabrieli thanked the Presidents for their reactions and asked Board members if they had any questions or comments.

Board Member LaRock commented that as the Community College segmental representative and Chair of the board at North Shore Community College, he questions what his college is doing in terms of its mission to help the people of Lynn, when in throws of the pandemic the people of Lynn are suffering. Member LaRock challenged the group to focus on educational

impact, mission and relevance to communities that are most impacted by COVID-19 at this time. He stated that academic programs, program formats and institutional arrangements might be a great place to start.

Member Christenson expressed concern on where there will be jobs after the COVID-19 pandemic and how we can help students prepare for that by providing information. She also inquired about whether there are things the Department can do to create interim credentials to help minimize attrition.

Student Segmental Advisor Gushi commented that the data presented provided students with an overview how things appear financially. He stated that as a Board it is important to also focus on how students are impacted. He concluded that students need a supportive structure. Student Segmental Advisor Patel agreed, and emphasized the need to address student mental health to ensure that all students in the Commonwealth are succeeding.

Board Member Pagliuca commented that it would be helpful to understand, identify and address the issues. For example, if it is a childcare issue, there are ways to give a childcare credit?

Chair Gabrieli thanked the Board, EY-Parthenon, Deputy Commissioner Simard and Commissioner Santiago for their continuing work to ensure the fiscal state of the campuses is in sufficient order for their near-term requirements. He stated that from an oversight point of view, the fiscal viability of these campuses need not be a concern. Despite intense dependence on enrollment, campus enrollment has been meaningfully impacted in ways many were concerned about.

## **IX. OTHER BUSINESS**

None

## **X. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Gabrieli adjourned the meeting at 1:21 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Carlos E. Santiago  
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*

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<sup>i</sup> Stepped away briefly at 10:23 am, but returned