



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Higher Education

Commissioner's Spotlight

Board of Higher Education Meeting

May 19 2026

Key Deliverables for 2026 (working list based on Board Priorities)

Financial Aid and Student Success

- Pre-Collegiate Marketing and Recruitment
- Expand GEAR UP Collaboration
- Early College
- HS Graduation Requirements
- SU SUCCESS 2.0

Economic Mobility

- Earnings Metrics and Reporting
- Work-Based Learning

Innovation

- Innovation Regulation
- Adult Learner Re-Engagement
- Innovation Hub

Public Good

- Environmental Scan and Literature Review
- Goal Setting (5 and 18-month)

Today's Agenda

1. Innovation as a Board Priority
2. From Strategy to Capacity
3. Early Execution: Co-operative Education
4. Work Ahead



DHE Team Members Presenting Today



José Luis Santos
Senior Deputy Commissioner



Danielle Rowdy
Chief Innovation Officer

Innovation Priority: Guiding Principles

- **Dedicated Capacity:** create focused innovation unit equipped with resources to execute on the priority and a dedicated team with innovation expertise.
- **System-Focused:** focus on innovation at the systems level that has the potential to address shared priorities and challenges across public higher education institutions.
- **Enabling Policy and Resources:** establishing enabling conditions for future innovation will likely require developing policy and identifying sustainable resources.
- **Pilot and Innovation:** incubate promising approaches by piloting with interested institutions; make decisions to discontinue, adjust, or scale based on ongoing evaluation.
- **Enhance Impact Through Technology:** prioritize technology solutions with potential to meet learner and campus needs more effectively.
- **Expert- and Grassroots-Informed:** innovations will be sourced both from the broader field and its emerging best practices and directly from institutions within the system and segments.

Innovation Priority Timeline



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 28, 2025

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Department of Higher Education Awarded \$2 Million Grant to Launch Higher Education Innovation Hub

Grant from the non-profit Axim Collaborative was announced at UMass Lowell on Friday

LOWELL – The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) announced today that it has been awarded a \$2.1 million grant from the non-profit Axim Collaborative to launch a Higher Education Innovation Hub that will be the first of its kind in the nation. The Hub will allow DHE to pilot innovative approaches to college access and student success within Massachusetts, including in enhancing cooperative education (Co-op) opportunities at public colleges, strengthening pathways from high school to college and integrating high-value non-degree credentials such as industry recognized certificates or licensure.

Source: [DHE Innovation Hub Press Release](#) (March 28, 2025).

Meet the Team



Danielle Rowdy
Chief Innovation Officer



Katy Coutley
Project Director



Danny Curtis
Project Director

Massachusetts Cooperative Education Initiative



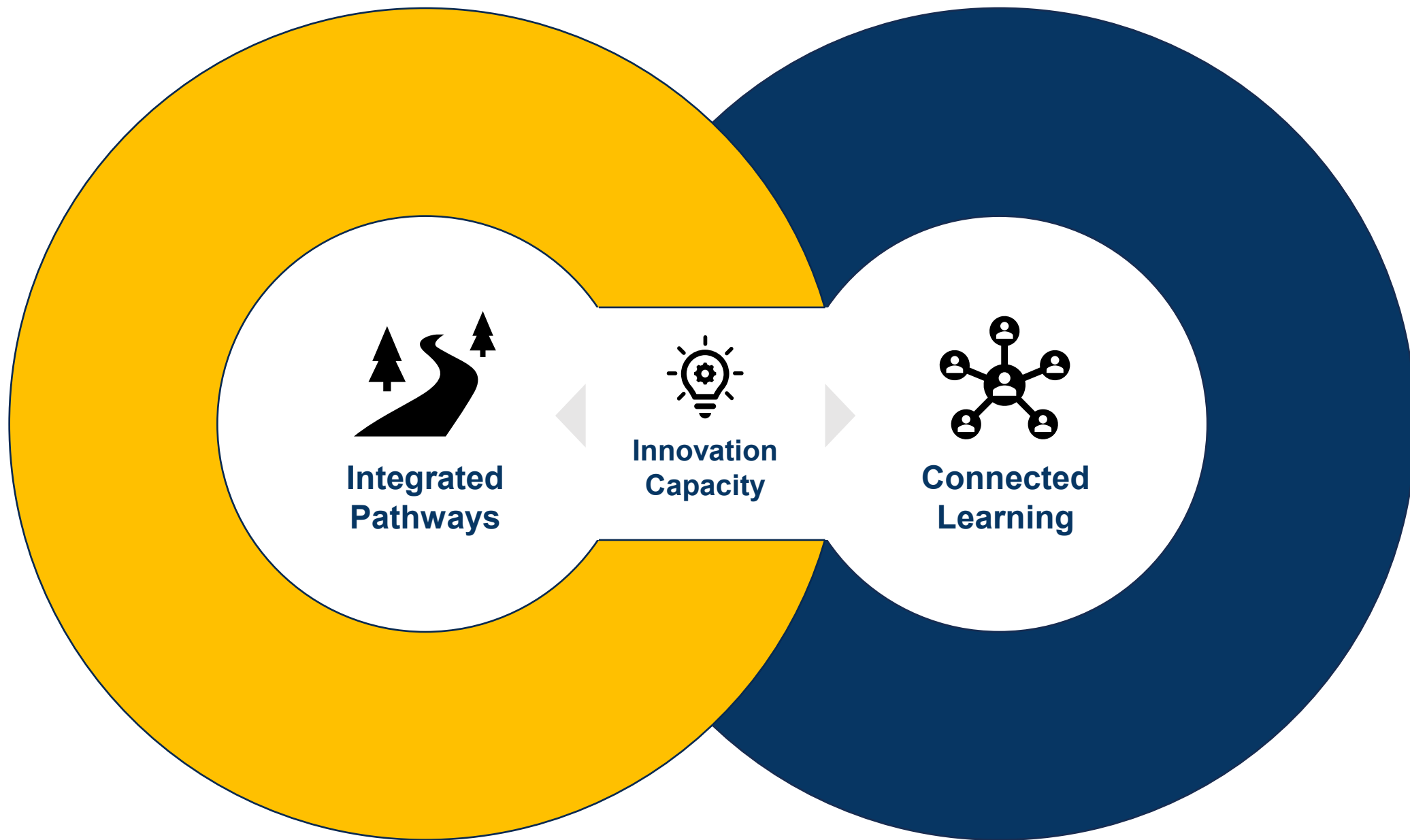
Expanding Co-op Education in MA



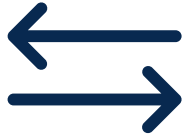
Image: Henry Marte, Marte Media.

- **Massachusetts Cooperative Education Initiative (MCEI)** announced on **April 6**, in partnership with UMass Lowell and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education
- Supporting 3 institutions to launch co-op programs in AY27: **Bridgewater State University, Framingham State University and MassArt**
- **Second cohort** of institutions in planning phase

Pillars of Innovation



Areas of Exploration



Credit Transfer Pathways

Methods for ensuring minimal credit loss for students moving between educational institutions and programs



AI Enablement

Capacity for AI experimentation and engagement for faculty, staff, and students in the state public institutions



Simplified Admissions

Pathways to facilitate learner enrollment in the Commonwealth's postsecondary institutions



Transcript Management

Digital solutions for learner credential management and employer skill verification processes



Career-Connected Learning

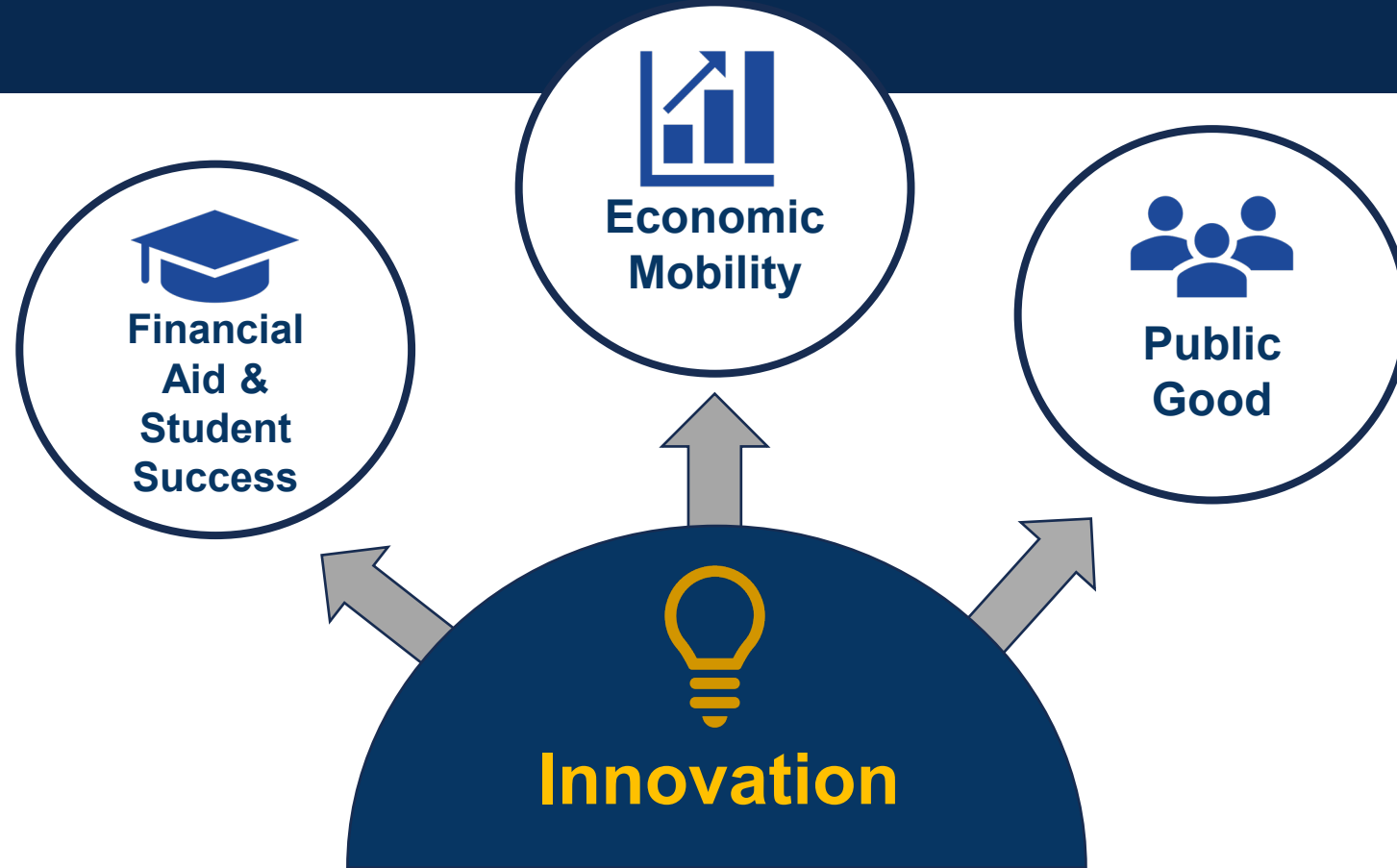
Additional opportunities to embed workforce engagement in existing and new learner pathways



Modern Services

User-focused constituent services to streamline engagement with the Department's critical learner services

Role of the Innovation Priority



Innovation is a catalyst joining existing DHE work to advance all other BHE Priorities.



| Q&A