

**Massachusetts Community Colleges, Council of Presidents**  
**Chair: Dr. Patricia A. Gentile, President, North Shore Community College**  
**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**  
**Rescheduled: Tuesday, December 17, 2019 to Friday, January 10, 2020**

Good Morning Chair Gabrieli, board members, Commissioner Santiago and all of the DHE staff along with participating colleagues. I wish you all a happy holiday and a wonderfully successful and healthy new year.

Today you will be voting on a Fiscal and Academic Year 2021 budget recommendation. Investing in the public good of higher education is fundamental to developing the workforce needed for today's and tomorrow's economy. Annually, the 15 Massachusetts community colleges educate nearly 150,000 individuals with about 120,000 enrolled in credit courses and degree programs and an additional 30,000 workers in continuing professional education. That translates into serving the largest number of headcount and full-time equivalency (FTE) of undergraduate students and continuing education students in the Commonwealth. No other sector yields such a significant impact on the preparation of the labor force in this state.

The community colleges were born out of a movement to provide opportunity to an affordable college education for economic mobility in the spirit of social justice with access for all who can benefit. In today's knowledge economy, this access is more important than ever for developing a local and regional labor force with the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to compete in a global economy.

With such a future in mind, sixty years ago Governor Foster Furcolo established the Commonwealth's commitment to fund a system of comprehensive community colleges. Originally serving mostly middle-class high school graduates for their first two years of a baccalaureate degree, today's community college students are a diverse group of adult learners with a mean age of 26 who originate primarily from middle and lower-income families with a substantial percentage being the first in their families to go to college.

Community college certificates and degrees provide direct entry into the workforce with over 60% of our students enrolled in career technical education serving the major employers across the state. The transfer option continues to be a core function for 40% of our students and both the university sectors and 15 community colleges have worked diligently through MASS Transfer to ensure a seamless transfer experience. Although not yet perfect, we are light years ahead of where we were just a decade ago.

As you ponder the impact of the proposed FY 2021 higher education budget, it's important to remember that over 50% of community college students are eligible for federal and state grants because of their income level. For those students who are at a FAFSA Estimated Family Income of zero (ability

to contribute \$0 toward the cost of college), the price of tuition and fees at all 15 community colleges are covered by public grants. However, the total cost of going to college – including books, transportation, housing, food, supplies and other living expenses – is not and is becoming more and more difficult to underwrite in this high cost-of-living state. As a result, more potential community college students are walking away from enrollment in any institution of higher education in this state.

Let me give you a compelling example of the impact of this growing financial difficulty on potential community college students: Tracking through the National Student Clearinghouse we can see what happens to those applicants at a Massachusetts community college who submitted the requirements, were accepted into the college but did not enroll in that community college and, when tracked, did not enroll in any college. In other words, the applicants who expressed interest in going to college never made it into even one college course. Instead, they walked away.

Looking at the data of 10 of the 15 community colleges (67%) over the last five years, the thousands of Massachusetts residents walking away from college is significant. In the Fall Semester of 2018 with all ten MA community colleges reporting, 14,687 potential college students walked away from college altogether, i.e. never enrolled in any college. If we take a mean of the sample from that same fall semester, we can estimate that somewhere around 22,000 interested college goers across the state failed to enroll in any college, including in the most affordable option that Massachusetts offers – the community college. Table 1 outlines the data obtained from the recent sector survey:

**Table 1. Those who applied & accepted but did not enroll in the community college or ANY college**

CC	Fall 15		Fall 16		Fall 17		Fall 18		Fall 19	
	Number	%Not Enrolled	Number	%Not Enrolled	Number	%Not Enrolled	Number	%Not Enrolled	Number	%Not Enrolled
Berkshire	204	48%	248	44%	329	54%	282	61%	611	71%
Bristol	1,398	81%	1,490	81%	1,521	81%	1,410	78%	1,395	80%
Bunker Hill	3,063	86%	3,681	87%	2,759	82%	4,627	79%	3,905	81%
Greenfield	565	67%	616	70%	581	71%	622	74%	491	72%
Holyoke			308	34%	380	40%	494	39%	595	40%
MassBay	1,065	83%	1,461	81%	1,548	74%	1,724	71%		
Mt. Wach	1,668	78%	1,621	80%	1,624	80%	1,757	82%	1,648	79%
NECC	1,312	78%	1,304	77%	1,294	75%	1,317	75%	1,324	77%
NSCC	740	57%	823	56%	1,162	80%	727	72%	1,279	74%
STCC	1,663	75%	1,729	78%	1,779	77%	1,727	77%	1,914	80%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,678</b>		<b>13,281</b>		<b>12,977</b>		<b>14,687</b>		<b>13,162</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1,298</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>1,328</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>1,298</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>1,469</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>1,462</b>	<b>73%</b>

Number = the number of accepted students who did not enroll anywhere, as tracked through the National Student Clearinghouse

% Not Enrolled = the percentage of total not enrolled at that cc who did not enrolled anywhere, or calculated as follows: Number Not Enrolled Anywhere / Total number of accepted applicants not enrolled at the community college.

I point out that this is primarily a matter of unaffordable costs because recent research by Gallop through Strada Education Network asked stop outs and non-enrolled adults why they have not or no longer were registered in a public institution of higher education. The number one reason given was that college is not affordable and when combined with the opportunity cost of foregone wages to provide the time to attend college, it is out of their reach. In 2017 at my college -North Shore Community College, we confirmed affordability was the number one reason when we surveyed those who had applied at our college and then failed to enroll at NSCC or anywhere else.

Absorb the consequence of this...every fall thousands of people interested in going to college make the decision they cannot afford to enroll in a Massachusetts community college to acquire the knowledge, skills and credentials they were hoping to achieve. This is especially distressing since the community college system mission statement, as established by the Board of Higher Education in 1999, concludes with the following statement: “No eligible student shall be deprived of the opportunity for a community college education in Massachusetts because of an inability to pay tuition and fees.”

Who are those disappointed folks? Research tells us that a large portion are the same folks we are hoping to attract and serve through the Equity Agenda. What does it take to provide the ability for these potential students to enroll?

First, it takes colleges with the capacity to provide that affordable experience. As a result, we believe that each of the 15 community colleges must be funded sufficiently so that the reliance on annually raising fees to cover increasing costs is mitigated. A December 2016 study by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center demonstrated that for every \$1 decline in real (inflation adjusted) State support, community college general fees went up \$1— an exact correlation. The Center also demonstrated that since the turn of the century in real dollars the State has continuously disinvested in public higher education. Research just published by The Grapevine Survey noted that Massachusetts’ increase in funding higher education was a meager 2.7% (unadjusted) in the last fiscal year (2018-2019), coming in 27<sup>th</sup> of the 50 states in the percentage of increase in funding levels. Even during times of positive surpluses in this state, the funding levels for public higher education remain insufficient. It is more important than ever to advocate together for meaningful increases in community college base allocations.

Second, keeping tuition and fees stable is not enough. Increased state financial aid for students enrolling in a public institution is essential. This is the only way to get at the true cost of attending. The recent commitment expressed in the MassGrant Plus initiative is much appreciated. However, designed as a last dollar strategy and distributed at the end of a semester dampens its impact. To be more effective, MassGrant Plus needs to be available when students are making their enrollment and registration decisions before the semester begins. This is because the huge challenge that basic needs insecurity poses to our students doesn’t wait until the end of the semester.

As you are aware, 48% of community college students have experienced food insecurity nationally. More than 19% stated they had lost weight because there was not enough money for food and 51% said they worried about whether their food would run out before they had the money to buy more. Because of the high cost of living in Massachusetts, the percentage of students facing basic needs shortages is even higher than the national statistics. Many of these students are coming from our Gateway Cities, the same students that the K-12 system is set to allocate a historic additional \$1.5 billion dollars over the next seven years to meet their disproportionate educational needs.

We know from the critically important debate around the needs of K-12 students from disadvantaged communities that an equitable public level of support is critical. Unfortunately, in this state, our sector – which includes the colleges serving the largest proportion of low-income and students of color – is allocated the lowest level of state support. We are shortchanging our state’s economic future if we continue to underfund our most accessible and affordable public higher education institutions. We will surely continue to fall short of our moral responsibility to provide low-income students and students of color with the same opportunities as their more affluent peers.

In my October 2019 address to this Board, I pointed to the very conservative financial notion that \$1,561 additional state support per community college student would provide the means to create an infrastructure to realize higher retention and completion rates for our most needy students. At 50% Pell eligibility for the credit students we are currently serving, the total price would be around \$117 million. I know that sounds like a lot, but it is a small change compared to the \$1.5 billion enhancement for the same profile of students in the K-12 sector.

In closing, let me confirm that the community college presidents believe that the Equity Agenda is an ideal goal for moving the Commonwealth forward. We are grateful for the work of Commissioner Santiago, his staff and you, the members of the Board of Higher Education, for focusing on this priority. To accomplish this worthy goal we are obligated to make the 1999 Community College mission statement a genuine promise through adequate funding of public higher education and expansion of individual financial aid for those enrolling in public institutions of higher education.

Thank you.