

## BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

**NO.:** BHE 20-05

**BOARD DATE:** February 4, 2020

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#### **COMMON VISION OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby resolves to make a broad-based commitment to collect, review, and act on high-quality evidence to inform ongoing and new initiatives intended to strengthen higher education in Massachusetts. The BHE, working through its Department (DHE) and with institutions of higher education, as well as other partners from early education through workforce and beyond, will collect, integrate, and analyze the data needed to understand the students and adults served by our systems, their needs, and the impact of various policies and initiatives. This commitment also includes proactively designing and testing new initiatives to continually build and refine the evidence-based set of policies supporting postsecondary success across the Commonwealth. Finally, the BHE commitment reflects that data about learners and best practices will be securely held, readily available, and user-friendly, with an explicit emphasis on responsible and accountable data sharing with stakeholders, including end-users in our schools and institutions, research partners, and more broadly with the students, families, and communities that we serve.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by BHE 2/4/2020.

**Authority:** Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A § 9; *By-Laws of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education*, Articles III, Section 4.

**Contact:** Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner



MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Higher Education

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Higher Education

**From:** Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Carlos Santiago, Commissioner of Higher Education  
Katherine Craven, Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Chris Gabrieli, Chair, Board of Higher Education

**Date:** December 13, 2019

**Re:** Evidence-Based Policy Making

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At the December 2019 joint meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Higher Education, staff and board leadership are looking forward to providing an update on recent work in the area of evidence-based policy making and strategic data use. By way of background, last year, the chairs of the three education boards (our two boards plus the Board of Early Education and Care) and Secretary Peyser agreed to jointly pursue a strategic planning process to improve cross-agency data coordination and use among DESE, DHE, EEC, EOE, and Labor and Workforce Development. To support this effort, EOE funded a consultant, Aimee Guidera, with pro bono support from Strategic Grant Partners, to facilitate a set of conversations and learning experiences to inform a set of strategic recommendations on this topic.

Throughout the course of the Strategic Data Use Project, members of the education agencies, key secretariats, and external partners learned about best practice models from other states, brainstormed critical questions to prioritize for coordinated data efforts, and discussed potential ways to further collaborate to make data meaningful, more broadly accessible, and impactful in policy making.

This project shed light on significant progress as well as continued gaps in our inter-agency data systems and capacity. Massachusetts has been recognized as having one of the most robustly interconnected data systems in the country, largely due to continuous improvement of data linkages from pre-school through workforce data. This work has been supported by the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) federal grants. As the SLDS grant steward, DESE, in particular, has built significant capacity to create a wide array of data reports and meaningful data partnerships. At the same time, we have room for improvement. The three agencies (DESE, DHE, EEC) lack a coordinated approach to prioritizing and fulfilling research requests that span agency data sets, and would benefit from an overarching vision to ensure evidence-based policy

making across the education agencies. Further, analytic staffing capacity varies among the three agencies.

At the December joint board meeting, we will provide updates on near-term actions to continue to move this work forward and will ask the boards to vote on a joint vision statement around evidence-based policy making. Please see the end of this memorandum for the proposed motion.

In addition, the chairs of the BESE and BHE have agreed to form individual board committees on evidence-based policy making; each will establish those committees using their own board processes. These committees will focus on key activities that will be determined within each board and may include:

- Understanding the current state of evidence for key priorities by reviewing the quality and accessibility of the department's most relevant data collection and analyses, and supporting department staff in targeted improvements
- Recommending specific further steps to be taken by the board and department to ensure that high-quality evidence appropriately informs policy making, including adoption of new policies, evaluation of new and innovative initiatives, and refinement of policies over time
- Reviewing findings from studies in Massachusetts and nationally that could have an impact on policy making in Massachusetts, and advising on the dissemination of these findings

We are optimistic that the EEC board will similarly affirm these commitments at their next EEC board meeting.

While these initial action steps will strengthen the boards' commitments and approaches to evidence-based policy making and create a clearer channel of communication between the respective boards and data work within the departments, achieving this vision will require further efforts. DESE's pending application for the most recent round of the SLDS federal grant could provide additional capacity and resources to accelerate cross-agency work. This grant application focuses on using our existing data infrastructure to further drive equitable outcomes for all Massachusetts students – by dedicating analytical capacity to address critical questions (including at agencies that have been particularly under-resourced), enhancing IT infrastructure to make research requests easier, and securing new staff to coordinate interagency work and disseminate best practices to turn evidence into action. This initiative could include establishing a more robust governance structure that spans the education agencies and relevant secretariats to further promote strategic data use. We will find out about the SLDS grant in January 2020.

Finally, as part of the presentation at the joint meeting on December 17, we will also feature recent research by Brown University researchers, commissioned by DESE in partnership with DHE, which sheds light on the correlation between the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and college persistence and life outcomes. This excellent emerging research is a great example of the high-impact research that a collaborative approach can

produce. At the same time, we need further discussion about the implications of the research findings for state policy, to ensure our policy agenda is driven by emerging data and evidence.

We look forward to engaging the boards in a discussion at the joint meeting. The discussion will be a springboard for the board chairs and commissioners to explore how to accelerate this work in the coming months.

### **Proposed Motions: Vote on a Common Vision of Evidence-Based Policy Making**

**Context:** Massachusetts is acclaimed for its rich history in education dating back to the first public school and college in America and continuing today with the highest levels of achievement in K-12 and postsecondary attainment in the country. Effective policy making is important to ensure continued state leadership, particularly in promoting equitable opportunities and outcomes for underserved students.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary motion:** Therefore, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) hereby resolves to make a broad-based commitment to collect, review, and act on high-quality evidence to inform ongoing and new initiatives intended to strengthen K-12 education in Massachusetts. The BESE, through its department (DESE), working with schools, districts, and other partners from early education through workforce and beyond, will collect, integrate, and analyze the data needed to understand the students and adults served by our systems, their needs, and the impact of various policies and initiatives. This commitment also includes proactively designing and testing new initiatives to continually build and refine the evidence-based set of policies supporting postsecondary success across the Commonwealth. Finally, the BESE commitment reflects that data about learners and best practices will be securely held, readily available, and user-friendly, with an explicit emphasis on responsible and accountable data sharing with stakeholders, including end-users in our schools and institutions, research partners, and more broadly with the students, families, and communities that we serve.

**Board of Higher Education motion:** Therefore, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby resolves to make a broad-based commitment to collect, review, and act on high-quality evidence to inform ongoing and new initiatives intended to strengthen higher education in Massachusetts. The BHE, through its department (DHE), working with institutions of higher education as well as other partners from early education through workforce and beyond, will collect, integrate, and analyze the data needed to understand the students and adults served by our systems, their needs, and the impact of various policies and initiatives. This commitment also includes proactively designing and testing new initiatives to continually build and refine the evidence-based set of policies supporting postsecondary success across the Commonwealth. Finally, the BHE commitment reflects that data about learners and best practices will be securely held, readily available, and user-friendly, with an explicit emphasis on responsible and accountable data sharing with stakeholders, including end-users in our schools and institutions, research partners, and more broadly with the students, families, and communities that we serve.