

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 22-68

**BOARD DATE:** June 21, 2022

**RECEIPT OF THE STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RACIAL EQUITY**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) receives the *Statewide Strategic Plan for Racial Equity* from the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Steering Committee, which was comprised of a group of more than 25 diverse higher education practitioners, BHE members, and civic, community, and industry leaders from across Massachusetts and the United States.

The Board thanks the members of the Steering Committee, public higher education stakeholders, and Department of Higher Education (DHE) staff who worked collaboratively and intentionally to develop Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

The Board endorses the goals and objectives of the *Strategic Plan for Racial Equity* and directs the Commissioner to: support the institutions of public higher education in developing their own plans and priorities for implementation; make specific systemwide policy recommendations to the BHE; and provide periodic updates to the BHE, with an initial update no later than June 2023. Further, the Board directs the Commissioner to recommend systemwide or sector-specific goals and targets to the BHE, in partnership with the institutions of public higher education, by June 2023.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by BHE 6/21/2022.

Authority: M.G.L. c. 15A, §§6 and 9 (c), and (u); BHE 19-03.

Contact: Carlos E. Santiago, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Chief of Staff and Assistant Commissioner for Academic Policy & Student Success

## Background

In late 2018, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) set forth the Equity Agenda, which outlines how the BHE and Department of Higher Education (DHE), in partnership with the Commonwealth's public higher education institutions, intend to address its top statewide policy and performance priorities of significantly raising the enrollment, attainment, and long-term success outcomes among Students of Color. The Equity Agenda outlines an action plan that covers five key areas: Policy Audit; Student Experience; Data and Evidence; Community of Practice; and Sustained Transformation. Under the "Sustained Transformation" key area, the Board committed to developing a 10-year Statewide Strategic Plan focused on advancing racial equity.

The *Statewide Strategic Plan for Racial Equity* ("the Plan") is the realization of that action plan. The Plan was created in partnership with representatives from key stakeholder groups throughout the Commonwealth all of whom recognize the importance and urgency of this work. The moral impetus to transform the Commonwealth's public higher education system to focus on racial equity is clear: data show that for generations the system has failed its Students of Color (see Appendix A). The system has produced large disparities over time in admission, enrollment, retention, and graduation rates when comparing averages for Students of Color with the averages of all students. And too many Students of Color report difficulty engaging with a curriculum in which their histories, cultures, and identities are not represented nor valued.

The system must make swift reforms now to eliminate these disparities and transform campus cultures to be places where Students of Color feel a sense of belonging and have equitable opportunities for success, both during and after their time in higher education. Racial equity must be the guiding paradigm for policies, practices, and culture transformation in all of Massachusetts' public institutions of higher education. A commitment to racial equity will allow the Commonwealth to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and to dismantle systemic racial inequities to remedy and repair harm endured by Students of Color.

Additionally, the Commonwealth recognizes that it will not maintain its position as the most educated state in the country unless it addresses the systemic racial inequities that exist within our public higher education system. When all Students of Color are accessing – and excelling in – racially-just higher education, they, their families, and their communities all benefit. The work of grounding policies, pedagogies, practices, and services in racial equity should be thought of as an investment, not an expense. Through this work, Massachusetts will remain a global competitor in industries such as biotechnology, healthcare, education, and professional services, but more importantly, it will fulfill the promise of economic and social mobility that students, especially Students of Color, seek when accessing postsecondary education.

The Strategic Plan for Racial Equity is focused on eliminating racial disparities in the Massachusetts Public Higher Education System. To do so, the details of the Plan are race conscious, not race neutral, and are meant to eradicate historic and systemic inequities within the system. Institutions vary in their progress to date in addressing racial equity issues; the Plan is meant to support all of them as they continue the work that they are doing to achieve racial equity. Regardless of where each Institution is with this work, all must aim to have policies, practices, pedagogy, and services that are rooted in racial equity to build campus environments where Students of Color thrive and are regarded in the totality of their human dignity.