

MASSTRANSFER STEERING COMMITTEE

Meeting: Friday, October 10, 2025
10 a.m.
via Zoom

MINUTES

The first meeting of the Department of Higher Education's ("Department" or "DHE") MassTransfer Steering Committee ("Committee") was held on Friday, October 3, 2025 at 10:00AM remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Committee members were present:

Richard Riccardi; Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs, DHE; Committee Chair
Arthur Esposito
Claudine Barnes
Oren Cohen
Monique Lopez
President Barry Maloney, Worcester State University
Susan Martin
Midori Morikawa
Trinh Mguyen
Cristan Orellana
Darlene Rodowicz
Patrick Sullivan
President George Timmons, Holyoke Community College
Vice President Nef Walker, University of Massachusetts System

The following Committee members were not in attendance:

Reyes Coll Tellechea
Joanna Gonsalves

I. CALL TO ORDER

DHE Deputy Commissioner and Committee Chair Rick Riccardi called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM,

II. REMARKS AND REPORTS

DHE Commissioner Noe Ortega began by welcoming all meeting participants and expressing his appreciation for their time and expertise in supporting the enhancement

of transfer opportunities across Massachusetts. Commissioner Ortega acknowledged that the Committee had been long in development and he expressed gratitude for the collective commitment of the Committee's members

Commissioner Ortega explained that the primary purpose of the meeting was to provide context and establish direction for the committee's future work. He highlighted the importance of transfer pathways in terms of advancing equity goals and improving student access and completion rates across the Commonwealth's higher education system. Commissioner Ortega explained that the Committee's work would address procedural challenges to facilitate smoother student transfers, referencing key initiatives such as direct admissions, joint admissions, and financial aid investments as tools for expanding access and streamline student progression. He also mentioned the importance of considering the "stackability" of credentials and upcoming federal policy discussions regarding short-term Pell Grants.

The Commissioner expressed gratitude to the Healey-Driscoll Administration for its continued investment in higher education affordability. He noted positive enrollment trends at public campuses in Massachusetts, due in large part to tuition-free opportunities for Pell-eligible students and enrollees across all Massachusetts Community Colleges. He reaffirmed the Board of Higher Education's commitment to its equity goal and reiterated that the Committee's work would align with the Board's own four strategic priorities: student success and affordability, economic mobility, public good, and innovation.

Commissioner Ortega concluded his remarks by thanking Committee Members for representing their constituencies and for their shared dedication to these priorities. He then turned the meeting over to Chair Riccardi, who invited those Committee Members in attendance to introduce themselves and speak briefly on their respective backgrounds.

Following Committee Member introductions, Deputy Commissioner Riccardi introduced DHE Assistant General Counsel Chris Grimaldi to advise the Committee on the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and its application to Committee activities.

Assistant General Counsel Grimaldi explained that the MassTransfer Steering Committee was a statutorily-established public body created to advise a government agency (DHE), it is subject to the Open Meeting Law's procedural (i.e. keeping substantive meeting minutes, posting timely public notice) and substantive requirements, which are primarily concerned with ensuring public access to - and sufficient recordkeeping of - Committee deliberations.

Assistant General Counsel Grimaldi emphasized that the Open Meeting Law is enforced by the Attorney General's Office, and that non-compliance with Open Meeting Law requirements could result in punitive measures such as mandatory training, nullification of committee actions, civil penalties, or the release of public records.

Assistant General Counsel Grimaldi concluded his presentation by assuring the Committee that he and DHE's legal office were available to assist the Committee with any Open Meeting Law-related questions or compliance issues.

Following Assistant General Counsel Grimaldi's presentation, Deputy Commissioner Riccardi noted that the applicable FY2025 budget language required the Committee to designate a Committee Chairperson by vote. Commissioner Ortega recommended that, for this first year of the Committee and for the sake of level-setting, Deputy Commissioner Riccardi should serve in the role of Committee Chair. The Commissioner continued by pointing out that the Committee was established in perpetuity and that reassessment, year over year, to define the most effective governance structure would be an appropriate way to proceed.

Committee Member Rodowicz introduced a motion to designate Deputy Commissioner Riccardi as chair and to establish yearly reassessment, which was seconded by Committee Member Cohen and unanimously adopted by the Committee.

III. CHARGE TO THE COMMITTEE

Chair Riccardi reported that he and Director Esposito had developed a draft charge, which he planned to distribute to the group with the rest of the meeting's materials. He provided background information, noting that Section 9 of the Committee's enabling legislation empowered BHE to develop and implement a transfer compact to facilitate student transfers between public institutions without the loss of academic credit or standing.

He explained that in June 2008, BHE accepted the final report from the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group, which introduced a new statewide transfer policy called MassTransfer. Since that time, DHE's MassTransfer policy and related programs had evolved to support vertical transfer within Massachusetts' public higher education system.

Chair Riccardi stated that the Committee's enabling legislation charges the Committee with serving as a consultant to DHE to assist with the assessment and advancement of MassTransfer by incorporating input from students, campus leaders, transfer staff, and external business community members. The committee's main role was to advise DHE on improving students' ability to transfer degrees and course credits within the Commonwealth.

He further elaborated that the Committee is responsible for 1) convening and collaborating with campus partners to assess the effectiveness and implementation of MassTransfer policies; 2) recommending the development of new – or proposing revisions and amendments to existing – MassTransfer policies and procedures; and 3)

advising DHE on creating a Common Course Numbering system for lower-division courses.

In response to a couple of follow-up questions from the Committee, Chair Riccardi suggested that effective communication strategies and the consideration of dual enrollment will be addressed at future Committee meetings.

Mario Delci, DHE's Associate Commission for Research and Planning, presented an overview of the current state of community college transfer outcomes and how such data can inform the Committee's future work.

In his initial comments, Associate Commissioner Delci pointed out that nationwide data show a staggering 80% of community college students enroll with the intent to transfer, but a much lower percentage of such students ultimately go on to transfer. He also demonstrated the importance of increasing the number of students who do transfer and how vital it is that we help more of them complete bachelor's degrees, citing that 61% of high-demand, high-value occupations require a bachelor's degree as the entry-level academic credential.

Associate Commissioner Delci pointed out that, despite some fluctuation year-over-year, data shows that transfer rates have remained relatively stable in the last decade. He also noted that the data show a richly diverse student population in the Commonwealth, but also that there are significant equity gaps in terms of completing vertical transfer and in degree attainment.

Associate Commissioner Delci also shared that student retention after transfer (students returning for a second year) is about 78–80%, rebounding after a dip during the pandemic and that bachelor's degree completion after transfer has risen from 55% to about 62–63% over the past decade. He also pointed out that the data show that 65% of associate-degree holders earn a bachelor's within four years of transfer, compared to 53% without an associate's degree.

IV. QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Chair Riccardi opened the discussion to questions or comments.

Committee Member Nguyen expressed gratitude for the invitation to serve on the Committee and noted the importance of identifying programmatic "gaps" to identify opportunities for creating stakeholder partnerships. Committee Member Nguyen further noted the importance of having an "ecosystem of support" to identify the services that students need to transfer and complete a bachelor's degree, and to then invest in those services.

Chair Riccardi answered a written question in the Zoom meeting chat regarding MassTransfer's "process flow." In response, Chair Riccardi noted the challenge of

managing a centralized database that relies on individual input from each campus and assured the committee that this item would be further discussed at future Committee meetings.

Next, Committee Member Sullivan inquired about the impact of tuition-free access through MassEducate on Community College enrollments.

In response, Committee Member Timmons indicated that 40% of those students who have taken advantage of MassEducate at his institution (Holyoke Community College) are over the age of 25 years. He stated that these students are oftentimes working parents and in need of significant wraparound support. Committee Member Timmons also suggested that the Committee consider the role of wraparound support services rather than solely focus on the efficiency of credit transfer processes.

Committee Member Barnes noted that a similar trend is evident at Cape Cod Community College and acknowledged that needs of “nontraditional” students, who are returning to college or shifting careers, may require additional support services such as developmental, non-credit-bearing, coursework that lengthens the time of degree completion.

Committee Member Sullivan asked whether the demographic shift among students will escalate as people become increasingly aware of tuition-free educational options.

Committee Member Timmons responded with information that they have gleaned from an environmental scan of Western Massachusetts: the fastest population growth is over the age of 60 and that the 18- to 22-year-old population is shrinking. He shared his opinion that the student population will be predominantly older students in the coming years.

Chair Riccardi noted that, in response to the rise of “non-traditional” students, higher education institutions will need to adjust wraparound support services through degree completion, accordingly.

Committee Member Walker suggested that the Committee should investigate institutions’ preparedness to support an older student population’s unique challenges, such as “cognitive fatigue” from working multiple jobs and supporting a family while pursuing a degree. In turn, Committee Member Walker suggested that students’ cognitive load may be lightened by “centering” the student experience and making it easier for them to choose their best pathway to a degree.

Director Esposito emphasized the importance of considering the Committee’s comments from the standpoint of academic advising, pointing to the historic effectiveness of proactive and holistic academic advising when it is employed to situate a student’s educational opportunities within the context of their own lived experiences. Director Esposito emphasized the critical role of informed, proactive, and empathetic academic advisors in helping students—especially those facing “time poverty”—navigate the challenges of higher education. He further noted that advising shouldn’t

remove academic requirements but rather should provide professional support to help students meet them without diminishing the learning experience.

Committee Member Lopez asked whether the definition of success might also shift as institutions increasingly recognize the time-deficit faced by student-parents and students who work, and the increased amount of time that such students may require for degree completion.

Committee Member Rodowicz referenced a college/career partnership program that pays working students a full-time salary for eight to sixteen hours of work during the semester in exchange for the student's commitment to the position for three years following graduation. Noting that this sort of partnership is expensive, she also shared positive outcomes for business partners that equaled those the student experiences.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Riccardi asked for any additional questions or comments. Receiving none, Chair Riccardi presented a motion to adjourn, and the meeting concluded at 2:30pm.

Documents used during the meeting are available at
https://www.mass.edu/strategic/masstransfer_committee.asp