



## **A New Direction for Enhancing Economic Growth and Social Mobility in Massachusetts: An Equity-focused Strategic Framework for Public Higher Education**

### Overview

During the September 2018 Board of Higher Education (BHE) retreat, Commissioner Santiago and Chair Gabrieli proposed to members a new direction for public higher education that would reaffirm the state's commitment to maintaining high levels of educational attainment among the adult population while emphasizing equitable postsecondary outcomes for students from traditionally underserved backgrounds. In partnership with Massachusetts public higher education institutions, the Board and Department of Higher Education (DHE) will develop a statewide strategic framework focused on equity. The expectation is that by focusing on equity in our policies, programs, and initiatives, the Massachusetts System of Public Higher Education will enhance economic and social mobility for all citizens, but particularly for those that have historically been underserved and underrepresented throughout all levels of education.

The heart of our work will focus on assessing current and prospective higher education policy from an equity perspective. To determine the overall success of this initiative requires the closing of opportunity and achievement gaps by ensuring that the most underserved students are succeeding at faster rates than the population at large. Movement in the right direction would be illustrated by overall improvements for all students in general, accompanied by even greater improvements for disadvantaged students. Equity is more than simply creating a level playing field; It requires a concerted and intentional effort to remove barriers and obstacles that hinder the success of students that heretofore did not have these advantages. Massachusetts will not be able to maintain its position as the most educated state in the country unless we address the systemic inequities that exist within our system public of higher education.

At its December 11 meeting, the BHE adopted the Vision Statement below to guide the work of developing a new statewide strategic framework for public higher education.

*The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) aims to sustain and expand on Massachusetts' unique leadership position in higher education as defined by the strength and reputation of our private and public postsecondary institutions and our nation-leading level of attainment among our adult citizens. To further realize those goals and to ensure that public higher education opens doors of opportunity and fulfilment for traditionally underserved populations, we elect to make our top statewide policy and performance priority – Significantly raise the enrollment, attainment and long-term success outcomes among under-represented student populations. We intend this equity lens priority to guide campus and system performance measurement and promote initiatives and policies that collectively expand success for residents and for our economy and society, including the development of an integrated financial planning process to ensure long term sustainability and affordability.*

## Background

Public higher education has served as a path to economic and social mobility in the United States for broad swaths of the population but many of its citizens have been left behind. The great systems of public higher education were created during what has been referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of public higher education—between 1943 to 1979. The advent of the GI Bill in 1943 democratized public higher education as never before. At the time, significant investments were made in new facilities and buildings to accommodate the growing number of students in public higher education. Not so coincidentally, inequality declined dramatically up until the decade of the 1980s as standards of living increased for many Americans.<sup>1</sup> This narrative changed quite dramatically in the 1980s as inequality grew and social mobility began to stall.<sup>2</sup> Now it was the children of the baby boomers that took advantage of the opportunities that public higher education offered.<sup>3</sup>

The very success of public higher education, best exemplified by the growing gap in earnings between those with a college degree versus those with only a high school diploma, created the growing opposition to support for funding public higher education. This was an important point of transition when higher education was viewed as a public good yet increasingly came to be considered a private good from the perspective of many Americans. Students that had been supported by grants were now increasingly supported by loans and student debt began to rise. As more students from underrepresented backgrounds began to access postsecondary education, a new narrative began to emerge and supported the notion that if public higher education were to mostly benefit the individual student then students should carry a larger portion of the costs of education.

At the same time, the country was changing demographically. The opening of immigration to people of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia through new immigration laws in 1965 began changing the racial character of American society in

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<sup>1</sup> The Gini coefficient, which measures overall levels of income inequality, remained relatively flat for household income and family income between 1947-1979 and then clearly moved upwards after that. In a recent posthumous opinion piece in the *New York Times*, the distinguished economist Alan Kruger wrote: “Since 1980, more than 100 percent of the total growth in income in the United States has gone to the top 10 percent of families. A whopping two-thirds of all income gains have gone to the top 1 percent. The bottom 90 percent saw their combined income actually shrink.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/01/opinion/sunday/music-economics-alan-krueger.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>.

<sup>2</sup> David Stockman, President Ronald Reagan's budget director in the 1980s is quoted as saying, "I don't accept the notion that the federal government has an obligation to fund generous grants to anybody that wants to go to college. It seems to me that if people want to go to college bad enough then there is opportunity and responsibility on their part to finance their way through the best way they can." In 1985, this perspective led to cuts in grants and the growth of student loans. Max Kutner, Higher Education spent a fortune for prestige. Now it's for sale to the highest bidders. How did we get here? *Boston Globe*, 2019:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2019/04/05/status-for-sale/Q6AVfAtwGZAMLhQz3feAFJ/story.html?event=event12>

A new report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York finds that “The college wage premium generally increased during the 1980s and 1990s, rising from less than \$20,000 to around \$30,000, before settling into a relatively narrow range of \$30,000 to \$35,000 after 2000. <https://libtystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2019/06/despite-rising-costs-college-is-still-a-good-investment.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship between inequality and inter-generational social mobility has been dubbed “The Gatsby Curve.” While the Gatsby Curve does not posit a causal relationship between inequality and social mobility, the correlation between the two is quite evident.

fundamental ways.<sup>4</sup> People of color began entering the United States in larger numbers and their birthrates were high relative to the White population. Likewise, the African American population in the United States continued to grow and the influx of migrants from the Americas, particularly Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America altered the demographic landscape of the United States. This process continues to this day.

Support for public higher education received short shrift when compared with the growing funding for healthcare, at least in the context of many state budgets. No doubt, when faced with the choice of funding public higher education or the rising costs of healthcare, many Americans chose the latter. Not an unusual outcome given the aging of the majority population in the United States. But one can certainly argue that the desire to produce more affordable healthcare has constrained both federal and state budgets leading to a crowding out of investment in higher education spending, particularly public higher education. That this occurred while the nation was experiencing significant demographic and cultural change is an important consideration. It is time to reassess these decisions as the need to provide better equipped citizenry for the knowledge-based economy is growing as well as the imperative of promoting social justice and reducing inequality in our democratic society. These changes are also necessary if the higher education business model is to survive in its present form. Some argue that it will not.<sup>5</sup>

### Statutory Authority

While the BHE has given attention to approving the individual institutional multi-year strategic plans, it also has the statutory authority to set the strategic direction and goals for higher education in Massachusetts. This strategic approach should encompass the work of the individual campuses yet have a broader reach in terms of systemwide goals and objectives. This new direction is the culmination of years of research and analysis to better understand the history of Massachusetts education, the current higher education landscape, and its longer-term trajectory. It also reflects work that has been ongoing at the institutional level.

Clause c., described below, reflects the statutory authority that undergirds the BHE's recent decision to pursue an explicit system-wide goal focused on attainment with equity.

**\*\*M.G.L. c. 15A, Section 9(c).** The council shall have the following duties and powers: — ...**(c)** analyze the present and future goals, needs and requirements of public higher education in the commonwealth and establish overall goals in order to achieve a well-coordinated quality system of public higher education in the commonwealth. Such analysis shall include, but not be limited to, an analysis of state and local labor market trends and the economic development plans of the commonwealth conducted in cooperation with the secretary of labor and workforce

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<sup>4</sup> The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 changed the demographic mix in the United States by removing racial and national barriers to immigration. Previously, immigration laws gave preference to northern and western Europeans and now it was opened to non-European countries.

<sup>5</sup> A recent opinion piece (April 1, 2019) by Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn in the publication *Inside Higher Education* reinforces their earlier prediction that a high percentage of higher education institutions will likely close, merge, or consolidate. This seems to be apparent in Massachusetts where many higher education institutions reside. The authors contend that this outcome is not inevitable and that those institutions that innovate, largely using technology and considerable focus, cannot only survive but thrive. Source URL: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/04/01/many-private-colleges-remain-danger-opinion>.

development, the secretary of housing and economic development, and their respective staffs;

The statute does not prescribe the process by which the development of a statewide strategic plan should take, but in accordance with the individual campus strategic plans it should be “transparent and inclusive, involving ‘the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes’ (following the New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE) Standard 2.1). The planning process should be a vehicle for cultivating a commitment from all members of the campus community, allowing institutions to grow, change and adapt practices as needed to achieve their goals.”<sup>6</sup> The Advisory Board, described later in this document, will be the primary conduit of information between the Board and individual institutions and their segments.

Another related statutory requirement that complements an initiative such as that proposed by the BHE appears below:

**M.G.L. c. 15A, Section 9(f).** subject to the secretary’s approval prepare a five-year master plan for public higher education in the commonwealth, which plan shall take into account the analysis mandated in clause (c) [below] and the five-year plans submitted by individual boards of trustees. The master plan shall include, but need not be limited to, enrollment projections, utilization of existing facilities, promotion of research, programmatic excellence, and public service activities, recommendations for closing of facilities or the construction or acquisition of new facilities, program distribution and the need for program revision, including the termination of obsolete or unnecessarily duplicative programs. The master plan shall be filed with the clerk of the house of representatives, the clerk of the senate and the secretary of administration and finance;

Many key elements are in place to facilitate the discussions that will be necessary over the coming year to bring this initiative to fruition. The first element is the seriousness with which the public institutions of higher education have embraced their campus strategic planning processes. The individual plans highlight the uniqueness of each institution and their steps to meet a variety of local goals while addressing system-wide objectives. This concordance bodes well for participation in the development of a statewide strategic planning framework. We envision the framework that is ultimately developed will serve as the basis for a planning, implementation and goal setting document.

Another major component that supports the system-wide strategic planning effort is the completion of the Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS). This statutory requirement serves to operationally identify our goals and to measure the progress in achieving them. A key strength of the system is that the public institutions themselves have participated, through a two-year long process, in the identification of key metrics and consensus on how to best measure them. These discussions have also allowed our institutions to identify national peer institutions and thus gauge progress on a scale beyond the borders of Massachusetts. Further, the Department has added equity spotlights to highlight the persistent gaps between different student groups.

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<sup>6</sup> See Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, *Revised Campus Strategic Planning Guidelines and Procedures*, 2017-18, p. 4-5.

The ability of colleges and universities to monitor their initiatives and to measure their performance is crucial to the success of a strategic planning framework. The Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS) provides the essential ingredient to ensure accountability and to measure progress towards achieving the identified goals. It will also allow us to produce periodic reports informing our stakeholders, including campus leadership and boards of trustees, the extent to which progress is being made or whether obstacles to improve performance have emerged and need to be removed.

### The Rationale for a System-wide Strategic Plan Focused on Equity

Massachusetts is often touted as the education state. This is due, in part, because of its many higher education institutions and their significant academic reputation and longevity. The State leads the nation in several educational measures and is rightfully proud of its focus on education at all levels.<sup>7</sup> In addition to having the highest percentage of postsecondary credential holders in the nation at 57 percent, Massachusetts also has the highest high school graduation rate, the highest college going rate, and among the highest public college graduation rates.<sup>8</sup> By and large, these indicators have been improving over time. Both public and private higher education institutions have contributed to these positive educational outcomes. It is also important to note that while private higher education institutions educate many students in the state, the majority of Massachusetts resident students attend public higher education institutions. Massachusetts is, in effect, a net importer of college going students by the very fact that more students come to Massachusetts colleges and universities to study than the number of Massachusetts resident students that leave to study outside the state.

Despite the impressive performance in education indicators there do exist some underlying challenges that are often overlooked when highlighting Massachusetts's educational accomplishments. One is that high school students who successfully graduate from high school are placed into non-credit bearing courses. Approximately 40 percent of students who enter public postsecondary institutions in the Commonwealth are assessed as underprepared and students of color are disproportionately assigned to developmental courses. However, the assessments typically used do not accurately capture college readiness and there are major initiatives that seek to reform developmental education. These structural barriers are reflected in significant opportunity and achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and geography.<sup>9</sup> Massachusetts is characterized as demonstrating high-performance in some areas, but it falls short in others.

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<sup>7</sup> A recent report from U.S. News & World Report suggests that Massachusetts' higher education ranking among states is perhaps less stellar than many believe. In effect, the report ranks MA 27<sup>th</sup> among states on a variety of indicators. Where Massachusetts falls short is in affordability and student debt. See, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education/higher-education>

<sup>8</sup> These four indicators are defined, respectively, as follows: (1) percentage of ninth graders in MA public high schools who graduate high school within four years; (2) percentage of MA public high school students who enroll in college within 16 after high school graduation; (3) percentage of first time, degree seeking students who initially enroll at a Massachusetts public college or university and graduate from any US higher education institution within six years; (4) percentage of Massachusetts residents (age 25+) who possess a college degree (associate or higher).

<sup>9</sup> A recent report from *U.S. News and World Report* ranks Massachusetts overall as 27<sup>th</sup> in the nation among states in terms of higher education indicators. While placing number 1 in attainment it falls short in terms of two-year graduation rates and affordability.

The prevalence of significant and sustained opportunity and achievement gaps is one of the areas where the State is profoundly deficient. By simply focusing on postsecondary attainment, inequities faced by students of color and marginalized communities are often ignored. Likewise, it will be impossible for Massachusetts to surpass its current attainment goal if the opportunity gaps between Black and Brown students and their White peers are not closed. The data below reflect some of the gaps leading to the unfortunate conclusion that, even in a state like Massachusetts that is so proud of its educational accomplishments, a student's station in life prospects for the future are determined largely by one's zip code and race.

The higher education environment, both nationwide and within the state, has become much more challenging than ever before for education providers as well as students. Small enrollment-driven institutions are struggling as they face declining enrollments and emerging competition for students by online providers using new technologies. To compensate for the enrollment decline, many institutions are increasing their discount rates which often lead to a further decline in revenues. The business model that targets the traditional age high school to college population is under considerable stress, sometimes resulting in closures, mergers, and consolidations. This relatively recent phenomenon in Massachusetts further complicates the ability of the state to continue to make forward progress in advancing college attainment.

At the same time, there is a continuous need to upgrade the skills of the labor force to better drive the innovation economy. Employers are competing for skilled talent and realizing that it has become increasingly difficult to replace the skilled manpower that is already retiring in large numbers. This discussion is sometimes framed in the context of a mismatch between job skills and the hiring demands of employers. Other times it is couched simply as the result of a declining labor force. No matter how the issue is characterized, it boils down to the need for a larger and better educated labor force.

The economic necessity to recruit a highly skilled labor force for the innovation economy, such as that of Massachusetts, requires a greater number of higher education degree holders than we currently have. This is exacerbated by both the declining numbers of high school to college going students in the northeast as well as the significant increase of retiring baby boomers. The graph below highlights the dramatic decline in college going students that will last well until the next decade. A 2014 DHE report made the assertion that by 2025 "...Massachusetts 'public higher education system will fall short of meeting the states need for new associates and bachelor's degrees by a minimum of 55,000 to 65,000 (p. 8)."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in 2011 the Pew Research Foundation projected that the percentage of the nation's population 65 years of age and older will grow from 13% to 18% by 2030.<sup>11</sup> While Americans are living longer, this represents a significant portion of the Massachusetts labor force that is older, on average, than most states. To compound the issue, a subsequent report by the Department in 2016 indicated that a more detailed analysis showed that 80% of those retiring degree holders would be at the baccalaureate

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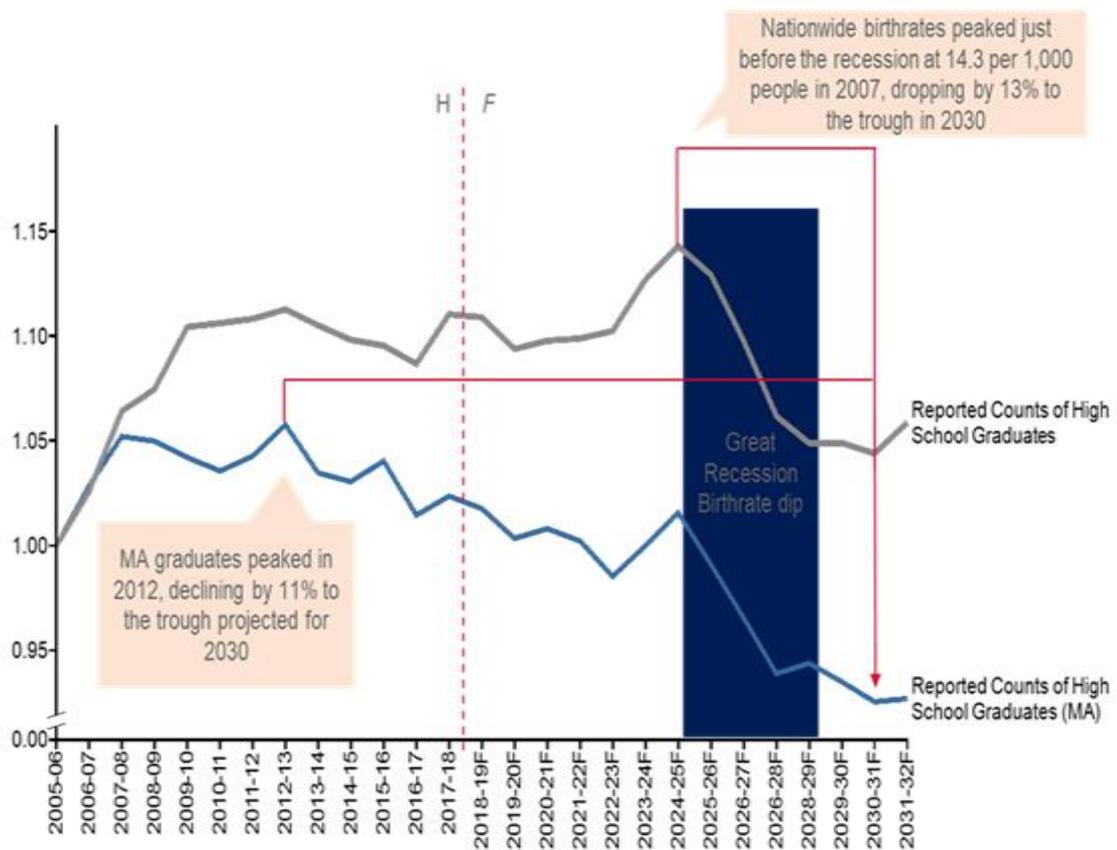
<sup>10</sup> This projection is based on the following sources: DHE, *Degrees of Urgency: Why Massachusetts needs more College Graduates Now*, October 2014; University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute Demographic Projections; Georgetown University: Center on Education and the Workforce, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*, June 2013; New England Economic Partnership: Massachusetts forecast. Calculations by DHE.

<sup>11</sup> See D'Vera Cohn and Paul Taylor, *Baby Boomers Approach 65-Glumply*, Pew Research Center, December 20, 2010. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/12/20/baby-boomers-approach-65-glumply/>.

level or higher.<sup>12</sup> Data from the DHE suggests that if gaps closed between African American and Latinx students and their white peers starting in high school (persistence and graduation) through college (enrollment, retention, and completion), the number of African American graduates between 2025 and 2038 would increase by over 30,000 and the number of Latinx students with degrees would increase by more than 75,000. Even if the gaps were halved, that would still supply the Commonwealth with the requisite number of degree-holders needed to meet workforce demands. Furthermore, this would reintroduce the concept of fairness many Americans believe to be synonymous with higher education, as it is higher education that serve as the major engine of opportunity in the United States.

Figure 1 illustrates the decline in the future college going population in Massachusetts. These projections are likely to remain on target as birthrates during the Great Recession of 2007-2009 fell to 30-year lows. It is also likely that we will not see a rebound in these numbers until after 2030 and it will be even longer before we regain the high school to college going population that existed in 2012. The reality of a declining college going population in Massachusetts remains a significant challenge to Massachusetts' national leadership in technological innovation and economic progress.

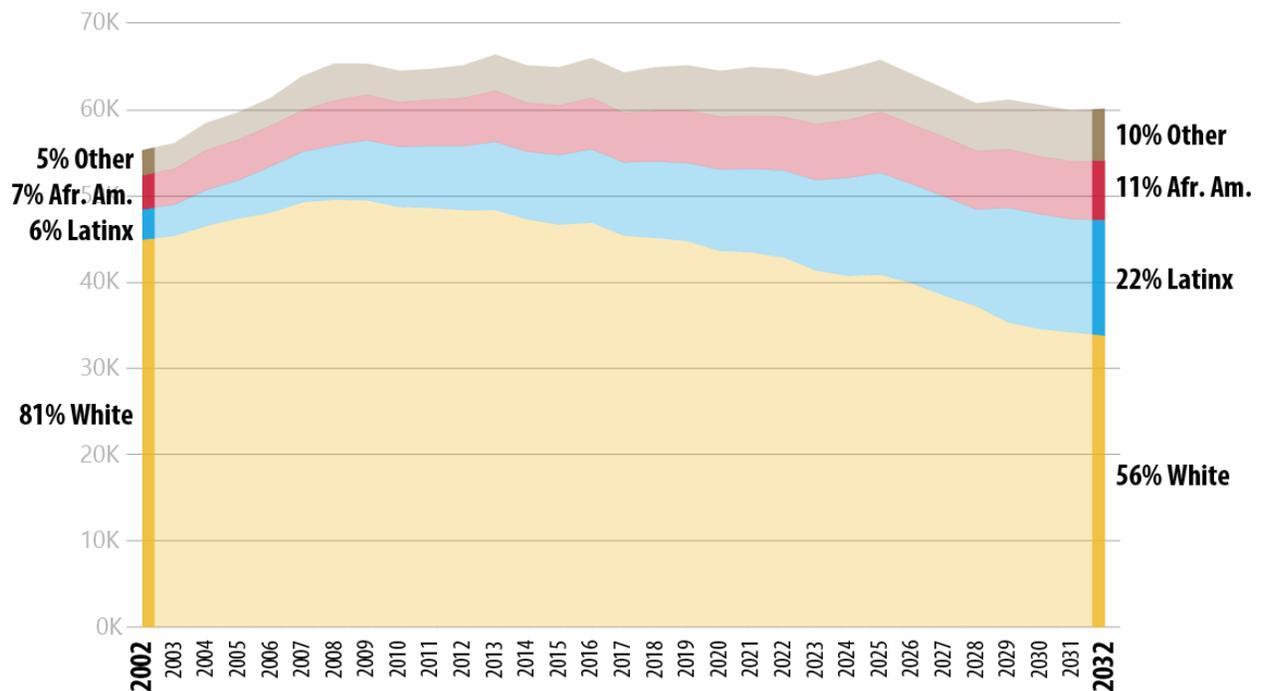
**Figure 1.** Total public and private high school graduates in the United States and Massachusetts Indexed to 2005 (2000–2031F)



<sup>12</sup> BHE, *The Degree Gap: Honing in on College Access, Affordability and Completion in Massachusetts*, June 2016, p. 8.

The projected enrollment decline masks student growth among ethnic and racial groups. While the percentage of white students in Massachusetts high school graduating classes will decline from 82% to 56% by 2032, notable growth will be evident among students of color. The population of graduating high school students is shifting as students of color grow relative to the white population. Figure 2 illustrates these demographic changes as the Latinx and African American populations begin to claim a greater share of high school graduating students in Massachusetts. By 2032, the Latinx high school graduating population will represent nearly one quarter of the potential college going population increasing from a base of 6% currently.

**Figure 2.** Total public high school graduates in Massachusetts by race/ethnicity  
*Actual 2002–2016, Projected 2017–2032*



Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2016.

That population growth has been occurring among ethnic and racial groups that have historically been underserved by education at all levels is a notable event. This moment in time allows us a real opportunity in time to make progress to improve social mobility among groups that have, in great measure, been left out of these positive changes. This certainly could be characterized as Massachusetts’ opportunity to promote social justice and racial equity among broad swaths of its citizenry. Thus, both the economic and social imperatives driving the future standard of living among its population requires that Massachusetts public higher education lead the effort to bring about greater equity in outcomes of its students.

The fundamental shift in the high school population in Massachusetts requires increased attention on opportunity gaps by race, ethnicity, and gender if we are to address the possible consequences of a declining high school to college population. By virtually any measure, gaps are apparent throughout the educational pipeline from early childhood education to K-12 to

higher education and onto the labor force. Massachusetts' many accomplishments in the field of education, at all levels, will be overshadowed if it does not make headway in reducing the significant structural and systemic barriers that a large and growing number of its student's face. While it is necessary for Massachusetts to focus on increasing educational attainment, it will not succeed in meeting the needs of the growing economy if it does simultaneously close opportunity gaps. At a time when the state needs a larger and more skilled labor force, ensuring equitable outcomes for all its students, particularly Black and Brown students, is a key element to a successful attainment strategy. This reality has become both an economic and social imperative.

Among the most pronounced educational gaps are those between white females and Latino males. The college graduation rate for white females is approximately 65% while for Latino males stands around 22%. This 43-percentage point gap in overall college attainment is simply unacceptable for a state that prides itself on academic achievement. To more effectively narrow opportunity gaps requires concerted and targeted interventions. These gaps are persistent and are evident in both two and four-year institutions. But the gaps are not immutable and can be reduced with concerted, focused, and sustained interventions. Student support structures will need to be created or existing support structures enhanced to ensure that all admitted students are equipped with the tools to succeed.

The goal of the strategic framework that is being developed is to fully close these gaps by adopting a more holistic approach to student success and college attainment. Agreement on metrics that have emerged from the fruitful conversations associated with the development of the Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS) is a step in the right direction. We need to identify and remove the obstacles that limit student's abilities to successfully complete their academic requirements in a reasonable amount of time.

With agreed upon metrics and an analytical platform, the institutions of the MA System of Public Higher Education are well positioned to strengthen existing initiatives and launch new initiatives that promote equity and allow students from traditionally underserved backgrounds to succeed in a postsecondary setting.<sup>13</sup> Closing opportunity gaps are a necessary condition to bringing about social mobility through higher education in Massachusetts but not a sufficient condition. Sufficiency requires that all student success indicators are moving in a positive direction. Institutions will need to examine every facet of institutional policy through an equity lens to determine whether existing practices and structures advance equitable outcomes for all students. If an academic institution takes this approach and we shift the focus from college-ready students to student-ready colleges and universities, it can truly lay claim to the goal of equity.

It will be necessary to define, identify, and understand the conditions and structures that most need to be addressed if we are to fully tackle this issue. The important considerations of race, ethnicity, and gender will also need to be spelled out. There is an interest in promoting a student-focused and place-bound approach. In other words, who do we target and where might the interventions be most necessary and effective? Another dimension that is particularly crucial if we are to scale up our positive outcomes is that of location or geography. Where students receive their formative education, prior to seeking college admission, provides crucial information. Thus, we identify where students experiencing the largest opportunity gaps reside prior to high school

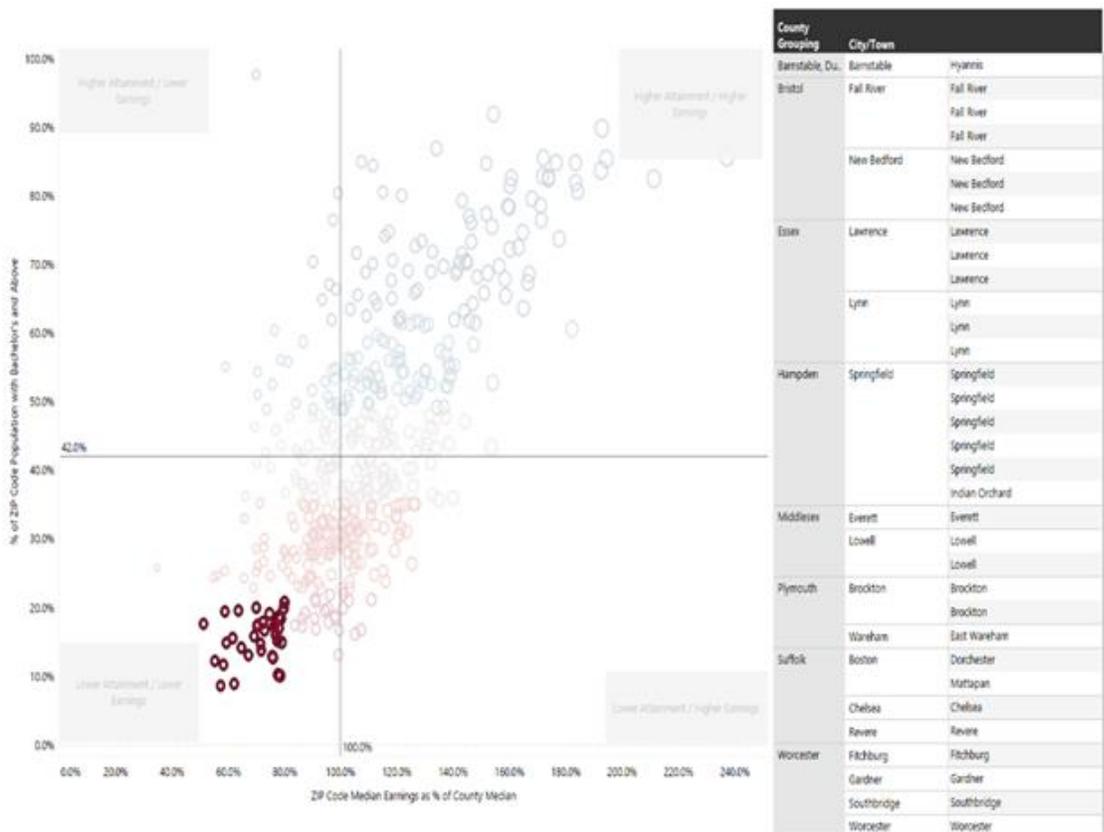
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<sup>13</sup> At present, the DHE has supported use of *Tableau* as its analytical platform and has participated in a system-wide purchase of this analytical tool.

graduation. This led to a focus on communities with relatively low levels of educational attainment and median earnings that fell below the state average.

Figure 3 identifies these communities in Massachusetts by zip code. The results are not all that surprising inasmuch as these communities consist of significant populations of people of color. They are also predominantly located in Gateway cities that house most the state’s high schools wherein less than 50 percent of the population self-identifies as White. The identified communities (See Figure 4) include Worcester/Leicester; Lawrence/Lowell; Brockton; Springfield/Holyoke/Chicopee; Greater Boston; and New Bedford/Fall River. Besides the fact that these communities are known for the significant diversity of their population, they are also communities with great potential for students of color as there are two- and four-year public institutions in proximity. Likewise, they are communities that happen to be surrounded by areas of job growth, greater educational attainment, and higher median earnings. Thus, if educational attainment among the target populations in these areas can be enhanced, there will likely be employment opportunities in relative proximity to better economically support their growing communities.<sup>14</sup>

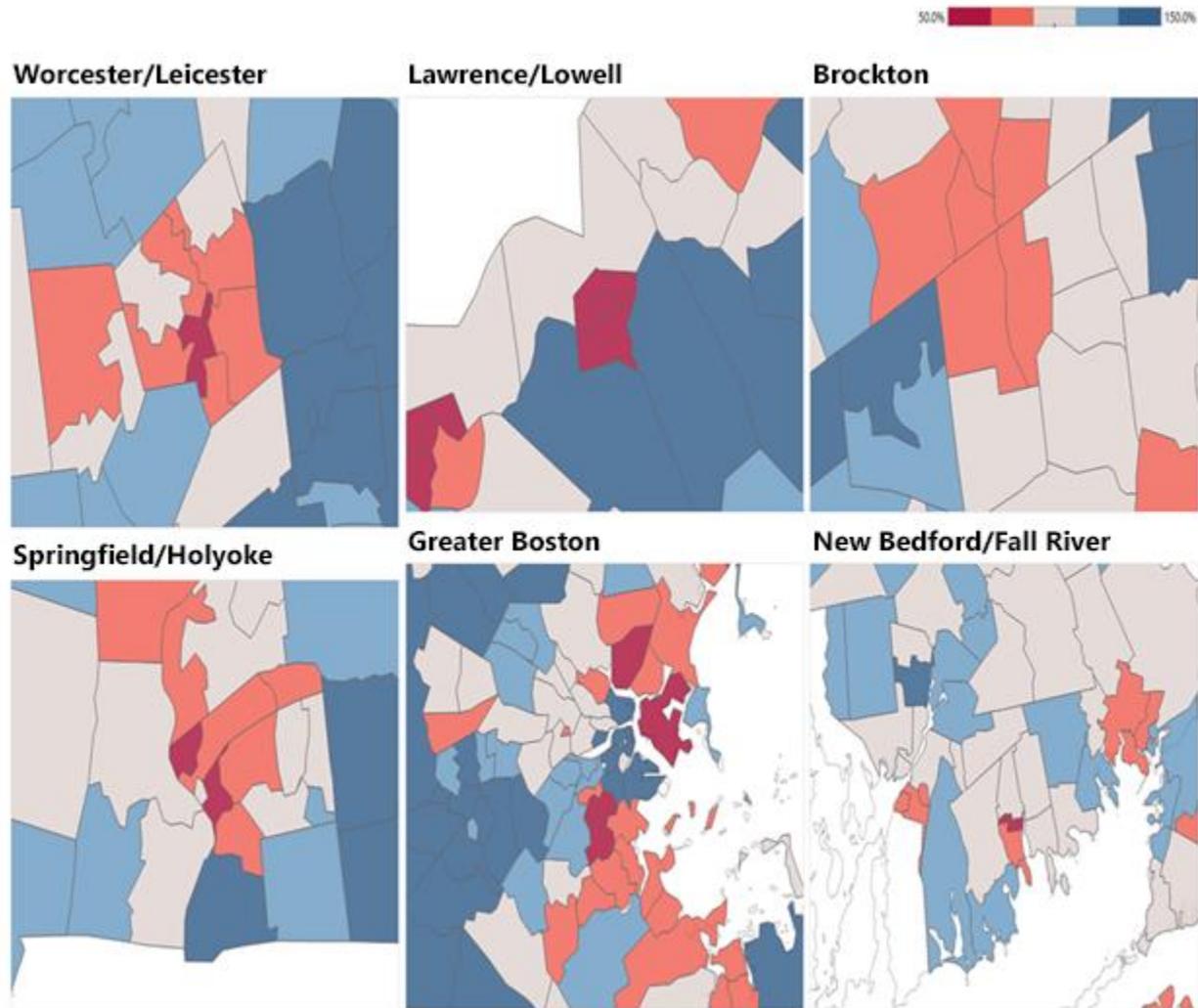
**Figure 3.** Scatterplot by ZIP Code: Bachelor’s attainment vs. median earnings as % of county median (Highlighted ZIP codes are those with lower attainment and lower median earnings)



<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that rural communities do not face educational challenges or that gaps are not prevalent in these parts of the state. The conversation regarding a strategy to identify and close gaps that prevail in rural parts of the state has not been taken up at this time. Nonetheless, lessons that might be learned from a process that closes opportunity and achievement gaps among students of color might help guide an approach to rural inequality.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

**Figure 4.** Urban regions: Median earnings as % of county median by ZIP code  
*Selected regions show urban ZIP codes with lower median earnings (and generally lower bachelor's attainment) surrounded by ZIP codes with higher median earnings (and generally higher bachelor's attainment)*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

The data suggest that if Massachusetts is to be a statewide leader in fully adopting and carrying out a strategic framework centered around equity, it will need to focus on two major identifiers: race and geography. This is not to suggest that other opportunity and achievement gaps should be ignored but rather that if our system of higher education can ensure the success of students of color, all students will benefit. To accomplish this, several key elements will need to be in place: (i) a campus leadership that is committed to racial equity and appreciates the cultural wealth of students of color; (ii) a campus community that understand and values the importance of making their institutions welcoming places for students, faculty, staff, and administrators of color; (iii) a

complete set of academic and social structures that will eliminate barriers and provide the support that students of color need to succeed; and a realization that promoting an affordable college education is essential if students who have traditionally been underserved are to succeed.

### Structure of the Consultation Process

In order to meet the two goals in the vision statement, the Department will need to partner with institutions as most of the work needed to promote equity and increase attainment occurs at the campus-level. As we know, we will not be able to meet goals around educational attainment if we do not close opportunity and achievement gaps and center our work on ensuring equitable outcomes for all students. Critical to the viability and sustainability of a statewide strategic framework for Massachusetts public higher education will be the integration of system goals at the campus-level, specifically within institutional strategic plans. This means the Department will also need to examine its existing policies and initiatives to determine how to better align and promote the statewide equity imperative.

A master plan is not identical, per se, to a system-wide strategic framework. As described above, the master plan is operational in nature while the strategic framework is aspirational. It is difficult to envision a master plan that is not informed by an overarching strategic framework.

To help implement this ambitious agenda, Department staff propose a structure to engage with external stakeholders that includes a relatively small Steering Committee supported by a larger Advisory Board. The Steering Committee would consist of a president/chancellor from each segment of public higher education, the Chair of the BHE and the chair of the Board's Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), one representative from a national organization focused on promoting equity in higher education, and two open seats for Massachusetts partners committed to the work. The smaller Steering Committee will be charged with advancing work in two areas: inform the direction of the statewide strategic framework and develop a process to ensure alignment between statewide goals centered on equity and Department initiatives and policies.

The Department will convene an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will consist of campus representatives that will engage in deep conversations regarding changes in policy and projects, at both the system- and campus-level, needed to advance the equity strategic framework. The Advisory Board will be regularly informed during the development of the statewide strategic framework and be asked to provide input on overall direction.

In order to advance this important project, Department staff, in partnership with members of the Board, will seek external support, both in the form of financial resources and consulting expertise. Financial resources will be needed to support the development of the strategic framework and provide professional development opportunities for Board members, Department staff, and campus administrations, faculty, and staff.

To ensure the long-term success of the statewide equity framework, the Department and institutions will need to examine their own organizational cultures, structures, and policies. A major component of being able to do so with an equity lens is the need for professional development across all levels, from the state to the institution. The Department seeks to partner with the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center and adapt the Equity Institutes model to provide the professional development needed to successfully advance the state's new strategic framework.

## Data

As noted in the Vision Statement, the progress made on goals identified as part of the statewide strategic framework will be measured using the new PMRS. The PMRS will not only monitor progress at the institutional-level, but at the segment- and system-level. The baseline dashboards launched in May 2019, and the BHE's intention is to set goals during FY2020 for these metrics that are specific to public higher education, targeting specific annual increases along with a simultaneous closing of gaps between subgroups (with a specific focus on African American, Latinx, Pell Recipients, and Male students). Further, Department staff will need to identify baselines, benchmarks, and targets for systemwide policies and initiatives to ensure alignment with the broader goal of ensuring equitable outcomes for all students.

## Timeline

- Spring 2019: Commissioner Updates to Board of Higher Education through Equity Data Spotlights
- Summer 2019: Department staff host initial Steering Committee meeting.
- Summer 2019: Department staff host initial Advisory Board meeting.
- Summer 2019: Department staff identify major policies and projects to advance goals and objectives.
- September 2019: Board retreat focused on systemwide strategic framework and review goals, baselines, and targets.
- September 2019: Release guidelines on campus commitments and efforts related to closing equity gaps
- October 2019: Department staff host joint meeting of Steering Committee and Advisory Board.
- Winter 2019: Equity Institute systemwide convening.
- February 2020: Campuses submit commitments and efforts related to closing equity gaps.
- March 2020: Department staff review campus plans.
- April 2020: Department staff feedback to campuses and request revisions.
- May 2020: Department staff host final joint meeting of Steering Committee and Advisory Board.
- June 2020: Board of Higher Education – Adopt systemwide strategic framework.

## Conclusion

Increasing degree attainment while reducing gaps for numerous student outcome indicators is a challenging undertaking. This is even more difficult to achieve in the context of a system of public higher and particularly a decentralized one, such as that of Massachusetts. The expansion

of public higher education in the United States after 1943 served to open higher education to citizens who previously had little access to it. Subsequent generations of students benefited from this development. We are now at a juncture where large and growing segments of our population, particularly among African Americans and Latinx, will be left behind, precisely at a time when more degree-holders are necessary, if a concerted effort is not made to expand opportunities for the least advantaged students. All our investments and initiatives need to focus on the goal of growing degree attainment with equity. An enhanced focus on increased attainment with an emphasis on equity can not only help Massachusetts remain a global competitor in industries such as education, medicine and technology, but more importantly, it would fulfill the promise of economic and social mobility for many students, especially students of color.