

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

December 15, 2020
10:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education ("BHE" or "the Board") was held virtually on Tuesday, December 15, 2020 on the web-conference platform Zoom.

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair
Sheila Harrity, Vice Chair
Ann Christensen
Veronica Conforme
Alex Cortez
Patty Eppinger
JD La Rock
Paul Mattera
Tom Moreau, Designee for Secretary James Peyser
Judy Pagliuca
Mike O'Brien
Paul Toner

Jorgo Gushi, non-voting Student Advisor, Community College segment
Kush Patel, non-voting Student Advisor, UMass segment

Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

The following Board Members were absent:

Charles Bianchi, Student Member, State University segment

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. and announced that this meeting is being held remotely and in accordance with Governor Baker's recent Executive Order which suspended certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law for the purpose of authorizing public bodies to allow remote participation by all members while the state of emergency is in effect. Chair Gabrieli announced that Board members and select Department of Higher Education (DHE or "the Department") staff would be participating remotely, via Zoom; that the meeting is being livestreamed and recorded; and that members of the public who signed up for public comment would be allowed to join the Zoom meeting to provide comment. DHE Chief of Staff,

Elena Quiroz-Livanis, then took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chair Gabrieli reported that there were two requests to address the Board during the public participation period and asked that remarks be kept to three minutes. Chair Gabrieli welcomed Cape Cod Community College students Caitlyn Marotta and Lindzie White, who are appearing before the Board to offer comment and support regarding amendments to the student trustee law, which had only permitted full-time students to serve as Student Trustees at community colleges and state universities.

Cape Community College Students, Caitlyn Marotta and Lindzie White thanked the Board and the Department for the opportunity to participate today. They referenced the recently amended student trustee law which expands student trustee eligibility to include part-time students, and thanked Commissioner Santiago, the Board and the Student Advisory Council (SAC) for their support through the process. They shared the past challenges experienced in finding eligible full-time students because of the requirement. After sharing their findings with other schools, it was discovered to be a common issue, which pointed towards inequitable representation since many part-time students come from underserved demographics. With the assistance of the SAC and through collaborative outreach, the amendment was passed by the Senate in November 2020, and was signed by Governor Baker. They concluded by thanking Chair Jorgo Gushi, Vice Chair, Nikki Parliamentarian, Professor Claudine Barnes, Dean Christine McCarey, David Coffman and President Cox for their support.

III. WELCOME

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion to accept minutes of the last Board meeting, which was held on October 20, 2020. The motion was duly moved and seconded. Jorgo Gushi, the non-voting Student Advisor for the Community Colleges segment, identified a technical issue, noting that the minutes wrongly designated him as the voting student member instead of Charles Bianchi, and he asked that this be corrected. Chair Gabrieli acknowledged the error and asked for the minutes to be approved subject to this technical correction; with no further discussion the motion proceeded to a roll call vote and passed unanimously, subject to the technical correction, as follows:

- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes

- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

V. REMARKS & REPORTS

A. Chairman's Remarks

Chair Gabrieli thanked the Commissioner and Department staff for the essential work done while working remotely. He commended the progress made on addressing long-term strategic issues, despite engaging in a more challenging environment. He gave deference to the Community Colleges and State Universities, faculty, and staff for their mutual sacrifices made to fulfill their commitments to students. He extended appreciation to students for their consistency and adaptability to change where needed during the 2020 school year.

Chair Gabrieli spoke about the critical need to look ahead at what he anticipates will be a challenging spring semester. He said that although a more likely return to normalcy is probable for the fall 2021 school year, the long-term challenges and needs in higher education have not shifted but have instead been exacerbated. For the purposes of this meeting, Chair Gabrieli outlined the Board's commitment to evolving both functionally and strategically. This included rebooting the Board's committee meetings, and the Board's long-term task of assuring the system's overall fiscal health. Chair Gabrieli noted the importance of the year ahead in terms of the Board's processes, the Equity Agenda and work of higher education in Massachusetts. He referenced emerging efforts between the DHE and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to answer timely questions about the impact of COVID-19 on the high school graduating classes of 2020 and 2021. One of the questions raised was if students were able to engage in available higher education opportunities. If not, what can be done to assist their moving forward in times ahead. Chair Gabrieli concluded that a more in-depth discussion would be made at the end of the Board meeting.

B. Commissioner's Remarks

Commissioner Santiago thanked the Cape Cod Community College student leaders who joined the meeting earlier for identifying an area of concern to their constituents. He shared his full support and appreciation of their great efforts to do something positive about the student trustee law. He acknowledged the presidents and representatives from the State University and Community College executive offices in attendance. He commented that all five open presidential searches had launched, with an anticipated completion date on or before July 1, 2021. Commissioner Santiago then congratulated Alex Nally, a DHE staff member, for successfully passing his Massachusetts bar exam. Mr. Nally began his work with the Department as an intern a few years ago and later transitioned as an employee while attending law school. The Commissioner shared how delighted and fortunate the Department was to add another member to their legal staff. He concluded by stating that he is reserving his comments related to today's agenda items, including the Equity Agenda, for later in today's meeting.

C. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education's (EOE) Remarks

Secretary Peyser's designee for today's Board meeting, Tom Moreau, offered remarks on behalf of the Secretary. He briefly stated how impressed he was with the extraordinary steps taken by those in the higher education space to get through these challenging times. He also stated that he would be recusing himself on two votes today—the one on the strategic plan and the other on budget matters since both are forwarded to Secretary Peyser for subsequent approval.

D. Report from Presidents

State University Segmental Report

For a copy of President Birge's full remarks, please see:

<https://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/documents/2020-12-15%20Report%20from%20SU%20Presidents.pdf>

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts College President James Birge thanked Chair Gabrieli, the Board, Commissioner Santiago, and DHE staff for the opportunity to share updates on behalf of the Massachusetts State Universities. He also thanked Secretary Peyser, the Governor and the legislature for prioritizing the FY21 state budget. President Birge recognized the unique challenges facing state leaders in this year's budget process, the investments made during these unprecedented times to help communities manage the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as investments made to help support institutions' missions to provide the high quality public education. He commented that although there are some minor differences between the branches and the spending plans, it is clear that Beacon Hill leaders are committed to ensuring the viability of our Massachusetts public higher education system.

President Birge stated that he appreciated the FY21 budget's recognition of the amortized cost

of past collective bargaining agreements and how the budget incorporates in campus line items. Also included are grants awarded through the FY20 performance-based funding line item, and a \$10 million increase in the state scholarship line item. He added that the legislature also recapitalized the State Universities' performance-based funding formula by adding \$5.5 million to the line item. These funds will be distributed through a performance-based formula that was mandated by the legislature and developed by the Department of Higher Education in 2015. President Birge expressed gratitude for investments made in the campus appropriations, the funding formula account, the State Universities' internship incentive program and the state scholarship and financial aid line items. He thanked the Department for their leadership and advocacy throughout the process.

President Birge also thanked the Commissioner and his staff for developing a proposed FY22 budget that further invests in our campuses and students, adding that the State University Council of Presidents enthusiastically endorses the Department's budget recommendations to the Board.

Regarding COVID-19 response efforts, President Birge stated that all the State Universities are willing to be part of the vaccine distribution plan. Our campuses are located in every region of the Commonwealth and can be used to effectively distribute these vaccines, especially in our gateway cities.

President Birge also shared an update on the fall semester. He was happy to report that with the help and support of the campus community, they had successfully offered a mix of in-person and online classes, as well as an opportunity for residential on-campus student housing. In collaboration with public health experts, community leaders, emergency management professionals, and with the help and support of our faculty, staff and students, each State University campus developed an operationalized, a COVID-19 return plan that focused on the health and safety of our students, of our staff and of our faculty. In compliance with the Department of Public Health and Center for Disease Control guidelines, the State Universities worked to de-densify the campuses and classrooms by expanding remote online and distance instruction and offering students a blended learning environment.

All in all, President Birge said, the fall semester was a success. As the State Universities look forward for the spring semester, they are again working with our campus communities to update our COVID safety plans, incorporate new testing and tracing guidance, and plan for a full educational experience for our students. President Birge thanked the Board for their time.

Community College Segmental Report

For a copy of President Kennedy's full remarks, please see:

<https://www.mass.edu/bhe/lib/documents/2020-12-15%20Report%20from%20CC%20Presidents.pdf>

Berkshire Community College President Ellen Kennedy spoke on behalf of President James Mabry and the Community College Council of Presidents. She extended his best wishes for a healthy, safe and peaceful end to 2020 and offered remarks on the devastating impact of COVID-19 on

Community Colleges. President Kennedy commented on how many students are facing unemployment, food issues and housing deficits. In some cases, students are even helping their children with school while trying to complete their own courses. Last week, analysis by the Community College Resource Center out of Columbia University showed that equity gaps are deepening. According to the data, low-income community college students are twice as likely to cancel their plans for college than students from high income households. As of October, more than 40 percent of households reported that a community college student is canceling their plans. Another 15 percent are taking fewer courses or switching programs. Students who are also parents and those who have lost work since March are also much more likely to cancel their plans. She stated that these students are the future workforce of the Commonwealth and we need them back in the classroom. The Community Colleges' decision to go remote early on helped faculty and students prepare for the challenges before them. It ensured that the institutions could provide high quality instruction and services effectively in a remote setting.

Despite the challenges, President Kennedy shared that institutions still serve a critical role as a community hub for Massachusetts residents in all regions of the Commonwealth. The Community Colleges support local needs for food and housing and security, while many are also partnering to directly support the fight against COVID-19 through testing and offering space for shelters. Nursing and allied health students are on the front lines and will this week be vaccinating health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities. President Kennedy shared optimism about the future and possible vaccine distribution to provide more opportunities for campus repopulation. She stated that there is no doubt that the lost revenue due to COVID-19 has made a significant impact that has caused many difficult and challenging decisions.

President Kennedy thanked the Board, Commissioner Santiago, and Secretary Peyser for their advocacy as Governor Baker developed his revised FY21 budget recommendations. Governor Baker prioritized higher education in his budget and level funded most higher education accounts, including the Community College campus line items. President Kennedy noted that the Community College segment is especially excited about the \$7 million in funding included for the new "Success Fund" which would provide targeted investments and wraparound supports and services for community college students. She stated that the Governor's leadership on recommending level funding of our state appropriations will help the Community Colleges fulfill our mission to offer pathways to high- quality post-secondary educational opportunities to our Commonwealth's residents.

President Kennedy said she would be remiss to not mention the optimism we share for the incoming Biden-Harris administration. In particular, the greatest advocate for community colleges will be living in the White House- future First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. Dr. Biden's experience in a community college classroom was and will continue to be an asset to the White House and to the nation. This is an historic perspective to have in the White House. And we know that President Elect Biden already appreciates the importance of community colleges to opportunity, equity and workforce development. In the New Year.

President Kennedy added that the institutions have begun planning for returning students, faculty,

and staff to campus. With vaccine distribution plans rolling out, the Community Colleges hope that health care students and faculty will be vaccinated in the first round so that they can keep this critical pipeline open and not delay in getting students fully trained and out in the field. Further, they hope their faculty, staff and students are not far behind so that as soon as possible everyone can return safely to campus.

At the conclusion of remarks from the Council of Presidents, Chair Gabrieli asked if Board members had any questions or comments. Member Judy Pagliuca referred to President Kennedy's statements concerning the vaccine and inquired about students living in multigenerational settings with vulnerable seniors, and testing sites to curtail the pandemic's spread on school campuses. President Kennedy shared the types of "Stop the Spread" testing sites already in operation, and thanked Member Pagliuca for recognizing the multigenerational impact of Community Colleges in the Commonwealth.

E. Report from Student Advisory Council

Community College Segmental Student Advisor Jorgo Gushi shared regrets on behalf of Student Member Charles Bianchi, who was unable to attend the meeting. He thanked Caitlyn Marotta and Lindzie White for briefing the Board on the student trustee issue, and thanked the Board for their willingness to support in this effort. Mr. Gushi shared how the SAC worked with Caitlyn Marotta and Lindzie White, along with the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges to make changes to the student trustee law. He stated that this approval speaks volumes for equity and diversity in Massachusetts because the leadership and values of our students should never be connected to their enrollment status.

Mr. Gushi also addressed a Comcast Xfinity carrier issue, which has equally affected Community College, State University and UMass students. It presents a challenge because next year Comcast will begin to charge all Xfinity customers in the northeastern United States a coverage fee for exceeding their monthly data cap. Users will be able to use 1.2 terabytes of data per month before being charged for more. Without appropriate action, customers without unlimited coverage plans, would incur a \$10 fee for every 50 gigabytes they go over in data up to a maximum of \$100 additional each month. He expressed concern for how these fees could adversely affect remote learners using the internet more than eight hours a day. Since it remains unclear how much longer remote learning will be in place, the SAC asked for feedback on how to support this issue.

Mr. Gushi also reported on the SAC's forward movement with continuous support on Open Educational Resources (OER), legislative and funding advocacy, student representation, and a community building day. He commented on the campus sexual assault and climate survey bill being advocated by the SAC. It was successfully moving through the legislature. He shared that as student leaders, the SAC will continue their support on this issue because it is important for our equity and diversity.

UMass Segmental Student Advisor Kush Patel thanked the Cape Cod Community College

students for their dedication to the student trustee issue. He stated that it is huge win for them and permits students who want to run to do so at their own campus.

VI. MOTIONS

List of Documents Used

BHE Motions 21-35 through 21-39

Links to Videos accessible before the meeting:

- [BHE 21-35](#)
- [BHE 21-36 through BHE 21-37](#)
- [BHE 21-38](#)
- [BHE 21-39](#)

Chair Gabrieli proceeded with the next section of the agenda. He noted that pre-recorded presentations on all motions were made available to Board members before today's meeting, and stated that Board members will have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss each motion. He asked Commissioner Santiago for to introduce the motions.

Commissioner Santiago thanked DHE staff for preparing the video presentations. He reviewed how the Board would move through the motions, starting with the four motions — one conditional program approval, two letters of intent and one strategic plan—but before turning to the final motion Deputy Commissioner Tom Simard will provide a presentation on the FY22 budget recommendations.

The Commissioner commented on the first motion regarding a new institution, Boston Islamic Seminary, which seeks conditional approval to award the Masters of Islamic Leadership. He then proceeded to share two very strong letters of intent, one for a new program at Salem State University and the other for a new program at Westfield State University. Both programs show innovation and commitment to the Equity Agenda. The fourth motion pertains to Fitchburg State University's strategic plan. Commissioner Santiago publicly acknowledged the hard work of President Richard Lapidus and his team in developing a thorough and ambitious strategic plan, as well as the commentary from members of this Board who reviewed the plan and made important recommendations.

Member JD LaRock recalled that the Board recently approved another new institution, Sattler College, and noted that Sattler also had initial reporting requirements; he asked if there were any updates on that new institution. Associate Commissioner Cynthia Brown confirmed that the institution is in good standing in terms of regulatory reporting and compliance.

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of BHE 21-35: *New Institution Application of Boston Islamic Seminary to Award the Degree Masters of Islamic Religious Leadership*. There was a brief discussion regarding the financing of the institution and support from external stakeholders; Board members were satisfied with the information provided by institutional representatives. There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. The motion, having been duly moved and seconded, passed unanimously as follows:

- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity: Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- EOE Secretary Designee Bob LePage – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Secretary Peyser – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

BHE-21-35: NEW INSTITUTION APPLICATION OF BOSTON ISLAMIC SEMINARY TO AWARD THE DEGREE MASTERS OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby conditionally approves the amended Articles of Incorporation of **BOSTON ISLAMIC SEMINARY** with the authority to award the following degree: **Master of Islamic Religious Leadership.**

Provided further that the BHE will undertake to review, during the twelve year period set forth in 610 CMR 2.05(5), the continued progress of the institution toward meeting and maintaining compliance with the BHE's regulations, the Visiting Committee's recommendations, the goals and representations set forth in connection with the institution's petition to the BHE, and its compliance with the following conditions:

1. For the first five years of operation, the institution shall submit to the BHE semi-annual status reports by January 15th and July 15th of each year, providing narrative and statistical information on the institution's compliance with BHE standards and with the goals and representations set forth in connection with the institution's petition, including the institution's enrollment, finances, student learning outcomes, and other information as requested by Department staff.
2. Within the first two years of the program's operation, the Department will schedule a periodic review to monitor the institution's ongoing compliance with the Board's regulations.

Boston Islamic Seminary's conditional approval to award the Master of Islamic Religious Leadership shall continue through the first five years of operation.

The conditional approval period, and the conditions imposed upon its approval, may be extended once by the Commissioner, for up to an additional five years, upon a determination that there are outstanding issues of compliance with the BHE's regulations.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, Section 30 et seq.; 610 CMR 2.05(5).

Contact: Cynthia Farr Brown, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner for Regulatory and Veterans Affairs

Patricia Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-36: Approval of Letter of Intent of Salem State University to Award the combined Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Studies and Spanish and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. There being no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. The motion, having been duly moved and seconded, passed unanimously as follows:

- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity - Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

BHE 21-36 APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY TO AWARD THE COMBINED BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN HEALTHCARE STUDIES AND SPANISH AND AUTHORIZATION FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of Salem State University to award the **Combined Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Studies and Spanish** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree-granting authority pursuant to the Fast Track Review protocol.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b), AAC 18-40
Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D., Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Public Program Approval

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-37: Approval of Letter of Intent of Westfield State University to Award Bachelor of Music in Music Therapy and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. The motion was moved and seconded. There was a brief discussion regarding career opportunities for students in this field and the popularity of the degree across the country and in the state. Chair Gabrieli called for vote. The motion, having been duly moved and seconded passed unanimously as follows:

- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

BHE 21-37 APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY TO AWARD THE BACHELOR OF MUSIC IN MUSIC THERAPY AND AUTHORIZATION FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of Salem State University to award **the Bachelor of Music in Music Therapy** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast Track review protocol.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40
Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D., Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Public Program Approval

Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-38: Approval of Fitchburg State University's Strategic Plan*. The motion was moved and seconded. There being no discussion,

Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion passed with one abstention as follows:

- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity – Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Abstain
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes
- Paul Toner – Yes

BHE 21-38 APPROVAL OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the **Fitchburg State University** Strategic Plan and authorizes the Commissioner to forward the same to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 7, 9(f), 9(l) and 22(l); BHE By-Laws, Article I, Section 3(d) and Article III.

Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D.
Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Public Program Approval

BHE 21-39 APPROVAL OF BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION FY2022 BUDGET

Finally, Chair Gabrieli turned to the last motion on the agenda and asked for a motion for approval of *BHE 21-39: Approval of Board of Higher Education FY22 Budget*. The motion was made and duly seconded.

Commissioner Santiago set the context for the motion by discussing the current fiscal year, noting that it had been an unusual year. Due to COVID-19, budgets have been stretched thin and at the institutional level and with the legislature delaying action on the final budget for FY21, the budget process has taken a long time. He acknowledged that the BHE recommendations for the FY22 budget parallel and reinforce the work that this Board did in prior years. In focusing a budget, it was very student centered whose intent was to cover unmet need, particularly beginning in the Community College segment with MassGrant Plus, and this budget continues that effort to extend the program to the State Universities and the UMass campuses as well. The Commissioner stated that addressing affordability is of great importance in these times, particularly in light of the Equity

Agenda, and that we are quite pleased with the FY21 budget. He continued, stating that it is student centered, and it supports the initiatives that have been launched under the Equity Agenda. He then introduced Deputy Commissioner Simard to begin the presentation.

Deputy Commissioner Simard opened by providing context and background for Board's FY22 budget recommendations which will be submitted to the Secretary for consideration in the development of the Governor's FY22 budget. He reiterated this was an extraordinary year in which we were acting under provisional or interim budget authority. Most recently, the legislature and the Governor acted to support in substantial ways the mission of higher education and, in particular, public higher education. The budget recommendation for FY22 builds upon that and some of the key principles that were included in the current fiscal year budget are intended to align with and support the Board's equity priority.

Deputy Commissioner Simard focused on the line items and the programs that are particularly and strongly aligned with our equity work, noting the elements that are part of how we can strategically support this work, starting with affordability, policy, innovations, evidence throughout student supports, culturally appropriate, responsive, and relevant pedagogy, and campus climate.

He stated the most significant point about the FY21 budget, as well as the FY22 budget, are investments in need-based financial aid. Deputy Commissioner Simard noted that we are currently in our third year of the MassGrant Plus experience, which is a program designed for students in the community college segment who have unmet need for tuition and fees. MassGrant Plus is a gap filler program that accounts for that amount of financial need that is remaining after accounting for all other forms of public grant aid that includes federal and state grant aid, as well as institutional aid and calculated expected family contribution from the FAFSA. The budget includes continued funding for that program and most recently, the legislature and the Governor supported the incremental expansion of MassGrant Plus to include the state universities. This budget for FY22 would provide a full year funding for, based on our calculations, the students in the UMass system and the State Universities who continue to have unmet need for tuition and fees, who are full time enrolled and Pell eligible.

Deputy Commissioner Simard highlighted policy innovations, in which the Board validated its commitment to the early college program to expand opportunities for high school students, particularly students of color and first-generation students, to begin to introduce to them opportunities for educational pathways toward career success. And, the Board in the October meeting included a resolution adopted unanimously to fund this program at \$6.4M. For FY21 there is additional funding in this program in the state budget, and there is an additional two million dollars for dual enrollment and early college from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief funding from the CARES Act.

Mr. Simard continued by introducing the SUCCESS program, a new program funded in the FY21 budget. SUCCESS is an acronym for Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services. There are several proven models nationally, either based in part or derived in part from the city of New York ASAP program and other complementary programs that combine affordability with

critical resources to provide wraparound supports for students to help them succeed.

He referenced last year's recommendation to significantly increase formula funding, yet how much of the formula funding amounts for FY21 will be built into the budget has not been determined. The BHE recommendations are based on the assumption that those amounts will be included in the budget at a substantial enough amount to trigger the two components of the formulas, which are the foundational components of the formulas as well as the performance or outcome-based portions of the formulas. To ensure those aspects of the formulas are addressed, sufficient funding is crucial, and given the Board's commitment to racial equity and recognition of the PRMS work done to measure performance across the system he stressed the importance of revisiting them to ensure that what goes into the foundation and performance parts of the formulas reflect changes that this Board has approved for system-wide performance.

Deputy Commissioner Simard commented that the performance management set aside program is historically the most impactful one, given the dollars that are available to help the Department promote system transformation. Because a substantial amount of what the DHE does is funded through this line item, the BHE budget seeks a partial restoration up to \$5M. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence-based modeling are funded, including the Department's work with Tableau and working with the campuses in further developing a data-informed infrastructure and culture. It is also a program that we have used to incentivize cross-system collaboration and innovative approaches to education, such as the Open Educational Resources (OER) Initiative, One Hundred Males to College, competency-based education, and credit for prior learning. Mass Transfer and all these system and cross-system collaborations have also been funded through this item.

Deputy Commissioner Simard concluded that it is crucial that we continue to seek these kinds of resources in order to drive system innovation and performance. Other items in the budget recommendations reflect either level or maintenance funding for some ongoing critical DHE commitments. Upon the conclusion of Mr. Simard's presentation Chair Gabrieli asked Board members if there were any questions.

There being no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for vote, and the motion, having been duly made and seconded, passed with one abstention, as follows:

- Anna Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Patty Eppinger – Yes
- Chair-Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity- Yes
- JD LaRock – Yes
- Assistant Secretary Tom Moreau – Abstain
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Michael O'Brien – Yes
- Judy Pagliuca – Yes

- Paul Toner – Yes

BHE 21-39 APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the attached Board of Higher Education operating budget recommendations for Fiscal Year 2022 and further authorizes the Commissioner to submit the Board’s budget recommendation to the Secretary of Education.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 6, 9 and 15B

Contact: Thomas J. Simard, Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance

VII. PRESENTATIONS

A. Update Massachusetts Public Higher Education Financial Assessment Project

List of Documents:

- [Update Massachusetts Public Higher Education Financial Assessment Project](#)

EY-Parthenon’s Haven Ladd began by thanking Board members and providing a brief overview. He stated that today’s presentation would be a preview, rather than about formal recommendations. Mr. Ladd addressed three components to the assessment of the financial health of the Community Colleges and State Universities:

1. Key Indicators of fiscal health.
2. Recommend options to strengthen and streamline financial reporting.
3. Cost and value optimization strategies.

For purposes of the meeting, the focus would be on the second objective. Mr. Ladd provided a brief recap of the discussion during the BHE’s October meeting, where early indications of where we were heading on the fiscal health indicators were shared, as well as at a broad level where some of the cost and value strategies were going.

The core question of the second objective is whether there should be a heightened level of ongoing financial monitoring by the Department and, ultimately, the Board. EY-Parthenon’s initial recommendation to that question is “yes.” The formal recommendation will come out in February, though EY-Parthenon, but Mr. Ladd stated that he wanted to provided context for why EY-Parthenon thought there should be increased fiscal monitoring on a real-time, or near real-time, basis.

Mr. Ladd proceeded to share how to put the reason for his “yes” answer into context. He recalled Member JD LaRock’s mention of some of the long-term enrollment challenges they had been facing in both the Community College and the State University segments. The observation

showed that many of the individual institutions are at or near their 10-year low point in terms of enrollment. The second point shared back in the spring is that FY21 is a challenging year in terms of liquidity. There are several institutions that are managing below a level that we would generally consider as having enough liquid reserves to cover a meaningful amount of cash out first. In the case of the State Universities, it is typically around four months of available liquidity and for the Community Colleges it is three months of liquidity.

The good news is that these institutions are managing through these challenging times. They are cutting costs. They are doing things in their power to make sure that they do not close their doors, were able to make payroll each month this year. The challenge, of course, is that while they are able to make it through this year and they cited, at an earlier session, that FY22 may be increasing the challenge, we see not only in FY22 but over the coming years increasing financial challenges facing all of these institutions-- without knowing what is going to happen in terms of a recession, without knowing what is going to happen in terms of state aid going forward.

Mr. Ladd shared that it is very unlikely that demographics, in terms of the decline of high school graduates, will continue to put increasing pressure on the tuition and fee side of the income statement for both Community Colleges and for State Universities. These institutions are critically important to the Commonwealth. One way to look at this is the high percentage of Pell-eligible students that are being educated by these public institutions. In the case of the Community Colleges, 45 percent of their enrollment is Pell-eligible. In the case of the public, four-year State Universities, excluding UMASS is 34%. We can look at the same data by minority status and first-generation status. He pointed out that these institutions are important and that with the fiscal challenges that we are seeing this year and likely to see in the future, it is also important to make sure that the institutions always have the ability to meet their own payroll and continue to thrive to serve the important missions for the Commonwealth.

Mr. Ladd continued the presentation by noting that the intended approach is high level. The intention of Increased fiscal monitoring by the Department and the Board is not to take the responsibility for financial management off the shoulders of the individual institutions. These are institutions where local autonomy and decision making is important. Starting at the top of the individual institutions, the leadership teams-- including their individual boards-- are the first line of defense around fiscal health to make sure they are fiscally viable moving forward. This is not about supplanting the role of the individual institution, but rather about overall support.

EY-Parthenon worked very closely with representatives of all the Community Colleges and the State Universities, both with their presidents and CFOs, as well as others on the leadership teams. As a result of these meetings, five key design principles have come out of this process that should inform any final recommendations brought to the Board. These five principles include that there should be some level of a proactive and prospective approach. There are processes in place to look at the audited financial statements, typically from activities that closed at least 18 months in the past. The first objective is to look more at the current year's budget as well as future planning. A second one is to maintain the autonomy of institutional-level decision making. Third, is to ensure that the public has some level of confidence in the fiscal health of the segments of

institutions overall. It is critically important that there is confidence in our public institutions of higher education. Fourth, is that there should be a process in place to identify campuses that may require focused analysis or support, and this would be a process at the Departmental level. There should be metrics that are used as early indicators to help determine where the Department should dive in more deeply and ask questions about how they can help support these institutions. Finally, there should be structures in place that would encourage collaboration across institutions. It is not about mandating collaboration, but this should not preclude the ability for the institutions to work well with one another to come up with strategies and solutions that may help enable them to be financially stable in the medium to long-term.

Mr. Ladd commented on how these recommendations for heightened monitoring will play out over time. Up to now, the group has engaged in initial planning and has reviewed initial recommendations without a lot of detail publicly. It is anticipated that the FAAP Committee will take an emerging set of recommendations and determine at the community level what makes most sense to help support institutions, particularly those that are most at financial risk.

Mr. Ladd concluded by noting that the goal is to enable the institutions to better weather financial challenges and to ensure the Commonwealth has a set of financially stable institutions that can meet the growing educational needs of all potential students served. Ultimately, the process is as follows: collect data, analyze metrics, and take actions steps aligned to the goal of proactively supporting autonomous public institutions through potential challenges and ensuring public confidence in their fiscal health.

Chair Gabrieli thanked Mr. Ladd for his presentation and proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

B. Evidence Based Decision Making-Getting Ahead of the College-Going Gap of 2021

List of Documents:

- [Evidence Based Decision Making-Getting Ahead of the College-Going Gap of 2021 Presentation](#)

Chair Gabrieli shared how he and others have met informally with members of the Department to determine how to make sure we have a strong and growing statewide longitudinal data system. Within that context, an urgent issue involving the college-going gap has emerged that will inform actions that this Board, our campuses and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) might well need to act on in the middle of this pandemic.

He provided a brief overview of a data presentation prepared by the DHE's Senior Associate Commissioner Jonathan Keller, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) Chief Strategy Officer Matt Deninger. The main purpose behind the presentation stems from equitable access to higher education since the pandemic hit in March 2020. What happened to the high school graduating class of 2020 and are there indicators to say the same will repeat with the high school graduating class of 2021? Is there support to allow students subject to the Equity

Agenda the opportunity to successfully matriculate amid the economic downturn? Chair Gabrieli turned to DESE Chief Strategy Officer Deninger for the presentation.

Mr. Deninger opened his presentation by thanking the Commissioner and Board members and introducing his DESE colleague, Nyal Fuentes. At last month's higher education Board meeting, members saw data related to the overall gaps in college matriculation this fall and that those gaps were particularly pronounced for low-income and racially minoritized populations. While the agencies continue to collect data and review the situation this fall, attention has turned to the fall of 2021.

With that said, staff asked the following fundamental questions: Do we have any indication right now that history is going to repeat itself in the fall of 2021 with similar patterns of matriculation? If yes, what might we do about it now in order to prevent a similar inequitable gap from forming next fall? Before releasing the findings, Mr. Deninger proceeded to share more context about the cross-agency data and informed decision-making work their team has been engaged in.

Mr. Deninger highlighted the existence of widespread support for evidence informed decision making and shared how the team's charge as public servants is taken seriously in their approach to this work. They know that they can go farther if they go together, leveraging their administrative data and analytical capacity to improve our programs and to improve outcomes for all students. In that regard, in March of 2020, they were awarded a 4-year, \$3.5 million state longitudinal data systems grant from the federal government. The focus of these resources will be to improve the connections between our agencies, the governance of our data and the coordination of research. Although our agencies have a long tradition of working together, sharing data, ensuring that educators have access to rich information on their students' college readiness; we will now be able to do even more.

Mr. Deninger displayed data on the number of reports DESE provides to their educators. It includes, descriptive reports on the outcomes of high school completers, predictive reports to flag high school students who might not be college ready. Returning to the original question at the start of this presentation, Mr. Deninger responded, yes--it is possible to see if there is any indication of a repeat of the college entry gap in 2020, in the following fall, 2021. The information is located in the FAFSA data. He turned to Jonathan Keller to share the details.

Senior Associate Commissioner Keller stated that their use of the completion data from the FAFSA data, is a unique case. It is unique because the sharing of the financial aid form data - the completion data- is that we are looking at something that is not just traditionally our research and analytic databases, which tend to be less timely because they require vetting, and other processes. Databases, which tend to be timelier, could be more actionable with the FAFSA data. Mr. Keller also noted that sharing such data faster has been in place for a few years and was initially coordinated by DHE Senior Deputy Commissioner Clantha McCurdy at the Department's financial aid office. It allows school counselors to see how high school seniors are progressing and assists in their promoting FAFSA completion. This will bear out in future research that FAFSA completion is a very strong indicator of whether students will apply and attend to college in the following fall.

Senior Associate Commissioner Keller concluded that their existing FAFSA connection will be expanded to look deeper into what we can understand from the FAFSA completion data. The benefits of these data sets are that they are transactional data - not our traditional research database which lacks the same timeliness. He stated that we are expanding the scope of our research and we have greater potential for actionable analysis and rapid response and prompt identification of underserved populations. The important part of the state longitudinal data system grant will be to see how we can continue to expand the types of data we include in our data merges and data sharing so we can do the most valuable and expansive types of analysis. With that, he turned it over to Mr. Fuentes, to talk about the exceptional reports that have been done with the FAFSA data.

Mr. Fuentes noted the concept is really a matter of getting real time reports into the hands of high school counselors and the hands of those that are working with outside organizations like Gear Up, which is funded through the U.S. Department of Education, as well as a host of other college access professionals. It is essentially advancing this information, so they know who has completed the FAFSA, then moving beyond mitigating that huge financial piece onto other issues around college access.

He stated that most students who fill out the FAFSA are also going to fill out a college application. The reports also detail which populations do not complete FAFSA at the same rate as other populations based on district. There is an enormous gap between Black, Latino and economically disadvantaged students and other students in FAFSA completion. The summary report gives you an idea of where your district lies, such as what percentage of students have completed FAFSA at a particular date. As an example, the report displays all 12th graders in Massachusetts. It also shows the percentage in your in school and state that have completed the FAFSA. If we use the report details from the Student Information Management (SIMS) and combine it with the report details, a student list can be generated to determine FAFSA completion. It allows schools and districts to track students who have not completed it. It becomes part of college access, and part of the student plan. SIMS allows one to focus on providing information on Black, Latino, economically disadvantaged indicators. If a school's mission is to increase the percentage of students who are African American completing the FAFSA as an equity goal, it can be measured using these reports and can inform policy implications.

Mr. Deninger returned to the data sets to provide insight on FAFSA completion. He stated that we have seen a significant, but not surprising, gap in FAFSA completion this year in 2020, when comparing the overall FAFSA completion rates as of Thanksgiving, 2019 to Thanksgiving, 2020. Nationally, there is 16 percent decrease this year. When looking at Massachusetts overall, you see an 18% decrease. Being mindful of the equity focus, we decided to disaggregate to the 50 high schools in the state that have the largest numbers of low income and minority students. We took the data from that group and we found among those schools an average 20% drop. That is a decrease of approximately a thousand students. It is a significant range and it is due to an extremely challenging and disruptive year. Mr. Deninger proceeded to share action steps which included continuing to work with the Massachusetts Association of School Counselors Association (MASCA), and K-12 Education leadership to inform them of the available data.; reaching out to the

six schools where students have improved as compared to last year; and continuing strong, evidence-informed decision making.

VIII. DISCUSSION

A. Equity Agenda

Commissioner Santiago provided updates on the Equity Agenda, as it continues to gain traction. First, he reported that the Department has convened an advisory group of 60 campus representatives and students to review and update the new “undergraduate experience” document. The last BHE document to address the undergraduate experience was dated 1989, which from an equity perspective, is long overdue for changes. He shared the importance of the new undergraduate experience, and it serving as a guiding document to express the collective vision for the pedagogical and structural changes needed to transform public higher education. This collective vision he assured will secure access and a round of policies and practices required for all students to reach their public institutions goal.

The Commissioner also highlighted the webinar on the Seal of Biliteracy co-hosted by the DHE and DESE. The Seal of Biliteracy is an opportunity for English learners, world language students and heritage speakers, signers of languages other than English to receive a credential for their linguistic skills while in high school. The Seal of Biliteracy is awarded to high school graduates who demonstrate high proficiency in English and at least one other language. Nearly three thousand graduates from Massachusetts high schools have earned the Seal and are now eligible to receive credits at several colleges and universities.

Another significant update stems from the launched effort to develop a strategic document focused on meeting students’ basic needs in the Commonwealth. The Department has convened a Basic Needs Security Advisory Committee to review and assess economic barriers to retention and degree completion by students enrolled in the Commonwealth’s public higher education system. The Commissioner emphasized that close attention will be given to racial and geographic disparities evident in both the qualitative and quantitative data. The committee was asked to make policy recommendations to the Commissioner to develop further systemic response to students’ basic needs in security. Priority areas of inquiry include student support and food insecurity, homelessness, childcare, mental health and health care, transportation and technology access. Twenty-three participants joined the meeting, including BHE Member Judy Pagliuca. Commissioner Santiago highlighted the urgency behind this work given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner Santiago also spoke about the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) and said the RFP was released on December 1st and it is exclusively devoted to the Equity Agenda. Applicants are asked to propose innovations and evidence-based practices in higher education, specifically aimed at advancing the Commonwealth's overarching goal to raise success outcomes racially minoritized student. There are two areas of work under this year’s HEIF RFP: the Equity Agenda through institutional approaches to promoting anti-racism and students’ cultural wealth, and the second new

equity-minded approaches to assessing demonstrated knowledge, skills, and competency. Commissioner Santiago stated that he will continue to inform the BHE of developments in these high priority areas. Board members are welcome to learn more about this initiative and to play an active role, to the extent their time permits.

B. Board of Higher Education Committee Structure

Chair Gabrieli thanked Commissioner Santiago for updates on the Equity Agenda, and for integrating Board members into some of these opportunities to go deeper. He then proceeded to discuss the Board of Higher Education's Committee Structure

Chair Gabrieli referenced the listening sessions that were held over the past several weeks and indicated that he appreciated receiving feedback on the Board's committee structures. He stated that while the BHE's current, traditional committee structures presented challenges, it has been made clear that the committee meetings are a vital component to what we need at the Board. During the last meeting, President Birge made one of the most impassioned statements on the importance of committee meetings as being a place where participants and stakeholders can engage the most, and without constraint. The Board will therefore reinvigorate those meetings effective immediately, along with some newer ones. He shared that Vice Chair Harrity and Member Patty Eppinger will co-chair the Academic Affairs Committee, and Member J.D. LaRock will chair the Fiscal Affairs and Administrative Policy Committee. The Executive Committee will also be reconvened and will be used to review the overall committee approach.

Chair Gabrieli also confirmed and formally announced the establishment of an Evidence Based Policy Making (EBPM) Task Force which, in addition to himself, will include Ann Christensen, Alex Cortez, and Commissioner Santiago as members, and it will be staffed by Associate Commissioner Jonathan Keller. The EBPM Task Force is anticipated to be convened in late January or early February and the main charge of the Task Force will be to advise and make recommendations to the BHE on actionable items, and within that context to:

- review and make recommendations, as appropriate, on the current processes and content of the DHE's collection and analysis of data and evidence in support of policy making;
- coordinate with Elementary and Secondary Education, the Executive Office of Education, Early Education and Care, and other relevant agencies, as well as outside partners, to ensure a sustained and excellent statewide, longitudinal data system of use to benefit long-term learning and policy making for residents of the Commonwealth; and
- review and communicate new evidence from both within the state and across the nation that may bear on policy making in higher education in the Commonwealth.

Chair Gabrieli thanked the Board and shared his appreciation for the collaborative spirit of Commissioner Santiago. He committed himself to making sure as many members of the Board as have time can be as deeply engaged in other areas. He stated the newly invigorated committee meetings presented a powerful way to start, and he welcomed the Board to share what could be done

to better assist in their role.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Gabrieli adjourned the meeting at 1:01 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Carlos E. Santiago*

Commissioner and Secretary to the Board