

## BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

September 8, 2021  
8:30 a.m.- 10:00 a.m.  
Livestreamed, via Zoom

### Meeting Minutes

The September 8, 2021 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) was held virtually on the web-conference platform Zoom.

Committee Members Present: BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli; Veronica Conforme; Patty Eppinger; Bill Walczak and Commissioner Carlos Santiago (non-voting, ex officio).

Committee Members Absent: Vice-Chair Sheila Harrity

Department Staff Present: Constantia Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis.

#### I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster).

#### II. DISCUSSION

##### List of Material's Used

*Equity Agenda Potential Policy Levers  
Work and Resource Plan*

*Draft Motion BHE 22-XX Commissioner's FY21 and FY22 Salary Adjustments*

*Draft Revised Charges for Advisory Councils\_9.07.2021*

*DHE Budget Matrix*

Chair Gabrieli stated that there were three main items on the agenda. The items for discussion were the Advisory Council charges, the September retreat preparation and the Commissioner's compensation adjustments.

#### A. Commissioner's FY20 and FY21 Evaluation and Compensation Adjustments

Chair Gabrieli began by addressing the Commissioner's compensation adjustment. He stated that the Board had sole statutory authority to determine the Commissioner's compensation, but as a matter of practice the Board tends to follow guidelines provided by Administration and Finance (ANF) and applicable to all other state employees, including DHE staff and staff at our public higher education institutions. Chair Gabrieli recommended that the Board align the

Commissioner's compensation adjustments with the ANF guidelines. ANF recently issued compensation guidance that provides as follows:

- FY21 Increase: Effective July 5, 2020, eligible managers will receive a 2.5% across the board increase, including retroactive pay.
- FY22 Increase: Effective July 4, 2021, eligible managers will receive a 2% across the board increase, including retroactive pay.
- One-time Payment: Eligible managers will receive a one-time payment equivalent to 1.5% of their salary (minimum of \$1000). This one-time payment will be calculated after the FY21 and FY22 increases.

The Commissioner advised that he authorized Community College and State University local boards of trustees to align compensation adjustments for their respective Presidents with the ANF guidelines as well, though the timing and amounts are up to the discretion to the local boards. He also advised that he made a commitment to study and bring equity to the Community College and State University Presidents' salaries. He stated that a salary study was launched for Presidents and hoped to gather more information for review and a determination.

Committee member Walczak advised that there is a lot of concern among the Community College boards of trustees regarding losing Presidents. He stated that salary is a consideration, and their compensation should be aligned with the market as much as possible. Chair Gabrieli asked the Commissioner when the salary study needed to be completed. The Commissioner responded that the RFP is "out there" but does not know if a consultant has been selected. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis advised that she does not have an answer, but the RFP salary study was released. She also advised that the timing could not have been better, as the last study was conducted in the early 2000s.

Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou advised that discussions about presidential evaluations and compensation, historically and under the new process, tend to fall under the charge of the Executive Committee. She added that since the subject matter often entails sensitive topics, through its approval of the BHE Presidential Compensation Guidelines the Board has delegated a great deal of authority to the Commissioner to act on such matters, in consultation with chair and vice chair.

Chair Gabrieli informed the Committee that he was seeking their support to advance a motion to the full Board on the Commissioner's compensation adjustment at the next meeting. He advised that Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou drafted specific language that parallels the ANF guidance received, and that the proposed language is in the board packets. Committee member Conforme was in agreement and asked if all the raises were consistent. Chair Gabrieli replied that the raises would be identical to what the DHE team and staff at other state agencies are receiving. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou noted that the current evaluation is for FY20 performance, and a formal evaluation was not conducted for the Commissioner's FY21 performance; she inquired if there was a way to use the fundamental work that was already

conducted to get the Commissioner's FY21 performance evaluation completed sooner rather than later. Chair Gabrieli suggested they completely skip that year, as an evaluation was just completed.

Committee member Eppinger asked if the Chair would consider an addendum with everything that was different from what was already documented. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou agreed, noting that since the Commissioner's FY20 evaluation was completed so late in the fiscal year due to extenuating circumstance, the materials reviewed and discussed included FY21 accomplishments. Language could be added to the FY20 materials making it clear that the Board intentionally reviewing FY21 performance in conjunction with the FY20 review.

Committee member Walczak commented that the next evaluation would be based on the achievement goals for FY22, which would be difficult to evaluate if there are no goals. He stated that he is in favor of completing evaluations every other year, but they would probably need to make sure there are standard fiscal goals for FY22 in order to have something to evaluate against. The Commissioner commented that without formal goals established by the Board, he generally spends a month writing a document with his perspective of the year instead of a list. He continued by stating that the Chair would respond with a thoughtful response, which is very helpful because he would get a clear sense of what the expectations were for the next year. He advised that commentary from the committee is beneficial, and he offered to prepare any documents deemed necessary for the September Board Meeting.

Chair Gabrieli advised that there was an October Executive Committee meeting and Board Meeting, which the document could be presented. He advised it would be useful for the Commissioner to write down his goals, as there was a new Executive Committee and an ambitious Equity Agenda. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou advised that the conversation at the September Retreat could help inform the Commissioner's goals for FY22, which is why October felt like the right time to finalize the evaluation. She indicated that the Commissioner should still come to the retreat prepared with his preliminary thoughts and goals, but the retreat will finalize and shape that. Ms. Papanikolaou also advised that she could assist the Chair with adding a paragraph to the FY20 evaluation document to incorporate and bring closure to the FY21 evaluation. Chair Gabrieli agreed with the committee and Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou's approach.

## **B. Preparation for September Retreat**

Chair Gabrieli turned to a discussion of the September retreat and advised that the retreat would be a good place to address issues they are facing, and he wanted to engage this committee in planning for the retreat. Chair Gabrieli asked the Commissioner and committee members what they thought would be good use of their time. The Commissioner advised that there was an extensive agenda, and he would like to start with policy levers that they intend to present.

Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled the Equity Agenda Potential Policy Levers. The Commissioner continued by advising that the staff members were working on work plans around the presented initiatives, and he would like to present these initiatives and workplans at the retreat. He asked Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis if she could share a template of the workplan to give everyone a sense of how it will be laid out. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis presented two documents: the Work and Resource Plan template and the Statewide Dual Admissions Program Work and Resource Plan template. She stated the workplans are based on the Equity Agenda and seek to advance the identified priority areas. The Commissioner stated that his goal for the retreat was to receive feedback and clear direction from the Board on their priorities.

Committee member Walczak inquired if DHE staff asked colleges and universities what their main priorities were for the year or what they would like to see on the Retreat agenda. He added that the chairs of the Community Colleges would mostly likely say enrollment and retention are the most pressing issues and felt that should be added as an item to the agenda.

Committee member Eppinger notes there would be multiple purposes for the retreat, and there were also several new Board members. She wondered if there was a helpful way to distill the comments from the Board so as to provide the Commissioner the feedback he would be seeking and suggested the use of breakout groups. She also agreed with Committee member Walczak's point that student retention is an important priority. The Commissioner agreed with Committee member Eppinger. He also pointed out in response to member Walczak's earlier comments that the institutions were doing important work to improve student retention with the Department's support. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou added that the Department did conduct a recent survey of community college and state university trustees to ask about their priority issues for the year, within the context of planning and developing trustee training initiatives. She reported that the main topics identified were: public higher education enrollment; financing; board and faculty union relations; student mental health and basic needs; campus safety and campus sexual assault; and enterprise and risk management. Committee member Walczak said that if some of the recommendations from local trustees could require changes to current budget allocations. Chair Gabrieli responded that there was not a lot of money to reallocate at the Board level.

Chair Gabrieli said that he felt what was absent was a set of broad strategic claims about how the action areas map-up to a theory of what the problem is and how it will be addressed. He stated that he could not determine the scale of impact for the different priorities. He also believed that there was a lot to be said about taking actions that are within the Board's purview that would not require a great deal of money. Chair Gabrieli believed that fundamental affordability of college and basic needs have been some of the biggest reasons that students are unable to enroll and sustain in college. He thought it would be helpful for the Committee to provide the Board with rank order items, and a justification on why they think the items are something the Board can embrace at a strategic level. The Commissioner advised that there

would be forthcoming, overarching recommendations related to MassGrant and MassGrant Plus. The Commissioner believed that expanding and increasing MassGrant Plus for every low-income student would have a major impact on institutional outcomes.

Committee member Eppinger said it appears as though they are looking for an overview of what problem they are trying to solve, and then create a line-up. She also advised that students feel state funding is important. Committee member Walczak advised that Massachusetts is one of the lower-funding states for public higher education. He suggested an analysis on how well Massachusetts performs with funding compared to other states. Chair Gabrieli advised that the Finance and Administrative Policy Advisory Council would be launching a strategic financial review of public higher education.

Committee member Conforme expressed that she feels like the committee was trying to have a strategic discussion, but then also discusses everything. She urged the committee to decide on what they would like to accomplish. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis advised that the Department launched a strategic planning process for the Equity Agenda. She also advised that more needs to be done in developing the strategic plan, and the September meeting provides an opportunity to continue the conversation with the full Board, including a special focus group.

Chair Gabrieli said he was apprehensive about a seven-hour virtual retreat. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou advised that part of the purpose of a retreat is for Board members to get to know each other but agreed that a long meeting over Zoom may not be the most effective. She also advised that there was nothing prohibiting the Board from meeting in person for a few hours or staggering the retreat over two days.

Committee member Eppinger believed that it would be helpful to the new Board members if they had framework to explain the current issues facing higher education. Chair Gabrieli said he thought the Board could also spend time getting to know each other by discussing a small number of high priority areas. Around this time, Committee member Conforme logged out of the meeting.

### **C. Review of By-Laws, Board Structure and Processes**

In the interest of time, Chair Gabrieli gave a brief update on the implementation of the revised By-Laws. He advised that since the last Executive Committee meeting, Department staff have been working with the BHE-member chairs of each Advisory Council on drafting the charges for each Council. The intention is to bring final drafts of each Charge to the full Board, for approval during the retreat.

### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

### **IV. ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 10:03 a.m.