

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**  
**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS ADVISORY COUNCIL**

March 14, 2023  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The March 14, 2023, meeting of the Academic Affairs & Student Success Advisory Council was held remotely, via the web-conference platform Zoom.

ZOOM.

**Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present	Chair Patty Eppinger; Judy Pagliuca; Paul Toner; Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler; Commissioner Noe Ortega
Other BHE Members Present	Student Segmental Advisor, Andrew Whitcomb; State University Student Advisor, Robert Huttig.

Council Members Absent	BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli
------------------------	--------------------------

Department Staff Present	Keith Connors; Mario Delci; Allison Little; Clantha McCurdy; Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Constantia (Dena) Papanikolaou; Mary Price
--------------------------	---

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Academic Affairs & Student Success (AA&SS) Advisory Council Chair Patty Eppinger called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. Roll call attendance of council members was taken (see attendance roster reflected above).

**II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes from the January 31, 2023, meeting of the AA&SS Advisory Council were unanimously approved through a roll call vote.

**III. REMARKS**

**A. Chair's Remarks**

AA&SS Advisory Council Chair Eppinger began the meeting by welcoming everyone and reviewing the agenda. She then welcomed remarks by Commissioner Ortega.

**B. Commissioner's Remarks**

Commissioner Ortega spoke about the continuing excitement around the proposed budget by the Healey-Driscoll administration – a budget that proposes substantial increases in funding for higher education and invests in students. The proposed budget will allow the Board to support students through the student success framework and the strategic plan for racial equity. The Commissioner added that with increased funding comes increased responsibility. He said that the DHE would continue to carefully gather and track data to understand the differentiated student outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, and other important factors related to educational attainment. The Commissioner also emphasized the important work in understanding how we can make our institutions more welcoming for students who do not fit the typical understanding of what able bodied means, as well as students who have cognitive challenges. Related to this last point, Commissioner Ortega said he was eager to hear the presentation on Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) and he expressed pleasure with the Council and Board for thinking intentionally about how to craft an understanding for serving the needs of different populations of students.

#### IV. PRESENTATIONS

*List of documents used:*

MAICEI [Presentation](#)

Update on Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Goals [Presentation](#)

##### **Creating and Expanding Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism, and Other Developmental Disabilities**

Mary Price, Director of the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI), delivered the presentation. The presentation provided an overview of what the current MAICEI program is and what it does; reviewed the new law that expanded access to post-secondary education for students over the age of 22 with autism and significant intellectual disabilities; reviewed the national landscape of inclusive higher education; and concluded with an explanation of the proposed rollout for expanding inclusive postsecondary education.

MAICEI is designed to offer inclusive college options for students identified as having an intellectual disability, autism, or developmental disability. Public institutions of higher education (IHE's) that wish to initiate the program can access MAICEI grant funds. These students can matriculate and non-enrolled students and participate in courses (audit) alongside their non-disabled peers and are also welcomed to fully participate in other campus activities. MAICEI espouses: 1) academics and course of study, 2) career development. and 3) social opportunities for students in its program.

A new, recently enacted state law advances inclusive post-secondary education by removing barriers for persons with intellectual disabilities and autism from participating in state colleges and universities. The law requires colleges and universities to establish guidelines governing selection and participation of these students. Other components of the new law include expanding access by encouraging but not requiring Massachusetts public IHE's to apply for

MAICEI funding and, providing the opportunity for MAICEI eligible individuals, who have exited school without a diploma, to participate in college as non-matriculated students.

All states, but one, have options for students with intellectual disabilities to attend college. In Massachusetts, 15 of our public IHEs currently offer MAICEI programs for students enrolled in high school and under the age of 22. The presentation concluded with a recommended timeline for planning and initial implementation of the new law, which seeks to expand access to students who are not enrolled in high school and are over the age of twenty-two.

AAC Chair Eppinger thanked Director Mary Price and opened the floor to questions. Member Pagliuca asked how many students participate in MAICEI across the 14 public campuses currently offering the program, and asked whether there are trends in their course-taking? Director Price stated that the MAICEI program currently serves 215 students and that their interests are as unique as each individual student. Member Toner followed this question by asking about outreach efforts to secondary schools. Director Price responded saying webinars and presentations were the main mode of outreach while admitting the outreach could be more expansive. She said the program would be looking at more extensive outreach with the passage of the new law, including tapping into the Superintendent network. Secretary Tutwiler offered to partner with Director Price in this outreach effort. He added that he thought the outreach should also include school counselors and special education directors.

Member Pagliuca asked about the demographics of the 215 students in the program seeking to know how many consisted of students of color and of low-income backgrounds. Director Price replied the program collected that data and, broadly speaking, she noted that quite a few students of color participate but that the program was still predominately white. She said her focus going forward would be to concentrate outreach in school districts with high concentrations of low-income students and student of color. Director Price identified funding as a challenge, noting that some school districts pay a nominal fee to send students while also being responsible for transportation and an academic coach. Director Price said that the program is trying to figure out options on how to make these situations work to increase the percentage of students of color attending MAICEI.

Member Pagliuca followed on this response by asking if any of the current 14 public IHE's participating in MAICEI target these types of school districts. Director Price replied that many of the current IHE's do engage in school districts with high percentages of students of color and low-income students and she gave the example of Bridgewater State and Bristol Community College partnering with Fall River, Dartmouth and the Brockton school districts and of Northern Essex Community College partnering with the Lawrence school district. Member Pagliuca next asked about the cost per student and how much of the cost each district incurs. Director Price said it varied from program to program depending on their place within the grant cycle and depending on local support but that the average cost averaged around \$3,000 per year per student. Member Pagliuca expressed interest for ensuring more equity in the program even if it meant reallocating funds from elsewhere to ensure less affluent districts could send all students fitting the program criteria.

Member Pagliuca continued, stressing the equity concern over the ability of parents of limited means being able to successfully advocate for their children's acceptance into the MAICEI program. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou responded, noting that the new law seeks to mitigate impacts by allowing for social service agencies, such as the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and Mass Rehab to identify and fund student who are over 22 for participation in the program through "participation agreements." These new participation agreements provide for DDS and Mass Rehab to help identify students from diverse backgrounds who want to attend and will benefit from attending college. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou noted that the new law requires the BHE to promulgate regulations regarding how public IHEs can safely and appropriately students over the age of 22 who have disabilities and have not graduated from high school. She said that Department staff would return to the BHE in the fall with new regulations. She concluded by thanking member Pagliuca for her important comments and questions on the shared objective of ensuring that the program has equitable outcomes for students and ensuring that the program reaches a broader population. The discussion and presentation concluded with the commitment of making sure that the policies and regulations under development did not create a rigid system disconnected from employment opportunities.

### **Update on Strategic Plan for Racial Equity Goals**

Mario Delci, Associate Commissioner for Research & Planning, provided an update on the target setting process designed to develop system-wide and specific sector goals based on the charge to the Commissioner last June, when the strategic plan for racial equity was presented. The presentation included a review of the goals of the strategic plan for racial equity, setting system-level goal targets, defining and measuring goals, goal design and implementation, and next steps.

Upon the conclusion of Associate Commissioner Delci's PowerPoint Presentation, Commissioner Ortega spoke about the importance of the data for holding the DHE and the campuses accountable for progress on success measures. He credited Associate Commissioner Delci and his team for securing buy-in and agreement from the campuses on these measures.

Member Pagliuca expressed concern that the presented plan included too many goals. She said it has been her experience that a plan is less effective when too many goals are pursued simultaneously. One goal for which she expressed strong support was the goal of increasing the percentage of student "on-time credit accumulation." She said it was her experience that success in this area led to higher levels of persistence and, ultimately, degree completion. She encouraged a strong focus on this goal, particularly within the community college sector where persistence greatly lags behind the other two higher education sectors.

In contrast to Member Pagliuca's comments, AA&SS Council Chair Eppinger commented that she saw the presented plan as more of a system than discreet targets and goals – a sort of a pull if looked at horizontally versus vertically. She said she saw the presentation of a system that moves students along every step of the way to that eventual outcome. An approach, she said, that tries to identify ways to impact students' experience through their entire college or

university experience. She said that if we can get students from stage one to two to three to four, then we will remediate some of the issues that they have faced over time.

Member Pagliuca responded that she agreed with Chair Eppinger's interpretation of the value of a measuring system, but she felt the presentation does not reflect such a system. She added that if the targeted goals were interpreted as a system over a course of time, then she felt the first interventions were the most important and that the Council should take care in tracking them to determine what works-- adding that the "on-time credit accumulation" goal should be in that set.

Associate Commissioner Delci welcomed the input and shared that just that morning he impressed upon his staff the importance of the order of the metrics in relation to a student's academic trajectory. He added that he and his team saw "the sense of belonging" as the underlying foundation to the other goals and that it was a value he heard time and again from the campuses. If students can be successful on these metrics, especially for students of color, establishing a sense of belonging is essential.

Member Pagliuca asked how we measure the alignment of programs with workforce needs, and how we go about measuring such an assessment? Associate Commissioner Delci said the Department used a lot of labor and live market information when deciding high priority degrees or high award programs of study. He also shared that the Department would be bringing employment and earnings metrics to the Board later this year. He said the data compilation was being done with an attention to the majors and programs that lead to living wages and upward mobility. Associate Commissioner Delci further explained that the Department accomplishes this task by looking at data from Lightcast, which used to be called Burning Glass, and also from EMSI. His team also reviews census data and regional analyses of workforce investment areas. He added that the Department's data analysis is shared with the campuses, particularly the community colleges, through an employment earnings dashboard. He said these data helps program planning and policy decision making.

Member Pagliuca asked whether the Department measures alignment of staffing, the number of courses, the programs that are available in our system to workforce needs. Associate Commissioner Delci continued by explaining that a priority degree and certificate metric exists in the performance management system to capture that data. In the interest of time, Chair Eppinger suggested that the discussion of workforce metrics get addressed in a future meeting. All members agreed. Commissioner Ortega suggested that this topic also be considered as a discussion for the full Board, at which time Department staff could discuss the work happening at the Executive level (EOE) and the federal level. Member Pagliuca agreed and added that such a discussion should also include information on how new academic programs are created as changes in the workplace occur.

Secretary Tutwiler referenced and offered comment on the workforce skills cabinet, a partnership among the Executive Office of Education, the Executive Office of Workforce and Labor Development and the Office of Housing and Economic Development, stating that those three secretariats work very closely on the very topic of industry needs. He said that the

workforce skills cabinet members all work collaboratively in the education sector to create very clear pathways for folks to traverse to get to those much-needed jobs. He concluded by saying he would be happy to discuss this topic further in depth and that he would invite Assistant Secretary for Career Education, Robert LePage, into the discussion.

**V. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.