

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

April 3, 2024
1:30 p.m.

Online Meeting
via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of a task force convened by the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) to address *Nursing Education and Workforce Development* was held on Wednesday, April 3, 2024, via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, BHE Chair

Noe Ortega, Commissioner

The following Task Force Members were present:

Name	Affiliation	Role	Representation
Colleen Moran	Massachusetts General Brigham	Representing MJ Ryan	Healthcare Employer
Patricia Noga	Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association	Vice President Clinical Affairs	Healthcare Employer Association
David Rosenbloom	Boston University School of Public Health	Professor of Public Health	Consultant
Tara Gregorio	Massachusetts Senior Care Association	President	Healthcare Employer Association
Jay Prosser	Massachusetts Nursing Council for Workforce Sustainability	Executive Director	Nursing Practice
Luis Pedraja	Quinsigamond Community College	President	Community College Segment
Linda Thompson	Westfield State University	President	State University Segment
Antoinette Hays	Regis College	President	Independent Colleges and Universities

Kimberly Christopher	University of Massachusetts Dartmouth	Dean of Nursing	University of Massachusetts - System
Bob LePage	Executive Office of Education	Assistant Secretary Career Education	State Agency
Patricia Yu	Executive Office Health and Human Services	Senior Director of Healthcare Workforce Policy	State Agency
Alyssa Ordway	Executive Office Labor and Workforce Development	Undersecretary of Workforce Development	State Agency
David Cedrone	Department of Higher Education	Associate Commissioner Workforce Development	Higher Education Workforce Development

The following Task Force Members were absent:

Name	Affiliation	Role	Representation
MJ Ryan	Massachusetts General Brigham	Vice President Workforce Development	Healthcare Employer

I. CALL TO ORDER

Task Force Co-Lead Bill Walczak called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster). Co-Lead Walczak invited Commissioner Noe Ortega to offer opening remarks.

II. REMARKS

Commissioner Ortega welcomed the task force members and acknowledged that these conversations began almost a year ago, where people were asking for the BHE/DHE to step in and begin to examine how we understand some of the shortages, particularly around nursing and healthcare, and to think about a framework that could be put in place to direct the energy of the state and higher education in areas they could be part of the collective. Commissioner Ortega emphasize the idea of a collective because it will take multiple players and stakeholders coming together to be able to address this issue head on.

III. TASK FORCE ON NURSING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Co-Lead Walczak invited co-lead Purcell to provide context for the work of the Nursing Education and Workforce Task Force.

Co-lead Purcell reviewed the Task Force charge:

- First, to come together to develop a common understanding in framing the scope and the scale of nursing education and the workforce challenge as a foundation for further meetings and discussions.
- Second, to come out of this with some recommendations of potential solutions for the BHE to consider based on an examination of best practices within and outside of the Commonwealth.
- Third, to consider what current resources can be utilized and perhaps directed or redirected, and what new resources might need to be generated to support the implementation of the task force's recommendations.

Co-lead Purcell acknowledged that there is a multiplicity of relevant factors that go well beyond higher education policy in addressing nursing workforce shortages so it will be important to keep the role of this Task Force very clear, to focus on higher education policy, particularly, enrollment and graduation of nursing students, pathway progression all the way from CNAs, LPNs, ADN, BSNs, and perennial issues including faculty capacity and clinical placements.

Co-lead Purcell turned the meeting over to Associate Commissioner Cedrone who facilitated introductions by each member of the Task Force.

IV. PRESENTATION

Associate Commissioner David Cedrone led a presentation of data highlighting demand for registered nurses, supply through nurse education programs at public and independent institutions, and other sources including intra-state reciprocity agreements *e.g.*, "Travel Nurses" and international nurses. This concluded with an assessment of the demand-supply gap and possible areas of focus for policy initiatives to address this gap.

V. DISCUSSION

Associate Commissioner Cedrone led a 45-minute session of reaction and discussion among the Task Force members regarding the data presentation. Highlights of that discussion follow:

- Tara Gregorio mentioned the importance of the focus on nursing career education pathways from Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) through Registered Nurse (RN) as this will be critical in developing and diversifying the nurse workforce. She also called attention to the growing population of elder residents in the Commonwealth and their needs for nursing services.
- Linda Thompson further reinforced the importance of competency-based nursing education with emphasis on LPN to RN pathways and called attention to clinical placements as a constraint to expanding the nurse education pipeline. She also emphasized the need to diversify the nursing workforce, a continuing challenge that must be resolved.
- Jay Prosser challenged the national data suggesting a changing demographic trend that may lessen the shortage of nurses as having less relevance for Massachusetts nurse workforce. He further reinforced the importance of the CNA and LPN to RN pathway to address needs in hospitals, clinics, skilled nursing facilities and other community settings and to increase diversity in the nurse workforce. He made the point that there is a need for increased student support services to address a wide range of life challenges that today's nursing students face – scholarships are important, but student support services are of increasing importance. Finally,

he noted that as healthcare evolves there will be even greater demand for nurses and so we are going to have to robustly increase our capacity and the number of nurses that we're producing.

- Coleen Moran made note of the number of graduates from public and private schools that supply the nurse pipeline. She noted that students are attending community college programs and then maybe stopping out because of economic reasons, reinforcing a point made previously about the need for student support services – specifically, paid time off to pursue additional education.
- BHE Member Harneen Chernow amplified the call for diversifying the nurse workforce at all levels of nursing care and the opportunity for this through the incumbent workforce. She noted that these are “people who have already made a commitment to healthcare, understand the field, are in it, and are not scared of it. It's not that they're going to start a clinical experience and realize this is the wrong place for them. They already see it every day. They're related to people who are in it, they're deep in it, they also bring the cultural diversity, the language diversity that's really needed in terms of looking at providing culturally competent care. She reinforced the importance of flexibility around part-time programs, weekend programs, and evening programs.
- Patricia Noga focused on direct care positions, clinicians who are going to care for people outside of the hospital walls, in their homes, in their assisted living facility. She further reinforced the calls for student support services – more than just scholarships, stipends for transportation, childcare and more. She also noted the importance of thinking creatively about clinical placements in clinical settings and creative ways to retain the expert clinicians in new types of roles. She also suggested considering ways to engage colleagues in clinical settings and hospitals who are interested in working limited hours and providing expertise around the clock to mentor and be resources to those in novice and traveler positions.
- David Rosenbloom cautioned that the reference to “Registered Nurse” may too generic, suggesting the need for additional data articulating more specific gaps for nurses. He suggested that “RNs are going to be coming into dramatically different jobs, with respect to both where care is delivered, the aging population and the use of technology and the educational requirements that they will need to have. He also suggested the need for additional data on the actual capacity issues in education, including data on constraints on growing our capacity. For example, he asked whether it is just a faculty shortage or is it the rules under which the programs are operating that are constraining growth?
- Kimberley Christopher drew attention to the importance of baccalaureate level nurse education to ensure the preparation and ability to care for acutely sick patients in hospital settings meets the needs that ensure the right outcomes for patients. She questioned whether a baccalaureate degree must be earned in four years, eight semesters, and suggested exploring a different pathway to that baccalaureate degree. In Maryland, for example, she and her colleagues were able to take the curriculum from both programs, the associate and the baccalaureate, and integrate them in a way that allowed the student six months later to earn a baccalaureate in nursing.
- Antoinette (Toni) Hays addressed the concern about capacity and suggested that the answer to the problem isn't to open up multiple new nursing schools. If constraints of available faculty and clinical placements are the limiting factors, more nursing programs will only compound the problem. She suggested that collaborating with hospitals hiring the staff as faculty, preceptors

and mentors who are most familiar with the clinical settings is an important alternative to consider.

- BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli expressed appreciation for the dialogue and noted that this reflects the value of this Task Force to clearly depict the range of possible actions that the BHE is best positioned to address. This may include issues of funding, regulations and structures that affect public higher education. He also encouraged the Task Force to boldly address issues of scale, even though some recommendations may prove challenging to reach full consensus.
- Co-Lead Walczak focused on the next steps of this process, which included summarizing what was heard today and coming up with a few actionable items that can be accomplished-- both "lower hanging fruit" and items that are more long-term issues.

Co-Lead Purcell noted some common themes: (1) diversification of the workforce; (2) pathways for career mobility; (3) deeper, better, stronger wraparound services – scholarships are not enough; and (4) more detailed and informative data. She closed with the acknowledgement that the Task Force has a lot of work to do, but she expressed gratitude about the level of expertise that this group has to bring to this work.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

None

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Co-Lead Walczak adjourned the meeting at 2:59 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
David Cedrone
Associate Commissioner*