

**JOINT MEETING OF THE  
MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND  
MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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Thursday, June 20, 2024, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Livestreamed, via Zoom

[livestreamed and recorded.](#)

**Meeting Minutes**

The joint meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and Board of Higher Education (BHE) was held virtually and livestreamed on Thursday, June 20, 2024, starting at 3:12 p.m.

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

Katherine Craven, Chair  
Matt Hills, Vice-Chair  
Ericka Fisher  
Ela Gardiner, Student Member  
Farzana Mohamed  
Michael Moriarty  
Dálida Rocha  
Mary Ann Stewart  
Patrick A. Tutwiler, Secretary of Education  
Martin West

Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and Secretary to the Board

**Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:**

Paymon Rouhanifard

**Members of the Board of Higher Education Present:**

Chris Gabrieli, Chair  
Danielle Allen  
Mary Burns  
Harneen Chernow  
Ann Christensen  
Veronica Conforme  
Alex Cortez  
Paul Mattera  
Judy Pagliuca  
Christina Royal  
Patrick A. Tutwiler, Secretary of Education  
Bill Walczak

Andrew Whitcomb, Segmental Advisor

Noe Ortega, Ph.D., Commissioner and Secretary to the Board of Higher Education

**Member of the Board of Higher Education Absent:**

Mary Burns

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Craven greeted board members and called the meeting to order at 3:12 p.m. The roll was called and members of each board introduced themselves. Chair Gabrieli welcomed everyone to the joint meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE) and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). He explained that the meeting was being held virtually and livestreamed in accordance with temporary amendments to the state's Open Meeting Law. He confirmed that the meeting would be recorded and asked if there were any objections. Hearing none, he noted that the meeting was being recorded and livestreamed. Chair Craven similarly confirmed no objections to recording the meeting from the BESE.

**I. REMARKS**

**Chair Gabrieli** spoke of the importance of BHE-BESE collaboration and the progress that has resulted from this joint work, including the Early College Program, shared mission statements, and focus on evidence-based practices.

**Secretary Tutwiler** welcomed all and said it is a privilege to serve on both boards. He said he looks forward to a productive meeting.

**Acting Commissioner Johnston** thanked both boards for coming together to discuss shared interests in strengthening the Massachusetts education system, with a focus on equity and improved outcomes.

**Commissioner Ortega** thanked everyone for organizing and participating in this joint meeting to discuss our ongoing collaboration and coordination on some key topics that affect students in the Commonwealth.

**II. PRESENTATION**

**Lessons from Research on Educational Progress and Economic Opportunity in the Commonwealth – Dr. John Papay, Annenberg/Brown University**

Acting Commissioner Johnston welcomed Dr. John Papay, Annenberg/Brown University, who presented on Educational Progress and Economic Opportunity in the Commonwealth: Lessons from the State Longitudinal Data System. Dr. Papay explained this is a long-standing research-practice partnership between researchers at Annenberg and the Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education. The work uses longitudinal data to analyze how students progress through the state's K-16 education system and into the workforce, with a specific focus on providing evidence to inform policy and practice in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Papay listed five key themes:

- The demographics of students served by the MA public education system have changed dramatically over the past 20 years, with implications for measuring progress over time.
- Both MCAS scores and high-school course grades are important and distinct predictors of long-run outcomes, but many students and families may not be receiving accurate signals of their preparation for college and careers.
- Educational attainment and skills are key drivers of economic opportunity, and some schools enhance these better than others.
- Rates of college enrollment and completion for academically strong students from low-income families and from historically marginalized groups are low, particularly after the pandemic.
- Associate degree attainment and transfer rates for students enrolled in Massachusetts community colleges have stayed flat, but many more students who transfer are graduating from a four-year college.

Dr. Papay reviewed some key findings on Massachusetts student demographics and preparation, and ways in which MCAS 10<sup>th</sup> grade test scores and high school course grades appear to reflect complementary but somewhat different skills that predict long-term outcomes, with both being important predictors of long-run outcomes. He noted that community colleges are an important pathway to four-year institutions.

Dr. Papay responded to questions from board members about national context, general declines in college-going, and gathering evidence about effective high schools and best practices that prepare students for success. Chair Gabrieli and Chair Craven thanked Dr. Papay for his timely and informative presentation. Chair Gabrieli commended the strong partnership between BHE-BESE and their respective departments for creating a highly useful longitudinal data system and commissioning research that helps the boards make good decisions.

#### List of Documents Used

[K-12 and Higher Education: Lessons from Our Research](#) and [Supporting Memo](#)

### **III. PRESENTATION & MOTION**

#### **Expanded Access to High Quality Designated Early College Programming, and Joint Resolution Regarding Early College Strategic Planning**

Chair Gabrieli and Acting Commissioner Johnston welcomed Dr. Richard Riccardi, Deputy Commissioner of DHE; Dr. Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner of DESE; and Phylitia Jamerson, Executive Director of Early College at DESE, who presented on Expanded Access to High Quality Designated Early College Programming. The presentation reviewed trends and program growth over time and outlined proposed next steps.

Early College refers to a structured program of study and supports that increases college success and career readiness, prioritizing economically disadvantaged, students of color, and first-generation college

goers by achieving the following: high school students take college classes with strong career orientations in a cohort model; classes are offered at no cost to students or their families; students receive enhanced academic and guidance support in this program; and students can graduate from high school with a significant number of college credits.

Executive Director Jamerson stated that by June 2025, DESE's Office of Early College in partnership with DHE and EOE will create internal and external policy working groups; finalize the Early College initiative timeline and deliverable for the purpose of developing a 5- year plan with a 10- year vision; develop a designation and redesignation process that offers program variation and evaluative measures; and develop a long-term fiscal plan that is predictable, sustainable, and supports both K-12 and institutions of higher education partnerships.

The presenters responded to questions from board members about Early College program models and the Early College data dashboard. Chair Gabrieli thanked the presenters and invited members of each board to review and vote on the proposed joint resolution to set direction for Early College in Massachusetts. Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion and roll call vote from the Board of Higher Education. Chair Craven asked for a motion and roll call vote from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

***On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Higher Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution.***

***On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution.***

**BHE 24-63      JOINT RESOLUTION REGARDING EARLY COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLANNING  
BESE 6-20-24**

**VOTED:      The Board of Elementary & Secondary Education (BESE) and the Board of Higher Education (BHE) (collectively “the Boards”) receive the June 18, 2024 Joint Early College Memorandum and Presentation from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Acting Commissioner Johnston and Department of Higher Education (DHE) Commissioner Ortega. The Boards express their appreciation to the Commissioners, the members of the Early College Joint Committee (ECJC), and support staff from DESE, the DHE, and the Office of Early College at DESE.**

**The Boards affirm their shared commitment to helping students attain the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to succeed in college and careers, be engaged citizens, and lead productive and fulfilling lives. The Boards recognize that early college programming that allows high school students to experience and complete college level academic work and reduce the time and expense of earning a college credential can be a powerful tool to achieve the Commonwealth’s overall goals for educational achievement.**

**The Boards receive the draft Early College initiative timelines and deliverables as set forth in Appendix A in the June 1, 2024 memorandum and charge their respective Commissioners to work with and through the**

**ECJC to continue to refine and advance the draft Early College initiative timelines and deliverables for the purpose of developing a 5- to 10-year strategic plan which shall:**

- 1. include specific, quantitative enrollment levels to expand early college access and scale while ensuring effectiveness and impact;**
- 2. set ambitious goals sufficient to ensure broad, equitable access to higher education opportunities and impact sufficient to sizably reduce the current equity gaps in college matriculation and graduation rates;**
- 3. identify key levers and actions needed to pursue the named goals; and**
- 4. be developed in partnership with the Executive Office of Education and after consultation with relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to practitioners in K-12 and higher education, experts, advocates, and interested business, civic, and community organizations.**

**The Commissioners shall report back to both BHE and BESE boards, either individually or through a joint session, on the progress in developing a 5- to 10-year strategic plan no later than June 2025.**

**Authority** M.G.L. c. 15A, §9(u) and M.G.L. c. 69, §1B; [2017 Resolution regarding early college programming](#)

**Contact** Noe Ortega, Commissioner, Department of Higher Education  
Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

List of Documents Used  
[Early College Update](#) and [Supporting Memo](#)

#### **IV. PRESENTATION & MOTION**

##### **FAFSA Update, and Joint Resolution Regarding FAFSA Completion**

Chair Gabrieli asked DHE Commissioner Ortega to introduce the FAFSA update. Commissioner Ortega gave an overview of FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and noted the decline in FAFSA completion rates nationwide has been compounded by technical challenges stemming from implementation of the "new FAFSA." Concurrently, the Commonwealth has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of financial aid resources through initiatives such as the MassGrant Plus Expansion, significantly bolstering support for high school students aspiring to attain postsecondary credentials.

Commissioner Ortega asked Dr. Clantha McCurdy, Senior Deputy Commissioner from DHE, to present. Dr. McCurdy was joined by Nicole Smith, DESE's Assistant Director of Career Technical Education, and Jackie Reis, DESE's Communications Director. The presentation included the process for FAFSA and MASFA (Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid); the decline in FAFSA annual completion rates; the significant increase of financial aid and other supports for students in Massachusetts; cross-

agency collaboration among DESE, DHE, EOE, and the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) to enhance FAFSA completion and improve access to higher education; partnerships with the Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA) and other organizations to support students with college access and FAFSA completion; expanded outreach by DHE's Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA); grants to 100+ Gateway City and GEAR UP schools; extension of the priority deadline for MASSGrant; the Edwin FAFSA tool for direct student follow-up; and communications outreach.

The presenters outlined next steps including: enhance awareness and accessibility; increase awareness of college affordability and new state financial aid options for students and families; explore and pilot technology-enabled engagement strategies to better communicate financial aid availability and benefits to students; examine policies such as mandatory FAFSA completion; and produce an annual joint report detailing completion rates by student groups and summarizing interagency collaboration efforts.

The presenters responded to questions from board members about trends and strategies in other states. Commissioner Ortega said the simplification of the FAFSA form should be helpful for students and every state.

Chair Gabrieli thanked the presenters and invited members of each board to review and vote on the proposed joint resolution regarding FAFSA completion. Chair Gabrieli asked for a motion and roll call vote from the Board of Higher Education. Chair Craven asked for a motion and roll call vote from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

***On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Higher Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution.***

***On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution.***

#### **JOINT RESOLUTION REGARDING FAFSA COMPLETION**

***On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Higher Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution. On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously, by roll call, to approve the resolution.***

**BHE 24-64      JOINT RESOLUTION REGARDING FAFSA COMPLETION  
BESE 6-20-24**

**VOTED:**            that the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (collectively the Boards) receive the June 18, 2024 Joint Memorandum on FAFSA completion from Department of Higher Education (DHE) Commissioner Ortega and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Acting Commissioner Johnston. The Boards express their appreciation to the Commissioners and staff from the DHE and DESE on this work.

**The Boards recognize that FAFSA completion is a key step in the college application process and is positively associated with college enrollment.**

**Students who complete the FAFSA are substantially more likely to enroll in an institution of higher education.**

**The Boards therefore direct their commissioners to continue their ongoing interagency collaboration and coordination to develop recommendations aimed at increasing awareness for students and their families on college affordability, including new state financial aid availability. The proximate goals should include increased FAFSA and MASFA completion rates, with the ultimate goal of increasing college-going rates. The scope should include examination of innovative, technology-enabled student engagement strategies, and separately, examination of policies such as mandatory FAFSA completion. The Boards encourage the commissioners to use existing infrastructure to pilot promising approaches to effectively communicate financial aid availability to students transitioning to postsecondary education. The Boards further request that the commissioners produce a joint annual report that includes FAFSA and MASFA completion rates by student groups and a summary of the interagency work on this topic.**

**Authority** M.G.L. c. 15A, §9(u) and M.G.L. c. 69, §1B

**Contact:** Noe Ortega, Commissioner, Department of Higher Education  
Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

List of Documents Used

[FASFA Update](#) and [Supporting Memo](#)

**OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Craven and Chair Gabrieli thanked board members, the commissioners, and the presenters.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED:** that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 5:00 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED:**        **that the Board of Higher Education adjourn the meeting at 5:00 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Noe Ortega, Ph.D.  
Commissioner of Higher Education and Secretary to the BHE*

*Russell D. Johnston  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and Secretary to the BESE*