

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

November 25, 2024
2:30 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education ("BHE" or "the Board") was held virtually, on Monday, November 25, 2024 on the web-conference platform Zoom.

Committee Members Present: BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli; Paul Mattera; Bill Walczak; and Commissioner Noe Ortega (non-voting, ex officio).

Committee Members Absent: Veronica Conforme and Alex Cortez.

Others BHE Members Present: Secretary of EOE designee Robert LePage; Judy Pagliuca; Niki Nguyen (BHE Student Voting Member); and Thalles De Souza (non-voting Community College Student Segmental Advisor).

Department Staff Present: Constantia Papanikolaou; Nicole Johnson; Matthew Cole; and Michael Dannenberg.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 2:33 p.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster).

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

None- Minutes were not voted on during this Executive Committee meeting.

III. MOTIONS

List of Material's Used

BHE Motions 25-20 through 25-22

Chair Gabrieli noted that there were three motions on the agenda.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 25-20 Approval of Letter of Intent of Bristol Community College to Award Associate of Applied Science in Applied Artificial Intelligence and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Bristol Community College's (BCC) Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Andrew Fisher, provided context for the proposal, noting that the degree was designed with specific job place performance outcomes in mind; BCC was concerned about the community engaging in artificial intelligence as part of their daily workload with little access to skills and training to adequately do so. He continued, stating that reports demonstrated artificial intelligence was a growing field, and this area also required skills to engage technology in the regular workplace. Dr. Fisher stated that the degree was designed to provide the following: a general introduction to artificial intelligence, artificial intelligence-based tools, and integration within the workplace solutions; and an understanding of the parameters that go into the development of the artificial intelligence tools and how they work. Dr. Fisher spoke about the program teaching mathematical algorithms and coding-based solutions that are required to maintain the artificial intelligence tools. He concluded by providing a timeline of events for the process of developing and presenting the program to the Board for approval.

Committee Member Walczak stated that he is pleased to see the Community Colleges developing artificial intelligence programs, as he is now using artificial intelligence in other areas such as real estate. Assistant Secretary LePage asked about the potential of embedded industry credentials and potential to upstream to Bachelor's degrees. Dr. Fisher responded that BCC incorporated Cisco and CompTIA, including micro-credentials that are industry-specific. He concluded by commenting on the embedded apprenticeship where students are expected to deploy strategies taught at outside companies. Chair Gabrieli inquired where this information can be found in the materials provided. Dr. Fisher responded that the information can be found in the INT 210 Experiential Education course curriculum. Assistant Secretary LePage questioned whether BCC saw potential in a credit-bearing certificate that would appeal to adult workers amid career transitions that would qualify for funding under MassEducate or MassReconnect.

Dr. Fisher confirmed that there is potential, due to the tremendous need for access to information in a systematic way. Dr. Fisher added that BCC has been working with

institutions such as the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth (UMass Dartmouth) for the program to be transferable. Chair Gabrieli requested further information regarding the program's modality. Dr. Fisher responded that a majority of the students are taking the courses online. Considering the possibility that other Community Colleges may eventually adopt their own artificial intelligence-related degree programs, Chair Gabrieli asked whether BCC's program would have to continually reinvent itself and inquired as to the Community Colleges' information-sharing practices. BCC's President, Laura Douglas, responded that BCC shares information across different institutions, but many of their degrees are specialized. President Douglas added that BCC is the first Community College with this particular degree program, and it is anticipated that there will be many collaborations. Commissioner Ortega added that there are affinity groups which meet routinely to discuss these areas, and the Community Colleges meet routinely with the Department's Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success Richard Riccardi to discuss learnings, and findings that could assist with the creation of similar, future programs at other campuses.

Chair Gabrieli questioned whether BCC thought about approaching the program development differently to deter redundancies in resources and overlapping. President Douglas replied that BCC will assess the strengths and any redundancies of its own program in order to share feedback with other Community Colleges. Assistant Secretary LePage added that once the Governor's Artificial Intelligence Task Force's work is completed, he believes there will be some dialogue about how to create scalability across the Commonwealth through Mass Tech collaboration, as MassTech has been collaboratively organizing the public and private institutions in the creation of the Cyber Center Network.

Board Member Pagliuca asked how fast prospective students could obtain the skills and get into the workforce. Dr. Fisher replied that the degree would take two (2) years; the certificate would take one (1) year; and the micro-credentials could take as long as ten (10) weeks, depending on the different skillsets that are combined. Board Member Pagliuca asked about the program's scalability. Dr. Fisher replied that this is a very high-touch program with extra features providing students with access to the technology needed to complete the program. Board Member Nguyen asked if BCC engaged with students to provide resources to successfully complete this program. President Douglas responded that BCC has two solutions for students: a laptop loaner program that allows students to take a laptop home and computer lab at each BCC campus location.

Upon hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 25-20. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou clarified that Committee Member Mattera can vote on the motions, as he is a member of the Executive Committee. Upon a motion

duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 25-20 was approved unanimously by all Executive Committee members present, by roll call vote.

Next, Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE 25-21 Approval of Massachusetts State College Building Authority Henry E. Warren Barn Project - Framingham State University*.

Committee Member Walczak asked whether he had to recuse himself from voting, as he is on the Massachusetts State College Building Authority (MSCBA) Board. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou confirmed that Committee Member Walczak's membership on the MSCBA does not preclude him from voting on the motion, and he did not have to recuse himself for that reason.

Upon hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 25-21. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 25-21 was approved unanimously by all Executive Committee members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced the final motion *BHE 25-22 Approval of the Board of Higher Education Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Recommendations*. Commissioner Ortega began the discussion by providing a summary and overview of the Board's work on implementing the recent investments in higher education. He highlighted the Department's continued work to invest in the commitments for free community college and expanded access to state financial aid for eligible students attending the Commonwealth's four-year public institutions. Commissioner Ortega invited the Department's Deputy Commissioner of Administration, Finance, and Operations, Matthew Cole, to provide further background and context for the motion.

Deputy Commissioner Cole discussed maintaining current investments and having approximately 33% of Fair Share Amendment revenue dedicated to higher education long-term; reducing the financial barriers that exist for students to enter public colleges and universities, and ensuring there are resources and services available; investments in the infrastructure of campuses; dedicating funds to support multi-year investments as a system in the higher education system; and ensuring financial stability and sustainability for the Commonwealth through higher education.

The Department's Deputy Commissioner for Policy, Michael Dannenberg, highlighted the amounts derived from Fair Share Amendment revenue in Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025, noting that the amounts will fluctuate from year to year in accordance with the budget and the denominator amount available. Commissioner Ortega reminded Chair Gabrieli of the Board's ongoing initiative to establish key priorities. Commissioner Ortega continued by discussing priorities such as affordability, and the success and efficacy of investments. He briefly discussed innovation and collaboration across the

higher education system, and concluded by discussing high quality, affordable opportunities for all students.

Committee Member Mattera questioned when it can be said that public higher education is free, given all the financial aid provided to students. Chair Gabrieli responded, stating that the Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA) will conduct a meeting tomorrow (November 26, 2024) during which financial aid will be discussed, and the meeting materials prepared in support of that meeting seek to address this question. He further noted that other, private higher education institutions are currently releasing similar announcements pledging “free college” depending on students’ income level. Committee Member Mattera shared his belief that 18% of Fair Share Amendment revenue allocated to higher education appeared to be an inadequate figure considering promises made to the Commonwealth’s students. He concluded by stating that he is in support of where the Board is headed in terms of identifying and articulating budget needs.

Committee Member Walczak requested clarification on the allocation of funds per student under the Student Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS) funding. Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg clarified that the SUCCESS funding splits \$28 million between Community Colleges and State Universities, and \$2,000 is the approximate cost per student. Commissioner Ortega commented on the alignment between the SUCCESS funding and the Strategic Higher Education Financing Framework (SHEF) recommendations. Commissioner Ortega concluded by commending the motion’s timeliness, given the discussion happening in other areas, such as CHEQA.

Board Member Nguyen requested clarification on the Higher Education Bond Bill process. Assistant Secretary LePage explained that through the Bond Bill, the legislature authorizes the Commonwealth to go to market for the release of funding for the bonds to support capital investments and infrastructure.

Upon hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 25-22. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 25-22 was approved unanimously by all Executive Committee members present, by roll call vote.

IV. DISCUSSION

There was no further discussion.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.