

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

January 14, 2025

10:00 a.m.

Via Zoom

Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held on Tuesday, January 14, 2025, remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Danielle Allen

Mary Burns

Harneen Chernow

Ann Christensen¹

Veronica Conforme

Alex Cortez

Paul Mattera

Niki Nguyen, Voting Student Member, State University Segment

Christina Royal

Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Bill Walczak

Noe Ortega, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

Thalles De Souza, non-voting Student Advisor, UMass segment

The following Board Members or Advisors were absent:

Judy Pagliuca

Imani-Barbour, non-voting Student Advisor, State University segment

I. CALL TO ORDER

¹ Arrived at 10:16 am, after roll call attendance was taken.

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. Nicole Johnson, Director of Board and Community Relations, took roll call attendance (see above for attendance roster).

II. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTION

- [BHE 25-23](#) Bristol Community College Presidential Appointment

Chair Gabrieli introduced the first item on the agenda which was a motion to approve the recommended appointment of Dr. Sedgwick Harris as the next president of Bristol Community College. Chair Gabrieli recognized that Bristol Community College (BCC) Board of Trustees Chair Joan Medeiros was in attendance and that both she and Commissioner Ortega would provide context for the motion.

Commissioner Ortega expressed gratitude to Bristol Community College President Laura Douglas for her efforts in the search for her successor. Commissioner Ortega noted he was impressed by the candidates, particularly Dr. Sedgwick Harris, who was recommended for appointment and is expected to build on the significant progress made by President Douglas. Secretary Tutwiler acknowledged the robust search process and shared excitement over Dr. Harris's appointment.

BCC Board of Trustees Chair Joan Medeiros provided a summary of the search process. She highlighted that it was a busy year for BCC due to Dr. Douglas's retirement and the subsequent search process for a new president. Consistent with the BHE guidelines a search committee was formed. With support from DHE, the search committee interviewed ten (10) finalists in October of 2024, and subsequently narrowed the field to five (5) strong finalists. She added that Dr. Harris was recommended for approval as the fifth President of Bristol Community College, following a vote of the BCC Board of Trustees on December 13th.

Dr. Harris expressed gratitude for the opportunity and shared his commitment to accessibility, innovation, and inclusiveness in education. He highlighted his community college background and thanked his family for their support throughout his journey. Chair Gabrieli inquired about Dr. Harris's experience with implementing Guided Pathways to improve student success. Dr. Harris explained that Guided Pathways at Northampton Community College focused on helping students stay on track while allowing exploration. He also emphasized the importance of implementing academic advising for all students at Northampton Community College, which improved completion and retention rates.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 25-23, *Bristol Community College Presidential Appointment* was approved by Board members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes

- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Niki Nguyen - Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary of Education, Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

III. COMMISSIONER’S SPOTLIGHT

List of Documents Used

[Commissioner's Spotlight](#)

Commissioner Ortega welcomed everyone and highlighted the upcoming Lunar New Year. He introduced the Commissioner's Spotlight, emphasizing its relevance to the upcoming Board retreat, and gave a brief overview of what is to be discussed in the spotlight, which includes:

- Items guiding the Board’s Work
- Advisory Council on the Advancement of Representation in Education (ACARE)

Items guiding the Board’s Work

Commissioner Ortega provided context for the ACARE initiative, co-chaired by himself and Secretary Tutwiler. He referenced foundational documents that guide the work, including the Board’s Strategic Higher Education Finance (SHEF) Framework, the Equity Agenda, and the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. He noted the connection between these documents and ongoing efforts to improve affordability, success, socioeconomic mobility, and equity in Massachusetts. He emphasized the importance of leveraging technology and innovative approaches to address these priorities.

Advisory Council on the Advancement of Representation in Education (ACARE)

The Department’s Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou and Deputy Commissioner of Policy Michael Dannenberg presented jointly on ACARE report which was issued on October 15, 2024.

Chief Legal Counsell Papanikolaou provided background and context, noting that ahead of the Supreme Court's pending decision on the legality of race-based higher education admissions criteria, the Healey Administration formed the ACARE advisory council. The Advisory Council was charged with developing recommendations to help increase access to higher education and provide high-quality experiences to all students, regardless of background; and ensure that our higher education institutions will always be open, welcoming, and inclusive of all students, including students of color, our LGBTQ+ students, and other students historically underrepresented in higher education. The advisory council consisted of over 40 stakeholders, including representatives from Massachusetts public and private colleges, civil rights groups, and advocacy organizations, and was co-chaired by the Secretary and the Commissioner.

Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou added that Advisory Council members were tasked with assessing the impact of the Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action and developing strategies, within the law, to help keep Massachusetts colleges and universities welcome and inclusive for all students; and provide guidance and feedback to allow postsecondary institutions to eliminate barriers to higher education and foster representative student bodies. Finally, she stressed that within the Advisory Council's charge was not only a mandate to propose strategies on college access, but also on supporting student completion, which is consistent with a central tenet of the work of the Board and the Department.

Deputy Commissioner of Policy Michael Dannenberg reviewed a PowerPoint presentation which summarized the contents of the ACARE report. He summarized three key messages from the ACARE report:

- The importance of a welcoming environment for all students.
- Expanding opportunity for all socioeconomic groups and protected statuses, in recognition of diverse representation.
- The importance of comprehensive support for student success, which goes beyond admissions and seeks to improve affordability, enrollment and success outcomes from admission to graduation.

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg added that the ACARE report contains over 30 recommendations organized into five main categories.

1. Increasing access to higher education and postsecondary opportunities

Recommendations for increasing access include:

- Expanding ACT/SAT preparation access and addressing inequities in test preparation.
- Boosting access to high-quality curricula, such as MassCore and AP courses.
- Expanding early college and career pathways.
- Enhancing FAFSA and MassCore completion through initiatives like the MyCAP program.
- Enhancing the capacity of high school counselors and teachers and heightened outreach to elementary and middle school students.

2. Implementing innovative recruitment, admissions and enrollment policies pFor recruitment, admissions, and enrollment policies suggestions include:

- Encouraging holistic admissions practices and direct admissions policies, where students are pre-admitted based on existing academic records.
- Promoting dual admission programs for seamless transitions between community colleges and four-year institutions.
- Increasing transfer credit applicability and mobility.

3. Enhancing affordability

In terms of affordability, Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg noted that the report emphasizes the need for increased financial aid to support full-time enrollment, aligning with the discussions underway in the CHEQA Group, as well as redesigning and streamlining state financial aid programs.

4. Increasing higher education persistence and completion rates

To improve completion rates, the report highlights the importance of comprehensive student support services, such as advising, tutoring, and assistance with social services, as well as expanding work-based learning experiences. Conducting campus climate surveys was also recommended.

5. Enhancing alignment and collaboration among institutions

Lastly, Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg discussed the formation of communities of practice among stakeholders to share best practices and address challenges in improving equity and student success.

Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou concluded the presentation by emphasizing that the ACARE report's recommendations are a starting point and will actively inform ongoing initiatives, such as financial aid investments and eligibility guidelines; the extension of SUCCESS programming and funding across the system; the ongoing work with the CHEQA group; and financial aid redesign. Finally, Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou reviewing next steps outlined in the report, including,

plans to conduct statewide assessments of admissions processes to identify barriers for certain student groups.

Commissioner Ortega emphasized that the ACARE report offers multiple tools to help the Board and Department achieve their important priorities and goals, and acknowledged the importance of aligning the report's recommendations with the Board's strategic priorities while considering pilot projects with institutional partners prepared to implement changes. He highlighted ongoing efforts to collect artifacts and insights that will inform future discussions and planning.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Max Page, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), addressed the Board by discussing the upcoming legislative session. He noted that the MTA plans to file a package of legislative proposals aimed at advancing public education from early childhood through higher education. Mr. Page emphasized the need for true debt-free access to high-quality public higher education to achieve racial and economic justice goals. Highlighting an influx of resources for public higher education initiatives through the Fair Share Amendment, Mr. Page urged a proactive approach to public education, advocating for Massachusetts to lead in setting standards for quality public education throughout all levels.

Joe Nardoni, Vice President of the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC), addressed the Board about wage equity and working conditions at the Community Colleges. He stated that the last wage equity adjustment for faculty and staff was approved 25 years ago, which has led to lower starting salaries. According to Ms. Nardoni, the average salary for Community College faculty in Massachusetts is \$68,309, which is substantially below the living wage needed to support families. Consequently, some faculty and staff hold second or third jobs to make ends meet. Mr. Nardoni stated that low salaries make it difficult to recruit high-quality faculty, which jeopardizes essential workforce development programs.

Joanna Gonsalves, president of the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) advocated for fair compensation and benefits for part-time (adjunct) faculty. Ms. Gonsalves spoke to pay disparities for faculty in the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE), in comparison to pay for day faculty over time. According to Ms. Gonsalves, DGCE faculty earn only 69% of what day part-time faculty earn resulting in a disparity of \$1,992 per course in 2023. Ms. Gonsalves also

expressed concerns about blurred lines of distinction between day and evening programs and stated that some campuses utilize online classes in DGCE to pay faculty less. President Gonsalves concluded her remarks by calling for changes in Mass General Law regarding DGCE funding to benefit both faculty and students.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Gabrieli asked for a consolidated motion to accept the following two sets of minutes: minutes from June 20, 2024 joint meeting the BHE held with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE); and minutes from the BHE regularly scheduled meeting held on December 3, 2024.

With no comments noted, on a motion duly made and seconded, the motion to approve both sets of minutes proceeded to a roll call vote and was approved unanimously by all members present as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Niki Nguyen - Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary of Education, Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak- Yes

V. REMARKS & REPORTS

A. Chair's Remarks

Chair Gabrieli expressed gratitude for collaboration between Commissioner Ortega and Board members in preparing for the upcoming Board retreat. He emphasized the correlation between clear priorities and progress toward equity-related goals. He further noted that organizations with unclear or excessive goals lack direction and expressed pride in the Board's progress toward defining key objectives. He finally highlighted the need for careful planning and a strong commitment to effecting meaningful changes that will benefit students.

B. Secretary of Executive Office of Education's (EOE) Remarks

Secretary Tutwiler wished everyone a Happy New Year, highlighting the dual opportunities for reflection and commitment that educators experience at the start of both the calendar year and the school year. He expressed appreciation for Commissioner Ortega's emphasis on the ACARE group's ongoing work and the progress being made toward creating barrier-free pathways in higher education for historically underrepresented groups.

Secretary Tutwiler acknowledged the significant work that lies ahead to advance equity in education, and he expressed his commitment to supporting these efforts. Secretary Tutwiler noted the importance of building the Governor's budget, stressing collaboration across K-12 and higher education sectors, as well as the inclusion of responsiveness, innovation, and a student-centered approach. Additionally, Secretary Tutwiler addressed the Federal District Court of Kentucky's recent decision in *Tennessee v. Cardona*, which vacated the Biden Administration's 2024 Title IX regulations, by affirming that Massachusetts schools will continue to uphold enhanced protections based on gender identity and other characteristics, consistent with the state's core values.

C. Reports from Presidents

State University Segmental Report

[For a copy of President Linda Thompson's full remarks, please see here:](#)

Westfield State University President Linda Thompson provided an update on behalf of the Massachusetts State University segment. She welcomed Dr. Harris, the incoming president of Bristol Community College, and thanked outgoing President Douglas for her dedicated service.

President Thompson highlighted the State Universities' commitment to economic mobility and shared several accomplishments including:

- Bridgewater State University launched the Bridgewater Commitment for Fall 2025, covering tuition and fees for in-state students from families earning \$125,000 or less, reducing student borrowing by 9.3% since 2019.
- Framingham State University received ongoing accreditation and initiated a nearly \$8 million renovation of the Christa McAuliffe Center.
- Massachusetts College of Art and Design celebrated its second annual Common Good award, honoring individuals for their contributions to arts and community development.
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) ranked sixth among top public liberal arts schools and second in equity and opportunity nationally.
- Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) introduced the TS Patriot State, a training ship for mariners and humanitarian efforts.
- Salem State University achieved foundational eligibility to become recognized as a Hispanic-serving institution and hosted the first New England Hispanic Minority Serving Conference.
- Westfield State University launched a pioneering graduate certificate program in law

enforcement and mental health co-response.

- Worcester State University celebrated its 150th anniversary, received military-friendly designations, and renewed its commitment to the Latino Education Institute.

President Thompson encouraged Board members to visit the campuses to witness the ongoing work firsthand and expressed enthusiasm for future collaborative efforts.

Community College Segmental Report

[*For a copy of President Luis Pedraja's full remarks, please see:*](#)

Quinsigamond Community College President Luis Pedraja congratulated Dr. Harris on ascending to the presidency of Bristol Community College. He acknowledged the contributions of outgoing President Douglas, expressed gratitude for her dedicated service over the past seven and a half years, and wished her well in retirement. President Pedraja noted that Bristol Community College's Chief Financial Officer Steve Kenyon will serve as interim president during Dr. Harris's transition.

President Pedraja reported an increase in enrollment across the Community College segment and attributed this growth to Free Community College. He expressed excitement about collaborating with the legislature to advance higher education priorities, including the continuation of Free Community College and seeking increased funding. He emphasized the critical need for adequate compensation for faculty and staff, stressing that insufficient wages hinder the quality of instruction and support for students. President Pedraja highlighted the importance of having timely data to assess whether the funding for Free Community College is adequate for the academic year, noting that this includes funding for summer courses.

D. Report from Student Advisory Council (SAC)

BHE Student Member Niki Nguyen wished everyone a Happy New Year and reported that the Open Educational Resources (OER) Advisory Council finalized its goals for Spring 2025 on December 18, 2024. These goals include hosting legislative briefings and surveys to assess the fiscal year 2024 OER initiatives. She noted that the Council is considering a rebrand to emphasize affordability and student success, highlighting the need for collaboration and support from the Board of Higher Education and college presidents. Member Nguyen noted ongoing challenges in student and faculty engagement with OER due to gaps in support from college administrations, funding, and other resources. She emphasized the importance of financial grants in incentivizing OER projects at campuses and urged the Board to explore strategies for increasing cooperation among OER stakeholders.

Student Member Nguyen also raised concerns about equitable advertising to reach diverse student populations, including early college learners and adult learners, in promoting college applications. Finally, Student Member Nguyen warned that limited academic advising staffing can impact students' decisions to continue their education, stressing the need for support to help staff manage increased student enrollment effectively. She concluded by asking how the Board can better support public colleges and universities in facilitating smooth onboarding for students.

E. Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Ortega emphasized the Department and Board's commitment to creating affordable, equitable, and accessible post-secondary opportunities for all students, while maintaining a focus on quality. Commissioner Ortega noted the upcoming transition to a new federal administration and acknowledged potential impacts on the Board's work. He reaffirmed the Board's commitments to equity through initiatives like ACARE, and SHEF. Commissioner Ortega indicated that the regulatory motion on today's agenda is an initiative on equity and inclusivity, as it is aimed at broadening post-secondary experiences for various student groups with disabilities. He also acknowledged recent federal changes, particularly regarding Title IX, while emphasizing Massachusetts' strong student protection laws.

Commissioner Ortega mentioned plans for regular meetings with institutional leaders to navigate changes in the post-secondary educational landscape. He concluded by thanking outgoing President Douglas for her contributions to Bristol Community College and expressed enthusiasm for the Board's work in 2025.

VI. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS

List of Documents Used

- [BHE 25-24](#) Motion to Authorize the Commissioner to Solicit Public Comment on 610 CMR 15.0: Massachusetts Inclusive Post Secondary Education Initiative Program

[PowerPoint Presentation on MAIPSE Regulations](#)

- [BHE 25-25](#) Authorization for the Commissioner to Seek, Accept, and Administer Grants, Gifts and Trusts for System-Wide Purposes

Chair Gabrieli turned to the next agenda item, BHE 25-24, *Motion to Authorize the Commissioner to Solicit Public Comment on 610 CMR 15.00: Massachusetts Inclusive Post Secondary Education Initiative Program Guidelines*.

Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou introduced the motion and provided context and background. She provided a procedural history of the regulations and the underlying legislative history. Namely, she explained that in July of 2022, landmark legislation expanded opportunities for students with severe disabilities who were not able to achieve the competency determination to graduate high school. The legislation required the public higher education system to create opportunities for these to participate in post-secondary experiences—as non-matriculating students. The legislation charged the Department with promulgating regulations implementing the new law and associated grant program funding that will facilitate student access. In response to this charge the Department drafted regulations to establish minimum policy expectations and procedures to help public higher education institutions offer inclusive education programming safely and appropriately to eligible students, while strengthening partnerships with other state agencies.

Member Mattera expressed concerns related to timeline for promulgation, suggesting that the Board may not have enough time to offer feedback or revisions. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou acknowledged Board Member Mattera’s concerns welcomed Board member feedback. She emphasized that extensive vetting of the draft regulations has already occurred with relevant stakeholders, including representatives from each of the three public higher education segments, representatives from other state agencies and student advocacy groups. The stakeholder input was largely reflected in the proposed regulations presented to the Board.

Member Bill Walczak stated that there are many unknowns about the implementation of the regulations and the resources needed. He stressed the importance of ensuring institutions have adequate time to prepare. In response, Mary Price, Director of the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative, reassured the Board that many Massachusetts public higher institutions and partner agencies already have experience with MAICEI programming and grant funding, and are well-equipped to expand services to students over the age of twenty-two (22) under the MAIPSE initiative.

Chair Gabrieli highlighted the need to represent institutional voices in discussions about the regulations, suggesting that it is important for Board members to understand the perspectives of their segments. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou agreed and noted that segmental legal counsel and other segmental representatives from the executive offices were involved. She added that consistent with past protocol and practice, Board member engagement, comment and feedback is welcomed during the public comment period. And, after the public comment period closes, but before the Board votes on promulgation, Department staff would summarize all comments received. That will be another touchpoint allowing for further engagement and discussion of any concerns raised.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 25-24 was approved by members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Niki Nguyen - Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary of Education, Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes

BHE 25-24 MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE COMMISSIONER TO SOLICIT PUBLIC COMMENT ON 610 CMR 15.0: MASSACHUSETTS INCLUSIVE POST SECONDARY EDUCATION INITIATIVE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

VOTED The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby authorizes the Commissioner to proceed in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, M.G.L. c. 30A & 3 and solicit public comment on the proposed regulation, 610 CMR 15.00: Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education Initiative Program Guidelines.

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, § 9(u) and § 30A; M.G.L. c. 71B, § 17; and Sections 12, 22, 36, 165 and 168 of Chapter 126 of the Acts of 2022, as amended by Sections 56 and 57 of Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, and as further amended by Sections 23 and 26 of Chapter 206 of the Acts of 2024

Contact Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel
Richard Riccardi, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, *BHE 25-25- Authorization for the Commissioner to Seek, Accept, and Administer Grants, Gifts and Trusts for System-wide Purposes*. He indicated that the BHE’s enabling law authorizes the Commissioner, with Board approval, to seek, accept, and manage grants, gifts, and trusts to advance system-wide priorities. This motion initiates the first

step of this statutory process by authorizing the Commissioner to secure external funding for initiatives aligned with the Board's emerging Innovation Priority. Final acceptance and administration of funds will require further Board approval to ensure alignment with the Board's strategic goals and proper disbursement through the state treasurer.

Commissioner Ortega noted that previous funding for innovation has decreased and emphasized the need for philanthropic investments to pilot new ideas and demonstrate effectiveness. Chair Gabrieli emphasized this motion's importance as part of ongoing efforts to increase state support for innovation funding, which has been a priority since the State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) Report.

Member Walczak raised concerns about potential competition between the Department and institutions of higher education for the same grants. Chair Gabrieli responded that the Department's focus would be on multi-campus, system-wide initiatives to avoid competition with individual institutions. Commissioner Ortega added that the Board's diverse representation will help ensure a collaborative approach, positioning the Department to attract investment without detracting from individual institutions.

Member Harneen Chernow emphasized the importance of applying an equity lens when redistributing funds generated through philanthropy. She cautioned that additional resources could disrupt existing financial systems and urged careful consideration of how funds are allocated to avoid privileging certain institutions.

Noting no further comments, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 25-25 was approved by members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chair Chris Gabrieli – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Veronica Conforme – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Paul Mattera – Yes
- Niki Nguyen - Yes
- Christina Royal – Yes
- Secretary of Education, Tutwiler – Yes
- Bill Walczak - Yes

BHE 25-25 AUTHORIZATION FOR THE COMMISSIONER TO SEEK, ACCEPT AND ADMINISTER GRANTS, GIFTS, AND TRUSTS FOR SYSTEM-WIDE PURPOSES

VOTED The Board of Higher Education hereby authorizes the Commissioner to seek grants, gifts, and/or trusts for system-wide purposes from private foundation(s); provided further that upon securing the necessary commitments for such grants, gifts, and/or trusts the Commissioner must return to the Board before acceptance or administration of the proposed funding.

Authority Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, § 9(n)

Contact José Luis Santos, Ph.D., Senior Deputy Commissioner & Special Advisor to the Commissioner

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

None

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Noe Ortega,
Commissioner and Secretary to the Board*