

## MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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December 9, 2025

10:00 a.m.

Via Zoom

### **Meeting Minutes**

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair

Danielle Allen

Lisa Battaglino

Mary Burns<sup>1</sup>

Harneen Chernow, Vice Chair

Ann Christensen<sup>1</sup>

Alex Cortez

Michael Hannigan, Voting Student Member, Community College Segment

Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Noe Ortega, Commissioner and Secretary to the Board

Hannah Rosenkrantz, non-voting Student Advisor, University of Massachusetts Segment

The following Board Members were absent:

Veronica Conforme

Judy Pagliuca

Christina Royal

Bill Walczak

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the regular meeting of the Board to order at 10:03 a.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster).

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<sup>1</sup> Arrived after roll call attendance was taken.

## II. COMMISSIONER'S SPOTLIGHT

*Documents Used:*

- [Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability \(CHEQA\) \(PowerPoint\)](#)
- [SU Success, Basic Needs and Security, and ReUp \(PowerPoint\)](#)
- [CHEQA Report](#)

### **Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA)**

Chair Gabrieli stated that the first order of business was to receive and discuss the final report of the Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA). Chair Gabrieli explained that CHEQA was established through the FY25 budget and required the Department and Board to convene a stakeholder commission. He noted that he, along with Board Member Veronica Conforme, served as co-chairs and that the Commission included a broad range of representatives from across the Commonwealth, including higher education leaders, faculty and staff, and external stakeholders.

Chair Gabrieli stated that the Commission was given specific charges, some aligned with prior Department and Board work (including review of State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) data) and others that had not previously been addressed comprehensively. He described the Commission's process as thoughtful and rigorous, with substantial deliberation, and noted that the group reached strong consensus around five key recommendations intended to guide the Commonwealth over multiple years in improving higher education quality and affordability.

Chair Gabrieli emphasized that the recommendations were intended to provide direction while leaving appropriate flexibility for the Governor and Legislature. He noted that the report also documents additional ideas that received notable support, as well as individual perspectives that Commission members wished to include in the record. Chair Gabrieli encouraged review of the full report and accompanying materials and thanked the CHEQA Commission members for their service. He then invited Deputy Commissioner for Policy Michael Dannenberg to present an overview of the final recommendations.

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg stated that CHEQA was created by the FY25 budget and included approximately 21 members representing varied perspectives, including higher education institutions, student advocacy organizations, elected officials from both major political parties, and taxpayer and business groups. He explained that the Commission focused on three primary areas: student success, financial aid, and faculty and staff recruitment and retention. He noted that the Commission's work included in-depth examination supported by state and national experts and analytical assistance from EY-Parthenon, and that the final report would be made publicly available on the Department of Higher Education's website at [www.mass.edu/strategic/cheqa.asp](http://www.mass.edu/strategic/cheqa.asp).

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg summarized five principal recommendations:

1. Student SUCCESS (Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services) programming:

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg reported that the Commission identified low degree program completion rates as a key challenge, including an approximately 35 percent completion rate at the Community Colleges, and declining on-time credit accumulation and completion at the State Universities. He highlighted promising practices, including the Community College SUCCESS Program, which has shown a 16-percentage-point gain in persistence for participants compared to non-participants. He noted that the Commission's top long-term priority was significant investment in large-scale implementation of evidence-based student success programming to complement recent financial aid expansions. He explained that the Commission considered multiple approaches, including expanding existing Massachusetts success programs, replicating national models such as CUNY ASAP and SUNY ACE, and pursuing a coordinated set of evidence-based reforms.

2. Codification of financial aid commitments:

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg stated that the Commission emphasized the importance of predictable, multi-year state financial aid support, noting the risk of fluctuations associated with annual appropriations and enrollment changes. He referenced the recent need to pause or reallocate state financial aid due to higher-than-expected enrollment shifts and stated that codification would provide families with clear expectations. He noted that some states have adopted outcome-based commitments such as guaranteeing zero tuition and fees for eligible students across their academic careers.

3. Expansion of financial aid beyond tuition and fees:

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg reported that the Commission highlighted the significance of indirect costs, including food, housing, and childcare, noting that more than one in five students is a parent. He stated that EY-Parthenon's analysis estimated indirect expenses of approximately \$11,000 to \$14,000 annually for low-income students at public institutions. He explained that the Commission recommended expanding aid to address basic needs and to reduce the level of student loan debt required of low and moderate-income families to meet full cost of attendance. He noted that the Commission reviewed several policy approaches, including a basic needs stipend, a Pell Grant match, a hybrid approach combining basic needs support with a Pell match, and a debt-free guarantee.

4. Comprehensive review of faculty and staff recruitment, compensation, and workplace

practices:

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg stated that the Commission's research included surveys of higher education leaders and faculty/staff, and comparisons to peer states. He reported that higher education leaders identified recruitment as a greater challenge than retention, particularly in specialized areas such as STEM. He stated that while Massachusetts compensation levels may be comparable to peer states, the Commonwealth's higher cost of living creates significant challenges for frontline workers and prospective employees. He also referenced a Massachusetts Teachers Association-sponsored study indicating that cost-of-living pressures affect employee well-being and stability, including food and housing challenges.

#### 5. Long-term investment and Fair Share revenues:

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg stated that the Commission considered what level of investment would be needed to advance the recommendations and discussed the use of Fair Share revenues, which are dedicated to education and transportation. He explained that the Commission debated whether a specific percentage of Fair Share revenues should be dedicated to higher education and ultimately recommended that a fixed, meaningful share of annual Fair Share revenues be used to support higher education, without identifying a specific percentage.

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg concluded by encouraging review of the full report for additional detail.

Chair Gabrieli expressed appreciation for the time and thoughtfulness Commission members contributed to the process, noting that consensus required members to support recommendations even when outcomes differed from their ideal positions. Chair Gabrieli remarked that the CHEQA recommendations aligned closely with themes reflected in the Board's 2022 SHEF-related work and noted that, while the purpose of the agenda item was to present the Commission's work—not to adopt a Board position—he anticipated the Board would revisit its strategic priorities in 2026 (including student success and financial aid) and consider how to build on the broader stakeholder consensus reflected in the CHEQA report.

Student Advisor Hannah Rosenkrantz expressed appreciation for the CHEQA report and voiced support for the Commission's "student success" recommendation. She shared observations from conversations with students and emphasized the importance of wraparound supports—such as mentorship, peer support, and affinity groups—in fostering community, belonging, and higher attainment for students studying in Massachusetts. She recommended that the Board assemble a group of students to advise on the support-needs most relevant to individual campuses while strengthening and improving existing structures.

Vice Chair Chernow stated that the CHEQA report addressed core issues for the Board and the

future of higher education in the Commonwealth, including student success, access, affordability, and faculty and staff recruitment and retention. She expressed particular interest in the outcomes of efforts to expand successful community college student success models to four-year institutions and stated that she hoped the CHEQA report would inform a Board work plan. Vice Chair Chernow emphasized the importance of translating the report's broad goals into actionable steps and stated that she looked forward to the Board considering how it can help convene stakeholders and advance implementation.

Chair Gabrieli added that, subsequent to the CHEQA Commission vote, the Legislature approved a requirement for a classification study for Community College faculty and staff, which aligned with aspects of the report's recruitment and retention recommendations.

Student Voting Member Mike Hannigan stated that the report's themes aligned with feedback he has received from fellow students. He highlighted concerns regarding funding inconsistency for basic-needs programming, noting that many Community Colleges' basic needs services are administered through college foundations and funded through grants. He stated that staff in basic needs roles often spend significant time securing funding for their own positions, which detracts from service delivery. Student Member Hannigan recommended a shift away from framing basic needs supports as charitable services and toward institutionalizing them as essential functions that are annually funded as regular college positions.

Member Lisa Battaglino commended the report and asked a question regarding the recommendation that the Commonwealth dedicate a "fixed meaningful share" of annual Fair Share revenues to higher education. She asked whether the Commission reviewed other states' approaches or identified any suggested percentage ranges, and whether such a share would be consistent year-to-year or subject to annual change.

Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg responded that the Commission did not identify comparable state examples, noting that Massachusetts may be unique in having a dedicated Fair Share revenue stream—generated by the "millionaire's tax"—that is restricted to education and transportation. He also noted that higher education funding is not solely a matter of Fair Share revenues because the base budget remains significant. He referenced research by the Hildreth Institute regarding the share of Fair Share revenues allocated to higher education, stating that recent allocations have been approximately 10 percent, though they have fluctuated.

Chair Gabrieli added that while some states have dedicated revenue streams for specific education purposes (such as lottery-supported programs), and Massachusetts has a dedicated funding mechanism in other contexts (for example, a portion of sales tax revenue supporting the school building assistance program), Fair Share is distinct in scale and structure. He emphasized that most higher education state funding continues to come from the general fund

and noted that Commission members discussed potential tradeoffs associated with establishing a fixed Fair Share percentage. Chair Gabrieli stated that the Commission debated a specific percentage but did not reach consensus, adding that some members expressed concern that any specified percentage could function as a ceiling rather than a floor. He noted, however, that the Commission's intent was to advocate for a higher, more consistent share than current levels, while recognizing competing demands on Fair Share revenues.

With no further questions or comments, Chair Gabrieli stated that the Board would likely return to the CHEQA recommendations in future Board work to align priorities and advance implementation.

### **Commissioner's Spotlight – Student Access and Success Portfolio**

Commissioner Ortega stated that it was validating to see the Board's priorities aligned with concerns from the field as reflected in the CHEQA report, both statewide and nationally. He reiterated the Department's focus on supporting individual economic mobility and broader public-good outcomes, as well as the role of financial aid and affordability in encouraging enrollment and the need to invest in student success strategies to improve persistence and completion. Commissioner Ortega invited Allison Little, Assistant Commissioner of P-16 Alignment and Outreach, to present the Commissioner's Spotlight on the Department's student access and success portfolio.

Assistant Commissioner Little introduced her presentation as a set of strategic initiatives intended to support students through the "Student Throughline" (from Recruitment to Enrollment to Retention to Completion to Employment). She emphasized the importance of Retention and Completion on this Throughline, noting that completion is critical for students to realize the economic mobility benefits of a degree. Assistant Commissioner Little stated that she would focus on three programs: State University SUCCESS 2.0, Basic Needs Security, and ReUp.

#### **State University SUCCESS 2.0**

Assistant Commissioner Little stated that State University SUCCESS 2.0 aligns with CHEQA Recommendation No. 1 by scaling evidence-based student success supports. She noted that the Department is using data to guide implementation, citing declining completion at State Universities and widening equity gaps as the rationale for new strategies. She stated that the Legislature invested new funding over the last two years to launch a wraparound-support model focused initially on low-income students, including those receiving Pell, MASSGrant, or MASSGrant Plus.

Assistant Commissioner Little noted that the Department reviewed national models to inform

SU SUCCESS 2.0, including predictive analytics used by Georgia State University's National Institute for Student Success (NISS) and the CUNY ASAP case-management model (and its replications), while also incorporating promising work already underway in Massachusetts.

Assistant Commissioner Little stated the program begins with a needs analysis using predictive analytics to identify who should be served and each campus's strengths and growth areas. She outlined three core pillars: (1) case management, (2) financial wraparound supports, and (3) academic momentum. Assistant Commissioner Little emphasized that SU SUCCESS 2.0 is intended to build on—not replace—existing campus efforts, within a common statewide framework that preserves local flexibility. She reported that all nine State Universities are conducting needs assessments and implementing case management and direct financial supports. Meanwhile, eight of the nine State Universities are implementing academic momentum strategies, and institutions are providing supports such as free student transportation where appropriate. She noted that Bridgewater State University began an earlier needs assessment with the Gardner Institute and is continuing that work with Department support.

### **Basic Needs Security**

Assistant Commissioner Little stated that the Department's Basic Needs Security work aligns with CHEQA Recommendation #3, which calls for expanded supports beyond tuition and fees to help students persist and complete. She stated that basic-needs supports complement expanded financial aid and are an essential part of achieving completion. She described the Department's holistic approach to basic needs, noting that students experiencing one form of insecurity often experience additional insecurities. She identified seven areas of focus: food, housing, transportation, technology, behavioral and mental health, childcare, and healthcare.

Assistant Commissioner Little referenced national survey work conducted by the HOPE Center and stated that a majority of students experience at least one form of basic needs insecurity. She stated that students also stop out due to mental health challenges and noted that many students are not aware of resources available to them. She stated that case management and coaching—through SU SUCCESS, existing campus structures, and other supports—can help students learn about and access available services and resources.

Assistant Commissioner Little reviewed FY26 basic needs funding and stated that the Department received \$500,000 to support Hunger-Free Campus initiatives, distributed to 30 institutions (27 public), and \$800,000 to support a housing scholarship program. She stated that funding for the housing scholarship includes support from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and from the Office of Student Financial Assistance within DHE. She stated that where the Department does not have direct funding, it participates in inter-agency task forces and working groups and convenes communities of practice for postsecondary staff. She also

noted that SU SUCCESS 2.0 has flexibility to support basic needs areas not otherwise covered.

### **ReUp**

Assistant Commissioner Little stated that the Department is piloting work to engage Massachusetts residents who have some college credits but no credential, aligning with the Board's priority related to economic mobility. She stated that the Commonwealth has approximately 766,000 residents in this category and that the Department launched a pilot with ReUp, with nine institutions participating.

Assistant Commissioner Little explained that partner institutions identify stopped-out students and share those lists with ReUp, which then conducts outreach to students. She stated that students who express interest receive coaching, including support navigating re-enrollment and financial aid, and that coaching continues after students return to support retention and completion. She stated that this approach provides additional capacity for institutions to re-engage and support these students.

Assistant Commissioner Little shared early indicators from the pilot and stated that, after initial outreach over approximately seven days, 460 students had expressed interest in returning to higher education. She stated that a portion of interested students indicated that they wanted to return as soon as possible (including potentially in the Spring), while many others indicated a longer timeline of six months or more. She stated that these early indicators suggest that sustained, longer-term investment is needed to support adults returning to higher education.

In closing, Assistant Commissioner Little stated that the student access and success portfolio is designed to complement expanded financial aid by ensuring students have the supports needed to persist and complete. She stated that SU SUCCESS 2.0 is a key strategy to improve retention and completion at the State Universities; Basic Needs Security helps address non-academic barriers; and ReUp supports residents with some credits but no credential to return, complete a credential, and strengthen their economic mobility. She stated that, together with other campus initiatives, these efforts support increased degree attainment and a stronger Commonwealth workforce.

Commissioner Ortega stated that Assistant Commissioner Little's presentation underscored the Board's focus on two key levers in its theory of change—access and success—and reflected the Department's comprehensive approach to serving all learners, including returning adults. He emphasized that increasing attainment requires both significant work and significant investment, and that effectiveness depends on a well-informed, research-based approach grounded in pillars such as case management, wraparound supports, and academic momentum.

Member Danielle Allen asked about the intersection of student affairs and academics and requested clarification on curricular innovation referenced by one institution. In response, Assistant Commissioner Little stated that Westfield State University proposed the curricular innovation and is considering a curriculum redesign to better meet changing student needs, including how and when courses are offered. She added that case management can help maintain a holistic lens across academic and student affairs supports.

Student Advisor Rosenkrantz stated that the Student Advisory Council's (SAC's) priorities include increasing campus engagement and asked about bringing more students into the work. Assistant Commissioner Little stated that ICF will conduct student focus groups as part of evaluation, and she agreed that student voice should more meaningfully inform design within the three pillars.

Student Member Hannigan, a peer tutor funded through SUCCESS programming, emphasized that students are often most effective at connecting other students to services and increasing awareness. He noted that peers may reach students more effectively than staff emails.

Chair Gabrieli expressed his appreciation for the program's balance of campus autonomy with data collection. He stressed the importance of benchmarking outcomes and holding campuses accountable to practices that significantly improve student success, even when deeper changes—potentially involving faculty—are required. He emphasized the importance of focusing on outcomes, not only inputs. Assistant Commissioner Little agreed and stated that evaluation will be critical for determining the impact of such initiatives, including including for curricular innovation and related strategies.

### **III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Chair Gabrieli stated that the Board had received three requests for public comment. He identified the speakers as Claudine Barnes, President of the Massachusetts Community College Council; Sheila Gilmour, President of the University Staff Association; and Max Page, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA). Chair Gabrieli invited Ms. Barnes to begin.

Ms. Barnes introduced herself as a member of the CHEQA Commission and stated that she strongly supported the CHEQA report. She stated that the Community College system is experiencing significant stress that existed prior to MassEducate but has intensified due to increased enrollment and rising student need. She stated that the Community Colleges are understaffed and require additional full-time faculty and staff to implement CHEQA's recommendations as well as to support students with increased needs, including challenges related to food and housing insecurity, transportation, and childcare. She also noted that some faculty and staff experience the same basic needs challenges. Ms. Barnes stated that implementing case management approaches would require direct investment in personnel. She

stated that successful student transfer and completion depend on alignment across sectors as well as adequate staffing, reasonable workloads, and improved wages to recruit and retain faculty and professional staff. She urged timely action and encouraged the Board to advocate for implementation of CHEQA's findings.

Mr. Page also introduced himself as a member of the CHEQA Commission. He noted that, despite differing viewpoints among CHEQA members on other policy issues, the group found common ground on the importance of investing in public higher education. He expressed support for SUCCESS programs and for the goal of debt-free public higher education, referencing strong enrollment growth at the Community Colleges following "Free Community College" initiatives as evidence of demand. He emphasized that a substantial portion of the cost of attendance extends beyond tuition and fees and stated that addressing costs such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare is necessary to expand access for those historically excluded from higher education. He also emphasized low pay for faculty and staff across sectors, particularly at Community Colleges, and called for increased pay, additional full-time positions, and improved conditions for adjunct faculty. He urged the Board to use the CHEQA report as a starting point for implementation, cautioned against austerity narratives, and cited the Commonwealth's fiscal capacity to invest. He expressed the MTA's intent to partner in implementation efforts.

Sheila Gilmour, President of the University Staff Association, stated that she was proud of the CHEQA report and appreciated the opportunity to review it. Speaking as a higher education support professional and community leader, she emphasized higher education's role as a public good and a key economic driver in Western Massachusetts. She stated that UMass Amherst lost significant staff and faculty during the pandemic and that many positions were not replaced, noting that the University shifted from being the region's largest employer in 2017 to the second-largest employer. Ms. Gilmour emphasized that low wages for faculty and staff harm individuals and regional economic stability and shared her experience of working a second job while serving in a full-time supervisory role, all of which impacted her health, work, and capacity to perform community service. She expressed support for the report's recommendation for a timely, comprehensive review of remunerative and non-remunerative faculty and staff structures, policies, and practices. She urged continued advocacy for public higher education, emphasizing staff and faculty commitment to students and campus communities.

#### **IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

Chair Gabrieli requested a motion to bundle and approve the minutes from the following BHE Meetings: October 1, 2025, and October 28, 2025. On a motion duly made and seconded, the October 1, 2025 and October 28, 2025 BHE meeting minutes were approved unanimously by all Board Members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglino – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Abstained
- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education – Yes

## **V. REMARKS**

### A. Board of Higher Education Chair

Chair Gabrieli deferred his remarks and turned the floor over to Secretary of Education Tutwiler.

### B. Secretary of Education

Secretary of Education Tutwiler provided a brief update on the Commonwealth's K-12 graduation work. He stated that an Executive Order signed by Governor Healey in January of 2025 created a 32-member Graduation Council to address what it means to earn a Massachusetts diploma and how to ensure that every graduate meets a high standard. He noted that Deputy Commissioner Dannenberg serves on the Council, along with Berkshire Community College President Ellen Kennedy and Westfield State University President Linda Thompson.

Secretary Tutwiler reported that the Council released its "Vision of a Massachusetts High School Graduate" in September of 2025, which is organized around three core qualities—thinkers, leaders, and contributors—and outlines an approach including foundational coursework, a hybrid assessment model, and requirements aligned with college, career, and civic readiness. He stated that a final report is due in June 2026 and encouraged members to review the materials on the [Commonwealth's website](#).

### C. Presidents

#### [State University Segmental Report](#)

Westfield State University President Linda Thompson delivered updates on behalf of the State Universities. She noted collaboration with Chair Gabrieli, Commissioner Ortega, and DHE's Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou on draft regulation 610 CMR 16.00, "Degree Granting Regulation for Pilot Proposals on Innovation," which was currently subject to public comment. While President Thompson noted that State University presidents continue to question the necessity and quality of reduced credit bachelor's degrees, they commended the Department's inclusion of consumer protections and academic rigor safeguards within the draft regulation. She stated that the Council will submit written comments during the public comment period

and anticipates continued partnership on innovation to expand access.

President Thompson expressed appreciation for the Legislature's recent appropriation of \$18.2 million in supplemental student financial aid through the FY25 supplemental budget, which would address student aid shortfalls and enable thousands of students to continue their education. She also cited the House's advancement of the BRIGHT Act as an opportunity to address deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs, and cited as an example Westfield State's proposal to replace a sixty-five-year-old academic building with updated labs and classrooms to support regional healthcare workforce needs. Finally, she referenced the Healey-Driscoll Administration's statewide post-college earnings report, which confirmed that graduates of Massachusetts public higher education institutions earn more than peers who do not pursue higher education, and noted that she would provide Member Allen additional information on curriculum work referenced earlier in the meeting.

#### [Community College Segmental Report](#)

North Shore Community College President William (Bill) Heineman delivered updates on behalf of the Community Colleges. He noted recent action taken by the Legislature to address a funding shortfall and prevent a reduction to the book and supply allowance associated with Free Community College.

President Heineman reported that Community College enrollment continues to grow and that enrollment across all three public segments has returned to pre-pandemic levels. He stated that the Community Colleges now serve about half of all public higher education students in Massachusetts and emphasized the need for sufficient funding, capital investment, and policy support to provide high-quality instruction, modern facilities, and wraparound services.

He highlighted the importance of the Massachusetts Endowment Incentive Program and stated that, while MassEducate and MassReconnect cover tuition and fees for many students, colleges rely on private fundraising to address total cost of attendance needs, especially amid growing political and economic uncertainty affecting low-income students. He described ongoing advocacy to expand the endowment match so that the Community Colleges can receive state matching funds for non-endowed gifts, including smaller donations supporting urgent student needs, and urged equitable endowment-match allocations across segments.

President Heineman also requested timely approval of the Performance Funding Formula, noting that delays could create challenges for campuses, and particularly for smaller colleges.

#### D. Student Advisory Council

Student Member Hannigan provided an update on behalf of the Student Advisory Council (SAC). He reported that he attended the Community College Student Leadership Association

Conference, where he facilitated a session on statewide student engagement and governance. He stated that students raised several concerns, including concerns about navigating free speech issues on campus and the loss of childcare services.

Student Member Hannigan reported that on November 12 he participated in a State House advocacy day with MassPIRG students and the Massachusetts Hunger Free Campus Coalition, which brought together approximately 80 participants. He stated that the group met with 50 legislative offices and conducted outreach to more than 100 offices, using the meeting as a platform to advocate for Fair Share Amendment funding for the Hunger Free Campus Initiative.

Student Member Hannigan reported that SAC met on December 4, 2025 to review policy and student success data. He stated that Department staff briefed SAC on student success metrics, federal student loan policy changes, and the BRIGHT Act. He stated that students were encouraged by the House's passage of the BRIGHT Act to address aging facilities and accessibility challenges but emphasized that capital investments must be paired with human investments—advising, basic needs supports, flexible services, and attention to economic security and adjunct faculty benefits—to improve student outcomes. He also noted that national trends highlighted in an American Association of Community Colleges report align with themes discussed in the CHEQA report, including the growing importance of serving non-traditional learners and addressing basic needs to support completion.

Student Advisor Rosenkrantz added that SAC is prioritizing broader campus engagement and expressed interest in bringing more student voices into the SU SUCCESS work moving forward.

#### C. Commissioner

Commissioner Ortega began his remarks by providing federal updates and reported that the federal administration released draft regulations to extend Pell Grant eligibility to very short-term workforce courses. He stated that the regulations are currently subject to negotiated rulemaking, with a final agreement expected by July 2026. He also reported that the U.S. Department of Education entered into six inter-agency agreements to transfer significant functions—particularly those related to funds and distribution—to other federal agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, State, and Interior. He stated that the Department, working through Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou and her team, is closely monitoring these developments and continues to raise concerns as issues arise, through coordination with Attorney General Andrea Campbell's Office and the Executive Office of Education.

Commissioner Ortega further reported that rules related to Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) have been published and noted attention to a provision reserving the right to remove eligibility for borrowers employed by nonprofit organizations that have been determined by the administration to be engaged in "substantially illegal purposes," the definitional ambiguity of

which has generated significant concern.

### **Commissioner's Year-End Reflections and Updates on Board Priorities**

Commissioner Ortega noted that this was the Board's final meeting of Calendar Year 2025 and used his remarks to highlight selected accomplishments tied to the Board's priorities endorsed at the January 2025 Board retreat. He reiterated the Board's four priorities—Student Success and Financial Aid, Economic Mobility, Public Good, and Innovation—and noted that additional work remains to be done in the developing the Public Good priority.

Regarding the Board's Innovation priority, Commissioner Ortega stated that in March 2025 the Department received an award from the Axim Collaborative, which supported the launch of an Innovation Hub at the Department. He stated that the Department is in the process of hiring two key positions to support this work—an inaugural Chief Innovation Officer and a Project Director—and referenced additional pilot projects underway.

Regarding the Board's Financial aid and Student Success priority, Commissioner Ortega reported continued year-over-year investment in affordability, including a recent supplemental budget that supported adjustments to awards for the current year. He noted the importance of sustaining and managing the Commonwealth's commitments to students regarding tuition and fees, consistent with themes raised in the CHEQA report. He also referenced the Department's "Go Higher" campaign highlighting the Commonwealth's signature affordability initiatives and stated that he and Secretary Tutwiler conducted a roadshow to promote these programs. Regarding Student Success, Commissioner Ortega referenced the work presented earlier in the meeting, noting the Department's continued focus on success interventions alongside affordability as part of its broader theory of change.

Regarding the Board's Economic Mobility priority, Commissioner Ortega referenced the PMRS earnings dashboard and an accompanying earnings report. He stated that the report underscored that public higher education investments are paying dividends for students, citing reported earnings differences (approximately \$20,000 to \$30,000, depending on credential) compared to peers without a degree. He also reiterated the importance of aligning K-12 preparation with postsecondary expectations and highlighted the work of the Graduation Council referenced earlier by Secretary Tutwiler.

### **VI. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS**

*List of documents used:*

[BHE 26-31](#) and [Attachment A](#); [BHE 26-32](#); [BHE 26-33](#);

Chair Gabrieli introduced the first motion, *BHE 26-31: Approval of Naming of Framingham State University's Hemenway Laboratories Building in Honor of Professor Thomas and Joan Eames*, a request made in recognition of their charitable donation establishing a permanent endowed fund to support the University's College of STEM.

Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-31 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglino – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Yes
- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education – Yes

**BHE 26-31      APPROVAL OF NAMING OF FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY'S  
HEMENWAY LABORATORIES BUILDING IN HONOR OF  
PROFESSOR THOMAS AND JOAN EAMES**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the request of Framingham State University's Board of Trustees to rename the Hemenway Laboratories building the "Professor Thomas and Joan Eames Laboratories."

**Authority**      Massachusetts General Laws c. 15A, §6 and 9(m); BHE 17-23

**Contact**      Matthew Cole, Deputy Commissioner Administration, Finance, and Operations

Chair Gabrieli next introduced *BHE 26-32, Affirmation and Amendment of the Endowment Incentive Program Guidelines for the FY26 Budget Appropriation* and stated that the motion would amend and affirm updates to the program guidelines.

Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-32 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as

follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglino – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Yes
- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education – Yes

**BHE 26-32      AFFIRMATION AND AMENDMENT OF THE ENDOWMENT  
INCENTIVE PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR THE FY26 BUDGET  
APPROPRIATION**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education hereby affirms the attached Endowment Incentive Program guidelines initially approved by the BHE in May 2022 (BHE 22-50), provided that the funding allocations and disbursement timelines are hereby amended to include \$20 million in funding appropriated in FY26, as well as any additional funding appropriated through FY26 supplemental budgets, as set forth in Attachment A (as amended).

**Authority**      Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 15E; Section 1 of Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2025 (Line Item 1596-2425); BHE 17-23; BHE 22-50; BHE 23-15; BHE 23-70; BHE 24-11 and BHE 25-37.

**Contact**      Matthew Cole, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, Finance, and Operations

Chair Gabrieli introduced the final motion, *BHE 26-33, Approval of the Community College and State University Funding Formula Allocations for FY26*. He noted that the allocation details appeared in the meeting materials and described the approach as consistent with prior years but applied to a significantly larger funding amount.

Chair Gabrieli stated that the Board has used the current approach for some time and that, given the increased dollar amount, it may be appropriate in the future to discuss whether the separate line item and methodology remain useful or whether simplification should be considered. However, he stated this was not urgent and supported timely distribution of funds.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-33 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglino – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Yes
- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education – Yes

**BHE 26-33      APPROVAL OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND STATE  
UNIVERSITY FUNDING FORMULA ALLOCATIONS FOR FY2026**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education (BHE) hereby approves allocations to provide additional operational funding for the Community Colleges and State Universities in FY2026, as set forth in Attachment A.

**Authority**      M.G.L. c. 15A, § 9(dd); M.G.L. c. 15A, §15B; Line items 1596-2601 and 1596-2602. Section 2 of Chapter 9 of the Acts of 2025.

**Contact**      Matthew Cole, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, Finance, and Operations

**VII. OTHER BUSINESS**

None

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 p.m.

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