

## MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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April 7, 2026  
10:00 a.m.  
Via Zoom

### Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Board of Higher Education (BHE or Board) was held on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

The following Board Members were present:

Chris Gabrieli, Chair  
Danielle Allen<sup>1</sup>  
Lisa Battaglino  
Mary Burns  
Harneen Chernow, Vice Chair  
Ann Christensen  
Alex Cortez  
Michael Hannigan, Voting Student Member, Community College Segment  
Bob LePage, Secretary of Education Designee<sup>2</sup>  
Bill Walczak<sup>3</sup>  
Stephen Zrike, 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

### 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.

<sup>2</sup> Attended with Secretary Zrike and remained to serve as the Secretary's designee following the Secretary's departure at 11:51 am..

<sup>3</sup> Departed at 11:36 am

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## II. COMMISSIONER'S SPOTLIGHT

### *Documents Used:*

- [Commissioner's Spotlight](#) (PowerPoint)

Commissioner Noe Ortega welcomed newly-appointed Secretary of Education Stephen Zrike to his first BHE meeting and stated that he would use the Commissioner's Spotlight to highlight DHE and BHE's work toward advancing affordability and access for underserved students. He noted that the Spotlight would also provide an orientation to recent financial aid investments and related Board priorities. Commissioner Ortega reviewed the Board's four strategic priorities—financial aid and student success; economic mobility; innovation; and the public good—and stated that the Board had identified a working list of deliverables at its January 2026 retreat that will continue to be updated as opportunities and budget-cycle developments emerge.

Commissioner Ortega then revisited the Strategic Higher Education Finance Framework (SHEF) work endorsed by the Board in 2022. He described key design elements that informed the framework, including "systemness;" an emphasis on high quality; equity commitments; transparency; attention to local institutional context; and the integration of innovation and collaboration. He also reviewed key goals that informed subsequent budget framing and policy work, such as making college more accessible and affordable; bolstering institutional funding to support student success; building capacity for innovation and collaboration; considering incentives and cost-sharing; and increasing simplicity, transparency, and predictability for all. Commissioner Ortega noted that such themes are reinforced through the Advisory Council for the Advancement of Representation in Education (ACARE) report; the Board's endorsement of strategic priorities; and the recommendations of the Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA).

Commissioner Ortega stated that Massachusetts has doubled its financial investment into state financial aid programs to nearly \$400 million in support of programs such as MassReconnect, the MASSGrant Plus expansion, and MassEducate. He described how the Department and Board have used both legislative direction and Board-set guidelines to direct financial aid resources. While Commissioner Ortega noted that Pell-eligible students stand to benefit from tuition and fee-free options at the Community Colleges and State Universities, he also reviewed the Department's work to provide additional affordability supports for students above Pell eligibility, including students closer to the middle class, by reducing tuition and fees by up to 50 % for certain income bands.

Commissioner Ortega reviewed the total growth in state financial aid investments and awards across public institutions. He stated that, from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2025, total aid awarded increased from approximately \$163 million, serving approximately 60,000 students with an average award of approximately \$2,600, to over \$360 million, with an increased number of students receiving awards and higher average awards. He explained that these increases reflected both expanded eligibility and changes to the award formula. He also reviewed how distributions and award sizes have increased across segments, as a result of free community college and the growth in average award sizes. Commissioner Ortega stated that the direction of this work is further reinforced by CHEQ's recommendations to codify multi-year financial aid commitments; expand aid beyond tuition and fees to address basic needs and reduce debt; and ensure that a fixed, meaningful share of Fair Share revenues is directed to higher education affordability investments.

Chair Gabrieli discussed the Board's focus on affordability outcomes, noting that a significant share of students in the four-year segment now attend with no tuition and fees. Board Member Lisa Battaglini asked why the total of aid dollars allocated to the State Universities was lower than the amount allocated to other segments. Commissioner Ortega clarified that multiple drivers affect distribution, including differences in tuition and fee costs and interactions with federal and institutional aid because the programs operate as last-dollar awards. Chair Gabrieli added that the commitment for Pell-eligible students is identical across the two four-year segments and explained that differences in the presentation reflect differences in enrollment volume and tuition and fee levels.

Student Voting Member Mike Hannigan raised concerns about Pell eligibility calculations and the volume of financial aid appeals, noting that in his experience an appeal might not be processed before enrollment deadlines. Commissioner Ortega stated that changes to Pell formulas and federal policy shifts affect last-dollar state programs and that the Department would continue to monitor federal developments closely. Chair Gabrieli encouraged Student Advisory Council members to share on-the-ground student experiences so the Department can understand and address execution issues where possible.

Before concluding the Spotlight, Commissioner Ortega briefly highlighted a recent event held on April 6, 2026, at UMass Lowell that launched the Massachusetts Cooperative Education Initiative, which aims at expanding public university student access to in order to strengthen the state university to workforce pipeline.

### **III. BERKSHIRE PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT**

*List of documents used:* [BHE 26-43](#)

Chair Gabrieli next introduced BHE 26-43 as a motion to approve the recommended appointment of Dr. Hara Charlier as the next President of Berkshire Community College (BCC).

Commissioner Ortega thanked the Berkshire Community College search participants and Department staff involved in the process, including Cynthia Brown, Senior Associate Commissioner of Regulatory and Veterans Affairs at the Department of Higher Education, who served on the Berkshire Community College Presidential Search Committee as the Commissioner's designee. Commissioner Ortega noted that he and Board Member Bill Walczak interviewed finalists and then invited BCC Julia Bowen to summarize the search process and recommendation.

BCC Chair Bowen thanked the BHE for its collective investment in and support of community colleges and for its commitment to equity. She expressed appreciation for outgoing President Ellen Kennedy's fourteen years of leadership, noting that her dedication and vision laid a strong foundation for the incoming president. BCC Chair Bowen described the search process, which was conducted by a sixteen-person search committee representing stakeholders across the college, as thorough, transparent, inclusive, and efficient. She further stated that the Berkshire Community College Board voted unanimously to recommend Dr. Charlier's appointment.

Dr. Charlier introduced herself by sharing her commitment to changing lives and strengthening communities through social and economic mobility. She described her professional focus on rural community colleges and stated that Massachusetts' affordability and equity work, including free community college and SUCCESS programming, made the Commonwealth especially compelling. Dr. Charlier stated that she was impressed by Berkshire Community College's students, employees, and board members, all of whom emphasized that institution's commitment to equitable, accessible, and transformative education. She also expressed appreciation for President Kennedy's legacy and stated that she would be honored to build on that foundation.

Chair Gabrieli asked Dr. Charlier about her experience with collaborative higher education center models and pathways for rural, place-bound students. Dr. Charlier referenced work within a system that includes both two- and four-year institutions, described the importance of partnerships in rural areas, and cited efforts such as dual admission and clear pathways as means for enabling students to complete bachelor's degrees. She stated that higher education centers and cross-institution partnerships can expand access while avoiding counterproductive competition and noted that wraparound supports remain important for completion.

Student Voting Member Hannigan stated that he had worked on Berkshire Community College's campus around the time MassReconnect was implemented and had heard many success stories of students reengaging with higher education. He noted the importance of basic needs supports and expressed support for Dr. Charlier's candidacy.

Member Walczak stated that he and Commissioner Ortega interviewed the finalist candidates and expressed confidence that Dr. Charlier is well suited to serve Berkshire Community College and would bring valuable experience to the system.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-43 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglini – Yes
- Mary Burns – Absent during the vote
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes
- Alex Cortez - Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Yes
- Stephen Zrike, Secretary of Education – Yes

**BHE 26-43      BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the March 16, 2026, recommendation of the Berkshire Community College Board of Trustees recommending Dr. Hara Charlier as President of Berkshire Community College. Such appointment is effective on or before July 1, 2026, is subject to the successful and satisfactory completion of a State Police background check and is subject to and in accordance with the attached Terms and Conditions of Appointment.

**Authority**      Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(q) and 21

**Contact**      Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Max Page, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA): Mr. Page urged Board support on pending legislative measures, including the BRIGHT Act, the DRIVE Act, and Senate Bill 930, which he described as addressing adjunct faculty pay, health insurance, and retirement access. He encouraged the Board and Department to more actively document and communicate the impacts of expanded affordability initiatives, such as through public messaging and a possible study of long-term benefits to the Commonwealth. Citing increased community college attendance, Mr. Page also expressed concern regarding proposed tax-cutting ballot initiatives that he stated could reduce state revenues by approximately \$7 billion and urged the Board to oppose those initiatives in order to protect recent higher education investments.

## V. REMARKS

### A. Board of Higher Education Chair

Chair Gabrieli referenced that the Department's April 6th event at UMass Lowell which highlighted the expanded co-ops initiative. He stated that the event, along with the subsequent media coverage, marked a shift in focus toward workplace learning in higher education. Chair Gabrieli stated that the Board would be voting on apprenticeship-related degree programs that embody the Board's economic mobility priority. He also noted that integrating work opportunities into students' collegiate experiences is especially important for first-generation and low-income students.

### B. Secretary of Education

Secretary Zrike thanked Commissioner Ortega, Vice Chair Chernow, and the Board for their warm welcome and stated that he was pleased to join the Board. He referenced his experience in K-12 education and stated that he witnessed firsthand the impact that partnership programs such as early college, dual enrollment, the Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program, and educator preparation have on student access, persistence, and workforce outcomes. He shared his excitement about joining the Board at a time of renewed focus on economic mobility, robust financial aid, high-impact innovation. He concluded his remarks by highlighting the expanded co-op initiative announced at UMass Lowell as an example of those priorities in action, noting its potential to enable students to earn money while in school, graduate with significant work experience, build professional networks, and access high-paying, high-demand jobs.

### C. Presidents

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

Westfield State University President Linda Thompson shared remarks on behalf of the State Universities, noting that enrollment has stabilized and that supportive success grants advanced over the past two fiscal years are contributing to improvements in student retention and graduation rates. She highlighted that the State University segment's FY27 priorities include full funding of collective bargaining obligations, recapitalization of the performance-based funding formula through a \$12.5 million request, continued investment in MASSGrant, MASSGrant Plus, and MASSGrant Plus Expansion, and additional funding to address an estimated gap in support for the broader affordability commitment for students with adjusted gross income under \$100,000. She also cited advocacy priorities, such as level funding for the State University SUCCESS program, internship incentive funding, restoration of student behavioral and mental health grants, restoration of PACE funding, and support for Early College.

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

North Shore Community College President William Heineman offered remarks on behalf of the

Community Colleges and noted several presidential transitions throughout the Community College segment., including at Berkshire Community College, Springfield Technical Community College, and Cape Cod Community College. He highlighted the Community College segment's FY27 priorities, which include increasing SUCCESS program funding from \$14 million to \$28 million, maintaining free community college funding, preserving current budget language governing the treatment of non-loan aid so that private scholarships may be used for non-tuition expenses, and collaborating with the Department on a legislatively-mandated compensation study for faculty and staff. He also noted that free community college has driven significant enrollment growth and cited an estimate that SUCCESS currently serves approximately 8% of eligible students. He concluded his remarks by stating that the Community Colleges remain focused on the betterment of their students, the workforce they will enter, and the communities in which they will live and work.

At this point during the meeting, Board Member Walczak left meeting.

#### D. Student Advisory Council

Offering remarks on behalf of the Student Advisory Council (SAC), Student Voting Member Hannigan reported that SAC's meeting on April 2, 2026 focused on gathering students' perspectives on the Board's "Public Good" initiative. He also reported that SAC members specifically raised student concerns about transportation access and food insecurity, including discontinued shuttle services, limited dining options, and broader financial challenges, and he urged increased investment in student basic-needs supports.

After describing how service-based learning and campus advocacy had shaped his own path into public service, Student Voting Member Hannigan suggested that campuses should incorporate civic engagement, into institutional strategic plans. He then suggested that the Board establish a task force with student representation to advance the Public Good priority and expressed support for preserving Department positions supporting both civic engagement and open educational resources.

#### D. Commissioner

Commissioner Ortega reported that the Department, working in partnership with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), had recently launched an educator loan repayment program offering loan repayments of up to \$7,500 for eligible early education professionals who are saddled with student loan debt. Commissioner Ortega described the program as part of the Department's broader affordability work, particularly in an area where compensation challenges remain significant.

Commissioner Ortega then commented on the Trump Administration's federal budget proposal

observing that it would maintain Pell Grant funding while also proposing cuts to programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, federal work study, and SEOG grants. He stated that Congress rejected similar cuts in the prior year and that the Department would continue monitoring developments related to student loan borrowing and repayment.

Commissioner Ortega invited Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou to provide updates on ongoing, higher education related litigation at the federal level. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou provided updates on three matters:

- First, she reported on multi-state coalition litigation filed on March 11<sup>th</sup> and led by Attorney General Andrea Campbell which seeks to enjoin a new U.S Department of Education (USED) Admissions Consumer Transparency Supplement (ACTS) survey associated with IPEDS. The new, supplemental ACTS survey would provide the Administration with disaggregated information about the test scores and GPAs of several years' worth of an institution's admitted classes. The concern is that the intended use of the data is to help the support claims of intentional discrimination based on racial disparities across that data, and pressure institutions to stop considering factors beyond test scores and GPAs. The Department, along with Worcester State University and the University of Massachusetts, filed a declaration in support of this litigation, On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, U.S. District Court Judge Saynor granted the coalition's request for a preliminary injunction finding, among other things that USED engaged in arbitrary and capricious decision making in implementing the survey.
- Next, she stated that on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Massachusetts Attorney General AGO filed suit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as lead plaintiff along with 19 other states. The lawsuit seeks declaratory and injunctive relief from the USDA's imposition of new General Terms and Conditions for federal grant awards. She stated that the new conditions would require state entities to certify to a vague set of funding requirements related to USDA's purported anti-discrimination policies, gender ideology, "fair athletic opportunities" for women and girls, and immigration. The lawsuit is challenging these conditions as vague, harmful, broad, and unreasonable, and alleges that the conditions would include impositions beyond what federal law requires
- Finally, Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou provided a brief update on the ongoing federal challenges to state tuition equity laws in other states and reported that, on March 27<sup>th</sup> the U.S. District Court in Minnesota dismissed the U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit challenging Minnesota's tuition equity policy.

Commissioner Ortega also provided an update on the Department's implementation BHE regulation 610 CMR 16.00, (Degree Granting Regulations for Pilot Proposals on Innovation), which the Board voted to approve at their February meeting. He stated that the Department is developing implementation procedures while reviewing initial inquiries and applications. Commissioner Ortega also noted that, in an effort to streamline the review process and create

efficiencies, the Department will continue coordinating with the New England Commission for Higher Education (NECHE) to share resources and expertise regarding pilot program applications. He added that the Department and NECHE are seeking to memorialize their collaboration and approaches.

At this point during the meeting Secretary Zrike left the meeting; his designee, Bob LePage represented the Secretary for the remainder of the meeting.

## **VI. BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MOTIONS – Part B**

*List of documents used:*

[BHE 26-44](#); [BHE 25-45](#); [BHE 26-46](#); [BHE 26-47](#); [BHE 26-48](#); [BHE 26-49](#) with [Attachment A](#); [BHE 26-50](#); [BHE 26-51](#); [BHE 26-52](#) with [Attachment A](#) and [Attachment B](#); [BHE 26-53](#); [BHE 26-54](#); [BHE 26-55](#); [BHE 26-56](#)

Chair Gabrieli introduced BHE 26-44, *Approval of the Letter of Intent of MassBay Community College to Award an Associate of Science in Paramedicine* and noted that MassBay Community College President David Podell and team members were present for questions. Chair Gabrieli commented that the proposal appeared to complement existing work and community needs, and referenced MassBay's new Center for Health Science, Early Childhood, and Human Services in Framingham. He also referenced the college's articulation agreements to the baccalaureate degree and expressed interest in future in-state public higher education articulation pathways. President Podell said the college would work toward that.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-44 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
- Bob LePage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**COLLEGE TO AWARD THE  
ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN PARAMEDICINE FOR FAST TRACK  
REVIEW**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **MassBay Community College** to award the **Associate of Science in Paramedicine** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the FastTrack review protocol.

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

**Contact** Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, BHE 26-45, *Approval of Letter of Intent of Middlesex Community College to Award an Associate of Science in Surgical Technology (Apprenticeship Pathway)*. He noted that Middlesex Community College (MCC) representatives were present to address any questions from the Board. He stated that the proposal was notable as an apprenticeship pathway degree model. Board Member Alex Cortez asked about the conditions that supported MCC's development of an apprenticeship pathway degree model as well as how policy and market conditions could support additional apprenticeship degrees. Karen Townsend, Dean of Health at Middlesex Community College, stated that the proposal emerged out of demand from hospital partners seeking a local pipeline of surgical technologists who would remain with the hospitals. She also noted that the development aligned with grant funding supporting apprenticeship degree programs.

Chair Gabrieli discussed the structure of the pathway and described it as a shift from the traditional model because it is designed for apprentices employed at partner hospitals, with some apprenticeship work counting toward degree credits. Dean Townsend stated that employer partners were recruiting incumbent workers from within their organizations and described examples of employees in other roles expressing interest through the apprenticeship modality.

Vice Chair Chernow asked about the meaning of "apprenticeship option" and whether the program was approved by the Board of Registered Nurses (BORIN), noting that registered apprenticeships are required to meet specific standards. Dean Townsend stated that the college was working in conjunction with the Department of Apprenticeship Standards on additional regulatory approvals. Dean Townsend further stated that the college is initially focused on partnering apprentices with current employer partners, with the goal to add clinical sites and a "traditional track" over time.

Student Voting Member Hannigan commended the proposal and noted the potential value of

innovative models to address the budgetary pressures of healthcare program delivery. In response to Student Advisor Rosenkrantz's question as to whether the model was scalable, Dean Townsend stated that scalability and expanded employer partnerships are program goals.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-45 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
- Bob LePage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-45      APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AWARD THE ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY (APPRENTICESHIP PATHWAY) FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

**VOTED**            The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Middlesex Community College** to award the **Associate of Science in Surgical Technology (Apprenticeship Pathway)** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

**Authority**            Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

**Contact**            Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, BHE 26-46, *Approval of Letter of Intent of Middlesex Community College to Award an Associate of Science in Anesthesia Technology*, which MCC presented as structurally similar to its medical technology apprenticeship pathway proposal.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-46 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
- Bob Lepage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-46      APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AWARD THE ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN ANESTHESIA TECHNOLOGY FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

**VOTED**            The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Middlesex Community College** to award the **Associate of Science in Anesthesia Technology** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

**Authority**        Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

**Contact**         Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, BHE 26-47, *Approval of Letter of Intent of Middlesex Community College to Award an Associate of Science in Diagnostic Vascular Sonography*.

Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-47 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
- Bob Lepage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-47      APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AWARD THE ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN DIAGNOSTIC VASCULAR SONOGRAPHY FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Middlesex Community College** to award the **Associate of Science in Diagnostic Vascular Sonography** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

**Authority**      Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

**Contact**      Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, BHE 26-48, *Approval of Letter of Intent of Northern Essex Community College to Award an Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology*. He noted that Northern Essex Community College (NECC) representatives were available for questions and asked whether they could distinguish the proposed program from other surgical technology proposals before the Board. Kathy Hudson, NECC’s Dean for Health Professions, cited the Merrimack Valley region’s demand for surgical technologists, the program’s alignment with existing professional healthcare offerings, and the Lawrence campus’s simulation lab capacity as distinctive factors. Dean Hudson also observed that expanded financial aid and free community college have increased access and demand for healthcare programs.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-48 was approved unanimously by all members present through a roll call vote, as follows:

- Chris Gabrieli, Chair – Yes
- Danielle Allen – Yes
- Lisa Battaglini – Yes
- Mary Burns – Yes
- Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair – Yes
- Ann Christensen – Yes

- Alex Cortez – Yes
- Michael Hannigan – Yes
- Bob Lepage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-48      APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF NORTHERN ESSEX  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AWARD THE ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED  
SCIENCE IN SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

**VOTED**      The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Northern Essex Community College** to award the **Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

**Authority**      Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

**Contact**      Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli introduced the next motion, BHE 26-49, *Approval of Westfield State University Strategic Plan*. Chair Gabrieli described the review process, noting that the Department provides feedback through multiple touchpoints prior to the plan coming before the Board.

Member Allen asked President Thompson to identify the most important directional shift reflected in the plan. President Thompson cited a focus on innovation in teaching and learning, attention to financial sustainability, and emphasis on regional impact, alongside continued focus on student access and success. Michael Freeman, Westfield State’s special assistant and chief of staff, emphasized the theme of stability and described innovative learning, delivery modes, program development, and expanded partnerships beyond campus.

Vice Chair Chernow asked how artificial intelligence is reflected in the plan. President Thompson stated that the university formed a campus committee to consider AI and that AI considerations are increasingly integrated into campus thinking and policy development. Mr. Freeman referenced an upcoming workshop led by students for faculty on how students use AI.

Assistant Secretary LePage stated that he would abstain on the vote to follow protocol because the plan proceeds to the Executive Office of Education and the Secretary.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and seconded, BHE 26-49 was approved 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
- Bob Lepage, Secretary of Education Designee – Abstain
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-49      APPROVAL OF WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

**VOTED**            The Board of Higher Education (Board) hereby approves the **Westfield State University Strategic Plan 2026-2030**, subject to the institution ensuring that all strategies within the plan will be implemented consistent with relevant state and federal laws as well as guidance issued by the Massachusetts Attorney General; and provided further that the institution is authorized to make revisions to the document as needed from time to time to maintain compliance. The Board further authorizes the Commissioner to forward the strategic plan to the Secretary of Education for final approval pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(l) and 22(l).

**Authority**        Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 7, 9(f), 9(l) and 22(l); BHE By-Laws, Article I, Section 3 and Article III.

**Contact**        Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Chair Gabrieli stated that he would like to bundle for approval the FY27 resident and non-resident tuition rates for the Community Colleges and State Universities (BHE Motion 26-50 through BHE Motion 26-56) in a single vote and asked if there were any objections. Hearing none, the Board proceeded accordingly.

Chair Gabrieli referenced the Board’s Strategic Higher Education Financing (SHEF) work and expressed continuing concern on the tuition and fee structure within the State University and Community College segments, noting that tuition remains relatively steady, and low, while fees comprise a substantial share of student charges. He also clarified that the Board’s votes pertain to tuition rates at the Community Colleges and State Universities, but not the University of Massachusetts system.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a vote. On a motion duly made and

seconded, BHE Motions 26-50, 26-51, 26-52, 26-53, 26-54, 26-55 and 26-56 were bundled for approval and 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
- Bob Lepage, Secretary of Education Designee – Yes
- Bill Walczak – Absent during the vote.

**BHE 26-50      COMMUNITY COLLEGES RESIDENT TUITION RATES FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2027**

**VOTED**

The Board of Higher Education adopts the following resident tuition rates at the community colleges for Fiscal Year 2027:

	Change	Rate Per Credit	Annual Resident Tuition
Berkshire Community College	\$0	\$26	\$780
Bristol Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Bunker Hill Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Cape Cod Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Greenfield Community College	\$0	\$26	\$780
Holyoke Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Massachusetts Bay Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Massasoit Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Middlesex Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Mount Wachusett Community College	\$0	\$25	\$750
North Shore Community College	\$0	\$25	\$750
Northern Essex Community College	\$0	\$25	\$750
Quinsigamond Community College	\$0	\$24	\$720
Roxbury Community College	\$0	\$26	\$780
Springfield Technical Community College	\$0	\$25	\$750

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-51 COMMUNITY COLLEGES NON-RESIDENT TUITION RATES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education adopts the following non-resident tuition rates at the Community Colleges for Fiscal Year 2027:

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Rate Per Credit</b>	<b>Annual Non- Resident Tuition</b>
Berkshire Community College	\$0	\$260	\$7,800
Bristol Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Bunker Hill Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Cape Cod Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Greenfield Community College	\$0	\$281	\$8,430
Holyoke Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Massachusetts Bay Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Massasoit Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Middlesex Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Mount Wachusett Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
North Shore Community College	\$0	\$257	\$7,710
Northern Essex Community College	\$0	\$266	\$7,980
Quinsigamond Community College	\$0	\$230	\$6,900
Roxbury Community College	\$0	\$247	\$7,410
Springfield Technical Community College	\$0	\$242	\$7,260

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-52 ALTERNATIVE NON-RESIDENT UNDERGRADUATE TUITION RATES – BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education adopts the following alternative tuition rates and enrollment caps for new, non-resident, undergraduate students at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Berkshire Community College for Fiscal Year 2027:

**Alternative Non-Resident Undergraduate Tuition Rates**

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Rate Per Credit</b>
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	\$0	\$1,545
Berkshire Community College	\$0	\$39

**Enrollment Caps for New Students**

	<b># of Students</b>	<b>Change</b>
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	125	0
Berkshire Community College	40	0

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-53 STATE UNIVERSITIES RESIDENT UNDERGRADUATE TUITION RATES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education adopts the following resident undergraduate tuition rates at the State Universities for Fiscal Year 2027:

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Annual Resident Undergraduate Tuition</b>
Bridgewater State University	\$0	\$910
Fitchburg State University	\$0	\$970
Framingham State University	\$0	\$970
Massachusetts College of Art and Design	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	\$0	\$1,030
Massachusetts Maritime Academy	N/A	N/A
Salem State University	\$0	\$910
Westfield State University	\$0	\$970
Worcester State University	\$0	\$970

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-54 STATE UNIVERSITIES RESIDENT GRADUATE TUITION RATES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the following resident graduate tuition rates for state-supported programs at the State Universities for Fiscal Year 2027:

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Annual Resident Graduate Tuition</b>
Bridgewater State University	\$0	\$1,675
Fitchburg State University	\$0	\$1,675
Framingham State University	\$0	\$1,675
Massachusetts College of Art and Design	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	\$0	\$1,675
Massachusetts Maritime Academy	N/A	N/A
Salem State University	\$0	\$1,675
Westfield State University	\$0	\$1,675
Worcester State University	\$0	\$1,675

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-55 STATE UNIVERSITIES NON-RESIDENT UNDERGRADUATE TUITION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education adopts the following non-resident undergraduate tuition rates at the State Universities for Fiscal Year 2027:

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Annual Non-Resident Undergraduate Tuition</b>
Bridgewater State University	\$0	\$7,050
Fitchburg State University	\$0	\$7,050
Framingham State University	\$0	\$7,050
Massachusetts College of Art and Design	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	\$0	\$9,975
Massachusetts Maritime Academy	N/A	N/A
Salem State University	\$0	\$7,050
Westfield State University	\$0	\$7,050
Worcester State University	\$0	\$7,050

**Authority** Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 9(i)

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

**BHE 26-56 STATE UNIVERSITIES NON-RESIDENT GRADUATE TUITION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027**

**VOTED** The Board of Higher Education hereby adopts the following nonresident graduate tuition rates for state-supported programs at the State Universities for Fiscal Year 2027:

	<b>Change</b>	<b>Annual Non-Resident Graduate Tuition</b>
Bridgewater State University	\$0	\$7,050
Fitchburg State University	\$0	\$7,050
Framingham State University	\$0	\$7,050
Massachusetts College of Art and Design	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	\$0	\$9,975
Massachusetts Maritime Academy	N/A	N/A
Salem State University	\$0	\$7,050
Westfield State University	\$0	\$7,050
Worcester State University	\$0	\$7,050

**Authority** Motion adopted by the BHE on 4/7/2026.

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

**VII. OTHER BUSINESS**

None

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

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