

Commissioner's Spotlight

April 7, 2026

Key Deliverables for 2026 (working list)

Financial Aid and Student Success

- Pre-Collegiate Marketing and Recruitment
- Expand GEAR UP Collaboration
- Early College
- HS Graduation Requirements
- SU SUCCESS 2.0

Economic Mobility

- Earnings Metrics and Reporting
- Work-Based Learning

Innovation

- Innovation and Regulation
- Adult Learner Re-Engagement
- Financial Aid Pilot

Public Good

- Environmental Scan and Literature Review
- Goal Setting (5 and 18-month)

State Higher Education Financing (SHEF) Framework

SHEF Framework

- Endorsed by the BHE in December 2022
- Established a "strategic framework" for how state higher education financing should evolve
 - Includes six key principles; five key goals, and five key design elements
- Followed a study led by the BHE's Fiscal Affairs and Administrative (FAAP) Advisory Council

SHEF Key Principles

- 1) The System works for both **students and institutions**
- 2) The System advances student **participation** in high quality, affordable education.
- 3) The System promotes **equity in student outcomes**.
- 4) The System is **transparent** and rooted in providing stakeholders with sufficient ability to plan.
- 5) The System recognizes **institutional context**.
- 6) The System recognizes and invests in **innovation** and collaboration.

SHEF Goals and Multi-Year Priorities

1. Make college more accessible and affordable for students
 - Address barriers to participation for low-income and part-time students, including adult students.
 - Address burdensome debt levels for low- and middle-income students and families.
2. Bolster institution funding to support student success
3. Ensure system-level capacity to foster innovation and collaboration
4. Align incentives on cost sharing between the state and campuses
5. Increase simplicity, transparency, and predictability for all

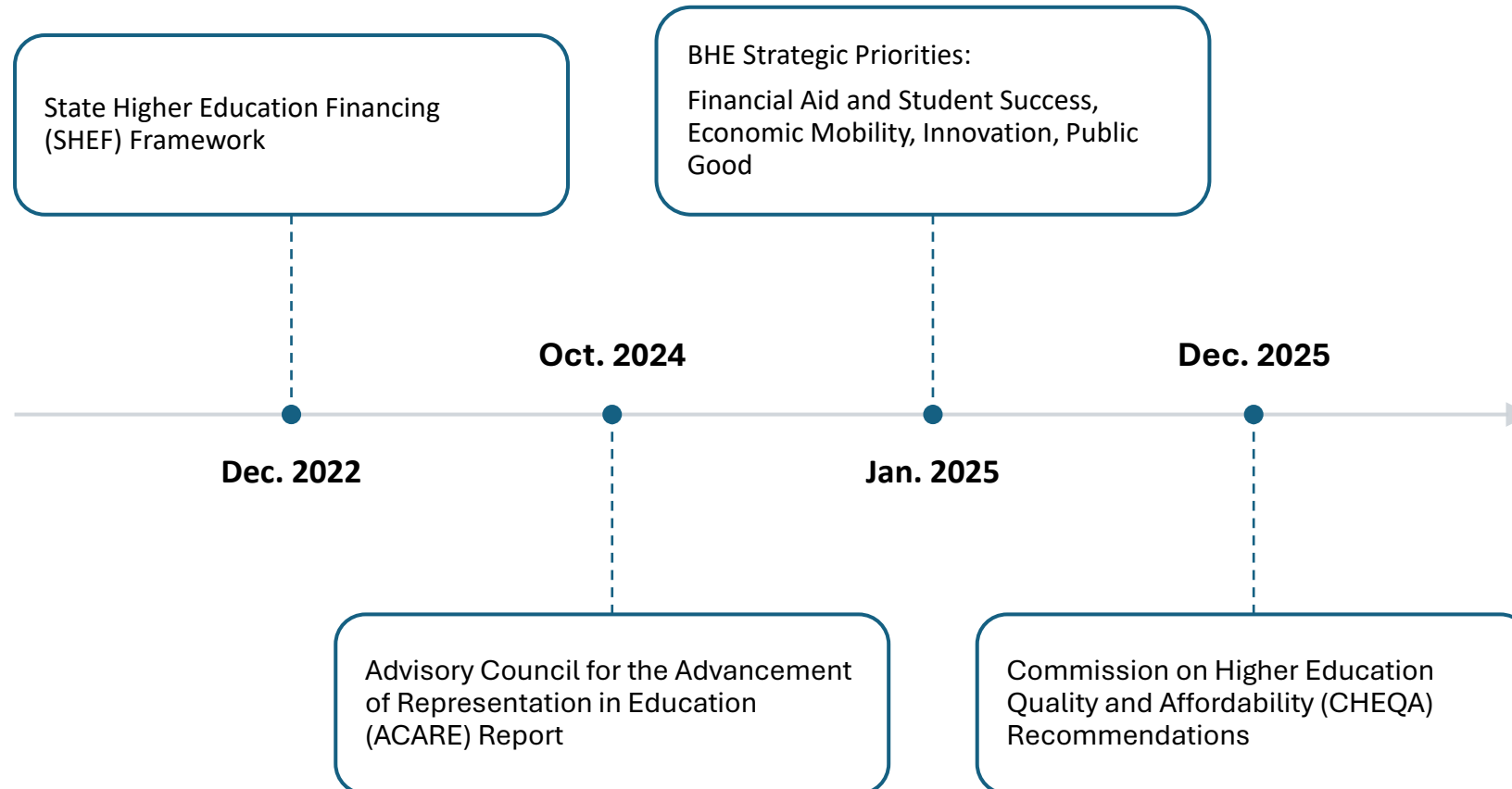
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Happenings Since SHEF (2022)

Recent Reports and Established Priorities



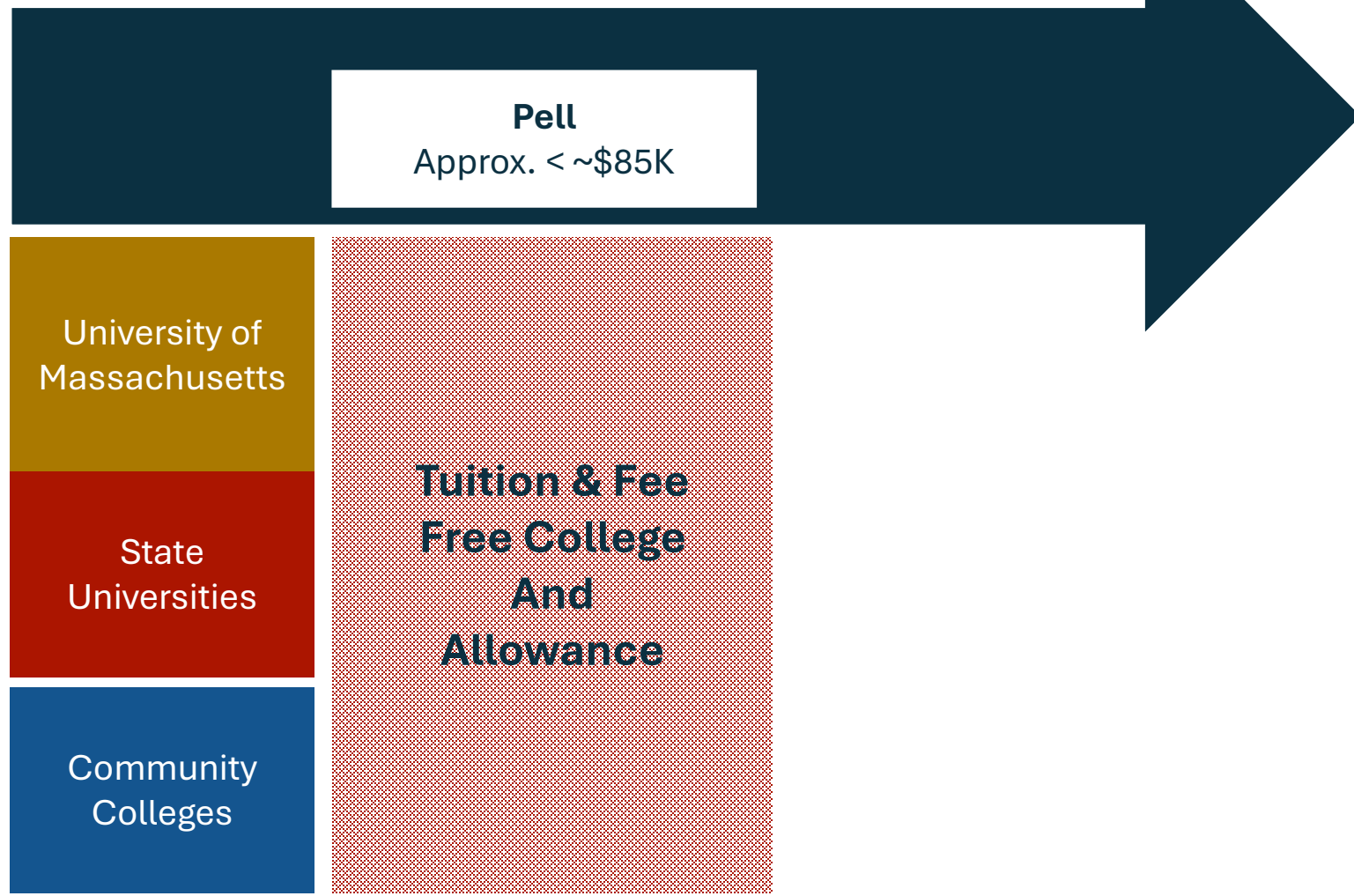
Increased State Financial in Massachusetts

Financial aid doubled after Fair Share with **nearly \$400 million** in state financial aid programs now available.

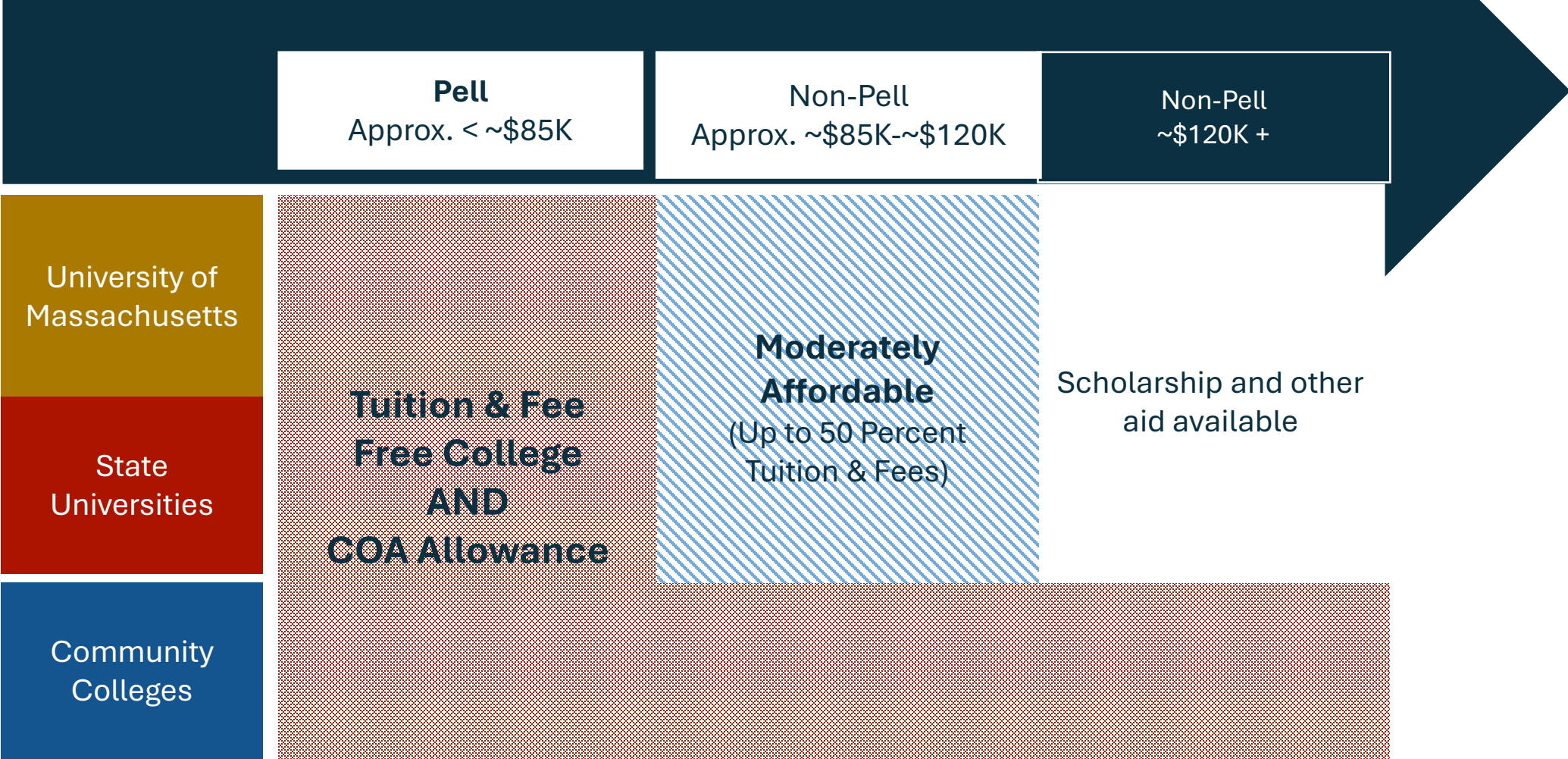
New Massachusetts Financial Aid Programs Funded by Fair Share

- MassReconnect (Fall 2023)
 - Tuition & fee free community college for those age 25 and older
- Expansion of MASSGrant Plus (Fall 2023)
 - Aid extended to Part-Time students and moderate-income families
- MassEducate (Fall 2024)
 - Tuition & fee free community college for all degree seeking students

Progress on Affordability Goals



Progress on Free College



Shift in Award Calculations to Benefit Low-Income Students

Direct Costs

Tuition

Fees

Books and
supplies
~\$1,200

Limits a student's financial aid to the cost of tuition, fees, and a \$1,200 allowance.



Shift in Award Calculations to Benefit Low-Income Students

- Student awards previously were capped at “direct costs”
 - Students could receive no more than the cost of tuition, fees, and \$1,200 for books and supplies
- Updated guidelines to cap awards at “total cost of attendance” rather than “direct cost”

Total Cost of Attendance

Tuition

Fees

Books and
supplies

Housing

Food

Transportation

Childcare



Allows low-income students to receive more financial aid. Helps make our free community college program one of the most comprehensive in the country.

Financial Aid Impact by the Numbers

State Grant Aid Changes from FY23 to FY25 for public colleges and universities (numbers do not include financial aid for students at private institutions).

		FY23	FY25	% Change
System	#Received Aid	60,897	90,232	48%
	Amount of Aid	\$162,793,305	\$362,821,631	123%
	Average Aid	\$2,673	\$4,021	50%
Community Colleges	#Received Aid	25,321	51,089	102%
	Amount of Aid	\$34,778,667	\$132,810,294	282%
	Average Aid	\$1,374	\$2,600	89%
State Universities	#Received Aid	14,068	15,218	8%
	Amount of Aid	\$58,899,534	\$89,957,352	53%
	Average Aid	\$4,187	\$5,911	41%
UMASS	#Received Aid	21,508	23,925	11%
	Amount of Aid	\$69,115,094	\$140,053,985	103%
	Average Aid	\$3,213	\$5,854	50%

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Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA) Recommendations

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Second of five recommendations in the CHEQA report (emphasis added):

*It is essential for the Commonwealth to codify its financial aid commitment to students, families and institutions of higher education in a manner that establishes **clear, consistent multi-year support** on which they can rely.*

- Consistent with the MassEducate and MassReconnect commitment to free community college in the Commonwealth, a long-term commitment for students across the system should be not only **codified** but prioritized.
- For example, this could be accomplished in the form of a “promise program” alongside other streamlined student aid programs that express simply and clearly the financial support upon which students and families can rely.

Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA) Recommendations

Third of five recommendations in the CHEQA report (emphasis added):

*The Commonwealth should continue to **expand financial aid** and other complementary public benefit programs over time for students in **two primary directions**:*

- First, to support meeting the **basic need expenses** (e.g. housing, food, child care, and mental as well as physical health care) of low-income students to enable them to take full advantage of tuition and fee-free college access opportunities;
- Second, to **reduce on a sliding scale the burdensome debt that low- and moderate-income families must take on** to meet their full cost of attendance. Options and cost estimates for meeting these goals were laid out for review, including one that pursues both directions at once.

Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA) Recommendations

Fifth of five recommendations in the CHEQA report (emphasis added):

*To meet these goals and all of higher education's needs, the Commonwealth needs to rely both on sustained general budget appropriations and complementary additional investment from Fair Share funds. **The Commonwealth should commit a fixed, meaningful share of annual Fair Share Education and Transportation proceeds to support a range of higher education uses.***

Key Takeaways and Board Spotlight

- Making college fully accessible involves looking at the **full cost of attendance** families confront and structuring financial aid with those costs in mind, including housing, transportation, and childcare.
- Lifting financial barriers to college for low- **and** middle-income students has been a consistent Board and Department of Higher Education goal on which we have made historic progress, but significant work remains to be done.
- A throughline of the Board and Department of Higher Education's principles is clear, consistent, and reliable information for students and institutions.
- Not only the Board and Department, but also through CHEQA a **diverse group of stakeholders** including representatives of institutions, business, organized labor, and students **have endorsed** this approach.

Questions

April 6: Expanding Work-Based Learning for Massachusetts Students

