



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

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Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Zrike, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board:

Thank you for your time this morning – I will do my best to be brief today, but with so much happening in the world of higher education, there are a number of important items I want to address.

First, before I begin, I want to join my colleagues in congratulating the Commissioner on his new endeavors. Commissioner, we appreciate your careful and thoughtful approach to Massachusetts public higher education over the last four years and, on behalf of my colleagues in the community colleges, we are grateful for the many initiatives you have helped to implement and oversee during your tenure including a dramatic expansion of financial aid, the high school completer law, and, of course, free community college. Congratulations, and we wish you and your family only the best.

As José Luis Santos prepares to take over the helm of the DHE on an interim basis, I speak for all of my fellow presidents when we offer our congratulations to him as well. We look forward to being part of the search for the next permanent Commissioner in the coming months.

I also want to acknowledge some additional comings and goings at the community colleges: Hara Charlier and Jennifer Cournoyer officially assumed the presidencies at Berkshire and Springfield Tech, respectively, in July. Ellen Kennedy, who served as the president at Berkshire for fourteen years, is now helming Cape Cod Community College on an interim basis while the search for a permanent president is underway.

President Bill Mitchell at Massasoit Community College has announced his retirement at the end of this academic year, and at Quinsigamond Community College, President Luis Pedraja has announced that he will retire at the end of next July. We welcome our new presidents with open arms and wish our outgoing presidents a smooth academic year as they prepare to transition into retirement.

And what a busy academic year this is shaping up to be. With an eye towards what's happening on the federal level, we have been incredibly busy over the last few months. Just last week, the community colleges submitted formal comments to the U.S. Department of Education in response to proposed rules on accreditation and the awarding of grants. While both proposed rules have kernels of positivity, there are a number of deeply concerning provisions that we are on record as opposing.

Additionally, as you are all likely aware, the state application for Workforce Pell closed last Friday after months of anticipation and preparation. Workforce Pell, which passed in July of 2025, allows Pell Grants to cover some short-term workforce training programs with an eye towards helping people build skills quickly and move into high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand jobs. We have been working closely with the Governor's administration, particularly the team at EOE and EOWLD, to roll out the Massachusetts application, and we look forward to seeing programs begin to receive their approval.

With the fall semester well under way, our colleges continue to work with the Department on ensuring that Free Community College is being implemented and communicated consistently across all 15 institutions. While we've seen a dramatic jump in enrollment over the last several years, we recognize that we must continue to do more to ensure that our students are persisting and completing their programs – whether they aim to join the workforce or continue on into a baccalaureate program.

Unfortunately, our SUCCESS program was level funded for FY27, meaning only a small fraction of eligible students will access the program's intentional, intensive wraparound services for the upcoming year. Although we are months from FY28 budget advocacy, we will continue to talk about the good work SUCCESS does – and the need to increase the program's overall funding. Without fully funding our completion strategy, our Free Community College funding is not being expended to its fullest potential.

In addition, we continue to impress upon the Department the need for quick action on the faculty and staff compensation study. The study is significantly delayed and, although we are seeing progress, every further delay hampers our ability to address the dreadfully low pay that our faculty and staff are currently receiving.

Finally, with regard to President Grant's remarks today, I had the pleasure of being at Salem State University twice last week for events and saw a vibrant campus with engaged students and faculty. Salem is a primary transfer destination for NSCC graduates and I know the same is true around the Commonwealth. With strong state support, the public higher education system will help the Commonwealth thrive.

Thank you again for your time today - I am happy to answer any questions you might have.