



CoP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education

October 20, 2026

Good morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Assistant Secretary LaPage, Interim Commissioner Santos, and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, I appreciate the opportunity to share some comments with you today.

With early enrollment reports central to today's agenda, I want to begin by underscoring the significant and welcome milestone for our state universities. That after more than a decade of enrollment challenges, compounded by the disruptions of the pandemic and a declining population of high school graduates, early enrollment indicators – as you have just heard - suggest that our system has not only stabilized student enrollment, but that we are beginning to experience renewed growth across our system.

Much of this growth is being driven by a welcome rebound in transfer enrollment, including students transferring from our community college partners.

This is particularly encouraging, as it reflects the importance of maintaining strong and accessible pathways for students to continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree. It reinforces the critical role of our state universities in providing high-quality, affordable pathways to completing a four-year degree.

These early numbers give us good reason for optimism.

They reflect the commitment of our institutional leaders to strategic enrollment management, retention, affordability, and student success. They also demonstrate the creativity and innovation of our institutions and the enduring value of a high-quality state university education that prepares students with the skills needed for today's and tomorrow's work force.

From the Council of Presidents' perspective, these early results are more than simply encouraging enrollment numbers. They represent an opportunity to build on this momentum, strengthen our partnerships with community colleges, and continue expanding access to a high-quality, affordable four-year education for students throughout the Commonwealth.

Each of our nine state universities serves a distinct student population and regions across the Commonwealth. And with our special mission institutions, our system offers students an exceptionally broad range of educational opportunities, from traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs to specialized fields ranging from marine engineering to architecture and fashion design. We are proud of the work we are doing to deliver on our mission-driven promise to the residents, businesses, and communities of the Commonwealth.

With that in mind, I asked each of our presidents to identify one enrollment highlight they believe is particularly noteworthy and worth sharing with the Board:

- Over the past two enrollment cycles, Bridgewater State welcomed in its largest incoming class of first-time students.
- Fitchburg State University undergraduate enrollment increased for the first time since 2017, with a 38% increase in freshmen and 20% increase in transfer students enrolled in the day program.

- Framingham State University welcomed the largest entering class since 2020. They experienced a 10% increase in first year students and 11% increase in transfer students.
- At MassArt, we saw an increase in both BIPOC and first gen students with 42% of the incoming class identifying as BIPOC and 34% as first generation.
- MCLA expects an overall increase of more than 10% in their student enrollment this fall.
- Mass. Maritime Academy saw its largest incoming class of students of color at 18% with 28% of the incoming class identified as first-generation representing 23 different states.
- At Salem State University, new first-time, full-time student enrollment increased by 8.5%; out of state enrollment rose by 8.7%; and undergraduate continuing education and graduate enrollments increased 10.5% and 6.5% respectively.
- At Westfield State University, half of the incoming first-year class identifies as first-generation with students representing 14 states and two countries.
- And Worcester State University proudly offered enrollment options to 60 students from Anna Maria College this fall after the closure of that campus.

We are encouraged by this renewed momentum, but we also recognize that there is more work to be done, as we continue to strengthen transfer enrollment from our Massachusetts community college partners, working closely to expand seamless transfer pathways and ensure that every student who begins their education at a community college and aspires to earn a bachelor's degree has a clear and accessible pathway to successfully doing so.

These enrollment trends are reassuring but I also want to assure you that we are equally committed to ensuring that *all* students who enroll at our institutions have the support they need to persist, succeed, and graduate.

Through the investment of SUCCESS funding, we continue to strengthen our retention efforts. On October 2, DHE and COP brought together our state university SUCCESS leaders and practitioners at Worcester State University to share information and experiences about their campus programs, discuss challenges and barriers encountered, and highlight innovative and promising practices.

Following up on this gathering and to ensure we keep working collaboratively we are establishing a State Universities SUCCESS Coordinating Committee, which President Donna Hodge has graciously agreed to chair.

I would also like to take this opportunity to once again express our strong support for the BRIGHT Act. Like the SUCCESS funding, investments in our campus infrastructure are investments in student success. 21st Century classrooms, laboratories, and other learning spaces contribute directly to our enrollment success and retention and persistence efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Board, for the opportunity to share this report. I'm happy to answer any questions.