



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

January 14, 2025

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and members of the Board.

Thank you for having me here for the first Board meeting of 2025. Before I begin my remarks, I want to take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate my new colleague, Dr. Sedgwick Harris, the incoming president of Bristol Community College. On behalf of all of my fellow presidents, we greatly look forward to working with you, Dr. Harris!

And as we welcome Dr. Harris, we also have to say farewell to outgoing president Dr. Laura Douglas, who has served Bristol with distinction and dedication for the last seven and a half years. Laura, we will miss the passion and positivity you've brought to your presidency and wish you only wonderful things in retirement.

We also are grateful to Steve Kenyon, Bristol's CFO, who will serve as interim president while President Harris prepares to relocate to Massachusetts, which he does at a time of great opportunity and excitement for the community colleges.

Although the spring semester doesn't begin for another week, I can anecdotally report here that our colleges are once again up in enrollment across the board. We look forward to bringing more concrete numbers to the Board in the coming months, but I can confidently say that free community college is doing exactly what it intended – bringing students to the community colleges and opening the doors of education without the worry of covering the cost of tuition and fees.

In addition to the start of a new academic year, we are also excited to work with the legislature in the 194th general court to advance priorities across all of higher education, including the continuation of free community college and seeking an increase in SUCCESS funding. These student-focused priorities drive our mission and are deeply interconnected.

I will continue to come to this Board and talk about the importance of faculty and staff compensation – you've all seen news stories over the last several months that underscore this critical item: we are not paying our faculty and staff a sufficient wage to maintain the level of instruction and support that our students deserve and expect. We must keep this as a top priority and we will continue to have the important conversations around compensation – not

just during the annual budget cycle, but regularly and consistency. Without a well-compensated faculty and staff team, our colleges simply cannot support the students coming through the doors.

Lastly, I want to impress upon the Board and the Department how important it is that we have timely data to know if the funding supporting Free Community College is sufficient for the current academic year, or whether it will need supplemental appropriations. I would remind you that the academic year includes funding for summer courses, something that students at community colleges regularly take advantage of. Getting timely and accurate data is imperative to the success of this important program for the both the Colleges and the Commonwealth.

Thank you – I am happy to take any questions you might have.