



## **Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report**

Luis Pedraja, President, Quinsigamond Community College  
Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

October 22, 2024

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

Thank you for the chance to address the Board and discuss some of the exciting things happening at our community colleges. I am President Luis Pedraja, president at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester, and I have the pleasure of serving as Chair of the Community College Council of Presidents for this academic year. Thank you to my colleague Jim Vander Hooven at Mount Wachusett Community College for serving in this role for the last year.

Before I begin, I want to take the opportunity to formally welcome Dr. Jonathan Jefferson, president of Roxbury Community College, who has just marked the start of his fourth month at RCC – welcome, Jonathan!

Big things have been happening at the community colleges since your last board meeting in June. With the passage of the FY25 budget, our college faculty, staff, and administrators have:

- established SUCCESS fund allocations, targeting historically underrepresented students in an effort to increase completion and persistence;
- begun to lay the groundwork to examine ways to better collaborate and build efficiencies across our colleges;
- continued to focus on supporting Early College and dually enrolled students, an initiative that my own institution has enthusiastically supported – QCC has the third largest group of Early College students at our community colleges, a population we have sought to grow and develop;
- and added almost 10,000 new students across the 15 community colleges.

Yes, as you've seen from the enrollment report presented this morning, community college headcount increased 14% overall this fall, thanks to the implementation of free community college for all. And, when we isolate that to just NEW students, our 15 colleges saw an increase of over 25%. As you know, year one of MassReconnect – which provides free community college for those 25 and older who have not earned a degree – boosted our enrollments for the first time in a decade, with an 8% increase last fall. This fall, with a simple message of “free for all” and an on-the-ground implementation from our campus teams that has been nothing short of miraculous, our colleges have welcomed thousands of new students. We

are grateful to the Legislature and the Healey-Driscoll administration for the investments and supports that have brought us to this point. When MassReconnect began last year, we saw spring enrollments increase even more than the fall and we are expecting that this trend will continue with MassEducate.

We are, again, deeply grateful for these investments, and are committed to making free community college a success for the students who've already arrived at our doors, and those who will come in the future. We simultaneously recognize that although free community college for all has been an investment in our students, we have significant strides to make in the infrastructure of our colleges. Most notably, we must continue our focus on:

- Faculty & Staff Compensation: our ability to recruit, attract, and retain quality faculty and staff. Compensation for our MCCC and AFSCME members is of primary concern to myself and my fellow presidents. We must holistically support our hardworking faculty and staff, particularly during this period of enrollment growth, and acknowledge publicly that the current rate of pay has resulted in long-standing failed searches. This is an urgent challenge that must be addressed for free community college to be successful.
- Student Supports: with an influx of students, so, too, do we see an increase in the need for student supports – this means everything from basic needs like food, housing, and childcare to academic and counseling supports that ensure students can be successful and persist in their coursework.
- Capital Improvements: our colleges were all built between 50 and 60 years ago. And while we've made improvements where possible, built new buildings here and there, and maintained our capital needs to the best of our ability, we simply need additional investments in this space. It is no secret that many of our students are studying in state-of-the-art lab spaces in high school and experience a dramatic decline in physical spaces when attending our colleges. In order to provide our students with the best education possible, it is fundamentally important that students believe that we value them.

The final topic I want to be sure we keep on our collective radars is that of short-term workforce training. As my predecessors in this role have mentioned many times, our colleges were the recipients of \$15 million in ARPA funding for the Education & Training Fund which supported high-demand workforce training programs that aligned with regional labor market blueprints. While the goal was to graduate 1,500 students, more than 3,200 students completed job training at no cost to them in high demand fields like healthcare, IT, and human services. 63% of those students were placed in industry jobs. It's particularly important that we do not lose sight of these critical training programs – which are not eligible for financial aid or free community college – as they play an important part of the workforce landscape in Massachusetts.

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