



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

October 22, 2024

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

I hope you all had a restful and healthy Thanksgiving holiday – the community colleges have a lot to be thankful for this year, and we are grateful to you all for your continued leadership and support.

In the midst of a busy end of semester, we are looking forward to joining together next week as presidents and trustees for a Massachusetts-specific governance leadership institute designed and presented by our national partners at the Association of Community College Trustees. This is a chance for trustees and presidents to learn together about national best practices on ways to align their goals and strategically plan for the future, and we are excited to bring those tools to our day-to-day work at the community colleges.

In addition, we are, like you all, discussing and planning for the FY26 budget cycle. As you heard from the Commissioner, we are continuing to focus on the affordability of higher education in Massachusetts and we are ready partners with the Board, Administration, and Department in our priorities.

Specifically at the community colleges, we have three top priorities this year:

- The continuation of free community college, which drove a 14% enrollment increase in the fall;
- An increase in SUCCESS funding, which provides the support necessary for students to persist in their studies; and
- The issue of faculty and staff compensation, which we have mentioned before this board consistently as it is a critical component of our colleges' sustainability.

Rather than three disparate priorities, these items are all interconnected: free community college brings students through the door and removes the burden of the cost of college. Without a more robust investment in SUCCESS, however, our students have less of a chance of finishing their degrees, and without an investment in our faculty and staff compensation, our students have fewer opportunities to learn, consistently, from skilled educators.

SUCCESS is a proven tool to improve student retention and persistence – from fall 2022 to fall 2023, students engaged with SUCCESS were 10 percentage points more likely to persist from semester to semester. As we continue to serve larger numbers of students through free community college, it's absolutely imperative that we continue to fund SUCCESS at levels that will ensure all eligible students receive the services that will help them persist and complete.

As critical as investments in wrap-around supports are to students' success, so too is the issue of faculty and staff compensation. Our faculty and staff are dramatically underpaid, which hinders our ability to recruit, attract, and retain professional educators who can support students in their learning – wraparound supports like SUCCESS and the adequate funding of our college's educators are two sides of the same coin. As I mentioned last month: this is an urgent challenge that must be addressed for free community college to be successful and, thereby, for our students' success.

As we look towards the spring semester – where enrollment is once again trending towards significant increases – we will continue to advocate for our priorities that will help our colleges be successful, and we look forward to doing so alongside you all.

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