



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

Bill Heineman, President, North Shore Community College Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

December 9, 2025

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

It is hard to believe we have reached the end of 2025. It has been a tremendous year for our colleges, and public higher education in Massachusetts in general, and we remain grateful to this Board and the Healey administration for all the support of our colleges and our students. We are also very thankful to the legislature for all their work, most recently to address a critical shortfall in funding and working quickly to prevent a reduction in the book and supply allowance given as part of Free Community College that had been proposed, which would have been devastating for our most vulnerable students. Every dollar is so critical for our students and we are relieved that they will be receiving the full amount promised to them.

As we heard at the last meeting, community college enrollment continues to grow, and we are thrilled that enrollment across all three segments is back to pre-pandemic levels. Today, half of all students attending a public college or university in the state are attending one of our community colleges, a statistic we are proud of, but we are also aware that it comes with a responsibility to ensure our students have the high-quality instruction, state of the art facilities, and wraparound support services they need to complete their degrees and thrive in the workforce after they leave us. We are committed to fulfilling this obligation by advocating for the funding resources, capital investments and policy changes necessary for our campuses to meet the moment.

One such policy that helps us support students is the Massachusetts Endowment Incentive Program and we appreciate that the guidelines of the program are on the agenda today. While community college tuition and fees for many of our students are covered by MassEducate and MassReconnect, the cost of college goes beyond tuition, fees and books. Private fundraising helps us create and strengthen supports for students that cover the total cost of attendance, a priority that is even more crucial given our current political climate and economic uncertainty.

The community colleges serve the highest percentage of low-income students in public higher ed – with federal funding freezes, grant cancellations, and the possibility of future government shutdowns, our students are worrying about how to pay for rent, groceries, and childcare and are looking to our campus resources for help.

We know that when our students and their families face economic hardships, they are more likely to leave school and stop-outs have long-lasting impacts on earnings potential for our students, the effects of which can be felt throughout our economy. The endowment match allows our donors to double their impact to our students, and it is a crucial component of our colleges' advancement strategies.

In addition to these funds, we have also been working closely with partners in the state legislature to advocate for further changes to the program, notably, to ask for a change in the legislative language to allow community colleges to receive a state match for any private donation to our foundations, even if it's not enough to be endowed. Endowed funds require a sizeable initial gift, are not designed to address immediate needs, and the current statute does not consider the reality of fundraising at the community college level. Our private donors want to help students right now, with donations to support students who need help feeding their families, or to fix a flat tire to get to class. The pending legislation that supports this change would be a game-changer, allowing our colleges to approach a broader base of donors with the promise that their contributions will be amplified by a state match, regardless of whether their gift is for a building, a small scholarship, or our student emergency fund. We will also continue to ask that endowment match funds be appropriated to all segments equally in future fiscal years so that we can plan our fundraising strategies long-term.

Also on your agenda today is the performance funding formula – your quick action on this is appreciated as we are just about halfway through the fiscal year and any further delays could cause challenges on our campuses, especially at our smaller colleges. This funding is critical to our institutions and our students, and we thank you for your work in approving these allocations.

As we look ahead to 2026, we remain committed to working in partnership with this Board to strengthen opportunities for our students. Thank you for your continued leadership and for your unwavering support of our colleges and the students who rely on us. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.