



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Community College President's Report

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Chair, Community College Council of Presidents

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

After a busy summer and an even busier start to the fall semester, I am pleased to be back here with you all today.

Since the last BHE meeting in June, our colleges have navigated a series of seemingly endless uncertainties. Changes at the federal level – both realized and proposed – have caused concerns, worry, funding cuts, and staff reductions at a time when our colleges' enrollment is growing exponentially. Although there are silver linings, the general sense of not knowing what could be coming next is an incredibly challenging space in which to operate.

When we last met in June, we were raising the alarm about proposed significant cuts to Pell Grants – while those did not come to fruition, the Reconciliation bill that passed did include Workforce Pell. A longstanding priority of community colleges across the country, Workforce Pell is set to lower the threshold on the length a program needs to be to qualify for federal financial aid. The negotiated rulemaking process is currently underway, and will need to be complete before Workforce Pell is rolled out. We are beginning to lay the foundation for implementation at our colleges now and remain in close contact with our colleagues at the American Association of Community Colleges who are watching the process on behalf of all community colleges. We are also appreciative of the collaboration with EOE and DHE as the state also prepares for its anticipated role.

On the state level, when we last met, we had not yet seen the final FY26 state budget. That certainly feels like a long time ago, but it is important to state that we are pleased by the continued level funding of many of our programs. Nevertheless, we will continue to advocate for necessary funding for next fiscal year, particularly around support services for our students. Notably this year the colleges saw the unfortunate elimination of STEM Starter funding and important grants for student behavioral and mental health. Compounded with a reduction to the SUCCESS fund – at a time when investments are more critical than ever – we continue to sound the alarm that covering tuition and fees is only part of the equation for community college students.

To that end: yes, Free Community College continues to work exactly as intended. This fall, our colleges have seen another yet another 15% increase in enrollment – that is 10,000 more students enrolled at our community colleges this year than last fall. Our credit count increase is even larger, with a 17% increase compared to last fall.

We applaud EOE and the Department on the launch of their Go Higher campaign to spread the word about college affordability in Massachusetts. We know first-hand that removing the cost barrier works, and we're grateful to be part of that affordability landscape for students.

We are also pleased that the Department has taken the first steps for the legislatively-mandated classification study of the compensation of our faculty and professional staff, who are represented by the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC). You have heard my predecessors in this role note that faculty pay at the community colleges is woefully low, and I will reiterate that here again today. For example, North Shore Community College currently has 5 open full-time faculty roles. Per the statewide collective bargaining agreement, our anticipated starting salary for a new fulltime faculty member is between \$57,013 - \$62,000. Let me say that again: our starting salary for a full time faculty member is currently \$57,013 - \$62,000. This classification study should serve as a first step in addressing the pay disparity between our faculty and those in the same roles in similar states and we are all anxious for the work to begin.

Finally, the community college presidents encourage the Department to continue to examine and study the impact changes to financial aid have on students and staff at our colleges. As you are all aware, a last minute shift in book awards for this academic year means that our students with the greatest financial need will see fewer dollars for books and supplies come spring – a change that will have a notable impact on students who are already trying their best to make ends meet. We call on the Department and Board to notify administration and legislative leaders that, absent supplemental funding, students will see direct reductions in their spring awards for textbooks, thereby causing them to need to pay out of pocket. This was not the intent of the legislature in the structuring of the free community college program, and we urge you to support our students in ensuring this doesn't become a reality next semester.

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