

State Universities BHE Segmental Report – February 1, 2022

Good Morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, I thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

I would like to begin my remarks by acknowledging Commissioner Santiago on his recent announcement that he will be stepping down from his position as Commissioner in June.

During his time as Commissioner of Massachusetts Higher Education, Dr. Santiago has been an extraordinary advocate for colleges and universities across the Commonwealth and has led higher education to new heights in Massachusetts. In many ways, Commissioner Santiago has positioned Massachusetts Higher Education as the standard bearer for what American Higher Education can attain. A very short list of Commissioner Santiago's contributions to elevate Massachusetts higher education includes his work to address racial inequities in public higher education that has been recognized nationally, to expand early college opportunities, to increase financial aid through the new MassGrant Plus program, and to develop a statewide, seamless system of transfer from community colleges to four-year universities.

All the while Dr. Santiago has been accessible to the Presidents of the Commonwealth's institutions, often visiting our campuses to share his insights with

colleagues and our trustees. My colleagues and I are grateful to Dr. Santiago for his advocacy on our behalf, for his leadership, and for his collegueship.

Chair Gabrieli, finding a successor who is equal to Commissioner Santiago will be no small accomplishment. My colleagues in the State Universities and I look forward to you joining our February 7 meeting when we can speak more about the search process and to offer you our support and expertise on selecting executive higher education leadership. Indeed, my colleague Fed Clark at Bridgewater State University formerly sat in your role as the BHE Chair and conducted a Commissioner search. We look forward to that conversation with you.

Spring 2022 System Update

I would like to provide you with a brief COVID update on the spring term reopening for our state university campuses. Our campuses are successfully working toward a return to pre-pandemic operations and campus life. I am happy to report that all our campuses started the semester on-time and spent the first week of classes safely onboarding the students. Although most campuses started the first week of classes with remote instruction to ensure adequate time to test returning students, all our campuses have returned to in-person classes, labs, and lectures, as well as a full return to on-campus housing, athletics, and as close to pre-pandemic campus life and activities as safely possible.

As part of our onboarding process, our campuses performed thousands of COVID tests on returning students and employees. With the highly contagious Omicron variant the dominant strain of COVID, we wanted to ensure that returning students and staff were not unknowingly carrying the virus. Through our on-campus testing

programs we identified some COVID positive students (between 1% and 7%). I am heartened to report that these positive rates are far below the state average of 15%. We attribute this to all the COVID mitigation policies we have implemented including mandatory COVID vaccinations and boosters, mask wearing policies, social distancing, advanced cleaning, and encouraging good public health behaviors. All these policies and practices have led to over 90% of our campus communities being fully vaccinated and lower than a 1% positivity rate over the past year. Frankly, if other industries followed the lead of the Commonwealth's public and private higher education institutions, the impact from COVID would likely have been significantly mitigated.

As we start to transition into a new phase of the pandemic on campuses, we are grateful for the recent guidance from Secretaries Sutters and Peyser. We look forward to returning to open gatherings and fewer restrictions, although for some of our students and colleagues who have more risks associated with exposure, we will be mindful of their concerns.

I would like to take a few minutes to share with you some thoughts about the Governor's FY23 spending plan and funding recommendations for our state universities. My colleagues and I are grateful to Secretary Peyser for providing public higher education leaders with an overview of the Governor's budget after it was released Wednesday afternoon. That briefing was helpful and informative.

As this board knows, the state universities reached agreement with our three employee bargaining unions on a three-year labor contract. The COVID pandemic disrupted our contract negotiations in March 2020 and we reached agreement on successor agreements in August 2021. The three labor contracts run from July 1,

2020 to June 30, 2023. It should come as no surprise that our Council of Presidents always prioritizes CBA funding in our budget advocacy, this year's funding is extraordinarily critical as the FY23 budget must include all three years of funding for those labor contracts. Despite agreement among the parties to compensation increases, those increases have not yet been paid out to your valued employees as we wait for the Legislature to authorize payment through the 150e process.

Thank you to the Department of Higher Education for their work with our campuses and with the Administration on the calculation of our collective bargaining costs. In particular, I want to thank Joe Wallerstein at the Department of Higher Education for all of his work on the calculations of collective bargaining agreement costs. Although the funding levels in H2 do not cover the full cost of the collective bargaining agreement, we are grateful that the Governor recognized all three years of the contract in his recommendations.

I would be remiss if I didn't also personally thank Secretary Peyser and his team at EOE for working with our Council of Presidents on funding for our collective bargaining agreements. The Executive Office was our direct line of communication to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance. The Secretary met with the presidents on funding the agreements and Deputy Secretaries Ann Reale and Tom Moreau worked directly with our CoP office throughout the process. Thank you for your help and support.

I also want to thank the Governor for including \$9m in our state university funding formula line item. The state universities funding formula line item supports our efforts – through a performance-based funding formula – to help keep state universities accessible and affordable for students. While there are some

discrepancies in the calculation in the CBA base, we are hopeful we will be able to resolve that issue during the legislative budget process.

My colleagues and I also would like to express our gratitude for the significant increase to the financial aid line item. The Governor is recommending an \$18 million expansion of the MassGrant Plus program. This increase will go a long way toward making our public colleges and universities more affordable for low-income students.

There was one important item that was not included in the Governor's budget, the State Universities Internship Incentive Program. When we begin our legislative budget advocacy, we will request funding for this important initiative. We ask this board and the department to join us in our advocacy efforts in the House and Senate so that the legislature will prioritize public higher education in their budgets.

Earlier in this meeting the Board approved the selection of Framingham State University's next president, Dr. Nancy Niemi. My colleagues and I lament the retirement of our friend and colleague, Dr. Javier Cevallos. Javier's wisdom and perspective leave a lasting impression on each of us. At the same time, we welcome Dr. Niemi as Framingham State University's next President. Dr. Niemi's appointment enhances the State University's commitment to high quality leadership and brings new perspective to us from Maryland's public higher education system.

Finally, let me thank the BHE for providing me with the opportunity to share this update from your state universities. We look forward to continuing to work with all of you in the upcoming year in order to advance our mission of delivering high-

quality, accessible and affordable post-secondary educational opportunities to our students. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.