

Good Morning!

- Chair Gabrieli,
- Secretary Peyser,
- Commissioner Santiago, and
- Members of the Board of Higher Education

My remarks today, will briefly cover two areas.

First, I'd like to tell you about the community college segment's professional development program. This is an opportunity for our emerging community college leaders to participate in the national Chair Academy Program. This national program provides a systems approach to transformational leadership and is built upon a foundation of educational administrative research, theory, competencies, and best practices. Leaders are mentored during the Academy by experienced coaches and they are networked with mentors on their campuses and colleagues from their leadership class.

During the mid-year regional experience, our Massachusetts' community college leaders participated in an intensive 2-day program that focused on appreciative inquiry, leadership skills assessment, and transformational leadership. They also heard from experts in the field through presentations and panel discussions. Again, I would like to acknowledge and thank Commissioner Santiago for spending time with the participants to discuss the state's strategic framework, our equity agenda and, the state's higher education policy structure.

I acknowledge that our employees are the life blood of our work with students. We are committed to ensuring that their skills are honed and refreshed frequently.

The second topic that I will address is the Board's work in taking on the challenges within the equity agenda. This is hard, and complex work, but necessary.

When one looks at the gaps in student achievement, retention and completion that are associated with race, then the differences in employment, earnings, wealth are easily understood.

Working at a college that has a concentration of students, 90% of color, 80% low income, has helped me to understand the high level of support needed and why these gaps occur and why students struggle to complete.

Allow me to tell you about one of our students, who I will call Mary. Two years ago, Mary came back to RCC after leaving, without completing her degree, ten years ago. She left then to take a full-time job. When Mary returned to RCC, she came after back to school after losing that job, and losing her home as a consequence. When Mary came back to RCC, she was living in a shelter. An advisor from RCC had visited the shelter to discuss opportunities for job training and education, and told Mary that she qualified for a full financial aid package. When Mary returned to RCC she was pleased to learn of the supports available to her, including a program called Project Access that connected her to social service agencies that could help her to find housing and other personal benefits that she needed. Because Mary had a hearing problem, Project Access also informed her of assistance through Mass Rehabilitation Services. Mary found that by borrowing a computer from the library and getting support from our free tutor support, she was still able to excel in her classes. Mary was eventually able to find housing and this past spring, she completed her associate degree. Mary is now attending UMass Boston.

While all of our students do not have the challenges that Mary had, most RCC students have several. Yet, I have personally seen that with extra support, time and attention, many more students can be successful. I am excited by the prospect of helping more students and working across the State to share best practices and solutions. On behalf of students like Mary, I thank you and applaud your taking on this complex work.