

## Talking Points for Pres. Mabry – BHE Meeting – Tuesday, 2-2-2020

- Good morning Chair Gabrieli, Board Members, Commissioner Santiago, Secretary Peyser, DHE staff, and my colleagues in public higher education. I want to thank you all for this opportunity to share updates from the Massachusetts Community College segment.
- We are all acutely aware of the devastating impacts of COVID-19, and how the pandemic's toll on employment and education continues to play out in community after community across the entire Commonwealth. And as you know all too well, both current and prospective community college students have been disproportionately hurt by this crisis.
- During these months, we have been tirelessly focused on tackling the many complex challenges brought on by this unprecedented crisis. But, we are also working to find new and creative solutions and to plan for the new post-pandemic future. For example...
  - o We have been working with our partners in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to coordinate summer bridge programs for high school seniors graduating without full MCAS proficiency.
  - o And, we are working as a segment to double down on our outreach to school districts to increase the number of students completing the FAFSA application and applying for financial aid.
- What we hear directly from our students is that people need emergency aid and financial assistance **now** more than ever. In fact, a recent Community College Research Center analysis confirmed this harsh reality: the equity gaps are deepening. According to the data, the results show that:

- Low-income community college students are twice as likely to cancel their plans for college than students from high-income households.
  - “40 percent of households reported that a community college student is canceling their plans.”
  - “Students who are also parents and those who have lost work since March are also much more likely to cancel their plans.”
- But, we must remind ourselves that COVID-19 did not create these stark inequities. It has simply exacerbated and widened them.
- Yet, we are still optimistic about the future.
  - We believe in our mission of access, equity, and success.
  - We believe in the faculty and staff, who have, despite many difficulties, continued to do everything possible to help our students.
  - And we believe our administrators have the capacity to guide us through these unprecedented times.
- Our number one priority as community colleges is to always provide Massachusetts residents with the most affordable and accessible pathway to higher education. We pride ourselves on making the dream of higher education possible. And thousands of students continue, despite the odds stacked up against them, to take classes and make progress toward their dream of a better life.
- This pandemic has once again underlined the important roles we play in every region of the state, serving as critical community hubs for Massachusetts residents.

- Our campuses are supporting local needs for food and housing security while many are also partnering in the fight against COVID-19 through providing space for testing and vaccine distribution.
- And we are continuing to work closely with our public higher education colleagues to partner on local and regional initiatives that have allowed us to focus additional resources on our low income, first generation, black and brown students and to keep higher education as affordable and accessible as possible for our students.
- However, as we look ahead, we must be clear: any reduction in support **or in spending** will disproportionately hurt our students and damage their chance of success. This is especially true for our population that is largely made up of students who have been hit incredibly hard by this public health and economic crisis.
  - o Any reduction will continue to price out and thwart the dreams for would-be first-generation college students and set the Equity Agenda further behind.
  - o Any reduction will slow workforce development and hinder future economic growth in every region of the Commonwealth.
- Funding education is an investment in the future of the Commonwealth's economy. Our students remain in the Commonwealth and will always be the core of the workforce. That's why now, more than ever, we must invest *further* in our public institutions so that we can meet our unique mission and fuel the economic recovery that is desperately needed.
- We have operated from a position of deep underfunding for decades, yet we continue to find ways to provide high quality

academic courses and workforce training with the core services and supports our students need - all on shoestring budgets. Though this is a national issue for community colleges, the high cost structure of New England compounds the challenge of affordability.

- We know that investing more, not less, will bring the greatest benefit to our state's economy, especially as we work together to rebound from this crisis. We know that the best approach for long term fiscal health and stability is through the continued investment in our public institutions and the students they serve.
- Without strong community colleges, the core of the future Massachusetts workforce could be left behind.
- With 15 colleges with campuses operating in all corners of the Commonwealth, the community college system provides an integral service to Massachusetts residents. Our localized approach is the most effective way to build regional economies in Massachusetts: in our Gateway Cities, in rural towns, from the Berkshires, to Bunker Hill and the Cape and the Islands — the community colleges are the engine of equity for the Commonwealth.
- We look forward to working together with the Board, the Department, and our higher ed colleagues to advocate for further investments into public higher education.
- Thank you all for this opportunity and what you do to support public higher education in this great state.