

Massachusetts Community Colleges, Council of Presidents
Chair: Dr. Patricia A. Gentile, President, North Shore Community College
Massachusetts Board of Higher Education
Tuesday, May 5, 2020

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, board members, Commissioner Santiago and all of the DHE staff along with participating colleagues. I hope your endurance capacity continues to run high as we work our way through the challenging COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on higher education institutions in the Commonwealth. I also hope you and your family remain safe and healthy throughout this ordeal.

The pandemic has certainly put a spotlight on our first responders and health care workers. In fact, most folks are now quite familiar with the term “essential worker” and, I believe, are pleased to see that it’s not descriptive of the CEOs, Wall Streeters, Elected Political Leaders, or the Rich and Famous. Instead, it includes the Nurses, CNAs, Medical Assistants, Respiratory Therapists, EMTs, Pharmacy Techs, police officers, firefighters, retail clerks and cashiers, delivery workforce and all the IT and cybersecurity folks keeping us connected. We have now added to that definition of an essential worker lab technicians, contact tracers, medical examiner staff, funeral service workers, mental health providers, and others who are overwhelmed with providing support services to those exposed to the virus and those who have died from the virus as well as their family members who often grieve in isolation.

What this disparate corps of essential workers has in common is that the vast majority of them were trained, educated and credentialed in a public community college. These are the middle skilled workers our sector has focused on for decades. This is the workforce that springs into action when a catastrophe, like this pandemic, befalls a community...or a country. We have known for many years now that the labor supply has not been sufficient in the health care and first responder fields and are acutely aware now of the need to educate more workers for entry into these fields. It is in our national and regional socio-economic interest to invest public funds to insure we have a sufficient supply to meet the demands of the front lines.

Over the past several months, we’ve been consumed with the emergency at hand pivoting to provide a continuous and safe learning environment for our enrolled students while preparing for immediate needs during the summer semester and upcoming possibilities for the fall. It’s been quite challenging and I’m pleased to state that our sector has worked hand in glove with each other in a strong collaboration across the 15 colleges. We have truly been in it together. For example, our colleges received the federal CARES Act funding for student financial aid just 7 working days ago and have already distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to our spring semester students whose academic

journey has been negatively impacted by COVID-19. We will continue to help our students in the immediate now and future until those funds run out.

We've lent our life saving equipment, such as ventilators, to area hospitals, donated thousands of pounds of PPE to those on the front lines, and allowed our facilities to be utilized for purposes such as food distribution centers, COVID-19 community engagement activities, and are working in close collaboration with MEMA and local public health agencies and municipalities.

As we look ahead, our challenges are changing from response to preparation for the unknown short and longer-term future. We are feverishly working on those plans now and looking to the state administration, public health agencies and CDC to provide guidance for the parameters on how to go safely from highly restrictive access to our campus facilities to less restrictive access that allows a fuller scope of delivery modalities of learning and support services for our students.

For now, we are finishing our spring semester in remote fashion with either cancellation or postponement of most spring engagement activities. Some of the colleges have devised some provision of ceremonial events in the virtual world as an alternative. Each community college is working on those plans to best suit their student and local community needs.

We have also begun to create alternative scenarios for the Fiscal and Academic Year 2020-2021 which begins on July 1. The state appropriations will be essential in supporting our work, our students and our colleges' fiscal and academic health. It is still too early to know exactly how to project summer session and fall semester enrollments let alone project accurate enrollment scenarios for the next 12 months. We only know right now that we have to be prepared for a range of eventualities with respect to the virus, state appropriations and student enrollment in credit and non-credit courses and programs. We will do our best to mitigate potential cuts and enrollment declines with innovation and flexibility but it will be extraordinarily difficult for institutions already least financially supported by the state to do so.

According to a State Higher Education Finance report released by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) just this morning, only seven states have met or exceeded pre-recession education appropriation levels after declining during the Great Recession a decade ago. Massachusetts is not one of them. This means that our public higher education institutions have not yet recovered from the cuts enacted during the last recession. This puts our sector in a very precarious financial status to withstand more appropriation reductions if the Administration decides to use higher education as a budgetary pressure release valve in FY2021 and beyond. The Board's Equity Agenda can only be met by addressing affordability concerns and ensuring that community colleges have the resources to better serve students of color and other historically underserved groups.

In my decades in the community college sector, I don't ever remember a time like this with so many unknowns looming just around the corner.


We are also preparing for the response that will be needed to help the millions of workers who will now need to be retrained for the new normal of their existing jobs or retrained for entry into new industries. In order to make that economic transition, the workforce development supports will need to be efficient, quick to task, employer demand driven, and meeting industry standards.

This is where our sector shines brightly. The 15 community colleges are regional economic engines with more than 40 locations across the state, a long and successful history in delivering virtual learning modalities, and have already constructed credit and non-credit pipelines for entry into various career paths, including a heavy investment in first responder and health care fields, as well as various support services and science and technology fields. As the Commonwealth looks to strengthen the state's economy and put our people back to work quickly, the community colleges have the recent and highly successful Great Recession record to get it done.

As a help to the Governor's Re-Open the Economy Task Force, we submitted the attached one pager as a solution to the workforce challenges facing the Commonwealth. Investments in high quality, short-term workforce development will be imperative to soften the already calamitous economic blow to Massachusetts families. We include these recommendations to you as Members of this Board for your review and support as well.

Although I said my goodbyes as the Chair of the Community College Council of Presidents last month during the April emergency meeting, this is really the last time I will appear before the Board representing our sector. Our next Chair, Dr. James Mabry, president of Middlesex Community College, takes over this responsibility in early June. You will find Dr. Mabry a strong, knowledgeable leader who will provide you with good information and advocate effectively on behalf of our sector. You will be in good hands.

Thank you for your hard work, dedication and strong belief in the Massachusetts public higher education institutions. It's truly been an honor to know you and I am convinced you will always put the needs of our students at the forefront of any decision this Board makes.

Grazie mille e arrivederci! 

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
RE-OPEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS
Monday, May 4, 2020

The 15 Massachusetts public community colleges (CCs) are already working to address the Commonwealth's workforce development needs, despite the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presents, while strictly adhering to the Governor's mandates, public health agency criteria, and CDC guidelines. The sector needs the safety equipment and supplies to assure healthy campuses. Although the IHEs will solve immediate re-opening challenges, post-COVID-19 there will still be significant ongoing negative economic impacts across the state.

Our expertise in meeting workforce needs – especially moving adult learners back to work – is what differentiates us from the other higher education sectors. The CCs uniquely possess a capacity and strength to address the widespread unemployment and underemployment of the labor force. Skill retooling will be necessary to re-charge the economy and make it strong again. The CCs provide a **solution** for this work, given our existing strong working partnerships with the Commonwealth Corporation, the MASSHire system, the MA DOL&WD, the state's regional technical high schools, and long-term training relationships with area employers.

The CCs are the largest provider of adult worker training having retooled 45,000 workers in the past year through non-credit operations. The sector was the workhorse of the Great Recession putting millions back into the labor force. The state can quickly scale up its CCs' capacity to deliver online, virtual, and remote short-term postsecondary training by addressing the following:

- Implementation of the Strada Education Network grant outcomes for redirection of state financial aid to non-credit workforce development programs – MA DHE OFA and the EOE has been intimately involved in the process. Individual workers, especially those disproportionately impacted by loss of jobs, do not have the financial wherewithal to underwrite their own training. Research from Strada demonstrates that 65% of such workers prefer online short-term skill training and are looking to the nation's community college to deliver it.
- Statutory change in the maximum grant caps for workforce development grants issued through the Commonwealth Corporation to allow for large scale statewide retraining programs for dislocated and unemployed workers through an efficient consortium of CCs. A successful model has resulted in a year-long effort to educate the CCs professional in its efficiency and learning benefits. Such a consortium approach will allow more state assets to be funneled into training efforts directly benefitting the unemployed rather than the large amount of resources that currently go into administering the current small-grant approach.
- Implementation grants to reconfigure technical training programs into online/hybrid/remote delivery modalities. The state's technical high schools are working now to develop the skills and technology to deal with virtual modalities. The CCs 30 years of online and remote professional development, curriculum creation, and instructional technology expertise could move virtual technical training forward quickly in a strong partnership. The state should re-envision the Governor's proposed Career Technical Institutes to innovate technology training for the current and future virtual needs of adult workers.
- Significant investment in the CCs for expansion of technology, professional development, and moving industry-specific curriculum to a rigorous virtual delivery. The CCs are ready and able to support the administration's goal of reopening higher education and its economy through reimagining the delivery of workforce development in Massachusetts to incentivize and hasten the return of

skilled workers trained for the new normal of career paths while meeting the needs of post-COVID emerging industries.

- Finally, there is an urgent need to invest in the nursing, allied health care pathways, and first responder programs at the CCs which annually add scores of credentialed professionals to this labor force. The workforce gaps before the pandemic in this arena were significant; post-COVID-19 it is projected that there will be even more need in Massachusetts to increase the resiliency and bandwidth of an expanded health care workforce. Expanded access for students to simulation labs, virtual clinicals, laptops, hotspots and remote area expansion of broadband would significantly support virtual learning options for these and other students.