

BHE Remarks 3.23.2021

- Good morning Madame Chair Harrity, 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.
- It is remarkable that we have passed the one-year point since the realities of COVID-19 took over here in Massachusetts. We continue to watch the disproportionate impacts of this public health and economic crisis as it plays out in the lives of Massachusetts residents and people across the country.
- I want to start today by addressing how the community colleges are preparing for the Fall semester.
- We had a great conversation with the Academic Affairs Committee last week and discussed our proactive approach to finding ways to safely meet the needs of all our students and provide the learning opportunities and services they need to thrive.
- Throughout the last year, the community colleges have always been “open.” The incredible transition to remote and hybrid learning modalities has been quite successful, and our faculty and staff have stepped up their game and done a tremendous job. And now we are taking all we have learned and are incorporating this knowledge base into strategic and collaborative processes involving the entire campus community. At the core of our discussions is a clear focus on our distinct mission and how we can safely serve *our* students.
- Though we all support the dream of postsecondary education; community colleges are not simply a “more affordable” version of other sectors.
 - The average age of our average age is 26-28, which puts our students in a very different risk profile from K-12 students.
 - Our students don’t live in dormitories.
 - 70% work 30 hours or more a week
 - Many are low income, persons of color, parents, immigrants, and first-generation college students.
 - Many are single parents or come from multigenerational households
 - Our students come from communities that have been given a one two punch and have been disproportionately impacted by both the pandemic and the recession
 - Many of our students have been unable to continue their education because they have been out of work, they are broke, they are struggling with basic needs as they struggle to support themselves and their families.

- Looking ahead, like the Baker Administration, we are cautiously optimistic about current public health trends. And as people begin to get vaccinated and more of our dedicated faculty, staff, and students see the possibility of a vaccination, the fear is declining, and optimism continues to grow.
- With all this in mind, we continue moving ahead toward an increased face-to-face presence on our campuses and continue making plans for the “new normal of campus operations” in the upcoming Fall.
- The new normal will incorporate all we have learned about remote teaching and learning and using the virtual support systems that have proven effective and beneficial. As a sector, we have gained many new competencies that will serve us well as we move forward and plan for the fall.
- But it is essential that we meet the evolving needs of *all* our students, who again are older adults on average, and who still must juggle the demands of being parents, working full-time, among many other considerations.
- The community college presidents are laser-focused on ensuring that as we return to significant in-person operations this Fall, public health remains paramount, and we continue to serve the diverse needs of every one of our learners. We look forward to further information from the CDC and state government partners to guide our planning for the fall.
- I came up the academic ranks and served for over a decade as a dean and a chief academic officer. I built student centered schedules for colleges with up to 25,000 students. In most years, it was 90% a data-based process with about 10% based on experience and intuition. 90% science, 10% art.
- In recent years, to address changing needs we have been scheduling more online courses and fewer evening courses, more short term courses and mini-semesters. We have built up extensive dual enrollment and early college programs. In short, scheduling has become more of an art and less of a science because of rapidly changing needs.
- Now the pandemic hits. It’s not all new, it’s just the existing trends on steroids. But there is much less data to go on so how do you figure out how many sections of English 101 and how many chemistry labs will you need without much relevant data.
- You do this right by listening to your students. We have called them, emailed them, texted them, survey them and looked a national trends. We talked to faculty and

advisors who work with students every day. We stayed in touch with our students, even the ones who did not come back.

- Out of this, we are building complex, multimodal schedules to serve all our students and address their varied needs. We will have on campus, hybrid, online synchronous and online asynchronous sections. We will have day and evening courses. We will have 15 week, 8 week, and 5 week semesters.
- It has been and will continue to be challenging as the new normal emerges from these unprecedented times. But we will meet this challenge by staying in touch with **our** students and doing everything we can to meet **their** needs.

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- Also front of mind is the FY22 State Budget Process. For FY21, the Legislature and Governor Baker ensured that the community colleges could continue doing the important work of educating a diverse group of students, closing the equity gap, and training the Commonwealth's future workforce.
- Last week, I testified on behalf of the community college segment and shared our budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. As we look to FY22, we will again be counting on our leaders in the Legislature to continue targeted investments in community colleges to maintain affordable access to the opportunity of higher education and propel economic development in all corners of the Commonwealth. Without strong community colleges, the core of the future Massachusetts workforce could be left behind.
- Stable state funding in FY22, with targeted equity investments in areas such as the SUCCESS Fund and Early College, will continue to create greater opportunities for students. We have also been proud of our work with the entire MA federal delegation on the American Rescue Plan, which will provide critical emergency funds for these same students.
- 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.
- With 15 colleges with campuses operating in all corners of the Commonwealth, 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.

Supplemental Points – for potential Questions – from JCWM hearing 3.16.2021

- **Federal – background info on stimulus funding**
 - CARES Act: \$48M – half to students (\$24M)
 - Mainly for expenses directly tied to the rapid change to remote learning, campus public health and safety.
 - CRRSAA: \$105M total - \$24M to students
 - Using for lost revenue, especially due to enrollment.
 - American Rescue Plan: \$184M total / half to students (\$91M)
 - Will use for lost revenue, but also for public health needs for repopulation of campuses.
 - Even now, we are still awaiting clarification on guidance, especially with the change in federal Administration and US Dept. of Ed.