

The background of the page features a large, faint, light blue seal of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The seal is circular and contains the text "SIGILLUM REIPUBLICAE MASSACHUSETTENSIS" around the perimeter. In the center is a shield with a Native American figure holding a bow and arrow, with a five-pointed star above. A ribbon scrolls across the shield with the motto "ENSE PETIT PLACIDAM SVB LIBERTATE QVIETEM".

ADVISORY COUNCIL TO ADVANCE REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

January 2025 Implementation Plan

TO:

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GOVERNOR

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SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

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CMR. OF HIGHER EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

On October 16, 2024, Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler and Commissioner of Higher Education Noe Ortega released a [report](#) (Report) with recommendations to enhance access to the state’s higher education system and provide a high-quality experience to all students regardless of background. These recommendations were crafted along with the Healey-Driscoll Administration’s Advisory Council to Advance Representation in Education (ACARE), which was established ahead of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on race-based admissions.

The recommendations in the report describe commitments of the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and fall into five general categories of recommendations. As part of achieving the recommendations, the Secretary and the Commissioner committed to certain implementation and accountability actions that include submission of periodic implementation plans to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. This is the first of those implementation plans tied to the Commonwealth’s FY25 budget. The plan is organized by the commitments made by the EOE and DHE and the five categories of recommendations. Any commitment or recommendation not included here will be included in future plans submitted to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor.

JANUARY 2025 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

COMMITMENTS

I. Communities of Practice

- Beginning in January 2025, the EOE is working with colleagues at DHE and DESE to build out a directory of community-based organizations (CBO) and nonprofit organizations currently working with students in accessing, persisting and succeeding in higher education. EOE is starting with organizations the education agencies work with currently and then adding to the directory those organizations that the agencies are not yet working with. Report at 17.
- STEM Summit 2025 will focus on advancing equity and improving access for historically underserved and underrepresented students pursuing STEM Education in higher education and will invite students, educators, and employers to highlight and collaborate on strategies and policies in higher education to ensure that underrepresented students have equitable access to support services and resources to enter high demand STEM careers. EOE will use this opportunity to build a

community of practice among higher education educators and STEM industry partners. Report at 17.

II. Enhance Alignment and Collaboration Across Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs).

- Beginning in February 2025, DHE will be regularly convening representatives of public and private higher education in Massachusetts on the legal rights, responsibilities, and optional responses to U.S. Department of Education and associated federal agency guidance. Report at 18.

III. Proactive and Ongoing Communication and Engagement.

- Beginning in February 2025, to ensure that Massachusetts students, particularly those historically underrepresented, know about the significant financial aid available and are inspired to attend public IHEs, Secretary Tutwiler and Commissioner Ortega, in collaboration with DESE, are kicking off a Higher Ed Financial Aid Winter Road Show focusing on communities across the state that had low FAFSA completion rates in 2024. Report at 18-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Increase Exposure and Access to Higher Education for K-12 Students.

- **Access to College Level Courses.** In FY25 the state has committed to funding up to \$1.25 million in fee subsidies for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate exams as part of EOE's efforts to reimagine high school, allowing low-income students – or their schools – to pay only \$22 per AP test. Report at 19.
- **Career Connected Pathways.** In FY25, the administration awarded \$1.7 million in Career Technical Education (CTE) Partnership Grants to six Massachusetts school and district partnerships, adding 342 new seats for students in fields such as advanced manufacturing early education and care, and health assisting; \$387,000 in Innovation Career Pathway Planning Grants to 26 school districts, including 11 that were first time grant recipients, enabling public schools to create strong partnerships with employers in health care, technology, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and environmental sustainability; \$17 million in Skills Capital Lab Modernization Grants to 18 schools across Massachusetts to purchase and install equipment related to high demand industries and occupations, such as advanced manufacturing, health care, information technology, construction/skilled trades, and life sciences; and \$8 million in designated Early

College grants to support schools and IHEs as they design new Early College programs as well as expand existing programs to provide an estimated additional 2,300 seats. In November 2024, DESE approved 18 new CTE programs in 12 high schools, adding an estimated 335 new seats for students in a variety of areas including HVAC, health assisting, metal fabrication & joining technologies, carpentry, programming & web development, construction, radio & television broadcasting, cosmetology, and environmental science & technology. Report at 19.

- **College and Career Advising.** In FY25, the administration awarded more than \$900,000 to 135 schools in 49 districts to help them adopt MyCAP, a student-centered, holistic, multi-year planning tool for students. To date, over 200 schools in more than 150 districts have engaged in MyCAP implementation and training from DESE. This year DESE is focusing on adding MyCAP coaches to help schools implement MyCAP and build sustainability of this research-based program. Report at 19-20.
- **FAFSA and Massachusetts Application for Student Financial Aid (MASFA) Completion.** As noted above, the Secretary and DHE Commissioner will be kicking off a Higher Ed Financial Aid Winter Road Show in February 2025, to partner with engaged high school seniors to promote awareness of Massachusetts's financial aid programs and how to access them among their peers. At the same time, the DHE is working with Archipelago Strategies Group Boston on an ad campaign that will run from February 2025 through April of 2025 to increase awareness of state financial aid programs and how to access them through FAFSA and MASFA among adult and student audiences. DESE and DHE have set joint goals for FAFSA and MASFA completion statewide and in select Gateway cities and have instituted a tracking tool to monitor progress.
- **Bridge to College.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report including an assessment of bridge programs. Report at 20.

II. Re-Engage Adult Learners and Encourage Participation in Higher Education.

- **Career Transition Programs.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report including an assessment of career transition programs. Report at 20.

- **College and Career Advising.** In FY25, Massachusetts launched MassEducate making community college tuition and fees free for all students regardless of age and income level. The administration also continues to promote the MassReconnect program, which provides free community college for students 25 and older looking to return to higher education, which in its first year of implementation supported over 4,500 students. The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development is also collaborating with the state's community college partners to enhance awareness of MassHire staff and claimants. Report at 20.
- **Establish a High Demand Workforce.** In FY25 the administration awarded \$13.4 million in Career Technical Initiative (CTI) implementation and planning grants to 21 organizations and 1,641 jobseekers for careers in high-demand occupations within the trades, construction, and manufacturing sectors in partnership with over 180 employers across Massachusetts. The CTI grant program, now available in all seven workforce regions, partners with CTE schools to provide adult learners, especially unemployed and underemployed individuals from underserved populations and underrepresented groups, with career training and technical skills to meet the needs of employers. Report at 20.
- **Provide Credit for Prior Learning.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report including an assessment of programs that provide credit to adults possessing work experience and industry credentials of value. In addition, in January 2025, DHE authorized state universities to make use of SUCCESS program funding for prior learning assessments. Report at 21.
- **Expand Experiential Learning Opportunities.** In November 2024, the administration announced the launch of the state's first Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program, aimed to diversify and strengthen the educator workforce and pipeline. In a partnership between DESE and the Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the program will allow aspiring teachers to work toward a full teaching license while employed in an instructional role in a district. Report at 21.
- **Work and Learn Models.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report including one on implementation of work and learn models at public and private IHEs. Report at 21.

III. **Implement Innovative Recruitment, Admissions, and Enrollment Policies.**

- **Remove Historic Barriers to Admission for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report, including an assessment of existing admissions processes, practices, and criteria that may serve as barriers for certain student groups. Report at 22.
- **Transfer Credit Applicability and Mobility.** As part of the FY25 budget, the Legislature created a MassTransfer Steering Committee charged with advising the DHE on the creation, implementation, and improvement of the MassTransfer program to allow for a more efficient credit transfer system among public IHEs. The budget language also requires the Board of Higher Education to develop and approve a common course numbering system with the goal of creating transparency for credit transferability. Report at 22.

IV. **Improve Equity in Financial Aid and Enhance Support for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students and the Institutions that Serve Them.**

- **Student Financial Aid.** In FY25, Massachusetts launched **MassEducate** making community college tuition and fees free for all students regardless of age and income level. Enrollment at Massachusetts' 15 community colleges rose by 14% following the launch of the program. Report at 23.
- **Redesign State Financial Aid.** DHE has engaged C+C to assist in a re-branding of state financial aid for students. Currently, the team is engaged in a research phase to better understand the perception of Massachusetts financial aid offerings. Later this winter, the team will move into foundational strategy development, a creative development phase, and a brand launch with the goal of launching an ad campaign later this spring. Report at 23.
- **Equity Analysis.** As part of the FY25 budget, the Legislature created a Higher Education Quality and Affordability Commission charged with studying and making recommendations on improving the quality and affordability of higher education in the commonwealth, including state financial assistance programs. The specific items the commission must review and evaluate include: (i) state assistance programs and funding, including, but not limited to, aid for tuition, fees, books, supplies and other costs of attendance and make recommendations to ensure the accessibility and affordability of said higher education institutions and how to achieve best outcomes; (ii) student costs and debts during and after

attending said universities; (iii) programs that improve student success, including, but not limited to, academic support, career counseling, assistance with applying for state and federal benefits and improvements to facilities; (iv) improvements needed to increase the recruitment and retention of qualified adjunct and full-time faculty and staff; and (v) financial assistance program design and models to efficiently increase state assistance, improve outcomes and reduce student costs. The Commission is to consider financial, logistical, cultural and other barriers affecting students, the financial resources of the state, the financial resources of students attending university and make recommendations to reduce barriers and increase access to high-quality higher education. Report at 23.

V. Increase Persistence and Completion for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students in Higher Education.

- **Provision of Comprehensive Support Services.** In December 2024, in addition to the \$14 million awarded to community colleges for comprehensive, wraparound support services, the administration awarded a second \$14 million to support student SUCCESS programming at Massachusetts' nine state universities financing support services such as peer mentors, academic skills workshops, and academic, career and scholarship advising aimed at increasing graduation rates, particularly among historically underserved students. Report at 24.
- **Career Advising and Employment Support.** EOE will be issuing an RFP in FY25 to find a vendor to assist in conducting several statewide assessments recommended in the ACARE report including an assessment of programs providing career readiness, career placement, and support services to Massachusetts' college students. Report at 24.