

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF
REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

Leading the Way in Massachusetts: Championing Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Higher Education

RECOMMENDATIONS REINFORCING REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER
EDUCATION FOLLOWING THE SUPREME COURT DECISION
ON RACE-BASED ADMISSIONS

TO:

Maura T. Healey

GOVERNOR

Kim Driscoll

LT. GOVERNOR

SUBMITTED BY:

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Dr. Noe Ortega

CMR. OF HIGHER EDUCATION

October 16, 2024

Dear Governor Maura Healey, Lt. Governor Driscoll and Colleagues:

When the Supreme Court departed from decades of settled law to overturn race-conscious admissions processes at two institutions, we declared that Massachusetts would lead the way in enhancing representation in education. That's because we know that the whole of society benefits when the highest pursuits of knowledge are enriched by the multitude of backgrounds and worldviews that come with a representative student body – when we are welcoming and inclusive of all students.

When the Supreme Court took up the issue of race in admissions in 1978, Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr. declared that “the nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation,” highlighting the powerful benefits of an inclusive and representative student body. Beyond the importance of safeguarding higher education opportunities for students of color, a diverse student body benefits institutions themselves, allowing them to better prepare their student citizens for the critical leadership and professional roles they will ultimately assume.

The Supreme Court’s higher education admissions decision, while disappointing, did not deter our commitment to making sure our schools reflect our communities. Last June, the Healey-Driscoll Administration formed the Advisory Council for the Advancement of Representation in Education, assembling a diverse group of stakeholders, including student representatives, with expertise in higher education; civil rights advocacy; diversity, equity and inclusion work; and the experiences of students of color. This group brought together broad perspectives on how to proceed and represented the rich diverse voices of our communities and experiences. Over the past year, we engaged in an iterative process to develop strategic recommendations on breaking down barriers to higher education that ensure our state remains open, welcoming, and inclusive of all students.

We know there are racial disparities in college access, affordability, and attainment and this administration, and our critical partners, remain steadfast in creating a higher education system that serves all students equitably and well. This Council is a nation-leading example of how we can provide our institutions of higher education with the knowledge and resources to lawfully work towards this goal. We deeply thank all of the Council members for their partnership and dedication.

Massachusetts is the home of America’s first public school and first university. With the actionable recommendations presented in this report, we believe that our state will lead the way in making sure our schools continue to reflect our communities and our values. It is imperative we take action so that students, colleges, and our greater society can continue to benefit from the invaluable input from students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and other students historically underrepresented in higher education.

With respect for the continued work ahead,



Dr. Patrick Tutwiler
Secretary of Education



Dr. Noe Ortega
Commissioner of Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We want to send a clear message to students of all backgrounds – you are welcome here in Massachusetts. We are a national leader in education, home to the first university and first public school, and we are strong because of our commitment to equity and inclusion. We’re backing up that commitment today with action to expand access to tools that will help break down barriers to higher education, especially for students of color, LGBTQ+ students and first-generation students.”

- Governor Maura Healey

In June 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration [established the Advisory Council for the Advancement of Representation in Education \(ACARE\)](#) ahead of the Supreme Court decision on race-based admissions and in response to the decision issued a [joint statement](#) that was endorsed by over 100 representatives from the education sector and institutions of higher education (IHEs); state government; and advocacy, civil rights, and labor organizations.

The launch of ACARE demonstrated a meaningful collaboration among members of the Council – leaders who have expertise in K-12 and higher education; advocacy and civil rights; access, diversity, equity, and inclusion work; and the experiences of students of color – who were tasked with assessing the Supreme Court decision’s impact and crafting strategies, within the law, that allow Massachusetts’ schools to achieve representative student bodies – so students, colleges and universities, and greater society could continue to benefit from the invaluable contributions from and perspectives of students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and other students underrepresented in higher education.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present recommendations to promote access to higher education, particularly for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, low income students, and other students historically underrepresented in enrollment and completion of programs at the postsecondary level.

The Understanding Where We Are: Massachusetts Higher Education Landscape section presents selected types of data about the pursuit of higher education in Massachusetts to provide some context for the recommendations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

This report presents recommendations across five policy areas.

1. **Increase Exposure and Access to Higher Education for K-12 Students** – Continually enhance the availability, intensity, and quality of services for students across the state,

and especially historically underserved and underrepresented students, so that they have consistent and equal access to the information, tools, guidance, and resources that they need to pursue all types of postsecondary opportunities.

- Provide resources to increase access to SAT/ACT preparation services, assist with registration fees, and provide access to local testing sites.
- Increase the availability of college-level courses such as Advanced Placement courses and access to dual enrollment and other early college opportunities especially in underserved communities.
- Continue to expand Early College, Innovation Career Pathways, and Career Technical Education programs to increase the number of participating high schools and students particularly from historically underserved and underrepresented groups.
- Continue to expand educators' access to professional learning opportunities about [My Career and Academic Plan](#), a student-centered, holistic, multi-year planning tool for students, and continue to build out the program to include new high schools and new middle schools across the state, particularly in Gateway Cities.
- Identify effective practices for bringing more college and career counseling professionals into our high schools.
- Expand the provision of guidance and support services related to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid.
- Identify effective practices for providing bridge to college services – including academic enrichment and preparation courses plus transition assistance – to incoming students at public and private IHEs.
- Organize college and career events for middle school students to introduce them to postsecondary opportunities and career pathways.

2. Re-engage Adult Learners and Encourage Participation in Higher Education – Enhance adult learners' access to the guidance and resources they need to pursue multiple educational and career opportunities including enrolling or re-enrolling in college and making seamless career transitions.

- Identify effective practices for the provision of individualized academic advising, academic enrichment and preparation courses, and transition assistance prior to enrollment in college.
- Implement strategies and allocate targeted resources to provide college and career advising to those who are under/unemployed.

- Expand degree programs at public and private IHEs to close workforce training gaps in high-demand occupations and high-priority industry sectors such as manufacturing, clean technology, healthcare, bioscience, and information technology.
- Expand training and certificate programs at public and private IHEs that will enable adult students to gain industry credentials, support employment, and provide up-skills in high-demand occupations.
- Identify effective practices related to awarding college credits to adults possessing work experiences and industry credentials of value and also accepting credentials or degrees for individuals from other countries.
- Increase the availability of paid work-based learning opportunities including apprenticeships, internships, co-ops, clinical programs, practicums, and capstone projects.

3. Implement Innovative Recruitment, Admissions, and Enrollment Policies – Continually review and enhance recruitment efforts, enrollment policies, and admissions practices across all public and private IHEs to further advance equity, access, and representation for historically underserved and underrepresented students.

- Initiate programs at public and private IHEs to incentivize the voluntary implementation of 1) equity-centered, creative, and targeted recruitment efforts aimed at attracting a diverse pool of applicants, especially historically underserved and underrepresented students, and 2) holistic admissions review processes that enable admissions officers to consider factors such as cultural competencies, income level, first generation to attend college, neighborhood or community circumstances, disadvantages overcome, and the impact of an applicant’s particular experiences on their academic achievement and on the perspectives that they would bring to the school environment.

As described in the [Joint Guidance](#), co-issued by the Attorney General, EOE, DHE, and DESE in October 2023, IHEs may continue to use admissions criteria that look beyond traditional measures such as grades to more holistic ones that allow for consideration of applicants’ life experiences more generally.

- Expand professional learning opportunities for admissions officers related to enhancing access and representation for historically underserved and underrepresented students, increasing diversity, and breaking down barriers to higher education.

- Conduct a statewide assessment of existing admissions processes, practices, and criteria (including, but not limited to, legacy preference and binding early decision) to identify those that may serve as barriers for certain student groups.
- Implement innovative admissions models to remove barriers for historically underserved and underrepresented students such as direct admissions, dual admissions, and guaranteed admission for students graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school class.
- Enhance MassTransfer to support the seamless transfer of college credits and increase alignment of curricula and degree pathways and programs among participating IHEs.

4. Improve Equity in Financial Aid and Enhance Support for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students and the Institutions That Serve Them – Enhance state support and institutional capacity to enable students and adult learners to pursue multiple postsecondary pathways and successfully achieve their goals without being impeded by financial concerns.

- Allocate state financial aid to incentivize and facilitate full-time attendance for historically underserved and underrepresented students, increase the proportion of need- versus merit-based grant and scholarship funding at both public and private IHEs, and revise financial aid policies so that state funding is awarded to students attending either public or private IHEs who demonstrate high levels of need.
- Reorganize and simplify the provision of different types of current state financial aid; streamline administrative and application processes; and provide consistent access to comprehensive information about financial aid options to students and adult learners, parents/family members/guardians, educators, community stakeholders, and representatives of public and private IHEs.
- Conduct a statewide analysis of the adequacy and equity of state financial aid (with respect to the allocation of both student and institutional aid) to assess the impact of current funding on different groups of historically underserved and underrepresented students and identify the needs that are not being addressed. Assess all types of state funding to implement enhanced and inclusive policies that better address the financial and other needs of historically underserved and underrepresented students attending both public and private IHEs.

5. Increase Persistence and Completion for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students in Higher Education – Enhance institutional capacity and increase state funding so that 1) all students have ongoing and equal access to essential academic and comprehensive, high-quality support services and 2) all IHEs establish and maintain welcoming, inclusive, and supportive learning and campus environments that create the conditions necessary for student well-being and success.

- Incentivize the provision of a comprehensive array of research- and evidence-based wraparound services to students including asset-based advising and coaching; mental health services; emergency financial aid; and assistance related to other issues including, among others, food and housing insecurity and costs related to transportation and child care.
- Enhance the institutional and organizational capacity of IHEs to provide high-quality services efficiently and effectively and also address the factors that impede student persistence and completion.
- Expand access to continuous professional learning opportunities for all faculty members, administrators, and staff members at public and private IHEs related to student- and equity-centered, asset-based pedagogy and advising; issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access; and cultural and social competency.
- Expand access to continuous professional learning opportunities for members of boards of trustees at public IHEs and higher education advisory committees related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and increasing access and representation in higher education.
- Identify effective practices and new strategies related to providing valuable career readiness, career placement, and support services that will enable students and adult learners to gain employment upon the completion of degrees and credentials at public and private IHEs.

The strategies presented in these recommendations are aligned with [federal](#) and [state](#) guidance and will advance Massachusetts' efforts, within the law, to enhance access, representation, diversity, and equity in higher education. In addition, this report includes commitments of the Executive Office of Education and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with other state agencies, to maximize individual expertise and institutional resources, expand the implementation of effective practices, and enhance alignment and collaboration across public and private IHEs.

ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

These recommendations are a starting point. Over the next several months, we will learn more about the impact of the Supreme Court decision on the enrollment of students of color and other historically underserved and underrepresented students at Massachusetts' IHEs. As such, we will continue to identify gaps in the provision of services and address institutional/organizational and systemic barriers to postsecondary attainment and completion.

INTRODUCTION

“We want to send a clear message to students of all backgrounds – you are welcome here in Massachusetts. We are a national leader in education, home to the first university and first public school, and we are strong because of our commitment to equity and inclusion. We’re backing up that commitment today with action to expand access to tools that will help break down barriers to higher education, especially for students of color, LGBTQ+ students and first-generation students.”

- Governor Maura Healey

In June 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration [established the Advisory Council for the Advancement of Representation in Education \(ACARE\)](#) ahead of the Supreme Court decision on race-based admissions and in response to the decision issued a [joint statement](#) that was endorsed by over 100 representatives from the education sector and institutions of higher education (IHEs); state government; and advocacy, civil rights, and labor organizations.

The launch of ACARE was the start of a collaboration with the members of the Council who helped to develop the recommendations in this report. The proposed strategies build on Massachusetts’ successes to date, including the significant and unprecedented increase in financial aid for students through the [MASSGrant Plus Expansion](#); the expansion of [My Career and Academic Plan \(MyCAP\)](#) and the [Massachusetts Early College Initiative](#); the establishment of the [MassReconnect](#) program; and numerous initiatives implemented at our schools, districts, and public and private IHEs in partnership with state education agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and other stakeholders.

With these recommendations, we will maximize substantial state investments in the fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget, including \$5 million to develop a new state mental and behavioral health framework; \$47 million to Reimagining High School to further expand early college opportunities and innovation career pathways; and multiple items related to enhancing access, representation, and completion including \$117.5 million for free community college through the [MassEducate](#) program, an additional \$80 million in financial aid to cover tuition, fees, and other costs plus reduce out-of-pocket expenses for Pell Grant-eligible students, \$28.7 million in SUCCESS funding to expand the provision of advising and wraparound services at both community colleges and state universities, and \$2.5 million for a Higher Education Persistence Fund to enable our campuses to better support our students.

ACARE MEMBERS, CHARGE, AND ACTIVITIES TO DATE

The Council is comprised of leaders across multiple sectors who have expertise in K-12 and higher education; advocacy and civil rights; access, diversity, equity, and inclusion work; and the experiences of students of color.

The charge to the Council members is as follows.

The Council shall meet at least quarterly each year at the direction of the Secretary and the Commissioner. The Council will continue to meet through August 1, 2024 after which, the Secretary and Commissioner shall submit a formal written report to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, summarizing the Council's work, findings, recommendations and feedback on how to promote access to higher education, particularly for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, low income, and other students historically underrepresented in enrollment and completion of programs at the postsecondary level.

The Council members' expertise, insights, and generous contributions enabled us to meet the charge and present this report. We convened meetings of the full Council on June 14, 2023; July 26, 2023; December 11, 2023; March 25, 2024; and June 17, 2024 and conducted additional meetings with members, both individually and in groups, during the spring and summer of 2024.

In October 2023, the Executive Office of Education (EOE), Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE), Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts co-sponsored a statewide conference entitled Access & Admissions: Advancing Representing in Higher Education. At this gathering of over 250 representatives from high schools, school districts, and IHEs, the EOE, DHE, DESE, and the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General co-issued [Joint Guidance](#) to Massachusetts' institutions of higher education and K-12 schools to further their work to promote access to educational opportunity in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision. During the conference, we amplified students' perspectives and experiences, learned about essential equity-centered practices from state and national experts, and created important opportunities for colleagues across the state to deepen relationships centered on increasing attainment and success for historically underserved, underrepresented, and marginalized communities of students.

As announced shortly after the Supreme Court's decision, over the past year the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) has continued to expand students' access to [MEFA Pathway](#), a free online career and career planning resource. Through the *Time is Now* statewide campaign, which was launched in the summer of 2023, MEFA has empowered students in underresourced communities, primarily Gateway Communities, by increasing their access to MEFA Pathway and additional resources including assistance to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and guidance regarding planning and paying for college. Notable outcomes from this campaign include over 11,000 new registrations for MEFA Pathway with over 5,000 for students in Gateway Cities; the submission of almost 4,000 college applications developed with MEFA Pathway tools and resources; and over 100 financial aid and FAFSA webinars or seminars conducted for students, family members, and educators.



PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

ACARE is building on a strong foundation of work and the collective efforts of partners across the state. The purpose of this report is to present recommendations to promote access to higher education, particularly for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, low income students, and other students historically underrepresented in enrollment and completion of programs at the postsecondary level. These proposed recommendations reflect multiple pathways to postsecondary success. In addition, the strategies underscore the importance of supporting educators and education professionals as well as institutions of higher education; and continually strengthening the education infrastructure in Massachusetts.

We thank the Council members for their generosity with regard to sharing their expertise and experiences, their insightful feedback and guidance about our work, their valuable contributions at in-person and virtual meetings, their enthusiasm about this initiative and eagerness to advance this work, and most importantly, their unwavering commitment to engaging in collective action to advance equity and better serve our students.

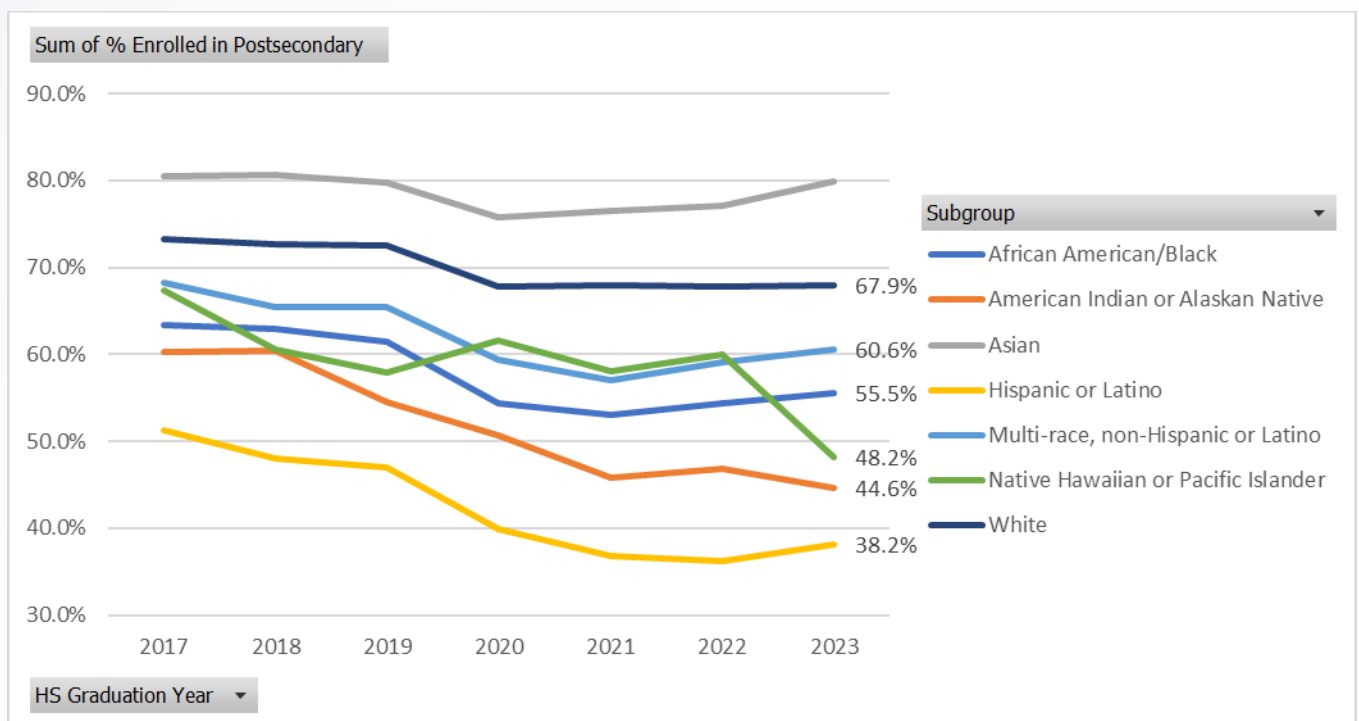
UNDERSTANDING WHERE WE ARE: MASSACHUSETTS HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

This section presents selected types of data about the pursuit of higher education in Massachusetts to provide essential information about students and context for the recommendations.

Additional K-12 school and district data, including postsecondary readiness data, are available on the [DESE School and District webpage](#) and higher education data, including enrollment and completion data, are available at the [DHE Data Center](#).

ENROLLMENT IN COLLEGE IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Figure 1. Percent of Massachusetts public high school graduates who enroll in college anywhere in the U.S. by the first fall after high school graduation.¹



Immediate college enrollment among Massachusetts public high school graduates is decreasing overall, and at sharper rates among African American/Black and Hispanic or Latino students.

¹ Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

FAFSA COMPLETION DATA

An important factor affecting our students' ability to apply to and enroll in college is affordability and completion of the FAFSA is an essential step in the process of securing both state and federal financial aid.

Table 1. Percent of Massachusetts public high school seniors who completed the FAFSA as of August 22, 2024 by race/ethnicity.²

	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>
All Students	59.6%	56.3%	58.1%	54.8%	52.4%	51.7%
Asian	68.2%	67.1%	72.0%	69.3%	68.7%	57.8%
Black	55.4%	50.6%	54.5%	52.9%	48.4%	44.4%
Hispanic	42.0%	37.4%	36.9%	35.5%	33.3%	33.3%
White	64.2%	61.5%	63.5%	60.4%	58.9%	60%

The data indicate that for all racial/ethnic groups, while there have been minor increases or decreases over the past six years, fewer students completed the FAFSA in 2024 than in 2019. An important caveat regarding the 2024 data is the impact of multiple delays related to the rollout of the updated federal FAFSA form and processing issues that have not been fully resolved by the U.S. Department of Education.

² Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Note: "Seniors" are defined as students in 12th grade and special education students beyond 12th grade.

HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT DATA

The following table presents enrollment data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, for the public higher education segments and private non-profit IHEs in Massachusetts.

Table 2. Percent of students enrolled in Massachusetts postsecondary institutions from each racial/ethnic group by segment/sector.³

	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Community Colleges	79,820	75,626	67,788	65,047	62,248
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5%	5%	6%	6%	6%
Black or African American	15%	15%	14%	15%	14%
Hispanic or Latino	20%	21%	21%	22%	23%
Two or more races	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%
U.S. Non-resident	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Unknown	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%
White	49%	48%	48%	47%	44%
State Universities	40,117	39,032	36,054	33,453	31,750
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Black or African American	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%
Hispanic or Latino	12%	12%	13%	13%	15%
Two or more races	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
U.S. Non-resident	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Unknown	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
White	68%	67%	66%	65%	63%

³ Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Note: Quincy College, a municipally affiliated college, is included in the “Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above” group, though they only began offering bachelor’s degrees in 2022.

University of Massachusetts	57,074	57,379	56,944	55,217	54,518
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	10%	11%	11%	12%	13%
Black or African American	9%	9%	9%	10%	10%
Hispanic or Latino	10%	11%	12%	12%	12%
Two or more races	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%
U.S. Non-resident	7%	7%	6%	5%	6%
Unknown	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%
White	54%	54%	53%	53%	52%
Private not-for-profit, 2-year	1,212	1,050	842	843	821
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	11%	12%	12%	11%	7%
Black or African American	13%	14%	16%	13%	13%
Hispanic or Latino	52%	53%	48%	53%	52%
Two or more races	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%
U.S. Non-resident	0.4%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unknown	7%	3%	1%	3%	6%
White	15%	17%	21%	20%	19%
Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above	177,012	175,276	168,021	172,310	170,298
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	10%	10%	11%	12%	12%
Black or African American	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Hispanic or Latino	10%	10%	11%	11%	12%
Two or more races	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
U.S. Non-resident	13%	13%	11%	12%	13%
Unknown	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%
White	51%	50%	50%	49%	48%

The data indicate that for all public segments and private non-profit IHEs, there have been enrollment declines that are attributable to demographic changes such as declining birth rates and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; however, initial data for the 2023 school year indicated an increase of 3 percent at our public institutions with the largest increase at the community colleges compared to FY 2022.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS BY POLICY AREA

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

The recommendations presented in this report were developed in partnership with the Council members in accordance with the following process. DHE and EOE staff members conducted research about practices, current or pending initiatives in other states, and multiple types of data and discussed strategies with policy experts; they presented a variety of initial recommendations to Council members and requested preliminary feedback. EOE staff invited Council members to participate in individual conversations to discuss the recommendations in greater detail; identify issues and barriers that need to be addressed; and generate ideas about additional strategies.

Based on key themes and priorities that emerged from these conversations, Council members were assigned based on their preferences to five working groups: 1) Support Services to Enhance Access to Higher Education; 2) Academic and Comprehensive Support Services to Increase Higher Education Persistence and Completion; 3) Affordability and Allocation of Financial Aid; 4) Admissions and Enrollment Policies; and 5) Alignment and Collaboration Among Institutions of Higher Education. Council members provided detailed feedback during quarterly ACARE meetings, and working groups were convened on two occasions to give the members the opportunity to further discuss the proposed recommendations and ideas. Based on this feedback, DHE and EOE worked to refine the recommendations.

OVERVIEW OF POLICY AREAS AND TOPICS

The proposed recommendations address five policy areas: 1) Increase Exposure and Access to Higher Education for K-12 Students; 2) Re-engage Adult Learners and Encourage Participation in Higher Education; 3) Implement Innovative Recruitment, Admissions, and Enrollment Policies; 4) Improve Equity in Financial Aid and Enhance Support for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students and the Institutions that Serve Them; and 5) Increase Persistence and Completion for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students in Higher Education. As noted in the introduction, the recommendations focus on opportunities for improvement and enhancing ongoing work.

Several principles guided the finalization of the recommendations: first, they should have both short-term and sustained impact on the most underserved and underrepresented groups of students; second, they must address the factors that impede access, representation, and completion – especially for students of color and students from lower-income households – but they should also be broad enough to address the needs of multiple groups of underrepresented and underserved students; third, they should be aligned with and expand upon both current efforts and previously recommended strategies; and fourth, they must incorporate action at K-12 institutions/organizations and all segments and sectors of higher education, including highly

selective private IHEs.

The strategies presented in the following recommendations align with [federal](#) and [state](#) guidance and will advance efforts, within the law, to enhance access and representation and achieve greater diversity and equity in Massachusetts higher education.

COMMITMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This section begins with commitments of the EOE and DHE – actions to be taken jointly in collaboration with other state agencies and key partners – to complement the following recommendations.

The opportunity – maximize individual expertise and institutional resources, expand the implementation of effective practices, and create a statewide higher education and postsecondary infrastructure to provide comprehensive and high-quality academic, career, and other services to students.

- Communities of Practice – Use the convening power of the Secretariat to establish the following communities of practice.
 1. High school counselors and higher education admissions personnel to share information and data, identify effective practices and strategies, and create opportunities for collective and statewide action related to enhancing access, representation, and diversity in higher education.
 2. Representatives from CBOs, nonprofit organizations, and educators to enhance alignment and collaboration; identify gaps in services; create tools to provide information to students, parents/family members/guardians, and educators; facilitate the establishment of partnerships with K-12 schools, districts, and IHEs; and enhance collaboration with DESE and DHE.
 3. Representatives from public and private IHEs, workforce development, MassHire Workforce boards, economic development agencies, adult education programs, and industry partners to enhance alignment and collaboration, identify gaps in services, and facilitate partnerships to increase participation of historically underserved and underrepresented adult populations including adults engaged in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programming, adults with high school equivalency credentials, and adults who are under/unemployed.
 4. High school administrators and teachers to implement effective strategies to provide valuable guidance and services for all students, especially historically underserved and underrepresented students, to enhance their ability to successfully complete all components of [MassCore](#), a state-recommended program of study that includes the

successful completion of specific numbers of units across academic subjects, and increase postsecondary readiness.

- Enhance Alignment and Collaboration Across Public and Private IHEs – Use the convening power of the DHE to gather representatives from public and private IHEs on an ongoing basis to discuss the following mutually concerning and beneficial issues and collaboratively implement both institutional and systemic strategies.
 1. Recruitment and Admissions – recruitment of historically underserved and underrepresented students and implementation of equity-centered and holistic admissions processes.
 2. Comprehensive Support Services – provision of equity-centered and asset-based advising, coaching, and wraparound services plus the establishment of integrated delivery systems and organizational structures; the creation of effective models and practices; and guidance regarding needs assessment tools that can be adapted by institutions.
 3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives – implementation of DEI initiatives and equity-centered agendas, collection of multiple types of aggregated and disaggregated data, professional development and leadership training, conducting needs assessments, and institutionalizing and sustaining DEI initiatives.
 4. Public/Private Partnerships – expansion or establishment of regional partnerships among public and private IHEs to identify student-centered and statewide opportunities for collaboration and disseminate information about successful public/private partnerships and effective practices.
 5. Campus Climate – administration of campus climate surveys to students, faculty, staff members, and administrators and aggregate data analyses to inform the implementation of state policies and impact institutional change efforts (for example, how resources can be allocated to provide equity-centered and culturally and linguistically responsive student support services and also enhance instructional structures and processes).
 6. Data Management – enhancement of data sharing and analytics across institutions and establishment of a statewide data collection and management system, as applicable, for all public and private IHEs.
- Proactive and Ongoing Communication and Engagement – Use the communications platforms of the Secretariat, DHE, DESE, and the Department of Early Education and Care to celebrate and increase public awareness of their shared commitment to postsecondary success for all students and adult learners; highlight collaboration across the early education, K-12, adult education/ESOL, and higher education sectors to enhance readiness across the birth through postsecondary continuum; provide

information to children/students, adult learners, parents/family members/guardians, and community members in multiple languages using multiple methods of communication; and highlight resources that are available to support students' and adult learners' pursuit of postsecondary opportunities.

INCREASE EXPOSURE AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR K-12 STUDENTS

The opportunity – continually enhance the availability, intensity, and quality of services for students across the state, and especially historically underserved and underrepresented students, so that they have consistent and equal access to the information, tools, guidance, and resources that they need to pursue all types of postsecondary opportunities. Provide greater support to our students and adult learners – plus their parents, family members, guardians, and others – so that they are empowered and prepared to make informed choices and decisions.

- College Entrance Examination Preparation and Access – Provide resources to increase the availability of SAT/ACT and other preparation courses, assist with registration fees, and provide access to local testing sites through collaboration with schools, districts, CBOs, and other partners. Continually assess the impact of these efforts on historically underserved and underrepresented students across the state.
- Access to College Level Courses – Increase the availability of college-level courses such as Advanced Placement courses and access to dual enrollment and other early college opportunities in high schools across the state and especially in underserved communities, offer preparation support, assist students with exam preparation and paying registration fees for examinations, and collect aggregated and disaggregated data on student enrollment in college level courses, including any tests taken and scores. Support the adoption of consistent and equitable awarding of college credits to all students for achieving passing grade/exam scores in college level courses upon enrolling in college.
- Career Connected Pathways – Continue to expand Early College, Innovation Career Pathways, and Career Technical Education programs to expand the number of participating high schools and increase the number of participating students statewide, particularly historically underserved and underrepresented students.
- College and Career Advising – Continue to expand educators' access to professional learning opportunities about [MyCAP](#), a student-centered, holistic, multi-year planning tool for students, and continue to build out the program to include new high schools and new middle schools across the state, particularly in Gateway Cities. Work with the Massachusetts School Counselors Association to convene counselors and other school-based advisors on an ongoing basis. Through collaboration with schools, districts, CBOs and other relevant stakeholders, identify effective practices for bringing more college and career counseling professionals into our high schools.

As part of expansion into middle schools referenced above, incentivize collaboration among schools, districts, IHEs, CBOs, and community partners to organize college and career events for middle school students and incorporate them into MyCAP activities. Convene partners to share information and data, enhance collaboration and alignment, and scale up effective practices.

- FAFSA and Massachusetts Application for Student Financial Aid (MASFA) Completion – Increase awareness of and expand the provision of FAFSA and MASFA guidance and support services to students, parents/family members/guardians, and other community partners. Integrate support of completion of FAFSA and MASFA in students' MyCAP.
- Bridge to College – Conduct a statewide analysis to identify effective practices for providing differentiated academic advising for high school graduates who are enrolling in college, academic enrichment and preparation courses to enhance college readiness, transition assistance to incoming students at public and private IHEs, and implementing statewide strategies.

RE-ENGAGE ADULT LEARNERS AND ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The opportunity – enhance adult learners' access to the guidance and resources they need to pursue multiple educational and career opportunities including enrolling or re-enrolling in college and making seamless career transitions.

- Career Transition Programs – Conduct a statewide analysis to identify effective practices for the provision of individualized academic advising, academic enrichment and preparation courses to enhance college readiness, and transition assistance prior to enrollment in college and also the implementation of statewide strategies.
- College and Career Advising – Implement strategies and allocate targeted resources to increase public and private IHE collaboration with MassHire Career Centers and Adult Basic Education/ESOL programs, provide college and career advising, and enhance college entry/re-entry for those who are under/unemployed.
- Establish a High Demand Workforce – Support the establishment or expansion of degree programs at public and private IHEs and expand instructional capacity to close workforce training gaps in high-demand occupations in high-priority industry sectors such as manufacturing, clean technology, healthcare, bioscience, and information technology.
- Expand Industry Credentialing – Identify effective practices and initiate programs at public and private IHEs to expand training and certificate programs that will enable adult students to gain industry credentials, support employment, and provide up-skills in high-demand occupations.

- Provide Credit for Prior Learning – Conduct a statewide analysis to identify effective practices related to awarding college credits to adults possessing work experiences and industry credentials of value including, but not limited to, federal and state licensure/registration, industry certifications, and apprentice cards. Implement strategies to enhance transparency and alignment across public and private IHEs.
- Support International Degree and Credential Recognition – Identify effective practices related to the recognition and acceptance of credentials or degrees for individuals from other countries to enter or return to public and private IHEs and initiate statewide programs that provide tools and professional learning opportunities for college administrators.
- Expand Experiential Learning Opportunities – Implement strategies to enhance collaboration between industry partners and public and private IHEs to increase the availability of paid work-based learning opportunities including apprenticeships, internships, co-ops, clinical programs, practicums, and capstone projects.
- Work and Learn Models – Conduct a statewide analysis to identify effective practices related to the implementation of work and learn models at public and private IHEs such as apprenticeships, learn to earn, and paid half-day/half-college classes and the implementation of statewide strategies.

IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT, ADMISSIONS, AND ENROLLMENT POLICIES

The opportunity – continually review and enhance recruitment efforts, enrollment policies, and admissions practices across all public and private IHEs to further advance equity, access, and representation for historically underserved and underrepresented students. Expand current initiatives to engage multiple types of students and those who support them, share valuable and comprehensive information about higher education programs and opportunities, and enhance the capacity of higher education professionals to successfully implement innovative strategies.

- Promising Recruitment and Admissions Strategies – Initiate programs at public and private IHEs to incentivize the voluntary implementation of 1) equity-centered, creative, and targeted recruitment efforts aimed at attracting a diverse pool of applicants, especially historically underserved and underrepresented students, and 2) holistic admissions review processes that enable admissions officers to consider factors such as cultural competencies, income level, first generation to attend college, neighborhood or community circumstances, disadvantages overcome, and the impact of an applicant’s particular experiences on their academic achievement and on the perspectives that they would bring to the school environment.ⁱ

As described in the [Joint Guidance](#), co-issued by the Attorney General, EOE, DHE, and DESE in October 2023, IHEs may continue to use admissions criteria that look beyond

traditional measures such as grades to more holistic ones that allow for consideration of applicants' life experiences more generally.

- Professional Learning for Admissions Officers – Initiate programs at public and private IHEs to expand professional learning opportunities for admissions officers related to enhancing access and representation for historically underserved and underrepresented students, increasing diversity, and breaking down barriers to higher education.
- Remove Historic Barriers to Admission for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students – Conduct a statewide assessment of existing admissions processes, practices, and criteria (including, but not limited to, legacy preference and binding early decision) to identify those that may serve as barriers for certain student groups.ⁱⁱ Use common metrics to identify the scope, depth, and impact of these practices at public and private IHEs in Massachusetts.
- Implement Innovative Admissions Models to Remove Barriers for Historically Underserved and Underrepresented Students
 1. Direct Admissions – Establish partnerships among public and private IHEs to proactively offer acceptance to students who meet statewide criteria such as cumulative high school GPA, optional SAT and ACT scores, or a high school equivalency credential.ⁱⁱⁱ Identify Gateway Cities to pilot this initiative and scale up effective practices.
 2. Dual Admissions – Establish partnerships among public and private IHEs to offer students who are enrolled in in 2-year institutions the opportunity to be concurrently enrolled in a 4-year institution to which they intend to transfer (these students would be eligible to earn credits and have access to other academic and support services at the 4-year institution prior to transfer). Scale up effective practices and implement statewide strategies.
 3. Percent Plan – Investigate the potential of a guaranteed automatic admission program to 4-year state universities and all University of Massachusetts campuses for students graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school class.
- Transfer Credit Applicability and Mobility – Enhance MassTransfer to support the seamless transfer of college credits among public IHEs, increase alignment of curricula and also degree pathways and programs among participating IHEs, increase the number of participating private IHEs, guarantee admission with junior status for community college students to 4-year institutions (with priority admission to similar majors and local campuses), and enhance DHE support and oversight.^{iv}

IMPROVE EQUITY IN FINANCIAL AID AND ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AND THE INSTITUTIONS THAT SERVE THEM

The opportunity – enhance state support and institutional capacity to enable students and adult learners to pursue multiple postsecondary pathways and successfully achieve their goals without being impeded by financial concerns.^v

- **Student Financial Aid** – Allocate state financial aid to incentivize and facilitate full-time attendance for historically underserved and underrepresented students, increase the proportion of need- versus merit-based grant and scholarship funding at both public and private IHEs, and revise financial aid policies so that state funding is awarded to students attending either public or private IHEs who demonstrate high levels of need.
- **Redesign State Financial Aid** – Reorganize and simplify the provision of different types of current state financial aid; streamline administrative and application processes; and enhance communication and engagement strategies to enable students and adult learners, parents/family members/guardians, educators, community stakeholders, and representatives of public and private IHEs to have consistent access to comprehensive information about financial aid options.
- **Equity Analysis** – Conduct a statewide analysis of the adequacy and equity of state financial aid (with respect to the allocation of both student and institutional aid) to assess the impact of current funding on different groups of historically underserved and underrepresented students and identify the needs that are not being addressed. Assess all types of state funding to implement enhanced and inclusive policies that better address the financial and other needs of historically underserved and underrepresented students attending both public and private IHEs.

INCREASE PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION FOR HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The opportunity – enhance institutional capacity and increase state funding so that 1) students at both public and private IHEs have ongoing and equal access to essential academic and comprehensive, high-quality support services; 2) asset-based, equity-focused, and individualized services are provided to all students and especially historically underserved and underrepresented students; 3) all IHEs establish and maintain welcoming, inclusive, and supportive learning and campus environments that celebrate all types of diversity and lived experiences; and 4) all IHEs create the conditions necessary for student well-being and success.

- **Provision of Comprehensive Support Services** – Initiate programs at public and selected private IHEs, particularly those serving higher proportions of historically underserved and underrepresented students, to 1) incentivize the provision of a comprehensive array

of research- and evidence-based wraparound services to students including proactive, individualized, and asset-based advising and coaching; mental health services; emergency financial aid; and assistance related to other issues including, among others, food and housing insecurity and costs related to transportation and child care; 2) enhance the institutional and organizational capacity of IHEs to provide high-quality services efficiently and effectively and also address the factors that impede student persistence and completion; 3) conduct ongoing campus assessments to identify gaps and determine the impact of services; and 4) enhance data sharing, collaboration, and alignment among state education and other agencies, IHEs, CBOs, and other partners that offer these services.

- Capacity of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators – Increase access to continuous professional learning opportunities for all faculty members, administrators, and staff members at public and private IHEs related to student- and equity-centered, asset-based pedagogy and advising; issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access; and cultural and social competency.
- Capacity of Trustees – Increase access to continuous professional learning opportunities for members of boards of trustees at public IHEs and higher education advisory committees related to DEI issues and increasing access and representation in higher education.^{vi} Share professional learning resources and opportunities with colleagues at private IHEs.
- Career Advising and Employment Support – Conduct a statewide analysis to identify effective practices and new strategies related to providing valuable career readiness, career placement, and support services that will enable students and adult learners to gain employment upon the completion of degrees and credentials at public and private IHEs. Scale up effective practices and implement statewide strategies to enhance alignment and collaboration across the state.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

We must hold ourselves and our partners accountable for this work; as such, we will engage in strategic planning and organizational learning and also continually assess progress to identify and resolve issues that impede our work.

Future implementation and accountability action items are as follows.

- The EOE, DHE, and DESE will submit an implementation plan to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor by January 2025.
- On a quarterly basis starting in December 2024, the EOE will coordinate cross-agency assessment of progress to date and the development of strategies to address barriers to implementation.
- On an annual basis, the EOE will work in collaboration with DHE and DESE to revise the implementation plan as necessary.
- In the fall of 2025, the EOE will report to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor about the first year of implementation of the ACARE recommendations, changes to the implementation plan (as applicable), and challenges that must be addressed to continually advance the work.

CONCLUSION

“A lot of students think that if they have one failure, they’re done – so it’s about trying to get people back and recapture those who think that it’s too late for them, that one mistake or one bad grade is the end of the world. One of the most important things that needs to be highlighted when we’re talking about students is we can’t just think about the ones who are successful now. We have to think about the ones who will be successful down the line.”

– Darie Martinez, ACARE Student Representative, Middlesex Community College

“We cannot expect students to come to us college ready – institutions have to be student ready and we must adapt to meet the needs of the populations that we serve.”

– David Podell, President, Massachusetts Bay Community College

“We have to think about students from an asset-minded perspective. Institutions have deficits that we usually ascribe to students so we must identify what students need to be successful, remedy institutional failures, and create the conditions for them to succeed.”

– Harry Dumay, President, College of Our Lady of the Elms

These recommendations are a starting point. Over the next several months, we will learn more about the impact of the Supreme Court decision on the enrollment of students of color and other historically underserved and underrepresented students at Massachusetts’ institutions of higher education. As such, we will continue to identify gaps in the provision of services and institutional/organizational and systemic barriers to postsecondary attainment and completion.

We are grateful to the ACARE members for their passion and commitment to supporting students, adult learners, families, educators and education professionals, and community members across the state. We have established a robust coalition of partners and allies, and we are excited to build on the momentum that the ACARE initiative has created.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

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APPENDIX B

RESOURCES

[Press Release: Ahead of Supreme Court Decision on Race-Based Admissions, Healey-Driscoll Administration Takes Action to Promote Representation in Education](#)

[Press Release: Healey-Driscoll Administration Releases Joint Statement in Response to Supreme Court Decision on Race-Based Admissions](#)

[Press Release: Governor Healey and Attorney General Campbell Issue Joint Guidance to Affirm and Strengthen Equity Efforts in Higher Education, K-12 Schools](#)

[Overview and Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Supreme Court's Decisions in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina*](#)

[DHE Data Center](#)

[DESE School and District Data](#)

APPENDIX C

ENDNOTES

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