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October 29, 2020

Dr. David Podell
President
Massachusetts Bay Community College
50 Oakland Street
Wellesley Hills, MA 02481

Dear President Podell:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on September 24, 2020, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts Bay Community College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts Bay Community College be accepted;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2021 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. incorporating adjunct faculty into the assessment process;
2. ensuring compliance with federal work study award requirements, and implementing the corrective action plans developed to respond to concerns noted by its auditors;
3. achieving its enrollment goals and maintaining its financial stability;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2025 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2025 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving its hiring goals for full and part-time faculty;
2. achieving more equitable student success rates;
3. achieving its goals related to its five strategic directions.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts Bay Community College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of January 20, 2016 and April 11, 2018 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Massachusetts Bay Community College (MassBay) for its comprehensive, well-written interim report. We understand that MassBay welcomed a new president, David Podell, to the institution in 2016. We are pleased to learn of the efforts to improve communication across the institution, particularly President Podell's regular town hall meetings, investments in communication-related technology, and the addition of a student representative to the President's Council. The Commission concurs with MassBay that it has made "significant progress" in assessing student learning and in increasing its data analysis capacity through "professional development opportunities" for faculty. We also note positively that the College developed a new five-year strategic plan, "The Massachusetts Bay Community College Strategic Plan, 2018-2022: MassBay – A Catalyst for Transformation," through a participatory process that included faculty, staff, and students with "many opportunities for input from stakeholders." After working with external consultants to understand "the viability of existing programs and the value of potential new programs," MassBay launched three new programs in Surgical Technology, Cyber Security, and Liberal Arts with an English concentration. Lastly, the Commission is gratified to learn that MassBay continues to "work to become a more student-centered institution." Progress in this area includes the hiring of a director of retention, expansion of the Office of Counseling Services, and mandatory first-semester advising.

Massachusetts Bay Community College's Reflective Essay on Educational Effectiveness provided an update on the College's progress to "nurture a culture of assessment." We appreciate that MassBay supports faculty "knowledge, involvement, and ownership of programmatic assessment" and, in addition to the professional development opportunities noted above, encourages faculty participation at assessment conferences and hires "assessment fellows." The Commission notes with favor that program learning outcomes are mapped to each program's curriculum and that those outcomes are assessed "at least once every five years" through direct and indirect measures. Areas for improvement are identified and changes made to the curriculum as needed. We note with favor that MassBay created a set of "Graduation Competencies" and is now systematically assessing those competencies. The Commission also appreciates learning that the College's retention rate ranged from 54% to 59% over the past five years and that the retention of first-time, part-time students increased from 44% in the Fall 2014 cohort to 49% in the Fall 2018 cohort. Lastly, we note positively that, using the Voluntary Framework of Accountability metric, Massachusetts Bay Community College's most recent six-year comprehensive student success rate was 68%.

The three items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2021 are related to our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Institutional Resources*, and *Students*.

As noted in MassBay's Data First Form on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, the College currently has 290 adjunct faculty. While the Commission appreciates, as noted above, the progress made by Massachusetts Bay Community College in developing a culture of assessment, there was no mention in the report of the role of adjunct faculty in the assessment process. We understand that engaging adjunct faculty in assessment is a process that requires sustained attention over time, and therefore, we look forward to learning, in the Fall 2021 progress report, of MassBay's progress in engaging adjunct faculty in the assessment process to "ensure[s] that the experiences and data gathered by each group are coordinated, shared, and reviewed collectively for purposes of improving the academic program and services for students" (6.13). Our standard on *Educational Effectiveness* will also inform this section of the report:

Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The Commission understands that Massachusetts Bay Community College's most recent audit identified continued issues related to the administration of its Federal Work Study program that requires at least 7% of the funds received to be used to "compensate students employed in a community service activity." The Fall 2021 progress report will afford MassBay the opportunity to update the Commission on its success in ensuring compliance with federal award requirements, and implementing the corrective action plans it has developed to respond to the concerns noted by its auditors, as guided by our standard on *Institutional Resources*:

All fiscal policies, including those related to budgeting, investments, insurance, risk management, contracts and grants, internal transfers and borrowing, fundraising, and other institutional advancement and development activities, are clearly stated in writing and consistently implemented in compliance with ethical and sound financial practices (7.19).

The institution has in place appropriate internal and external mechanisms to evaluate its financial status including fiscal condition, working capital, capital projects, cash flow requirements, and financial management. The institution uses the results of these activities for improvement and to maintain institutional integrity (7.20).

The Commission acknowledges that MassBay has "restructured its budget" as a result of declining enrollment over the past several years. We appreciate learning from the Data First Forms that the College is projecting a steady enrollment of 830 for FY2020 and FY2021 and that "operating revenue has increased each year for the past three years." We note, however, that the COVID-19 pandemic may have an impact on the College's enrollment goals and financial stability, and therefore ask that the Fall 2021 report give emphasis to these matters. Our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources* are pertinent here:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2025 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Educational Effectiveness; and Planning and Evaluation*.

The Commission is gratified to learn that, between 2017 and 2020, MassBay hired over 15 full-time faculty. We also understand that an early retirement incentive program resulted in the "loss of several experienced faculty members" and, as a result, there are several searches in progress. In addition, according to the Data First Forms, the number of adjunct faculty has increased from 227 in FY2017 to 290 in FY2020. As guided by our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, we look forward to learning, through the Spring 2025 self-study, of the College's success in achieving its hiring goals for full-time and adjunct faculty as evidence that "the composition of the faculty reflects the institution's mission, program, and student body" (6.1) and that "there are an adequate number of faculty ... for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes" (6.2).

As noted above, the Commission is pleased to learn of the progress made by Massachusetts Bay Community College in assessing student learning. We appreciate MassBay's candid assessment that "urgent action" is needed to ensure success for all groups of students, particularly Latinx and Black/African American students. The Spring 2025 self-study will provide the College an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in achieving its goal to "close achievement gaps to ensure that all students achieve their academic goals." Our standard on *Educational Effectiveness* provides this guidance:

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

We understand from the interim report that MassBay identified five strategic directions to guide the College: "(1) improve student outcomes, (2) increase college participation, (3) strengthen workforce partnerships, (4) enhance professional growth of faculty and staff, and (5) optimize resources." The Commission notes positively that work is already underway; MassBay is implementing its plans in these areas. We look forward to being apprised, through the Spring 2025 self-study, of the College's "success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Massachusetts Bay Community College and hopes the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board and the head of the state system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Thomas Peisch and Dr. Carlos E. Santiago. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Mr. Thomas Peisch
Dr. Carlos E. Santiago

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions