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Healey-Driscoll Administration Reports Increased Enrollment in Community Colleges and Four-Year Public Colleges

Historic investments in free community college fueled double digit percentage enrollment increase this year, reversing over a decade of declines

Public four-year colleges see first enrollment increase since 2013

BOSTON – The Healey-Driscoll Administration announced today that preliminary data from this fall shows that enrollment at Massachusetts’ 15 community colleges has risen by 14 percent following the launch of [MassEducate](#), adding 9,482 students for a total of 77,226 students enrolled. MassEducate, signed into law by Governor Maura Healey in the state’s fiscal year 2025 budget, made tuition and fees for community colleges free for all students regardless of age and income level. Enrollment at public four-year colleges in Massachusetts also increased this year for the first time since 2013.

This increased enrollment in higher education will strengthen Massachusetts’ economic competitiveness by training more students with the skills that are most in demand in today’s economy and helping to fill job openings at businesses across the state.

“We’ve seen through MassReconnect, MassEducate and our public higher education system that when college is made accessible and affordable, students are eager to enroll and get the education they deserve,” said **Governor Maura Healey**. “As a result, we’re going to have more students than ever graduating with the skills that are in

demand in today's economy and ready to meet the needs of our employers. We're grateful for the strong partnership of the Legislature and higher education leaders to remind us all why Massachusetts is the best place to live, go to school, work and build a future."

"College is a public good that benefits both the students attending, and members of our communities who rely on educated nurses, teachers, innovators and more," said **Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll**. "This boost in enrollment shows the power of investing in Massachusetts' learners and sets an example of what is possible when we prioritize education."

Today's announcement was made at the Board of Higher Education meeting. This significant increase follows an 8.7 percent enrollment increase last year, driven by Governor Maura Healey's [MassReconnect program](#) that made community college free for students 25 and older last year. The administration and Legislature's historic investments in financial aid have reversed over a decade of declines in community college enrollment and contributed to the first two years of consecutive growth since 2012.

The Department of Higher Education's early enrollment report also shows slight growth in enrollment for Massachusetts' public four-year campuses, marking the segment's first overall increase since fall 2013. Across Massachusetts' nine state universities, undergraduate enrollment has reached 31,860, an increase of 379 students, or 1.2 percent. At the four University of Massachusetts (UMass) undergraduate campuses, where the pandemic had the smallest impact on enrollment among the three segments, undergraduate enrollment is 53,844, a growth of 0.1 percent, compared to fall 2023.

After nearly a decade of declining undergraduate enrollment—initially driven by expected demographic shifts in the state and later worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic—the Massachusetts public higher education system overall is experiencing its second year in a row of enrollment growth.

"I'm proud to see that our efforts to increase access to community college are already seeing fantastic results," said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. "By removing major cost barriers, so many students have shifted their thinking from 'I wish' to 'I will' when it comes to seeking higher education, showing how important it is that we continue to increase access to community college and make investments in public higher education as a whole. The MassEducate program is a win for our students looking to support themselves and their families, a win for our local industries seeking skilled workers, and a win for the future of our Commonwealth."

"The latest enrollment data marks a pivotal moment for higher education in the Commonwealth," said **House Speaker Ronald J. Mariano (D-Quincy)**. "Through our historic investments, in partnership with the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the Senate, we've made higher education more financially accessible, while also ensuring students have the additional supports they need to succeed."

The Healey-Driscoll Administration has made significant investments in financial aid, doubling state spending and adding over \$200 million in two years. A portion of that funding has gone to MassReconnect and MassEducate, making community college tuition and fee free. Students may also qualify for an allowance of up to \$1,200 for books and supplies based on income level. Some students may also be eligible for an additional allowance (up to \$1,200) to help with other costs of attending college. These benefits make Massachusetts' free community college program one of the most comprehensive in the country.

The administration also invested this funding to make public four-year colleges and universities more affordable. Through MASSGrant Plus, families making up to \$85,000 a year before taxes can get the full cost of their tuition and fees covered. It also provides an allowance of up to \$1,200 for books and supplies. Further, families making between \$85,000 and \$100,000 a year before taxes can have their tuition and fees reduced by up to half of out-of-pocket expenses.

“Making college affordable and accessible is central to higher education equity, and we have clearly lifted a barrier for many students who had college dreams but had not been shown an affordable path to achieving them,” said **Education Secretary Dr. Patrick Tutwiler**. “The Biden-Harris Administration stated when the Supreme Court Affirmation Action ruling came out that addressing affordability was an important part of ensuring institutions remained diverse. Massachusetts has met that challenge head-on and made transformational change, opening the door to higher education for thousands more students.”

“I’m grateful to Governor Healey and the Legislature for their historic financial aid investments, which are already showing us how affordability can increase access and drive enrollment,” said **Commissioner of Higher Education Noe Ortega**. “Whether students choose to attend one of our two or four-year campuses, Massachusetts is increasingly lifting barriers to higher education and sending a resounding message that we want all learners across the Commonwealth to enroll at one of our campuses.”

“The Massachusetts Business Roundtable hears from our members all the time about how they have job openings to fill but often struggle to find the skilled and diverse talent they need,” said **JD Chesloff, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable**. “Public four-year colleges and community colleges have a critical role to play in training our next generation of workers, and I’m excited that more students than ever are enrolling in these institutions because of the work of the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the Legislature to lower costs.”

“This enrollment data is a win for our businesses, our economy and our entire state. Massachusetts’ world class institutions of higher learning and highly skilled workforce are essential components of our state’s competitiveness,” said **Brooke Thompson, President and CEO of the Associated Industries of Massachusetts**. “Thanks to the efforts of the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the Legislature to make public

colleges more accessible for students, we'll be better able to meet the needs of businesses across the state.”

This announcement comes on the heels of the administration’s [new report](#) with recommendations that provide Massachusetts colleges and universities with resources to enhance access into the state’s higher education system and provide a high-quality experience to all students regardless of background. The recommendations were crafted with the administration’s [Advisory Council to Advance Representation in Education \(ACARE\)](#), which was established ahead of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on the legality of race-based higher education admissions criteria in June 2023.

Dr. Linda Thompson, chair of the State Universities Council of Presidents, announced at the Board meeting today on behalf of the State University System that:

- Framingham State University experienced an 18% increase in new first year students with 26% of the incoming class identifying as Hispanic and 51% identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).
- At MassArt, 26% of their incoming undergraduates are first generation college students, and this cohort represents students from 27 states and 17 countries.
- At Worcester State University, enrollment increased over last year, and 47% of the incoming class identifies as ALANA (African American, Latino or Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American)/BIPOC, which is the highest in University’s history.
- Mass Maritime welcomed its largest incoming class ever with a 25% increase over last year. They also have the largest incoming class of women and the largest incoming class of students of color.
- At Salem State University, the total enrollment is up for the first time since 2012 with the largest incoming undergraduate class in several years, with 30% of new students identifying as Hispanic.
- Westfield State University saw a nearly 20% increase in new student enrollment, with over 44% of the new students self-identifying as first-generation students.

Dr. Linda Thompson ended her remarks by sharing that “Earlier this month, the Community College and State University Council of Presidents met jointly at Quinsigamond Community College to discuss ways to partner in order to offer students seamless and affordable pathways from a 2-year to a 4-year degree. We talked about establishing system-wide joint admissions agreements, early college admission agreements between the two systems, pathways for community college students to live in state university on-campus housing, and maximizing the positive impact of the free community college initiative. We are committed to working with our community college

partners to create a seamless system of public higher education for the students in the Commonwealth.”

“Higher education is a main driver of equity and opportunity, and it is now more accessible to all Commonwealth residents thanks to robust state investments” said **Senator Jo Comerford, Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Higher Education**. “It’s thrilling to see these investments work so beautifully for Massachusetts students through both MassReconnect and now the MassEducate program. Kudos to the Healey-Driscoll Administration, the Department of Higher Education, and the Legislature for this enduring commitment. I am excited to see how this expanded student assistance will continue to catapult students and our Commonwealth forward, and I’m looking forward to the work still to come.”

“We have seen a remarkable surge in community college enrollment, which is a direct result of our commitment to investing in public higher education,” said **Representative David Rogers, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Higher Education**. “I appreciate the leadership of Speaker Mariano, Chairman Michlewitz, Governor Healey, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega, and their outstanding teams. Every additional student represents a brighter future for our Commonwealth!”

“Our campuses are filled with excitement and activity as we enjoy a second straight year of tremendous enrollment growth,” said **Luis Pedraja, president of Quinsigamond Community College and chair of the Community College Council of Presidents**. “We’re grateful to the legislature and the Healey-Driscoll administration for this incredible investment in our students and are thrilled that the simple message of ‘community college is free’ is resonating with Massachusetts residents. We look forward to seeing what the spring semester will bring.”

[The full Early Enrollment and Student Success report can be found here.](#)

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