

# Caf to Cap and Gown

Evaluating the Impact of Massachusetts' Hunger Free Campus Initiative

Stefano Mancini  
Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow  
February 2024

Abstract: Massachusetts is a model for the nation in expanding SNAP for college students and in designing innovative Hunger-Free Campus approaches. The Hunger-Free Campus Initiative can form part of historic recent investments in public education due to the passage of the Fair Share Amendment and permanent universal K-12 school meals. The small investment of the Hunger-Free Campus Initiative helps students to make fewer tradeoffs between tuition, healthcare, childcare, rent, utilities, and food.

# WHY COLLEGE HUNGER?

- 37% of MA public college students experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days (2019)
  - Disaggregation by race is starker – 52% of Black students have experienced food insecurity
- Negative impacts on
  - Student health
    - Physical health
    - Mental health
    - Diet quality
  - Graduation rate
- Beyond students already in college – what about students who can't afford college in the first place?
  - 2015-2021 – sharpest declines in immediate post-HS college enrollment among Hispanic (18 percentage points) and Black (14 percentage points) MA residents

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, “2019 #RealCollege Survey Results Report for Massachusetts Public Higher Education System” (2019)

Rebecca Hagedorn-Hatfield, “A Decade of College Student Hunger: What We Know and Where We Need to Go,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (2022)

Hildreth Institute, “Seizing the Opportunity: Reversing Enrollment Declines in Higher Education” (2023)

## WHY COLLEGE HUNGER?

- At Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, 60% of students who did not complete their degrees had a GPA of above 2.5; it was overwhelmingly a lack of basic needs assistance that prevented them from graduating (2019)
- Investments in higher education are undermined by students unable to graduate due to lack of access to basic needs assistance
  - Only 22% of low income students in Massachusetts will graduate, compared to 56% of middle/higher income (2022)
- In 2023, Massachusetts became the 8th state to pass universal, permanent school meals
- From K-12, students will have support for two meals a day at school, but once they graduate, they no longer have meals provided
- Investments in universal K-12 school meals are crucial, but that investment will have strongest returns if those students are also supported through college

Matthew Dembicki, "Wraparound Services and Student Success," Community College Daily, American Association of Community Colleges (2019)

Benjamin Forman and Simone Ngongi-Lukula, "Investing in Success: Findings from a Cost-Benefit Analysis of Massachusetts Community Colleges," MassINC (2022)

# MASSACHUSETTS HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

- Despite being the most highly educated state in the country, Massachusetts has not previously prioritized expanding access to higher education
  - MA ranks 37<sup>th</sup> nationally in average grant aid per student and has **cut** financial aid when adjusting for inflation since 2000
  - Massachusetts' higher education grant application system is complex and discourages students from accessing aid they may be eligible for
- Community colleges have the lowest percent of college costs covered by state financial aid (MassGrant)

Hildreth Institute, "Rising Barriers, Shrinking Aid: The State of Financial Aid in Massachusetts" (2023)

# MASSACHUSETTS HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

- Changes under the Healey-Driscoll Administration in FY23 and FY24
  - MassReconnect/MassGrant Plus
    - Free community college for all MA residents over 25 who have not yet received a bachelor's/associate's degree
- Higher education as a tool to discourage outmigration of young people and enhance workforce development to face affordability crisis
  - MA is the only state where the majority of the workforce has a bachelor's degree or higher
  - Number of college educated workers is expected to decline by 200,000 by 2030
- Funding increases in part due to Fair Share Amendment, 2022
  - 4% tax on annual income over \$1m
  - Passed by referendum, earmarked for transportation and public education
- Tuition equity and Massachusetts Application for Student Financial Aid

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, “Fair Share Amendment” (2023)

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, “Higher Education Investments: Supporting Our Economy and Future Generations” (2023)

## COLLEGE STUDENTS AND SNAP

- College students face barriers to SNAP access (“work for food” requirement)
  - Does not preclude the efficacy of SNAP enrollment
- Typically, to be eligible for SNAP, students must attend half-time and meet one of
  - Participation in work-study program
  - Care for young child/recipient of TANF
  - Disability
  - Existing enrollment in SNAP and in SNAP-approved training program
  - Paid work, 20+ hours per week
- MA Department of Transitional Assistance activated option in 2010 to add eligibility for students in state-approved community college programs likely to lead to future employment
  - Exemption introduced in 1990 Mickey Leland Food For Peace Act (7 USC s2015(e)(3)(d))
  - In MA, nearly all community college students are eligible for SNAP

Ashley Burnside, Parker Gilkesson, and Patricia Baker, “Connecting Community College Students to SNAP,” Center for Law and Social Policy/Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (2021)

# THE MA HUNGER-FREE CAMPUS COALITION



- Established in 2019
- Public colleges (29) and minority-serving private institutions (3)
- Partnerships with
  - College access organizations
  - Students and student groups
    - MassPIRG
  - Direct service providers
  - Colleges and universities
  - Food banks
    - Students in need visit agency partners, but agency partners are often far away from colleges
      - College pantries = more space for community members at agencies off-campus
      - New opportunities for colleges to become partner agencies
    - Restrictions on SNAP access – emergency food system is crucial for students



# THE MA HUNGER-FREE CAMPUS INITIATIVE

- 2021 pilot funding
  - \$3.7m in American Rescue Plan Act funding for DHE used for a pilot for Hunger Free Campus funding
  - 30 institutions received funding
  - Average grant of \$178,861 to community colleges and \$71,428 to universities
    - Positive to see equitable investment in historically underfunded community colleges that serve students with highest need
- FY24 budget funding
  - \$1m in FY24 budget for Hunger Free Campus funding



# THE MA HUNGER-FREE CAMPUS INITIATIVE

- Successful project examples
  - Food pantries
  - EBT markets
  - SNAP enrollment
    - Increasing federal funds brought into MA
- Facilitated through strong social policy beyond Hunger-Free Campus – example – SNAP enrollment
- Each university can design initiatives based on their own context
  - New arrivals/international students
  - Students with families/living at home
  - Students experiencing homelessness



## CHALLENGES

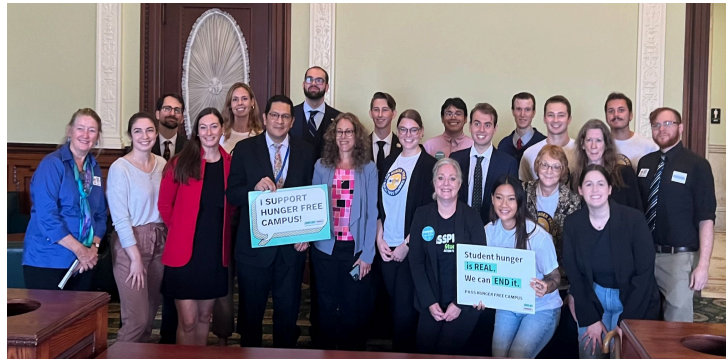
- Nationally, trend towards high market share for just three companies (Aramark, Compass, Sodexo)
  - Replicated in Massachusetts; nearly all institutions use one of the three
  - Fewer opportunities in a less competitive market to negotiate contracts with support for food insecure students
  - Opportunities to build on previous successful work and take advantage of partnerships with strong companies (Holyoke Community College, UMass Lowell EBT market)
- One-year timescale for programs
  - Projects need immediate success, may not find success until grant period is almost over
  - Students/basic needs staff feel uncertainty/frustration with possibility that support is not guaranteed
  - Difficulty of evaluating impacts of one-year funding
  - Difficulty of building institutional knowledge

# OPPORTUNITIES FROM CASE STUDIES

- Cultural foods/pantry expansion
  - University of Massachusetts, Lowell
  - Middlesex Community College
  - Institutions with limited SNAP eligibility and significant international/new American presence
- Expanding service hours
  - Bunker Hill Community College
  - Springfield Technical Community College
  - Institutions with significant portions of non-traditional students, students working full-time
- Expanding availability of hot/instant meals
  - Bunker Hill Community College
  - Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology
  - Salem State University
  - Institutions with significant populations of students where students commute significant distances or live on their own
- EBT Markets
  - University of Massachusetts, Lowell
  - Institutions with significant numbers of students accessing SNAP and institutional capacity to support market, institutions (community colleges) without dining halls
- Meal swipe programs
  - Institutions with amenable meal providers; national partners through Swipe Out Hunger

# RECOMMENDATIONS – MASSACHUSETTS CAMPUSES AND HFCC

- Everyone has a part to play in ending hunger – explore partnerships to take advantage of college dining providers' national networks and scale, local restaurants' desires to stay profitable through remote work
- Follow examples of campuses who have shared food security/basic needs staff or projects through grant and beyond grant
- Follow examples of campuses who have designed solutions around existing state transitional assistance programs
  - Springfield Technical Community College – partnerships with farmers' markets and mobile markets that are eligible for SNAP incentives (Healthy Incentives Program)



# RECOMMENDATIONS – HEALEY/DRISCOLL ADMIN AND DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Expand MassGrant Plus grants to include funds for basic needs assistance
- Encourage campuses to negotiate contracts with food vendors jointly to increase purchasing power and advocate for flexible meal hours and meal swipe swap programs
- Revise RFP for Hunger Free Campus grants so that campuses can design initiatives based on student needs; include needs assessment/consultation with students as part of RFP
- Consider two-year timescales for some Hunger Free Campus grants for longer-term projects
- Allow campuses to combine Hunger Free Campus funds with Supporting Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS) funds through aligning grant periods

