



**Board of Trustees
Executive Committee Meeting
Agenda**

September 30, 2026
3:00 p.m.

Zoom (Meeting ID: 996 9402 9861)

A livestream of the meeting for public viewing will also take place at the following link: <https://www.westfield.ma.edu/live>

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| 1. Call to Order | Board Chair Melissa Alvarado |
| 2. Items for Discussion | Board Chair Melissa Alvarado |
| a. President's Evaluation | |
| b. Renaming of University Hall | |
| 3. Items for Action | Board Chair Melissa Alvarado |
| a. Motion – President's Evaluation | |
| b. Motion – Renaming of University Hall | |
| 4. Adjournment | Board Chair Melissa Alvarado |



**Five-Year Presidential Evaluation
for
President Linda Thompson**
September 23, 2026

Evaluators

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Introduction

This report presents the combined findings of the confidential survey and interview components of a comprehensive five-year evaluation of Dr. Linda Thompson, President of Westfield State University. The evaluation was structured around the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's (formerly the Board of Higher Education, or BHE) four 2025 Strategic Priorities — Student Success and Financial Aid, Economic Mobility, Public Good, and Innovation — the common framework used across the Commonwealth's public higher education system to guide institutional planning and evaluation. Every survey question and interview conversation was built around these four priorities, and participants were asked to address the president's strengths and progress, unfinished or underdeveloped areas, and priorities for what should come next with respect to each.

The evaluation team (see appendix D for professional biographies) was instructed to invite 98 individuals across five constituency groups — students, faculty, staff, administrators and cabinet members, community and state representatives, and board of trustee members — to take part in a confidential survey and a confidential interview between July 30 and September 16, 2026. Twenty-four individuals completed the survey, which paired quantitative ratings on a five-point scale (Not Demonstrated to Exemplary, or N/A) with open-ended questions tied to each strategic priority. Twenty-nine individuals participated in interviews, conducted virtually using three common questions for all groups with a fourth question that was constituency specific.

Westfield State University Presidential Evaluation: Summary of Findings on Six Leadership Criteria

This section summarizes what participants in the five-year presidential evaluation said about the president on six leadership criteria:

- Tone and climate established for the campus community
- Communication with the campus, the board, and external stakeholders
- Effectiveness in developing a leadership team and setting measurable goals (KPIs)
- Articulation of the institutional agenda and priorities consistent with the strategic plan
- Effectiveness as a representative of the university to the broader community
- Effectiveness in advancing the four Board of Higher Education (BHE) strategic priorities, including the equity agenda

The findings draw on two sources. The first is interviews with five groups: board members; faculty; staff, administrators, and cabinet members; students; and community and state officials. The second is a questionnaire completed by 24 respondents from those same groups, which included both rated items and open-ended responses. Part I combines all this input into a single account, without separating responses by group or interview date. Part II summarizes each interview group separately. Names, titles, and positions of the people interviewed are omitted throughout.

Related documents:

- Confidential survey (Appendix A)
- Interview Script (Appendix B)

Executive Summary

This report presents the combined findings from the confidential survey and interviews conducted for the five-year evaluation of the President of Westfield State University, Dr. Linda Thompson. The evaluation was built around the four 2025 Strategic Priorities of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (formerly the Board of Higher Education, or BHE): Student Success and Financial Aid, Economic Mobility, Public Good, and Innovation. It also assessed the president on six leadership criteria:

- the tone and climate she has set for the campus
- her communication with the campus, the board, and external stakeholders
- her development of a leadership team and use of measurable goals
- how well her institutional agenda matches the strategic plan
- her effectiveness as the university's representative to the broader community
- her progress on the BHE priorities, including the equity agenda

Ninety-eight individuals from five groups were invited to take part between July 30 and September 16, 2026. The groups were board members; faculty; staff, administrators, and cabinet members; students; and community and state representatives. Twenty-four completed the survey and twenty-nine were interviewed. The findings below combine all groups and do not identify any participants.

Participants expressed broad and steady confidence in the president's leadership. She arrived at a difficult moment, after several presidents in roughly fifteen years, heavy cabinet turnover, and mistrust among the board, the administration, and the faculty union. Participants in every group credited her with calming the campus, rebuilding trust, and giving the university the continuity it had lacked. They described her as warm, compassionate, approachable, and deeply committed to students. Students, board members, and community leaders all pointed to her visible presence at campus and community events.

Her strongest and most consistently praised area is her work as the university's representative to the community, the region, and the Commonwealth. Participants in every group pointed to her regular meetings with local officials and her board service with regional health and civic organizations. They also cited her legislative testimony, her leadership of the state university presidents' group, and partnerships that have produced concrete results. Examples included a community Martin Luther King Jr. legacy event that funds scholarships, regional convenings of college presidents, and transfer and dual-admission agreements with community colleges.

The survey reinforced this picture. Roughly half to two-thirds of respondents rated every item "Highly Effective" or "Exemplary." Average scores on the five-point scale were:

Strategic priority	Average score
Student Success and Financial Aid	3.89
Public Good	3.83
Economic Mobility	3.78
Innovation	3.69

The item on building relationships with employers, public agencies, and regional leaders drew the largest share of "Exemplary" ratings.

Participants also credited the president with an inclusive 2025–2029 strategic plan that is aligned with the BHE priorities and carries measurable goals throughout. They credited her with a strengthened senior team, especially in finance and advancement, and with major gains in the university's data capacity. Other areas of progress they cited were:

- new career-focused programs in health, business, and graduate study
- a reworked financial aid model
- her personal fundraising for student aid
- new investments in innovation

Alongside this praise, participants in every group gave a consistent message about the next phase of her presidency. Most of it concerned execution, focus, and internal engagement rather than direction:

- **Focus:** board members, staff, and faculty said the stabilizing and planning phase is complete. They want a short, ranked set of funded priorities, clear decisions about what to stop doing, and clearer signals about which of her many ideas will be pursued.
- **Accountability:** cabinet members and faculty asked for clearer roles, closer follow-through on delegated decisions, and measurable goals that drive budgets and decisions rather than simply being reported.
- **Internal communication:** faculty and staff described internal communication as lagging well behind her external communication.
- **Morale and breadth:** faculty described low morale among many colleagues and asked for visible support for disciplines beyond health sciences and business.
- **Presence with students:** students asked to see her in person more often.
- **Student outcomes and equity:** participants urged stronger attention to retention, graduation, and equity outcomes, and asked for clearer evidence of graduates' career success.

Overall, participants described a presidency that has succeeded first as a stabilizing, relationship-building, and student-centered force, and that has earned wide respect on campus, across the region, and in the Commonwealth. The shared expectation is that the energy and vision behind her external standing will now be matched inside the institution by sharper focus, stronger accountability, and disciplined execution.

Significant Themes at a Glance

- **The president is an exceptional ambassador for the university.** Every group, and the survey, named her visibility, relationships, and advocacy with local, regional, and state leaders as her defining strength. Participants linked this strength to enrollment, partnerships, fundraising, and a changed community view of the university.
- **Her tenure has restored stability and trust.** After years of leadership turnover and mistrust, participants credited her with calming the campus. They said her staying power now makes longer-term change possible.
- **She sets a warm, student-centered tone.** Participants in every group described a caring and approachable leader whose commitment to students is visible. Students respond warmly when she is present and want to see her more often.

- **The strategic plan is strong, and the work now is execution.** The 2025–2029 plan, aligned with the BHE priorities and built around measurable goals, was widely praised. Participants want fewer priorities, resources tied to them, and a clear shift from planning to results.
- **Her ideas are valued but need clearer focus.** Participants admire her creativity and ambition. Many said the flow of new ideas, without a clear signal about which will be pursued, confuses the campus and spreads effort too thin.
- **The leadership team needs clearer accountability and stability.** Participants praised recent senior hires. They asked for ranked goals, clearer roles, closer follow-through on delegated decisions, and several years of cabinet continuity.
- **Data capacity has grown, but metrics do not yet drive decisions.** Participants credited major gains in reporting and measurable goals. They want metrics to guide board and cabinet discussions and budget decisions, and to track student-success spending and graduate outcomes.
- **Communication on campus lags her communication off campus.** External communication is a clear strength. Faculty and staff described gaps in explaining decisions, sharing plans, and celebrating successes, made worse by the lack of a communications lead.
- **Faculty want broader support and renewed morale.** Faculty described fatigue and uncertainty among many colleagues. They asked for visible advocacy for teacher education, the arts, the liberal arts, STEM, and criminal justice alongside health sciences and business.
- **Student success and economic mobility are the most urgent next priorities.** Falling retention and graduation rates, rising costs, free community college, and demographic decline led participants to call for stronger student-success systems, strategic use of aid, and evidence of graduates' career outcomes.
- **Innovation is well supported, but its results need to be visible.** Innovation funding, facilities, and new programs were widely recognized. Participants asked for clearer criteria and timing, results that are shared, and an institutional strategy for artificial intelligence.
- **Equity is advanced through access and aid, but outcomes need closer attention.** Participants credited her commitment to first-generation and underserved students. They asked for outcome data broken out by student group, stronger safety nets for students who need more support, and completion of a requested equity audit.

Part 1: Comprehensive Summary of Interview and Survey Data for All Groups

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community

Participants in every group described the president as a warm, caring, and steadying presence. They consistently used words such as "compassionate," "kind," "open," "approachable," and "thoughtful." Her arrival was widely framed against a long stretch of instability, during which the university had several presidents in roughly fifteen years, heavy cabinet turnover, and mistrust among the board, the president's office, and the faculty union. Board members and outside peers credited her with "calming the waters," "building bridges," and stabilizing an institution that had "not always been kind to its presidents." One participant described her early years as "trauma surgery." Several said her staying power is itself an accomplishment that now makes longer-term change possible. Participants also praised her steady handling of current federal pressure on higher education. They said the university has "held its head high" and that its mission has not changed, even where some of the language has had to.

Participants widely admired her rapport with students. Board members, community leaders, and students described her at move-in weekend, athletic events, student government meetings, performances, and lunches in the dining commons. Students buy and wear her signature hat around campus. One student said her commitment to students "radiates" from her. Faculty likewise described a positive personal working relationship with her and appreciated that she spent her first year observing and learning before making major changes.

Beneath this personal regard, faculty and staff described a more complicated campus climate. Faculty spoke of a large "middle group" of colleagues who are tired, feel unappreciated or unseen, and are anxious about the future of smaller programs. They said small but persistent process problems wear down goodwill. Staff and cabinet participants described "innovation fatigue" and a divide between the humanities, arts, and sciences faculty and the professional-studies faculty. They also said change stalls or gets "chipped away" when support is not built ahead of time. Board members acknowledged that a long-standing culture of negativity and resistance to change remains, which they saw as inherited rather than created by the president. They described culture change as a "slow-moving train." Students were overwhelmingly positive about the climate but said they see her less often than before now that her open office hours have ended. Taken together, participants see a leader whose personal tone is a clear asset, and they see room to turn that goodwill into deeper engagement and morale among faculty and staff.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders

Participants in every group rated the president's external communication highly. They described her regular breakfasts and lunches with area mayors, her testimony before the Massachusetts House and Senate, her advocacy in statewide discussions among state university presidents, and her willingness to raise difficult subjects directly. Community participants noted, for example, that she raised the city's lack of any Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance at her first meeting with local leaders. Board members described an open, transparent, and productive relationship. They said she welcomes different ideas, keeps the board focused on next steps, and has been clear about "where we're going versus where we've been." One outside peer had heard she is doing strong work with her board and urged her to keep treating that relationship as a top priority as her tenure matures.



Communication on campus drew more mixed reviews. Several board, staff, and cabinet participants raised the same concern: her steady flow of new ideas can confuse people about direction, because the campus sometimes takes an idea she is exploring as a new institutional commitment. Faculty said the lack of a transparent long-term plan leaves room for "speculation," concern, and fear. They pointed to the innovation fund as an example: it was announced in the early fall and then went quiet until late April, when it opened at a time in the term when few could apply. Faculty and staff also said good news is not shared. Grant recipients are "always a mystery," approved faculty press releases have gone unposted, and a valued weekly campus news digest has lapsed. Several cabinet member departures were never explained to the campus. Staff and cabinet participants said the university has no communications lead, which limits how well its work reaches outside audiences. They also asked for earlier and more consistent communication within the cabinet before decisions are made. Students wanted more two-way contact, and their main advice was that she "listen to what students are saying."

The survey results fit this pattern. The item on fostering trust, transparency, and collaboration with community partners, civic leaders, legislators, alumni, and board members had a mean of 3.86. It was also one of the most divided items in the survey: nearly 42 percent of respondents rated it "Exemplary," while about 21 percent rated it "Not Demonstrated" or "Emerging."

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs)

Participants agreed that the president has rebuilt much of her senior team and that recent hires are strong. They especially praised the new finance and advancement leader. Board members credited her with being persistent, even "relentless," in building a cabinet of her own, and several said she handled a recent senior's departure graciously. Participants also valued the new division of people and culture, the new grants and data and assessment offices, and the enrollment leadership of recent years. Community participants noted with approval that she has put senior administrators in charge of work usually delegated to junior staff, such as town–gown relations and local high school recruitment. Everyone who addressed the question agreed that the cabinet now needs several years of stability to become a cohesive, collaborative team focused on results.

On **leadership** style, faculty, staff, and cabinet participants raised consistent concerns. Faculty said she delegates heavily without checking in closely enough, and that some consequential decisions, including a program closure and a change in department leadership, were described as "delegated" when faculty felt the president should own them. Cabinet participants described a consensus-seeking approach and asked her to set ranked priorities, clarify senior roles, and hold cabinet members accountable for specific results. Faculty and staff also pointed to several unexplained vice-presidential departures and rumors that the cabinet does not work well together as sources of uncertainty. One questionnaire respondent likewise said student success is delegated heavily and asked for the president to be more visibly in charge of that strategy.

On **measurable goals**, participants saw real progress. Board members described a major improvement in data capacity. Reports that once took months, or never arrived, now come regularly, and the 2025–2029 strategic plan includes KPIs in every section for the first time. The president reportedly now questions her cabinet on KPIs at every cabinet meeting, and she recently issued a ranked list of annual priorities. Participants agreed, however, that measurement does not yet drive decisions. Board members want metrics, including leading indicators, to guide every board and cabinet discussion. Cabinet participants

said divisional budgets roll over year to year without being tied to priorities, a gap the accreditor has flagged.

They also said student-success spending lacks outcome data and that no single person owns student success. Faculty noted that the strategic plan's concrete actions cover only its first two years, and that the general education program has not been assessed for its effect on retention. The survey reinforced this. The item on using data and evidence to identify barriers to student success had a mean of 3.53 and the highest share of "N/A" responses, and the item on using technology, data, and new delivery models to reduce barriers for students had the lowest mean in the survey, 3.50. The most common open-ended recommendation for student success was to continue building a data- and KPI-driven approach.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan

Participants credited the president with producing a strong, inclusive strategic plan after earlier "fits and starts." Board members called the 2025–2029 plan thorough and well built, and one called it "our Bible." They noted that it drew wide participation and was reopened for a second round of input when some campus groups felt left out. Staff and cabinet participants noted that the plan is built almost entirely around the four BHE priorities. They contrasted it with earlier plans that "all said exactly the same thing." The board has reorganized its own committees to match the plan. Across groups, participants recognized a clear agenda: career-focused and professional programs, a signature emphasis on health sciences, innovation, access and affordability, and stronger transfer pathways. Students said student success and affordability are "literally all she talks about." Community participants tied the health sciences focus to her own background and to regional workforce needs.

The main concern was focus and follow-through, not direction. Board members said the stabilizing and planning phase is complete and that "it's time to execute." Several urged her to narrow the university's scope and put resources behind a smaller set of core priorities, which they acknowledged means hard choices about what to stop doing. Cabinet participants said that "we get the plane up but don't land the plane," that the university "can't be all things to everyone," and that new ideas "creep in" and risk "hijacking" agreed plans. Questionnaire respondents made the same point: vet fewer ideas, fund them well, and see them through to measurable results. Faculty said the plan lacks a longer-term framework for program priorities, faculty hiring, and resource allocation. They also asked for visible support for disciplines beyond health care and business, including teacher education, criminal justice, the arts, STEM, and the liberal arts. Several questionnaire respondents shared the concern that the university's public identity is narrowing around health sciences. Faculty and staff also said heavy use of the word "innovation" has worn thin because it has not been matched by follow-through, and that the university has no institutional position on artificial intelligence. Students understood her priorities clearly but could not see how they connected to the plan's dated milestones.

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community

This was the area of strongest agreement across every group, and several participants called it her greatest strength. Participants described her as deeply embedded in Westfield, Springfield, Holyoke, and the wider region. They noted her service on the boards of regional health systems and civic organizations, her regular meetings with local officials, and a presence at community events so constant that it has become "a running joke" in town. She chaired the state university presidents' group for two years, and peers said she "did an amazing job." Board members described her as a leading voice among

the state university presidents and a "rising star" with the BHE. Participants credited her with co-founding a Martin Luther King Jr. legacy event with the city that now raises scholarship money for local students, launching a speaker series that draws audiences from neighboring cities, and hosting symposia on public health and on climate and social justice. They also cited her work convening the region's community college and state university presidents to discuss shared regional needs, building transfer and dual-admission partnerships, developing international ties, and asking employers for internships, mentoring, and hiring rather than only money. A faculty member who lives in the city said local attitudes toward the university have changed a great deal. Students called her connections with local leaders "amazing."

The survey confirmed this strength. The item on building meaningful relationships with employers, workforce partners, public agencies, and regional leaders had the highest share of "Exemplary" ratings in the survey (about 46 percent) and a mean of 4.00. The item on articulating the university's role in serving the public good also had a mean of 4.00. Participants raised only two cautions. First, faculty noted that her standing off campus does not always carry over to campus, so that the "two houses" do not yet match. Second, community and board participants warned that as fundraising takes more of her time off campus, she will need to stay present with students and campus, which one outside peer called "her foundation." Several participants also said the university is "the best-kept secret" in the region and that its story needs to be told more widely.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda

Participants reported progress on all four priorities, though unevenly. The survey showed the same broad confidence: priority averages on the five-point scale were 3.89 for Student Success and Financial Aid, 3.83 for Public Good, 3.78 for Economic Mobility, and 3.69 for Innovation. Roughly half to two-thirds of respondents rated every item "Highly Effective" or "Exemplary."

On **student success and financial aid**, participants pointed to a reworked financial aid model and new aid dollars drawn from reserves and investment earnings. They cited her personal fundraising for aid (reportedly more than \$1 million, including an estate gift), a "last-dollar" effort for upper-division students, and a broad-based donor goal of 1,000 donors giving \$1,000 each. They also cited a state success grant, a national review of barriers to student success, new success staff, basic-needs support for students facing food and housing insecurity, and an inclusive program for students with intellectual disabilities. Students gave personal examples of the president steering them toward aid that resolved a balance. The highest-rated survey item concerned this priority, with a mean of 4.10. At the same time, staff, faculty, and some board members raised serious concerns. They cited declining retention and six-year graduation rates, admission standards lowered to the state minimum without matching support, overlapping support programs without evidence that they work, and a discount rate that one participant said roughly doubled without enrolling more students. They also noted that foundation scholarships are awarded too late to help recruitment, graduate students receive no institutional aid, and state internship funds go unclaimed for nursing and teacher-licensure placements. Most staff and cabinet participants named this priority as the most urgent unfinished work.

On **economic mobility**, participants credited the president with building career-focused programs that match regional needs. Examples included the only physician assistant program in the state university system, a new behavioral-health nurse practitioner master's, BSN pathways and dual admission in nursing with a community college partner, an early-college health careers pathway, an MBA with several

concentrations, and graduate social work options. Community participants also cited more students enrolling from local high schools and employer internships and hires. Board members, faculty, and questionnaire respondents agreed that the university must make a stronger case for its value, especially now that community college is free in Massachusetts. They said this means tracking graduates' earnings and career outcomes, extending employer partnerships beyond the health fields, and keeping the breadth of a liberal-arts education while aligning programs with workforce needs.

On **public good**, participants pointed to her community leadership, the MLK legacy event, symposia, a student ambassador program, and her regional convening of college presidents. Board members and faculty described public good as the least developed priority but one gaining deliberate attention. Several faculty saw it as the best fit with the university's mission and the president's strengths. Faculty and community participants encouraged more attention to rural communities to the west and to adult learners.

On **innovation**, participants cited an innovation fund supported by investment earnings, a new innovation center and makerspace, a student-run investment lab, a redesigned first-year seminar, curriculum-redesign grants, and a board retreat on artificial intelligence. They also pointed to planned renovations for a health and science academic building. Students called innovation her strongest area. Faculty, staff, and board members said results have lagged investment. They cited slow and unclear fund rollout, unclear award criteria, an innovation center that has not met its intended purpose, slow uptake among faculty and staff, and no institutional AI strategy. AI was the innovation area questionnaire respondents mentioned most often. One outside peer suggested focusing on the first three priorities rather than treating innovation as a separate goal.

On **equity**, participants credited the president with directing aid toward underserved students and students of color. They also cited serving a population in which about half of new students are first-generation, maintaining the university's inclusive mission under federal pressure, and creating new leadership for belonging and inclusion. Her own story as a first-generation student resonates with many students. Several participants, however, raised equity concerns. They reported that outcome data for some student groups "didn't look good," that the achievement gap may be widening as retention falls, that safety nets for students admitted with lower preparation need strengthening, and that a requested equity audit has not yet been delivered. The departure of a senior diversity, equity, and inclusion leader, which was not explained to campus, was also noted. Participants generally declined to blame the president personally for these trends, but they want disaggregated outcome data and clear follow-through.

Most Significant Themes Across All Groups

- **The president is an exceptional representative of the university to the community.** Every group, and the survey, identified her visibility, relationships, and advocacy with local, regional, and state leaders as her defining strength. Participants tied this directly to enrollment, partnerships, fundraising, and a changed community view of the university.
- **Her tenure has brought stability and trust after years of turnover.** Participants credited her with calming a campus shaped by frequent leadership changes and mistrust. They see her staying power and relationship-building as the foundation that now makes sustained change possible.
- **Her warmth and commitment to students define her tone.** Participants in every group described a caring, approachable, student-centered leader. Students respond warmly when she is present and want to see her more often.

- **The strategic plan is strong, but the work now is execution and focus.** The 2025–2029 plan, aligned with the BHE priorities and carrying KPIs throughout, was widely praised. Participants in nearly every group want fewer priorities, resources tied to them, clear decisions about what to stop doing, and a shift "from planning to execution."
- **Her flow of ideas is valued but needs clearer signals.** Participants admire her creativity and ambition. Many said the number of new ideas, and the lack of a clear signal about which will be pursued, confuses the campus and spreads effort too thin.
- **Delegation needs clearer accountability and a stable cabinet.** Faculty, staff, and cabinet participants asked for clearer roles, ranked goals, closer follow-through on delegated decisions, and visible ownership of key areas such as student success. Board members hope for a multi-year stretch of cabinet stability.
- **Data capacity has grown, but metrics do not yet drive decisions.** Participants credited major gains in reporting and KPIs. They want metrics to guide board and cabinet discussions, budgets to be tied to priorities, and outcomes tracked for student-success spending and graduate careers.
- **Communication on campus lags communication off campus.** External communication is a clear strength. Faculty and staff described gaps in explaining decisions, sharing plans, and celebrating successes, made worse by the lack of a communications lead.
- **Student success and economic mobility are the most urgent next priorities.** Falling retention and graduation rates, rising costs, free community college, and demographic decline led participants in every group to call for stronger student-success systems, strategic use of aid, and evidence of graduates' outcomes.
- **Innovation is well supported, but results must become visible.** Innovation funding, facilities, and new programs were widely recognized. Participants want clearer criteria, better timing, results that are shared, a functioning innovation center, and an institutional AI strategy.
- **Equity is supported through access and aid, but outcomes need closer attention.** Participants credited her commitment to underserved and first-generation students. They asked for disaggregated outcome data, stronger safety nets, and completion of the requested equity audit.

Commendations and Recommendations for the President

Across all five groups and in the survey, participants expressed broad and steady confidence in the president's leadership. They described a president who arrived at a difficult moment, restored stability and trust, and has become one of the most visible and respected leaders in the region and in the state university system. The commendations below reflect the strengths participants cited most often. The recommendations reflect their shared view of what would help her leadership have even more impact in the years ahead. Most recommendations concern execution, focus, and internal engagement rather than her vision or direction.

Commendations

- **She restored stability and trust to the institution.** After years of presidential and cabinet turnover, she calmed the campus, built bridges with unions, volunteer boards, and the community, and gave the university the continuity it needed.
- **She is an outstanding representative of the university in the community and the state.** Through her board service, regular meetings with local officials, legislative testimony, and leadership of the state university presidents' group, she has raised the university's profile and influence. Participants and survey respondents rated this her strongest area.

- **She shows visible, personal commitment to students.** Participants praised her presence at student events, her personal interventions to help students find aid, and her constant focus on retention and affordability.
- **She led a strong, inclusive strategic plan aligned with the BHE priorities.** The 2025–2029 plan drew broad participation, carries KPIs throughout, and has aligned the board, the president, and the cabinet.
- **She built a stronger senior team and better data capacity.** Participants praised her recent hires in finance and advancement, the new grants and data offices, and her regular review of KPIs with the cabinet as meaningful steps toward accountable leadership.
- **She expanded career-focused programs that support economic mobility.** New and growing health, business, and graduate programs, along with nursing dual admission and transfer partnerships with community colleges, were widely cited as matching regional workforce needs.
- **She invested in financial aid and fundraising.** Participants credited her with the reworked aid model, new aid dollars, her personal fundraising, and broad-based donor campaigns, all aimed at making sure students do not leave for financial reasons.
- **She advanced the public good and equity through community partnerships.** The MLK legacy event and its scholarships, regional convenings of college presidents, symposia, basic-needs supports, and an inclusive program for students with intellectual disabilities were cited as clear evidence of her commitment to the region and to underserved students.
- **She built a culture and funding base for innovation.** The innovation fund, new facilities, the student investment lab, the redesigned first-year seminar, and the board's work on AI were recognized as foundations for future growth.

Recommendations

- **Shift decisively from planning to execution.** Participants recommended naming a short, ranked list of annual priorities tied to the strategic plan, funding them, setting timelines and owners, and deciding what the university will stop doing.
- **Test new ideas before sharing them, and signal clearly which will be pursued.** Participants suggested vetting ideas for feasibility first, parking new ideas until current commitments are met, and telling the campus clearly which initiatives are institutional priorities.
- **Strengthen accountability across the leadership team.** Participants recommended clarifying senior roles, holding cabinet members to specific results, following through more closely on delegated decisions, and preserving several years of cabinet stability.
- **Let data and KPIs drive decisions and budgets.** Participants recommended using leading and lagging indicators at every board and cabinet meeting, moving to a budget process tied to priorities, and assessing whether student-success programs and general education work.
- **Take clear ownership of student success and financial aid.** Participants recommended naming one owner for student success, streamlining overlapping support programs, and using foundation scholarships and the discount rate strategically for recruitment. They also recommended strengthening early outreach to students at financial risk and resolving barriers such as unclaimed state internship funds.
- **Improve internal communication and tell the university's story.** Participants recommended hiring a communications lead, explaining major decisions and departures, restoring regular campus news, celebrating faculty, staff, and grant successes, and publishing clear criteria and outcomes for the innovation fund.
- **Build buy-in and visibly support every discipline.** Participants recommended involving faculty, staff, and cabinet earlier through cross-campus working groups, paying close attention to faculty morale,



and advocating visibly for teacher education, the arts, the liberal arts, STEM, and criminal justice alongside health sciences and business.

- **Stay present on campus as external demands grow.** Participants recommended restoring regular open office hours or a similar way for students to reach her, spending time where students gather, and keeping a strong internal team in place as fundraising and campaign travel increase.

Taken together, participants' comments describe a presidency that has succeeded first as a stabilizing, relationship-building, student-centered force, and that has earned wide respect across campus, the region, and the Commonwealth. The foundational work of rebuilding trust, assembling a new team, and producing a strategic plan is largely complete. The shared message across groups is confidence in the president's direction, paired with a clear call for sharper focus, stronger accountability, more consistent communication on campus, and disciplined execution. If the energy and vision that built her external standing are matched by that follow-through inside the institution, participants believe the university is well positioned for its next chapter.

Part 2: Interview and Survey Summaries by Group

Board Members

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community. Board members largely agreed that the president has been a stabilizing, trust-building presence on a campus that had endured years of presidential and cabinet turnover and mistrust among the board, the president's office, and the faculty union. They credited her with "calming the waters," building bridges with the unions, volunteer boards, and the community, and bringing a steady, positive, can-do attitude despite pressure across higher education. Members repeatedly described her rapport with students: she attends athletics, student government, and campus events, and students seek her out. They noted, however, that a long-standing culture of negativity and resistance to change remains, which they saw as inherited rather than created by her. As one member put it, the bridges have been built, and the work now is getting people to keep "showing up to them." One member added that a healthy climate requires every employee, not only students, to feel valued and respected.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders. Board members described the president as open, transparent, and accessible, and described a strong working relationship with the board. She welcomes different ideas and keeps the board moving toward next steps. They praised her communication with legislators, state officials, local government, and the business community, including her testimony before the Massachusetts House and Senate. The most consistent concern, raised independently by at least three members, was that her steady stream of new ideas can confuse the campus, because people sometimes treat an idea she is exploring as a new direction. Members urged her to vet and narrow ideas before sharing them widely and to say clearly which will be pursued. Others asked her to "stay in front of the data" with the board and to publicize the university's work with underserved communities more.

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs). Board members credited the president with persistence in building a cabinet of her own. They praised the current team, especially recent finance hires, and said she handled a recent senior departure graciously. They hope for a two- to three-year stretch without cabinet turnover so the team can become more collaborative. Members agreed that data capacity has improved dramatically. Reports now arrive regularly, the new strategic plan has KPIs in every section for the first time, and the president questions her cabinet on KPIs at every cabinet meeting. Members also agreed that measurement does not yet drive decisions. They want metrics, including leading as well as lagging indicators, to "guide our conversations" and to be reviewed at every board meeting.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan. Board members praised the 2025–2029 strategic plan as thorough and inclusive, noting that it was reopened for a second round of input when some groups felt left out. One called it "our Bible." They said the board, the president, and the cabinet are aligned around the plan, and the board has reorganized its committees to match it. They credited the president with a clear view of enrollment, demographic, and competitive pressures and of where the university can stand out, especially in health programs. The main concern, shared by most members, was that "it's time to execute." Members urged her to narrow the university's scope, put resources behind a smaller set of core priorities, make hard choices about what to stop doing, and connect innovation to measurable results.

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community. This was the area of strongest and most unanimous praise, and one member called it her "superpower." Members described her as deeply embedded in Westfield, Springfield, Western Massachusetts, and the Commonwealth. She serves on local boards, meets regularly with local officials, and includes them in the university's calendar rather than contacting them only when something is needed. Members said her involvement is genuine, and her constant presence is "a running joke" in town. At the state level, they described her as a leading voice among state university presidents and a "rising star" with the BHE. They also said her visibility helps enrollment and gives the university a voice at the table.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda. Board members saw progress on all four priorities, though unevenly. On student success and financial aid, they cited a reworked aid model, substantial new aid dollars, modest fee increases, and enrollment rising while peer institutions are flat or declining. On innovation, they cited the new innovation center and makerspace, a student investment lab, a campus innovation fund, and a board retreat on AI. They described the president as "an absolute idea generator" and asked for a "phase two" on AI. Members described public good as the least developed priority, now advanced through a board retreat with lawmakers, economic development leaders, and other college presidents. Several named economic mobility as the top priority ahead and called for data on graduates' earnings and careers and for outreach to non-traditional and urban students. On equity, members credited her with directing aid to underserved students and students of color. One member said outcome data for some student groups "didn't look good," that safety nets for at-risk students need strengthening, and that a requested equity audit has not yet been delivered. That member was careful not to blame the president personally.

Most Significant Themes: Board Members

- **Board members see her as a stabilizing leader who arrived at the right time.** Members framed her tenure against years of turnover and mistrust, and several called her the right person at the right time.
- **Her external presence is her greatest strength.** Every member who addressed it praised her engagement with local, regional, and state leaders and saw it as genuine and good for enrollment and reputation.
- **She has strong, natural rapport with students.** Members described her as visible, approachable, and a real advocate for students, and saw this as helping retention.
- **The board wants execution rather than more planning.** Members agreed that the stabilizing and planning phases are complete and that the coming years should focus on execution and a narrower set of priorities.
- **Her ideas need focus and clearer signals.** Members valued her creativity but said the flow of new ideas can confuse the campus about direction.
- **KPIs should drive decisions, not just be reported.** Members credited major gains in data and KPIs and now want metrics, including leading indicators, to guide every board and cabinet discussion.
- **Economic mobility and innovation are the top priorities ahead.** Members pointed to graduates' outcomes and AI as the next frontiers and described public good as the least developed priority.
- **The cabinet needs a stable stretch.** Members praised the current team and hope for several years of continuity.
- **Equity outcomes need clearer data and follow-through.** Members recognized increased aid for underserved students, and one pressed for disaggregated data, the pending equity audit, and stronger support for at-risk students.

Faculty

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community. Faculty views on climate were split between personal regard for the president and concern about faculty morale. Several participants described a warm, positive working relationship with her. They said she attends campus performances and events and truly wants the best for the university, and one appreciated that she spent her first year observing before making major changes. Several also described a tired and discouraged faculty, including a large "middle group" who feel unappreciated, unseen, and unheard. Faculty in smaller programs are anxious because they cannot see a long-term plan. Participants said small, persistent process problems wear people down, and that the campus is "not all rowing in the same direction." One participant noted that some on campus resist any success, while stressing that the president is sincerely trying to do right by the institution. Participants advised her to "feel the pulse" of faculty morale more closely and to work on re-energizing the faculty.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders. Faculty agreed that the president communicates very well externally. They described communication on campus as inconsistent. Several said the lack of clear shared goals and a transparent long-term plan leaves "a lot of speculation," which breeds concern. A widely shared example was the innovation fund: announced in the early fall, then silent until late April, when it opened at a time in the term when few faculty could apply. Faculty also said good news goes unshared. Grant winners are a "mystery," approved faculty press releases have not been posted, and a valued weekly news digest has lapsed. Several senior departures were never explained. One participant wished she would push back more on the board's economic-return framing and explain the university's comprehensive public mission. Another felt she does not clearly say that she supports every discipline, even if she does.

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs). This was one of the most critical areas for faculty. Participants praised some leadership decisions, including combining administrative roles and hiring an energetic enrollment leader who brought momentum to recruitment. They urged her to keep that momentum as the position is filled again. At least four of seven participants said she delegates heavily but does not check in closely enough. They cited a program closure and a change in department leadership that were described as delegated, but that faculty saw as presidential decisions. Participants also cited unexplained vice-presidential departures, a long period of austerity under a former finance leader, and rumors of a divided cabinet. On measurable goals, faculty said the strategic plan's concrete actions extend only through its first two years, that general education has not been assessed for its effect on retention, and that retention is falling. One participant urged her to review the leaders she has placed in faculty-facing roles.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan. Faculty agreed that the president clearly champions health care and business, consistent with the strategic plan. The strongest shared concern, voiced by at least five of seven participants, was that this focus is too narrow. They asked for similar advocacy for teacher education, the university's historical root, and for criminal justice, the arts, STEM, and the liberal arts. One participant from a health field warned against depending too heavily on health care in uncertain times. Faculty described the plan as a work in progress that lacks a larger framework for faculty hiring, program priorities, and resource allocation. They said "innovation" is used so often that faculty "roll their eyes," because it is not tied to follow-through. They also said the university has no institutional position on AI. Participants saw multi-year planning as the president's job: "who else would do it?"

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community. Faculty broadly agreed that this is the president's clearest strength. They cited her leadership of the statewide council of state university presidents, her standing with the legislature, her public advocacy for public higher education, and her work with Springfield, Holyoke, and West Springfield. They also cited community events such as the MLK legacy celebration, for which she invited student performers. A participant who lives in the city said local attitudes toward the university have changed a great deal, and that she is known personally and "not just a figurehead." Faculty also credited partnerships with international health care visitors and a state conservation agency, and her service on a national athletics presidents' council. The main qualification was that she is "very well respected outside of our campus" but that this does not always carry over to campus.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda. Faculty gave credit on innovation and public good and raised concerns about student success and economic mobility. They agreed that the innovation grants, funded from investment earnings, are valuable seed money, though their rollout has hurt their credibility. On student success, they mentioned the state's success funding and the national review of barriers to student success, which found that financial aid information needs to be easier to access and use. They were unsure how much of this was the president's own work. On economic mobility, they said the university is not yet making a convincing case for its value, especially now that community college is free, and must show graduates' career earnings. Several saw public good as a strength and the best next priority, and they encouraged more attention to underserved rural communities to the west. On equity, one participant reported that the achievement gap is widening as retention falls, possibly linked to admissions below state standards, but would not blame the president. The unexplained departure of a senior diversity, equity, and inclusion leader was also noted.

Most Significant Themes: Faculty

- **Faculty see her as a highly effective external ambassador.** Nearly every participant pointed to her statewide leadership, legislative standing, and personal presence in the region, and credited her with changing how the community sees the university.
- **She delegates heavily without enough oversight.** Most participants said she delegates widely but does not follow up closely or visibly own major decisions.
- **Her external standing is not matched on campus.** Participants contrasted the respect she enjoys off campus with frustration inside it and want the two to "match."
- **Faculty want support for more than health care and business.** Most participants asked for visible support for teacher education, the arts, the liberal arts, STEM, and criminal justice.
- **Innovation is funded, but follow-through is weak.** Participants valued the innovation grants but said poor timing, little recognition of winners, and overuse of the word have hurt credibility.
- **Faculty morale is low, and many feel unseen.** Participants described an exhausted middle group of faculty who feel unappreciated and uncertain about the future.
- **Long-term plans and measures are missing.** Participants cited a plan that fades after year two, no multi-year hiring or resource framework, no assessment of general education, and no AI strategy.
- **Leadership turnover has created uncertainty.** Unexplained vice-presidential departures and rumors of a divided cabinet were cited as sources of instability.
- **Public good is the best next priority.** Several participants saw it as the best fit with the university's mission and with the president's strengths.

Staff, Administrators, and Cabinet Members

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community. Participants described the president's personal manner warmly. They called her compassionate, a strong relationship builder, and a deep, expansive thinker who is "always reading, always thinking." One called working with her "a privilege and a pleasure," and another said she shows real concern for students, faculty, and staff alike. Several praised her steady leadership under current federal pressure, saying the university "held our head high" and "the mission doesn't change." Their concerns were about the climate for change rather than her personal tone. Several said too little support is built before decisions, so plans "get chipped away" when groups push back. One described "innovation fatigue" and a divide between the humanities, arts, and sciences faculty and the professional-studies faculty that slows change.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders. Participants rated her external communication more highly than her internal communication. They described her as an "external president" who speaks for student needs before the legislature and has improved town–gown relations. One staff participant said the leadership has been "very transparent" about its initiatives. Cabinet participants wanted more consistent communication within the cabinet and earlier notice before decisions so they can help build support. Two gaps came up more than once: the university has no communications lead, so innovative work "can't reach the outside world," and there is no clear information about how innovation funds are awarded or by whom. Participants said the new finance leadership has explained finances to the board much more clearly. They recommended gathering input "from the bottom up," using cross-campus working groups, and scheduling and marketing speaker events so students attend.

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs). This criterion drew the most pointed and consistent concerns, especially from cabinet members. The cabinet has turned over heavily, adding three new vice presidents and a new division of people and culture that houses human resources, compliance, Title IX, and belonging and inclusion. Several participants saw this as a chance to reset and praised the new finance and advancement leaders. One said she deliberately chooses leaders with innovation experience. Others described her as a consensus leader who needs to set priorities and "hold cabinet members accountable," and asked for clearer roles for at least one senior position. Cabinet participants agreed that divisional budgets are "locked in" year to year without discussion of priorities, which the accreditor has flagged. They also said student-success spending lacks outcome data and that no one clearly owns student success. The president had just issued a ranked list of annual priorities for the first time, which participants saw as promising but overdue.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan. Participants credited the president with completing a new strategic plan after "fits and starts." They noted it is built almost entirely around the four BHE priorities, unlike earlier plans that "all said exactly the same thing." The broad agenda of career-focused programs, innovation, and access was widely understood, and no one questioned the direction. Criticism centered on focus and follow-through. Participants said the institution cannot "zero in on five top things," that new ideas "creep in" and threaten to "hijack" agreed plans, and that the university "gets the plane up but doesn't land the plane." Two cabinet participants independently said the university "can't be all things to everyone" and needs a short list of funded annual priorities. Views on the readiness for a capital campaign differed. Some saw groundwork being laid, and one asked, "campaign for what?"

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community. This was consistently a strength, with no dissent. Participants described her convening of the region's community college presidents and a peer state university at a facilitated retreat on Western Massachusetts needs, which produced agreement on shared focus areas. They cited a public health symposium, a planned climate and social justice symposium with a state agency, transfer partnerships with nearby community colleges, and international ties. Participants said she has personally raised or given more than \$1 million for financial aid and constantly talks with others about giving. The main limit they saw was capacity: without a communications lead, the story of this outreach is not being told well.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda. Participants agreed that the strongest progress is on economic mobility. They cited the MBA, a new behavioral-health nurse practitioner master's, the only physician assistant program in the state university system, BSN pathways, early college in health careers, and graduate social work options. They noted the region's need for advanced manufacturing that the university cannot currently meet. On innovation, they credited the redesigned first-year course, curriculum-redesign grants, and the innovation fund, but said the innovation center has not met its purpose, and the fund's criteria are unclear. On public good, they cited the new student ambassador program and the symposia. Student success and financial aid was the priority most often named as needing the most work. Participants cited declining retention and graduation rates, admission standards lowered without matching support, overlapping support programs, and a discount rate that rose from about 14 to 30 percent without enrolling more students. They also cited foundation scholarships awarded too late to aid recruitment and no institutional aid for graduate students. They credited a state success grant, an external review of barriers to student success, new success staff, and a new leader for belonging and inclusion. On equity, participants noted that about half of new first-year students are first-generation and that the university has kept its inclusive mission under federal pressure. They framed equity mainly through access and support for underprepared students.

Most Significant Themes: Staff, Administrators, and Cabinet Members

- **They admire her vision, but the institution struggles to focus.** Participants value her expansive thinking and say it also spreads effort too thin.
- **They want clear priorities and a cabinet held accountable.** Cabinet participants asked for ranked goals, clear roles, and accountability for results, and saw the rebuilt cabinet as the moment to set them.
- **The budget is not tied to the strategic plan.** Participants said budgets roll over year to year without discussion of priorities; a gap the accreditor has flagged.
- **Student success and financial aid are the most urgent unfinished work.** Falling retention, overlapping programs, lowered admission standards, and aid that is not used strategically made this the priority most participants named first.
- **Economic mobility is her clearest programmatic success.** New and expanded career-focused health, business, and graduate programs were praised for matching regional needs.
- **Innovation has support, but results are not yet visible.** Participants credited new courses and grants but said the innovation center and the fund's award process need work.
- **She is a strong regional leader.** Her convening of regional presidents, her legislative advocacy, her partnerships, and her personal fundraising were consistently praised.

- **Support must be built before change is launched.** Participants said initiatives stall when faculty, staff, and cabinet are not involved early. **The university needs a communications lead.** Participants said this gap limits how well the university's work is told inside and outside the campus.

Students

Only two student interviews were conducted, so these findings, while consistent with each other, come from a small sample.

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community. Students described the president's tone as warm and centered on students. One said her commitment "radiates" from her, and the other called her "a well-liked figure on campus." Her signature hat has become a sign of goodwill that students buy and wear. Students said her visible presence matters a great deal. They "absolutely loved" seeing her at move-in weekend, and a lunch in the dining commons led to a moving conversation with students. The main concern was that students feel less connected to her than before. Her open office hours ended about a year ago, her office is on the far side of campus, and students seemed surprised when invited to sit with her at lunch. Students see a positive, caring climate and want more face-to-face contact to sustain it.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders. Students had little direct view of her communication with the board or outside stakeholders. They noted regular campus-wide emails. One described how she personally encouraged a student to contact financial aid about a balance, which was resolved with one call. Students described her as "out there, having those conversations" with donors and community partners. The main concern was two-way communication. One student's top advice was to "listen to what students are saying," noting that someone in her position has few chances to hear students' concerns directly.

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs). Students had very little view of this area. One credited improvements at the university to innovation "that she has added, and that the people she's hired have added." Another described, secondhand, a healthy difference of views within senior leadership, in which the president pushed to raise scholarship money rather than recruit more students who can pay full cost. One student wanted an update on the strategic plan's dated milestones, which suggests progress on the plan is not clearly visible to students.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan. Students clearly understood her top priority: student success, retention, and making sure students can afford to finish their degrees. One said this is "literally all she talks about" and her "top, top, top priority." Students connected her agenda to new academic facilities and to pursuing grants and donations. They linked what they saw to her personal values more than to the formal strategic plan and could not say how her priorities map to specific plan goals.

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community. Students saw the president as an effective, well-connected representative of the university. One described her "amazing connections" with local mayors, government offices, schools, and community programs, and called her "a wealth of information" about community resources. The other said some of her most enjoyable moments seem to come from community and athletic events. Students noted that she actively seeks

donors and is building a program to bring students to meet donors "to tell them our stories." Neither raised any concern in this area.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda. Students were not familiar with the four BHE priorities until reminded, then responded favorably. On student success and financial aid, they saw strong commitment through scholarship fundraising, attention to retention, and personal help with aid, though one noted funds are not always available. On economic mobility, one saw good job outcomes for recent graduates and "a really good pathway" into fields such as nursing. On public good, they cited her community ties. One student named innovation as her strongest area, pointing to the finance lab, the renovated health sciences center, planned building renovations, and strong recent admissions. On equity and access, students stressed her insistence that no student should have to leave for financial reasons. One urged even more focus on financial aid given rising living costs and families in the greater Springfield area who need support.

Most Significant Themes: Students

- **Students see her as deeply committed to student success.** Both students described a president who puts students first, and one said student success is what she "breathes."
- **Students want her to be more visible and accessible.** The main recommendation was to restore open office hours or similar regular contact.
- **When she is present, students respond warmly.** Move-in weekend, dining-hall conversations, and her signature hat show how much her presence means to students.
- **Students credit her with innovation and new facilities.** The finance lab, the health sciences renovation, and planned renovations were cited as visible progress.
- **Affordability is central to her equity agenda.** Students saw fundraising and aid as a clear strength and as the area that most needs continued attention.
- **She is strongly connected in the community.** Students described strong local ties and raised no concerns about how she represents the university.
- **Students have little view of governance and plan progress.** Students knew little about the board, the leadership team, KPIs, or BHE priorities, which suggests these are not widely shared with students.

Community and State Officials

Tone and Climate Established for the Campus Community. Participants agreed that the president has brought stability and warmth to an institution that had seen frequent leadership changes. One noted she is about the fifth president in roughly fifteen years at a campus where presidents "have not always been treated well," and said she has "really stabilized things." Another said she has "coalesced the campus around some major changes." Participants described her as highly visible and approachable with students. One recalled that within weeks of arriving she had a detailed conversation with a student and then introduced that student to the governor. Words such as "warm," "open," "compassionate," and "kind" came up repeatedly, and one called her "a master class at getting along with people." Participants saw the campus climate mostly from the outside, so these views are secondhand.

Communication with the Campus, the Board, and External Stakeholders. Participants saw external communication as a clear strength. She holds regular meetings with area mayors, tells the university's story "in all corners" of the region, and speaks openly about difficult subjects, including race and the



city's lack of an MLK Day observance. Peer presidents described her as a vocal advocate in system-level discussions, especially for changes to state rules on the degrees state universities may offer. One participant had heard she was "doing great work with their board" and urged her to keep board relations a top priority as her presidency matures. No participant could speak directly to her internal communication. The group's advice was to keep up the outreach and broaden the university's message beyond a narrow audience.

Effectiveness in Developing a Leadership Team and Setting Measurable Goals (KPIs). Participants had little visibility into this area, and none spoke to KPIs. One peer said they had "heard no issues" with her senior team and saw her as still shaping it, including a recent advancement hire aimed at building fundraising capacity. That participant stressed that a president heading into a campaign needs a strong internal team to manage the campus while she is away. A municipal participant praised her for assigning senior administrators to work usually given to junior staff, such as town–gown relations and local high school recruitment. One peer noted that economic-mobility outcomes are hard to measure systemwide because institutions receive little data on graduates.

Articulation of Institutional Agenda and Priorities Consistent with the Strategic Plan. Participants described a clear, recognizable agenda, though none cited the strategic plan by name. The recurring theme was building the university into a regional leader in health sciences. They pointed to growth in nursing and physician assistant programs and a planned renovation for a health and science building, which one called "landmark" for the state university system. Other parts of the agenda they recognized were career-focused curriculum reform, including fewer required credits, stronger community college transfer pathways, workforce alignment that anticipates AI, a possible manufacturing and aviation track, and a fundraising campaign now in planning. One said she has "more ideas than sand on a beach," which participants saw as energy and ambition. Peers advised having fallback plans in case capital projects are delayed and being ready to retire programs as new ones are added. Several said unfinished items were held back by state rules and politics, not by any lack of drive on her part.

Effectiveness as a Representative of the University to the Broader Community. This was the group's strongest area of agreement. Participants described her as "dynamic in the community," "engaged and engaging," and "doer." They said the city had long wanted an actively involved president at one of its largest employers. They cited her board service with regional health systems and civic organizations, her two years chairing the state university presidents' group, the MLK legacy event she co-founded with the city, a speaker series that draws audiences from neighboring cities, and partnerships with employers for internships and mentoring. They noted that she asks businesses to get involved, "not just looking for a handout." A community college peer called her "one of our strongest collaborators" and credited her with bringing regional higher-education leaders together. The main caution was that as fundraising takes more of her time off campus, she must stay present with students and campus.

Effectiveness in Advancing the Four BHE Strategic Priorities, Including the Equity Agenda. Participants cited progress on all four priorities. On student success, they cited career-focused curriculum reform, basic-needs support for students facing food and housing insecurity, and an inclusive program for students with intellectual disabilities. On financial aid, they cited the goal of 1,000 donors giving \$1,000 each and an estate gift of more than \$1 million. On economic mobility, they cited nursing dual admission and transfer work with a community college partner, more students enrolling from local high schools, and workforce alignment meant to keep graduates in the region. On public good and innovation, they cited the MLK legacy event, community partnerships, and planning around health care and AI. On equity, participants pointed to the MLK event's scholarships for local students, especially those from

marginalized backgrounds, and said her own story as a first-generation student resonates with the university's many first-generation students. One peer questioned whether innovation should be a separate priority at all. Several said state constraints limit progress, including financial aid the state has not delivered, statutes that bar doctoral degrees, and state land-use rules.

Most Significant Themes: Community and State Officials

- **She is an exceptionally effective and trusted regional representative.** Participants described regular engagement with local leaders, board service, and statewide leadership, and said the community had "craved" this kind of presence.
- **She has stabilized an institution with a history of turnover.** Participants said her staying power shows that "continuity matters" and now makes longer-term change possible.
- **Health sciences is the signature of her agenda.** Participants linked her background to growth in health programs, a planned health and science building, and ties with regional health systems.
- **Her partnerships produce results for economic mobility and equity.** Dual admission, transfer work, local recruitment, and the MLK legacy event and its scholarships were cited as concrete results.
- **Unfinished work is largely due to state constraints.** Participants attributed barriers on doctoral degrees, land use, program approvals, and aid funding to state policy rather than to the president.
- **Participants had limited visibility into internal leadership.** Most saw her from outside the campus, and none addressed KPIs, so internal criteria rest mainly on other groups' evidence.
- **Fundraising is the next phase and will test her campus presence.** Participants saw the advancement hire and campaign planning as the right next step and cautioned her to stay connected to campus.
- **A broader recruitment and service focus will help meet enrollment decline.** Participants suggested serving adult learners, marketing more broadly, and bringing families to campus through events.
- **Board relations deserve continued attention.** One experienced peer urged her not to take board support for granted as her presidency matures.

Part 3: Comprehensive Interview Summary of BHE Strategic Priority Alignment

Summary of Interview Sessions and Themes

This section of the report presents the findings of a comprehensive five-year evaluation of the President of Westfield State University, Dr. Linda Thompson, conducted through interviews. The evaluation is structured around the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's (formerly the Board of Higher Education, or BHE) 2025 Strategic Priorities, the common framework used across the Commonwealth's public higher education system to guide institutional planning and evaluation. Every interview conducted for this evaluation was built around these four priorities, and each participant was asked to address the president's strengths and progress, unfinished or underdeveloped areas, and priorities for what should come next with respect to each. All interviews were conducted virtually.

The four BHE strategic priorities, and their significance to this evaluation, are as follows. Student Success and Financial Aid centers on supporting and advancing student access and success through well-designed, sufficiently funded, and clear and consistent financial aid and student success program funding — a priority made especially significant by the university's large population of first-generation and financially at-risk students. Economic Mobility focuses on increasing the economic mobility benefits of postsecondary participation, or whether a degree meaningfully improves a graduate's earning power, career opportunities, and long-term independence — a question made more urgent by rising public skepticism about the value of a four-year degree and growing competition from tuition-free community college. Public Good centers on improving alignment between public good outcomes and postsecondary higher education opportunities, reflecting the university's broader civic and regional role as an economic engine, workforce partner, and anchor institution whose impact extends well beyond the students it directly enrolls. Innovation involves facilitating and fostering high-impact innovation throughout the public higher education system, capturing the university's capacity to adapt its programs, delivery models, and partnerships so that it remains relevant and responsive amid shifting demographics, workforce needs, and technology. Together, these four priorities framed the questions asked of every participant and the lens through which their responses have been organized below.

Interviews were conducted between July 30 and September 16, 2026, with five constituency groups: board members, community and state officials, faculty and department chairs, staff, administrators, and cabinet members, and students. This report combines what was shared by participants across all five groups into a single, comprehensive narrative. Names, titles, and positions have been omitted throughout, and responses are not separated by constituency group or interview date.

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Across every constituency, the single most consistently cited strength was the president's ability to build and sustain external relationships. Board members, faculty, staff, students, and community and state leaders alike pointed to her visibility with local officials, business leaders, other university presidents, and state legislators, along with her personal presence at campus and community events, as a defining trait that has translated directly into enrollment growth, new partnerships, and expanded funding. Regional business and government leaders specifically credited her with a first-of-its-kind community event tied to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy, dedicated senior-administrator ownership of town-gown relations, and a deliberate push to recruit locally that has meaningfully increased the number of

area high school students choosing to enroll. Peer presidents and municipal leaders also described her as a stabilizing figure at a university that had cycled through several presidents in the years before her arrival, calming a campus previously marked by cabinet turnover and faculty-union mistrust and rebuilding a more cohesive senior team.

Participants across nearly every group also pointed to tangible, personal commitment to student success and financial aid: new “last-dollar” support for upperclassmen, a rising institutional discount rate aimed at affordability, foundation and community fundraising campaigns built around broad-based giving, and direct examples of the president personally connecting individual students with available aid during a shortfall. On economic mobility, respondents cited concrete outcomes — graduates and student-athletes moving into strong jobs in high-demand fields such as nursing, curriculum intentionally aligned to regional job readiness, and employer mentorship, internship, and hiring partnerships with regional businesses and health systems. Public good was tied both to the president’s own community presence and to specific institutional programs, including a program supporting students with disabilities, a dual-admissions partnership with a neighboring community college, and grant-funded work to reduce transfer barriers for students moving between institutions. Innovation was cited widely as well, spanning a new innovation center and internal idea-funding programs, a new finance lab and revamped health sciences facilities, a new nurse-practitioner program and expanded graduate offerings, and healthcare- and technology-focused workforce partnerships with a regional hospital system. Several respondents also noted early, ongoing groundwork on fundraising and advancement infrastructure, including a newly hired advancement leader and a healthcare-focused academic building identified as a signature capital priority.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

The most frequently cited gap, particularly among trustees and faculty, was public good — described as the least developed of the four strategic priorities and only recently receiving sustained, deliberate institutional attention. A closely related and recurring critique, raised independently by board members, faculty, and staff, was a gap between the president’s vision and its execution: an abundance of ideas and delegated initiatives — innovation-grant rollouts, internship funding, program and personnel decisions — that have stalled, gone unexplained, or lost momentum once handed off to others, alongside continued cabinet and staff turnover that several respondents said has undercut consistency. Faculty in particular described an uneven sense of institutional attention, with visible enthusiasm and resources concentrated in health sciences and business while other long-standing programs — education, criminal justice, and the arts — feel comparatively underserved. Staff and cabinet-level respondents pointed to structural rather than motivational barriers: no dedicated communications function to promote the university’s achievements, a budget process that has effectively locked in divisional funding without a genuine strategic conversation, financial aid that is often sequenced too late to help with recruitment, and unclear ownership of innovation funding. Several also noted that institutional data capacity is still maturing — new infrastructure is emerging but using that data consistently to drive decisions and hold leadership accountable remains a work in progress.

Community and state-level respondents offered a distinct but complementary perspective: they were far more likely to attribute unfinished work to constraints outside the president’s control than to her own performance. These included state-level community-college credit and articulation policies limiting enrollment pipelines, state land-use and capital-asset rules that have blocked a proposed housing and hotel development on university-adjacent land, and federal and state financial-aid and loan-eligibility policies that limit what the university itself can do to close affordability gaps. A smaller number of

respondents, including students, said none of the four priorities stood out as clearly underdeveloped, though when pressed pointed tentatively to financial aid and economic mobility as areas warranting continued attention given the rising cost of living.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

The clearest and most widely shared recommendation, echoed across board members, faculty, staff, students, and community and state leaders alike, was to sharpen and sustain focus on student success, financial aid, and economic mobility — treating them as inseparable priorities driven by a large proportion of first-generation students, a shrinking regional pool of college-age applicants, aggressive discounting from competing institutions, free community college, and a sharply rising cost of living. Respondents urged the university to demonstrate concretely how a degree translates into earning power, stable employment, and independence, and several tied this directly to curriculum aligned with regional labor-market needs in healthcare, business, and technology-adjacent fields so that graduates can build careers without leaving the region. A number of board members and community leaders also linked economic mobility and innovation together, arguing that demographic pressure, competition from free community college, and the disruptive effect of artificial intelligence on degree value make these two priorities especially urgent and intertwined going forward.

Several respondents, particularly among faculty and staff, also urged a stronger and more intentional emphasis on public good — leaning into the university’s regional identity and historic mission, using the president’s relationships with legislators and fellow presidents to advocate for fairer tuition, fee, and financial-aid policy, and, as one peer president put it, continuing to “honor” all of the existing priorities rather than adding new ones. Facilities and long-range financial planning were also flagged as overdue, including the cost of underused university-owned property and the need for genuine multi-year strategic and financial planning beyond the first year or two of the current plan. Community and state respondents added that continued investment in fundraising and advancement infrastructure, and continued resource development to support capital priorities such as a healthcare academic building, should remain a priority over the next several years. A smaller number of respondents, mostly among trustees, argued that after several years of planning and stabilization, the coming period should emphasize disciplined execution and follow-through on existing commitments rather than the introduction of new ones.

Comprehensive Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **External relationship-building as the president’s most universally recognized strength:** trustees, faculty, staff, students, and community and state leaders independently named her visibility and personal presence — with local officials, legislators, peer presidents, and the broader community — as her defining trait and a direct driver of enrollment, fundraising, and new partnerships;
- **A stabilizing tenure that rebuilt trust after a turbulent period:** board members, faculty, and external peers alike credited her, arriving after a stretch of high presidential and cabinet turnover and internal mistrust, with calming the campus, rebuilding a cohesive senior team, and providing consistency the university had previously lacked;
- **Genuine, tangible progress on student success and career-aligned programming:** nearly every group cited concrete, personal evidence of investment in affordability and outcomes — from direct financial aid interventions and last-dollar scholarships to new nurse-practitioner, graduate, and dual-admissions programs built around regional workforce needs;

- **Innovation broadly admired but inconsistently coordinated:** new centers, grant programs, facilities, and external partnerships were praised across every constituency, but faculty and staff in particular described this energy as scattered seed funding without a coherent institution-wide strategy, clear ownership, or reliable follow-through;
- **Uneven attention and delegation gaps beneath the president:** a recurring critique — from faculty, staff, and trustees — that programs and initiatives outside her most visible priorities receive comparatively less consistent support, and that decisions delegated to others are not always executed, communicated, or accounted for;
- **External and demographic pressure increasingly framing every priority:** a shrinking pool of college-age students, free community college competition, artificial intelligence reshaping degree value, and state and federal policy constraints — from land-use rules to financial-aid and loan-eligibility changes — were cited across every constituency, including external community and state partners, as forces now shaping how all four strategic priorities must be pursued; and
- **Public good as the least internally developed priority yet among the most externally visible:** trustees and faculty describe it as only recently gaining sustained institutional attention, even as community and government partners point to it as the source of some of the most tangible, well-regarded achievements of her tenure.

Overarching Summary of Interviews

Taken together, the interviews across board members, community and state officials, faculty, staff and cabinet, and students describe a presidency that has succeeded first and most clearly as a stabilizing and relationship-building force — rebuilding trust after a turbulent period and translating personal visibility and external partnerships into tangible gains in enrollment, fundraising, and community standing. Genuine, often personally driven progress on student success, financial aid, and career-aligned innovation is visible and valued across nearly every group, and the university's role as a community and regional anchor was repeatedly cited as a highlight of her tenure. At the same time, a consistent and cross-cutting theme emerges around execution: participants at every level, from trustees to students, want to see the same energy and vision that built these relationships and initiatives matched more reliably by follow-through, communication, and even attention across the full range of academic programs and constituencies. With the foundational work of stabilization and strategic planning largely complete, and with demographic, economic, and policy pressures continuing to intensify, the shared message across constituencies is one of confidence in the president's direction paired with a clear appetite for sharper focus, stronger accountability, and more consistent execution as the university moves into its next chapter.

Board Member Interviews: Theme Summary

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Board members described the president's most consistent strength as deep, sustained engagement with the community and external stakeholders: visibility with local officials, business leaders, other university presidents, and state legislators, paired with a personal presence at campus and community events that several trustees called her defining strength. Closely related was a strong narrative of stabilization: after a stretch of high presidential and cabinet turnover, faculty-union mistrust, and one presidency marked by open conflict, the president was widely credited with calming the campus, rebuilding trust, and assembling a more cohesive senior team. Trustees also pointed to the recent rollout of a broadly developed five-year strategic plan, the first to embed measurable KPIs throughout, as a major

achievement, along with enrollment growth at a time when comparable institutions are flat or declining, expanded financial aid targeted at underserved and first-generation students, and visible investment in innovation, including a new innovation center, internal idea-funding programs, and a full board retreat devoted to artificial intelligence and its implications for higher education.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

“Public good” was repeatedly named as the least developed of the four priorities, only recently receiving sustained board attention through new convenings with legislators and other regional college presidents. Several trustees pointed to long-standing weaknesses in institutional data, particularly the ability to track graduates’ post-completion outcomes and equity metrics; while new data infrastructure is now emerging, respondents said the harder work of consistently using that data to drive decisions and hold the cabinet accountable to specific KPIs is still in progress. Continued cabinet and staff turnover were cited as an unresolved source of instability. Others pointed to deferred facility needs (including a dormitory sitting offline), a need for stronger long-range financial planning rather than only short-term budget management, and a board governance structure still carrying too much low-level, operational decision-making (routine purchase approvals, all-day meetings dominated by static reporting) that could be delegated to free the board for higher-level strategic oversight. A few also raised the concern that because the president generates so many ideas, campus constituents sometimes struggle to tell which are firm direction and which are still being tested, arguing for tighter vetting and prioritization before new concepts are rolled out broadly.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

Most board members pointed to innovation and economic mobility/student success as intertwined top priorities, driven by the same set of external pressures: a shrinking pool of college-age students, free community college competing directly for the same population, and artificial intelligence reshaping which degrees and skills hold value in the job market. Several trustees explicitly framed the value of a Westfield State degree in terms of what it does for a graduate’s earning power and independence. Arguing the university must be able to demonstrate that return to increasingly skeptical families. A smaller number emphasized execution and focus over new priorities altogether — arguing that after years of planning and stabilization, the coming period should be about disciplined follow-through on commitments already made rather than adding new ones.

Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **Stabilizing bridgebuilder:** a narrative frames most of the five-year period as recovery from an earlier stretch of turmoil, with trust rebuilt among the faculty union, the community, and the board itself before the university could turn fully to strategy;
- **External relationship-building:** the single most consistently cited strength across the entire board, credited not just as a personal skill but as a direct driver of enrollment and resource gains;
- **Data-informed governance still maturing:** the university is moving toward data-informed governance, but the harder discipline of using that data to make and enforce decisions, and of holding the cabinet accountable to specific KPIs on a regular cadence, remains a work in progress rather than an accomplished fact;
- **A double-edged strength:** the president’s abundance of ideas is genuinely valued as vision and creativity but also cited as the institution’s biggest coordination risk, since new ideas can arrive faster than the campus can vet, resource, and finish the ones already underway; and

- **External pressure as the dominant lens:** demographic and economic pressure on higher education broadly — a shrinking pool of college-age students, free community college competition, and the disruptive effect of artificial intelligence on career and degree value — has become the dominant lens through which trustees judge every one of the four strategic priorities, reframing even established strengths like innovation and community engagement as urgent necessities rather than optional enhancements.

Question 4: Board’s Guidance on Expectations for the Coming Year

Unlike some of the other interview groups, every board member was asked the identical closing question — what guidance they would offer the president about the board’s expectations for the coming year regarding the four strategic priorities — so there is a single combined group here rather than multiple variants.

The most consistent message was a call to shift from planning into execution: trustees described the last several years as having done the necessary groundwork — rebuilding trust, completing a comprehensive strategic plan, and standing up better data capacity — and expect the coming year to focus on translating that plan into a small number of tracked, resourced priorities rather than layering on new initiatives. Tied to this was a push for more disciplined use of metrics: moving from annual, backward-looking reporting toward regularly reviewed leading and lagging indicators that actually drive board and cabinet conversations, rather than serving as an afterthought.

A second theme centered on streamlining board governance itself — reducing the number of committees, restructuring meeting time to spend less of it being presented to and more of it working through strategic decisions, and moving routine, low-dollar operational approvals off the board’s plate so it can concentrate on financial sustainability, risk oversight, and progress against the strategic plan.

A third theme was long-range financial discipline: several trustees want multi-year financial planning that ties enrollment projections, fee assumptions, and reserve or endowment use together, rather than a short-term, annual view, combined with continued conservative stewardship of the university’s limited fee-setting authority.

A number of board members also framed the ultimate test of all four priorities in terms of what happens to students after they leave — securing employment in their field, earning a competitive wage, and being prepared to live independently — and expect the president and cabinet to measure and report against that outcome specifically. Finally, several combined this call for accountability with an explicit offer of support: encouraging the president to be bold in making the case for new investment, to build broader campus buy-in before rolling out new ideas and reaffirming that the board sees its role as a partner in the work, not solely an evaluator of it.

Summary: Significant Themes for Question 4

- **From planning to execution:** a clear pivot point, with the strategic-planning and trust-building phase considered largely complete and disciplined, visible follow-through expected in its place;
- **Governance modernization:** a push to reallocate the board’s own structure and meeting time away from routine approvals and toward strategic oversight, treating this as a change the board itself must make, not only something it expects of the president;
- **Long-range financial discipline:** a demand that extends beyond the annual budget cycle into genuine multi-year planning tying together enrollment, fee assumptions, and reserve use;

- **Outcome partnership stance:** a commitment running through nearly every response, framing the board's expectations not purely as oversight or evaluation, but as a shared commitment to support the president in being bolder and more resourced in pursuing the university's priorities.
- **e-based definition of success:** a standard that measures the four priorities against tangible post-graduation results for students — employment, wages, and independence — rather than activity or effort alone; and

Community and State Leader Interviews: Theme Summary

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Participants consistently described the president as highly visible and personally engaged across the community, not just on campus. Several pointed to a signature public event she started several years ago honoring the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr., which draws several hundred attendees annually, has grown each year, and has brought neighboring cities' leadership into a shared recognition program with the university. Others cited her monthly, informal meetings with leaders of neighboring communities, her seats on regional health-system and civic boards, and her decision — described as a first for the institution — to dedicate a senior staff member specifically to town-and-gown relations. Participants also credited her with personally directing enrollment staff to recruit at local high schools rather than leaving that work informal, which multiple participants tied to a large, historically unusual jump in local students matriculating to the university.

On student success and financial aid, participants cited concrete programs rather than general praise: a support program addressing food and housing insecurity, a state-partnered inclusive program supporting students with special needs, and a fundraising push aimed at building broad-based small-dollar giving specifically for financial aid. Several described curriculum changes driven by faculty but shaped around what employers actually need, and cited direct hiring and internship relationships between local employers and the university's business programs as evidence those changes are translating into jobs.

On innovation and economic mobility, the clearest and most repeated theme was a deliberate, personal focus on health care — an area participants tied directly to the president's own professional background. Participants described her pushing to expand health-sciences programs, engaging the region's largest health-care employer as a partner, sitting on that system's board and a local hospital board, and advocating to change state law so the university could offer advanced nursing credentials it is currently barred from offering. Multiple participants also pointed to new transfer and dual-admission partnerships with a regional community college — including a grant-funded effort to align curriculum so associate degrees transfer in at junior standing — as evidence of a genuine regional pipeline strategy rather than a one-off initiative.

Several participants also framed her tenure itself as a strength: after a period of real instability and turnover — both at this university and, participants noted, across public higher education generally — her reaching the five-year mark was seen as evidence of stability and follow-through. More than one participant connected her personal story and background to her ability to relate to a largely regional, often first-generation student population, describing that connection as a genuine strength rather than a talking point.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

The unfinished items participants raised were, almost without exception, attributed to constraints outside the president's direct control rather than to her leadership. The most frequently cited example was state-level policy: a state statute currently prevents Massachusetts state universities from offering certain advanced nursing credentials, which participants said the president is actively lobbying to change; state capital-asset rules were also described as complicating specific facilities and property plans, including a stalled boutique-hotel concept and questions about how a large parcel of university-connected land could be used. Several participants similarly pointed to a proposed technical/manufacturing program track that has stalled less because of institutional will and more because of state-level approval processes and the need to coordinate with neighboring two-year institutions, so programs do not overlap.

Financial capacity was another recurring theme: participants noted that state financial aid funding has not always matched what was promised, that a senior advancement/fundraising hire is still new, and that a major capital project — a health-sciences academic building — remains in the early, resource-development stage rather than complete. A couple of participants also noted that the university does not yet track what happens to graduates after they leave the region, which makes it difficult for anyone, including the president, to fully demonstrate progress on economic mobility.

A smaller set of more specific gaps came up as well: ongoing work to reduce the overall credit load required for a degree, continued need to expand internship and paid work-experience opportunities, and a comparative gap in dedicated wraparound support for adult and non-traditional learners — such as on-campus childcare, a food pantry, or a one-stop service center — relative to what a partner institution serving more adult students has built. One participant offered a candid, sector-wide observation: these priorities are, by nature, never fully finished, and much of what looks unfinished reflects a broader lack of political will and follow-through at the state level rather than a gap specific to this president or this university.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

The strongest area of convergence was health care: participants repeatedly said the president should continue building out the university's health-sciences programs and facilities, continue pursuing the state policy change needed to offer advanced nursing credentials, and keep deepening ties to the region's health-care employers, describing this as both a genuine institutional strength and a real regional workforce need. Closely related, several participants emphasized economic mobility specifically defined as helping students find good-paying, livable-wage work without having to leave the region — continuing to align curriculum and employer partnerships (including for roles tied to newer technology such as AI) so that a degree translates into a job close to home.

Participants also encouraged continuing and formalizing transfer and dual-admission partnerships with regional two-year colleges, framing this to extend the university's reach to a broader, often more economically vulnerable population and to build a stronger regional talent pipeline overall. One participant offered a notable counterpoint on innovation specifically: rather than treating innovation as a priority in its own right, this participant argued the university should simply focus on executing student success, financial aid, and public good exceptionally well for every student, and should direct collective energy toward pressing the state to follow through on its own funding commitments — arguing that doing the fundamentals well is itself the innovation regional public universities are best positioned to deliver. A related note of caution came from participants who felt the university's traditional strengths

— preparing teachers, public-safety professionals, and health-care workers — are a better foundation to build on than chasing technology-sector programs that may not fit the institution's identity or resources.

Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **Health care as a defining, personally driven strategy.** More than any other single topic, participants pointed to a deliberate, sustained push into health-sciences programs, facilities, employer partnerships, and state advocacy — tied directly to the president's own professional background — as both a current strength and the clear direction for what comes next.
- **Visible, hands-on regional presence.** Participants described a level of personal engagement with neighboring communities, civic leaders, and regional institutions that they said was new for this university — recurring events, regular informal meetings with area leaders, and a first-ever staff role dedicated to community relations.
- **Real partnerships with regional two-year colleges.** Dual-admission programs, transfer-credit alignment, and grant-funded work to reduce transfer barriers came up repeatedly as concrete, still-growing evidence of a genuine regional education pipeline rather than a one-off initiative.
- **Most unfinished work traces back to the state, not the institution.** Participants were notably consistent in attributing gaps — restrictive program statutes, capital-asset rules, uneven financial aid funding, slow program-approval processes — to constraints outside the president's control rather than to her leadership.
- **Financial and advancement capacity is still being built.** A recent senior fundraising hire, an early-stage major capital project, and the broader work of expanding donor culture beyond traditional scholarship giving were all described as underway but not yet mature.
- **Economic mobility, defined regionally, is the clear next priority.** Nearly every participant tied “what's next” back to helping students find good-paying work without leaving the region — whether through health care, employer partnerships, or community-college pipelines.
- **A minority but notable view: innovation isn't a separate priority.** One perspective offered a real counterpoint to the consensus — that excelling at the fundamentals, and pushing the state to fund them properly, matters more than pursuing innovation as its own initiative.

Question 4: Advice for Strengthening Community and Regional Relationships

Asked what advice they would offer the president for strengthening community and regional relationships over the coming year, participants most often said: keep doing what she is doing, and do not let up. More than one participant framed this explicitly as advice to stay engaged and visible even as fundraising and other demands pull time away from campus and the community, noting that this kind of role always carries the risk of drifting away from the relationships that matter most. Several participants emphasized that presence and continuity are themselves what the community has been hungry for, and that the president should be careful to protect time for both campus connection and regional engagement rather than letting one crowd out the other.

The second theme was about who the university's outreach and marketing actually reaches. More than one participant said the institution, like higher education generally, tends to focus its message on a narrow slice of the population and, in doing so, risks alienating or simply missing everyone else — which they linked directly to broader enrollment pressure. Their advice was to widen the message to include the whole community, not just the traditional college-going population, while acknowledging that doing so is a genuine balancing act given the many audiences — state government among them — a public university president has to answer to.

A third theme focused specifically on reaching adult and non-traditional learners, with one participant pointing to a comparison institution's wraparound supports — an adult learning center, on-campus childcare, a food pantry — as a model for how the university could better serve a population that, across the region, is already a large and growing share of college students. Relatedly, participants encouraged making campus facilities and events more physically present in community life — for example, hosting youth sports tournaments and family-oriented events on campus — as a low-cost way to get people who do not otherwise have a reason to visit onto campus and comfortable with it.

Finally, several participants advised continuing to build formal, ongoing partnerships with peer institutions and regional leaders rather than treating regional relationship-building as occasional outreach: proactively telling the university's story so it stops being described, as more than one participant put it, as a “best-kept secret”; continuing joint programming and cross-visits with other regional colleges to help place students; and continuing to actively manage and nurture the relationship with the university's own governing board, since participants noted that a board's relationship to a president naturally shifts over time from initial support toward ongoing performance expectations.

Summary: Significant Themes for Question 4

- **Sustain the pace — don't let up.** The most repeated advice was simply to continue the visible, personal engagement already underway, and to actively protect time for it as other demands, particularly fundraising, compete for attention.
- **Widen the message beyond a narrow audience.** Participants want marketing and outreach to reach the whole community, not a small target slice, tying this directly to concerns about enrollment.
- **Build out support for adult and non-traditional learners.** Participants pointed to concrete, comparison-backed ideas — wraparound services, on-campus supports — to reach a growing student population the university does not yet fully serve.
- **Bring the community physically onto campus.** Suggestions like hosting community and youth sporting events were offered as simple, near-term ways to build familiarity and comfort with the campus among people who otherwise have no reason to visit.
- **Keep telling the story and keep partnering regionally.** Participants want proactive, ongoing communication about what the university does and why, paired with continued formal partnerships with peer institutions and consistent attention to the go

Staff, Administrator, and Cabinet Interviews: Theme Summary

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Participants agreed the president's central strength is her capacity to generate ideas and build relationships — described repeatedly as a genuine thinker and scholar who connects personally with people and shows real concern for students, faculty, and staff. Concrete evidence of progress was cited across several areas: successful stewardship of a five-year strategic plan built directly around the four BHE priorities after early setbacks; substantial personal and institutional fundraising for financial aid, including new “last-dollar” support for upperclassmen and a rising institutional discount rate aimed at affordability; and a widening slate of career-aligned academic programs — a new nurse practitioner program, expanded MBA concentrations, and health-career pathways that begin in high school and run through a bachelor's and now a master's degree. Multiple respondents pointed to innovation-focused achievements, including a new Innovation Center, funding for departments to redesign their curricula over the summer, an interdisciplinary first-year course model, and multi-institution regional convenings



the president organized with other area college and community-college leaders. Several also noted the recent creation of dedicated grants and data-assessment functions, plus new data infrastructure developed with an outside consulting partner that is beginning to give the university reliable baseline information for decision-making, along with new hires and offices focused on belonging, inclusion, and student retention.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

The most frequently cited gap was the absence of a dedicated communications function to promote the university's innovation work and other achievements to the outside world. Several respondents said fundraising and advancement infrastructure is still maturing, with new leadership only recently hired and a capital campaign not yet ready to launch. On student success, respondents described support resources spread across multiple overlapping programs with no clear single owner — and cautioned that available data actually showed students enrolled in some of these support programs retaining at lower rates than those who were not, raising real questions about their effectiveness. Financial aid distribution was flagged as poorly sequenced, with foundation scholarships often awarded only after a student's aid package is already finalized, limiting their usefulness for recruiting new students, and a past decision to sharply raise the institutional discount rate was said to have produced no measurable gain in enrollment. Innovation funding was described as lacking clear criteria or a clear decisionmaker for who receives it, and respondents noted a divide between departments that can readily demonstrate progress (accredited, professional, and science fields) and those slower to adapt curricula and enrollment (humanities and some arts and sciences fields). The budget process was repeatedly named as the most significant structural barrier: divisional budgets have been effectively locked in year over year without a genuine conversation about strategic priorities, a gap also flagged in the institution's own accreditation reviews. A few respondents also pointed to admissions standards having been lowered substantially in past years, effectively to the state minimum, without a corresponding plan to support the resulting less-prepared student population — a shift they linked to declining retention and six-year graduation rates — as well as the absence of an engineering or advanced-manufacturing program despite regional workforce demand.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

The clear consensus was that student success and financial aid should be the top priority going forward, driven by a high proportion of first-generation students (roughly half of the most recent incoming class) who often lack family experience navigating college, a shrinking regional pool of college-age students, and increasingly aggressive discounting by private-college competitors. Several respondents treated student success and economic mobility as essentially inseparable, noting the university's largest majors — criminal justice, education, and health-related fields — already serve both goals simultaneously. Specific recommendations included using state student-success funding more strategically to intervene with at-risk students before they consider leaving, spending foundation financial aid dollars more strategically to help recruit new students rather than only supplementing aid for students already enrolled, and expanding financial aid to graduate students, particularly in professional programs newly affected by federal loan-eligibility changes. A recurring, broader theme was the need for sharper institutional focus generally — narrowing the number of concurrent priorities, pairing that focus with a budget process that actually funds them — and, in a few responses, growing fully online program offerings and international partnerships to widen the pool of prospective students.

Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **Vision and relationship-building as the defining strength, with a follow-through gap:** the president is consistently described as a compassionate, idea-generating connector, yet several participants said that abundance of ideas outpaces the institution's capacity to execute and communicate them, most visibly in the absence of a dedicated communications function;
- **Real but recent progress on data-driven decision-making:** new grant, data-assessment, and external-consultant work is beginning to establish baseline data the institution previously lacked, but participants said this has not yet translated into resourcing decisions or clear ownership, particularly for student-success programming;
- **Student success and financial aid as the connective tissue across nearly every response:** whether framed as retention, affordability, or economic mobility, participants repeatedly returned to the university's large first-generation population and shrinking regional applicant pool as the forces that should drive institutional priority-setting;
- **Structural, not motivational, barriers:** a repeated framing that the biggest obstacles are not a lack of good ideas but an unaligned budget process, unclear ownership of innovation funding, and admissions decisions made without a matching plan to support the students they bring in; and
- **New career-aligned academic programming as a genuine strength:** participants across roles pointed independently to new health-related, graduate, and professional-studies programs designed around regional workforce needs as some of the clearest evidence of forward movement on economic mobility and innovation together.

Question 4: Advice for the President

This section combines three roles, each of which was asked a different version of the closing question, so the responses are summarized here by the question actually asked rather than blended into one.

Cabinet-level respondents were asked what support, clarity, or alignment the president could offer that would help the cabinet advance the four priorities. Responses centered on a call for more consistent, disciplined priority-setting: a short, explicit list of the handful of goals the cabinet is actually resourced and expected to deliver on in a given year, paired with real accountability for holding that list once set, rather than allowing new ideas to be absorbed mid-stream and dilute focus. Several also wanted the president to build broader buy-in and constituency support in advance of decisions — bringing the right stakeholders into the room early, rather than communicating a decision after the fact and then managing the pushback — and to bring more clarity to certain role definitions within the cabinet so that responsibility and voice are unambiguous.

Dean-level respondents were asked what support, clarity, or alignment would be most helpful to deans specifically. This response focused narrowly on financial support for graduate students, who are increasingly priced out of certain programs — a flagship health-professional graduate program in particular — by recent federal changes to loan eligibility and limits, pushing them toward higher-cost private borrowing; the guidance was for the institution to begin planning now for how to close that emerging affordability gap.

Staff and administrator respondents were asked what advice they would offer the president about including staff and administrators in advancing the four priorities. The guidance centered on inclusion and transparency: actively soliciting input from staff and administrators, not only cabinet, on strategic direction; continuing to share goals, priorities, and progress broadly so staff understand how their work connects to the larger strategy; and sustaining what was described as already fairly strong

communication practice from current leadership, so staff feel like part of the effort rather than only recipients of top-down direction.

Summary: Significant Themes for Question 4

- **A call for disciplined, resourced prioritization:** cabinet-level respondents most wanted a short, explicit list of yearly priorities that the president holds firm once set, rather than allowing new ideas to be absorbed mid-stream and dilute focus and resources;
- **Building buy-in and alignment before decisions land:** multiple cabinet respondents wanted the president to bring the right stakeholders into the room earlier in the decision process, so initiatives arrive with constituency support already in place rather than requiring damage control afterward;
- **Sharper role clarity within leadership:** respondents pointed to lingering ambiguity in how certain cabinet-level roles are defined and expected to operate, arguing that clearer expectations would make it easier to hold people accountable for results;
- **Closing an emerging affordability gap for graduate students:** at the dean level, the specific ask was for proactive planning to offset new federal restrictions on loan access for professional graduate programs, which are pushing students toward higher-cost private borrowing; and
- **Broader transparency and bottom-up input beyond the cabinet:** staff and administrators asked for continued and expanded communication about institutional goals and priorities, paired with genuine channels for their own expertise and perspective to inform strategy, so they experience the work as a shared effort rather than direction handed

Faculty Interviews: Theme Summary

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Participants most frequently praised the president's investment in innovation grants — internal seed funding that gives faculty resources and creative latitude to develop new programming, workforce-preparation efforts, and ways to serve students — as a hallmark of her tenure, along with sustained support for the university's health-related programs, including nursing, health science, and a nurse-practitioner program. Several participants also credited her strong external orientation: her visibility and personal presence in the city of Westfield and surrounding communities, her role leading the Commonwealth Council of Presidents, her national involvement with NCAA Division III athletics leadership, and her general facility for building partnerships — with a state conservation agency, a healthcare partner overseas, and a national student-success initiative with Georgia State — that have translated into new funding, programming, and visibility for the university. Multiple respondents noted she deliberately spent her early tenure observing and building relationships before making major changes, which was seen as a thoughtful, trust-building approach after a period of prior administrative turnover. A few also pointed to concrete gains in student success and financial aid, including new state “success money” funding targeted at first-time and at-risk students, and progress combining enrollment-related administrative positions to bring more focus to recruitment.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

The most frequently cited gap was an imbalance in institutional attention: participants said the president's visible enthusiasm and connections center heavily on health sciences and business, leaving other historically important programs — education, criminal justice, the arts, and other regional strengths — feeling comparatively underserved and less publicly championed, especially given the Board



of Trustees' own business-oriented lens. Several described a persistent disconnect between the university's public-facing narrative of innovation and cohesion and the lived, on-the-ground experience: innovation funds have been distributed without a coherent institution-wide strategy or clear ownership, delegated initiatives (such as innovation-grant rollouts and access to statewide internship funding for nursing and teacher-education students) have stalled or been mishandled by administrators below the president, and cabinet and vice-presidential turnover — including instances participants said went unexplained — has undercut momentum and left some functions, such as academic affairs and finance, described as not working well together or as insufficiently accountable. Others pointed to a lack of clear multi-year planning for faculty lines, program investment, and resource allocation, declining retention rates and a widening achievement gap linked in part to admissions decisions, and instances in which significant decisions (a program closure, a department chair's removal) were delegated without the president visibly taking ownership of the outcome. A few also felt the university was slow to develop an institution-wide strategy for artificial intelligence and its implications for curriculum and skills.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

The most common recommendation was to sharpen and better communicate the university's economic-mobility value proposition — demonstrating concretely how a Westfield State degree translates into earning power, career outcomes, and independence — in order to compete with free community college and answer growing public skepticism about the value of a four-year degree. Closely related, several participants urged a stronger, more intentional emphasis on public good: leaning into Westfield's regional identity and historic mission rather than competing on the same terms as better-resourced institutions and using the president's relationships with state legislators and fellow presidents to press for fairer treatment of tuition, fee, and financial-aid policy. A number of respondents also flagged facilities and long-range financial planning as a priority, citing overdue capital improvements and the ongoing cost of an unused, state-owned residence hall (roughly \$2 million a year), as well as the need for genuine multi-year strategic planning — several noted the current five-year strategic plan is detailed only for its first year or two and offers little specific direction beyond that. A few also pointed to recruitment and retention amid a shrinking pool of college-age students as an urgent, connected priority.

Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **Innovation as a valued but uncoordinated strength:** the innovation-grant program was the most consistently cited concrete achievement across all three interviews, yet many participants said it functions as scattered seed funding rather than a coordinated, institution-wide strategy, with no clear owner and inconsistent follow-through on funded ideas;
- **External relationship-building as the president's signature strength:** her visibility in the surrounding community, her statewide and national leadership roles, and her ability to broker partnerships were praised repeatedly, though several participants felt this outward focus is not always matched by comparable attention to internal faculty relationships and morale;
- **An uneven sense of institutional attention:** participants across departments said the president's public enthusiasm and support are concentrated in health sciences and business, leaving faculty in education, the arts, and other historically significant programs feeling less visible and less certain the university is investing equally in their future;
- **Delegation without follow-through:** from delayed innovation-grant rollouts and unclaimed internship funding to unexplained cabinet and vice-presidential departures, participants described a

recurring pattern in which decisions and commitments made at the top are not reliably executed, communicated, or accounted for further down the organization; and

- **Demographic and economic pressure reframing every priority:** a shrinking pool of college-age students, free community college competition, and rising public skepticism about the value of a four-year degree have become the dominant lens through which faculty evaluate the university's progress, pushing economic mobility, public good, and long-range financial planning to the top of most participants' priorities.

Question 4: Advice for Strengthening Faculty Engagement

Asked what advice they would offer the president for strengthening faculty engagement in the four strategic priorities, participants converged on a few consistent points. Several urged more visible, active support for the full range of academic disciplines, not just health sciences and business, so faculty across campus feel equally valued and represented in the president's public messaging. A recurring frustration was the gap between initiatives the president announces or funds — most often cited was the innovation grant program — and their execution: delayed rollouts, cumbersome application processes, and inconsistent follow-through from staff to whom the work is delegated were all described as undermining engagement, since faculty enthusiasm fades when initiatives lose momentum or communications (including approved press releases and newsletter items) sit unpublished.

Multiple participants recommended more consistent, timely recognition and celebration of faculty and program achievements, including publicizing outcomes from innovation-grant recipients, as a low-cost way to build morale and goodwill. Others emphasized the value of longer-term planning that faculty can see and plan around — particularly multi-year hiring plans that reassure departments about future staffing and preserve a pipeline of junior faculty seen as a source of innovation — as well as continued investment in faculty professional development and creative promotional efforts, such as showcasing the arts, that could support recruitment across programs. A few also suggested the president pay closer attention to overall faculty morale and to smaller, chronic administrative frustrations that, while individually minor, cumulatively sap time and goodwill.

Summary: Significant Themes for Question 4

- **Uneven visibility across disciplines:** faculty want clearer, more consistent presidential support for the full range of academic programs — not primarily health sciences and business — so departments across campus feel equally valued and represented;
- **Execution and communication gaps undercut engagement:** delayed or inconsistently followed-through initiatives, especially the innovation grant program, along with unpublished announcements and press releases, were repeatedly cited as draining faculty enthusiasm and reinforcing skepticism that new initiatives will be sustained;
- **Recognition and celebration as an underused tool:** multiple participants said the university misses opportunities to publicize faculty achievements, grant outcomes, and community contributions promptly, and that more consistent recognition would meaningfully boost morale at low cost;
- **Long-term planning faculty can see and plan around:** participants asked for multi-year hiring plans and clearer signals about departmental futures, arguing that predictability — and continued investment in junior faculty — is essential to sustaining faculty confidence and innovation; and
- **Attention to faculty morale and everyday friction:** several respondents urged the president to pay closer attention to overall faculty morale and to the smaller, chronic administrative frustrations that, while individually minor, cumulatively drain time, energy, and goodwill.

Student Interviews: Theme Summary

Question 1: Strengths and Progress

Both students described the president's commitment to student success and financial aid as her clearest, most personal priority — one described it as something she talks about constantly, actively working to bring in scholarships and donations and personally connecting a student to available financial aid funds during a shortfall, while the other credited campus support resources with helping students succeed academically when they take advantage of them. On economic mobility, participants pointed to real outcomes: one described the president's insistence that no student should have to leave because they can't afford to stay, and the other cited recent graduates and fellow student-athletes who have gone on to strong job opportunities, particularly in high-demand fields like nursing. Public good was tied to the president's visible community presence and relationships — deep connections with local government, schools, and community programs on one hand, and her popularity and approachability at campus and community events on the other. Innovation was cited by both as a clear strength, with references to a new finance lab, a revamped health sciences center, additional buildings planned to build on it, and steady incremental improvements that one participant credited with helping drive strong recent admissions numbers even as competition for students has intensified.

Question 2: Unfinished or Underdeveloped Areas

Only one participant addressed this question directly and said that, overall, none of the four priorities stood out as clearly underdeveloped. Pressed to identify any area with room for improvement, that participant pointed tentatively to financial aid and economic mobility, without citing specific gaps.

Question 3: What Should Be Prioritized Next

The one participant who answered this question recommended financial aid as the top priority going forward, citing the sharply rising cost of living over the past two years and noting that public institutions like Westfield have been gaining enrollment in part because they remain a more affordable option as some private colleges close. This participant felt financial aid was the area where continued investment could have the most immediate, tangible impact on students and prospective students from lower-income communities in the surrounding region.

Summary: Significant Themes Across Questions 1–3

- **Student success and financial aid seen as the president's clearest, most personal priority:** both students described tangible evidence — direct financial aid outreach to a student in need and an ambassador program connecting students with potential donors — that this priority extends beyond messaging into real action;
- **Economic mobility backed by visible outcomes:** alumni and peers' postgraduate success, particularly in high-demand fields, was cited as concrete proof that a Westfield State degree translates into real job opportunities;
- **Innovation viewed as the strongest-performing priority:** new facilities and incremental improvements were credited with helping the university grow admissions even as regional competition and demographics work against it;
- **Public good grounded in community connections:** the president's personal relationships across local government, schools, and community programs were repeatedly cited as evidence of her commitment beyond the campus itself; and

- **Little sense that any one priority is lagging:** neither student identified a clear underdeveloped area, though the one respondent who ventured an opinion pointed to financial aid and economic mobility as most deserving of continued attention given the rising cost of living.

Question 4: Advice for the President

Both participants' advice converged on the same underlying request: greater direct, personal engagement between the president and students. One described students repeatedly saying they want to see her on campus more, noting her office sits a fair distance from the center of campus, and recounted how visibly excited students were when she unexpectedly joined them for lunch during a campus event — evidence, in that student's view, that more of this kind of visibility would be welcomed and valued. The other emphasized that the president's role naturally limits her everyday contact with students, and urged her to proactively and directly ask students what matters to them and where resources might be better spent, rather than relying mainly on secondhand information; that participant also noted that reopening a specific, long-closed campus amenity remains one of the few recurring student complaints, reflecting a broader desire for leadership to notice and respond to the everyday things that shape student life.

Summary: Significant Themes for Question 4

- **A shared call for greater visibility and access:** both students said they want more of the president's physical presence and direct contact on campus, rather than mostly hearing about her through secondhand achievements or communications;
- **Enthusiastic response when she has shown up:** an anecdote about the president dining with students during a campus event was cited as proof that increased in-person engagement is well received and memorable when it happens;
- **A structural gap in students' access to leadership:** her office's distance from the center of campus was cited as a factor reducing casual, everyday encounters with students;
- **A request for direct, structured listening:** rather than relying on secondhand reports, students want the president to proactively ask them what matters and where resources might be better spent, so decisions reflect actual day-to-day student priorities; and
- **A concrete, symbolic ask tied to the broader message:** a recurring student request to reopen a specific closed campus amenity reflects the same underlying desire — for leadership to notice and respond to the small, everyday things that shape student life, not just larger strategic

Part 4: Comprehensive Summary of Survey Data for All Groups

Presidential Evaluation Survey Instructions to Participants

How to Respond

- Use the rating scale consistently. For each rated item, select the response option that best reflects your assessment: 1 = Not Demonstrated, 2 = Emerging, 3 = Effective, 4 = Highly Effective, 5 = Exemplary, or N/A = Not Enough Information to Assess.
- Select N/A when appropriate. If you do not have sufficient knowledge or experience to evaluate a particular statement, please select N/A rather than guessing.
- Provide examples when possible. Open-ended responses are most useful when they include specific observations, examples, outcomes, or recommendations.
- Base feedback on the evaluation period. Responses should reflect the past 5 academic years.
- Maintain a constructive tone. Feedback should be candid, professional, and focused on leadership effectiveness, institutional priorities, and opportunities for continued progress.

Rating Scale Definitions

This survey is designed to gather stakeholder perspectives on presidential leadership in advancing the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education's four strategic priorities: Student Success and Financial Aid, Economic Mobility, Public Good, and Innovation.

Not Demonstrated: Evidence of this behavior or outcome is limited or not apparent.

Emerging: Some progress is evident, but performance is inconsistent or still developing.

Effective: Performance is solid and generally meets expectations.

Highly Effective: Performance is strong, consistent, and exceeds expectations in important ways.

Exemplary: Performance is exceptional and demonstrates sustained, high-impact leadership.

N/A: Respondent does not have sufficient information to provide a rating.

Note: Q1 Name (Optional) has been omitted from this report to protect participants' confidentiality. Open-ended responses (Q7, Q12, Q17, and Q22) are included in Appendix C.

Summary of Survey Responses and Themes

The following results combine responses across all five respondent groups (Board of Trustees, Cabinet & Staff, Faculty, Community & State Representatives, and Students). Appendix E: Survey Mean Ratings by Question

Quantitative Data

Q2. What is your relationship to the institution?

Response	%	
Direct working relationship with the president	12.5%	
Occasional interaction with the president	41.7%	
Observed president's work primarily through meetings, reports, or public engagement	20.8%	
Other (please specify)	25.0%	

Q2. "Other" Responses

- Board Member
- Trustee
- Trustee
- Past board chair and current trustee
- Presidential colleague
- I am a past 20-year WSU board member and former Chair of the Board of Trustees of Trustees. I also am a CEO of bank and have regular contact with President Thompson

Priority 1: Student Success and Financial Aid

Q3. The president has advanced student access, persistence, completion, and long-term success, particularly for currently and historically underrepresented students.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	0.0%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	4.2%	
4 - Highly Effective	33.3%	
5 - Exemplary	33.3%	
N/A	16.7%	

Q4. The president has communicated a clear vision for affordability, financial aid, and student support programs.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	4.2%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	29.2%	
N/A	12.5%	

Q5. The president has strengthened partnerships, policies, or resources that help students move successfully to and through college.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	0.0%	
2 - Emerging	8.3%	
3 - Effective	12.5%	
4 - Highly Effective	25.0%	
5 - Exemplary	37.5%	
N/A	16.7%	

Q6. The president has used data and evidence to identify barriers to student success and guide institutional action.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	4.2%	
3 - Effective	12.5%	
4 - Highly Effective	45.8%	
5 - Exemplary	8.3%	
N/A	20.8%	

Priority 2: Economic Mobility

Q8. The president has positioned the institution as a driver of economic mobility for students, families, and communities.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	16.7%	
4 - Highly Effective	33.3%	
5 - Exemplary	25.0%	
N/A	8.3%	

Q9. The president has aligned academic programs, credentials, and student experiences with workforce needs and career opportunities.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	4.2%	
3 - Effective	16.7%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	25.0%	
N/A	12.5%	

Q10. The president has built meaningful relationships with employers, workforce partners, public agencies, and regional leaders.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	8.3%	
4 - Highly Effective	20.8%	
5 - Exemplary	45.8%	
N/A	8.3%	

Q11. The president has advanced pathways that connect students to internships, work-based learning, career placement, and upward mobility.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	8.3%	
3 - Effective	16.7%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	20.8%	
N/A	8.3%	

Priority 3: Public Good

Q13. The president has articulated the institution's role in serving the public good and meeting community, regional, and statewide needs.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	0.0%	
2 - Emerging	8.3%	
3 - Effective	25.0%	
4 - Highly Effective	20.8%	
5 - Exemplary	41.7%	
N/A	4.2%	

Q14. The president has fostered trust, transparency, and collaboration with community partners, civic leaders, legislators, alumni, and board members.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	4.2%	
4 - Highly Effective	20.8%	
5 - Exemplary	41.7%	
N/A	12.5%	

Q15. The president has advanced institutional contributions to civic engagement, educational attainment, community well-being, and regional vitality.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	16.7%	
4 - Highly Effective	25.0%	
5 - Exemplary	33.3%	
N/A	4.2%	

Q16. The president has balanced institutional priorities with broader public higher education responsibilities.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	8.3%	
4 - Highly Effective	33.3%	
5 - Exemplary	29.2%	
N/A	12.5%	

Priority 4: Innovation

Q18. The president has encouraged innovation that improves access, affordability, completion, student experience, or workforce alignment.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	0.0%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	12.5%	
4 - Highly Effective	33.3%	
5 - Exemplary	33.3%	
N/A	8.3%	

Q19. The president has created a culture that supports responsible experimentation, learning, and scaling of high-impact practices.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	8.3%	
3 - Effective	8.3%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	29.2%	
N/A	8.3%	

Q20. The president has leveraged technology, data, partnerships, or new delivery models to reduce barriers for students.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	4.2%	
2 - Emerging	12.5%	
3 - Effective	16.7%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	12.5%	
N/A	16.7%	

Q21. The president has balanced innovation with accountability, sustainability, equity, and quality.

Response	%	
1 - Not Demonstrated	8.3%	
2 - Emerging	8.3%	
3 - Effective	12.5%	
4 - Highly Effective	37.5%	
5 - Exemplary	16.7%	
N/A	16.7%	

Primary Themes – Quantitative Rating Data

- **Overall, consistently positive feedback:** Every topic received responses (roughly 50–67%) of "Highly Effective/Exemplary." No specific area stands out as a clear strength or weakness; the president is seen as solidly effective everywhere.
- **Data and technology:** Q20 and Q6 are the lowest scores. Q6 also has the highest "N/A" rate in the survey. Respondents aren't necessarily rating it poorly so much as saying they can't assess it. This may suggest the university's data infrastructure is not very visible to evaluators outside of data-adjacent staff.
- **Trust, transparency, and civic engagement:** Q14 and Q15 reveal the highest combined "Not Demonstrated/Emerging" rating and the most polarized results in the deck. However, the majority of participants still ranked the president positively.
- **Affordability messaging and innovation culture:** Q3, Q4, and Q19 revealed the president's highest top-box scores.
- **Most evaluators rated the president from some distance:** Q2 shows only 13% of respondents have a "direct working relationship" with the president — 42% have just "occasional interaction," and a quarter picked "other." That distance likely explains why the less-visible, more operational items (data use, technology, delivery models) get the most "N/A" responses — many evaluators simply aren't close enough to the inner workings to judge those specifically.

Bottom line: the numbers tell a story of broad, steady confidence in the president's leadership, with the most room to grow — and the most divided opinion — concentrated around data/technology infrastructure and community-facing trust-building.

Qualitative Data

Student Success & Financial Aid Outcomes

Q7. Open-ended response: What specific actions should the president prioritize next to improve student success and financial aid outcomes?

- **Keep building a data- and KPI-driven approach:** The most repeated recommendation is to continue strengthening the use of data and clearly defined KPIs (retention, persistence, graduation, financial aid) to identify barriers, target interventions, and measure whether resources are having the intended effect.
- **Simplify and expand financial aid and affordability support:** Several respondents want continued investment in financial aid paired with simpler aid processes, clearer communication with students and families, and more fundraising for grants and scholarships.
- **Strengthen advising, retention infrastructure, and career readiness:** Suggestions include stronger academic advising, smaller class sizes for more meaningful student connections, centralized student-success services, and clearer tracking of outcomes after degree completion.
- **Reach underserved and first-generation students:** A few respondents want the university to specifically target under-served and first-generation populations in the region to grow enrollment and expand access to support.
- **Some want more direct presidential ownership:** One respondent noted the president delegates this area heavily to the provost and would like her more visibly driving the big-picture strategy herself.

Strengthening Economic Mobility Outcomes

Q12. Open-ended response: What additional opportunities should the president pursue to strengthen economic mobility outcomes?

- **Expand employer partnerships, internships, and co-ops:** By far the most common theme: grow relationships with regional employers and expand internships, co-ops, and work-based learning — several respondents specifically want this extended beyond health-related fields.
- **Align academic programs with workforce needs, without losing liberal-arts breadth:** Respondents want programs and credentials tied more closely to career outcomes and return on investment, while preserving the critical-thinking skills a broader liberal-arts education provides.
- **Track outcomes with data:** Using KPIs and outcome data to follow career placement, earnings, and upward mobility is seen as key to identifying where to focus continued investment.
 - **Institutional pace and decision-making agility:** One respondent, drawing on business experience, flagged that decisions requiring broad multi-stakeholder consensus can slow the institution's ability to act decisively on economic-mobility opportunities.
 - **Some uncertainty from respondents outside the academic day-to-day:** A handful of community and other respondents said this question was hard to answer without closer visibility into the university's academic operations.

Strengthening the Institution's Public Impact

Q17. Open-ended response: What should the president do more of, less of, or differently to strengthen the institution's public impact?

- **The president is widely seen as a highly visible, trusted public face of the university:** Many respondents — especially trustees and community members — describe her as engaged, transparent, and effective at building trust across varied stakeholder groups.
- **Room for deeper town–gown connection:** Several faculty members and at least one community respondent want more direct, two-way engagement with local residents and more visibility at community events, beyond campus or health-focused settings.
 - **Elevate and market the university's brand more assertively:** Respondents want the institution's accomplishments and impact showcased more — moving from a 'hidden gem' to a more widely recognized public asset.
 - **Concern that public identity is narrowing around health sciences:** A few respondents feel the university's public profile has become too centered on health programs, potentially overshadowing other historic strengths like teacher training.
 - **Public impact is partly outside the president's direct control:** At least one respondent noted that some of the university's ability to expand public impact depends on state-level decisions rather than the president alone.

Innovations to Meet Evolving Student and Community Needs

Q22. Open-ended response: What innovations should the president consider to better meet the evolving needs of students and communities?

- **Strong appetite for AI adoption, approached responsibly:** AI is the single most frequently mentioned innovation area — respondents want the university to actively explore AI tools while doing so thoughtfully and responsibly.
- **Focus on fewer ideas and follow through:** Multiple respondents caution against spreading innovation efforts across too many initiatives at once, recommending the university vet a smaller number of ideas, fund them well, and see them through to measurable results.
- **Concerns about the sustainability of 'innovation' funding:** Some respondents feel one-time innovation funding is hard to sustain and may come at the expense of established, quality programs that need ongoing support.
- **Technology and infrastructure investment for students:** Respondents point to concrete needs such as reliable student laptops/technology access, ADA compliance, and facilities upgrades as innovation priorities that directly affect learning.
- **Connect innovation to institutional mission and leadership:** A few respondents want innovation more clearly tied to the university's core mission, with more direct presidential leadership rather than heavy delegation to the provost.

Five-Year Presidential Evaluation

Appendix

Appendix A: Presidential Evaluation Survey

Westfield State University Presidential Evaluation Survey

Q1. Name (optional):

Q2. Your relationship to the institution:

- Direct working relationship with the president
- Occasional interaction with the president
- Observed president's work primarily through meetings, reports, or public engagement
- Other (please specify)

Use the rating scale consistently. For each rated item, select the response option that best reflects your assessment: 1= Not Demonstrated, 2=Emerging, 3=Effective, 4=Highly Effective, 5=Exemplary or N/A=Not Enough Information to Assess.

Priority 1: Student Success and Financial Aid

Please rate the following statement

- Q3. The president has advanced student access, persistence, completion, and long-term success, particularly for currently and historically underrepresented students.
- Q4. The president has communicated a clear vision for affordability, financial aid, and student support programs.
- Q5. The president has strengthened partnerships, policies, or resources that help students move successfully to and through college.
- Q6. The president has used data and evidence to identify barriers to student success and guide institutional action.
- Q7. Open-ended response: What specific actions should the president prioritize next to improve student success and financial aid outcomes?

Priority 2: Economic Mobility

Please rate the following statements.

- Q8. The president has positioned the institution as a driver of economic mobility for students, families, and communities.
- Q9. The president has aligned academic programs, credentials, and student experiences with workforce needs and career opportunities.
- Q10. The president has built meaningful relationships with employers, workforce partners, public agencies, and regional leaders.
- Q11. The president has advanced pathways that connect students to internships, work-based learning, career placement, and upward mobility.
- Q12. Open-ended response: What additional opportunities should the president pursue to strengthen economic mobility outcomes?

Priority 3: Public Good

Please rate the following statements.

Q13. The president has articulated the institution's role in serving the public good and meeting community, regional, and statewide needs.

Q14. The president has fostered trust, transparency, and collaboration with community partners, civic leaders, legislators, alumni, and board members.

Q15. The president has advanced institutional contributions to civic engagement, educational attainment, community well-being, and regional vitality.

Q16. The president has balanced institutional priorities with broader public higher education responsibilities.

Q17. Open-ended response: What should the president do more of, less of, or differently to strengthen the institution's public impact?

Priority 4: Innovation

Please rate the following statements.

Q18. The president has encouraged innovation that improves access, affordability, completion, student experience, or workforce alignment.

Q19. The president has created a culture that supports responsible experimentation, learning, and scaling of high-impact practices.

Q20. The president has leveraged technology, data, partnerships, or new delivery models to reduce barriers for students.

Q21. The president has balanced innovation with accountability, sustainability, equity, and quality.

Q22. Open-ended response: What innovations should the president consider to better meet the evolving needs of students and communities?

Thank you for taking the time to thoughtfully complete this survey.

Appendix B: Zoom Interview Questions

Westfield State University Presidential Evaluation Aligned to BHE Strategic Priorities Zoom Interview Questions

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) four strategic priorities will be provided to interviewees in advance as prep for the interview.

2025 Strategic Priorities / Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

1. Student Success and Financial Aid- Supporting and advancing student access and success through well-designed, sufficiently funded, clear and consistent financial aid and success program funding.
2. Economic Mobility- Increasing the Economic Mobility Benefits of Postsecondary Participation.
3. Public Good- Improving Alignment Between Public Good Outcomes and Postsecondary Higher Education Opportunities.
4. Innovation- Facilitating and Fostering High-Impact Innovation Throughout the Public Higher Education System.

All stakeholder groups will be asked the following questions during Zoom interviews.

1. What strengths have been demonstrated by the president and what progress has been made regarding the four BHE priorities? Please give examples.
2. What seems unfinished or underdeveloped and needs more attention or improvement? Please give examples.
3. What components of the strategic priorities should the president prioritize next? Please explain why.

In addition to the general questions above, each stakeholder group will be asked a group-specific question to close the interview.

Board of Trustee Members: What guidance would you offer the president about the board's expectations for the coming year regarding the strategic priorities?

Staff, Administrators and Cabinet Members: What could the president offer as support, clarity, or alignment that would be most helpful to the cabinet in advancing the BHE's priorities?

Community and State Representatives: What advice would you offer the president for strengthening community and regional relationships over the next year?

Faculty: What advice would you offer the president for strengthening faculty engagement in the four strategic priorities?

Legislators: What should the president understand about legislative expectations for the institution in the next year related to the strategic priorities?

Staff: What advice would you give the president about including staff in advancing student success, economic mobility, public good, and innovation?

Student Leaders: If you could give the president one piece of advice from students, what would it be?

Appendix C: Evaluation Survey Open-Ended Responses

Q7, Q12, Q17, and Q22 open-ended responses from participants, combined across all respondent groups.

Student Success & Financial Aid Outcomes

Q7. Open-ended response: What specific actions should the president prioritize next to improve student success and financial aid outcomes?

- Focus on student retention, enrollment, and improving graduation rates.
- Multiple challenges on the horizon and prioritization of strategic focus areas will be critical.
- Nothing to add.
- The president should continue to use data and evidence to better understand the drivers of student success, to develop targeted interventions, and to regularly measure outcomes to ensure resources are having the intended effect. Continued investment in financial aid should remain a priority and should be coupled with efforts to simplify aid processes, improve communication with students and families, and reduce barriers to accessing available support. Strengthening academic advising and career readiness programs will also help students persist and achieve success upon graduation.
- Continue to strengthen the use of data and clearly defined KPIs to identify barriers, measure progress, and drive accountability for student success. Priorities should include establishing meaningful KPIs for retention, persistence, graduation, and financial aid outcomes, regularly reviewing trends and disparities, and using those insights to target resources and interventions where they can have the greatest impact.
- I'm also adding an explanation to this one: Question #6 - I feel that the institution is on the right trajectory as it relates to data use and decision-making, and I am excited to see where we go with this. Up until recently, there was not a lot of confidence in the data that was available. However, that has shifted, but I feel that we need more time, and we need to see how data is being used in order to get an accurate measure of effectiveness. To answer this question specifically, continue to collect data, measure, and identify areas of improvement. Continue aligning enrollment, support services, and outcomes with strategic plan goals.
- I think the University and President Thompson can identify a set of focus under-served populations in metropolitan areas of Mass and nearby states to expand the reach and interest first generation college students. Pool is very vast and can easily tap to help a population desperately in need of attention. This pool can help enrollment and also train and educate a vast group that can provide for themselves and families by studying Math, sciences, data forensic, computer science, AI, and several other potential fields of study.
- The president could actualize her goals for student success by successfully launching a fundraising campaign; reinventing the volunteer boards and inspiring the faculty to work collaboratively on new and innovative learning activities.
- Demand data from student success programs
- More private partnerships if allowed to do so.
- avoiding the use of consultants. it looks weak
- Provide examples and opportunities for students, other than those interested in the health fields, on a consistent basis and not as an outlier.
- The President has empowered Academic Affairs to reorganize student support services into a centralized Center for Student Success. The university has also been able to secure funding from the Commonwealth to help pay for a variety of students services to targeted populations on campus. The university has struggled with cultivating a data culture and consequently has been data poor. This has started to change as Academic Affairs through a contract with Huron, and the funding of adequate staff in institutional resources has begun to generate meaningful data to start to make better decisions. I would encourage the President to continue to support these efforts so that the university can start to utilize effectively the data that has started to come to light.

- With the current demographic, we should be reducing class size to make more meaningful connections with students. This will directly impact retention and student success. Clear department focused on marketing for recruitment purposes.
- Raise money for grants and scholarships. Promote the university.
- Help departments and programs identify (and post) outcomes upon degree completion.
- The president delegates these topics to the provost. It would be nice if she were to take on the big picture herself (I guess the strategic plan does some of that).
- Every president needs to respond to the needs of their campus community. For us at Framingham State University, relying on increasingly good data to show us where to act on improving student success outcomes is one key. I am not sure what financial aid outcomes are in this context, but students at our State Universities need more of it. We need to help them make satisfactory academic progress through advising, attention to scheduling, tutoring, and other academic programs. I imagine Dr. Thompson is thinking about similar programs.
- Continue to fundraise for scholarships.
- The President should continue to focus efforts on grants and scholarships that will allow a more affordable experience for more students.
- That is difficult to answer as I am not a part of the academic community on a day-to-day basis.
- I can't think of anything.
- Continued focus on paid internships providing "real world" experience. Looking at the successes of University's like Northeastern University and Wentworth Institute of Technology and their requirements of multiple for credit internships during a student's 4/5-year educational journey, Westfield State University would be a step ahead having this be a requirement for fulltime students. Allowing students in continuing education and part-time courses to qualify for their current (potentially qualifying) job toward their college degree credits may attract more students to the University.
- As a student who cannot receive financial aid, I struggle to answer this question

Strengthening Economic Mobility Outcomes

Q12. Open-ended response: What additional opportunities should the president pursue to strengthen economic mobility outcomes?

- Continue to partner with more regional businesses and corporations across the Commonwealth for more job readiness training, internships, and job opportunities for students.
- Driving initiatives that increase the % of graduates who get a job in their field of study. Increasing partnerships with local and national organizations for internship opportunities and entry level hiring would positively impact the % of students who get a job in their major.
- I know the President is trying hard to align with the business community to strengthen economic mobility outcomes. We often talk of the skills that business owners need in their future employees. As a business owner, I personally have the ability to make quick decisions, responding to rapidly changing markets. However, after observing how a university is run for the past two years, it appears that the "community" requires a different approach and as a result the institution is not very agile. Strategic, and many tactical decisions appear to require much discussion and broad consensus among many varied interest groups before any action can be taken. I understand that the University is not a business, but I perceive this as a cultural institutional weakness (extending beyond Westfield State) and limits decisive action to achieve the end result, which is the only thing that matters.
- As students increasingly seek programs with clear career outcomes and return on investment, the university should accelerate alignment of academic offerings with workforce needs while maintaining the broad skills and critical thinking fostered by a liberal arts education.
- Continue to build on the university's strong employer partnerships and expand opportunities for internships, work-based learning, and career connections. Leveraging KPIs and outcome data to track career placement, earnings, and upward mobility will help identify opportunities for continued growth and ensure more students have access to pathways that lead to meaningful careers.

- Continue expanding internship and "real world" opportunities, keep finger on the pulse of needs within the states to perhaps develop new programs (I.e., Master of Business Administration, Master of Athletic training, and Master of Science in Nursing - Psychiatric Mental Health NP) to fill those needs.
- Internships within the local industry (whether health care, manufacturing, financial firms, law enforcement, etc.) are an area that can help our students grow and enhance their learning experience.
- The president has a great opportunity to align the offices related to student support and learning experiences such as, internships, co-ops, study abroad and service learning. Many of the offices duplicate activities on a small scale and don't collect results-oriented data. Aligning the office and eliminating the duplications with a data-oriented approach will improve overall student success.
- President has initiated several new programs: EMT, NP in Psychiatry, MBA Focus on these new programs to be excellent rather than seeking to do more
- NA
- Not focus so much on healthcare.
- Better alignment with current faculty initiatives so the experiences are incorporated directly into coursework and campus experiences
- The president should work on establishing paid co-ops/internships and service-learning opportunities so that all students can gain relevant professional experience before graduation. These have to be outside of the normal health realms that have garnered a lot of attention over the past 5 years. Here there is also a need to provide support for transportation and housing so that students can take advantage of such opportunities over the summer.
- My academic department has not had any thoughtful relationships created for our students by the President.
- Improve access to financial aid. Seek to support outcomes that emerge beyond the first decade after graduation. Encourage the campus to focus on lifelong learning so our graduates can adapt to the rapidly evolving future.
- Emphasize announced academic return on investment for students exploring programs
- Again, the president could be more visible as driver of these, instead of deferring to the provost, who has provided one instance of alignment by suspending a program.
- Again, this is specific to each campus. Dr. Thompson has likely made many relationships with area residents and businesses so that she can help students connect to what opportunities are possible.
- Work with the region's various business organizations to promote the work being done by the students and faculty at WSU.
- I would love to see the President become more involved at the employer level related to internships; to strengthen the relationship the University has with local businesses that are taking in WSU students.
- Continue to grow opportunities in the manufacturing and avionics fields.
- If the president is responsible for creating an institution that drives economic mobility for communities, she needs to think about how she can do that for the City of Westfield. How can she create opportunities not just for individual students but for the community itself?
- Increase business/educational partnerships throughout Massachusetts for internship opportunities to enable students to have options in their respective home areas for potential cost of living savings for student affordability.
- I am not familiar with this field, so I feel unable to answer

Strengthening the Institution's Public Impact

Q17. Open-ended response: What should the president do more of, less of, or differently to strengthen the institution's public impact?

- Continue to be a leader in the commonwealth by serving on various educational state committees.
- I believe President Thompson excels in this area.
- I am a lifelong resident of Westfield. My opinion is that President Thompson is the President who is the most engaged with the Westfield community that I have seen. Many of my peers have expressed the same opinion over the years.

- The president has built strong relationships across key stakeholder groups. The recent Board retreat demonstrated a meaningful effort to engage those stakeholders in a broader discussion about the university's role in advancing the region. Continued opportunities for this type of dialogue, with broader involvement of Cabinet members and the Board, would further strengthen collaboration and alignment.
- President Thompson should continue to build on the university's many strengths and successes by elevating its public profile and celebrating its impact on students, the community, and the Commonwealth. Increasing opportunities to showcase the university's accomplishments, partnerships, and contributions will further strengthen its reputation and amplify its positive impact.
- The skepticism of a college degree is growing. From a long-term economic perspective, the evidence remains fairly strong that, on average, bachelor's degree holders earn substantially more over their careers than individuals whose formal education ends with high school. I don't hear university leaders talking about this much. Weaving some of this into marketing, promotional materials, presentations, etc. could help improve public perception.
- Linda has become the positive face of WSU, not only in the pioneer valley but also in the entire state. She has brought transparency and built trust with a clear majority of stakeholders (fully realizing one cannot satisfy 100% of the population). Linda has ideas and can connect with all walks of life. Leveraging this rare trade can help her and the university immensely.
- Nothing here.
- Spend less time with groups and ideas that just don't fit at WSU and won't deliver dollars to the University
- Expand the brand. We shouldn't be a "hidden gem" we should be known.
- n/a
- Better communication on how the connections being made by President Thompson directly connect with campus, current initiatives, and professions other than health care.
- The president should look west of the university. The university could position itself as a huge resource in these struggling rural communities.
- The President rarely attends anything in the area. She should be more active at events in the Community.
- More focus on critical thinking, creativity, intellectual achievement, and lifelong learning. Invest in full-time faculty. Promote intellect. Less focus on providing worker bees. More focus on training adaptive, creative thinkers who will become leaders.
- Bring more community leaders into programs, and not just on campus or at remote meetings. This is a campus and a community that needs to be experienced.
- The president should support teacher training more, given that this is a regional need and a historic strength of the institution. Instead, there is a razor-sharp focus on health sciences, which is not appropriate for a comprehensive school.
- I cannot comment since I am not in a position to see this work firsthand.
- Linda is a highly visible leader; she should continue on the path that she is on by attending events and promoting WSU.
- I would like to see the President continue working and meeting with local public and business leaders to continue to monitor employment needs in the geographic area and continue to align the University's offerings to these needs.
- The president finds a situation where ability to have a greater public impact is reliant on state level decision making and not necessarily the ability of the president.
- The president needs to work harder to improve town/gown relationships. The citizens of Westfield need to be invited to more campus events. Most people in the community have no interactions with campus, and that needs to be improved.
- The President's continued visibility around campus and engaging directly with students, families, and the community is fantastic. This is something that was not seen with the past couple of Presidents of the University. I am not sure if the University is already doing this but bringing in 2nd and 3rd year groups of high school students and providing one-to-five (WSU Student to HS Student) tours of the University. This will increase the visibility of WSU and make potential applicants more comfortable with the offerings and exposure to the campus.
- My experience of Westfield State has been incredibly positive, so I do not feel there is a need for change.

Innovations to Meet Evolving Student and Community Needs

Q22. Open-ended response: What innovations should the president consider to better meet the evolving needs of students and communities?

- We have to incorporate AI.
- AI is changing everything at a rapid pace. Ensuring the University explores AI adoption opportunities will be critical to long term future.
- I believe that the President is the right person to lead us through the changes in higher ed that we are currently experiencing. Times are difficult (budgets, costs to students, demographic cliff, rapidly changing workplace, university alternatives). I just think we collectively need to support her and move more quickly. Just because we did things a certain way in the past, does not mean they will work in the future. Culturally, the University is designed to maintain the status quo. As we move forward, we need to quickly understand the "market" by gathering often imperfect facts and then decide on the path to move forward. I would rather take 10 decisions and have 3 wrong than take no decisions.
- The president is a champion of creative thinking and innovation in addressing the evolving needs of students and communities. Rather than pursuing a large number of new initiatives, continued focus on evaluating, refining, and fully implementing promising ideas may yield the greatest impact. Sustained focus and follow-through will help ensure innovation yields measurable outcomes.
- Leverage emerging technologies, including AI, and expanding innovative academic and co-curricular opportunities to help the university remain responsive to the evolving needs of students and communities while positioning the institution for continued success.
- Responsible use of AI and the continued exploration of AI-supported tools and systems.
- Linda is a visionary. Not all walks of life can handle or cope with new ideas. Change is hard. One potential avenue is to form a think tank, headed by a trusted advisor to vet these innovative ideas for bandwidth, expertise, resources, student needs, and society's present and future needs. Too many ideas in too short of a time would confuse the stakeholders and they will lose interest. The ideal possibility is to vet 5-10 ideas. Pick no more than two and concentrate on developing and executing those ideas. Once people see the results, they would engage more and then no one could stop that train
- We need better data capture tools that are coordinated with advising and support. We also need analysis regularly to respond to the changes observed in student needs.
- Focus on programs WSU is known for (Nursing, PA, Criminal Justice, education, and the recently added MBA, NP Psychiatry, and MBA. Do these well and don't try to do too much else that WSU doesn't have the budget or human capital for.
- NA
- n/a
- "innovation" has resulted in one time funding opportunities that are hard to sustain or complete in an academic year..."innovation" has also come at the expense of established quality programs that are not receiving funds to maintain in light of how "innovation" funds are spent. Additionally, the president has provided too much oversight to a provost with clear bias and a lack of innovate thinking.
- There is no sustainability at the university. It is hard to advocate for creating resilient sustainable communities when it does not happen at home. On a different note, the president should explore the development of interdisciplinary centers that bring together faculty, students, and community partners around significant regional challenges. For example, the university could bring together its expertise in environmental science, regional planning, and health (nursing, bio, health sciences, etc.) to address issues impacting the region. Such centers serve to provide real world opportunities to students but also work to solve regional problems facing the surrounding communities.
- The President needs to be helping develop and fund programs that are technology based. The Innovation Fund Grants need to be more accessible and larger.
- Facilities upgrades and improvements. Compliance with ADA.

- Technology is a barrier for students' learning. Too many students without functioning laptops. Most students are trying to work their way through school. Not sure how, but getting these hardware items into student hands is necessary.
- The president is excited about promoting innovation as a concept but should connect this to the mission of the institution. As an aside: Perhaps the mission of the university could be aligned more with the BoHiEd's mission.
- Answering this is up to the president and the campus community, as well as the region it serves.
- Research the impact of AI on higher Education and how it can also help WSU grow and prosper.
- Nothing to add at this time.
- Since the college is a university maybe offer terminal degrees in those common areas such as education and criminal justice.
- I cannot think of anything.
- Getting "buy-in" from as many professors as possible to the value proposition of WSU is a major key. The President and her immediate team can only do so much. If the University as a whole can promote the offerings throughout their lives and take pride in their amazing product, we all win!
- I think there has been very good change over the last couple of years.

Appendix D: Academic Search Team Bios

Kristin McClanahan, M.S.

Search Manager, Academic Search

Ms. Kristin McClanahan joined Academic Search in 2023 and brings experience from her work in both higher education and independent school settings. She has focused her career on counseling with expertise in career and college advising. Her administrative skills have led to the development and implementation of internship programs at both the college and high school levels.

Ms. McClanahan previously worked at Cannon School (Concord, NC) as the Associate Director of College Counseling. In addition to her caseload of students, she served on the upper school leadership team and multiple search committees and led institutional initiative cohorts. Through her role, she visited the campuses of over 150 institutions of higher education. Prior to Cannon School, she worked at a variety of institutions including Baldwin-Wallace University, Ferrum College, and Miami University.

Ms. McClanahan holds an M.S. in college student personnel with a focus in counseling and a B.S. in business finance from Miami University, Oxford. She has been involved with the National Association of College Admission Counseling and had the opportunity to present at their southern regional conference.

Maria Thompson, Ph.D.

Managing Director and Senior Executive Coach, Academic Search

Dr. Maria Thompson (no relation to President Linda Thompson) is a career educator with a distinguished history of leadership in higher education. She is considered a leading expert on data democratization in higher education and has made numerous presentations on the topic throughout the nation. She has demonstrated success in academic and research administration, university accreditation, organizational restructuring, and resource reallocation to strengthen academic programs, and designing and implementing data analytics tools to improve student success outcomes. She served as principal investigator on numerous grants and received millions in federal funding for scientific research, facilities construction, and educational projects from the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, Air Force Office of Scientific Research, Department of Energy, and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency.

From 2015 to 2019 she was president and CEO of Coppin State University (CSU), one of the 12 University System of Maryland campuses. She was the first woman to be installed as president of CSU. Prior to her appointment at CSU, she was provost and vice president for academic affairs at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Oneonta from 2011 to 2015, the first African American in the role. Thirteen years of her career were spent building the research enterprise at Tennessee State University (TSU). At TSU she held various positions in research administration culminating in a promotion to vice president for research and sponsored programs, the first woman to serve as chief research officer at the institution. She was on the faculty at the University of Kentucky in the College of Human Environmental Sciences before moving into administrative roles. Dr. Thompson is co-author of a series of workbooks for higher education leaders. The first in the series, *Running the Race: Transitioning into a New Leadership Role in Higher Education*, was published in 2021. The second book, published in 2022, covers equity-minded leadership in higher education. The third book is a step-by-step guide for landing a leadership position in higher education that was published in 2024. The fourth book in the series, also published in 2024, covers shared governance. Additionally, she is a managing director and senior executive coach for Academic Search.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Tennessee State University in Textiles, a Master of Science degree in Textile Science from The Ohio State University, and a doctorate in Textile Science and Textile Economics from the University of Tennessee.

Appendix E: Survey Mean Ratings by Question

The means below are for the rated quantitative survey data of the WSU 5-Year Presidential Evaluation Summary Report. Each mean uses the 1–5 scale (1 = Not Demonstrated, 5 = Exemplary) and excludes N/A responses. Percentages in the report convert to whole counts out of 24 respondents, so the means are exact. Q2 is not included because its responses are categories rather than ratings.

Question	Priority	Mean (1–5)	Respondents rating (excl. N/A)
Q3	Student Success	4.05	20
Q4	Student Success	3.86	21
Q5	Student Success	4.10	20
Q6	Student Success	3.53	19
Q8	Economic Mobility	3.68	22
Q9	Economic Mobility	3.86	21
Q10	Economic Mobility	4.00	22
Q11	Economic Mobility	3.59	22
Q13	Public Good	4.00	23
Q14	Public Good	3.86	21
Q15	Public Good	3.65	23
Q16	Public Good	3.81	21
Q18	Innovation	3.95	22
Q19	Innovation	3.77	22
Q20	Innovation	3.50	20
Q21	Innovation	3.55	20

Averages by Priority

- **Student Success:** 3.89
- **Economic Mobility:** 3.78
- **Public Good:** 3.83
- **Innovation:** 3.69

Priority averages are the mean of the four question means in each priority.