

**OFF-SITE MEETING****December 16, 2021****Remote Meeting**

**Present for the Board:** Butts, Chisholm, Contreras, DeSimone, German-George, Mattera, Maldonado, Russell and Lutts (chair). Also participating President Keenan and Board Secretary Montague

**Absent:** Zahlaway-Belsito

**I. Welcome, agenda review, announcements**

Chair Lutts convened the meeting at 1:03 pm and thanked the trustees for taking the time attend the Off-site meeting. President Keenan remarked on the NECHE accreditation, the submission of the BOLD application in the coming weeks and provided an update on the unwelcome visitor to campus. Lutts then reviewed the agenda, made brief remarks and introduced the first speaker, Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education Carlos Santiago.

**II. Equity Agenda****Advancing the Massachusetts Statewide Equity Agenda at the Institution and System Level**

Commissioner Santiago greeted the Board of Trustees and then spoke to the group about the advancement of the Equity Agenda, and the changes necessary to ensure racial equity across public postsecondary education in Massachusetts, and, more specially, to better serve racially minoritized students attending institutions of public higher education in Massachusetts. Commissioner Santiago's talk was followed by a question-and-answer session. (See the attached presentation)

**III. Updates:****NECHE****Provost and Academic Vice President Silva**

Provost Silva detailed the NECHE accreditation process and thanked the faculty, staff and administrators for their excellent work

(See the attached letter from NECHE).

**BOLD**

A briefing memo was sent in advance of the meeting.

(See the attached update)

**Salem State University Strategic Planning Process****President Keenan**

**Executive Director of Civic Engagement & Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee,**

**Cynthia Lynch**

President Keenan and Executive Director of Civic Engagement & Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, Cynthia Lynch discussed that the Strategic Planning Committee had recently been convened and that there would be many touch points and opportunities for input in the future.

**IV. 2021 Board Survey – Self-Evaluation**  
**Dr. Stephen Reno, Facilitator**

Steve Reno facilitated a discussion with the Board of Trustees regarding a self-evaluation that was recently completed by the members. Reno discussed with the trustees that it has been a difficult time in higher education due to COVID, zoom, stress and healthcare concerns, racism, enrollment and education costs just to name a few. He stressed the importance of the trustees role versus the president and administration’s role.

Reno then reviewed the Board’s self-evaluation results. Seven trustees took the survey. Of the respondents, six trustees have served for three years, and one has served for one year. There were five major takeaways from the survey:

- 1) The board does not feel that there is adequate time for substantial topics and there are too many items on the board meeting agenda.
- 2) In general, the board is satisfied with the committee structure, however they feel that too much time is spent on reports.
- 3) The board needs to be better informed on education issues on the national level and best practices.
- 4) The board is not able to monitor progress made on the strategic plan via the dashboards.
- 5) The board agrees that good communication exists with the president and there is support for the work that he has done.

**Conclusion and Adjourn**

- Chair Lutts thanked Dr. Reno for joining today’s event and for his thoughts on the board’s evaluation. President Keenan added a special thanks to his team and to the board for their input.

There being no further business to come before the Board Chair Lutts called for a motion. On a motion duly made by Trustee Mattera and seconded by Trustee Chisholm it was unanimously

**VOTED: To adjourn**

<b>Voting in the affirmative:</b>	Butts, Chisholm, Contreras, DeSimone, German-George, Mattera, Maldonado, Russell and Lutts (chair)
<b>Voting in the negative:</b>	None
<b>Absent:</b>	Zahlaway-Belsito

The meeting ended at 2:40

President,



John D. Keenan

*Lynne Montague*

Lynne Montague  
Secretary to the Board of Trustees



# The Equity Agenda

Achieving Racial Justice in  
Massachusetts Public Higher Education

Carlos E. Santiago, Commissioner  
Salem State University Board of Trustees  
Presentation  
December 16, 2021

MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Higher Education

# Equity Principles—Toward an Anti-Racist Frame

These values guide our work to fulfill the Equity Agenda

## Racial equity:

- Is the **top policy and performance priority** for the Department of Higher Education
- Will be achieved **when race no longer determines one's outcomes** in the Massachusetts public higher education system
- Must be **embedded** system-wide and permeate the Department's structure, culture, and policies
- Requires the use of **asset-based language** to minimize the threat of harm, deficit, and stereotype reinforcement
  - *"Asset-based language" defines people by their aspirations and contributions, rather than the systemic barriers and challenges they face*
- Requires **acknowledgement, remedy, and repair** of policies and practices which have excluded or created barriers

# Equity Principles—Toward an Antiracist frame


These values guide our work to fulfill the Equity Agenda

## We must:

- Recognize that **clarity** in language, goals, and measures is vital to racially equitable practices
- Promote **culturally sustainable campus climates** in which all students can thrive and are regarded in the totality of their human dignity
  - *“Culturally sustainable” means recognizing, maintaining, and developing cultural identity and diversity, as they are assets, not weaknesses (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012)*
- Create and cultivate an **inclusive environment** to encourage the support and participation of relevant stakeholders
- Acknowledge the **experience and knowledge** of people of color, and seek to engage people of color in the pursuit of racial equity in meaningful ways
- Incentivize the development and support the implementation of **equity-minded, evidence-based solutions**

# Cultural Conditions toward Racial Equity--Participatory Leadership

To achieve racial equity, DHE has developed various **formal and informal networks** to catalyze and support staff in developing knowledge, building relationships, and implementing policy changes

	Individual	Groups	Agency and System	
<p>Networks include but are not limited to:</p> 				
<p><b>Internal Communications &amp; Professional Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DHE ICPD Working Group</li> <li>DHE Community Conversations</li> <li>DHE Equity Book Club</li> <li>DHE Equity Institutes (completed) and future professional development</li> </ul>	✓	✓		
<p><b>Policy &amp; Program Design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DHE Policy &amp; Program Audit Learning Community</li> <li>BHE Committees &amp; Full Board</li> </ul>		✓	✓	
<p><b>New Undergraduate Experience Design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering Committee</li> <li>Student-Ready Institutions Committee</li> <li>Teaching &amp; Learning Committee</li> </ul>		✓	✓	✓
<p><b>Coalition Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DHE Strategic Communications Team</li> <li>Equity Coalition</li> </ul>		✓	✓	✓

# Cultural Conditions toward Racial Equity: Shared Departmental Values

At the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education,  
**we share these interconnected values:**

## Equity

*Understanding and confronting oppression in all its forms*

## Accountability

*Answering for the outcomes of decisions and actions*

## Community

*Showing care and respect toward others*

## Empowerment

*Facilitating others' opportunities for growth and contribution, within teams and across DHE*

## Intentionality

*Acting with purpose and clarity*

## Teamwork

*Embracing the power of unity, collaboration, and collective insight*



# Equity Agenda Overview

The Equity Agenda outlines an action plan that covers five key areas:

### Policy Audit

- Complete a Department-wide policy audit to assess all policies and initiatives
- Identify and remove policies that exacerbate racial inequity
- Redesign the Department's policy scheme to build a culturally sustainable public postsecondary system where students can thrive

### Student Experience

- Reimagine the undergraduate experience in order to dismantle systemic barriers by recognizing students' cultural wealth and transforming teaching and learning (*New Undergraduate Experience*)
- Align system and institutional efforts to create student-ready campuses

### Data and Evidence

- Expand data dashboards to measure progress toward the goal of racial equity and include baseline projections and benchmarks of Massachusetts public higher education enrollment through 2030
- Value students' experiences through qualitative research
- Identify and support the implementation of equity-minded, evidence-based solutions

### Community of Practice

- Support the growth of a system-wide community of practice
- Elevate the work of equity leaders
- Create digital resources for campuses, which may include implementation toolkits and digital archives to allow sharing across campuses
- Develop a statewide professional development curriculum focused on culturally sustaining teaching practices

### Sustained Transformation

- Convene and support a broad coalition of equity partners
- **Develop a 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on advancing racial equity**



# Discussion



November 29, 2021

Mr. John D. Keenan, J.D.  
President  
Salem State University  
352 Lafayette Street  
Salem, MA 01970-5353

Dear President Keenan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 24, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Salem State University:

that Salem State University be continued in accreditation;

that the institution be asked to submit a report by August 15, 2023 for consideration in Fall 2023, that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. ensuring the effectiveness of the institution's shared governance processes, with emphasis on engaging the community, including faculty, in the development and implementation of the next strategic plan;
2. continuing to build a culture of assessment with evidence that results are used to improve student learning outcomes;
3. achieving its goals to increase enrollment and retention;
4. strengthening the institution's financial position;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by January 15, 2026 for consideration in Spring 2026;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2031.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Salem State University is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Salem State University (SSU) is commended for its comprehensive and thoughtful self-study that documented the institution's accomplishments over the past decade and provided an opportunity for it to reflect on the challenges

ahead. Along with the visiting team, we note with favor that the institution's mission and vision focused on student success continue to guide SSU's planning as evident in its 2018-2022 strategic plan and that an Office of Strategic Planning and Decision Support was established to provide "critical data to facilitate institutional decision-making." Faculty efforts to ensure the relevance of the SSU student experience include adoption of a new undergraduate core curriculum, development of 4+1 Bachelor/Master's degrees, and an expansion of graduate degree offerings. In addition, the University's attention to building an "inclusive and respectful community" is apparent from the significant increase over the past ten years in the racial and ethnic diversity of its full-time faculty (23% in 2020) and staff (21% in 2019), as well as from the growth in programming offered by the Leadership, Engagement, Advocacy, and Diversity (LEAD) Office to respond to "justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion" concerns. We further give credit to SSU for its emphasis on civic learning and engagement that is now recognized by the institution's Community Engagement Carnegie classification. We also are pleased to learn that the University's support of students has been strengthened through the reorganization of the Student Life division in 2017 and investment in "Navigate" to serve as the hub of its "campus-wide coordinated care approach." Particularly noteworthy, too, is SSU's continued emphasis on affordability with unrestricted financial aid increasing from \$3.1 million in FY2018 to \$6.3 million in FY2021. The success of these and other student-focused initiatives has been instrumental in effecting an impressive increase in graduation rates, from 41.8% (2005 cohort) to 59% (2014 cohort). SSU's commitment to funding faculty scholarly activities and professional development including the establishment of a Center for Research and Creative Activities that works "in collaboration" with the University's Advisory Research Committee is also commendable. As reported by the visiting team, the "passion" for serving Salem State University students and the communities of the North Shore region shared by the University's Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff provides the foundation on which the institution will succeed in achieving its mission in the years ahead.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2023 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, Educational Effectiveness, Students, and Institutional Resources.*

As observed by the visiting team and recognized by the institution, recent events at Salem State University intended to address its structural deficit, including release of the Vision for a Sustainable Future report that outlined potential areas of investment (e.g., academic programs with growth potential) and the SSU BOLD plan to sell the south campus and use the proceeds to renovate facilities on the north campus, have led to "divided perspectives" and increased tension between the Board, administration, and faculty resulting in low morale across the institution. We understand that faculty have since invoked "work to rule," withdrawing their participation from all but the standing committees specified in the collective bargaining agreement. We therefore share the concern of the visiting team that low engagement in shared governance is adversely "altering the scope, quantity, and quality of the work" needed for SSU to move forward on a number of its initiatives of common interest including the development of the institution's 2022-2027 strategic plan. Led by the Collaboration Committee, SSU has identified a number of strategic goals to achieve over the next five years that still need to be refined and vetted with the involvement of the community: becoming an Hispanic-Serving institution by 2025, stabilizing enrollment and increasing student retention, finalizing institutional learning outcomes and developing a consistent approach to assessment, closing achievement gaps by advancing the state's Equity Agenda, and reconsidering the scope and structure of the University. As the success of the next strategic planning process "relies critically on [SSU's] ability to engage the entire campus

community,” we support the leadership’s view that “new and multiple means of providing effective and extensive opportunities for discussion, feedback, and consultation” will need to be found that respond to the concerns of the faculty and that “reestablish greater trust to foster active engagement.” In the Fall 2023 report, we look forward to learning of the success of the University’s efforts to work together to ensure the effectiveness of its shared governance processes, with emphasis on engaging the community, including faculty, in the development and implementation of the next strategic plan. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Organization and Governance* provide this guidance:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

... The board, administration, staff, faculty, and sponsoring entity understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The institution’s organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution’s system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution’s internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations (3.17).

The effectiveness of the institution’s organizational structure and system of governance is improved through regular and systematic review (3.19).

We note with approval that Salem State University has “embraced a culture of transparent assessment and continuous improvement” with measures of student success being shared “frequently and broadly.” A robust process of program review exists for all academic programs, both those that are externally accredited as well as those that are not. Yet, the University recognizes that “institution-wide programmatic assessment of student learning is a work in progress,” and the adoption of institutional learning outcomes has been identified as a priority of the next strategic plan. We also understand that, to date,

institutional assessment efforts have been “heavily dependent on the goodwill of faculty” with no office or individual responsible for oversight of the process. While the visiting team found “much enthusiastic support” to create a more comprehensive assessment culture at SSU, the faculty’s work to rule and a lack of resources are making it “difficult for [SSU] to sustain important efforts, including assessment,” particularly with respect to the core curriculum. We are therefore encouraged that the institution has made a commitment to provide additional resources to regain momentum, including the addition of a full-time position in the Office of Strategic Planning and Decision Support tasked with developing a comprehensive assessment plan that “unifies infrastructure from the existing assessment areas.” As specified in our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness*, we seek to be assured, through the Fall 2023 report, that the institution is continuing to make progress in building a culture of assessment with evidence that results are used to improve student learning outcomes.

The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience (2.7).

The institution provides clear public statements about what students are expected to gain from their education, academically and, as appropriate to the institution’s mission, along other dimensions (e.g., civic engagement, religious formation, global awareness). Goals for students’ education reflect the institution’s mission, the level and range of degrees and certificates offered, and the general expectations of the larger academic community (8.2).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

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

Since Salem State University’s last comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2011, enrollment has steadily declined. New students peaked at 1,148 in Fall 2014 with 996 in Fall 2021; yield fell from 25% in Fall 2016 to 18% in Fall 2020; transfer applications are down 52% over the ten-year period; and first-to-second year retention decreased from a high of 81% in Fall 2013 to 73.5% in 2020. At the same time, the diversity of SSU’s student body has been increasing with 20% of full-time undergraduate identifying as Latinx and 41% students of color, and graduate enrollment reached a record high of 460 students in Fall 2020. We note with approval that a number of strategies have been implemented to achieve the University’s goal of “maintaining enrollment and increasing retention” such as creating the position of Vice President for Student Success, implementing an on-the-spot admissions program, increasing the use of social media, optimizing financial aid to boost yield, targeting adult learners to the institution’s degree completion programs, and establishing Living/Learning Communities. The Fall 2023 report will provide an opportunity for SSU to share its success in achieving its goals for enrollment and retention as evidence that “[c]onsistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution

wishes to serve” (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

We support Salem State University’s position that going forward it will need to “continue to right size the institution and develop a sustainable budget that reflects future enrollment declines,” a strategic planning priority reflected in the Vision for a Sustainable Future report. The University’s financial challenges stem from having flat budgets over the last few fiscal years and a dependency on tuition and fees that makes it particularly vulnerable to enrollment and retention declines. In FY2020, even with \$6.2 million in federal CARES funding, SSU ended the year with a \$440,000 deficit, and total operating revenue was comprised primarily of tuition and fees (59%) and state appropriations (35%). We view positively the institution’s increased fundraising capacity as demonstrated by the \$6 million gift received, the largest in Massachusetts State University history, and its “record setting” pace in raising 30% toward its capital campaign goal of \$50 million. We ask that the Fall 2023 report give emphasis to the institution’s success in further strengthening its financial stability. We remind you of our standard on *Institutional Resources*:

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

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

The institution’s financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. The purpose of the Spring 2026 report is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution’s current status in keeping with the Policy on Periodic Review.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2031 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Salem State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also

Mr. John D. Keenan, J.D.  
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welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, David Silva, Provost, and Joseph Bertolino, team chair, during its deliberations.

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

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Tetler".

George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

cc: Mr. Rob Lutts  
Mr. Carlos Santiago  
Visiting team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions





**TO:** Salem State University Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Karen P. House, VP for Finance and Facilities  
*Karen P. House*

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**RE:** SSU BOLD – Status Update

**DATE:** December 14, 2021

I am pleased to provide a status update about this significant project. The university is currently working to complete our funding application to DCAMM for financial support and will file it by December 23. No trustee action is requested at this time. Discussion, if desired, may be held during the Board’s committee meetings in January.

What is SSU BOLD?

SSU BOLD, A Campus Unification and Modernization Project, is an \$84.3M transformative capital project. Among its several goals are to decrease the footprint and deferred maintenance and to add state of the art lab and classroom facilities in the campus core. It will accomplish these goals by selling South Campus, fully renovating Horace Mann Building which provides new labs for nursing and Occupational Therapy and building an addition onto Meier Hall for seven new state of the art, flexible “wet” science labs.

What’s different now?

In the previous application process, the project included a small renovation in the library to provide classrooms for swing space during construction and to enhance digital teaching and learning going forward. However, due to changes in enrollment and pedagogy, swing space is not needed, and the library component has been removed. In addition, the university completed a study of the exterior (envelope) of Horace Mann. Due to the findings, the project budget has been increased to address those deferred maintenance items as part of the building’s renovation. Based on completion of a decarbonization study, costs for the lab addition as well as the Horace Mann renovation have been increased to provide for updated energy standards and non-fossil fuel burning HVAC systems. The final change is to recognize in the project budget that construction inflation has occurred and continues.

Where are we in the process?

The application will be completed soon and has been prepared with feedback from the previous application process and a peer review of a draft application that was

completed in November. The university was recommended to stay the course and not break the project into smaller projects.

What preparatory activities are underway?

We are working with DCAMM to market South Campus. They expect to issue an RFP in January and select a winning development team to sign a preliminary contract by August 2022. Because of due diligence and other contractual steps, the sale of South Campus will not close until late 2024. At that point, the university intends to lease back the Harrington Building until the Horace Mann renovation is complete and the South Campus-based programs can be relocated to North Campus. We are working with MSCBA regarding Bates residence hall. As part of that process, in May 2022 we will shutter Bates and defease the remaining debt.

What are the funding sources?

Funding is anticipated from a variety of sources, the largest of which is the Commonwealth's award that we are working to receive. With an upcoming change in state Administration, we are hopeful of a more favorable level of Commonwealth funding than the current \$30M cap. As you know, BOLD is a \$10M goal in the fundraising campaign. While some fundraising for BOLD is underway, we anticipate the biggest success will come after the Commonwealth funds the project and upon completion of the study and design process that immediately follow the announcement of an award. The university's commitment figure will be finalized after the Commonwealth award and proceeds from sale of South Campus are determined. Before issuing debt that may be needed or advantageous as part of the university's financial commitment, discussion will be held within the Finance and Facilities Committee. An appropriate motion will be put forward by the committee to the full board.

An overview of the timetable follows:

- a. Submission of funding proposal – December 2021
- b. Sell South Campus – January 2022 through December 2024
- c. Commonwealth Funding Decision – June 2022
- d. Begin formal required studies – August 2022
- e. Board of Trustees vote on debt, if any – TBD – 2022 - 2023
- f. Complete construction/move in mid to late 2026