



The Unfinished Agenda

*Charting a Course for the Second Decade
of Massachusetts Education Reform*



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We have always believed that raising standards and improving student achievement must be a community-wide endeavor. To that end, we have conducted quarterly public opinion surveys of Massachusetts residents (in association with our sister organization, Mass Insight Corporation) that have included education-related questions since the beginning of Massachusetts' higher-standards effort in 1993. The October 2004 survey provided information for the Great Schools Campaign and this report.

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See www.massinsight.org for a complete list of Mass Insight Education field consultants and partner organizations, including Lesley University, Learning Innovations/West Ed, ClassMeasures Inc., ASK Enterprises, and the UMass Donahue Institute.

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A Note About Mass Insight Education and the Recommendations in This Report

The Unfinished Agenda calls for an expansion of public funding for a range of school-improvement services, including teacher and leadership development, interventions in struggling schools and districts, and assistance with student performance data analysis. All are areas in which Mass Insight Education is actively partnering with school districts across the state and in conjunction with a number of partners, including Lesley University, Learning Innovations at WestEd, the UMass Donahue Institute, and ASK Enterprises.

Based on our experience and the evidence from states with a track record of outside support for schools, the report's recommendations point to the need for a new, diverse, high-capacity cottage industry in the state to assist school districts and state government in the pursuit of the Commonwealth's higher-standards goals. The scale of the challenge before us calls for capacity-building in every corner of reform: within the schools, within state and local government, and within the partner universities, nonprofits (like MIE) and for-profits that will play vital roles in the improvement of student achievement. Great schools need strong partners, and MIE would be proud to have helped spur the development of many such partners in Massachusetts.



Supreme Judicial Court to State House: *The Buck Stops There*

NOW WHAT?

Twelve years after Massachusetts' original school-funding court case helped lead to the drafting and passage of its landmark Education Reform Act of 1993, the Commonwealth's highest court has dismissed the successor to that case. In declining to act on *Hancock v. Driscoll*, the Supreme Judicial Court lay the responsibility for continued improvement of the state's public schools directly at the feet of the Governor and legislative leaders.

Our Position on *Hancock v. Driscoll*

In the *amicus curiae* brief prepared for us by Goodwin Procter, LLP, Mass Insight Education, along with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education and Associated Industries of Massachusetts, agreed with the plaintiffs in *Hancock v. Driscoll* that students in some urban school districts were not receiving the education they are entitled to under the state constitution.

We continue to believe that is the case. However, we disagreed that the remedy was entirely a matter of more spending. Money matters, but all of the evidence — here and elsewhere — suggests that *how* money is spent is as important as having it available.

Court-ordered solutions generally do not produce effective public policy. Decisions on the detailed list of reforms and investments that Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford suggested in her findings (reviewed by the SJC) are best left for the state to decide.

It is now up to the state to make those decisions — and take the actions necessary to make Massachusetts' schools known here and around the world as *great* schools.

For twelve years, state action on school reform was driven in part by the threat of judicial intervention of the kind that is now reshaping education in New York and other states. Higher expectations, statewide learning standards, tests based on those standards, accountability systems for students and schools, emergency help for high school students who had fallen behind — not to mention more than \$20 billion in new state investment: all of this was the fruit of widespread consensus that if the state failed to step up on its own, the courts would *make* it address the challenge of an inequitable, underperforming public school system.

The decision by the SJC changes the landscape in some ways, but not in others. The SJC found that since the original *McDuffy* case was filed in 1993, the state has been “moving systematically” to address the inadequacies of public education in the plaintiff communities. However, the court also acknowledged that “serious inadequacies in public education remain” in the Commonwealth, and five of seven justices reaffirmed that the Massachusetts Constitution imposes an obligation on the part of the Commonwealth to ensure that a quality public education be available to every student in the state.

In short, the message was: the job's not done. Massachusetts has, in fact, passed into a second decade of school reform — one that presents challenges every bit as daunting as those the Commonwealth met successfully during the first decade (*see box*). Those challenges will test us all: policymakers, educators, community leaders, business leaders, school improvement service providers, taxpayers, parents and students.

We can meet the challenges if we learn from the experiences of our first decade of reform. What were the hallmarks of the Commonwealth's approach to improving public school during the first decade?

- Setting clear goals
- Providing adequate funding
- Reforming the system where reforms were needed

Those same hallmarks will serve us well now. That is what this report and the coalition that developed it are all about: updating and clarifying the goals, strategies, and most pressing needs of school reform as Massachusetts enters the second decade of this work.

Great public schools are the single most important asset a state can have to assure its future prosperity. Access to great schools for urban and poorer students is the civil rights issue of our time.

Mass Insight Education and the leaders of the Great Schools Campaign look forward to working with the Governor and legislature to complete the Commonwealth's unfinished agenda of education reform.

—*William Guenther and Andrew Calkins*

Three Signals of an Unfinished Agenda

- 1. Math performance** — 43% of all Massachusetts' tenth graders failed or were scored "Needs Improvement" on the 2004 MCAS math test. That's more than *30,000 students statewide at risk of graduating from high school with no better than eighth-grade skills in math.*
- 2. Failing schools** — In virtually all of the 114 lowest performing schools (elementaries, middle schools, and high schools) now on state and federal "watch lists" for consistent under-performance, *seven of ten students score in the bottom two categories on the MCAS math tests.*
- 3. Minority achievement gap** — While 92% of the Class of 2005 has attained a Competency Determination by passing MCAS, *nearly one of five African-American, Hispanic, urban or economically disadvantaged students has yet to do so.*

The context for this report

THE FIRST DECADE of education reform in Massachusetts focused on setting — for the first time — rigorous, statewide academic standards, establishing high-quality tests tied to those standards, and successfully implementing a graduation requirement staked to minimally acceptable skills. Substantial new state funding provided support for the goals of higher standards. It's now time to build on the accomplishments of that first

New goals, new funding and new reforms — success depends on clarity and accomplishment in each of these areas.

decade. Massachusetts must set new goals and help schools continue to raise student achievement with a comprehensive package of targeted funding and new reforms. *New goals, new funding* and *new reforms* must be adopted as an integrated package, because (as we learned so clearly in the first decade) overall success depends on clarity and accomplishment in each of these areas.

The first decade of reform also taught us something else. Schools — as would any organization contemplating such fundamental change — need considerable outside support in order to meet the new goals that government and society have set for them.

New goals

Raise the ceiling: Excellence in math and science. Massachusetts, with its skills-dependent economy, can no longer afford to have anything less than world-class schools. Math and science education, in particular, must be dramatically improved at all levels, in all schools,

if our students are to compete successfully in the global economy. We need to increase the percentage of students performing at the “advanced” level in math MCAS tests by half, from 29% to 45%, with similar progress goals for science and literacy.

Raise the floor: Passing should mean proficiency. The 220 MCAS score required for high school graduation equates to an eighth-grade skill level, according to a recent, authoritative report by Achieve, Inc. A score of 240 is defined by Massachusetts standards as “proficient” — ready for success in college or in a skilled job. We must increase the passing score to 230 by 2010 and 240 by 2014, the goal established by the federal NCLB law.

No excuses: Turn around failing schools now. Twelve years into the education reform effort, more than 100 of Massachusetts' 1,894 public schools continue to fail to provide students with the opportunity to learn guaranteed by the state Constitution. With a greater sense of urgency, the state must invest in a variety of creative and aggressive strategies to turn around the performance of the 100 lowest-performing schools within the next three years.

New funding

Massachusetts must ensure that new state money is spent so as to maximize its effect on improving student performance. Chapter 70 state aid should be adequate, equitably allocated, with predictable increases. However, the lesson of the first decade of education reform is that in too many cases, general state funding has not led to higher student achievement. The state should move towards targeting \$400 to \$600 million of state aid (10-15% of the total) for specific investments in research-based strategies that are known to improve academic achievement, and are often hard to budget for at the local level, including content-based professional development,

Executive Summary

leadership training, more time-on-learning, and early childhood education.

New reforms

To achieve the new goals, there are some critical challenges that can only be tackled as statewide problems with statewide solutions using targeted new funding where appropriate. They include:

People: Investments to improve teaching and leadership

- Massachusetts must make a \$50 million investment in high-quality content training, focusing especially on math and science at the elementary and middle school levels. Studies show that most teachers at those levels do not have the content knowledge necessary to teach higher-standards math and science effectively.
- The state's public and private colleges and universities, together with the appropriate state agencies, should take the lead in establishing more comprehensive, coordinated, and rigorous programs to recruit and prepare the best teachers in the country, again focused particularly on math and science. Nearly half of Massachusetts' teacher workforce will turn over during the next decade. The creation of a competent teaching force should be a benchmark for public institutions of higher education.
- Incentive pay must be used as part of a package of funding and reforms to attract talented teachers to critical areas — math and science and positions in struggling schools in exchange for managerial flexibility.
- High-quality, on-going leadership training institutes should be provided on a regional basis for principals and superintendents. (Cost: \$2 million per year for at least three years.) Years of standards-based reform

have produced a new knowledge base about effective school improvement — knowledge and skills that every school and district need and deserve to have.

Program Design: Matching high-impact investments with the areas of highest need

Standards and accountability have exposed critical areas of need that cut across district and school lines and should be addressed at the scale of statewide initiatives. They include:

- **A longer school day:** The research is clear that students (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds) benefit significantly from more time to learn. The state should support lengthened school days for urban students and those who are falling behind, with a special emphasis on models that incorporate the extra time into their core structures and school culture.
- **Pre-school and all-day kindergarten:** The state is already moving ahead in this important area, using a process that could serve as a model for the kinds of targeted investments recommended here. The key is to weigh each investment within the larger context of reform, and not to regard any single measure as a silver bullet.
- **Assisting at-risk students who need extra help:** Our state's student accountability requirements demand that we provide remediation programs to every child who needs the help. The state has made significant investments in this area that need to be maintained, with the recent cuts at least partially restored.
- **Effective use of performance data to improve instruction:** Statewide investments in this area would help educators apply more effectively what they learn from MCAS and other data to the improvement of curricula and teaching approaches.

Operations: Building in more flexibility to do the right thing

Even as local education budgets expanded during the first decade of reform, superintendents' flexibility in the use of those funds was not matched with flexibility over a great many other dimensions of reform. To enable local school leaders to do their best work, the state should:

- **Remove all school administrators from collective bargaining agreements.** Removing principals from collective bargaining and making them accountable to superintendents for performance was one of the most important changes made in the 1993 Education Reform Act. Principals and superintendents need the same flexibility in hiring their own administrative staff.
- **Simplify and consolidate all rules, regulations, and paperwork required of districts by government at all levels; consolidate grant programs.** Massachusetts' many small districts (380 in all) do not have the capacity to keep up with the sheer weight of reporting requirements.
- **Provide flexibility to superintendents to intervene more vigorously on behalf of struggling schools.** The state should implement the recommendations of *Partners in Progress*, produced by the Governor's Task Force on State Intervention in Under-Performing Districts. These include providing superintendents with the authority to reconstitute low-performing schools and to have increased flexibility over staffing, schedules and work rules in those buildings. *(See box.)*

No Excuses: Turn around the state's lowest-performing schools

The reforms discussed in this report should be applied, generally speaking, across the state. *But they should be applied more immediately and more intensively on behalf of the schools that urgently need the help.*

State and federal accountability programs have collectively produced a set of 114 Massachusetts schools (out of 1894) that are clearly and consistently failing the students they serve. Most of these schools are located in urban areas, serving largely poor, minority populations.

Massachusetts policymakers, educators, and the public should feel a tremendous sense of urgency about turning around these schools, before another generation of students moves through them to emerge inadequately equipped.

The state should:

- **Declare an emergency** for the state's 100 (or so) lowest performing schools. The state should expand — make available earlier — emergency provisions for these schools, allowing superintendents to take the necessary steps to make rapid, significant improvement.
- **Build a diverse, high-capacity cottage industry** of school-improvement service providers—universities, non-profits, and others—to help districts carry out turnaround strategies in these schools.
- **Make failing schools models for reform,** pioneering strategies that can be applied more broadly elsewhere. These schools can and should be approached as opportunities to do more than “tinker around the edges” of school improvement. They have significant needs, which need to be met with significant resources (financial and otherwise). Their success can then inform education reform more broadly across the state.



CONTEXT

The Unfinished Agenda of School Reform: Where We Are and What We've Learned

SINCE PASSAGE OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 1993, Massachusetts' public school students have benefited from new statewide academic standards, high-quality testing, a graduation requirement, and more equitable funding for schools across communities of differing economic profiles. With 96% of the class of 2004 meeting state requirements to graduate, and with the Massachusetts standards guiding steady improvement in schools throughout the state, many of the 1993 goals have been achieved.

But much work still lies ahead.

- Too little effort has been devoted to establishing excellence as a goal, moving beyond passing and proficiency to produce schools that are international leaders and students with a world-class education.
- Too many students are meeting only the minimum "Needs Improvement" standards (roughly equivalent to an eighth-grade education, according to the authoritative report from the national non-profit Achieve, Inc.). They are thus still falling well below the "Proficiency" level — defined by state standards and national studies as the skill level required for success in college or for a well-paying job.
- Too many minority students, disproportionately clustered in low-performing urban schools, lag significantly behind their white peers.
- In addition, more than 100 of Massachusetts' 1,894 schools are clearly and continuously failing to provide students with an adequate education, as measured by state, national, and independent standards. Hundreds more schools, though improving, still

post distressingly low levels of student performance, especially in mathematics and science.

An expanded vision for the next decade of education is essential for the future of the Massachusetts economy. At a time when the Commonwealth is striving to attain and retain leadership in high technology, biotechnology and other knowledge-based industries, we cannot continue to graduate students lacking the skills necessary to succeed in those industries or in college — skill levels that are often required for even entry-level jobs in a knowledge economy.

Too many students are still falling well below the "Proficiency" level – defined by state standards as the skill level required for success in college or for a well-paying job.

In our second decade of education reform, Massachusetts must continue to *raise the floor* of public education in the state, revisiting the state's role based on what we learned during the first decade. But we must also *raise the ceiling*, pushing all schools — and students — to look beyond passing to proficiency, and beyond proficiency to excellence.

In the 1990s, Massachusetts over-estimated the capacity of schools to respond to the heightened expectations for student achievement. During this next decade, the Commonwealth must organize itself (and its funding priorities) to build that capacity. We must create and nurture an educational environment in which success is the norm and the expectation, and we must find faster and more effective ways to intervene when schools fail to

Where We Are and What We've Learned

adequately serve their students. We must give administrators and teachers more flexibility to choose and craft methods that fit the needs of their schools and their students, and we must hold them accountable for the results.

Money matters... sometimes

Paraphrasing Richard Murnane and Frank Levy in their influential 1996 article, "Why Money Matters Sometimes": While an adequate supply of money clearly is essential, investments are only effective when they are linked to real reform and targeted at programs that lead to improved student achievement. We must be willing to spend additional public dollars to improve education — but we must have a strategy to ensure that those dollars are spent on programs that get results.

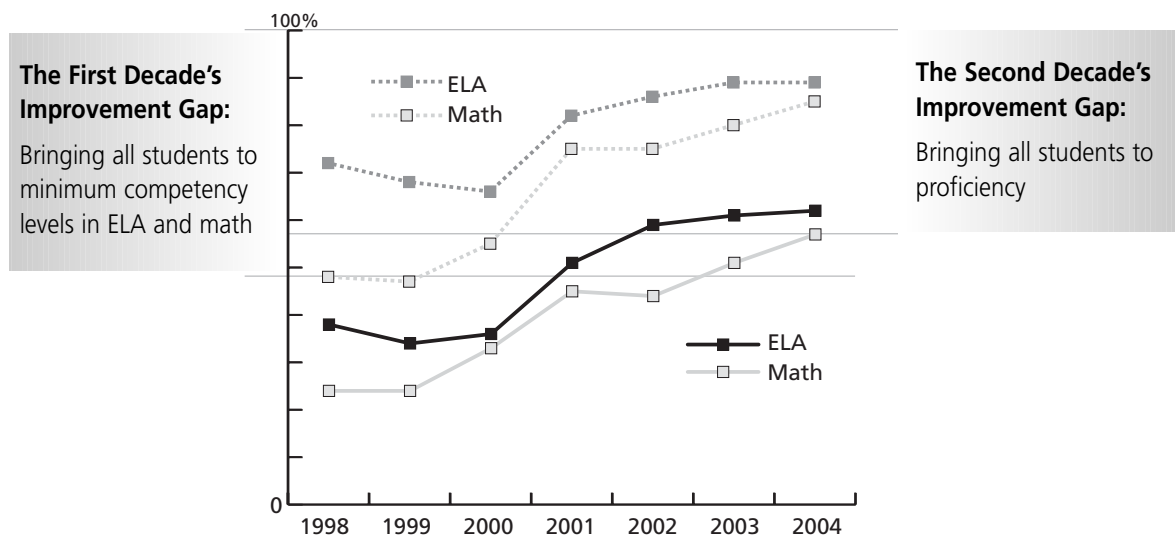
The timing is right to articulate an expanded vision for a second decade of reform in Massachusetts.

- The Supreme Judicial Court has dismissed Massachusetts' ground-breaking education funding case, *Hancock v. Driscoll*, and deliberately handed responsibility for continued ed reform to the Governor and state legislature.
- Schools are facing increasing pressure to meet achievement levels established by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
- Industry and civic leaders are united in their opinion that public education in 2005 is at once a critical economic issue for the state and a pressing civil rights issue for those students trapped in underperforming schools.

In the following pages, the Great Schools Campaign outlines its vision for the next generation of education reform in Massachusetts.

The Challenges of Reform's Second Decade: Just as steep, just as important — and more complex

The two dotted lines: % of students *passing* 10th-grade MCAS tests, '98-'04
The two solid lines: % of students achieving *Proficiency* or better





OVERVIEW

Great Schools: **A Call for New Goals, New Funding, and New Reforms**

THE GREAT SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN, organized by the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute and co-chaired by Paul Grogan of The Boston Foundation and Gloria Larson of Foley Hoag LLP (*see Steering Committee, inside cover*), has convened and engaged a broad coalition of school superintendents, business and community leaders, academic experts, and other reform partners around three guiding principles:

- **New, aggressive goals** have to focus on turning around our failing schools, raising the minimum standards bar for all students, and expecting excellence for an increasing number of students and schools.
- **State funding**, linked to new goals and reforms, needs to be adequate to achieve the goals, predictable enough to allow local districts to plan ahead, and allocated in a way that promotes the use of programs and reforms that have been proven to increase student achievement.
- **New, multiple reforms** are needed to improve teaching, strengthen school leadership, and turn around low-performing schools by making them models for the emerging knowledge base on effective reforms, incorporating (among other strategies) longer school days and incentive pay for highly skilled teachers, linked to flexibility in managing schools.

To accomplish all of the above, we must be willing to rethink some longstanding ways of doing business and experiment broadly with new approaches. Specifically:

- **The state must redefine its role to suit the requirements of this second decade of reform.** School reform can work well when skilled leaders at the local level have the flexibility and resources to select and organize the programming needed to

improve the performance of their schools. That philosophy — shaped and given urgency by the first-ever state standards — guided the Commonwealth's general approach in the first decade. But as we enter the second decade, it has become clear that standards and accountability have exposed critical areas of need — some quite localized (underperforming schools or districts) and some pervasively statewide (math/science teaching capacity, effective use of performance data). The state must now organize itself to take direct aim at those challenges and take an affirmative, proactive role in enabling the solutions. That does not mean radical expansion of the Department of Education, but it does mean a substantial (for this historically strong local-control state) redefinition of the state's role in identifying, prioritizing, and supporting a comprehensive strategy to respond to the local and statewide challenges surfaced by standards and accountability.

It has become clear that standards and accountability have exposed **critical areas of need** – some quite localized (underperforming schools or districts) and some pervasively statewide (math/science teaching capacity, effective use of performance data).

- **Some of the challenges require statewide solutions — i.e., solutions of real scale.** The redefinition described above, focused on building capacity both in and outside of the schools, is already underway to some degree. The DOE has received high marks from the field for its Performance Improvement Mapping program, aimed at helping

struggling schools develop data-driven, results-oriented school improvement plans. The Board of Higher Education is experimenting with a promising math-science-technology “pipeline” teacher recruitment model. Various state agencies, legislative leaders, and the Governor have already been responsive to, or expressed deep interest in, many of the issues raised in this report. But in a state inefficiently organized around too many small units (380 school districts in all), capacity in the field to reach reform’s ultimate goals is sorely lacking. This is by far the most critical issue of the second decade.

In areas where scale matters — for example, working much more vigorously across school district/college/agency institutional lines to prepare teachers and school leaders better, or employing technology to support the design of instruction and analysis of data — the state can and must expand its impact, its direct investment and its leadership.

- **We must implement reform in two distinct categories: broadly applicable innovation and improvement support for schools and districts across the Commonwealth; and a substantially more intensive effort to turn around failing schools.** All schools and districts would applaud and benefit from the streamlining of Department of Education paperwork and grant requirements (as California recently accomplished), broadscale teacher training programs to ensure deep subject-matter expertise in the critical areas of math and science, and solid, standards-based leadership training for school administrators. The state’s lowest-performing schools present an especially urgent challenge — and an opportunity to

experiment with deeper levels of innovation. In making such schools models of reform, we can substantially improve the educational experience for the students they serve and collect valuable data to support decisions on which strategies work best and could be applied more broadly.

Public to state: “School reform is an unfinished agenda”

In a recent statewide poll conducted by Mass Insight Education to give voice to the public’s assessment of the first decade of education reform and opinions on priorities for the decade ahead:

- **54%** of those questioned characterized education reform as an “unfinished agenda” in Massachusetts — nearly four times the response to any other characterization.
- **57%** said that new reforms will require new money — but that the money should be tied to reforms proven to increase student performance. Just 21% said that more money alone was the answer.
- **93%** said it is important to turn around the performance of the 100 worst-performing schools within the next three years.
- **73%** considered it important to increase the MCAS score required for high school graduation.
- **69%** called for improved teacher training in areas such as math and science.
- **67%** called for more classes in advanced subjects.

These results and others are presented in Mass Insight Education’s report on the survey, *The Unfinished Agenda: The Public’s View of Massachusetts School Reform*, available at www.massinsight.org.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. New Goals

IF WE HAVE LEARNED one thing from our first decade of school reform in Massachusetts, it is the power and importance of setting measurable goals.

In the ten years following passage of the 1993 Education Reform Act, Massachusetts focused on setting — for the first time — statewide academic standards, establishing high-quality MCAS tests directly aligned with the standards, and instituting (amidst some controversy) a graduation requirement staked to those standards and tests along with substantial new state funding to support the new goals. That requirement — set at the equivalent of an eighth-grade skill level, and only in English and math — presented, and continues to present, a daunting challenge for some districts in the state. It is clear, however, that the graduation requirement and the effort required to meet it were the catalysts that propelled Massachusetts forward in its largely successful education reform drive in the late 1990s and early part of this decade.

But what was an attainable (though difficult) goal from 1993–2003 still reflects a skill level that was accurately labeled by the DOE and the Board of Education: “Needs Improvement.” Our state’s accomplishments have made us a national model. Nonetheless, we have only partly fulfilled the ultimate vision — and constitutional mandate — for equivalent educational opportunity sufficient to prepare every Massachusetts student for post-high school success.

We must learn from our own success. Moving forward, we need to articulate — and codify — a new set of consistent, clear, measurable goals. Mass Insight Education and the partners we assembled to inform this report propose that state leaders adopt new, forward-looking goals in three critical areas: promoting genuine academic excellence (particularly in the high-priority areas of math and science); raising the minimum achievement bar

NEW GOALS

- 1.1 *Raise the ceiling:
Excellence in math and science*
- 1.2 *Raise the floor:
Passing should mean proficiency*
- 1.3 *No excuses:
Turn around failing schools*

for all; and following through on a commitment to turn around failing schools.

1.1 **Raise the ceiling: Excellence in math and science**

Massachusetts — more than many other states — cannot afford to have anything less than world-class schools. With its high-cost, high-skill economy, Massachusetts is locked in a race with other regions around the country and around the world for leadership in cutting-edge, knowledge-based industries. The Commonwealth needs to attract and retain global industries — and the people these leading businesses employ — with the quality of our public school graduates and with schools recognized throughout the country for excellence.

■ **Make Massachusetts’ schools and students among the best in the world in math and science.** If our state is to continue its leadership role in an increasingly technological global economy, we must all commit ourselves to preparing students to meet the intellectual demands of that economy. This discussion is well underway in Massachusetts, but it is time to move beyond \$2 and \$3 million pilot teacher training programs and scale this effort appropriately to the need — an investment of \$50 million annually for math and science teacher training. (Mass Insight Educa-

U.S. students lag behind competitive countries in math achievement

Average mathematics scale scores of eighth-grade students, by country: 2003

Country	Average Score
Singapore	605
Republic of Korea	589
Hong Kong SAR	586
Chinese Taipei	585
Japan	570
Belgium-Flemish	537
Netherlands	536
Estonia	531
Hungary	529
Malaysia	508
Latvia	508
Russian Federation	508
Slovak Republic	508
Australia	505
United States	504

Source: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*, 2003.

tion’s 2003 report, *Raising Math Achievement in Massachusetts*, put the cost of retraining 10,000 teachers in math content knowledge at \$24 million. Providing on-going coaching for those teachers would cost an additional \$12 million annually.) The Governor, the DOE, and the state Board of Education have already begun discussing the timeline for including science in the graduation requirement, a necessary provision, but insufficient without an investment strategy to produce qualified science teachers.

Further: the state should set firm goals to increase the percentage of students performing at the “advanced” MCAS levels: in math to 45% by 2010, for instance. Currently, 29% of high school students achieve at

the advanced level in math; 43% score at the two lowest categories — failing and “needs improvement.” The superintendents in MIE’s Coalition for Higher Standards school network uniformly tell us that the direction of first-decade school reform focused their districts’ attention and resources on students and programs at or below the passing level on MCAS. The pendulum needs to swing at least partially in the other direction: ensuring that our schools are pushing more students toward academic excellence and are providing the opportunities in all schools for talented, motivated students to achieve that excellence. As MCAS science results become part of the graduation requirement, the state should set equally aggressive goals for improving the percentage of students achieving at the advanced level in that field — and back up that requirement with strategies to produce the qualified science teachers schools will need to reach those goals.

1.2 Raise the floor: Passing should mean proficiency

- **Increase the requirement for high school graduation from an MCAS score of 220 to an MCAS score of 230 by 2010 and (as required by federal law) to 240 by 2014.** A score of 220 equates to an eighth-grade education. A score of 240 is defined by Massachusetts standards as “Proficient” — ready for college or success in a high-skill

An MCAS score of **220** equates to an **8th grade** education.

job. The goal of the graduation requirement is to ensure that all Massachusetts students leave high school with an education adequate to allow participation in the state’s economy. In a high-skill economy in 2005, an eighth-grade education is not good enough.

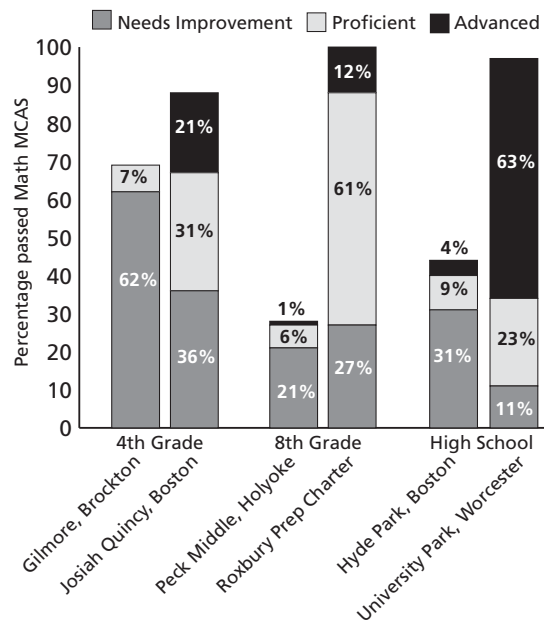
1.3 No excuses:

Turn around failing schools

■ **Significantly improve the performance of Massachusetts’ 100 lowest-performing schools within the next three years.** It is time to declare an emergency in the small percentage of Massachusetts’ 1,894 schools that are failing — year after year — to provide students with an adequate opportunity to learn, as guaranteed by the state constitution. For the first time, more than ten years into the reform effort, the state can identify these schools with confidence because multiple years of MCAS data show other schools serving similar student populations to be performing better. The fact that these schools are overwhelmingly clustered in cities, where they serve the state’s poorest, most heavily minority communities, makes this more than a question of fairness: it is the civil rights issue of our time. Students served by these schools are passing through their doors even as the challenge of *what to do* is endlessly debated — here in Massachusetts, and in every other state across the country. The state must begin investing — today — in a variety of creative and far more aggressive strategies to improve the programs and services of these schools before they fail another generation of young people.

High-performing urban schools show: There is no excuse any longer for chronic low performance

Percent of students passing math MCAS in demographically similar urban schools



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004



RECOMMENDATIONS

2. New Funding

AS SCHOOLS EMBARK on a new round of reforms aimed at achieving ambitious new goals, they need to be assured that the dollars invested will be adequate to meet the challenge, that they will be allocated equitably, and that they will be available predictably, allowing districts to sustain existing programs and plan future priorities.

What constitutes “adequate funding” for education is a highly charged topic that is being vigorously debated in state houses and courtrooms across the country. In Massachusetts, there is reasonable consensus that, from a point of lower-than-average state investment and inequitable spending among rich and poor districts in the early 1990s, the Commonwealth has come a long way (more than \$20 billion invested) towards enabling every district to spend within a range that could be termed “adequate.”

That commitment needs to continue in this second decade of reform. It could be more sharply defined by updating the foundation formula used to determine state funding for each district.

But “adequate” funding does not necessarily lead to higher achievement across the board. Beyond those initial, underlying principles, Massachusetts must also find ways to ensure that public resources are spent to maximum effect on improving student performance. This was not achieved adequately, in all schools, during the first decade of reform.

2.1 Make money matter

■ **Target 10-15% of state aid for large-scale investments in strategies known to improve academic achievement, and require a local match to build shared ownership.** Research and experience tell us that some educational investments have a greater return in terms of student achievement than others. The current system of

NEW FUNDING

2.1 Make money matter:
Target 10-15% of state aid for large-scale investments in strategies known to improve academic achievement, and require a local match to build shared ownership.

state aid to education does little to encourage that state dollars are spent on the most promising strategies. Absent such encouragement, it is no surprise that too many districts are caught in a bind where state funds are deployed only to maintain the status quo of current programming; there are few funds remaining and little incentive to invest in critical areas that will in fact improve student performance. High-quality content training for teachers of math and science, a longer school day, full-day kindergarten, and early childhood education are investments that often lose out to the need to protect staffing levels and pay for salary increases, other contractual obligations, or special education. These are areas that will only receive attention if the state makes a major commitment — and makes it easier for decision-makers at the local level (including superintendents, school committees, and municipal officials) to reframe their budgets.

Three criteria for targeted state investments.

This is not a new idea. High-quality professional development for teachers and administrators was viewed by the framers of the 1993 education reform law as a strategic imperative that deserved fairly aggressive advocacy by the state. It is representative of this “category” of reform because it fits three criteria:

- There is a considerable research base confirming its importance to significant educational improvement.
- Funding it at the district level is clearly a difficult proposition, as staff development in districts has been supported over time by soft money.
- Widespread impact requires large-scale statewide investments and policy decisions.

Spending mandates are problematic. Rising from \$75 per student in 1998, staff development was required to be spent by districts at the rate of \$125 per student out of each district's Chapter 70 allotment of state reform funding by 2002. But oversight was minimal and districts acknowledged finding many and varied ways of showing they had met the minimum. When funding became tight in FY03, the requirement was eliminated.

Massachusetts must find ways to ensure that public resources are spent to maximum effect on improving student performance.

Targeted spending creates a statewide network of programs. The state's funding of MCAS remediation programs has pursued a different, more successful model. These resources have been disbursed on a formula basis (though districts have to apply) as a separate line item from the Chapter 70 funds. The investments reached their peak at \$50 million per year in the early part of this decade. However, when remediation funding was cut 80% in the FY04 budget, most school districts lost exactly 80% of their remediation programs.

Combining targeted spending with required local matches would be most effective of all. One way for the state to use scarce resources most strategically would be to set aside a portion of state funds for use only on specific reform investments — and then only when matched with local education dollars. This approach might be called “Shared Ownership” investing, because it involves shared investment and responsibility for both the local district and the state. A requirement for a local district match might help preserve good programming if and when state funds disappear, because the districts would already have been investing in the program themselves.

In taking this approach, the state must strike the right balance between allowing local educators the flexibility to make critical decisions about what strategies are right for their districts, and assuring that enough money is targeted toward a small group of research-based strategies. Those strategies might include:

- **Staff development** that embodies the characteristics of the national research-based models: content-oriented, team-based, off-site institutes matched with on-site coaching, well integrated with district goals and school improvement plans.
- **Full-day kindergarten and early childhood education** — clearly a priority for many (but not necessarily all) superintendents.
- **Longer school days and/or academic years** — a hallmark of virtually all of the schools that are the state's top performers in serving highly disadvantaged student populations.
- **Integrated data management** and effective application of the data to improve teaching — a strong finding from a wide

New Funding

range of effective-practice studies, including Mass Insight Education's own research into 28 "Vanguard" models in Massachusetts (www.buildingblocks.org).

The state must develop a strategy to move from the current system to one in which 10-15% of all state education aid is earmarked for critical investments like those described above. Reallocation of some existing funds is one option. Another would be to require that 50% of all new state aid money be targeted in this way, until the total pool of targeted money equals the desired percentage of total state aid.



RECOMMENDATIONS

3. New Reforms

CLEAR GOALS CREATE CONSENSUS and give direction to the work. Adequate funding, spent strategically, creates the possibility of success. Both are necessary if we are to substantially improve Massachusetts' public schools – but insufficient without changes to the delivery system itself.

Money linked to reform. The framers of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act understood this. The state's commitment in 1993 to increased funding for public education was part of a “grand bargain” that initiated a range of vital reforms. Some among them have been quite visible over the years: for example, accountability for students, schools, and school districts (which pre-dated the federal accountability requirements from No Child Left Behind). Others have been less apparent to the public eye but no less important in their way: removal of school principals from unions, for example, and changes in the authority granted to school committees.

The second decade of standards-based school improvement in Massachusetts must bring a second generation of reforms. If the first decade focused primarily on the implementation of common learning standards and accountability for results, this second generation of reforms must focus on enabling school district leaders to reach their student achievement targets.

How? By removing barriers at all levels (statewide, district, school, classroom) and in all of the relevant areas (district management and governance, collective bargaining, higher education, state government) that prevent the building of capacity and its most effective deployment.

It's not a matter — as is often stated — of simply “working smarter.” It's about redesigning more strategically the systems that determine student achievement. These systems can be organized in a number of ways. For this

NEW REFORMS

3.1 People: Develop and more effectively deploy our most importance resource

3.2 Program design: Match high-impact investments with the areas of highest need

3.3 Operations: Build in more flexibility to do the right thing

report, we have collected them in three categories: *People, Program Design, and Operations*.

Note: *The reforms suggested here, across all three categories, are broadly applicable to all of the Commonwealth's public schools and school districts. In a separate section at the end of the report, we argue that these reforms need to be implemented immediately and more intensively to turn around the state's small number of unacceptably under-performing schools.*

3.1 People: Develop and more effectively deploy our most importance resource

Effective teaching: Central to education at all levels is the knowledgeable, well-trained, committed teacher. Massachusetts' public schools have tens of thousands of such teachers making a fundamental difference in the lives of students every day. Massachusetts (like every state) also faces three major challenges:

- Too many teachers do not have the capabilities and content knowledge required to be proficient in the subjects they teach, particularly in math and science. This is not their fault; we have raised student achievement standards and done little to raise teacher capacity levels commensurately.

- With the Baby Boom generation already beginning to retire, schools will need to hire a large number of new teachers — some estimates range as high as 50% — over the rest of this decade. Much needs to be done to make sure that the “pipeline” into the teaching profession draws bright, energetic individuals and that their pre-service training prepares them well.
- Critical shortages are already apparent in some areas. Precisely because math and science are so critical to this state’s economy, the best math and science students emerge from college with options more lucrative than teaching these subjects at the K-12 level. And, in all disciplines, the most desirable teachers have many attractive options outside of teaching in troubled inner-city schools where their efforts are most urgently needed.

Precisely because math and science are so critical to this state’s economy, the best math and science students emerge from college with options more lucrative than teaching these subjects at the K-12 level.

These are deeply embedded challenges. Solving them will require fundamental changes in the ways the state, our colleges and our school districts recruit, prepare, license, induct, develop, evaluate, compensate, and deploy our teacher workforce.

- **Massachusetts must expand and refine its efforts to retrain current teachers.** The Department of Education has made teacher development — particularly in math — a priority, and the state is currently using its limited federal funds to supply content-

focused training of teachers to boost their math and science skills. However, the effort must be substantially expanded to reach all teachers who need support. As important: the state can lead the way (as it has already begun to do) in pressing districts and providers to change their approach to teacher development, embedding much more of it through in-school coaching of the work teachers are doing in their classrooms. This is where the “Shared Ownership” model of targeted state investment requiring a local match comes in. Participating districts would receive state funds only if their programs met effective-practice guidelines — which in turn would provide superintendents with the incentive to impact-bargain local work rules and contractual requirements where necessary. The DOE routinely applies this thinking to its grant programs — but they are too small to provoke broadscale change.

- **Priming the pipeline into math, science, and other high-need teaching areas will require a level of collaboration that is unprecedented in Massachusetts.**

As one example, colleges and universities need to adjust their course requirements for aspiring elementary teachers so they take at least three courses in math content — a change they would have to do in collaboration with each other, because deans (perhaps justifiably) worry that a unilateral change will result in fewer applying students. The state should spur this development by heightening certification requirements to more adequately reflect the demanding math standards in today’s public schools.

All of this calls for a new task force, composed of public/private college presidents and supported by the state, to quickly develop the package of policy, licensure,

and coursework reforms necessary to make Massachusetts the pre-eminent center for math and science teacher preparation in the country.

Colleges and the state are not the only players here. Districts should much more proactively implement “distributed leadership” models that create professional advancement opportunities for teachers — and that do not necessarily take them out of the classroom. Teacher associations need to embrace these reforms (as some already have) and see them as part of their own charter to ensure proper preparation of their members and, consequently, lower attrition.

- **Salary structures and work rules must support reform’s achievement goals.** “Incentive pay” has become a hot topic, and extra remuneration or loan forgiveness programs for teachers in high-need disciplines or serving high-need populations is worth pursuing. It is just one piece, however, of a puzzle that has plagued the progress of education reform here and across the country: how to most effectively match capacity with critical need. The other pieces in the puzzle involve other forms of performance- or “responsibility-based” pay and the entire range of work rules governed by collective bargaining in Massachusetts. Progress on these issues depends in large part on communication between and among school districts and union leaders. School reform progresses best when every stakeholder shares the same vision, and is held equally accountable for results. The districts Mass Insight Education has studied that have made the most progress have done so in cooperation — occasionally hard-bargained — with their unions, not in opposition to them.

Effective leadership: The assumption of the 1993 Education Reform Act was that district and school leaders, armed with new funding and the urgency borne of new accountability, would know what needed to be done to bring students to much higher standards for learning. That turned out to be just partly true, for all kinds of reasons — among them, a substantially altered landscape for which most educators simply weren’t prepared. The state ran leadership institutes in the 1990s and has begun, more recently, to become involved in leadership development programs aimed at the district and school level. But these programs to date have scarce resources and little scale.

The districts that have made the most progress have done so in cooperation with their unions, not in opposition to them.

The need for more and better leadership training and development programs is dramatized by the flight of some of Massachusetts’ larger districts away from reliance on the traditional conduits of new leaders. Boston, Springfield, and a number of regional collaboratives have begun “grow-your-own-leaders” programs, some supported by national grants from funders such as the Broad and Wallace foundations. These programs look something like the medical residency model, relying on mentoring and real-world practice to give their participants a practical, effective head start.

They and some other field-based leadership development programs, such as the joint Harvard Business School/Harvard Graduate School of Education model, the District Management Council’s effective-practice collaborative and the emerging DOE collaborations with the National Institute for School Leader-

ship and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, deserve state funding support and (if warranted) immediate expansion. There is no silver bullet in education reform, but excellence in school and district leadership, along with teacher quality, probably comes closer than anything else.

3.2 Program design: Match high-impact investments with the areas of highest need

This category encompasses much of what school and district leaders would consider to be their job: organizing resources and structures to fulfill a vision of high achievement. The fundamental principle of standards-based reform is that higher statewide expectations for achievement, coupled with assessments carrying some measure of accountability, would drive wholesale changes in the ways school programs are designed.

The Great Schools Campaign's recommendations in this category focus on four areas identified by our collaborating superintendents. They represent dimensions of reform where high need can be readily matched with solutions of high impact.

A longer school day: Virtually all of the state's urban schools that clearly outperform their demographic peers do so in part through the wise use of extended time in school — both during the school year and by extending the length of the academic year. Worcester's University Park Campus School and the Boston Collegiate School (formerly the South Boston Harbor Charter School) are two examples. The research is becoming clear on time

and learning: disadvantaged students need more time to reach the higher-skills expectations the state has set, and the most promising application of extra time seems to be in models of whole-school design — not simply appending hours of remediation to the regular school day.

Pre-school and all-day kindergarten: Currently, about half of Massachusetts' kindergartners are in full-day programs. Participation in pre-school programs (and those programs' quality) varies largely by zip code. While there is some disagreement in the research community about the proven long-term academic effects of early childhood education, there seems to be consensus on its behavioral effects and on the impact of high-quality programs when provided to the children of greatest need. The state is already well down the road towards making initial investments in this area — using a process that could well serve as a model, generally, for the kinds of targeted state spending recommended in this report. The key, which cuts across all of the various investments policymakers will consider, is to view and weigh each investment within the larger context of reform. Each of these investments is necessary — but not, by themselves, sufficient.

Effective use of performance data to improve instruction: The key to investing in data analysis is understanding that it's not really *about* data analysis. It's about applying the analysis to reshape curricula, improve teaching strategies, and encourage collaboration among teachers. The state has made massive investments in producing good data (through MCAS). The opportunity now is to make further investments that help school leaders and teachers fully incorporate performance assessment and lessons gleaned from the data into the fabric and culture of the school. The DOE, the Governor, and members of the Legislature have each

The key to investing in data analysis is understanding that it's not really *about* data analysis.

expressed interest in widening the state's role in this area. That should happen – as quickly as in the FY2006 budget.

Fulfilling our commitment to students who need extra help: In 2002-2003, Massachusetts spent \$50 million on remediation programs in an effort to help the Class of 2003 pass the MCAS, as this was the first class required to pass to earn a diploma. Since then, the budget for remediation has been reduced to \$10 million, and more reductions could be looming. With the cuts, most schools (especially at the elementary and middle school levels) have had to eliminate the extra-help classes, tutoring, and summer programs that supported at-risk students in developing grade-level skills. While it can be argued that, twelve years into school reform, schools should be having to serve fewer and fewer students with below-grade-level skills, our state's student accountability requirements demand that we provide these programs in every school district. Much has been learned about effective remediation (see the *Keep the Promise* reports at www.massinsight.org), and the state puts the integrity and success of its reform effort at risk in cutting the remediation budget.

3.3 Operations: Building in more flexibility to do the right thing

Flexibility, our Coalition for Higher Standards superintendents have told us, is one of the great conundrums of Massachusetts' approach to standards-based reform. Even as their budgets have expanded over the years with Chapter 70 block grants, their flexibility in the use of those funds has not been matched with flexibility over a great many other dimensions of reform. Those constraints have prevented them from making most effective use of their human resources, working most efficiently with the DOE, and intervening in any really significant way to turn around their most troubled schools.

Some of the solutions recommended here would require additional legislative action, on top of what was accomplished through the 1993 Act. Some may require special dispensation — if such a thing is possible — from the federal government over grant-related application and reporting requirements.

Remove all school administrators from collective bargaining agreements. The 1993 reform act took principals out of bargaining units — a step that has been universally recognized as very positive for successful reform. But other district and school-level administrators remain in unions today. It is time to complete the work, giving principals and superintendents more flexibility in shaping and leading their management teams.

Flexibility in the use of [Chapter 70] funds has not been matched with flexibility over a great many other dimensions of reform.

Simplify and consolidate all rules, regulations, and paperwork required of districts by the state. Over and over, superintendents have told us, they are hampered in their ability to implement reform by the sheer weight of reporting requirements to various state agencies. Partly driven by Massachusetts' own accountability systems, partly by No Child Left Behind, and partly by other demands unrelated to accountability, government record-keeping and reporting requirements have become time-consuming beyond their value. This is particularly true in Massachusetts' legions of smaller districts, which do not have the central office infrastructure necessary to keep up.

An example: a grant process that engulfs even the most entrepreneurial school districts in

paperwork and regulations. The state should consider modeling itself after recent changes in the federal grantmaking process, consolidating different programs into a smaller number of integrated grants. California provides another model, having recently consolidated 26 existing grant programs into six block grants. The DOE and the Board of Higher Education are aware of the issue and have sought to relieve districts' burden, moving towards online grant applications and other reforms. But more could be done.

Provide flexibility to superintendents to intervene more vigorously on behalf of struggling schools. *Partners in Progress*, the report by the Governor's Task Force on State Intervention in Under-Performing Districts (and chaired by Great Schools Campaign co-chair Paul Grogan), found that excessive constraints on leadership undermine a school district's ability to turnaround low performing schools. *Partners in Progress* recommended broad policy changes, such as providing "all superintendents with authority to reconstitute their lowest performing schools, including authority to establish pilot schools and charter schools...hire own staff and remove teachers...[and] remove administrators from collective bargaining." With such reforms in place, districts would not have to wait for a school to fail consistently for four to five years before having the legal authority to use appropriate measures and tools to turn around the school. (Even now, it is unclear how readily those powers will be granted to districts with a "chronically underperforming school" — the most serious category.) The state should implement these recommendations and speed up the pace at which schools move through review and planning phases into categories that permit local leaders to take appropriate action.

Building a Marketplace of Support Providers

If reform's second decade is its capacity-building era, who will help districts build their capacity? In some states, the education agency is the sole provider, in part through highly resourced regional bureaus. In Massachusetts, where the DOE's head count has shrunk considerably despite its increasing responsibilities over the past 15 years, the answer is more likely to be found in an expanded, lively marketplace of school-improvement service providers.

That marketplace needs encouragement. Because funding for school-improvement services has been sporadic, at best, the "industry" of providers of such services has never matured in Massachusetts. School districts have contracted for in-service training and other services with professional associations, individual consultants (often retired educators), universities, regional consortia such as EDCO and TEC, and nonprofit organizations such as Mass Insight Education, Learning Innovations at WestEd, and Research for Better Teaching. (Mass Insight Education has been a provider of staff and leadership development since its inception in 1997.) Some districts are involved with the whole-school models piloted by the New American Schools initiative launched by President George H.W. Bush (for example: Success for All, Co-Nect, Roots & Wings), or with other national reform networks and foundations (Gates, Carnegie, Broad, Wallace).

But these programs are for the most part quite disconnected from each other, even in districts where several of them are working at once. The DOE has begun to play an important role in assembling Massachusetts' service providers and in viewing their collective development as an important step forward for the state. For example, the agency already makes a strong effort to shape providers' work through the RFP process for competitive grant programs. That kind of "benign management" should be encouraged and expanded. As schools and school districts become identified for intervention and the state's investments rise in this area, they — and the state as a whole — will profit from the presence of a healthy, dynamic, collaborative marketplace of school-improvement service providers.

The Turnaround Schools: Intensive Intervention in the State’s Lowest Performing Schools

In Massachusetts today, a decade and two years after the launch of standards-based reform, a small percentage of schools are clearly and consistently failing the students they serve. Most of those schools are located in urban areas, serving largely poor, minority populations where parents have few alternatives to inadequate public schools.

Governor Romney echoed the convictions of a wide range of national and local figures when, in his 2005 State of the State speech, he described the continuing inequity of educational opportunity between children of different races and economic backgrounds as the civil rights issue of our time.

A deliberate, thoughtful process has produced reasonable consensus about these schools — 114 out of 1,894 in the Commonwealth (*see next page*). They themselves have had roughly the equivalent *opportunity to teach* as comparable schools, serving comparable student populations, spending comparable amounts per student and all within the same statewide, standards-driven environment. But their students’ achievement levels do not measure up to those at the comparable schools — and have not, consistently, over the past four years. These students, compared to counterparts in similar schools, have clearly not enjoyed an equivalent *opportunity to learn*.

These schools need help: intensive intervention that integrates many of the reform ideas advanced in this report, but applied at a much more intensive level. It is the state’s Constitutional responsibility to ensure that they get it.

How? By following these three principles, adapted in part from the *Partners in Progress* report prepared by the Governor’s Task Force on State Interventions in Under-Performing Districts:

- **The Commonwealth must expand — and make available earlier — emergency provisions for chronically underperforming schools, through legislative action if necessary.** Whatever powers

the state would assume at the most extreme level of intervention — total receivership of a school or district — should be granted to superintendents when schools have performed poorly and without improvement for three consecutive years. Superintendents with schools in that category should automatically be permitted to enact “failing school” rules, rather than having to wait for a school to be named to the federal “restructuring” list after five or more years of failure. The Department of Education should support these superintendents with funding, resources, and training. Superintendents should have increased latitude over the hiring, firing, and placement of personnel, and a range of work rules including schedules and time for learning. Converting these schools into magnets, charters, pilots, or Horace Mann schools should be a ready option. The same principles should apply to whole districts deemed in need of intervention; at the penultimate stage (before receivership), local leadership should be granted the flexibility necessary to effect immediate change — and professional assistance (see below) to inform that change process.

- **State government’s role in these turnarounds should be to invest and steer, not row.** It would be difficult for the DOE to perform its current monitoring/evaluating role and a new role as turnaround service provider, simultaneously. The state can and should set standards and directions for the turnaround initiatives, and (of course) assess the results. But the day-in, day-out work of whole-school and whole-district intervention will most likely best be carried out by a diverse, high-capacity cottage industry of school-improvement service providers. That is how a blend of public, philanthropic, and private funding and initiative can most quickly produce the expertise Massachusetts needs, and at a scale that matches the potential need. There is precedent in the supplemental education services

(continued from previous page)

industry, which expanded geometrically on the heels of federal and state support for supplemental (main remedial/tutorial) kinds of programs.

- **These struggling schools should become viewed as potential models for effective reform.** There is an opportunity here to do more than turn around a group of under-achieving schools, as essential as that is. The framers of the Great Schools Campaign ask: why not view these schools as potential models for effective reform? The relatively small number of failing schools and the critical need to turn them around quickly make these schools ideal candidates to become pilots for effective school improvement — an environment in which the state's (and the nation's) most innovative educational thinkers and most experienced educational reformers can apply and perfect methods for improving student performance, all for the benefit of historically underserved student populations.

The point is to get quickly past the defensiveness and embarrassment of labels, and move much more quickly (now that so much multi-year performance data are in place) through the analysis and planning phases into interventions — proactive turnaround strategies that link the DOE, district leaders, and school-improvement partners around the principles and reforms suggested throughout this report.

We have spent twelve years and a lot of money to get to this point: knowing, based on irrefutable evidence, where we need to work hardest to make sure Massachusetts fulfills its Constitutional responsibility to children. Now, the question is: do we have the public will necessary to accomplish that work?

114 Schools That Need Significant Help — Now

The Great Schools Campaign's list of the 114 lowest performing schools in Massachusetts is not a new list in any way; it is a combination of other lists from the state and federal governments.

The list includes:

- Each of the schools that has been identified for Restructuring, Corrective Action, or Aggregate Improvement in two subjects, and Aggregate Improvement in one subject and Subgroup Improvement in the second subject have made the list; and
- Each of the schools that has been declared Underperforming or Chronically Underperforming by the Massachusetts DOE since 2000, minus the one school that has improved enough in four years to be removed from the list.

What does all of this mean in plain English? It means that these 114 schools have produced low achievement levels in literacy and math against the state's expectations for all schools *and* have not shown a capacity to improve on their own, over a period of at least two years and — for half of them — as many as four or five. The 114 schools identified by the list are in 24 different districts (out of 373) across the Commonwealth; however, nearly 80% of the schools are in just eight districts. The list will be available at www.massinsight.org.

Next Steps

The Great Schools Campaign's call to sharpen the vision, retool the funding, and refocus the reforms should in no way diminish appreciation of what has been accomplished here in Massachusetts since 1993. Educators, policy-makers, reform experts, advocates, parents, and students have all played critical roles in making the Commonwealth a model for the nation. To say that education reform in Massachusetts is an unfinished agenda is not to imply criticism of past results; it is to promise a renewed commitment and continued progress.

Ask any educator and you'll hear that, in fact, the challenge of improving public education will *always* be an unfinished agenda. A changing world and a dynamic economy constantly place new demands on our schools. With more research and more experience come new strategies to meet both old and new demands. Schools must constantly react to what we need and incorporate what we know.

The Unfinished Agenda is an effort to capture, at the level of state organizational strategy, what we do know today about Massachusetts' drive to improve our public schools: where we are, how far we have to go, and what we've learned that would help us get there. The many collaborators who have joined the Great Schools Campaign are working to develop specific proposals, following up on the policy directions outlined here. Campaign partners will be working closely with leaders from the Governor's office and from the two houses of the state legislature in the hope that the strongly bipartisan nature of the state's education reform effort to date can be continued.

Sustaining that bipartisan legislative and gubernatorial commitment to education reform became even more important, of course, in the wake of the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in *Hancock v. Driscoll* not to

intervene on the issue of equitable school funding. In effect, the court said, the state has been heading in the right direction and should not need judicial intervention to stay on that course. But it also issued a warning that inequities in educational opportunity persist between rich and poor districts, and that inaction on the state's part in addressing those inequities might reawaken the court's interest.

If Massachusetts were to fully commit itself to the goals, funding, and reforms outlined in these pages, education reform will still be an unfinished agenda ten years from now. But: more schools will be successful, and many more students will be learning up to the standards their time and place in the world has set for them. They will emerge from our public schools much better prepared to create a bright future for themselves. And Massachusetts schools will in fact *be* Great Schools, known around the country and the world as models of high achievement.



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The Mass Insight Education and Research Institute is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1997, that is focused on improving student achievement in public schools through the effective implementation of standards-based reform.

Our work supports and is informed by close partnerships with 30 school districts in Massachusetts (the Coalition for Higher Standards), representing more than 300,000 students. Our programs concentrate on school reform in Massachusetts, but have been held up as national models and increasingly will support effective implementation of higher standards in other states.

We are:

Researchers and communicators: A key source of information and field research on education reform in Massachusetts — for interested stakeholders at all levels, from parents to policymakers — and a national resource for information on the effective implementation of higher standards, through our Building Blocks Initiative for Standards-Based Reform.

Policy facilitators: A leading statewide convener and catalyst for thoughtful, informed state policymaking on education-related issues.

Leaders in standards-based services to schools: A provider of practical, research-based technical services, leadership training programs, and consulting services to schools and school districts — all focused on organizational strategies that help schools and districts transform themselves into higher-standards communities of learning. We have provided intensive leadership training to more than 1300 school and district leaders since 1998. Much of our current work focuses on integrated approaches to math reform, through the Math Achievement Partnership and other programs.

See www.massinsight.org and www.buildingblocks.org for details.



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