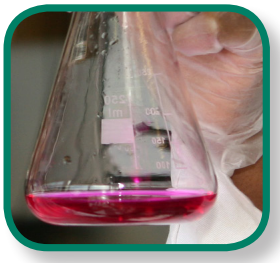
# Education Reform in Massachusetts 1993-2013


## 20 Year Anniversary Report

Twenty years ago, Massachusetts enacted its landmark Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA), which put the state at the forefront of the nation's move toward standards-based education. The Act kicked off two decades of reform that have built one of the best educational systems in the country; the state's students, on the whole, have achieved remarkable academic growth since 1993. Indeed, the state's students led the country on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), placing first or tying for first in all four categories – the fourth NAEP test in a row they earned that distinction. However, our work is far from completed:

- In 2012, out of more than 9,500 qualifying scores in Advanced Placement science, only 154 were earned by African-American students and only 242 by Hispanic students.
- Less than 10 percent of U.S. students from low-income families earn a bachelor's degree by their mid-20s.
- Only 12 percent of Massachusetts college degrees and certificates awarded in 2009 were STEM-focused.

The first decade of education reform was anchored by a singular goal: helping students in the Class of 2003 up and over the bar on the 10th grade MCAS. That focus drove the state's initial reform efforts and ultimately helped build an improved education system for all students.

In education reform's second decade, however, as the graduation requirement became commonplace, we lost sight of the opportunity the Class of 2003 had given us to focus our attention on a specific group of students and a specific – and ambitious – goal.

Just as we focused on the Class of 2003 when first implementing the MCAS graduation requirement, we should now hone in on the Class of 2020– students who will enroll as sixth graders in the fall of 2013 – to drive our improvement agenda, asking ourselves the question: What are we doing now to help those students and all Massachusetts students up and over the bar?

Looking forward, we need to set clear and ambitious goals for ourselves and our students – and measure our progress against those goals with a defined set of metrics. In this way, we can fulfill the promise of the 1993 Education Reform Act, which envisioned a state in which all students – not just those lucky enough to be born in certain ZIP codes – would have access to a high-quality education that prepared them for college and careers.

## Key Messages

**Being first in the nation is not enough: we can do better.** The progress of Massachusetts' top students has slowed in recent years, and achievement gaps are still much too large – signaling that there is untapped capacity in students across the state. To compete in an increasingly global economy, we must tap that capacity and push our students toward excellence.

**College success should be the new goal.** We can no longer measure the success of our K-12 systems by high school graduation and college matriculation rates. We must do more than simply get our students into college. We must prepare them to succeed in college through graduation.

**A strong emphasis on STEM is good for our students – and the state's economy.** Every year, thousands of promising students leave high school without having taken the challenging courses required to succeed in STEM fields. This is despite jobs data clearly showing near-term growth concentrated in the STEM fields – and a thriving STEM cluster in Massachusetts desperate for a pipeline of skilled and highly-educated young people.

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# A Call to Action

Getting students to high school graduation – or even getting them enrolled in college – is no longer sufficient. We must ensure that all students are prepared to succeed in college through to graduation. If we agree that college success is important – and there is widespread support for the idea that an associate's degree is the new baseline for educational attainment – then we should start this work now with goals and programs that will move the needle for the thousands of students currently enrolled in middle and high schools across the state.

## Strive for Excellence.

Our top students are among the best in the country – and are holding their own internationally. But the pace of growth at the advanced and proficient levels on various standardized tests has slowed in recent years, suggesting that the state's students have hit a plateau. If we want to remain competitive in this increasingly global economy, we must find a way to raise the bar even higher for those students who are already successful, pushing them toward excellence. Being first in the country is no longer good enough; we must strive to be first in the world.

## Achieve Equity.

Despite the progress that has been made – and the billions of dollars that have been spent – large and persistent achievement gaps still exist. Massachusetts' African-American and Hispanic students lag behind the state's white students, and its poor students trail those who are more well-off on measures of academic achievement, creating a two-class system in which some students have benefited from the reforms ushered in in 1993 and some have not. In the next decade of education reform, we must aspire to close these gaps once and for all, putting all our students on a level playing field.

## Build the best K-12 STEM education system in the country.

Job projections make clear what many in Boston's thriving life sciences cluster already know: demand in the STEM sector for well-educated, highly-skilled workers is far outpacing supply. We need to do more to align the state's K-12 system with this demand by exposing all students to a rigorous and engaging STEM curriculum. This is about educating our students so they are prepared to take advantage of lucrative STEM careers – but it is also about ensuring the health and sustainability of a STEM economy in Massachusetts.

# Tracking Student Achievement

*Progress should be measured against high-level goals by tracking a specific set of metrics that measure both statewide progress and the progress of demographic subgroups*

## High School Success

**Graduation Rate.** In 2012, the state graduation rate was 84.7 percent, but African-American and low-income students trailed by about 10 percentage points – 73.4 percent and 72.4 percent, respectively – and Hispanic students were even farther behind (65.5 percent).

**College Matriculation Rate.** About 74.7 percent of the Class of 2010 was enrolled in college within 16 months of their high school graduations. For African-American students, that percentage was 71.5 percent, for Hispanic students 61.6 percent, and for low-income students 62.3 percent.

**AP Participation**. In 2012, about 280 students out of every 1,000 juniors and seniors enrolled in Massachusetts high schools took an Advanced Placement math, science or English exam. While participation has increased steadily over the last decade, there is still untapped capacity across the state – particularly in traditionally under-served communities – that could benefit from and succeed in AP courses.

**AP Performance.** In 2012, Massachusetts students earned qualifying scores on AP math, science and English exams at a rate of about 203 per 1,000 eligible juniors and seniors. However, the success rates for some subgroups were much lower: African-American and Hispanic students earned qualifying scores at a rate of about 42 per 1,000 eligible juniors and seniors.

**MCAS.** In 2012, about 88 percent of the state's 10th graders scored at least proficient on the English MCAS, and 78 percent scored at that level on the math MCAS. The proficiency rates for some subgroups were significantly lower.

## College Success

**Persistence Rate.** Enrolling in college is just the first step. Students should be clearing the next hurdle and staying enrolled in college into their sophomore years. The statewide persistence rate for the state's high school Class of 2010 was 53.6 percent for those students enrolled in two-year programs and 79.4 percent for students enrolled in four-year programs.

**Graduation Rate.** According to *Complete College America*, the six-year college graduation rate for students who enrolled full-time in Massachusetts' public colleges and universities in fall 2002 was 57.8 percent. For part-time students the graduation rate was just 19.9 percent.

**Number of/Success in STEM Courses**. Demand for educated and highly-skilled workers in the STEM sector is growing. To ensure a strong pipeline of students who are ready for those careers, it is important to track the number of STEM courses students are taking in college and whether they're succeeding.

**Jobs.** The employment rates for students who have successfully completed either a four-year or a two-year program should also be tracked.

# History

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which was signed into law in June of 1993, was a groundbreaking and wide-reaching piece of legislation that has shaped the Commonwealth's approach to education for the past two decades and will continue to inform the dialogue over the next 10 years about what Massachusetts' schools should look like.

The state's education reform movement was spurred on by a group of business leaders, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), which formed in the late 1980s around a common desire to remake the state's education system to meet the needs of an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

The old way of doing things, the group argued in a 1991 report, wasn't giving students the skills or knowledge they needed to operate successfully in this new world. Instead, they said, the state needed to set high expectations – for all students – that were connected to a system of standards, assessment and accountability.

The MBAE's arguments were supported by polling, conducted by Mass Insight, that showed the public supported some reforms to the state's education system.

The advocacy by the Massachusetts business community, coupled with the political will of the state's political leadership – and a court case that challenged the Commonwealth's school financing system – pushed education reform from paper to reality, and in 1993, efforts began to transform the broad frameworks of the act into on-the-ground action.

A central premise of the Act was that increased – and more equitable – resources should be accompanied by a parallel increase in accountability that shifted some of the responsibility for student success from the state's shoulders to those of local districts and schools.

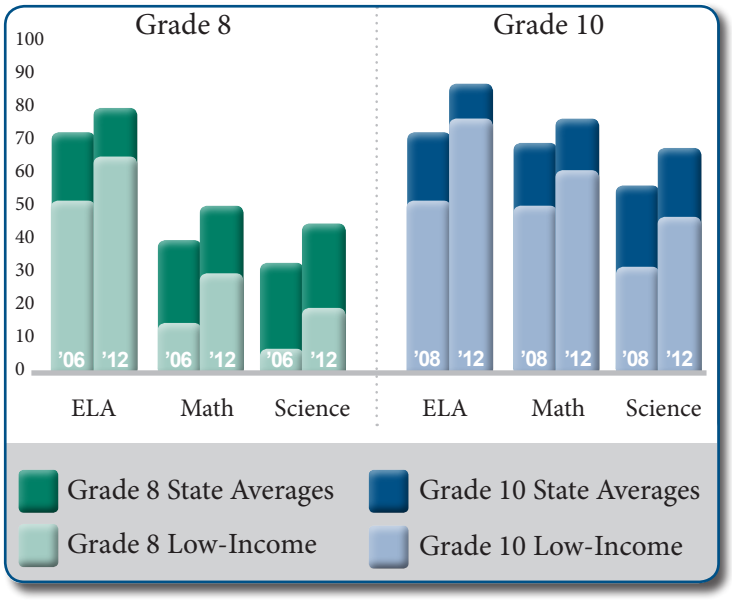
On the accountability side, the Act created a set of common standards, or frameworks, for what students were expected to know as well as a standardized way to assess whether students were meeting that knowledge bar – the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS.

MCAS was based on the standards – not the other way around – and results were reported at the student-level, which gave educators a way, for the first time, to see how individual children fared when tested on content they were intended to have mastered. Performance mattered: starting with the class of 2003, students were required to receive a passing grade on the 10th grade MCAS in order to graduate from high school.

"Some of the incremental things we did to get to where we are need to be replaced with some bolder interventions. … We've done OK but we need to really face up to the fact that we're kind of treading water in some ways. I think we need a bigger, bolder approach."

**David Driscoll**
Former Education Commissioner
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

*MCAS achievement gaps still persist for low-income*

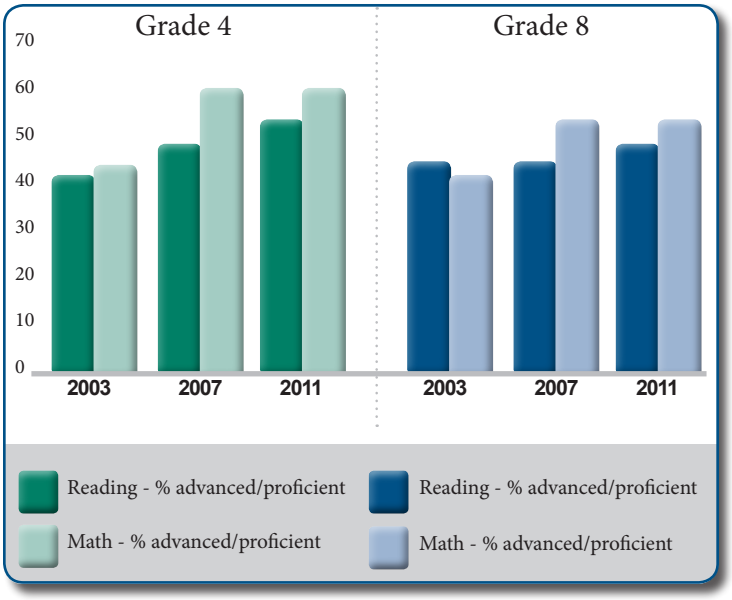



*MA ranks high on TIMSS, yet 10% still score "low"*

| Country | Average 2011 Scale Score for 8th Grade Science |
|---|---|
| 1. Singapore | 590 |
| ✶ ***Massachusetts*** | 567 |
| 2. Chinese Taipei | 564 |
| 3. Republic of Korea | 560 |
| 4. Japan | 558 |
| 5. Finland | 552 |
| 6. Slovenia | 543 |
| 7. Russian Federation | 542 |
| 8. Hong Kong SAR | 535 |
| 9. England | 533 |
| 10. ***United States*** | 525 |

From Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

*Improvement on NAEP has stalled*




*72/74 schools in bottom 5 percentiles are in Gateway Cities*

| *School District* | *# schools in bottom 5 percentiles* |
|---|---|
| Athol-Royalston | 1 |
| Chelsea | 1 |
| Chicopee | 1 |
| Fitchburg | 1 |
| Haverhill | 1 |
| Lowell | 1 |
| Salem | 1 |
| Fall River | 3 |
| Holyoke | 3 |
| Brockton | 4 |
| Lynn | 4 |
| New Bedford | 5 |
| Worcester | 6 |
| Lawrence | 11 |
| Boston | 13 |
| Springfield | 18 |

14/15 districts are *Gateway Cities*

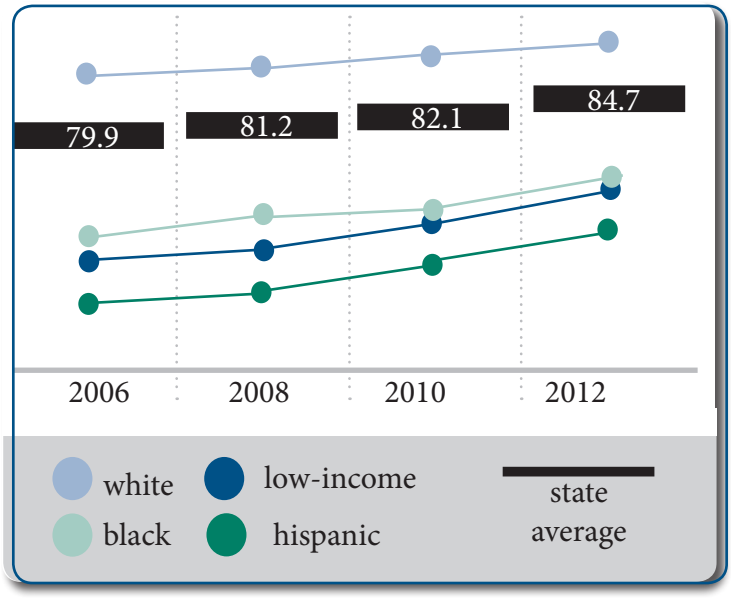
# Still More To Do

Building a pipeline of STEM talent is critical if Massachusetts is to remain competitive in the global economy. Our students lead the nation, yet too many children of color and children from low-income families lag behind. We must find ways to accelerate efforts to improve achievement and opportunities for college success among our most disenfranchised students and families. Only one out of every 10 students in poverty graduates from college, a figure that has remained unchanged over the past 40 years. In urban communities, multiple factors – poverty, lack of medical care and wraparound services, low adult educational attainment – exacerbate the challenges already present for many of students.

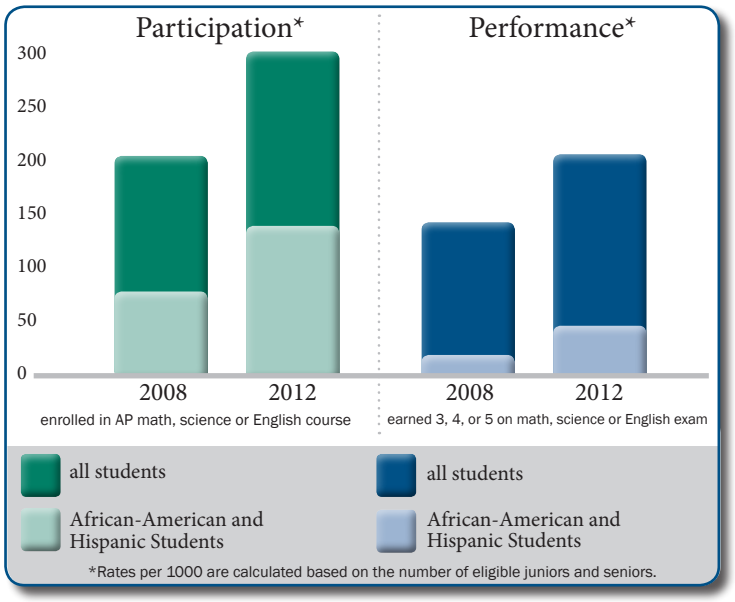
"We should at this point, in this state, have enough social capital built up and enough respect for all of our commitment to this effort that it should allow for a much different next phase of reform, a phase that's more focused on where there is consensus related to real change and improvement, less wariness and skepticism about motivations, and that ought to help us to move faster."

**Tripp Jones**
Managing Director,
New Profit, Inc.

*Graduation rates for underserved populations fall short*




*Minority populations still trail in Advanced Placement*




Even after controlling for the effects of poverty, eighth graders in urban schools are not doing as well as low-income students in suburban or rural areas. We must maximize the resources available in urban settings to increase the lifelong opportunities for significant numbers of students and families.

# Fast Facts

- Only 30.6 percent of all Americans ages 25-29 have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Nationally, the percentage of students graduating from four-year schools within six years remained relatively flat from 2005 to 2010, increasing less than 2 percentage points to 58.8 percent.
- The average tenure of a school superintendent in an urban district is about 3.6 years.
- Massachusetts ranks third among all states and the District of Columbia in the percentage of students in the Class of 2012 who earned a qualifying score on at least one AP exam during high school.
- Massachusetts ranks 19th among all states and the District of Columbia on closing the AP performance gap for African-American students and 41st on the same measure for Hispanic/Latino students.

*Sources: KIPP, The College Board, Council of Great City Schools, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

# Education Reform: Comparing Then & Now

| | *1993* | *2013* |
|---|---|---|
| Investment | • In fiscal 1993 – before the Massachusetts Education Reform Act went into effect – the state spent about $1.3 billion on local education aid.<br>• In fiscal 1993, the state average for per-pupil spending based on Net School Spending was about $5,296, of which state aid accounted for about 30 percent. | • In fiscal 2013, the current fiscal year, the state budgeted about $4.2 billion in Chapter 70 money.<br>• In fiscal 2012, average per-pupil spending was about $11,597, of which state aid accounted for about 37 percent. |
| Standards and Accountability | • The only statewide requirements to earn a high school diploma were taking one year of U.S. History and four years of physical education.<br>• The Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) was administered from 1988 to 1996, but it was a general assessment that did not assess students' performance against curriculum framework – because those frameworks did not exist prior to the 1993 Act.<br>• The MEAP only allowed for district-to-district comparisons and did not provide data at a more granular level.<br>• The MEAP did not "count" – there were no consequences attached for continued poor performance – so students and schools did not take it seriously. | • The 1993 Act introduced standards – a common framework for what students should know and be able to do – which focused efforts and attention on student outputs, or achievement.<br>• The standards were aligned to a new standardized test, the MCAS, which for the first time provided data on how individual students, classrooms and schools were doing.<br>• Starting with the Class of 2003, the 10th grade MCAS was a "high stakes" test: students needed to pass the exam in order to graduate. The graduation requirement gave focus to the education reform efforts. |
| Charter Schools | • There were no charter schools in Massachusetts prior to the 1993 Education Reform Act, and no legal framework for the creation of those schools. | • The first charter schools allowed under MERA opened in 1995.<br>• Through April 2013, a total of 102 charters – both Commonwealth and Horace Mann – have been approved by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education since 1994.<br>• A majority of the charters that are currently operating are in urban districts.<br>• During the 2012-13 school year, about 31,830 students were enrolled in charter schools across Massachusetts.<br>• There are about 53,492 students on wait lists for spots in charter schools.* |
| Systems | • Before MERA, principals could earn tenure and were part of a union.<br>• School Committees were responsible for most personnel decisions in districts, giving them significant powers over staffing. | • MERA ended principal tenure and removed them from the protection of collective bargaining agreements. Now principals are employed through contracts with the district and can be removed by the superintendent.<br>• Assistant principals and some other school administrators, however, remain protected by collective bargaining agreements.<br>• MERA redefined the role of the School Committee, limiting its authority to policy, budget, and limited staffing decisions including appointing a superintendent. |

**Data Source:** Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

*Some students may be double counted on the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's charter school wait list.

# Moving Forward: *College Success by 2020*

## *Why College Success*

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 60 percent of the new jobs created in the 21st century will require skills possessed by only 20 percent of the current workforce. Getting students into college is no longer enough. We must give students the skills they need to be successful in college and, ultimately, to graduate. Massachusetts is positioned to take a leadership role in the movement toward college success.

Massachusetts was one of the first 17 states to align with Complete College America, a national organization launched in 2010 to help states implement the bold reforms needed to dramatically increase the number of young adults completing college, particularly from traditionally underserved populations. By joining Complete College America's Alliance of States, Massachusetts committed to set degree goals at state and campus levels, establish common measures of progress and publicly report results annually, and develop and implement action plans to graduate more students.

In Massachusetts, less than 60 percent of full-time students at four-year public colleges or universities graduate within six years. For part-time students, the six-year graduation rate is just 19.9 percent. For two-year programs, the graduation rates are even worse: just 14.3 percent of students enrolled in public associate degree programs in Massachusetts graduate within three years, and the three-year graduation rate for part-time students is 4.3 percent.

As a state, we have made the commitment to transform those statistics and to prioritize college success. Now we must take that commitment and make it a reality by committing to a framework anchored in metrics, incentives and accountability that will put all Massachusetts students on a path to College Success by 2020.

## *Moving to a New Metric*

Across the country, education leaders are moving forward by adopting college success as the new benchmark by which we measure the success of our K-12 education systems. By adopting a college success framework, Massachusetts has the chance to vault to the top once more, just as it did after the enactment of the 1993 Education Reform Act.

**KIPP,** a national network of public charter schools serving about 41,000 students in 20 states and the District of Columbia, focuses on college graduation from the first day a student enrolls in one of its schools. KIPP is committed to tracking its students' success through college, publishing a report in 2011 that found that its middle-school graduates had a college completion rate of about 33 percent – higher than the national average, but far short of the 75 percent KIPP is shooting for.

**Project GRAD** is a Houston-based nonprofit working to ensure that more students in low-income areas receive a quality education and enter college prepared to succeed. The organization, which serves about 135,000 students across the country, tracks its success not just by high school graduation rates, but also by college matriculation and college graduation rates. About 51.5 percent of GRAD students complete college, well above the national average for students from similar low-income backgrounds.

**College Summit**, a D.C.-based nonprofit that works with about 50,000 students in 12 states, is committed to increasing the college enrollment rates of students from low-income communities. The organization measures the impact it has on its students by tracking the rate at which they enroll in college – and how likely they are to stay enrolled. For College Summit students, the latter metric, known as college persistence, is about 75 percent, on par with the rates for students from all income groups.

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Mass Insight Education, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Boston, MA, was founded in 1997 to help create and implement strategies that close educational achievement gaps. Through its two major efforts, The School Turnaround Group and The Mass Math + Science Initiative, Mass Insight Education partners with school districts to dramatically improve student achievement through increasing academic rigor and reinventing district systems. It is the sister organization of Mass Insight Global Partnerships, which helps businesses and institutions remain globally competitive by breaking down paradigms. Visit: **www.massinsight.org**

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