

06.24.08 - Education Reform Continues

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Education Reform Day Two

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As Delivered

Thank you. Thank you everybody. Let me first say that we are fortunate indeed in the Commonwealth - is that for me? - is that we are fortunate indeed in the Commonwealth to have EMC, and to have Joe at its helm, and Joe, thank you so much for your leadership and your example, and the warm welcome that all of you have shown to us here today. I agree we've got just the right guy, in just the right position, at just the right moment in Paul Reville as the Secretary Designate of Education and I'm looking forward very much to working with you.

And Dana Mohler-Faria, who I think does not have a speaking role in the program, but is here because Dana is, as some of you may know, the president of Bridgewater State College, which has shown such extraordinary leadership down in the South Coast in partnering - you know, I see some heads nodding - in partnering with businesses and other educational institutions, K through higher ed, in making opportunities available in interesting and innovative settings for all kinds of kids. And though we could not persuade him to give up his presidency to work in the administration, he has given us just about full time and a half through the last year as my senior education advisor, and has been a key to the Readiness Project, and Dana, I'll never forget, I appreciate it, we all are in your debt. So let's give Dana a round of applause. I want to thank and acknowledge all the folks who are here, whether you have a big title or not, and for your support and your interest in this; I particularly want to acknowledge the Senator for being a partner in so many things, and for being ready for the series of proposals that we'll be bringing forward in the Legislature. Our Readiness Project has completed their report, and developed an action agenda, and we expect to release that in full tomorrow. It is bold, as you've heard; it's ambitious; and it's just what we need to position the Commonwealth's next generation for success in the twenty-first century.

Now, as Joe said, thanks to the foresight and the hard work of many who have come before us, including many of the business leaders who are here right now, we undertake this effort from a position of great strength.

Our students today are by many measures the best in the nation, based on National Assessment scores and the SATs, and they continue to make improvement year over year in MCAS scores.

That is something to be enormously proud of. For one thing, it's great news for our economy. Individuals with bachelor's degrees have \$1.1 million in added lifetime earning potential over the earning potential of high school dropouts. In addition - I'll stop and let you process that, yeah - in addition, a focus on education is cost-effective from the perspective of taxpayers. Individuals with a bachelor's contribute a net \$180,000 to - through taxes, really - to support road and bridge construction and other services like public safety. High school dropouts, by contrast, tend to cost our taxpayers about \$275,000 over their lifetime. That's quite a delta. And when you multiply that by the numbers of dropouts that we have seen here in the Commonwealth over the last several years, it becomes a very, very big number indeed.

We've also seen persistent, and in some cases, widening achievement gaps. Poor and minority students, as a whole, still underperform white students, as a whole, all across the Commonwealth. And dropout rates have increased across the system. Today, in Massachusetts, for every ten high school freshmen, only eight will graduate with a diploma. Only six go on to college, and only four of them complete their college career.

Welcoming, learning-filled classrooms with state-of-the-art technology and exciting activities are just a few blocks away from broken, and underfunded, and ill-equipped classrooms. The digital divide is separating too many of our kids from twenty-first century information and twenty-first century economy. Lifelong access to opportunities are being determined not by intellect or effort, but in some cases by zip code.

And you know and I know that's not right. Meanwhile competitor nations like China or India are roaring into the twenty-first century, building educational foundations for growth industries and graduating new engineers at ten times the rate of American colleges and universities. All of that while achievement levels in the United States have been at a plateau. While, that global reality evolves, teachers in communities all over the Commonwealth are spending thousands of dollars, in some cases, of their own money for required materials in the classroom. And parents are paying added fees for school band, academic clubs, and sports experiences that round out a child's education.

The Milken Institute has ranked Massachusetts recently as the United States' top technology incubator in all three studies that they've released since 2002, including their most recent one, as I said, last week. Our economic future in Massachusetts is more and more tied to innovation industries - like yours - and like alternative or renewable energy, stem cell research, or nanotechnology and robotics.

And what happens if we don't have a workforce capable of doing those jobs in the future? If we want to maintain our leadership, we have to do a much better job not just of preparing students

for innovation jobs but also generating their interest in those fields. Only 1% of our college-bound high school seniors major in mathematics, today; 2% in physical sciences; 4% in biological sciences and 4% in computer and information sciences. We continue to trail the national average, and many of our competitor states in college-bound STEM majors. And on a global scale, U.S. students have dropped to 25th in math and 21st in science.

Our public schools have to continue to be engines of economic growth, creativity and social justice. To do so, they must continue to drive innovation and cultivate the highly-skilled talent that is in fact our calling card to the world. And that has to happen, ladies and gentlemen, in every community in the Commonwealth, not just in some.

That is why we launched the Commonwealth Readiness Project, our effort to re-examine how we deliver public education all across the Commonwealth. Tom Payzant, the former superintendent of the Boston city schools, Wheelock President Jackie Jenkins-Scott and EMC's own Joe Tucci, have very, very ably lead this group. They've done an incredible job, and they have engaged some 200 business leaders, education, and community leaders, policy thinkers, nearly 700 grassroots organizers in communities all over the Commonwealth, and a couple thousand others, who have involved themselves in public discussions about where we ought to go, where the gaps are, and what difference a change in specific policies might make.

I want to thank each and every one of them, Joe, and all of your team for the leadership you have shown for bringing us to where we are. From their work we have developed an action agenda, organized around four key priorities.

First, we have to raise the achievement of all students. That involves not only improvements in teaching and curriculum, but also teaching 21st century skills, addressing external factors that impede individual success, and providing heightened attention to quality care in the earliest years of life. By the way, we'll have some conversation when I'm done, so we can tease out some of these if there's any questions you may have.

Second, we must elevate the profession of teaching. We have to attract and retain the best and brightest to lead our classrooms and give them the tools and support they need to bring their magic to bear for our kids. Third, we must prepare every student for higher education, employment and lifelong learning. That starts by assuring at least two years of postsecondary learning. And it includes a curriculum with 21st century skills: math and science and technology as well as critical thinking and creative problem-solving. Teamwork: that is a part of the skill set that will make a difference in the economy we are becoming.

And finally, we have to use new ideas and approaches fundamentally to change the system of

education. We have got to de-emphasize administration and governance and place our emphasis on children and their abilities to succeed.

These are the places where we must be focused if we are going to prepare every student for the world and economy of the 21st century. This is how we have to proceed if we hope to address the persistent and pernicious achievement gaps that are keeping too many of our kids from reaching their full potential in communities of every type and kind all across the Commonwealth. And this is how we must proceed if we want to move beyond what the Secretary-designate describes as the one-size-fits-all sort of "batch-processing approach" to a system with the flexibility to respond to individual student needs seamlessly, from early childhood right up through a life in the workforce.

And I want to say just a word or two more about what we mean by elevating the profession of teaching, and then we can open this up to some conversation. To meet the needs of accelerated math and science curricula, we will be establishing a Readiness Science and Math Teaching Fellowship Program and grow our number of qualified math and science teachers.

We also want to offer financial incentives to attract the most talented and dedicated teachers to high-needs districts and schools, to work in high-demand disciplines and accept more challenging responsibilities. We want to look at forms of rewarding whole-school improvement, to encourage the kind of teacher collaboration that makes such a difference in the most highly successful schools.

We want to consider a statewide teacher contract that would offer teachers additional flexibility for pay and benefit packages at different stages of their careers, as well as creating a mechanism for more equitable distribution of teachers throughout the Commonwealth.

We want to reconsider the number of school districts in the Commonwealth. We have 391 separate school districts here in the Commonwealth; contrast that with Maryland, which has a student population of about the same size: they have 24 school districts. Why not ask the question, whether there's some efficiencies and savings we can capture by aggregating more of the - to fewer numbers of districts and applying those savings to the teaching of young people.

The process of becoming trained and certified for teaching is unnecessarily complicated. That has to be simplified. And we need to develop a career ladder for teachers so they see a pathway for advancement and professional development, something I know is important to you in your own workplaces. I've known that in every setting I've ever worked.

And we have to deal with a significant compensation gap that exists today for teachers in public colleges and universities. That is a key factor of retaining the talent we need at the higher-ed

level.

Lastly, to encourage entrepreneurial teachers, we're proposing to create a number of what we're calling "Readiness Schools." These are in-district laboratories, in effect, to enable teacher autonomy and creativity and to further student choice.

Now I'm going to stop, but I want to tell you why I think this is so vitally important. And I think its reasons go beyond, at least for me, beyond the importance of preparing our economy for twenty-first century competitiveness, as important as that is. It has to do with who we are as Americans.

Some of you here know my personal story, but for those of you who don't, I grew up on welfare on the South Side of Chicago. I shared a room and a set of bunk beds with my mother and my sister, so I used to go from the top bunk to the bottom bunk to the floor, every third night on the floor. I can't remember a time when I didn't love to read, but I don't actually remember ever owning a book, let alone my own bed, until I got a break in 1970 from a program called A Better Chance to go to Milton Academy. Now, that was my high school.

I contrast that with our daughter Katherine, who graduated high school last year. She's always had her own room. Most of that time in the leafy neighborhood in Milton where I used to deliver newspapers when I was a student at Milton Academy. By the time she got to high school, she had already traveled on four continents; she knew how to use and pronounce a concierge; and she had shaken hands in the White House with the President of the United States. When she was five years old - this is a favorite story in our household -- five years old and in kindergarten they were studying the changes in the seasons and her homework assignment was to come home and describe the four seasons to Mom and Dad. So she came home and proceeded, in accurate detail, to describe her several visits to the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington, D.C. She said, "First you drive up and the doorman takes your car." You know - five years old.

One generation. One generation. And the circumstances of our family were profoundly transformed. Now that story isn't told as often as we'd like in this country, but it's told more often in this country than any other place on Earth. That's an American story. And for a whole lot of us, that story has been about getting educational opportunity and having the sense of life learning ignited in us.

That has nothing to do - or ought have nothing to do - with zip code, or poverty. It has got to have to do with our willingness as a society to invest in ourselves, and make the American story possible for the next generation, the way a generation before us made it possible for us. That's why this is important, and I am so glad to be a part of rolling this out with all of you. Thank you for having me tonight.