

06.23.08 - New Era of Education Reform

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Education Reform Announced

June 23, 2008

As Delivered

Our Readiness Project has completed their report and developed an action agenda which we expect to release on Wednesday. It's bold, it's ambitious, and it is just what we need to position the Commonwealth's next generation for success in the 21st century. Thanks to the foresight and the hard work of many who have come before us we undertake this effort from a position of strength and that has to be acknowledged.

Our students today are by many measures the best in the nation with leading scores on national assessment tests and the SATs and steady improvement on the MCAS. But we have also seen persistent and in some cases widening achievement gaps. Poor and minority students as a whole still under perform whites as a whole. And drop out rates have increased all across the system.

Meanwhile, competitor nations like China and India are roaring into the 21st 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 US achievement has in many respects plateaued.

While that global reality evolves, teachers in too many of our schools are using their own money for basic and required materials in the classrooms. And parents are paying added fees for school band, for academic clubs or sports experiences that round out a child's education. I see some of you nodding your heads. You know this is true. And we know that we can't let that reality go unaddressed. Our public schools must continue to be engines of economic growth, creativity, and social justice. It's education that makes the American story possible. And if we're going to make that story possible for more kids, then we have got to focus here.

To do so, schools must continue to drive innovation and cultivate the highly skilled talent that is our calling card all around the world. And that has to happen in every community in our Commonwealth. That is why we launched the Commonwealth Readiness Project, our effort to re-examine how we deliver public education in Massachusetts. We engaged more than two hundred educators, business leaders, community leaders, nearly seven hundred grass roots organizers and more than two thousand ordinary and interested citizens all across the state. And I want to

thank each and every one of those who participated and who gave their time and energy and insights. From their work we developed an action agenda organized around four key priorities.

First, we must raise the achievement of all students. That involves not only improvements in teaching and curriculum but also teaching 21st century skills in addressing external factors, external to the classroom that impede success and providing quality care in the earliest years of life. And I see you over there Margaret; I hope you wrote that down. You've been a part of developing that very important recommendation.

Second, we must elevate the profession of teaching. We must attract and retain the best and the brightest to lead our classrooms and give them the tools, support, and opportunities to develop themselves that they need in order to bring the magic forth - [sneeze in audience] god bless you - in order to bring the magic forward for young people in their classrooms.

Third, we must prepare every student for higher education, employment, and lifetime learning. That starts by assuring at least two years of post secondary learning and it includes a curriculum of 21st century skills including math, science, and technology as well as critical thinking and creative problem solving. Finally, we must use new ideas and approaches to transform our system fundamentally. The whole apparatus for supporting public education has to got to move, has got to be more flexible and has got to respond to needs in tomorrows and today's economy and society.

These are the places where we must be focused if we're going to prepare every student for the world and economy of the 21st century. This is how we must 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. And this is how we must proceed if we want to move beyond what Paul calls the "one-size-fits-all" batch-processing approach to a system with flexibility to respond to individual student needs seamlessly from early childhood on into the work force. Now as we unveil these new initiatives over the next several days, we have to begin in earnest the discussion about education financing.

Now that we have a clear idea of what we want to fund, we need to focus on the best ways to do so. The foundation budget for education in the Commonwealth has not been re-calculated in fifteen years. It no longer reflects the support school's need to meet the expectations that we have of them. Our districts are suspending an average of 18% above the foundation budget, much of which comes from property taxes which puts extra burdens on homeowners and disproportionately impacts seniors and others on fixed incomes.

To address those and other issues I'm establishing the Readiness Finance Commission co-

chaired by Gloria Larson and by John Phish. Their charge is to cost out the proposals of the readiness project to recommend system savings and efficiencies, to identify potential sources of additional revenues and otherwise to consider options to overhaul the ways that we finance public education today. Gloria and John will be joined by some of the top education, business and policy leaders in the state and they will provide me with a report and recommendations by November 15th of this year.

Today we begin to unveil the blue print to transform our system of education into one that meets the needs of every young person in Massachusetts. All of us in state government and local government as well as in board rooms and at kitchen tables all across the Commonwealth must rise to this challenge. And so I ask all of you to join with us in this effort to ensure that the children of Massachusetts are ready for success in the 21st century. Thank you all for having me today and stay tuned because there will be an awful lot of good and important work that we have to do together over the next many, many **months and years**.