

Background

Since Horace Mann launched the vision of a free school system for all, Massachusetts has led the nation as a pioneer in public education. We have worked tirelessly to build a system of high expectations, rigorous curricula, challenging assessments, and meaningful accountability that allows our teachers to shine and our students to compete with their peers around the world.

In 1993 Massachusetts embarked on an ambitious course for change with the enactment of the Education Reform Act, which initiated standards-based reform in our state. This legislation established the key elements undergirding education reform in Massachusetts: a set of curriculum frameworks that set standards in all core curriculum areas, a rigorous system for assessing student progress toward meeting those standards, and a foundation budget that ensures each district has sufficient resources available to support this work.

The results are evident. Massachusetts students used to perform at the middle of the pack, but now they rank first among their national peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics assessments, and high against their international peers on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). We achieved these noteworthy results by setting ambitious standards, administering rigorous assessments, and holding districts and schools accountable for the results; providing more than \$21 billion in new state education funding since 1993; and distributing it more equitably, to ensure that the poorest school districts receive relatively more funding.

But while we remain proud of the achievements our students have made, persistent and unacceptable achievement gaps among our English language learners, minority, special education and low income students illustrate that the job that began with the passage of the Education Reform Act remains unfinished. Too many of our students still do not receive a world-class education, and too many of our educators still do not receive the support they need to help every student excel.

The next chapter of reform

These are the challenges that drive our second phase of reform, which was launched in 2008 with the development of Governor Patrick's Education Action Agenda. This robust and comprehensive blueprint for education reform was the final product of the Commonwealth Readiness Project, a nine-month effort by a diverse group of education, business, and civic leaders charged with assessing the public education system in Massachusetts. They created goals to individualize learning, develop and retain effective teachers, increase college and career readiness, and unleash innovation and systemic change throughout the public education system. These goals and the specific recommendations included in the Education Action Agenda are the foundation for Massachusetts's Race to the Top proposal.

The initiatives in our application are driven by our core belief that the persistent variation in student outcomes stems from both discrepancies in the quality of curriculum and instruction, and unrelated out-of-school circumstances that can affect a student's ability to learn. Each element in our proposal is designed to reduce this variation by focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning each student receives and on providing students and families with the health and human service supports they require. Overall, we aim to achieve four objectives:

1. Attract, develop, and retain an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce to ensure every student is taught by a great teacher and every school and district is led by a great leader

2. Provide curricular and instructional resources to provide every educator with the tools necessary to promote and support student achievement
3. Concentrate great instruction and supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools to create the conditions needed for improved student achievement
4. Increase dramatically the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and career

These objectives have garnered widespread support: 276 LEAs signed on to Massachusetts' Race to the Top proposal (70 percent of the 393 LEAs eligible to sign). These LEAs represent 1,375 schools, 74 percent of K–12 public school enrollment, and 88 percent of students in poverty.

Our initiatives

1. **Attract, develop, and retain an effective, academically capable, diverse and culturally proficient educator workforce to ensure every student is taught by a great teacher and every school and district is led by a great leader**

By employing student performance as the key barometer of impact and progress, we will transform the entire career continuum for both teachers and principals. Reaching this goal will require identifying and rewarding practices that work, changing and, when necessary, eliminating practices that do not, and connecting consistent, high quality feedback on performance to professional supports and opportunities for continual improvement and advancement. To that end, we will:

- **Develop a new statewide framework for teacher and principal evaluation and provide educators, schools, and districts with the tools, resources, and support needed to successfully implement more robust evaluation strategies.** Massachusetts will work with a task force of stakeholders to develop a new statewide framework for teacher and principal evaluation in which student performance will be a significant factor. Our existing student growth model, along with pre- and post-assessments in non-MCAS subjects and grades, will be a cornerstone of evaluation protocols to be implemented statewide over the next four years. We will provide training and support to ensure that teachers understand the new evaluation framework, and to ensure that administrators, principals, and other evaluators have the tools and supports they need to conduct comprehensive annual evaluations, provide meaningful feedback to both teachers and principals, and use evaluation results to inform critical personnel decisions.
- **Ensure students in high poverty and high minority schools have equitable access to highly effective educators, and expand the pool and pipeline of effective educators in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas.** We will employ a variety of monetary and non-monetary incentives to increase the number of effective educators in the state and deploy them in high need schools and hard-to-staff subjects. These will include recruitment incentives, improvements to school climate and conditions, and expansion grants for effective preparation programs. We will make preparation programs and training opportunities easier to access and more affordable to encourage seasoned educators to obtain additional licenses in high need areas, such as special education and English language development.

2. **Provide curricular and instructional resources to provide every educator with the tools necessary to promote and support student achievement.**

Our experience over the last 17 years has shown that establishing standards and assessments without providing the appropriate training and support is not good enough. Few schools or districts have the capacity to develop curriculum resources or instructional approaches to sufficiently meet the learning

needs of every student. To help all students succeed, we must provide more assistance to fill the gap between standards and assessments. To do this, we will:

- **Build a statewide teaching and learning system aligned with the Common Core Standards.**

Massachusetts will establish a comprehensive system that will include:

- More than 100 coherent, engaging, and rigorous curriculum maps and units in English language arts, mathematics, science and technology/engineering, history and social science, English language development, and vocational areas;
- Curriculum-embedded performance tasks aligned with standards;
- A digital library of curriculum resources developed by educators and external partners;
- A test builder engine to deliver interim and formative assessments statewide and return student results to educators within 24 to 72 hours; and
- 24-hour access to student achievement and growth data and associated reports for all 80,000 educators statewide.

3. Concentrate great instruction and additional supports for educators, students, and families in our lowest performing schools and their districts to create the conditions needed for improved student achievement.

To close the achievement gap and dramatically improve dropout and graduation rates, we must transform our lowest performing schools. Over the past several years Massachusetts has developed powerful frameworks and mechanisms for doing this work, and with the passage of An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, the state has access to new rules, tools and supports to accelerate the implementation of turnaround strategies and decisively address the conditions that contribute to underperformance. We plan to use RTTT funds to enhance this work through investments to achieve the following goals:

- **Develop a specialized corps of educators prepared to tackle the challenges of the lowest performing schools.** Great principals and teachers are critical to rapidly improving low achieving schools. The state will work with LEAs to accelerate the flow of highly effective educators into these schools through incentives for principals and teachers; training, mentoring, and support; and a statewide marketing campaign. At the end of four years, Massachusetts will have a well developed and highly skilled pipeline of principals and teachers whose specialties and preparation will have enabled them to contribute substantially to school turnaround efforts across the state.
- **Build district and state capacity to prevent low achievement and sustain progress.** The success of all four school intervention models developed by the U.S. Department of Education depends on strengthening district systems of support. We will focus first on strengthening four systems critical to districts' ability to intervene effectively in struggling schools: effective governance and leadership; integrated human resource management and development systems; enhanced community support for students' social, emotional, and health needs; and improved dropout prevention and recovery. We will also identify and scale partners with expertise in supporting three interconnected conditions for school effectiveness: social-emotional supports that ensure students enter the classroom ready to learn, an expanded school day and/or year, and effective use of data to support tailored instruction.

4. Increase dramatically the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and career.

Despite our students' strong academic performance overall, we continue to graduate too many students, especially low income and minority students, who are not adequately prepared for college and careers. We will dramatically increase college and career readiness by strengthening curriculum and instruction in low income, high minority schools, and improving alignment between high school and college.

- **Expose more students to rigorous curricula and college-level work, particularly in STEM fields.** Early exposure to rigorous curricula and college-level work is a proven strategy for increasing college and career readiness, particularly for low income and minority students. We intend to pursue this strategy through pre-AP training for teachers of middle and high school English language arts, mathematics, and science in schools that serve these students and through the establishment of STEM-focused Early College High Schools.
- **Align high school curricula with college entrance requirements.** We will make MassCore, our current recommended high school curriculum for college and career readiness, into the default curriculum: required for high school graduation unless students and parents agree to an alternate program of studies. We will also align MassCore with the public college entrance requirements so that students who successfully complete MassCore will also have met the Massachusetts public four-year college entrance requirements.

Achieving our four ambitious objectives hinges on the development of a robust state data and information infrastructure. Through RTTT we will transform our data systems so that they can efficiently deliver comprehensive, accessible, actionable, and timely data to all Massachusetts K–12 educators; invest in new technology to support the PreK–12 teaching and learning system and a more effective educator workforce; and strengthen and expand training and supports so that educators can use data to inform instructional decisions.

Budget

Massachusetts’ proposed RTTT budget totals \$250 million. Half will be distributed directly to participating LEAs using the Title I formula so they can access resources and services made available through the initiatives identified above. Half will support the state-level work needed to launch and evaluate these initiatives, ultimately benefiting all participating LEAs. The state half includes \$23 million in supplemental funding for participating LEAs to help them implement several of the most critical initiatives.

We’re ready

After the four years of Race to the Top, Massachusetts will have undergone a remarkable transformation. Every student will experience college- and career-ready standards and curricula, and every educator will have access to online curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data tools to support their students’ individual needs. Every educator will receive an annual evaluation that highlights their contribution to student performance and identifies strengths and areas for improvement in helping students grow, and every evaluator will be prepared to give high quality feedback on teacher and principal performance. We will have built a cadre of turnaround teachers and leaders prepared to take on the challenges of our lowest performing schools, and we will have strengthened districts’ capacity to improve their schools, close achievement gaps, and prevent low performance.

We know what we’ve done right, we know what we can do better, and we know the steps we need to take to get there. With or without Race to the Top funding Massachusetts is headed in this direction; RTTT resources will allow us to build the skills, expand the capacity, create the tools and harness the innovation we need to get there faster. We are committed to transforming ourselves into a state where every student’s needs are met, where every teacher and leader is well-trained and supported, and where every district has the tools, guidance, and direction necessary to continue to improve. Through the strategies detailed in this proposal, we expect to see our graduation rates rise, our achievement gaps shrink, and our performance continue to improve.

As Horace Mann once said, “Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen.” We are certain that he wouldn’t want the nearly one million children in the Massachusetts public schools to wait any longer.

