

01.10.08 - Governor Announces Plan for New Education Secretary

Governor Deval L. Patrick

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As Delivered

The vision we have for the success and growth of this Commonwealth requires world-class public education. And the vision we have for public education requires nothing less than bold, system-wide reform.

That is why, in June we launched the Commonwealth Readiness Project, our effort to re-examine how we deliver public education in Massachusetts. We want to move into the next era of educational excellence so that we are ready for the world and economy of tomorrow.

Being ready means a comprehensive, seamless education package that starts with high quality early education, universally available to three and four year olds, all day kindergarten and smaller class sizes, especially in the early years.

Being ready means extended learning time, so that there is more time for teachers to spend with individual kids and room in the daily schedule for music, and art, and exercise, and community service, and mentoring and other ways to expand a young person's mind and experience, and also to occupy young people in safe and supervised settings after the conventional school day ends.

Being ready means at least three years of mandatory high school math and science, and the chance for all Massachusetts students to complete at least an associate's degree or an apprenticeship in a trade - at the state's expense.

Being ready means well-prepared and well-respected teachers, qualified in the subject matter they are assigned to teach, with regular opportunities for skills development. Teachers whose ability to get certified is more straightforward, whose ranks range from fresh new graduate students to mid-career professionals or early retirees from other fields looking to bring practical life experience into the classroom.

Being ready means refurbished and well-equipped public college and university campuses, campuses that reflect the magic we seek and the achievement we honor in every dimension of academic life, from the laboratories of Nobel laureates to the classrooms for part-time commuter students.

Being ready means a higher ed program responsive to the demands for highly-skilled workers, producing nurses and lab technicians and teachers and entrepreneurs and clean energy engineers and whatever other skills our economy needs.

We want to restore esteem for learning and creativity, not just as the province of the privileged, but as the expectation for all.

We have initiated our Readiness Project by bringing together educators, business leaders and community advocates to put together a plan to implement this vision for the future of public education in Massachusetts. Some 200 individuals are involved in developing recommendations. I expect their recommendations in the spring.

And hundreds of grassroots organizers have signed up and are ready to mobilize. These "Readiness Reps" will bring the Readiness Project out of the haze of abstract policy and into our communities, to help citizens understand the stake we each have in these reforms.

This is the responsibility my administration has assumed. It is broad, ambitious and vital. It will take time, care and close coordination to implement.

But one thing I know from my experience in business: assuming responsibility without authority is a formula for failure. We want a seamless and comprehensive education pathway for young people. That will require seamless and comprehensive oversight. The silos that now make up our governance mechanisms will not do.

That is why I will file this afternoon legislation to create an Executive Office of Education, with a Cabinet Secretary, to serve as a single, responsible authority within the coordinated system we envision, and a chief liaison to my office.

The secretariat will consist of the Department of Early Education and Care, a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (what we now call the Department of Education), and a Department of Higher Education, each headed by a commissioner. The Secretary will help coordinate the efforts of the boards and commissioners within the state's three education agencies and be a central source of planning and accountability, one place where all of our educational efforts can be connected and from which a comprehensive policy will be driven.

We have had Education Secretaries before. This will be different in that he or she will have authority to approve the boards' hiring of each of the three commissioners; the mission statements, 5-year master plans, budgets and capital outlay requests both at the board level and, within higher education, at the institutional level.

The Secretary will also hold a voting seat on the three education boards, as well as the UMass board.

This legislation - developed over many months in consultation not only with many of you in this room but with many, many others as well - is designed to improve coordination across all sectors of education: early education and care, K-12 and higher education. It creates a framework to accept accountability for the recommendations of the Readiness Project, with which we can guide students seamlessly through every level of their education and into the workforce.

Remember: "one generation" is not just my story it's the American story. There is no greater gateway to opportunity and success than a first-rate education. Even in the afterglow of our history, and our current strengths, this achievement is not inevitable.

But it is possible. Indeed it is essential to be ready for our future. I ask each of you to join with me in working to make that vision real.

Thank you very much.