

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Education Bill Signing

Children's Museum, Boston, MA

Monday, January 18, 2010

As delivered

Seventeen years ago, with the passage of the Education Reform Act in 1993, we embarked on a journey to improve the public schools and raise the expectations of young learners all across the Commonwealth. The results have been impressive. Our students have scored first in the Nation on the NAPES achievement tests in each of the last three years and in the top three in the world on math and science. As parents, as teachers, as policy makers and as a community, we should be proud of these extraordinary outcomes. I know I am. We ought to give these kids a hand.

And yet for nearly as long we have left some children behind. Poor children, those who speak English as a second language, or who have special needs, more often than not children of color, have lagged other students. These are our children too. And they are just

as hungry for knowledge and education as any other. We can tolerate this no longer.

As James Baldwin wrote, “For these are all our children, we will all profit by or pay for what they become.” The Achievement Gap is an educational problem and an economic challenge, to be sure, but it is also a moral issue. And we can withstand that, and tolerate it, no longer.

To be clear, teachers are not the problem. Poverty is. Charter schools are not the singular answer, only part of it. The problem has been that the debate about what to do has been stuck in well-worn rhetoric focused mainly on adults, when it’s the children who demand our focus.

That is what our bill is all about. New tools, new rules and supports to enable teachers to do whatever is necessary to ignite a love of learning in every child. Today, in this building devoted to exploration, discovery and the power of a child’s imagination, we are standing up for children. We are showing the hungry minds in our

classrooms that we believe in them, and the committed teachers that populate those classrooms as well that we trust them to do what's best to help every child excel. And here's how:

First, the bill I am signing today creates Innovation Schools. This will furnish public schools with greater autonomy and flexibility in curriculum, in budget, school schedule and calendar, school district policies and professional development. Innovation is part of the Commonwealth's character and starting today we can harness that spirit and bring it to life in the classroom with new freedoms and flexibility.

Secondly, this bill strengthens the state's ability to intervene in underperforming schools and districts. We do our kids a grave disservice when we identify underperforming schools and then do nothing about it. What kind of message is that to send about what it means to be a mature and contributing and responsible adult? From now on, superintendents – and in some cases the Commissioner of Primary and Secondary Education – working collaboratively with teachers, principals and others, will develop turnaround plans for

underperforming schools, including new curriculum, increased planning time for teachers and budget reallocations. And all the adults will bear a higher level of accountability for reaching the kids who are struggling.

Third, this bill increases the charter caps in the state's lowest performing districts, so that charters can be part of our strategy to reach the harder to reach learners. New charter schools will have increased accountability and transparency standards. They will employ deliberate, specific strategies to attract, enroll and retain the high-needs students who are right now stuck in the achievement gap.

This bill is important for the future of public education in the Commonwealth on its own merits. I believe it will also enhance the chances we have in competing for federal Race to the Top funding as well. In these fiscal times, those resources will allow Massachusetts to retain its leadership role in education. And also significantly advance the Readiness agenda in education for the next decade.

I have more gratitude than I can express; I am so full and so excited. The spirit of partnership and collaboration that went into creating this bill, in all the ways the Mayor referred to and others, has been magnificent. And it is worth pausing and thinking about what we could do if we brought that same spirit to bear on a whole host of other needs and challenges facing this Commonwealth.

The contributions of teachers, union leaders, principals, superintendents and other education administrators, charter advocates, business leaders, parents groups, legislators have all made this a better bill. Thanks to each and every one of you for keeping kids the center of our focus.

Speaker DeLeo and President Murray showed extraordinary leadership in moving this bill, and I thank them for their efforts and passion for the schoolchildren of Massachusetts. It was also fun just checking in as we went along and doing the... I won't say co-conspirator, but working out those issues as we went along.

Chairman Walz, Chairman O’Leary, Senator Panagiotakos, Chairman Murphy, Leader Mariano and the other members of the conference committee: all were instrumental in this process, able shepherds of once-in-a-lifetime legislation.

And by the way, the members of the Legislature as a whole deserve our recognition and thanks for taking a courageous vote. It was a courageous vote, and political courage is not often recognized. Thank you.

And I also want to thank Mayor Menino for his tireless advocacy and commitment to bettering education in Boston and through this bill all across the Commonwealth. He was joined by many, many Mayors – some of whom are here today – we thank you so much for being a part of this, and other urban leaders who like the Mayor really put their back into getting the very best bill, and getting the sign-on necessary to take advantage of the Race to the Top funds should we win.

And I want to express really special appreciation to Education Secretary Paul Reville. Paul and I have spent hours and hours together, talking with teachers and students, seeing what works and what doesn't, witnessing the transformative power of education when everything in the way of that magical relationship between a great teacher and a hungry student is pushed aside. We have spent hours talking about what it would take to create those kinds of conditions in every school, in every community in the Commonwealth. And more than a policy-maker and leader – though he is that – he understood how important it is to me personally to get this right, and to make this meaningful. How important it is to me personally not to leave any child behind. Paul, you did a wondrous and a meaningful thing. And it's an extraordinary accomplishment. The children of the Commonwealth and all of us adults owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude. Thank you.

Now, in a minute I'm going to sign this bill, and I'm going to do it with pride and with hope. But this, as other speakers have said, is not the end of the Achievement Gap. It's the just the beginning of the end. I am counting on all of you who care about the future of children

– teachers and advocates, unions and school managers, parents and policy-makers – to work together, to collaborate on successful implementation.

Be respectful of differences in approach and solution. Share what works, and acknowledge what doesn't in candor and honesty. For the sake of the children, commit to get it right. If we do, there is nothing better we could do to honor Dr. King's Dream, and our own. Thank you.