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January 18, 2010

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

On behalf of the students, families, educators, and other citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I am writing to respectfully submit our Phase I application for the Race to the Top Fund.

When I visit many schools in Massachusetts, I am reminded of the truly transformative power of a high-quality education. I speak with students who are eager to learn, deeply engaged in their courses of study, committed to working hard, and excited about the future. I speak with teachers and school leaders who are passionate about providing their students with rich and varied educational experiences, have the content knowledge and leadership skills necessary to support students to their full potential, and understand that recognizing the needs of the whole child is essential to promoting student achievement.

I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of our students and educators, and our national reputation as the leader in education improvement and reform.

Given our moral obligation to provide all students with exceptional educational opportunities, however, doing well is not good enough. Too many of our students are not receiving a world-class education, as evidenced by unacceptable achievement gaps among different groups of students. Too many of our educators are not receiving the preparation and ongoing support that they need to provide all students with both differentiated and high-quality educational experiences. Massachusetts is fully committed to addressing these challenges in a comprehensive and systemic manner, and Race to the Top funding will enable us to achieve our ambitious goals much more quickly.

In 1993, the enactment of the Education Reform Act established the foundation for the first phase of education reform in Massachusetts. In 2008, I launched the Commonwealth Readiness Project and asked education, business, and community leaders to offer bold recommendations to create a truly student-centered and integrated system that would support students from birth through higher education. The product of the Readiness Project was the development of a comprehensive and long-term agenda for continuous improvement, grounded in four priorities: 1) meet the learning needs of each student and provide all the support they need to excel; 2) ensure that every student is taught by outstanding and well-supported educators; 3) prepare all students for college, career, and lifelong success; and 4) unleash innovation and systemic change throughout the public education system.

In 2010, we have established the foundation for the second phase of education reform in Massachusetts – a period within which we will continue to build upon our successes to date, but also learn from the lessons of the past so that we can finish the work that we started nearly twenty years ago.

Today, I signed a landmark education bill, *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which directly addresses several principles that you articulated when you visited us in July and includes groundbreaking strategies to intervene in our lowest-performing schools and promote innovation. First, state and district leaders will have expanded authority to implement aggressive intervention plans that will allow educators to break patterns of chronic underperformance. Second, teachers, parents, district and school administrators, and other community members will have the option to establish “Innovation Schools”, in-district public schools that will operate with increased autonomy and flexibility with regard to instruction, staffing, and budgeting. Third, a targeted charter cap lift in the lowest-performing districts will provide effective charter operators, those with demonstrated records of success, with the opportunity to serve our neediest students. This bill has created the legislative framework within which we can close achievement gaps and increase students’ and families’ access to innovative educational opportunities. More importantly, however, it creates the conditions within which we can commit to new ways of thinking and new ways of working together to achieve our goals.

The Race to the Top Fund is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leverage our successes to date, accelerate current efforts, and catalyze pioneering strategies. Our application is anchored in the priorities of the Readiness Project, and the implementation of our proposed initiatives will enable us to achieve four goals: 1) provide all of our students with more individualized educational experiences; 2) develop and retain an effective, diverse, and culturally competent workforce; 3) rapidly turn around our lowest-performing schools; and 4) increase college and career readiness for all students.

Massachusetts is exceptionally well-positioned to address the goals and priorities of the Obama administration. We are

ready to take advantage of this unprecedented and exciting opportunity to push the boundaries of education reform for several reasons; first, the establishment of the Executive Office of Education has created the infrastructure necessary to develop greater policy coherence across sectors; second, we are continuing to build capacity at different levels to not only implement, but sustain improvement and reform efforts; and third, our Race to the Top efforts have generated renewed commitment on the part of different stakeholders to embrace the second phase of education reform in our state. We will actively pursue our bold and ambitious agenda because we must do what is right for all students; we must ensure that every student in Massachusetts – no matter his/her ZIP code, age, or socioeconomic status – is given the opportunity to excel.

I deeply appreciate the leadership of the Obama administration to chart a new course for the future, and look forward to continuing our strong partnership to achieve common goals. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our application.

Sincerely,  
