



There Is No Excellence Without Equity:

A Path Forward for Education in Massachusetts



Massachusetts Education
Equity Partnership

There is no excellence without equity

At this pivotal time in **Massachusetts education**, we, the undersigned organizations representing the families, communities, and educators with the most at stake in educational decisions, come together to unequivocally state: **There is no excellence without equity.**

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Who We Are:

Advocates for Educational Equity and Justice



Black Advocates for Educational Excellence



Massachusetts: Number One Only For Some Students

Massachusetts has long been considered a leader in education, especially at the K-12 level. Hardly a month goes by without a [headline](#) noting that the Commonwealth is “No. 1 in education.”

Indeed, Massachusetts has much to be proud of — from its rich history of supporting public education to its leadership in advancing progressive education policy, including the landmark Massachusetts Education Reform Act and, more recently, the Student Opportunity Act (SOA).

But for a long time now, our state’s high overall rankings have masked deep inequities in student learning experiences and outcomes. As the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP)’s seminal “[Number 1 for Some](#)” report noted, even before COVID-19, the same metrics that gave us our high overall rankings showed that the education Black and Latinx students, and students from low-income families received in Massachusetts was on par with that of the average student in the nation’s lowest-performing states. Our outcomes for English learners and students with disabilities were even more concerning.

Voices from the Community

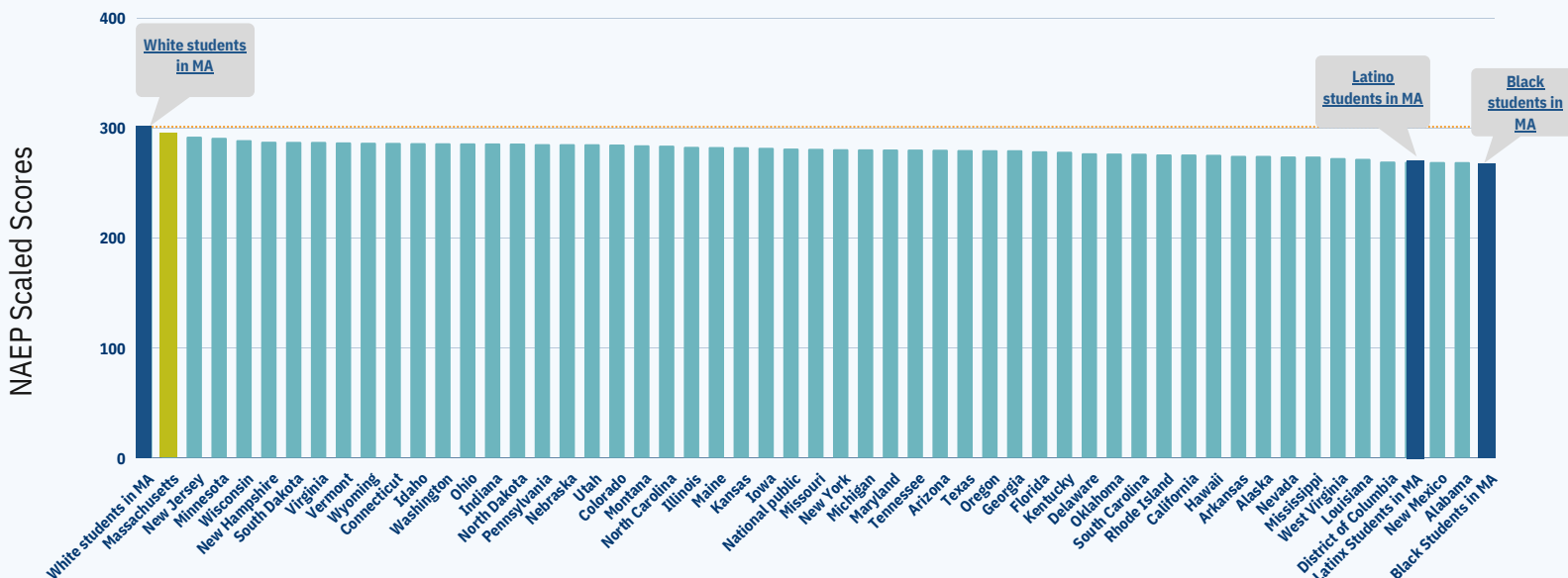
*“The genius of these communities has long been ignored and suppressed. Historically, those in power have masterfully made this legal, acceptable, and “normal.” I have an opportunity to change that, given my platform and experiences. Underserved communities don’t want quick fixes. **They want a fair chance to thrive.**”*

Robert J. Hendricks III, Founder, He is Me and MEEP Partner

All materials referenced in this report are hyperlinked. To view the online version of this document please visit masseduequity.org/no-excellence-without-equity

8th-Grade Math NAEP Results by State, 2019

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called The Nation’s Report Card, is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment that provides essential information about student achievement and learning experiences for public and private school students across various subjects. NAEP allows us to compare student achievement across states, providing educators, policymakers, and parents with necessary data.



Then, The Pandemic Hit.

COVID-19 affected students, families, and educators across the state — but its health, economic, and educational impacts have been most devastating in communities where the pandemic landed atop years of economic and educational disinvestment.

In parts of Boston and cities like Chelsea, Brockton, and Springfield, where infection and death rates were highest, the pandemic inflicted new levels of trauma and anxiety on families already facing significant adversity. Here, economic insecurity, made worse by the pandemic, pushed more young people into the workforce to support their families and forced them to put their education on hold.

Here, infection rates and building conditions made in-person learning all the more challenging, while the digital divide hampered students' ability to learn remotely. Here, the murders of George Floyd and too many others further eroded community trust in government institutions — including schools — that too often marginalize and criminalize children and families of color rather than serving and protecting them.

Not surprisingly, despite the often-heroic efforts of educators and education leaders, education disparities widened.



An Honest Look At The Data

- The number of early childhood seats — already **too low to meet statewide demand** — declined by more than 20% during the pandemic.
- **The percentage of Black and Latinx third graders reading on grade level dropped** from 38% to 32% and 28%, respectively. The grade-level rate for White students stayed more or less steady at 61%.
- 58% of **ninth graders from low-income families** passed all their classes in 2021, compared to 88% of their wealthier peers — an even wider gap than before the pandemic.
- 39% of 2021 Latinx high school graduates enrolled in college — **16 percentage points less** than before the pandemic. Among 2021 White high school graduates, 69% enrolled in college — about a 7 percentage point decline since 2019.

Unless we make significant changes in how we serve children and young people from birth through college, these new, wider disparities could become a permanent, compounding feature of our education system, with devastating impacts not only for individual students and families, but for our knowledge-based economy and our democracy.



Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages

We must — and can — do better. With billions in federal pandemic recovery and state Student Opportunity Act funding on the table, new state leadership on the way, and a greater public demand for change than we have seen in years, Massachusetts leaders have an opportunity to build on the state's rich educational history and authentically partner with families and communities to plot a new course forward — one that puts education equity front and center.

As organizations that work directly with students, families, educators, and education leaders, we know that there is no excellence without equity.

In subsequent pages, we put forth a vision for a more equitable education system that puts systemically underserved students and families first, and offer concrete recommendations for state leadership to make this vision a reality.

Our Vision: In Massachusetts

There is no excellence without equity

At the *early childhood* level



All families can **afford high-quality early education and care.**



All families — and especially systemically underserved families — have **easy access to high-quality, culturally affirming early education programs** that meet their needs.



Early childhood **educators are representative of the children and families they serve**, well-prepared, and tangibly valued and supported within their communities.

At the *elementary/secondary* level



All **students and families** feel like they **belong, are respected, and welcomed** in their school community.



All students receive **engaging, culturally responsive and rigorous learning experiences**, and the individualized support they need to prepare for college, careers, and life.



All students have access to a **diverse, well-prepared, well-supported, and stable educator workforce.**

At the *postsecondary education* level



All students have an **opportunity to access postsecondary education.**



All students applying to and attending public postsecondary institutions understand their financing options and can **complete their degrees without financial barriers.**



All students get the **support** they need to **successfully complete their degree.**

If Massachusetts truly wants to be No. 1, the next phase of educational improvement must focus on confronting and addressing disparities. **Every student deserves equitable opportunity.**

Today's reality falls far short of this vision, especially for students of color, students from low-income families, English learners and students with disabilities.

What you'll find in this document

On subsequent pages, we

- Offer snapshots of what students, families, and educators are experiencing right now,
- Recommend concrete actions that state leaders can take to move the Commonwealth's education system closer to the vision, described on these pages and;
- Suggest metrics to help gauge success.

We stand ready to work with the Commonwealth's leaders to help make Massachusetts the No. 1 education state for all students, not just some.



What you will not find here

This document is not a comprehensive roadmap for improving student outcomes in the Commonwealth. Rather, it highlights a limited number of focus areas that are especially important for advancing equity. Importantly, this document is also not a single-year action plan. While beginning, accelerating or deepening work in all of these areas is urgent, we realize that many of the changes will take multiple years to fully implement.

A call for inclusive, collaborative state leadership

Tackling education disparities will require a laser-sharp focus on the needs, assets, experiences, and perspectives of students, families, communities, and educators that often get lost in Massachusetts' high averages. It will require giving everyone a seat at the table when decisions are made and pushing back against those who wish to preserve the status quo. It will require calling out not just what the data tells us about where we are at this moment but challenging the history and racist and classist beliefs, systems, and structures that got us here. And it will require not just reflection, analysis, and conversation, but action. State leadership is critical in this work.

We urge state leaders to:

- 1 Model transparency and accountability:** Set concrete, numeric annual and long-term goals aligned with the recommendations and metrics outlined on these pages, and report annually on progress toward these goals. All student and family-focused goals should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income level, English learner status and disability status and should require more progress on behalf of systemically underserved populations.
- 2 Shine a light on education inequities to prompt action:** Establish and regularly update visually compelling, accessible dashboards that include disaggregated and cross-tabulated data on critical opportunity and outcome indicators at the forefront.
- 3 Work together to advance equity:** Establish cross-departmental collaborative structures to tackle issues such as expanding preschool access, establishing a birth-to-workforce longitudinal data system, reimagining postsecondary planning, and building strong and diverse early and K-12 educator pipelines. Collaborate, and foster local collaboration, with other human service agencies to ensure children and families get the support they need.
- 4 Require and model authentic engagement:** All recommendations in this document should be implemented in consultation with systemically underserved students, families, communities and educators.

Early Childhood Education

Our vision



All families can **afford high-quality early education and care**.



All families — and especially systemically underserved families — have **easy access to high-quality, culturally affirming early education programs** that meet their needs.



Early childhood **educators are representative of the children and families they serve**, well-prepared, and tangibly valued and supported within their communities.



From Vision to Reality

High-quality early childhood education is critical to children's future success — but in our state, children of color and children from low-income backgrounds do not have the same access to quality programs as their White and more privileged peers. Even before the pandemic, 62% of residents in low-income neighborhoods in Massachusetts lived in child care deserts. Moreover, the high cost of child care puts early education out of reach for many families, even as educators in the sector — most of them women and many of them people of color — often make only minimum wage.

The pandemic has only intensified this crisis. **To ensure that all children get the start in life they deserve, state leaders must build a well-funded and diverse early education system that puts equity at the forefront. The recommendations on subsequent pages are aimed at accomplishing exactly that.**

To bolster those efforts, we urge state leaders to:

- 1** **Work with the Legislature to implement all 14 recommendations in the [Special Commission on Early Education and Care Economic Review report](#)**, including increasing funding for the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).
- 2** **Collaborate with state and federal agencies to expand data collection and transparency regarding access to and affordability of early learning options** and supports for kids 0-5 and their families, and examine how these options differ by geography and family characteristics, including income level, race and ethnicity, and linguistic diversity.

All families can afford high-quality early education and care.

Where are we now?

In Massachusetts, there are 354,000 children aged 0 to 5, yet the early education and care system only has the capacity for 220,000. What's more, the cost of care in our state is among the highest in the country, especially for the youngest kids. And while the state subsidizes early education for families with the lowest incomes, the current state subsidy system serves only about 26,000 infants, toddlers and preschoolers. About 16,000 families are on a waitlist for subsidies and many more are struggling to find or pay for care, which can cost upward of \$20,000 for an infant and \$15,000 for a 4-year-old.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Work with the Massachusetts Legislature to secure public funding for early education to ensure that families spend no more than the federally recommended 7% of their annual household income on child care.** If new funding streams must be phased in over time, state leaders and the Legislature should ensure that families with lower income levels receive priority.
- **Ensure that state funding streams reflect the true cost of high-quality care.** State funding must realistically cover the costs of operating high-quality early learning programs, including fair and adequate compensation for staff.
- **In consultation with families and providers, revamp and streamline the subsidy application and determination process.** The process for getting a child care subsidy today is cumbersome at best and prohibitive at worst. State leaders should work with families, providers, and resource & referral agencies to streamline the process, automate eligibility determinations, and increase proactive outreach to families in their native language.

High Cost of Child Care for Families in Massachusetts

\$20K

is the average infant care cost per year. The average price for **4-year-olds is only slightly lower, at \$15,000 a year.**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), affordable child care costs 7% of a family's income. By this standard, **only 5.4% of Massachusetts families can afford infant care.**

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as simplification of the subsidy application and determination process	Public funding for early education The number of families receiving child care subsidies	The average annual cost of early childhood education and care, especially for systemically underserved families

All families — and especially systemically underserved families — have easy access to high-quality, culturally affirming early education programs that meet their needs.

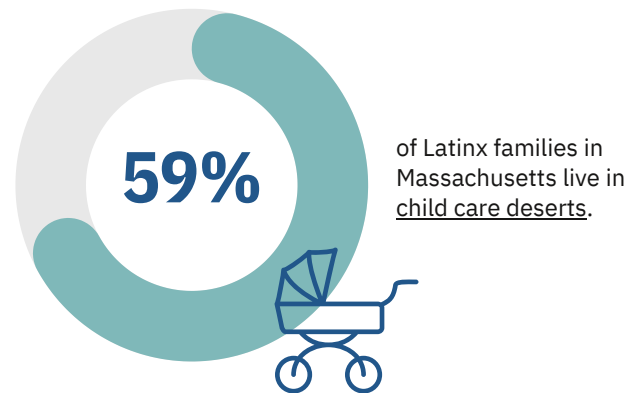
Where are we now?

About half of families in Massachusetts live in child care deserts — that is, places with no child care providers or with more than three children for every spot available. Latinx families and families living in low-income neighborhoods are even less likely to have access to child care. What’s more, even when care is available and affordable, families — especially families of color and families with low-income levels — may have difficulty finding early education programs that meet their needs and provide a positive, culturally affirming environment for their child.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Modify statewide quality standards to ensure that all children and families have access to culturally responsive and affirming early education and care programs.** Statewide quality standards should seek to phase out harmful and discriminatory practices, such as the use of exclusionary discipline, while encouraging programs to offer care that builds on the cultural and linguistic assets of families and communities.
- **Identify and address gaps in access to care, such as availability of care outside of the traditional 9-5 workday and in child care deserts.** Design, pilot, and implement targeted incentive structures to expand capacity for underserved communities and populations.
- **Ensure that all families — especially those systemically underserved — are able to choose the child care delivery model that will work best for them.** State early childhood education policy and funding should not privilege one program type (e.g., family child care or center-based care) over another.

Numbers Tell A Story



Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as modifying statewide standards to ensure access to culturally responsive and affirming early education and care programs	<p>The number of 0- to 5-year-olds from systemically underserved families enrolled in early education and care programs</p> <p>The availability of care outside of the traditional 9-5 workday, and in child care deserts</p>	<p>Disparities in access to early childhood education and care by geography, race/ethnicity, and income level</p> <p>The percentage of families living in child care deserts, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income level, and geography</p>

Early childhood educators are representative of the children and families they serve, well-prepared, and tangibly valued and supported within their communities.

Where are we now?

Insufficient public funding for child care means that families pay exorbitant fees and educators in the sector are grossly underpaid. The average early childhood educator in Massachusetts earns \$14 per hour. About 15% of early childhood educators live below the federal poverty line and 41% worry about having enough food. When we consider that 92% of the early childhood workforce is female, and 41% are people of color (compared to just 9% of elementary/secondary teachers), these statistics highlight a worrisome equity challenge in our education system.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Develop and implement career ladder and competency-based credentialing systems that are tied to a compensation scale** that ensures that early childhood educators and family child care providers are compensated at a level that is commensurate with public school teachers with equivalent credentials and training.
- **Retain and increase educator diversity and ensure that there is equitable demographic representation in leadership roles.** Work with the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to establish flexible and affordable pathways to leadership for early educators.
- **Continue to fund professional development (PD) and coaching, and build sufficient local and regional infrastructure to support PD throughout the system.** In addition to making PD and coaching that focuses on instruction and care available to all staff, program directors and other early education leaders should be trained on establishing positive, inclusive working conditions.
- **Elevate and celebrate the early educator profession.** Develop public relations and marketing campaigns to boost the visibility of the field and help elevate the profile of the early childhood educator in our state. Establish a Massachusetts Early Educator of the Year award that is akin to the Massachusetts Teacher of the Year award in elementary/secondary education and hold an annual conference for early educators, as Alabama does.

“Voices from the Community

The Early Education and Care field must remain rich with multi-options to meet the childcare needs of families, during the “typical” workday as well as out of school time and overnight hours. The diversity of options has to be affordable, and there is no reason that the childcare field cannot be supported in the same robust financial manner as public education. When early educators are compensated at the same rate as public school educators, we will have taken great steps in securing a dedicated workforce that should reflect the diversity of our field.

Jillayne, Early education advocate

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as implementing a career ladder and pay scale that ensures parity between K-12 and early educators.	The average pay of early educators	The percentage of early educators reporting financial hardship
	Early educator retention, disaggregated by race/ethnicity	Early educator turnover, disaggregated by race/ethnicity
	Diversity among early education program leaders	
	The number of people seeking early education jobs, by race/ethnicity	

Elementary/Secondary Education

Our vision



All students and families feel like they belong, are respected, and welcomed in their school community.



All students receive **engaging, culturally responsive and rigorous learning experiences**, and the individualized support they need to prepare for college, careers, and life.



All students have access to a **diverse, well-prepared, well-supported, and stable educator workforce**.

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages



From Vision to Reality

Today, with disparities in student learning experiences and outcomes growing ever-wider thanks to more than two years of pandemic-related disruptions, our education system is further from this vision than it has been in years. Eliminating long-standing and new educational inequities will require change at the state, district, and local levels.

In addition to implementing the recommendations on subsequent pages, we urge state leaders to provide resources and political support to local leaders, so they can put the needs of the systemically underserved students, families, and educators they serve at the forefront.

To that end, we ask state leaders to:

- 1 Fully implement the Student Opportunity Act**, including its funding and accountability provisions.
- 2 Redesign the state accountability system** to focus on eliminating disparities in learning experiences and outcomes.
- 3 Streamline DESE's technical assistance, guidance, and network offerings** and align them with a uniform needs assessment and improvement planning process to be used by schools and districts across the state.

All students and families feel like they belong, are respected, and welcomed in their school community.

Where are we now?

Having a sense of belonging in school is critical to student success and well-being. Yet discipline and dress codes that disproportionately police students of color, curricula that offer them windows but no mirrors, educator and peer micro- and macroaggressions, and dilapidated buildings have made many young people — especially students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students — feel like they are not valued or welcomed in their schools. Building learning environments that foster belonging for all students is especially important now, as students are readjusting to being in school buildings after two years of COVID-19.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Elevate the voices of systemically underserved students, families, and educators and make them count.** In partnership with educators, the community, and researchers, implement statewide surveys of students, families, and educators about school climate and working conditions. Hold schools and districts accountable for disaggregated results and for addressing any issues identified by the surveys.
- **Provide guidance and develop policies that help districts become community hubs** that can connect families to community resources and services and ensure that all students and families receive the mental health, academic, and wraparound supports they need.
- **Require all districts to ensure that conduct, discipline, and dress codes prevent discrimination.** Ensure that all preservice and current education leaders, educators, and student support staff are trained in culturally and linguistically sustaining, trauma-informed, and restorative practices.
- **Increase financial and operational support for student transportation and school facilities** in Gateway Cities. Re-examine Massachusetts School Building Authority reimbursement rates and policies to enable and prioritize facility modernization in Gateway Cities and other high-need communities. Ensure that Gateway Cities and other high-need communities can offer safe and reliable transportation to all students who live more than a mile from school. Provide resources, purchasing, and distribution support to address the [digital divide](#).

Voices from the Community

"It's sad that you have to teach your kids zero tolerance. I tell my son every day you might not get a second chance."

Father, MassINC Polling Group, focus group participant



Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as rollout of student, family, & educator surveys	<p>School culture/climate ratings (based on survey results) especially among systemically underserved students</p> <p>The percentage of educators prepared to support all students in culturally responsive ways</p> <p>Percentage of students and families receiving the wraparound services they need</p>	<p>Student discipline rates and discipline disparities between student groups</p> <p>Chronic absenteeism rates and disparities in chronic absenteeism between student groups</p>

All students receive engaging, culturally responsive, and rigorous learning experiences, and the individualized support they need to prepare for college, careers, and life.

Where are we now?

All students can soar academically when they receive high-quality instruction and support that builds on their strengths, challenges them, and connects meaningfully with their interests and experiences. But today, despite [all of the evidence](#) in support of rigorous, culturally-responsive teaching, for too many students – especially students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, and students with disabilities – such instruction is the exception, rather than the rule. Turning these patterns around has never been more critical than it is now, following two years of pandemic-induced disruptions to student learning.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Revise Massachusetts' academic standards to build racially and culturally responsive knowledge**, elevate the history, achievements, and key writings of communities of color in all subjects, and combat racial, linguistic and cultural biases. Require districts to adopt prescreened, standards-aligned curricula, including research-based approaches to early literacy. Work with districts to ensure that teachers receive ongoing training to teach the new curricula.
- **Help districts expand access to one- and two-way dual-language programs** by setting proactive policy conditions and providing funding and technical assistance.
- **Build on the [Acceleration Roadmap](#) initiative and provide districts with comprehensive pandemic recovery assistance**, including diagnostic tools, professional development, and guidance on instructional materials and on providing personalized academic and wraparound supports. Require all districts to develop and publicize pandemic recovery plans outlining how they will accelerate learning and support student well-being and ensure that these plans include disaggregated numeric progress targets for helping students catch up and descriptions of resources that will be provided to students and families.
- **Empower families with critical information about school performance – and about their child's progress**. Revamp the Department of Elementary and Secondary's (DESE's) [School Report Card website](#) to put disaggregated data at the forefront. Increase the usefulness of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) [Parent/Guardian Reports](#) by clarifying what the results mean and linking to vetted resources parents can use to help their child.



2/3 of Black and Latinx parents and more than half of White parents in MA believe that ensuring that **curricula better reflect the experiences and accomplishments of people of color** is a major priority.

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as revising the state academic standards	<p>The percentages of Black, Latinx, Asian, Native, and multiracial students who report seeing their experiences and identities reflected in instructional materials</p> <p>Enrollment in dual language programs</p> <p>Utilization of the School Report Card website and MCAS Parent/Guardian Reports and in positive feedback about them</p> <p>The percentages of students at grade level or on track to reach grade level in three years, with larger gains for systemically underserved student groups</p>	Disparities in grade level proficiency between student groups

All students have access to a diverse, well-prepared, well-supported, and stable educator workforce.

Where are we now?

Having a racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce is beneficial for all students — and particularly for students of color, who often thrive in classrooms led by teachers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds. Yet in Massachusetts, people of color make up only 9% of teachers. What’s more, students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and English learners are also more likely than their peers to have teachers who are inexperienced, or teaching out of field, and to attend schools with high teacher turnover, further undermining their educational experience.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Implement all state responsibilities outlined in the proposed Educator Diversity Act**, including establishing alternative certification requirements; setting goals for improving educator diversity; and publishing and regularly updating a data dashboard on critical indicators, such as recruitment and retention by race/ethnicity.
- **Invest in high-retention residency and community pipeline programs with a demonstrated track record of success for educators of color.** Incentivize traditional programs to adopt elements that make these pathways successful.
- **Work with the Legislature to establish a scholarship program for Gateway City and Boston high school graduates** who choose to teach in Gateway City or Boston schools.
- Work with leader preparation programs and school districts **to provide pre- and in-service training, professional development, and coaching for school leaders** on establishing working conditions that foster strong retention among educators of color.

In 2019-20,



of Massachusetts schools had zero teachers of color.

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as establishment of scholarship programs	<p>The numbers of Black, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial students successfully completing teacher or other educator credentials, in total and via residency or community pipeline programs</p> <p>The percentages of educators and education leaders of color</p> <p>Retention rates among educators of color</p>	<p>Educator turnover, especially in high poverty schools</p>

Postsecondary Education

Our vision



All students have an **opportunity to access postsecondary education.**



All students applying to and attending public postsecondary institutions understand their financing options and can **complete their degrees without financial barriers.**



All students get the **support** they need to **successfully complete their degree.**



From Vision to Reality

In Massachusetts' knowledge-based economy, a postsecondary education is a critical pathway to economic security and mobility that can affect not just individual students, but entire families for generations. Yet even before the pandemic, Black and Latinx students, as well as students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners faced vast disparities in access, affordability, and completion of postsecondary degrees. In response, in 2019, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education and Board of Higher Education launched a statewide [Equity Agenda](#), an ambitious initiative aimed at centering equity in public postsecondary policies and programs that is closely aligned with the vision put forth on these pages.

Since then, however, COVID-19's impacts on students, families, and institutions have only exacerbated long-standing inequities, elevating the urgency of this work.

Therefore, to sustain efforts already underway and accelerate progress, we urge state leaders to:

1

Further prioritize state actions to drive equity and help institutions do the same.

Develop an annual equity plan that identifies a limited number of priority action steps, with timelines and metrics to measure success. Provide institutions with guidance and needs assessment tools to identify priority action steps and develop equity plans for each campus.

2

Increase transparency and accountability. Track and publicly report annual progress on the initiatives and numeric goals in both the short-term equity plan and the longer-term Equity Agenda, including the [Strategic Plan for Racial Equity](#). Ensure that the Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS) data is current and expand PMRS to include additional equity metrics (such as participation in state need-based financial aid programs) and institutions.

All students have an opportunity to access postsecondary education.

Where are we now?

Although high school graduation rates continued to rise during the pandemic, college enrollment dropped sharply, especially among historically underserved student groups. For example, fewer than 40% of Latinx high school graduates enrolled in college in 2021, compared to nearly 70% of their White peers — a disparity roughly 1.5 times wider than before the pandemic. Left unchecked, these trends could prove devastating for students and their families, not to mention our state economy. Supporting students on their journey to and through college has never been more critical than it is today.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Reimagine postsecondary planning across the state in partnership with K-12 and higher education leaders, the business community, guidance counselors, families, students, community organizations and educators.** Develop and implement a comprehensive approach to postsecondary planning, including a series of career exploration and postsecondary planning courses required for all middle school and high school students. These courses should enable all students to complete a set of research-backed college and career planning milestones before graduation.
- **Hire more college counselors in high school who reflect the students they serve.** Assist districts in using their SOA dollars to recruit and hire more diverse student support staff who share students’ racial and cultural backgrounds and/or partner with community-based organizations that help students with college and career planning. Ensure that all pre-service and currently employed counselors receive professional development aligned with the above-mentioned statewide approach that enables them to provide high quality, culturally responsive support for students and families through all phases of postsecondary planning.
- **Expand access to Early College programs for systemically underserved students.** Launch new programs and expand existing programs in the state’s highest need districts. Work with districts to remove barriers to access, such as transportation. Establish clear and transparent policies for transfer of Early College credits to maximize their benefits for students.
- **Conduct an external review to determine how Massachusetts colleges and universities can increase access** for historically underserved students, including adult and part-time learners. Work with external partners, including current and prospective students and families, to evaluate current admissions practices and policies and provide recommendations for improvement.

Percent of Mass. high school graduates enrolled in college in March following graduation

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2021</u>	Decrease since 2019
White	76	69	-7
Black	70	56	-14
Latinx	55	39	-16
Asian	84	77	-7
Low-Income	58	45	-13
English learners	50	31	-20
Students w/ disabilities	55	43	-12

Note: discrepancies in the table are due to rounding.

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as implementing a statewide comprehensive approach to postsecondary planning	<p>The percentage of systemically underserved high school graduates enrolling in higher education institutions, disaggregated by student group</p> <p>Increases in the number of adult and part-time learners enrolling in public institutions of higher education</p> <p>The number of counselors prepared to support students in postsecondary planning</p> <p>The number of systemically underserved students participating in Early College programs</p>	Disparities in college enrollment between student groups

All students applying to and attending public postsecondary institutions understand their financing options and can complete their degrees without financial barriers.

Where are we now?

Public higher education is supposed to be an engine of economic mobility. Yet today in Massachusetts, state colleges and universities are unaffordable for many students — especially for Black and Latinx students, who have less wealth, on average, than their White peers, and those from low-income households. In recent years, college costs have increased dramatically at institutions across the state, and inadequate grant aid has left many students and parents no choice but to take on higher amounts of student debt.

Example Massachusetts State University
Average Annual Cost by Family Income

Family Income	Average Annual Cost	Annual Cost as Share of Family Income
\$0-\$30,000	\$13,252	44% or more
\$30,001-\$48,000	\$15,498	32% - 52%
\$48,001-\$75,000	\$18,485	25% - 39%
\$75,001-\$110,000	\$21,626	19% - 29%
\$110,001+	\$23,059	21% or less

We urge state leaders to:

- Increase the amount and accessibility of need-based state scholarship funding.** Work with the legislature to increase investment in MassGrant and MassGrant Plus and expand the program to students at all public colleges and universities, increase award sizes, and cover costs of attendance, like room and board, books, and transportation. Require any institutions serving MassGrant recipients to standardize financial aid letter format, content, and language.
- Allow all undocumented students to access in-state tuition and fee rates and state financial aid.** Work with the legislature to pass legislation that would allow Massachusetts' undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition and state financial aid.
- Building on the Board of Higher Education's work, pass legislation that equitably and adequately finances public higher education** to ensure that first generation, low-income and underrepresented minority students have authentic access and necessary support to succeed at and graduate from college.



For many students from families earning less than \$30,000 annually, Massachusetts public college attendance costs can amount to more than half of their family's income — after grants and loans. In contrast, families earning more than \$110,000 annually can expect to pay only a fifth or less of their annual income. **These inequitable patterns repeat at colleges across the Commonwealth.**

Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as launching a legislative committee to re-examine the funding model for higher education	The size of need-based state scholarship awards available to students from low-income families The percentage of direct and indirect college costs covered for systemically underserved students	The average annual college cost for students from low-income backgrounds The loan burden for systemically underserved students

All students get the support they need to successfully complete their degree.

Where are we now?

Today, only 1 of every 2 first-time students who enroll in a Massachusetts public college graduates within six years. Among systemically underserved student groups, the rates are even lower — in 2017, for example, only 28% of Latino male students at public colleges completed their degrees within this time frame. Students who don't graduate are often stuck with crippling debt — and without the benefits of a degree. Reversing these patterns and ensuring that our public institutions are able to support all students to graduation is critical to our state's future.

We urge state leaders to:

- **Improve the quality, diversity, and effectiveness of campus advising.** In partnership with students, researchers, and educators, develop guidelines and standards for strengthening academic and general advising services across colleges and departments, including establishing cultural competency requirements. Improve integration of advising with all campus services, including tutoring, career centers, wraparound services, and financial aid. Increase the diversity of campus advisors, which research suggests produces more equitable outcomes among student populations.
- **Leverage existing state policy levers — such as the SUCCESS Fund — to increase access to wraparound services and support.** Work with the Legislature to increase investments in the SUCCESS Fund to expand the program to all public colleges and universities. Make it easier for students to receive support by, for example, requiring institutions that receive SUCCESS funding to proactively gather information from students on the need for wraparound resources during the enrollment and registration process every semester.
- **Center student voice to build student-ready institutions.** Seek student input to prioritize strategies and areas for improvement identified in the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. Provide financial incentives and technical support to institutions for the implementation of strategies to improve student experiences. Consider incentivizing institutions to implement a research-based campus climate survey to inform their efforts.
- **Support institutions in increasing faculty diversity.** Implement the action steps to recruit and retain more administrators, faculty and staff of color outlined in DHE's Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. Collect and publicly report data on faculty demographics and retention by race/ethnicity for each institution.

Voices from the Community

*“My favorite part of the program was just definitely having the specialized advising. Through that, I felt like **I was able to get the tools to be successful** – not only in my first year of college as an early college student – but, also beyond. I continue to use those same resources; **I’m still in contact with my advisor who is now my greatest mentor.**”*

Hannah, former early college student



Indicators of Progress

Implementation of...	↑ Increases in...	↓ Decreases in...
Recommended policy and practice changes, such as coordinated advising services	First-year retention rates for systemically underserved groups of students	The percentage of students who drop out and do not complete their degrees
Timely reporting of success and completion indicators by race and income level	Percentage of students in each systemically underserved group completing gateway courses and accumulating credits on time Six-year graduation rates in four-year institutions and three-year graduation rates in two-year institutions for each systemically underserved student group	Disparities in college completion between student groups

We stand ready to work with state and
local leaders to help make

**Massachusetts a Number 1
education state for all students,**
not just some.





Massachusetts Education
Equity Partnership

There is no excellence without equity

About The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP)

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership represents a statewide movement of advocates for educational equity committed to building power and capacity in historically underserved communities, advancing policies and practices that achieve educational justice, and shifting decision-making power and representation throughout the education system to be inclusive of community voices. MEEP mobilizes a diverse group of leaders across sectors to strategically enhance opportunities for all Massachusetts families.

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