

"There can be no keener revelation of  
a society's soul than the way in which  
it treats its children."

-Nelson Mandela, Former President of South Africa



*A Blueprint for Investing in Our Future*



*MassSenate*



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# KIDS FIRST





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# Introduction



Kids First

In his first speech as the newly elected president of the Massachusetts State Senate in 1914, Calvin Coolidge famously stated:

*The Commonwealth is one. We are all members of one body. The welfare of the weakest and the welfare of the most powerful are inseparably bound together...The general welfare cannot be provided for in any one act, but it is well to remember that the benefit of one is the benefit of all, and the neglect of one is the neglect of all.*

Exactly 101 years later, a newly elected president of the Massachusetts State Senate from Coolidge's same legislative district picked up that theme, stating:

*Shared prosperity is the hallmark of a true Commonwealth...Consider this: if we were to put the right policies and resources in place we can make sure every child born is given the support he or she needs, from prenatal care to early childhood education to quality schools and higher education opportunities free of crushing debt, we could transform the Commonwealth in a generation. In a quarter century, we could dramatically diminish many of the problems that saddle both individuals and the Commonwealth as whole: chronic unemployment, workforce shortages, lack of opportunity. In their place: a generation of fully employed, prosperous young people, imbued with a sense of opportunity and possibility. A generation sharing in our collective prosperity.*

In the century from Calvin Coolidge to Stan Rosenberg, much has changed in Massachusetts. But one thing that has not changed is the fundamental belief, held by both conservatives and progressives, that the goal of our Commonwealth is to find a shared prosperity for us and our children. Since the days of Horace Mann, Massachusetts has resolved to build that shared prosperity through the tools of education. At this critical juncture in the early part of a new century, the Commonwealth must renew that resolve once again.

Massachusetts is a national leader in public education, health care, and innovation, but we still have room for improvement when it comes to building strong and resilient children on a path to productive adulthood. Building strong and resilient children should, and must, be our Commonwealth's number one priority. But all too often, education and other programs serving our children are left underfunded and under supported, crowded out by other pressing and immediate-term budgetary matters. We need to re-imagine our budgets and re-think our priorities. The investments we make in our children are both good policy and good economics. Investments in high-quality early education alone see a rate of return of 13%, an astonishingly high number.<sup>i</sup> The stronger our investments in children, the more we as a Commonwealth will be saving in the future, from higher rates of high school graduation and college completion to lower rates of incarceration, drug use, and unemployment.<sup>ii</sup>

Building strong and resilient children in the Commonwealth requires a commitment to our children, and their families -- because they are the building blocks of the Commonwealth itself. And it requires our fidelity to that commitment at every step of a child's social, economic, and educational upbringing.

Every parent or guardian wants what is best for their child. They want to know that their child is going to have the skills and preparation to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy. In order to achieve shared prosperity, the Massachusetts Senate similarly wants the best for every child in the Commonwealth.

Each child is on his or her own path. Some of our children will go on to discover groundbreaking cures for pernicious diseases; others will start innovative companies harnessing the power of new technologies and industries; and others will join the ranks of the teachers, nurses, manufacturers, and service workers who power our economy and sustain our Commonwealth. And all will become the decision-makers in our future democracy. Regardless of the personal career choices our children will make, Massachusetts requires an educational system that meets students where they are and gives them the life skills to grow, prosper, and be capable stewards.



Not all children begin their educational journey at the same starting blocks. Children from low and middle income families are often not starting with the advantages of their wealthier peers, and we see the results play out in the Commonwealth's public schools from the moment children enroll. But education – and particularly early education – can be a great equalizer, and its effects can be felt for several generations.

We know that early education is one of the most effective means of building strong, resilient, and healthy children who become successful adults. In Massachusetts, early education services rank high in quality, but affordability is an issue, especially for working families.<sup>1</sup> The average annual cost of infant care for one child in Massachusetts is \$17,062.<sup>iii</sup> Annual costs at a child care center in Massachusetts average \$29,843 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 33 percent of the median income for families with children.<sup>iv</sup> Despite the costs, parents in Massachusetts share a strong desire for their children to gain access to these high-quality programs. They know that early education services provide the necessary foundation for future academic success.

A critical indicator of future success in adulthood is reading proficiency by third grade. Children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school by age 19 than proficient readers (16% versus 4%).<sup>v</sup> Numerous studies demonstrate the link between early reading success and future educational attainment, including high school graduation rates.<sup>vi</sup> However, for the past 15 years, Massachusetts has barely moved the needle in this most critical of benchmarks, with roughly 40% of Massachusetts third-graders not reading proficiently for their grade level. While we should not place too much stock in any single exam, the third-grade reading test has been a proven early warning indicator for student academic achievement. And in that regard, the failure to improve the proficiency rate has had implications for the Commonwealth well beyond third-grade literacy.

The result of underinvestment in children's early education is very clear. The additional cost to taxpayers of each Massachusetts high school dropout over his/her lifetime is \$349,000.<sup>vii</sup> Or consider this fact: In 2013, the Commonwealth spent \$66 million incarcerating Boston residents in Suffolk County (a figure that does not include the cost of incarcerating Bostonians in other state and county facilities), a sum that is two and a half times larger than the combined funding for Bunker Hill and Roxbury Community Colleges.<sup>viii</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation report in 2013 titled "The First Eight Years" noted that "the longer society waits to intervene in children's lives, the more costly and difficult it becomes to make up for early setbacks – both for the struggling child and for the nation as a whole." Investing in children's early years not only helps build strong families and communities, it also helps our state compete in an increasingly sophisticated global economy.

### **Why it Matters..?**

*Beyond our shared moral duty to protect children, there are pragmatic reasons for implementing an integrated early childhood system that sets all young children on a path toward successful adulthood. Today, employers are struggling to find enough skilled workers. In the next decade, the demand for workers with a postsecondary credential or degree is expected to outpace the supply significantly. Furthermore, as the elderly population grows, the country faces the prospect of relying on a smaller workforce to pay for public-sector programs. A productive workforce is critical to generating the resources to support a growing population of retirees and the future success of our economy. High-quality early care and education play an important role in preparing children for success and lead to higher levels of educational attainment, career advancement and earnings. Our children are undeniably a key resource in building an economically strong future.* <sup>ix</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Massachusetts is one of 11 states where the average cost of full-time child care is more than 90 percent of median rent.



In addition to supporting our state's economic future, investing in children and families is a highly effective strategy for tackling some of society's greatest problems. In recent years, the Commonwealth's policymakers have been focused on two major issues: battling the opioid abuse crisis and reforming the criminal justice system. It is not simplistic to say that both those issues are, to a great extent, consequences of our state's failure to invest in children's education, health, and wellbeing in their earliest years. Drug abuse and high incarceration and recidivism rates are not permanent realities. Rather, smart investments in our children can obviate the need for larger investments in those other areas later. Horace Mann recognized that connection nearly two centuries ago when he stated: "Jails and prisons are the complement of schools; so many less as you have of the latter, so many more must you have of the former."

Massachusetts needs to prioritize young children and families in a meaningful, coordinated way. As a state, we have sprinkled funding across many programs, but going forward state leaders must make significant, sustained investments in children and their families in a manner designed for achieving the biggest impact and outcomes.<sup>2</sup> This report offers a vision for those kinds of investments.

It is time for our state government to make strategic policy choices and upstream investments in our children rather than avoidable and ever more expensive downstream investments to support the struggling adults -- lacking options and opportunity -- those children can become. Every resident of the Commonwealth, whether they have children or not, will benefit from strategic and smart investments in our children from birth to adulthood.



<sup>2</sup> Currently, 70% of the funding for early education and care programming managed by the state is supported by federal dollars. The Commonwealth invests little in state dollars compared to investments made to K-12.



# Executive Summary



## Kids First

Addressing the problems faced by all children in Massachusetts requires a holistic approach. Easy fixes and a narrow focus will not build the strong and resilient children the Commonwealth desperately needs for its own social and economic future. Rather, a sustained, comprehensive, and integrated approach is required. That approach must be as focused on parents, caregivers, and communities as it is on the children themselves. We must recognize that communities and societal backgrounds form and mold a child's educational platform for learning.

*Kids First seeks to make the health, welfare, and education of our youngest residents the Commonwealth's highest priority.*

As a longtime leader in driving resources and policy changes to support children's wellbeing, Senate President Stan Rosenberg created the Kids First initiative, chaired by Senator Sal DiDomenico, to propose a series of recommendations that seek to build strong and resilient kids in the Commonwealth. Senator Rosenberg and Senator DiDomenico convened a cross-jurisdictional working group of senators to look comprehensively at a wide variety of policy areas which relate to supporting children. The working group consists of: Senators Sonia Chang-Diaz, Jennifer Flanagan, Jason Lewis, Patricia Jehlen, James Welch, Joan Lovely, Linda Dorcena Forry, Eric Lesser, and Richard Ross. The senators invited experts in diverse fields, including early childhood development, health, education, housing, and nutrition, among others, to share their knowledge through questionnaires, meetings, and presentations.

Simply saying we need more money for education and social supports for children, without a plan to properly invest new resources, is not the answer. The goal of the Kids First initiative has been to identify the strategies that work and to build a blueprint for smart investments in our kids. While this initiative is broad in scope, from pre-natal to college/career, the focus and content of this report is on the critical years of birth to age 9. Recent reports from the Foundation Budget Review Commission<sup>3</sup> and the Higher Education Finance Commission<sup>4</sup> identified strategies and investments for K-12 students and higher education students, respectively. The Senate's Kids First working group endorses those reports and incorporates their findings herein. Building on those reports, this vision document from the Senate's Kids First initiative seeks to determine what our youngest kids need, and how we can lay sturdy foundations in the earliest years of a child's life upon which can be laid the best strategies previously identified by those two commissions to help our older kids grow and succeed.



*Kids First proposes a comprehensive strategy to support our families, educators, and community leaders while building the strong and resilient children the Commonwealth wants and, more importantly, needs for its future success.*

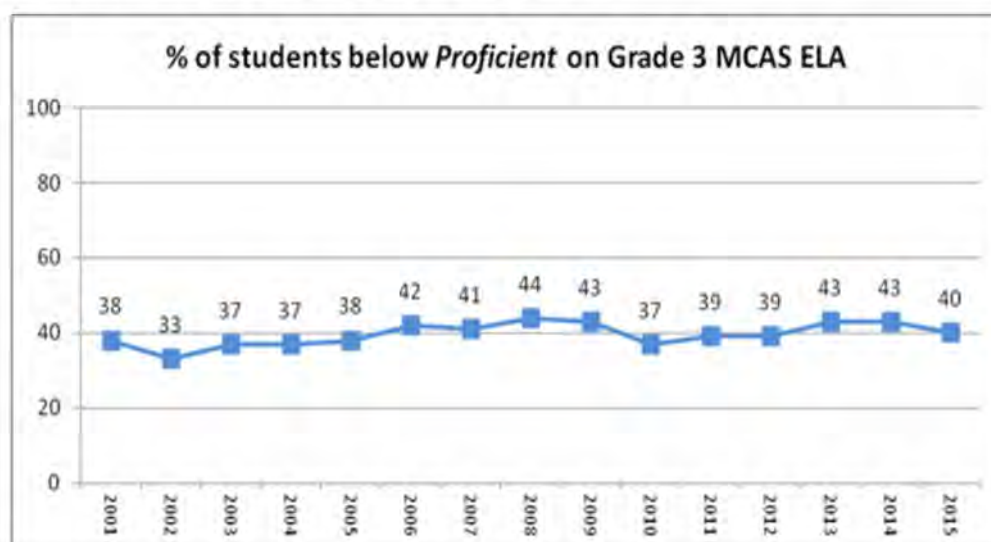
While the challenges of implementing a comprehensive strategy are many, the good news is that we know a lot about what works to build resiliency and healthier outcomes for children. We know that children are born ready to learn. What happens during those first years is critical to determining how well a child will thrive. Children who do not receive optimal growth and development can catch up to their peers if they receive appropriate interventions, but our current policies and funding do not always achieve the greatest return on investment. Spending priorities should be based on the best science and data that we have; if we simply followed the best data, there is little doubt that the Commonwealth would be spending much more on the early years of children's lives than we currently do. Moreover, according to Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, "Neuroscience is ... producing extensive evidence suggesting that the later we wait to support families with children who are at greatest risk, the more difficult (and likely more costly) it will be to achieve positive outcomes." <sup>x</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/legis/journal/desktop/2015/fbrc.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mass.edu/hefc/HigherEducationFinanceCommission-FinalReport10-2014.pdf>



For the last 15 years, Massachusetts has seen roughly 40% of its third graders (and 6 out of 10 low-income third graders) not reading at grade level, highlighting the shortcomings of our early education efforts and the steep challenges of our future efforts to close the achievement gap. The third grade English Language Arts (ELA) (aka reading exam) is not an end in itself, but it is one of the clearest early warning indicators for children falling behind their peers. For Massachusetts, it is simply not acceptable to be missing the mark on this critical indicator year after year, and it is an indictment of our own policies and efforts, not the abilities of our children. We must not allow the status quo of the last 15 years to remain.



After collecting extensive input from experts and stakeholders, the Senate's Kids First initiative sets an overarching goal of ensuring that the Commonwealth begins to prioritize smart and strategic policy choices and investments in children and their families that will provide a pathway to healthy, productive adulthood. Admittedly, such a goal is broad and somewhat abstract. That is why the Kids First initiative also proposes a shorter-term, ambitious, and attainable goal:

*As a Commonwealth, we commit to reducing by at least half the number of third-graders who are not reading proficiently by 2027.*

We know that children who are reading proficiently by the time they complete the third grade have the platform for academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing needed to become strong and resilient adults. There is no more important educational milestone in a child's early academic career. To be clear, the test itself is not the objective; rather, the objective is to ensure that by age 9 our Commonwealth's children are on the right path to healthy, productive adulthood. If we are closing the reading achievement gap by third grade, we are seeing concrete evidence that our efforts to build strong, resilient children are bearing fruit. We are taking the first real steps to build the Commonwealth's shared prosperity.



*A commitment to dramatically increase third grade reading proficiency rates is empty rhetoric without a set of strategies to achieve it. The work of the Senate's Kids First initiative has established four broad areas within which to focus specific strategies. Those areas are Access; Quality; Readiness; and Integration.*



## Access

*A child cannot learn what he never hears. For this reason, access is the most fundamental requirement of building strong and resilient children. Our children need to have access to the quality educational opportunities that will provide them a platform for future success. Whether it is access to a state-subsidized seat with an early education provider or access to a seat in a successful afterschool or out-of-school program, our students need to get through the door in order to reap the benefits.*

## Quality

*If access opens the door, quality turns on the light. Every child at every level of our educational system requires a highly qualified educator to guide them. That principle applies to every child, from our youngest children at early education and care facilities to our teenagers in high school.*

## Readiness

*Even when barriers to access and quality are removed, some children simply require more intensive time and attention to be ready to advance in their educational journeys. English language learners (ELLs), children with social and emotional issues, and students with disabilities are just a few examples of children who require a more sustained focus than what traditional school hours are able to provide. A commitment to the educational readiness of every child is essential to the success of all children.*

## Integration

*Neither our students nor our schools operate in a vacuum. Many students show up to school hungry, in poor health, and lacking supports away from the classroom. Parents are children's first teachers. It is crucial to better integrate programming that provides a continuum of services for families and children in order to effectively leverage the resources that support child stability and development. Building stronger families and communities bolsters a child's ability to maximize their full potential in a learning environment.*





Flowing from those broad areas, the Senate's Kids First working group identified the following high-priority recommendations to support our children, molding them into the strong, resilient, successful adults we aspire for them to become.

## Access<sup>5</sup>

- Appropriate the resources necessary to fully eliminate the waitlist for the income eligible early education and care program for children aged birth-5, which should include corresponding support for an expansion of our existing early education and care/afterschool provider network, child transportation rates, and provider rates to support quality programming.
- Expand the Chapter 70 formula to cover all education services for students from age 2 years and 9 months and up, using the current mixed delivery system model, while providing incentives for public school districts, private early education providers, and community-based organizations to collaborate, as seen in the communities that have implemented the federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) system.
- Develop a plan to make early education, afterschool, and summer programs more affordable for our low- and middle-income families, including consideration of:
  - o Implementing a high-quality child care tax credit for middle-income families.
  - o Capping families' child care expenses as a percent of income.
  - o Exploring the cost and capacity to increase the eligibility level for income-eligible early education and care/afterschool services.

## Quality

- Raise early educator rates for high quality programs to at least the 75th market rate percentile.
- Determine a long-term strategy to maintain rates at a sustainable level, including increased investments in corresponding rates to transportation providers and add-on rates for supportive child care consistent with the recommendations of the Special Commission on Early Education and Care Operations and Finance reported on December 31, 2013.
- Develop a funding structure that incentivizes quality in our early education field through training and education, which should include the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) considering a plan to implement a tiered rate structure that is tied to a quality rating system, enhance baseline educator requirements for licensing and ongoing professional development requirements, and ensure that each component of EEC's professional development curriculum builds upon each other to aid educators in achieving a bachelor's degree or beyond.
- Foster an intensive approach to ongoing educator development and data-driven instruction, especially in early education programs and schools with significant achievement gaps, through a pilot program that emphasizes dramatically improving early literacy achievement in Kindergarten through third grade.
- Launch a competitive grant program with funding for qualified districts as determined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and qualified early education providers to pilot intensive, systemic induction and mentoring in the first three years of teacher and early educator service.
- Fund the deficiencies cited by the Foundation Budget Commission related to special education, English language learners, educator health care, and low-income students to open up resources for reinvestment in schools.

<sup>5</sup> The recommendations regarding "Access" are not necessarily meant to be considered as separate approaches that should each be implemented. Rather, they represent a menu of policy options to address the issue of access.



## Readiness

- Explore options to create a sustainable source of funding to enable all schools to create and implement Safe and Supportive School plans. Ensure comprehensive and coordinated guidance to districts and utilize a broader set of student data to assess and track social-emotional skills.
- Develop a grant program that will build and/or expand a rigorous regime of integrated school supports/wraparound services at schools in the Commonwealth, with priority given to elementary and/or high-need schools. Such services should include appropriate screenings (e.g. developmental delays, dyslexia, health, and nutritional) for all incoming students and tailored referrals; placing one or more Student Support Coordinators in every low-income school to assist teachers; connecting students and their families to appropriate, non-educational, state and community-based services, including those related to health, mental health, housing, and social services; and providing ongoing guidance and assistance with coordinating and integrating those services.
- Ensure access to high-quality after school and out-of-school (ASOST) and summer programming in every high-need community by streamlining responsibility, funding, authority, and accountability of all ASOST and summer programs.
- Significantly increase the Commonwealth's extended learning time (ELT) grants to school districts, with priority given to high-need schools.
- Encourage comprehensive, research-based instructional programs for English language learner (ELL) students (with choices given to districts, such as sheltered English immersion, dual language education, and transitional bilingual education), and provide state grants to support and expand high-need programming, including summer programming, for ELL students in high-need communities, particular Gateway Cities.
- For high-need student populations in particular, it is critically important to fund the deficiencies cited by the Foundation Budget Commission related to special education, English language learners, educator health care, and low-income students to open up resources for reinvestment in schools.

## Integration

- Implement data systems that allow for more effective sharing of information across state agencies to benefit children and families and create governmental efficiencies. This should include creating a single electronic application process that would enable eligible applicants to apply online for a range of public benefits administered by the Commonwealth by developing an integrated eligibility system and common application, with priority given to more efficiently integrating the application processes for MassHealth and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- Map and evaluate current early childhood policies and programming to create a robust, comprehensive and coordinated continuum of care for children and families from prenatal through age five. Programs should include but not be limited to: early education and care, home visiting, early intervention, family support and engagement, food and nutrition, services for special populations (e.g., immigrants and children with disabilities), and particular situations (e.g., abuse prevention, substance abuse, and family stabilization). In the creation of such a continuum of care, consideration should also be given to the expansion of stabilization and prevention services, including programs that address post-partum depression, supports for substance-exposed newborns and their families, and more front-end services to keep children safely at home and prevent Department of Children and Families (DCF) involvement and out-of-home placements. Research the value of using family "hub networks" such as Family Resource Centers and Family Centers statewide, which serve as community gathering and information resource space for families with young children.
- As part of a broader integrated policy strategy to support positive early childhood development:
  - Pass into law "Paid Family and Medical Leave" legislation that ensures that Massachusetts families will not have to choose between taking care of a newborn baby or caring for a sick loved one and their job.
  - Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 23 percent to at least 30 percent of the federal EITC.
- Revive and support the Commonwealth's Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, an intergovernmental agency cabinet, chaired by the secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services, responsible for developing and implementing a shared vision to advance the health and well-being of all children and youth.



Taken together, the aforementioned strategies are part of an ambitious agenda to ensure strong academic and social-emotional foundations for children to succeed as they progress into adolescence and adulthood.

The Senate's Kids First effort has had the benefit of the hard work and research of those who have come before us on these issues. One of the more notable recent efforts focused on children was the Readiness Project, launched at the start of Governor Deval Patrick's first administration. The final report, titled *Ready for 21st Century Success: The New Promise of Public Education*, released in June 2008, highlighted many of the major investments the Commonwealth would need to undertake to ensure that our public education system created lifelong learners prepared for the world economy and global society. Although the launch of the Readiness Project is now more than a decade old, its findings still have resonance. Yet, many of its recommended actions – including greater investments in early education and extended learning time – remain either unaddressed or incomplete. This Senate initiative builds on and refines many of the Readiness Project's most notable recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the Senate is not alone in its emphasis on children and families. The Senate's initiative takes place at the same time that Speaker Robert DeLeo and the House of Representatives have prioritized early education, with a particular emphasis on improving and supporting the early education workforce. The Senate's Kids First working group believes that this report is consistent with and complementary to the ongoing work of the Speaker and his chamber. Based on that alignment of priorities and messages, there is hope that education, and particularly early education, offers a ripe area of legislative development this session.

The plan included herein is not meant as a blueprint for omnibus legislation, nor any piece of legislation in particular. Rather, this report is offered as a statement of the Senate's vision for children and as a statement of budgetary priorities in the years to come.



<sup>6</sup> Any recommendation in this vision document that was drawn from the prior work of the Readiness Project is noted with (RP). Additionally, this document utilizes information from several other Massachusetts reports, including but not limited to "Early Childhood Development: Implications for Policy Systems and Practice," Judge Baker Children's Center, 2017; "Condition of Education in the Commonwealth: Toward a More Comprehensive Vision of Student Learning," Rennie Center, Winter 2016; "Social and Emotional Learning: Opportunities for Massachusetts, Lessons for the Nation" Rennie Center, October 2015; "Uplifting the Whole Child: Using Wraparound Services to Overcome Social Barriers to Learning," Mass Budget and Policy Center, August 2014; "Recommendations of the Special Commission on Early Education and Care Operations and Finance," December 2013; and the Kids Count Data Center.





*It's not enough to train today's workforce. We also have to prepare tomorrow's workforce, by guaranteeing every child access to a world-class education.*

– President Barack Obama, January 28, 2014

We live in an age of waitlists. We hear about them frequently. The waitlist for a state-subsidized seat in an early education and care program (24,000).<sup>xi</sup> The waitlist for a seat in a charter school (29,000).<sup>xii</sup> The waitlist for a seat in the METCO program (8,750).<sup>xiii</sup> The waitlist for a seat in one of the Commonwealth's vocational-technical high schools (3,200).<sup>xiv</sup> The waitlist for a seat in one of our publicly funded Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes (18,303).<sup>xv</sup>

Despite the many high-quality educational opportunities that our Commonwealth offers its children, it is clear that we have an access problem. Demand outstrips supply. Although that may be good in the world of business, it is problematic when it bears on the educational avenues open to our children. Lack of access equates to lack of opportunity, and lack of opportunity leads to stunted academic and social growth.

The access crisis is most apparent and most critical in the area of early education and care. By the time a child turns three years old, much of their brain has already reached a critical stage of development. For low-income children who hear 30 million fewer words by age 3 than their wealthier peers, schools (including preschools) are playing catch-up with those children for the next two decades.<sup>xvi</sup> It is simply unrealistic and unfair to ask schools and educators on their own to eliminate an ever-widening achievement gap that is well established long before a student enrolls in Kindergarten.<sup>xvii</sup> The only solution is a commitment from the Commonwealth that any parent or guardian seeking (a) early developmental and learning services and (b) quality early education and care for their young child will have access to it.

The case for investments in early education is well documented. In the first few years of life, a young child's brain creates more than 1 million new neural connections every second. By the time a child turns three years old, much of their brain has already reached a critical stage of development.<sup>xviii</sup>

*Investing in preventive services like early education and care for infants and toddlers saves resources and produces more favorable outcomes than remediation later in life.*<sup>xix</sup>

High quality early education clearly improves school readiness and achievement. Low-income children who attend high-quality early education programs are 40% less likely to need special education or be retained a grade, 30% more likely to graduate from high school, and twice as likely to go to college.<sup>xx</sup> Investing in quality early education also lowers public costs in education remediation, incarceration, and social services, while supporting worker retention by allowing parents to consistently work and ensuring the availability of an educated and qualified workforce. In fact, investments in high quality early education and care can yield a rate of return of 13%.<sup>xxi</sup>

However, Massachusetts has the second most expensive child care costs in the country,<sup>7</sup> and is one of 33 states where infant care (at an average annual cost of \$17,062) is more expensive than in-state tuition for a 4-year public college.<sup>xxii</sup> Many families simply do not have the resources to afford early education services. As of January 2017, there were nearly 24,000 children, birth through school-age, on the waitlist for state-subsidized early education and out-of-school time care. Almost 10,000 on that waitlist are infants and toddlers.<sup>xxiii</sup>

### PROMISING PRACTICE Public-Private Partnerships to Serve High-Need Communities

Massachusetts is one of several states that are currently receiving a four-year, \$60M Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. The purpose of PEG is to expand high-quality preschool programs to reach children in high-need communities who were not being served. With the grant, the state provides a collaborative model that combines public and private services in which licensed early education providers partner with their local school district to deliver services, develop curricula, and mentor educators. This model of providing expanded early education and care through a public/private "hybrid" system has yielded promising outcomes in other states, including New Jersey. Such hybrid models provide flexibility to local communities – instead of being replaced by public school programs, community providers work in tandem with the school system, which allows PEG classrooms to benefit from their extensive experience.

Five Massachusetts communities have received the grant: Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell and Springfield. 48 new classrooms have been created, serving approximately 850 children each year who were not previously enrolled in early education programs. The communities will offer full-day, full-year slots to four-year-olds from families whose earnings are less than 200% of the federal poverty level, and will run through both local public school districts and community based organizations.

The first year evaluation of the PEG shows that collaboration between public schools and early education providers is effective in implementing high-quality programming in a short period of time. Additionally, the state provides planning grants for more cities and towns to develop similar strategic plans, aligned with the PEG model.

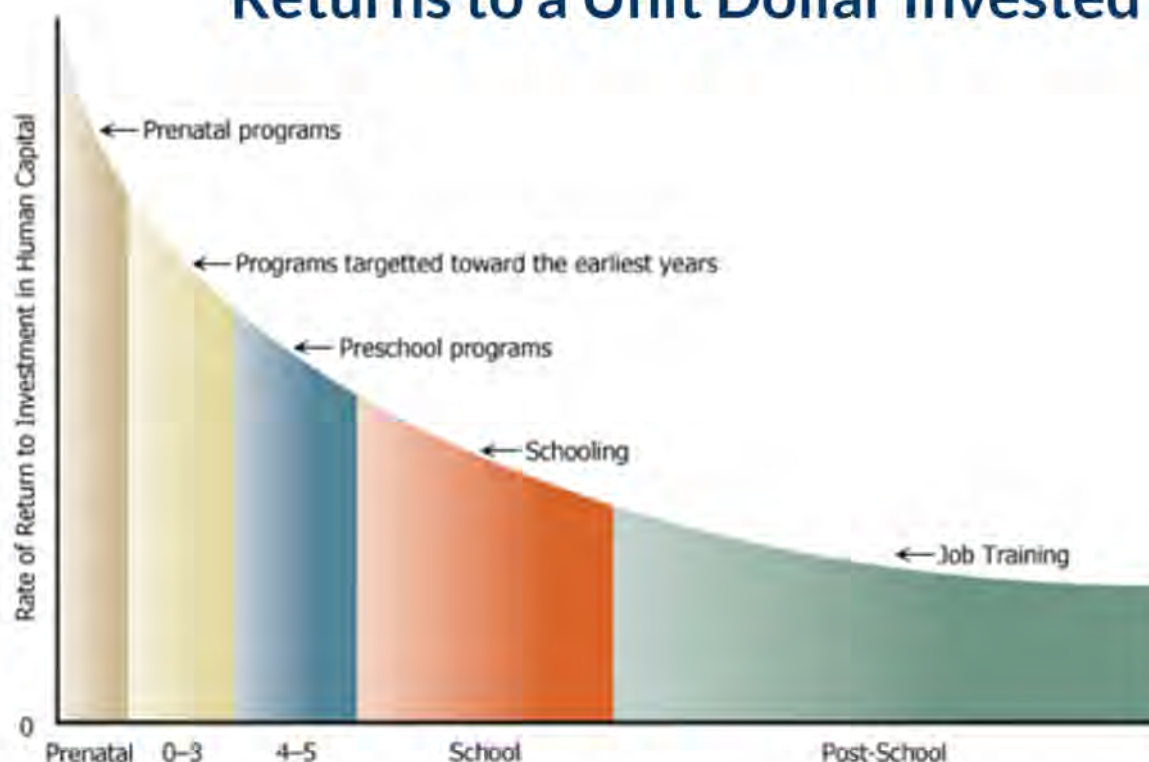
<sup>7</sup> Low child-to-educator ratios and significant overhead costs contribute to the expense of operating an early educator program in Massachusetts.



Access to early education and care is not only a concern for low-income families. The access dilemma weighs heavily on working and middle class families, as well. While low-income families struggle to get their children into high quality early education programs through the assistance of state subsidies, middle class families struggle with the costs of keeping their children in those same programs. All too often, the costs of child care force middle class families to make tough decisions about how to balance their monthly budgets. These families face hard choices about balancing child care, health care, food, and housing expenses.

We know that child care is a significant strain on resources for middle class families and is simply out of reach for the Commonwealth's low-income workers. The fact that many students, particularly those from low-income communities and whose first language is not English, enter first grade without having received any early education services is not sustainable for the state's economic future. Early learning, early pre-school education services, and K-12 public education must be seen as equally fundamental obligations of the Commonwealth. Every parent or guardian, regardless of income or socio-economic status, who wants their child to be in a quality pre-school program, should have access to one, without having to make difficult sacrifices from other parts of the family budget.

## Returns to a Unit Dollar Invested



Graph Source: Heckman, James (2008) "Schools, Skills, and Synapses" Available online at: [https://heckman.uchicago.edu/sites/heckman2013.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Heckman\\_2008\\_Schools%20skills%20and%20synapses.pdf](https://heckman.uchicago.edu/sites/heckman2013.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Heckman_2008_Schools%20skills%20and%20synapses.pdf)

Just as we increase access to early services and education, we need to continue providing access to ongoing learning opportunities as children enter Kindergarten and beyond. As home to the nation's first public school and a longtime leader on academic achievement, it is tempting for Massachusetts to rest on its laurels. But the achievement gap persists and many students are not reaching the levels they could. We know a lot about what works in education investments, and as such, we should make targeted investments that lead to the greatest outcomes for all children, including in afterschool and out-of-school programs.

Although our focus on educational access issues should rightfully focus on young children and early education, we must not ignore access issues for children as they progress through our educational system. Access to vocational-technical education, access to arts education, and access to Innovation Schools (established by the Achievement Gap Act of 2010) and similar non-traditional schools must be addressed in our long-term vision for providing greater access opportunities to our children.



Higher education is another area where we have seen access diminish with rising tuition costs. Although this report endorses the findings of the Higher Education Finance Commission of 2014, we also highlight an innovative concept known as Children's Savings Accounts that is showing great progress in opening access to higher education. These accounts provide the families of young children -- some as young as infants -- with seed money in their children's 529 college savings accounts. Children with these savings accounts are three times more likely to go to college and five times more likely to earn a college degree.<sup>xiv</sup> Interestingly, studies show that the amount saved in the account is not a determining factor in college enrollment because it is the mere behavior of saving that builds motivation and expectations for college enrollment and completion among parents and children who have them.<sup>xv</sup> Children's Savings Accounts, particularly models targeted to low- and middle-income families, are the kind of innovative concepts opening greater educational access that this document seeks to highlight and promote.

## *Priority Short-Term Recommendations*<sup>8</sup>

- Appropriate the resources necessary to fully eliminate the waitlist for the income eligible early education and care program for children aged birth-5, which should include corresponding support for an expansion of our existing early education and care/afterschool provider network, child transportation rates, and provider rates to support quality programming.
- Expand the Chapter 70 formula to cover all education services for students from age 2 years and 9 months and up, using the current mixed delivery system model, while providing incentives for public school districts, private early education providers, and community-based organizations to collaborate, as seen in the communities that have implemented the federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) system.
- Develop a plan to make early education, afterschool, and summer programs more affordable for our low- and middle-income families, including consideration of:
  - o Implementing a high-quality child care tax credit for middle-income families.
  - o Capping families' child care expenses as a percent of income.
  - o Exploring the cost and capacity to increase the eligibility level for income-eligible early education and care/afterschool services.

## *Other Critical Recommendations*

- Appropriate the resources necessary to fully eliminate the waitlist for the income eligible early education and care program for children aged 6-12, which should include corresponding support for an expansion of our existing early education and care/afterschool provider network, child transportation rates, and provider rates to support quality programming.
- Provide homeless families with immediate access to high quality early education and prioritize access to Early Intervention services and home-visiting-programs for children 0-3 experiencing homelessness.
- Increase funding and resource support services for applicants seeking to establish non-traditional schools and classrooms, including teacher-led models like Innovation Schools, that offer new opportunities to expand student access.
- Support legislative efforts to establish and expand existing Children's Savings Account initiatives for low- and middle-income families, including those supported by the Treasurer's Office, such as "\$EEDMA" and "\$OARMA".

<sup>8</sup> These recommendations are not necessarily meant to be considered as independent approaches that should each be implemented. Instead, they represent a menu of strategies that may or may not be combined to address the issue of access.





*As an educator myself, I understand the profound effect that good teachers and a quality educator have on the lives of our young people.*

– Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, August 7, 2012

Although access to educational opportunity is essential, quality is what gives meaning to the access. In Massachusetts, we take quality in education for granted. But quality requires investment and a sustained focus, notably on the educator workforce.

It is widely acknowledged that to thrive all students require great educators. Many of the countries whose students rank the highest in terms of academic achievement credit the secret of their success to a highly professional teaching workforce. Our students require qualified, highly professional educators who are well prepared, well compensated, and well supported. Research has shown that children benefit the most from well-trained educators as they are more skilled at “guiding individualized child learning, planning appropriate curricula and recognizing children’s needs. Teachers’ educational levels have also been linked to greater gains in children’s early writing skills, language and math skills, relationships with peers and later academic success.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

The quality factor in the Commonwealth’s early education programs has received greater interest and focus in the last few years, including most recently from Speaker DeLeo’s Early Education and Care Business Advisory Group. Part of the reason for that increased attention is the fact that Massachusetts is seeing that quality issues are holding back greater access to early education and care programming. Over the past several years, Massachusetts has been losing early educators, classrooms, and programs. In 2016 there were 8,262 early education programs in the state, a decrease from 11,824 in 2011.<sup>xxvii</sup> Difficulty with recruitment and retention of quality educators should come as no surprise as the Commonwealth pays subsidized child care rates well below the federal recommended level, at about a quarter of the market rate. Consider the following statistics:

- The average salary for educators teaching in the subsidized early education workforce is \$25,001 - \$27,500 for family child care providers and \$22,501 - \$25,000 for center-based educators,<sup>xxviii</sup> while the average starting salary for public school educators is \$40,462.<sup>xxix</sup>
- 39% of Massachusetts early educators are receiving public assistance benefits to support their own families.<sup>xxx</sup>
- In many metropolitan areas in Massachusetts, 90% of child care workers cannot afford the cost of living in their area and a typical child care worker would have to spend 68.1% of their income to afford infant child care for their own child.<sup>xxxi</sup>
- The turnover rate for early educators is approximately 30%.<sup>xxxii</sup>
- A 2013 analysis of center-based early educators found 35% have a bachelor’s degree or higher, 18% have an associate’s degree, 28% have some college, and 16% are high school graduates.<sup>xxxiii</sup>





While teachers in the K-12 education system in Massachusetts do not experience all the same challenges that the early education workforce faces, members of both workforces require meaningful professional development experiences, as well as time to plan and collaborate with one another. We know that educators matter.

Student performance and outcomes rely heavily on educators, and it is imperative that we support our education professionals.

Creating effective talent pipelines for the recruitment and retention of our educators is essential. We must support educator preparation programs, particularly at our public higher education campuses. We must make greater strides to recruit a talented educator workforce at all levels of our public education system, and to provide professional development opportunities, career incentives, and leadership pipelines to retain and promote those education professionals. We must also work harder to recruit and retain an educator workforce that looks like the increasingly diversified student population in the Commonwealth. While 37% of the state's public school students are minorities, only 7% of its teaching staff is.<sup>xxiv</sup> Massachusetts must do a better job of recruiting – and retaining – the best and brightest teaching talent from all ethnic, racial, and socio-economic groups that make up our Commonwealth.

It is important for Massachusetts to provide high quality education to all students, birth through high school graduation, and beyond. Recruiting, retaining, and appropriately compensating skilled early educators is one way to guarantee high quality. Supporting educators is another way to guarantee quality, and that can be accomplished through equipping them with the tools and training they need to teach the whole child, and providing expert help for particularly challenging situations so that they can focus on doing what they do best: teaching children.

### *Priority Short-Term Recommendations*

- Raise early educator rates for high quality programs to at least the 75th market rate percentile.
- Determine a long-term strategy to maintain rates at a sustainable level, including increased investments in corresponding rates to transportation providers and add-on rates for supportive child care consistent with the recommendations of the Special Commission on Early Education and Care Operations and Finance reported on December 31, 2013.
- Develop a funding structure that incentivizes quality in our early education field through training and education, which should include the EEC considering a plan to: implement a tiered rate structure that is tied to a quality rating system, enhance baseline educator requirements for licensing and ongoing professional development requirements, and ensure that each component of EEC's professional development curriculum build upon one another to aid educators in achieving a bachelor's degree or beyond.
- Foster an intensive approach to ongoing educator development and data-driven instruction, especially in early education programs and schools with significant achievement gaps, through a pilot program that emphasizes dramatically improving early literacy achievement in Kindergarten through third grade.
- Launch a competitive grant program with funding for qualified districts as determined by DESE and qualified early education providers to pilot intensive, systemic induction and mentoring in the first three years of teacher and early educator service. (RP)
- Fund the deficiencies cited by the Foundation Budget Commission related to special education, English language learners, educator health care, and low-income students to open up resources for reinvestment in schools.

### PROMISING PRACTICES

#### From Literacy Improvement to Total School Transformation

Mentoring, coaching, professional development, and collaboration are successful tools that are often employed to support teachers.

One such model used in Massachusetts is the Bay State Reading Institute (BSRI). The BSRI method uses research-backed teaching techniques to transform the traditional classroom experience. Teachers utilize a differentiated curriculum tailored to the abilities of each learner. Students are placed in learning groups according to their individual skill level and encouraged to work as a team.

Real-time assessments track the progress of every student, allowing the teacher to adjust the groupings, identify which techniques are effective, and make data-backed decisions about what is working. Because students are working on assignments tailored to their abilities, they are more engaged, active learners and they feel more successful and involved. Teachers, specialists, and administrators regularly collaborate, and students accomplish things previously thought impossible.

BSRI partners with approximately 50 elementary schools across the Commonwealth. But while they begin with a focus on literacy instruction, the BSRI model seeks to transform classroom practice.

Each school is provided a literacy and principal coach – all former teachers and principals – to assist with the implementation of new teaching techniques and provide ongoing support and feedback. BSRI creates professional development that is targeted to the needs of the school, and then supports it in the classroom.

The results speak for themselves in that on one measure, low-income and ELL students progressed at more than four times the state average.



## *Other Priority Recommendations*

- Expand the existing Early Childhood Educators Scholarship program to meet demand for the scholarship and add an emphasis on research-based skills and competencies.
- Develop a plan for a loan forgiveness program for qualified state college or university students with the appropriate training who commit to working for a baseline number of years for an early education provider or a high-need public school district.
- Improve and equalize the quality of teacher (including early educator) preparation programs in the Commonwealth, including:
  - o Partnering with the state's teacher colleges and universities to develop a statewide teacher residency program, similar to medical residency programs, that would combine rigorous coursework, practical training in diverse settings, and certification and licensure. (RP)
  - o Establishing fellowship programs in essential content areas and high-demand disciplines, like STEAM and Special Education, to increase the Commonwealth's supply of qualified educators in those areas. (RP)
- Promote diversity in the teacher workforce in Massachusetts, including in teacher preparation programs at state colleges and universities.
- Reform the state teacher certification and licensure processes, as well as other teacher development policies, to eliminate bureaucratic barriers to attracting, developing, and retaining a diverse, talented educator workforce in the Commonwealth. (RP)
- Incentivize alternative teacher certification programs run by school districts and nonprofits that have a record of attracting talented candidates of color, and restore funding for those initiatives.
- Provide sufficient time in the school day for teachers to obtain and work on professional development, including collaboration with other teachers.
- Support and fund teacher and leadership development pipelines, with particular focus on educators at high-need schools, establishing and supporting a statewide career ladder for educators pre-K through 12, creating a path of professional advancements with commensurate salary increases for educators who assume instructional mentoring and leadership positions within our schools and school districts. (RP)
- Establish a state commission to review compensation levels and benefits for educators in Massachusetts as they relate to recruitment and retention. Consider differentiated pay for qualifying educators in high-need districts and schools, in high-demand disciplines, and for those who possess highly needed, extraordinary skills and knowledge, or who volunteer for particularly challenging responsibilities. (RP)



# Readiness



Kids First

*There are no immovable barriers to education.*

– Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, January 19, 2010

Children often come to school unprepared to learn because of external factors: they are hungry, do not speak fluent English, have chronic health problems, experience trauma at home, or face myriad other obstacles for which teachers are ill-equipped and/or do not have the time to handle. While increasing access to early education and care is one strategy that has been proven both to give children a platform for future academic success and to reduce the achievement gap, there are practices and policies that effectively address improving student performance in other areas. In the last section, we discussed the need to support educators and improve the quality of educational services at all levels, but educator quality also lies in helping them focus on what they are trained to do -- teach -- while building integrated systems with other education and health professionals to confront students' non-academic barriers to learning. Educators are expected to teach all students core curricula so they can be ready to make progress in their academic development and be prepared for rigorous assessments; however, our educators are not often given the tools, time, or training they need to successfully teach children with challenging individual or family backgrounds.

Students who have health or behavior problems, traumatic backgrounds, economic challenges, hunger, housing insecurity, or family issues will have a difficult time learning while at school. Many of these challenges are linked with poverty, and thus we must tackle these “out of school” disadvantages if we want to begin to close the achievement gap. When 61% of low-income students are scoring below proficient on the third grade reading exam, we cannot ignore the role of poverty in student achievement.

We see the effects of non-academic barriers to student learning through chronic absenteeism and out-of-school suspension. These issues are particularly vexing for low-income students, and even young children. These are often the same students who need the most time in school as preparation to be reading at grade level by the third grade.<sup>xxxv</sup> We must address chronic student absenteeism and suspension issues by tackling their causes, including physical and behavioral health, family violence, and economic challenges.

Summer break compounds the problems of chronic absenteeism and suspensions, and it exacerbates the achievement gap. While students from high-income families participate in summer camps, cultural vacations, and enrichment activities, their middle and low-income peers struggle not to lose even more ground academically during those summer months. Research shows that low-income students lose an average of two to three months in reading skills over the summer break.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Teachers know that the “summer slide” in academic achievement is common, requiring them to spend vital classroom time reviewing last year’s concepts. Research shows that up to two-thirds of the achievement gap can be explained by unequal access to summer programs.<sup>xxxvii</sup> A recent study found that there was a strong demand among urban low-income students and their families for district-run, free, voluntary programs that combine academics and enrichment, fulfilling a need not being met elsewhere. The study also showed that students who enrolled in such programs returned to school in the fall with stronger math skills than their peers.<sup>xxxviii</sup> It is time that summer programs move from the periphery to the core of school reform strategies if we want to close the achievement gap.



*"We cannot ignore the fact that some children arrive for school each day having come from homes experiencing economic challenges, food insecurity, trauma and other obstacles beyond their control. We can have the best educators, schools and technology, but unless we tackle these out-of-school disadvantages and begin to support the whole child, we cannot expect to make serious headway in closing the achievement gap."*

– Senator Sal DiDomenico



Additionally, even with good attendance, some students often need more time than the traditional school day/school year can provide them. Prominent among them are ELL students. Immigrants make up a larger and larger share of our Commonwealth's student population with each passing year.<sup>xxxix</sup> Attempting to learn core academic subjects while also learning English presents a special challenge to these students, and the challenge is highlighted in the fact that these same students are required to keep pace with their English-speaking peers. Many ELLs come from households where English is not frequently spoken, if at all. To make the same academic progress as native English speakers, ELLs may need additional support. For that reason, we as a Commonwealth must find ways through afterschool time and summer breaks to allow ELLs to grow and prosper.

Students with disabilities (e.g. developmental delays and dyslexia) represent another group in need of more time and differentiated learning. The traditional school day and school year often is not enough to keep this group of students level with their peers. Students with disabilities often test below their peers in core academic subjects, including the third grade reading exam. These students require more time, individualized learning, and unique pedagogy.



It is very clear that different children require different educational strategies. One-size-fits-all educational systems created in an agrarian-based economy of yesteryear no longer work, if they ever did. If a doctor prescribed the same medical treatment for all his patients regardless of their symptoms, he would be guilty of medical malpractice, yet that is precisely how our educational system is structured to operate with respect to the time and strategies devoted to each child. Some children simply require more time and attention. Extra time for learning must be found in existing scalable programs.

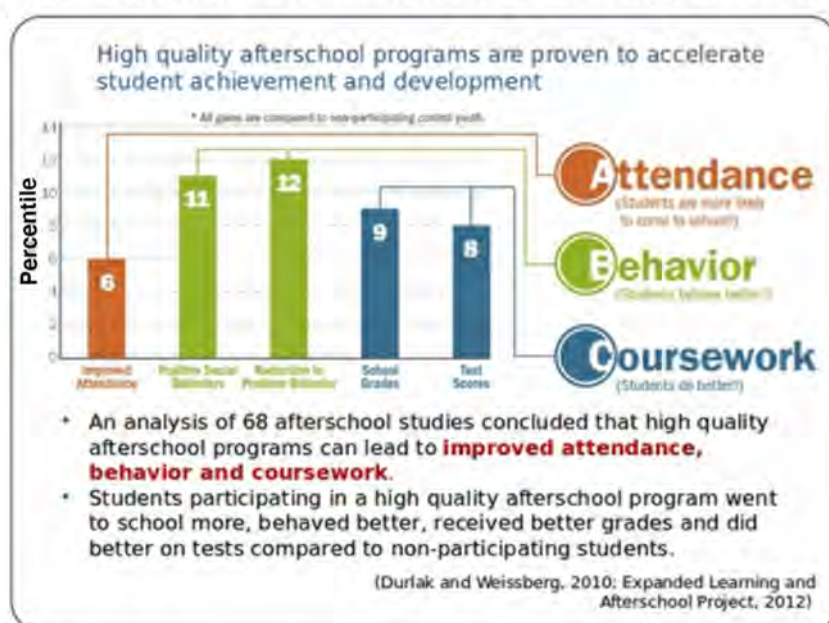
One strategy where Massachusetts has a long history is extended learning time (ELT). Yet, the demand for ELT funding far outstrips the supply, and many low and middle income school districts are left trying to address the needs of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students with behavioral health issues within the static confines of the 6-hour day and the 180-day school year. Middle schools tend to be an area of K-12 education where the need for ELT can be the greatest. The Commonwealth needs to make greater investments in ELT grants for a wider array of schools and districts.

Another strategy is to help districts provide physical education and recess at all public schools, and to support innovative school programming that combines academic instruction with physical education. Spark Academy in the Lawrence Public School District is one example of this innovative approach. Spark's school day intertwines rigorous academic classes with invigorating athletics including dance, karate, cheerleading, musical theater, stepping, and traditional sports. Spark's structures include high academic expectations, small group advisories, daily collaborative lesson planning time, and a school-wide behavior management system. Such a program can be a model for other districts across the state.

Summer break is another opportunity to close the achievement gap, particularly with ELLs. Summer English learning camps designed specifically to give ELLs more time in an engaged camp-like atmosphere can be an effective strategy to provide ELLs with more learning time and to avoid further regression through the "summer slide". Summer learning also provides an opportunity for greater access to STEAM education for students at all grade levels. STEAM education, and in particular arts education, often struggle for classroom time during the traditional school day. Summer camps focused on STEAM education would provide greater access to a fast-developing area of education.



In addition to ELT and summer learning, afterschool and out-of-school time (ASOST) offers great potential for providing more time and attention to differentiated learners. While originally developed to provide child care for unsupervised children afterschool, research has shown that (ASOST) programs benefit children in numerous ways. Students who attend ASOST programs attend school more often, are more engaged while there, and increase their academic achievement.<sup>xl</sup> Furthermore, ASOST supports working parents. One study showed that parental concerns about afterschool care cost businesses up to \$300 billion per year in decreased worker productivity.<sup>xli</sup> Like early education, the quality of ASOST programs matters. EEC and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which both oversee ASOST programs, have combined efforts to improve quality in programs. However, while almost 200,000 children participate in ASOST programs, over 360,000 would participate if one were available for them.<sup>xlii</sup> In March 2017, there were approximately 9,500 school-age children on EEC's waiting list for subsidized afterschool programs (families must be at or under 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) or \$45,771 for a family of three). The need is great, and there is clearly room for ASOST, summer programs, and expanded learning models where schools extend their hours to integrate enrichment and/or academic opportunities into regular school days.



Schools and teachers also need more supports for differentiated learning as the state's student population continues to diversify. School leaders report that trauma, anxiety, and other mental health challenges hinder student learning and/or result in behavioral problems and increased disciplinary action. The focus on academic performance in Massachusetts has been extremely successful, but success in the 21st century global economy requires students to develop skills that will also help them improve their performance in college and/or employment – skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, self-awareness, communication, and collaboration.<sup>xliii</sup> Research is clear that cognitive skills alone are not enough for kids to succeed in school and beyond, rather they also need Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, those interpersonal non-cognitive skills described above. The research clearly demonstrates that SEL programming significantly improves children's academic performance on standardized tests. Moreover, compared to control groups,<sup>9</sup> children who have participated in SEL programs have significantly better school attendance records, have less disruptive classroom behavior, enjoy school more, perform better in school, and are less likely to be suspended or otherwise disciplined.<sup>xliv</sup>

Last year, EEC and DESE made a significant first step in moving the needle for young children by developing a set of statewide SEL standards for preschool and kindergarten. This progress could be expanded by providing early educators with the tools<sup>10</sup> needed to conduct effective screening, assessment, and instruction of young children's social-emotional skills.<sup>xlv</sup> There are also promising models to maximize the full potential of students and attend to the needs of the whole child. The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) program provides support to children, families, and providers in early education and ASOST programs. Funding is included in the EEC budget each year to provide grants to expert organizations that work with classroom educators and teachers to help individual children as well as build teacher capacity.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> There is a growing momentum for statewide implementation of SEL, indicated by the economic and social need to get students ready for life outside of and beyond school, teachers calling for training and assistance in preparing students for careers and to be good citizens, and research showing there is a cost benefit for investments made in SEL. (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand & Zander, 2015) and Rennie Power Point (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/fy2016/2016-04/spec-item1-Slides.pdf>). Recent research even called for "education policy and practice to focus on developing students' non-cognitive competencies alongside their academic skills." (Ready to be Counted, Gabrieli, Ansel, Krachman, Dec. 2015).

<sup>10</sup> The state's current K-12 system addresses social-emotional skills through a variety of guidelines and requirements, such as legislation regulating mental health services, bullying, behavioral health, alternatives to expulsion, and others. DESE also uses the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) (a framework outlining a system of supports to meet the academic and non-academic needs of struggling students) and there are some SEL components in the state's professional standards for teachers. However, to be most successful in serving students, schools must be given the tools and training to intentionally integrate services and align initiatives.



Additionally, the Safe and Supportive Schools (SSS) initiative aims to help all districts, statewide, to create and foster safe, positive, and healthy learning environments for all students. The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, created in 2014, developed a statewide safe and supportive schools framework based on a public health approach that includes preventive services and supports and intensive services for those who have significant needs, with the overarching goal of fostering the emotional wellbeing of all students within a school. Currently, schools are encouraged to develop action plans that will be incorporated into their already required School Improvement Plans, and they are provided with a self-assessment tool to help in the creation of their plans. The framework is intended to provide an umbrella to integrate and align all of the many mandates that schools currently have to deal with, for example, anti-bullying, truancy, mental health, alternatives to expulsion, and drop-out prevention. Safe and Supportive Schools, by definition, align initiatives in an effective, efficient, and holistic way<sup>12</sup> that fits with the district's and school's own culture and locally identified priorities.<sup>xvii</sup>

Parental engagement is another way to address "out-of-school barriers" more effectively. With respect to chronic absenteeism, it is important for teachers to communicate with parents about a child's absenteeism and require parent engagement in a plan to reverse course. A recent Rennie Center report stated, "[s]chools can act quickly to interrupt poor attendance via home outreach, daily check-ins, and other triage measures." Strong parent-teacher partnerships are also necessary to establish strong foundations for student achievement. Parents and teachers both play essential roles in the education of children. But all too often, those two groups operate independently of one another, with no time for connection or communication. Strong parent-teacher partnerships are required to create a positive and continuous chain of student learning and achievement. When the connection between teacher and parent is nonexistent or frayed, we see an issue like a student's absenteeism spiral out of control. Teachers and parents must have a "hand in glove" relationship if a student is to succeed inside and outside the classroom. Reducing chronic absences requires a comprehensive approach that includes addressing barriers such as unreliable transportation, chronic health or mental health issues, or family issues.

## Priority Short-Term Recommendations

- Explore options to create a sustainable source of funding to enable all schools to create and implement Safe and Supportive School plans. Ensure comprehensive and coordinated guidance to districts and utilize a broader set of student data to assess and track social-emotional skills.
- Develop a grant program that will build and/or expand a rigorous regime of integrated school supports/wraparound services at schools in the Commonwealth, with priority given to elementary and/or high-need schools. Such services should include appropriate screenings (e.g. developmental delays, dyslexia, health, and nutritional) for all incoming students and tailored referrals; placing one or more Student Support Coordinators in every low-income school to assist teachers; connecting students and their families to appropriate, non-educational, state and community-based services, including those related to health, mental health, housing, and social services; and providing ongoing guidance and assistance with coordinating and integrating those services.
- Ensure access to high-quality after school and out-of-school (ASOST) and summer programming in every high-need community by streamlining responsibility, funding, authority, and accountability of all ASOST and summer programs.
- Significantly increase the Commonwealth's extended learning time (ELT) grants to school districts, with priority given to high-need schools.
- Encourage comprehensive, research-based instructional programs for ELL students (with choices given to districts, such as sheltered English immersion, dual language education, and transitional bilingual education), and provide state grants to support and expand high-need programming, including summer programming, for ELL students in high-need communities, particular Gateway Cities.
- For high-need student populations in particular, it is critically important to fund the deficiencies cited by the Foundation Budget Commission related to special education, English language learners, educator health care, and low-income students to open up resources for reinvestment in schools.

## PROMISING PRACTICE The "Whole Child" Approach in Action

Helping children learn successfully and helping teachers teach children who are ready to learn requires other experts and professionals to focus on "out of school" barriers. For K-12 students, there are successful programs that intentionally confront these "out of school" barriers, while also providing strong academic instruction. Such approaches take many forms and are referred to in various terms such as community schools, integrated student supports, or wraparound services. Recent research identified six elements as necessary for a high-quality wraparound service model that could be implemented in Massachusetts: service coordinators, comprehensive health service clinics, mental and behavioral health, wellness and prevention programs, school-based family resource centers, and district administration.[1] Wraparound services can and should also be used to attack, among other things, the causes of chronic student absenteeism.

City Connects (CC) is one such model. CC implements a comprehensive and systematic approach to mitigate the negative learning effects of out-of-school challenges. The model requires a social worker or a trained school counselor to be placed in each school. These Coordinators work with teachers, other school personnel, students and families to assess each child and create a personalized, tailored support plan for every student, effectively utilizing the complex network of resources available within the community. The Coordinator matches each child to the resources he or she needs and is accountable to ensure the planned services occur. Services include prevention, intervention, and enrichment, and the array of services become central to the school's role in supporting students.

Evaluations of City Connects are showing elementary school students, when followed into 8th grade, closed two-thirds of the achievement gap in math and half in English relative to the average for all Massachusetts students. Their four-year high school dropout rate was cut almost in half.

<sup>11</sup> The funding for ECMHC services has been cut by approximately 75% between fiscal 2009 and fiscal 2016.

<sup>12</sup> The Kids First working group also heard from many stakeholders that the most effective approach is one that emphasizes overall school climate, culture and operations, rather than specific programs. A "whole school" approach helps administrators, teachers, children and families all feel safe and supported.

<sup>13</sup> The "Ages and Stages Questionnaire" is an example.



## *Other Priority Recommendations*

- Communicate with parents directly about a child's absenteeism, and require parents to attend meetings with service providers and school educators when a student has more than four absences in a quarter.
- Prior to a student's enrollment in Kindergarten, support efforts in high-need school districts for teachers and parents to meet to discuss the student's home life, learning style, and health and nutritional needs.
- Provide state grants to high-need school districts to create a regime of rigorous and continuous teacher home visits to establish good learning practices for young students
- Consider amending state law to prohibit out-of-school suspensions in pre-K and Kindergarten, and to substantially limit out-of-school suspensions in grades 1-4. At the same time, fund statewide supports and professional development for centers and schools serving grades pre-K through 12 to implement alternative disciplinary strategies that promote keeping students in the classroom.
- Support evidence-based, high quality STEAM summer programs for students in all grades, with priority given to high-need districts.
- Reduce class size to 25 or fewer students in K-5 classrooms in high-need school districts. (RP)
- Provide supports for physical education and recess at all public schools, and support innovative school programming that combines academic instruction with physical education.



# Integration



Kids First

*Ensuring that we help prepare all kids for life, college, and work in our knowledge-based economy will require a collaborative, sustained effort from all stakeholders - from the president and the secretary of education on down to states, school districts, principals, teachers, parents, and community members.*

- Randi Weingarten, January 12, 2010

Neither our students nor our schools operate in a vacuum. Positive early childhood development and future social, academic, and professional success are closely tied to positive experiences in family and community environments at an early age. As discussed in the prior section, no child who is hungry, lacking dental or eye care, housing insecure, abused, or fearful for his or her safety can be ready to maximize his or her full potential in a learning environment. In order to support healthy early childhood development, we must be conscious of the needs of the whole child and address not only the academic needs of children, but also the social-emotional, health, and family/related concerns that students bring with them to the classroom. However, as the Judge Baker Children's Center recently reported, "Massachusetts lacks an integrated and multi-level infrastructure capable of adequately supporting a robust continuum of early childhood services and supports for all families."<sup>xlvi</sup>

The Commonwealth's early childhood initiatives are managed within several different state agencies. The number of initiatives and oversight agencies grows when taking into account programming providing supports for families more broadly, such as housing, nutrition services, and child welfare. Many families are eligible for multiple types of assistance that could reduce housing instability, food insecurity, and barriers to health and mental health care, yet they have difficulty navigating separate application processes and end up without key benefits.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Commonwealth is missing opportunities to bolster supports for parents that not only strengthen families, but are also good economics for the state as a whole. It's important to remember that parents are children's first teachers. For every expectant parent who is prepared for what is to come, there is a parent who lacks the knowledge, support, resources, and experience to create a healthy environment for his or her child. The task of building strong and resilient children starts with support for parents.

There are a number of ways that an integrated system of supports for parents and families bolster positive early childhood development. For example, access to prenatal care results in positive long-term outcomes for children, such as lower obesity rates, higher high school graduation rates, and higher incomes later in life. Additionally, research strongly demonstrates that maternal depression and toxic stress have a detrimental effect in raising children, and that effect is felt even in utero.<sup>xlix</sup> Health and mental health supports in a child's earliest years for both mothers and children enable positive long-term outcomes for children.<sup>l</sup> Furthermore, it goes without saying that homelessness and housing insecurity play a huge role in the health and wellbeing of children.<sup>15</sup> Research focusing on metro Boston families found that children under age 4 in families who had moved two or more times in the past year were 59% more likely to have been hospitalized, and children in families behind on rent were 52% more likely to be at risk for developmental delays, compared to those in housing secure families.<sup>li</sup>



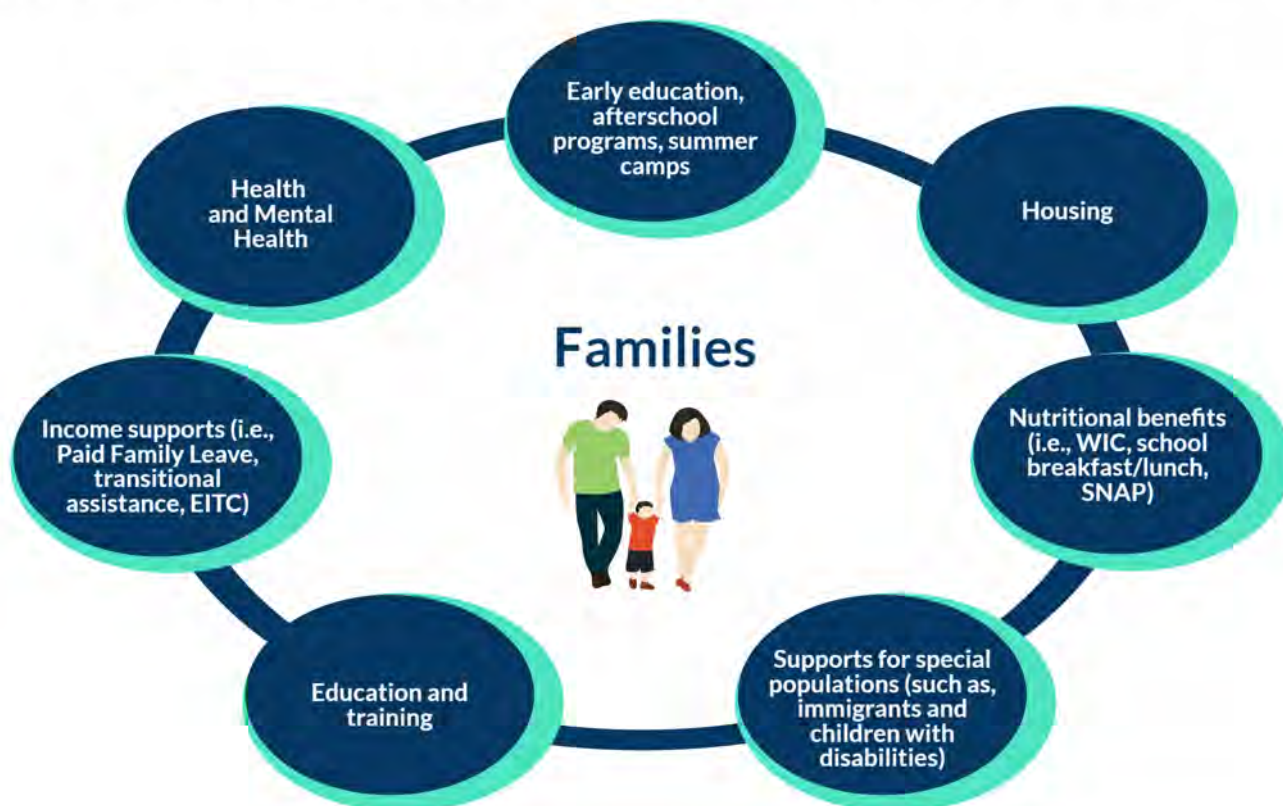
<sup>14</sup> For example, there are thousands of families receiving MassHealth that are likely eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program "SNAP", formerly "food stamps") but not currently receiving food assistance (<http://www.masslegalservices.org/content/its-time-close-massachusetts-snap-gap>). This is often referred to as the "SNAP Gap." Researchers have reported that nationally only 5 percent of "low-income working families with children receive the full package of benefits for which they qualify: SNAP, child-care and Medicaid." (See Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-TheFirstEightYearsKCPolicyReport-2013.pdf> citing Zedlewski, S. R., Adams, G., Dubay, L., & Kenney, G. M. (2006, February 24). *Is there a system supporting low-income working families?* (Low-Income Working Families, Discussion Paper No. 4). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved September 2013, from [www.urban.org/publications/311282.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/311282.html).) Removing barriers to applying for SNAP will help reduce food insecurity among low-income families.



Moreover, despite the growth of the economy since the recession, hunger rates are still stubbornly high. Nearly 4 million families with children in the United States regularly face a limited or uncertain supply of nutritious and safe food. Locally, Boston Medical Center reports that more than 14% of children younger than 4 are underweight when they come to the hospital's pediatric emergency room.<sup>lii</sup> Almost 10% of households in Massachusetts are food insecure, and that number almost doubles to 19.2% for households with children.<sup>liii</sup> Additionally, 44% of children in the state are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.<sup>liv</sup> Maternal food insecurity is associated with poor pregnancy outcomes and can also be part of several forms of toxic stress that damage the architecture of a child's developing brain.<sup>lv</sup> Research has found that young children who are food insecure are nearly twice as likely to be in fair or poor health compared to their food-secure peers, and significantly more likely to be hospitalized.<sup>lvi</sup> It is no surprise then that children cannot adequately learn if they are hungry. Children experiencing hunger have lower math scores and are more likely to repeat a grade. Furthermore, hungry children display more behavioral and emotional problems.<sup>lviii</sup> Food insecurity also negatively impacts school engagement and behavior at each educational level, including adolescents who are more likely to exhibit absenteeism and tardiness, hurting their chances of graduating from high school.<sup>16</sup>

It is crucial that parents have the capacity to provide for the basic needs of their children and focus on creating a safe and supportive environment (such as speaking and reading to their children daily and encouraging play).<sup>lix</sup> Children miss out on critical health and emotional benefits when this fundamental early parent-child interaction is lost due to a lack of paid parental leave.<sup>17</sup> This is a policy proven to contribute to the healthy development of children, improve the health of mothers, and allow time for parents to find appropriate early care and education services, leading to greater work productivity.<sup>lx</sup> The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is another tool that provides work, income, educational, and health benefits to low- and moderate-income families each year. Research has shown that not only does the tax credit boost work effort for parents, it also increases the likelihood that children perform better in school, are more likely to attend college, and earn more as adults.<sup>lxi</sup> It is important that the Commonwealth leverage proven policies such as these to help support positive early childhood development.

As we find ways for parents to provide the necessary time and attention to foster critical academic, health, and emotional development in their children, we must also look to our communities to leverage resources for that same purpose. Some of the most underleveraged and underutilized resources that we have in local communities are our school buildings and libraries. We need to see our schools and libraries, particularly in low-income communities, as centers of the community, places where before and afterschool programming, social services, child care, preschool, elder services, adult education, and vocational education flourish.



<sup>15</sup> The report by the Senate's Special Committee on Housing noted that "Massachusetts residents face high levels of homelessness and housing instability" and saw the 4th highest increase in homelessness among all states during 2013-2014.

<sup>16</sup> In turn, failure to graduate high school leads to social and economic consequences, including negative impacts on adult physical and mental health. Food-insecure children are at risk of becoming unhealthy adults, which can translate into increased employee absenteeism and lower productivity for business. Food insecurity is thus an expensive public and private health problem.

<sup>17</sup> Paid parental leave is typically unavailable to low-income parents, who are also less likely to be able to afford unpaid leave.



Katherine Boles and Vivien Troen of the Harvard Graduate School of Education have written: “Schools are empty a significant part of the week and year, while outside their walls social needs are poorly coordinated and unmet. Schools are particularly underutilized as providers of child-centered services to families.” The authors go on to propose re-thinking our schools as a “locus for child advocacy.”<sup>lxii</sup> In that new thinking, the school would offer services within the school community, with the school at its center. We should be re-structuring our schools, particularly in low- and middle-income communities, to become a primary resource in providing physical and social-emotional health-care support services for children and families. Schools that have adopted in-classroom breakfast have seen significant increases in participation and academic achievement with a corresponding reduction in student tardiness, absences, and school nurse visits.<sup>lxiii</sup> Additionally, special programs, including adult basic education courses for families (e.g., English as a second language and literacy classes), lending libraries, and intergenerational programs, must be part of the full-service school model. Libraries also offer ripe opportunities for engaging families and children. When we start to imagine our schools and libraries as family-support centers, we can see the impact on the community and the student.

### Spotlight On Poverty

A child is born into poverty in America every 32 seconds.<sup>lxiv</sup> There are close to one in seven children living in poverty in Massachusetts.<sup>lxv</sup> That translates to approximately 200,000 children in our state living in families with incomes under \$24,000 per year (for a family of four).

Research has long shown a strong correlation between family poverty and a range of poor outcomes in life, such as lower school achievement, increased incidences of physical and mental health impairments, lower lifetime income, greater likelihood of incarceration, and even premature death.<sup>lxvi</sup> Being poor is challenging. Most people who are living in poverty are working at least one job and often relying on a complicated combination of public benefits, requiring them to navigate multiple complex government systems that operate on different timelines and do not communicate with one another. They are often using public transportation, necessitating countless hours traveling from point A to point B. Work schedules may be unpredictable, banking is usually more expensive, and it is sometimes difficult to afford healthy food. Adding parenting (in many cases single parenting) to the mix can be truly overwhelming.

For children, early childhood is a particularly dangerous time to experience poverty. We now know from years of research that the human brain develops at its most rapid pace from the prenatal period to the toddler years, with the brain’s circuitry most sensitive to outside influences. When babies are exposed to chronic stress (such as extreme poverty, repeated abuse, long-term hunger, or severe maternal depression) without supportive relationships with adults, it can be toxic to their developing brains. While positive stress (moderate, short-term uncomfortable experiences) is a normal and necessary part of healthy development, toxic stress actually changes the architecture of the brain, and the cumulative effect often leads to lifelong health, learning, behavior, and/or mental health problems. But when babies and toddlers have secure and supportive relationships with adult caregivers, it is possible to prevent and even reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress. Designing programs to work with children and families who are most at risk for experiencing toxic stress will reduce the need for more expensive and less effective interventions down the road.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Research informs and guides us in recommending policies to help children and families in poverty. First, it is more impactful as well as less costly to prevent problems instead of intervening to treat them later. Policies that can help alleviate poverty and its impacts while children are young may in fact have a profound impact on their development, leading to better lifelong outcomes.<sup>lxviii</sup> Building on this idea are promising practices that disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty and apply social science to program design, seeking to support both parents and children together. Second, behavioral science indicates that policy and program requirements that are simplified and streamlined will be more likely to maximize their impact than complex and onerous ones. Finally, policies that provide work supports and incentives as well as pathways to economic security will benefit children and families, as well as our state’s economy, by helping parents become contributing taxpayers.



To sum up, putting kids first requires putting all families first, and this requires a statewide-integrated program infrastructure to provide the necessary foundation to support early childhood development. Integrated and simplified programming contributes to child stability and development. Aligning public benefit administration systems reduces barriers for families in need of services.<sup>18</sup> Access to and maintenance of a continuum of supports helps stabilize families, which, in turn, helps to achieve positive child development. The Commonwealth must do a better job of leveraging, coordinating, and integrating existing resources and making strategic investments in evidence-based programming to close gaps that persist. We must strengthen the networks and communities in which our students live and learn if we want to see our students succeed.

### *Priority Short-Term Recommendations*

- Implement data systems that allow for more effective sharing of information across state agencies to benefit children and families and create governmental efficiencies. This should include creating a single electronic application process that would enable eligible applicants to apply online for a range of public benefits administered by the Commonwealth by developing an integrated eligibility system and common application, with priority given to more efficiently integrating the application processes for MassHealth and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- Map and evaluate current early childhood policies and programming to create a robust, comprehensive and coordinated continuum of care for children and families from prenatal through age five. Programs should include but not be limited to: early education and care, home visiting, early intervention, family support and engagement, food and nutrition, services for special populations (e.g., immigrants and children with disabilities), and particular situations (e.g., abuse prevention, substance abuse and family stabilization). In the creation of such a continuum of care, consideration should also be given to the expansion of stabilization and prevention services, including programs that address post-partum depression, supports for substance-exposed newborns and their families, and more front-end services to keep children safely at home and prevent Department of Children and Families (DCF) involvement and out-of-home placements. Research the value of using family “hub networks” such as Family Resource Centers and Family Centers statewide, which serve as community gathering and information resource space for families with young children.
- As part of a broader integrated policy strategy to support positive early childhood development:
  - Pass into law “Paid Family and Medical Leave” legislation that ensures that Massachusetts families will not have to choose between taking care of a newborn baby or caring for a sick loved one and their job.
  - Increase the EITC from 23 percent to at least 30 percent of the federal EITC.
- Revive and support the Commonwealth’s Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, an intergovernmental agency cabinet, chaired by the secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services, responsible for developing and implementing a shared vision to advance the health and well-being of all children and youth.



<sup>18</sup> Programs have different eligibility levels, separate applications, and varying renewal periods. This process requires applicants to not only know what benefits are available, but to also know how to apply for each type of benefit, which can be overwhelming for families living in crisis.



## Other Critical Recommendations

- Create and implement a plan to increase access to evidence-based services (EBS) for infants and young children and their families that support emotional and behavioral health and wellbeing.<sup>lxix</sup> The plan should include addressing the gap in infant and early childhood mental health services, including challenges to the coverage of and payments for services provided in the home or community, and expand funding for EBS programs, such as infant and early childhood mental health consultation, Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Project (MCPAP), and MCPAP for Moms, among others, to meet the growing need.
- Enhance universal early screenings and home visiting programs to identify at-risk children for developmental delays (including autism), emotional and behavioral health issues, and trauma, and create an infrastructure for seamless and coordinated referrals after screening.<sup>lxx</sup> Enhance agency coordination between DCF, DMH, and EEC to improve behavioral health services and supports for young children, including consideration of incorporating infant and early childhood mental health specialists at DCF and EEC.
- Develop and implement a multi-pronged strategy to reduce housing instability and homelessness that includes increasing housing production, preservation, and homelessness prevention resources as well as connected and comprehensive employment, income, and support services.<sup>19</sup>
- Maximize enrollment in food and nutrition programs for all under-enrolled populations by implementing:
  - o Public-private partnerships to implement universal, free, after-the-bell, breakfast in the classroom by 2020 for all schools with 60% or more free or reduced lunch eligibility.
  - o Greater participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a federal nutrition program that provides reimbursements for meals and snacks served to young children in childcare and after-school settings, allowing providers to allocate their scarce resources for other needs and helping to make care more affordable for families.<sup>lxxi</sup>
  - o Funding to schools in communities with high rates of childhood hunger to establish family food pantries, weekend backpack, and “food in the home” programs for children and their families.
- Create a permanent commission to review existing state policies and programs that are intended to assist low-income families. The Commission should establish measurable goals and benchmarks for increasing family self-sufficiency over time and report annually. Additional possible goals for the commission are to:
  - o Ensure state policies are evidence-based and coordinated with each other as well as with federal policies;
  - o Encourage innovation in state policy development, using the latest scientific research to inform decision-making;
  - o Establish a plan for co-locating services and programs and reduce other barriers to participation in public benefit programs;
  - o Explore policies that support families with very young children (including existing eligibility limits) and those that have a multi-generational approach;
  - o Develop policies that provide pathways out of poverty for families, including offering education and training programs that lead to good jobs with benefits, and minimizing “cliff effects” that occur when a small increase in wages leads to a substantial decrease in benefits;
  - o Create a plan that would provide for regular updating of assistance, such as periodic cost-of-living increases to the children’s clothing allowance.
  - o Coordinate with appropriate state agencies including the Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet.
- Increase funding to Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in the Commonwealth, and prioritize funding to ABE programs that cater to families with young children.

<sup>19</sup> The Commonwealth should implement the recommendations included in the Senate’s Housing report.



# Conclusion



## The Choice For Massachusetts

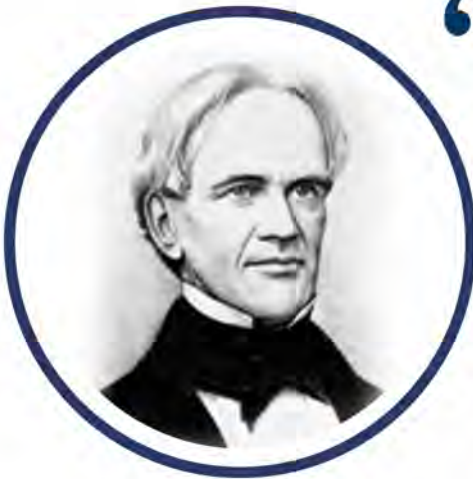
Kids First

*It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.*

- Fredrick Douglass

Massachusetts policymakers face a stark fiscal choice over the next decade. They can continue to sprinkle small (and often fleeting) funding increases across a few educational line items in the state budget, or they can radically re-think and re-imagine the way we prioritize spending on children and families. The former approach maintains the status quo, treading water amidst a fast-changing current. The latter approach leads to significant, sustained investments in children, designed to achieve the biggest impact, positioning Massachusetts to be an educational and economic leader for the 21st century.

At the outset of this vision statement, we remarked that it is time for the Commonwealth to make strategic and affordable upstream investments in our children rather than unfortunate and ever more expensive downstream investments to repair the struggling adults that those children can become. Every citizen of the Commonwealth will benefit from strategic and smart investments in our children. The Commonwealth's economic future depends on a new generation of healthy, resilient adults who will power the innovation economy that has put Massachusetts ahead of its competitor states for many years. Moreover, we have a moral obligation to provide our children with a platform for future academic and career success.



*“Having no other mines to work, Massachusetts has mined into the human intellect; and, from its limitless resources, she has won more sustaining and enduring prosperity and happiness than if she had been founded on a stratification of silver and gold, reaching deeper down than geology has yet penetrated...From her earliest colonial history the policy of Massachusetts has been to develop the minds of all her people, and to imbue them with the principles of duty. To do this work most effectually, she has begun it with the young. If she would continue to mount higher and higher toward the summit of prosperity, she must continue the means by which her present elevation has been gained.”*

- Horace Mann

*Massachusetts Senate President from 1836-1837*

Massachusetts has always advanced itself through the power of its greatest resource: its people. High-performing schools and an educated workforce have served Massachusetts quite well for the last two decades, allowing it to compensate for lack of oil or gold. But unless we continue to produce high numbers of college graduates and educated workers, our education-fueled economy will not be sustained over the next two decades and beyond.

Massachusetts must make serious, significant, and sustained investments in children, from cradle to career. It must prioritize those investments higher than all others. Quite simply, Massachusetts, this is the time to put all kids first.



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<sup>i</sup> García, J., Heckman, J., Ermini Leaf, D., and Prados M.J. (2016). The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. n. pag. Web. [https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F\\_Heckman\\_CBAOnePager\\_120516.pdf](https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> For long-term impacts of high-quality early education programs, see for example: García, J., Heckman, J., Ermini Leaf, D., and Prados M.J. (2016). The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. n. pag. Web. [https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F\\_Heckman\\_CBAOnePager\\_120516.pdf](https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf); Reynolds, A. J., et al. (2001). Longterm Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest. JAMA, 285(18), 2339-2346.; Reynolds, A. J., et al. (2007). Effects of a School-Based, Early Childhood Intervention on Adult Health and Well-Being. Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 161(8), 730-739.; Barnett, W. S. & Masse, L. N. (2007). Comparative benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program and its policy implications. Economics of Education Review, 26, 113-125.

<sup>iii</sup> Economic Policy Institute. (2016). The cost of child care in Massachusetts. Retrieved from <http://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/MA>; see also: Child Care Aware of America. (2017). Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2016 Report.

<sup>iv</sup> Child Care Aware of America, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2015 Report” (2015), available at <http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Parents-and-the-High-Costof-Child-Care-2015-FINAL.pdf> and 2014 U.S. median income as measured by Kids Count Data Center. See Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households With Children,” available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-incomeamong-households-with-children?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2-52/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/365>.

<sup>v</sup> Hernandez, D. J. (2012). Double Jeopardy: How third grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>vi</sup> See for example: Lesnick, J., Goerge, R., Smithgall, C., & Gwynne J. (2010). Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade: How Is It Related to High School Performance and College Enrollment? Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago ; Fletcher, J. M., & Lyon, G. R. (1998). Reading: A research-based approach. In W. M. Evers (Ed.), What’s Gone Wrong in America’s Classrooms (49–90). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press. ; Felton, R. H. (1998). The development of reading skills in poor readers: Educational implications. In C. Hulme & R. M. Joshi (eds.), Reading and spelling: Development and disorders (pp. 219-233). Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>vii</sup> Each high school dropout in Massachusetts, on average, costs \$349,000 more over a lifetime – in decreased tax revenues and increased public assistance costs– than the average graduate. Sum, A., Khatiwada, I., McLaughlin, J. Tobar, P., & Motroni, J. (January 2007). An Assessment of the Labor Market, Income, Health, Social, Civic and Fiscal Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Findings for Massachusetts Adults in the 21st Century. Center for Labor Market Studies Northeastern University.

<sup>viii</sup> The Boston Foundation and the Boston Indicators Project. (2016). The Geography of Incarceration: The Cost and Consequences of High Incarceration Rates in Vulnerable City Neighborhoods. A Special Report from the Boston Indicators Project in Partnership with MassINC and the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Reform Coalition. Retrieved from [http://www.bostonindicators.org/~media/Files/IndicatorsReports/Reports/Indicator%20Reports/Indicators\\_Incarceration\\_Final-web.pdf](http://www.bostonindicators.org/~media/Files/IndicatorsReports/Reports/Indicator%20Reports/Indicators_Incarceration_Final-web.pdf).

<sup>ix</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-TheFirstEightYearsKCpolicyreport-2013.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

<sup>xi</sup> As of January 2017, EEC’s subsidy waitlist for birth-school age care included 23,846 children, 14,194 were infant, toddler, or preschool age.

<sup>xii</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/about.html> (see Charter School Fact Sheet, Directory, and Application History)

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<sup>xiii</sup> 2016 METCO Program Report (March 2017)

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/11/25/students-vocational-education-wait-lists/JsfYrz5pvWTpqtZSINvQoL/story.html> (November 26, 2016) and [http://massbudget.org/report\\_window.php?loc=Skills-For-Our-Future.html](http://massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=Skills-For-Our-Future.html).

<sup>xv</sup> Reported by DESE as of March 31, 2017.

<sup>xvi</sup> Hart, B. & Risley, T. R. (1995). Meaningful Difference in the Everyday Experiences of Young Children. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. Developing Child. (2017). Five Numbers to Remember about Early Childhood Development. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-numbers-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>

<sup>xvii</sup> Disparities in children's cognitive, social, behavioral, and health outcomes are evident at 9 months and grow larger by 24 months of age. Halle, T., Forry, N., Hair, E., Perper, K., Wandner, L., Wessel, J., & Vick, J. (2009). Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

<sup>xix</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

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# Appendix A



**The Kids First Working Group has identified a number of bills filed this session by their colleagues in the Senate, which are thematically consistent with strategies identified in this document.**

- S.28, An Act preventing funds deposited in children's saving accounts from counting against cash assistance benefits
- S.32, An Act improving the children's medical security program and simplifying the administration process
- S.34, An Act to lift the cap on kids
- S.37, An Act promoting financial stability and asset development
- S.38, An Act establishing a special commission on two-generation approaches to childhood education
- S.44, An Act to protect children's mental health services
- S.45, An Act strengthening protection of children in the commonwealth
- S.59, An Act establishing a commission on the status of children and youth
- S.67, An Act providing guidelines for home visiting programs
- S.70, An Act to ensure accountability in the department of transitional assistance
- S.219, An Act to accelerate student success through expanded learning time
- S.221, An Act relative to universal pre-kindergarten access
- S.223, An Act modernizing the foundation budget for the 21st century
- S.232, An Act for language opportunity for our kids
- S.233, An Act to improve literacy skills
- S.237, An Act to support healthy development among preschoolers
- S.238, An Act relative to rates of payment for early childhood education and care programs
- S.240, An Act ensuring high quality pre-kindergarten education
- S.242, An Act regarding breakfast in the classroom
- S.245/S.286/S.322, An Act relative to homeless children school transportation
- S.254, An Act ensuring adequate nursing services at public schools
- S.257, An Act providing immediate childcare assistance to homeless families
- S.266, An Act relative to income eligible childcare
- S.271, An Act establishing an educational mandate working group
- S.294, An Act relative to students with dyslexia
- S.297, An Act to promote quality physical education
- S.313, An Act relative to dyslexia
- S.334, An Act relative to birth to 3 early education
- S.547, An Act to increase access to children's mental health services in the community
- S.612, An Act improving public health through a common application for core food, health and safety-net programs
- S.613, An Act relative to continuity of care for families enrolled in MassHealth
- S.647, An Act ensuring continued health insurance coverage for children
- S.682, An Act creating a child savings program
- S.691, An Act promoting access to higher education beginning at birth
- S.701, An Act relative to breaking generational cycles of poverty
- S.724, An Act relative to the economic mobility and stability program
- S.725, An Act relative to interagency efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness
- S.1048, An Act establishing a family and medical leave insurance program
- S.1219, An Act to establish a children's vision screening registry
- S.1502, An Act improving the earned income tax credit for working families
- S.1521, An Act improving the earned income credit for healthier families
- S.1639, An Act relative to the earned income tax credit
- SD.2161, An Act providing diaper benefits for certain parents





## Cost Estimates for Priority Recommendations

All estimates noted below are preliminary and relevant only to state expenditures. In many cases, it is difficult to project a cost as these recommendations do not include prescriptive implementation details. Costs are dependent on policy construct details, implementation timelines, and the latest data on inputs when implemented. Estimates noted below should be used only as a sense of scope for potential policy implementation. Additionally, certain recommendations below, especially those regarding "Access", are not necessarily meant to be considered as separate approaches that should each be implemented. Rather, they represent a menu of policy options. As such, the cost estimates noted below should not be combined.

### Access

1. Appropriate the resources necessary to fully eliminate the waitlist for the income eligible early education and care program for children aged birth-5, which should include corresponding support for an expansion of our existing early education and care/afterschool provider network, child transportation rates, and provider rates to support quality programming.

Estimate approximately \$155 million (estimate will increase as provider rates increase)

2. Expand the Chapter 70 formula to cover all education services for students from age 2 years and 9 months and up, using the current mixed delivery system model, while providing incentives for public school districts, private early education providers, and community-based organizations to collaborate, as seen in the communities that have implemented the federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) system.

Various models estimate a cost per student within a range of approximately \$8,200 - \$17,000 (around 40% of the cost per student would likely be paid for by the state, consistent with the current funding model for Ch. 70, but this depends on how the expansion is structured.)

3. Develop a plan to make early education, afterschool and summer programs more affordable for our low- and middle-income families, including consideration of:
  - Implementing a high-quality child care tax credit for middle-income families.
  - Capping family child care expenses as a percent of income.
  - Exploring the cost and capacity to increase the eligibility level for income-eligible early education and care/afterschool services.

Cost dependent on policy construct and implementation details.

### Quality

1. Raise early educator rates for high-quality programs to at least the 75th market rate percentile.

Cost is dependent on increases needed per region.

2. Determine a long-term strategy to maintain rates at a sustainable level, including increased investments in corresponding rates to transportation providers and add-on rates for supportive child care consistent with the recommendations of the Special Commission on Early Education and Care Operations and Finance reported on December 31, 2013.

Cost is dependent on implementation details.



# Appendix B



Kids First

## Quality

3. Develop a funding structure that incentivizes quality in our early education field through training and education, which should include the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) considering a plan to implement a tiered rate structure that is tied to a quality rating system, enhancing baseline educator requirements for licensing and ongoing professional development requirements, and ensuring that each component of EEC's professional development curriculum builds upon each other to aid educators in achieving a bachelor's degree or beyond.

The cost is applicable to investments made in rates overall and is dependent on implementation details.

4. Foster an intensive approach to ongoing early educator and teacher development and data-driven instruction, especially in schools with significant achievement gaps, through a pilot program that emphasizes dramatically improving early literacy achievement in Kindergarten through third grade.

The cost is dependent on implementation details

5. Launch a competitive grant program with funding for qualified districts (as determined by DESE) and qualified early education providers to pilot intensive, systemic induction and mentoring in the first three years of teacher and early educator service.

The cost is dependent on implementation details (e.g. size, scope, and length of program).

## Readiness

1. Explore options to create a sustainable source of funding to enable all schools to create and implement Safe and Supportive School plans. Ensure comprehensive and coordinated guidance to districts and utilize a broader set of student data to assess and track social-emotional skills.

The current funding level is approximately \$400,000 / year.

2. Develop a grant program that will build and/or expand a rigorous regime of integrated school supports/wraparound services at schools in the Commonwealth, with priority given to elementary and high-need schools. Such services should include appropriate screenings (e.g. developmental delays, dyslexia, health, and nutritional) for all incoming students and tailored referrals; placing one or more Student Support Coordinators in every low-income school to assist teachers; connecting students and their families to appropriate, non-educational, state and community-based services, including those related to health, mental health, housing, and social services; and providing ongoing guidance and assistance with coordinating and integrating those services.

Per pupil cost for wraparound services is approximately \$1,375 (but dependent on which types of services are included). Total cost for a grant program is dependent on scope of program.\*



# Appendix B



Kids First

## Readiness

3. Ensure access to high-quality afterschool and out-of-school (ASOST) and summer programming in every high-needs community by streamlining responsibility, funding, authority, and accountability of all ASOST and summer programs.

Approximately \$1,747 per student (but dependent on implementation details) for afterschool programming and approximately \$1,440 per student (but dependent on implementation detail) for summer learning programs.\*

4. Significantly increase the Commonwealth's ELT grants to school districts, with priority given to high need schools.

Approximately \$1,653 per student (but dependent on implementation details).\*

5. Encourage dual language immersion programs and provide state grants to support and expand high-impact programming, including summer programming, for English language learner (ELL) students in high-need communities, particularly Gateway Cities.

The cost is dependent on implementation details.

6. Fund the deficiencies cited by the Foundation Budget Review Commission related to special education, ELL, educator health care, and low-income students to open up resources for reinvestment in schools.

The cost is approximately \$900 million (if fully funded all in one year).

\*Estimates from 2014.

## Integration

1. Implement data systems that allow for more effective sharing of information across state agencies to benefit children and families and create governmental efficiencies. This should include creating a single electronic application process that would enable eligible applicants to apply online for a range of public benefits administered by the Commonwealth by developing an integrated eligibility system and common application, with priority given to more efficiently integrating the application processes for MassHealth and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

The estimate is dependent on capital and information technology costs. Capital funding authorization exists (Ch. 257 of the Acts of 2014) to implement modern, digital and integrated eligibility determination processes, and federal reimbursement is available under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).





## Integration

2. Map and evaluate current early childhood policies and programming to create a robust, comprehensive and coordinated continuum of care for children and families from prenatal through age five. Programs should include but not be limited to: early education and care, home visiting, early intervention, family support and engagement, food and nutrition, services for special populations (e.g., immigrants and children with disabilities), and particular situations (e.g., as abuse prevention, substance abuse and family stabilization). In the creation of such a continuum of care, consideration should also be given to the expansion of stabilization and prevention services, including programs that address post-partum depression, supports for substance-exposed newborns and their families, and more front-end services to keep children safely at home and prevent Department of Children and Families (DCF) involvement and out-of-home placements. Research the value of using family “hub networks” such as Family Resource Centers and Family Centers statewide, which serve as community gathering and information resource space for families with young children.

The cost is dependent on implementation details.

3. As part of a broader integrated policy strategy to support positive early childhood development:

- Pass into law “Paid Family and Medical Leave”, legislation which ensures that Massachusetts families will not have to choose between taking care of a newborn baby or caring for a sick loved one and their job.

Estimate: potentially up to \$12 million for start-up operating costs and information technology capital costs for the state.

- Increase the EITC from 23 percent to at least 30 percent of the federal EITC.

Estimate: \$75 million.

4. Revive and support the Commonwealth’s Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, an intergovernmental agency cabinet, chaired by the secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services, responsible for developing and implementing a shared vision to advance the health and well-being of all children and youth.

This measure will have minimal costs, if any.



