Investing in Education to Close the Achievement Gap

Since taking office in 2007, the Patrick-Murray Administration has worked with the legislature, educators, students, families, and community partners to build a 21st century public education system in the Commonwealth and provide the targeted support that each student needs to be truly successful.

Massachusetts students continue to lead their peers on national and international measures of student achievement. In Quality Counts 2013, a comprehensive ranking of state education performance and policy by Education Week, Massachusetts ranked second in the nation (an improvement from third overall in 2012) and maintained its first place ranking in categories related to K-12 student achievement and access to high-quality educational opportunities. However, the Administration recognizes that there are still persistent achievement gaps that disproportionately affect students in lower-income communities, English language learners, students with disabilities and students of color.

Massachusetts has an educational, economic, and moral obligation to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code, have the opportunity to reach their potential and achieve academic, career and lifelong success. Closing the achievement gap is one of the central pillars of the Patrick-Murray Administration’s strategy to educate all students and create a top-tier, competitive workforce.

To continue to meet this goal, the Administration will invest $6.79 B in education in FY 2014, a $550 M increase over FY 2013. This investment includes increased funding in achievement gap-related programs to fund the implementation of strategies in FY 2014 to:

- Provide the knowledge, skills, and support our students need to meet our high expectations;
- Ensure that every student in the state is taught by educators who continually receive the tools and professional support that they need;
- Prepare every student for postsecondary educational and career opportunities and lifelong success; and
- Foster innovation and change throughout the public education system.

Commitment to Third Grade Literacy for All Students

Third grade literacy is widely regarded as one of the most significant milestones in a child’s academic career, and it is an important predictor of future academic success. The FY 2014 budget targets increased funding to both early childhood education and programs for English language learners in order to work towards the Administration’s goal of universal third grade student proficiency in reading.

- Improve early literacy and kindergarten readiness
- Create language- and literacy-rich environments in all early education programs, homes, and communities
Expansion of Early Education
Providing access to high-quality early education programs is a vital component of addressing the achievement gap. This budget reflects a commitment to early education and care by making significant investments in access to and quality of child care programs for children served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), and for other qualified low income families. The significant new investments will provide:

- $56.75 M to significantly increase access to high-quality early education programs and provide universal access by eliminating the wait list for qualified children from birth to age five by FY 2017;
- $60.5 M to enhance the quality of early education programs and the effectiveness of the early educator workforce, including higher education grants for providers of children's programs;
- $6.2 M to strengthen parent, family, and community engagement programs;
- $5 M to expand comprehensive social and health services; and
- $2.5 M to increase EEC capacity and develop partnerships to effectively implement initiatives and sustain them over time.

Expansion of English Language Learning Programs
Recognizing that English language learners face increased challenges in attaining full literacy by third grade, the Administration has committed to investing in programs to provide additional support for these students. The FY 2014 budget doubles the available funding for English language learning and related programming, including new investments of $1.95 M for statewide programs for English Language learners, and $2 M dedicated to programming for English language learners in Gateway Cities.

Investments in Gateway Cities
Most students who disproportionately face an achievement gap reside in the Commonwealth’s 24 Gateway Cities. In FY 2014, the Administration will therefore continue to expand funding to implement new strategies that will support our neediest students and their families. The Gateway Cities Education Agenda, which the Patrick-Murray Administration launched in November 2011, is based on five core principles:

1. Renewing our commitment to high standards and rigorous accountability;
2. Providing comprehensive support so that all students come to school healthy and ready to learn;
3. Offering differentiated services and support to all students;
4. Promoting new expectations for college and career readiness; and
5. Promoting innovative educational practices and building stronger partnerships across the state.

The Patrick-Murray Administration will dedicate $11 M to support the expansion of locally-designed and implemented initiatives in the Gateway Cities, including:

- $575 K for Early Literacy and Kindergarten Readiness Programs to establish pilot programs for Kindergarten Literacy Readiness;
- $3.6 M to create Student Support Councils and deploy Student Support Counselors to predominantly low-income schools;
- $5 M for Enrichment and Acceleration Academies for English Language Learners to operate Summer English Learning Camps;
- $1 M to create the Education and Industry Councils and Planning for High School Career Academies, to offer high school students, especially those most in need of academic and career support, the opportunity for early career exploration and experiential, job-embedded learning opportunities;
$1 M to create a Statewide Education Innovation Fund that will combine annual appropriations from the Commonwealth and supplemental funds from business, nonprofits, and philanthropists to promote innovation in policy, practice, research, professional development, and capacity-building efforts.

The Gateway Cities Education Agenda will build upon the positive social, cultural, economic, and civic contributions of the 24 Gateway Cities, expand upon current initiatives, and provide targeted support while also complementing statewide initiatives to increase student achievement. Additionally, the Commonwealth will leverage federal grant awards such as the $50 M Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and the $250 M K-12 Race to the Top grant to implement a wide array of strategies in the Gateway Cities.

K-12 Investments

Chapter 70 funding is the primary method by which the state finances local K-12 public education. An increase of $226 M in Chapter 70 funding will bring this vital support for communities to an unprecedented $4.39 B. This represents a $677 M (18 percent) increase in Chapter 70 funding from pre-recession levels.

This investment will finalize the 2007 Chapter 70 reforms while ensuring that all school districts receive increased funding of at least $25 per pupil. The FY 2014 budget will fully fund all schools at foundation levels, and also begin to factor increased special education and pre-kindergarten costs into the calculation of the foundation budget. This allocation of funds to Chapter 70 will increase equity and access among all school districts and is intended to allow local educational authorities the flexibility to fund initiatives most needed in their communities. By providing flexibility at the local level, the FY 2014 budget allows schools to prioritize funding where it is needed most, whether in special education, MCAS support, literacy programming, or other programs.

Expanding Learning Time for High-Need Populations

One effective strategy for closing the achievement gap is to provide students in lower-income communities with access to additional enrichment opportunities offered beyond the traditional school day. To meet this need, the Administration has prioritized a $5 M investment in grants for middle schools in high-need, low-income school districts to expand the school day. This will jumpstart the Patrick-Murray Administration’s goal of providing additional educational enrichment to enhance students’ ability to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Closing the Achievement Gap at the College Level

The FY 2014 achievement gap initiatives will also expand opportunities for affordable higher education for Massachusetts residents. An additional $57 M will be directed to the University of Massachusetts, the State Universities, and Community Colleges to enable the campuses to deliver high-quality educational and extracurricular opportunities to students and avoid increases in tuition and fees. In addition, a new $116 M investment in the MASSGrant scholarship program, providing targeted scholarships in high-demand programs of study, and other types of financial aid, will ensure that more students in Massachusetts have the opportunity to enroll and succeed in college. For more information about closing the achievement gap at the college level, see the Issue in Brief on “Higher Education Affordability.”

Governor’s Priorities in the Program Budget
For more information on the Governor’s priority of Closing the Achievement Gap in program format, please visit www.mass.gov/budget/governor, the online version of the FY 2014 Governor’s Budget. Click on the Administration Priorities tab in the FY 2014 Program Budget Recommendations Quick Link. The tab will open to show a list of the four Governor’s priorities and the core set of programs that are critical in supporting the goals of each priority.

Additional investments included in this memo can be viewed by visiting the website and selecting the Education program.