

STUDENT PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS COALITION: POLICY PLAYBOOK

Massachusetts faces a set of overlapping challenges that, if unaddressed, will perpetuate wage, wealth, and opportunity gaps and jeopardize the state's future economic competitiveness:

- Lack of student access, particularly for students from under-resourced and marginalized communities, to programs and experiences that prepare them for college and for careers that offer upward economic mobility;
- A growing shortage of diverse, skilled workers that will be needed to drive economic growth; and
- A need for greater diversity in the workforce that promotes innovation, understanding, opportunity, and leads to a more stable Commonwealth.

Thankfully, education leaders in the Commonwealth will have access to historic levels of resources over the next few years that can be used to reverse these trends and build a more equitable Commonwealth. The next Governor of Massachusetts must act quickly to demonstrate bold leadership on developing and implementing policies that better connect students with the significant career opportunities that have the power to transform lives and communities.

The Student Pathways to Success Coalition is dedicated to empowering students, particularly those from historically under-resourced communities, to thrive and prosper in the Massachusetts economy thereby closing wage and wealth gaps and promoting a more equitable Commonwealth. We are committed to building a diverse, highly skilled workforce that will drive continued growth in the Massachusetts economy.

We believe that the next Governor, and other state leaders, must set a bold vision to spark the urgency that will be needed to expand access to a meaningful and relevant high school experience for all students across Massachusetts; one that puts them on a path to college and career success. That vision should start with the following goal:

By 2030, every high school student in Massachusetts will be on a personalized learner pathway and have opportunities to earn college credit, participate in work-based learning, attain industry-recognized credentials, and receive dedicated career counseling.

- Every public high school will offer multiple structured pathway options that are aligned with valuable postsecondary degrees, high-growth industries, or in-demand occupations.
- Every high school student will have the guidance and flexibility they need to create a personalized pathway that aligns with their higher education and career goals, allowing for the combining of coursework or elements from different pathway programs and the ability to transfer into other pathways.

How will we get there? State leaders must focus on the following strategies:

- 1. Adopt the North Star Pathways Goal and develop, through engagement with stakeholders, the strategy for achieving it with interim milestones and outcomes to be established and measured.**
- 2. Strengthen and scale pathway programs that work for students – including Early College, Innovation Pathways, and other career and technical education (CTE) programs such as Chapter 74 – while also bringing exciting new models like P-TECH to Massachusetts.**
- 3. Invest in guidance and career counseling so that students have access to navigation supports that will help them chart their personalized learner pathways.**
- 4. Ensure that high schools have the characteristics necessary to promote post-graduate student success.**
- 5. Grow the Workforce Skills Cabinet into a more robust governance structure to make sure that learner pathways programs continue to expand in ways that are aligned with future workforce needs.**
- 6. Collect better data on how pathways programs are helping students – and get that data in the hands of families, educators, and advocates.**

1. Adopt the North Star Goal and develop, through engagement with stakeholders, the strategy for achieving it with interim milestones and outcomes to be established and measured along the way.

- The Governor and other state leaders must embrace a clear vision in support of universal access to high-quality learner pathways and establish it as a priority in support of equity and economic competitiveness and mobility for the Commonwealth.
- The Governor and state leaders should act to assemble a group of stakeholders – including parents, students, educators, and business leaders – to strategize and devise an implementation plan for achieving the goal.
- The state should devise and adopt a schedule of interim metrics – including the expansion of pathway programs and number of students served, the number of credentials awarded, the percentage of students participating in work-based learning experiences, and the ratio of dedicated and trained career counselors to students – building to a system of universal pathways access.

2. Strengthen and scale existing pathway programs and college and career specific activities that work for students while also bringing exciting new pathway models to Massachusetts.

A. Expand Early College programs that give students a head start on higher education before graduating high school.

- Students who attend an Early College program take college coursework – strategically sequenced along a career pathway – while still in high school. Students receive robust counseling and guidance that helps them navigate their pathway, and they graduate with a high school diploma and a significant amount of college credits.
- There is a strong base of evidence showing that the Early College model produces positive outcomes for students in the Commonwealth: graduates of Early College programs were significantly more likely to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, enroll in higher education, and stay enrolled for at least two semesters.
- Most importantly, Early College programs are serving the students who have traditionally been shut out of our higher education system: two-thirds of Early College students identify as Black or Latinx, and half of all Early College students are economically disadvantaged.

B. Expand access to Career-Technical Education and Vocational Education aligned with in-demand occupations and industries.

- The next Governor should work to expand access to the occupational training pathway programs offered in vocational-technical schools through increased investment in infrastructure and programs, where appropriate, while also working to grow the number of Chapter 74 programs in the state's traditional and comprehensive high schools through greater regulatory flexibility and incentives.
- It will also be important to ensure equal access to these programs not only through expansion of offerings but also through the elimination of exclusionary admissions policies.
- The "After Dark" initiative that allows more students to take advantage of the highly successful programs offered at regional vocational high schools while continuing to take academic courses at their local high school deserves continued support.

- Scaling up and improving the existing Innovation Pathways programs in high schools across the state would give more students a chance to have a high school experience that includes work-based learning and career exposure experiences such as internships and capstone projects.

C. Help more high school students earn industry-recognized credentials that lead to good paying jobs.

- Recently-passed legislation requires the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to develop an annually updated list showing which credentials are aligned with in-demand occupations that pay high wages. The next Governor should ensure that the state incorporates these lists into a system for providing financial rewards to high schools who facilitate the awarding of these in-demand, high-value credentials to their students.

D. Strengthen and Expand work-based learning opportunities for students.

- Work-based learning can take many forms. It has the potential to significantly enhance a student's ability to explore careers while allowing them to gain employability (durable) skills that better prepare them for post-graduate success. More importantly, strong work-based learning experiences can help close equity and opportunity gaps for many students without access to networks and mentoring relationships.
- The state's leadership should ensure greater access for students to a range of work-based learning activities including, but not limited to, internships, mentoring, job shadowing, site visits, service learning, credit for work, and access to career days and speakers. Barriers to these opportunities should be removed and business leaders should be encouraged to be actively engaged in creating meaningful opportunities and experiences for students.

E. Bring the P-TECH high school model to Massachusetts.

- The P-TECH high school model, which started with the highly successful Brooklyn P-TECH school and has now been successfully implemented in 13 states, focuses on a particular STEM industry that has a significant presence in the state and/or the surrounding region. It has proven effective in strengthening and diversifying the pipeline of STEM workers, goals that Massachusetts urgently needs to make progress toward.
- P-TECH high schools are designed to engage students in a program of six years (or less) during which they earn both a high school diploma and a technical associate degree that qualifies them to interview for, and succeed in, high-demand STEM jobs.
- Successful P-TECH high schools have both higher education partners and business partners. The business partner representing an industry sector is actively engaged in curriculum design and offers internship (and sometimes externship) opportunities for students and faculty. The business community in Massachusetts has a number of leaders who care deeply about improving out STEM talent pipeline and are very interested in the P-TECH model.

3. Invest in guidance and career counseling so that students have access to navigation supports that will help them chart their personalized learner pathways.

A. Encourage greater investment in educators who are responsible for helping students explore their college and career pathway options, and ensure that guidance and career counselors are equipped with the latest information on how various pathway programs are preparing students for success after high school.

- Students will need support as they navigate the different pathway options offered at their high school and decide which combination of college coursework and work-based learning might be the best fit for their goals. State leaders should encourage districts, which will continue to receive large funding

increases through the Student Opportunity Act in the coming years, to invest in educators who can provide these navigation supports and provide them with the professional development and information they need to make informed recommendations.

- State leaders should also develop strategies to recruit students of color into graduate school guidance counselor programs – and work to ensure that such programs incorporate training on how to advise students to navigate career pathway options.

B. Require participation in MyCAP (My Career and Academic Plan) for all students beginning in 7th grade.

- The next Governor should support the adoption of the MyCAP program for all middle and high school students because personalized college and career advising is an important component of any pathways program. MyCAP is a multi-year planning tool that is student driven and supports the development of coherent pathways that outline academic, social/personal, and career goals for students and the coursework and strategies to support achieving them. Currently, MyCAP is required of students in state designated Early College and Innovation Pathways programs.
- Required participation of students and schools in MyCAP must be guided by counselors and other school staff trained in supporting students with the development of college and career planning.

4. Ensure that high schools have the characteristics necessary to promote post-graduate student success.

A. Ensure that all students have equitable access to rigorous coursework that confers the skills and knowledge needed to find success in higher education and the workforce.

- It is important that all students, including students who are in remedial education, are provided with the support and guidance they need to become college and career ready. The state must expand opportunities for all students to have access to, and participate in, rigorous curriculum and programming to all students, inclusive of Advanced Placement Courses, dual enrollment, International Baccalaureate, and a MassCore curriculum.

B. Support the acquisition of employability (durable) skills.

- All high school curricula should be infused with opportunities for students to gain the employability (durable) skills they will need to ensure future career success. The state should ensure that – in combination with robust work-based learning experiences – coursework and other activities enable the acquisition and cultivation of skills such as problem-solving, communication, leadership, organizational ability, time management, and others that cross sectors but enhance skills for career and life success.

C. Diversify the workforce of educators, administrators, and school personnel.

- Evidence shows that student success can be enhanced when students learn from teachers – and are supported by administrators and other staff – who look like them. Massachusetts needs to do more to increase the diversity of its educators to better represent the demographics of the student population. Continued and increased investment in programs that recruit, cultivate, support, and retain teachers and administrators of color are vital. “Grow your own” programs, which exist in other states, and dedicated Early College programs for building the educator pipeline must be encouraged. Expanded pilot programs that increase the diversity of the teaching force, with proper supports for new teachers, must also be implemented.

D. Expand access to, and participation in, Computer Science instruction.

- Computer science knowledge and digital literacy skills are increasingly essential to career success: as many as 25 percent of all new jobs being created in Massachusetts require some level of proficiency in these areas. Despite this, there is unequal access to gaining these skills: 27 percent of the state’s urban

high school students attend a school without a single basic computer science course. Massachusetts should consider following the lead of other states that have, as a minimum, required all high schools to teach computer science.

5. Grow the Workforce Skills Cabinet into a more robust governance structure to make sure that learner pathways programs continue to grow in ways that are aligned with future workforce needs.

A. Create a position in the Governor's Office that is exclusively focused on college and career pathways and designate that person to coordinate with the Workforce Skills Cabinet.

- The next Governor should also expand the membership of the Workforce Skills Cabinet to incorporate perspectives from regional and statewide business leaders, which will ensure that decisions about pathways programs will be informed by people with firsthand knowledge of future workforce needs. Industry leaders can also ensure that the Cabinet has a complete understanding of the landscape of workforce training options offered by employers and the skills such programs confer.
- In addition to making changes to the Workforce Skills Cabinet through Executive Order, the next Governor should work with the legislature to codify the governance body in statute to ensure continuity.

B. Task the Workforce Skills Cabinet with conducting a biennial review of all student learner pathway programs that focuses on alignment with workforce needs and equity of access to high-quality programs.

- This review process should incorporate input from business leaders across the state as well as student outcome data showing how graduates from different pathway programs fare in the labor market.
- The next Governor should also ensure that the review process has a strong equity focus by determining whether students who live in under-resourced communities have access to pathway programs that are aligned with in-demand jobs.

C. Ensure that the business community has a role in creating a system for defining, and regularly updating, a set of durable skills that should be incorporated into the curricula of learner pathways programs.

- The Cabinet should work to gather input from business leaders and labor market data to inform the process for defining the set of Durable Skills that are most relevant for workforce needs in the Commonwealth – as well as guidance for how to incorporate the acquisition of those Durable Skills into different pathway frameworks.

D. Establish a new annual report, whose production and publication will be overseen by the Workforce Skills Cabinet, which will provide updates on the industries, occupations, and skills that are expected to be the most in-demand over the coming year and beyond.

- This annual report will be designed to inform the curricula of different pathways programs, and it can also be used to target funding from initiatives such as the Workforce Training Program to ensure that state support is being directed toward human capital investments in industries that will continue to grow in future years.

6. Collect better data on how pathways programs are helping students – and get that data in the hands of families, educators, and advocates.

A. Set up the data infrastructure needed to collect information about which pathways programs are producing positive outcomes for their graduates.

- The Commonwealth already collects some information on whether high school graduates are finding success in college or career pathways, but stakeholders should be able to compare outcome metrics for students who participated in specific pathways programs: namely Early College, P-TECH, Innovation Pathways, Chapter 74, and non-Chapter 74 programs.
- As is the case with anything involving student data, privacy and security must be paramount to these efforts.

B. Build new public-facing data tools that clearly show information about different pathways programs and the preparedness levels of students in Massachusetts.

- The Executive Office of Education is already in the process of developing a public data tool, required by the Student Opportunity Act law, which will show a range of valuable information including participation in pathways programming, attainment of industry-recognized credentials, postsecondary success measures, and employment data.
- The next Governor should champion and amplify efforts to increase public reporting of data on pathways – with a particular focus on using disaggregated data to draw attention to equity gaps.
- This information should be used to help ensure that families, educators, policymakers and advocates are able to make informed decisions about which pathways programs are providing enough support to prepare different groups of students to find success in college and career.
- State leaders should also work to create and publicize data tools that allow students and families to explore information on different high-growth career options in Massachusetts that may be aligned with pathway programs.