

MASSACHUSETTS

DEFINITION: COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

College Access and Success refers to the field occupied by organizations working to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the ability to enter college and successfully obtain a degree. By working with students and their families, college access programs address academic preparedness, college aspiration and knowledge, and financial barriers.

SOCIAL ISSUE INDICATORS: MASSACHUSETTS

The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education aggregates Boston Public School (BPS) graduation rates annually and makes this data available on its website. College enrollment and graduation rates are not tracked annually in MA; the data presented below comes from a longitudinal study conducted by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, using a cohort of students that graduated from BPS in 2000.

	High School Graduation ¹	College Enrollment ²	College Graduation ³
At-Risk Populations			
Black	69%	60%	28%
Hispanic	60%	56%	24%
Comparison Group			
White	87%	72%	53%

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Historically, in the United States, education has been primarily a state and local responsibility. The following is a review of some of the key developments in Massachusetts state policy aimed at improving college access and success:

- **Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA)** – Passed in 1993 as a result of the unified effort of multiple stakeholders from the business, government and education sectors. Among other significant changes, this landmark legislation reduced the reliance of local schools on property taxes and injected nearly \$2B of additional funds into public education over the course of a decade. As a result, MA became one of the few states in the country to spend more on students in poor districts than on students in wealthy districts. In addition, MERA set higher expectations for students, developed statewide academic standards, and created assessments based on those standards.⁴
- **Persistent achievement gaps** – Today, 15 years after MERA was passed, Massachusetts' students have made steady and sustained progress and the state is consistently ranked near the top of national and international education achievement charts. Despite this success, significant achievement gaps remain across the state; these groups need to be addressed to fully meet the promise of MERA.^{5,6}

THE NEW PHASE OF EDUCATION REFORM: GOVERNOR PATRICK'S EDUCATION ACTION AGENDA

The New Promise of Public Education: Ready for 21st Century Success, launched in 2008, presents a robust and comprehensive blueprint for reform of the public school system by 2020. The report was produced by the Commonwealth Readiness Project, a nine-month effort by a diverse group of education, business, and civic leaders. Goals of the agenda include developing and retaining effective teachers, increasing college and career readiness, and unleashing innovation throughout the public education system. Results will be measured against targeted outcomes including reducing the state's high school dropout rate to less than 10% by 2020 and ensuring at least 90% of high school graduates are ready for college and do not need to take any remedial classes.⁷ Some of the recent initiatives related to the agenda include:

- **Alignment of high school graduation and college entrance requirements** – MA plans to make college preparatory curriculum the default curriculum for all high school students by 2016.⁸
- **Common Core Standards Initiative** – MA joined 27 other states in adopting the common standards that specify the math and English public curricula at each grade level. The Common Core standards were developed by a consortium of states and are designed to reflect the knowledge and skills that young people need to succeed in college and careers.⁹ The standards have been heavily promoted by the Obama administration, and their adoption has been linked to the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top (R2T) initiative.¹⁰
- **Race to the Top (R2T)** – The R2T proposal outlines the specific goals and recommendations of the Education Action Agenda to enhance and improve public schools. Most recently, MA has been selected as one of the winning states in the second round of this competitive federal grant program seeking to advance state-level reforms in education.¹¹ The grant awarded \$250 million to be applied towards the state's efforts to close the achievement gap.¹²

THE SOCIAL IMPACT RESEARCH PROCESS

SELECTING HIGH PERFORMING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS ORGANIZATIONS IN GREATER BOSTON

Social Impact Research (SIR) aggregates, analyzes, and disseminates information to help social impact investors identify and support high performing organizations working to solve particular social issues. To this end, SIR compiles three types of reports, designed to be read together. The social issue report provides investors with a broad overview of the social issue. The state report provides context about how the issue is being addressed in a particular state. The organization reports highlight high performing nonprofits in five metropolitan areas working on the issue.

SIR focused on the issue of college access and success because it represents a high impact area of investment. Supporting high-performing college access programs in the Boston area will create educational opportunities for many at-risk students, resulting in a number of positive outcomes for their families, government, and society as a whole. As discussed in the social issue report, these benefits include increased employment and productivity, lower crime rates and related costs, and an opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty.

Through desk research SIR identified over 50 nonprofit organizations in the Boston area working to improve college access and success through direct service, almost all of which focus on at-risk students. Through further analysis of publicly available financial documents and program data, this list was narrowed to approximately 20 programs that incorporate the core components of the SIR high impact approach – academic

preparation and enrichment, college aspiration and knowledge, and financial aid and planning. SIR then conducted interviews with organizations and administered a comprehensive survey in order to gain insight into the organization’s program performance, social outcomes, and overall health.

Each organization was analyzed using 35 discrete indicators within the following three categories:

- **Program Performance:** tutoring and study skills, coursework and test preparation, academic advising, building college aspirations, college application support, financial aid awareness and planning, college transition support, and timing of intervention
- **Social and Economic Outcomes:** systemic change activities, community partnerships, strategies to replicate and/or scale and efforts to improve program quality, college enrollment, college graduation, and program attrition rates
- **Organizational Health:** financial health and sustainability, board involvement, performance of the management team, and internal data collection process

During the analysis each organization was benchmarked by four analysts using SIR’s five point scale for each indicator. Based on this analysis, SIR selected 7 recommended organizations in Greater Boston, listed below. Social impact investors interested in supporting these high-performing nonprofits should refer to the organization reports to learn more about organizations in which to invest.

RECOMMENDED ORGANIZATIONS

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	NUMBER SERVED IN 2009
Breakthrough Cambridge	Cambridge	35
College Bound Dorchester	Dorchester	118
Hyde Square Task Force	Jamaica Plain	135
Steppingstone Foundation	Boston	967
Steps to Success	Brookline	286
Trinity Education for Excellence Program	Boston	123
Urban Scholars	Boston	163

ENDNOTES

1. “2009 Graduation Rate Report (DISTRICT) for All Students,” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/gradrates.aspx.
2. Sum, Andrew, “Getting to the Finish Line: College Enrollment and Graduation: A Seven Year Longitudinal Study of the Boston Public Schools Class of 2000,” Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, www.bostonpic.org/files/resources/BPS%20college%20graduation%20study.pdf.
3. Ibid
4. The American Diploma Project Network, “Taking Root Massachusetts’ Lessons for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda,” Achieve, Inc., <http://www.achieve.org/files/Massachusetts-SustainabilityCaseStudy.pdf>.
5. Ibid
6. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Measuring Up: 2008. www.highereducation.org.
7. “Ready for 21st Century Success: The New Promise of Public Education: The Patrick Administration Education Agenda,” Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Education, <http://www.mass.gov/Agov3/docs/Readiness%20Final%20Report.pdf>.
8. “Race to the Top Phase 2: Massachusetts Application Narrative,” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, www.doe.mass.edu/arra/rttt/narrative2.doc.
9. Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
10. Moran, Lyle. “Mass. board approves education curriculum change,” Associated Press, http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/07/21/state_prepares_to_vote_on_education_overhaul/.
11. “Department of Education Announces Ten More Race to the Top Winners,” Philanthropy News Digest, <http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/news/story.html?id=306500008>, retrieved August 30, 2010
12. “Race to the Top Executive Summary,” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/arra/rttt/execsummary2.pdf>.