

Legislation on Readiness Schools and Charter Schools

The Legislature will consider two important education bills filed by the Governor. One is the long-anticipated proposal for Readiness Schools and the other would have drastic implications for the number of charter schools allowed in Massachusetts.

Brief on Governor's Readiness Proposal

- The Readiness Legislative proposal establishes 3 types of schools: Acceleration, Advantage, and Alliance schools
- It is based on the idea that successful change can occur from the top down and it concentrates power in the hands of the education secretary
- The bill can limit roles for teachers and the local union president and exclude collective bargaining between the union and management from the process of creating and implementing these schools
- Acceleration Schools are created when a school or district is deemed chronically underperforming. A group including the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Superintendent, Chair of School Committee, President of local Teacher's Union, teachers, parents, and social service, health, and child welfare representatives meet
 - The commissioner then drafts a plan that can change the curriculum, provide additional funding, adjust salaries of administrators or teachers, adjust school day or year, and **limit, suspend or change provisions of the collective bargaining contract, and require administrators or teachers to reapply for their positions**
 - Stakeholders can submit changes to plan and the union and other may appeal the plan to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
 - Once plan is completed and approved by the Commissioner, the Superintendent or, in some cases, an external receiver is responsible for implementing it. An annual evaluation process is also set-up
 - If an entire district is underperforming, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education appoints a receiver with all the powers of the superintendent and the school committee
- Advantage and Alliance Schools can be new or converted schools. Advantage schools are to be formed when teachers determine they want more flexibility than is provided by the school district. Alliance schools are with external partners such as universities, museums, charter school operators, unions, and non-profit

organizations. The school committee approves the performance contract and the plan

- Establishing these schools is again done outside the collective bargaining process
- Applicant for Advantage or Alliance school prepares proposal with goals and vision of school which is reviewed by screen committee, including superintendent, a school committee member, and teacher selected by local union. Within 30 days, the committee needs to vote on the application, a 2/3 vote is required for approval
- If the application is accepted, a planning committee is established that includes: applicant, superintendent, a school committee member, parent, principal and two teachers (one of whom is picked by the union)
- **The plan may include waivers and changes to the current collective bargaining contract. It is not specified who would have the authority to grant or impose such waivers and changes, but the law provides that such waivers would trump existing collective bargaining agreement provisions, while the remainder of the agreement would remain in place**
- Once the plan is completed, the planning committee develops a performance contract by which the school is measured. The plan is submitted to school committee for approval and then to the teachers for approval. If teachers approve plan, then it is again submitted to the school committee for approval
- Both Advantage and Alliance Schools are evaluated annually by the superintendent

Brief on Governor's Charter School Proposal

- According to the Boston Globe, this legislation would lift the spending cap in low-performing districts from 9 percent to 18 percent and it has the potential to create an estimated 27,000 new spots in charter schools in about 30 districts
- Lifting the cap in our neediest districts means lost funding for thousands of students from local budgets, resulting in losses to school systems that are already increasing class sizes, laying off teachers and other educators, raising activity and busing fees, and cutting music, art, physical education and other vital programs
- Because of the districts the legislation affects, the very children most in need would be the ones who lose crucial resources

- The Legislation fails to address problems with the state's funding formula
- The funding formula for charter schools is the key problem with the present system, and it must be fixed
- The state should pay for charter schools or the amount a school district can lose in per-pupil funding should at least be capped at a sharply lower level than the present formula allows
- The legislation does show that the administration recognizes the need for Commonwealth charter schools to serve diverse groups of students. It is important for any final legislation to not only fix the funding formula, but to ensure that charter schools serve *all* students, including the neediest children.
- Enforceable mechanisms should be included requiring admission and retention of student populations similar to those educated by their sending districts, including children who have special needs, come from low-income families, are English language learners or are at risk of dropping out.

**Press Release
July 16, 2009**

Contact: Kyle Sullivan
Becky Deusser
Kim Haberlin
617-725-4025
Jonathan Palumbo (EOE)
617-979-8348

GOVERNOR PATRICK PUSHES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OFFER ALL STUDENTS ACCESS TO A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

U.S. Secretary of Education applauds Massachusetts reform efforts to close achievement gaps, turn around schools and promote innovation

BOSTON – Thursday, July 16, 2009 – Moving to fulfill the promise of education reform for all students in Massachusetts, Governor Deval Patrick today announced sweeping legislation to improve public schools and close achievement gaps that persist despite the successes of the state’s landmark Education Reform Act of 1993. The proposal will more than triple the number of charter school slots and expand the state’s authority to intervene in underperforming schools.

Joined by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the Museum of Science in Boston, the Governor unveiled his plans to increase accountability for school performance and student achievement and promote innovative Readiness Schools across Massachusetts. The legislation is also meant to strengthen the Commonwealth’s position as it competes with other states for \$4.35 billion in federal “Race to the Top” funds being made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“Children in failing schools can wait no longer, and neither can we,” said Governor Patrick. “We have made great strides since the Education Reform Act of 1993 but more must be done to ensure every school gives every student the chance they deserve to succeed.”

The Governor’s proposal seeks to turn around underperforming schools more quickly and effectively and provide more targeted support to struggling students. The reform package includes the availability of additional Readiness Schools to operate as innovative in-district schooling options for all Massachusetts students and families.

In order to qualify for the multibillion dollar national “Race to the Top” competitive grant program, U.S. Secretary Duncan has said states must demonstrate a strong desire to transform public education by partnering more aggressively with low-performing schools, enhancing opportunities for autonomy and innovation and expanding the number of charter schools.

“Massachusetts began by leading the nation on high standards and is now pushing the envelope in other critical areas of education reform,” said Secretary Duncan. “Turning around low performing schools is one of the toughest challenges out there and I applaud Massachusetts for having the courage to take it on. I look forward to watching state leaders, unions, teachers and parents work together to get this done.”

Sixteen years after the passage of the Education Reform Act, Massachusetts ranks at or near the top on national and international measures of reading, mathematics and science achievement. Still, too many public schools are failing to effectively serve too many students:

- In 2008, 70 percent of English Language Learners and 40 percent of low-income students in the Class of 2010 failed to meet MCAS graduation requirements.
- Based on 2008 statewide graduation data, approximately 70 percent of African-American and 60 percent of Latino students graduated from high school in four years compared to approximately 90 percent of White students.
- On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Massachusetts showed some of the largest achievement gaps between White students and African-American and Latino students, and between lower- and higher-income students in reading and mathematics.

“We recognize the need for the state to radically alter the way underperforming schools are managed in order to ensure all students are served by high-performing schools,” said Education Secretary Paul Reville, who joined Governor Patrick and U.S. Secretary Duncan today at the bill unveiling. “And we want to continue to build on our success with new opportunities for more creative approaches to education.”

The Governor’s intervention strategy outlines plans for a “Smart Cap” lift on charter schools and for the creation of Readiness Acceleration Schools. The charter school initiative will expand and create successful charter schools that serve high-need students in Massachusetts’ lowest-performing districts.

Specifically, the proposal:

- Lifts charter school spending caps in the lowest-scoring 10 percent of school districts from 9 percent to 18 percent, more than tripling the number of available slots in these districts from the current 10,000 to over 37,000.
- Invites only successful charter school operators with demonstrated records of student achievement to apply to open, or expand, charter schools.
- Compels providers to make efforts to recruit and retain populations of low-income students, persistently underperforming students, English Language Learners, students receiving special education and students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

The Readiness Acceleration Schools initiative will promote rapid school transformation by expanding the authority of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to intervene in underperforming and chronically underperforming schools.

The proposal:

- Provides the Commissioner with the ability to develop a performance contract and an “innovation plan” with local stakeholders.
- Enforces the inclusion of wrap-around services to meet social service, health and workforce development needs of students and families.
- Allows for greater autonomy and flexibility in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing and district policies.

The Readiness Schools initiative will also establish two types of innovative, in-district public schools that feature high degrees of flexibility and autonomy in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing, school district and school committee policies and provisions of local teacher contracts. The schools will promote high levels of student achievement, agree to a student performance contract and foster innovation by allowing parents, teachers, universities, museums, non-profit organizations and other groups to submit proposals to create new schools or convert existing schools. The goal of these schools is to allow educators to fundamentally transform classroom instruction.

For more information on the proposed legislation, please visit the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education website at www.mass.gov/education.

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