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MassINC GATEWAY CITIES INNOVATION INSTITUTE

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Building a Gateway Cities Education Vision

In the spring of 2012, Fitchburg Mayor Lisa Wong and Fitchburg State University President Robert Antonucci assembled Gateway City education leaders to discuss common challenges and opportunities. The mayors, city managers, and school leaders who attended this opening dialogue at Fitchburg State agreed that their communities had shared interests that could be advanced by working together collaboratively.

One year later, with support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, and the Parker Foundation, MassINC convened mayors, city managers, superintendents, and other education leaders for a full-day, facilitated meeting at Clark University to further this conversation.

At this meeting, the four focal points presented in this Vision and the overarching theme of "more time" were identified. Throughout the spring and summer, working groups met for deeper deliberation on each of these topics. Drawing on the ideas expressed during these sessions, MassINC undertook additional research and conducted dozens of interviews with mayors, superintendents, school leaders, youth leaders, and education policy experts.

This Vision seeks to present the education innovations, aspirations, and policy priorities of Gateway Cities. Over the coming months, we will bring this Vision to each community seeking additional input and affirmation.

This Vision is a living document charting a course toward a future destination. Piloted by the steadily expanding coalition of Gateway Cities leaders committed to working collaboratively, this document is a starting point on the journey toward dynamic community-wide learning systems.

November 2013

Dear Friends:

We all take enormous pride in the hard work and steadfast commitment of those in our communities who nurture and educate youth. As mayors, it falls upon us to give these educators the support they need to offer our children the best preparation possible for the future. Providing policy leadership is one way we can fulfill this obligation.

For the last several years, Gateway City educators have worked tirelessly to develop and implement new learning models. These green shoots hold enormous promise to give more students the skills and direction they need to succeed in an increasingly challenging economy, but this potential can't be cultivated without policies that position education leaders to systematically bring them to scale.

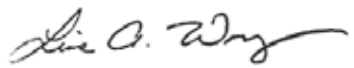
To make a compelling case for the necessary state investment, we must first redefine the narrative. It is imperative that we counter simplifications that label our communities as "underperforming" on the whole, painting us with the broad brush of data that do not adequately capture the complexity and dynamism of our cities. We must also showcase what we do well in Gateway Cities, and champion the strengths upon which we will do better. Above all, we must articulate a vision for effective 21st-century learning systems, and a convincing strategy to build them.

Over the past year, Gateway City leaders have shared their time, energy, and ideas to organize for this task. This document represents the fruits of their labor. It gives us language to communicate the achievements of our educators and the potential of our communities to provide high-quality learning experiences. The Vision offers a powerful framework for community-wide learning systems that meet the needs of students from birth to career. And it gives us a policy agenda, focusing our attention on the building blocks we will need to assemble this seamless system, piece by piece.

The pages that follow bring to life the creativity and imagination of Gateway City educators. As we organize in the months ahead to achieve the policy change that will enable us to realize this Vision for our students and families, we must mirror that same level of creativity and imagination.

Sincerely,

Kimberley Driscoll
Mayor
City of Salem



Lisa A. Wong
Mayor
City of Fitchburg

This Vision embodies the hard work, ideas, and aspirations of more than one hundred leaders who contributed their time and energy to a collaborative process. While this list is by no means complete, it represents a good-faith attempt to capture the names of those who attended meetings, interviews, and strategy sessions, as well as those who provided feedback and guidance over the past year. Special thanks to youth from Teens Leading the Way who set aside time on a Sunday afternoon to offer their input.

MAYORS AND MANAGERS

Jay Ash
Linda Balzotti
Gary Christenson
Kimberley Driscoll
James Fiorentini
Daniel Knapik
Bernie Lynch
John Mitchell
Alex Morse
Michael O'Brien
Daniel Rizzo
Domenic Sarno
Lisa Wong
Stephen Zanni

SUPERINTENDENTS

Melinda Boone
Mary Bourque
Paul Dakin
David DeRuosi
Jean Franco
John Jerome
Sergio Paez
Andre Ravenelle
Stephen Russell
Suzanne Scallion
Judith Scannell
James Scully
Michael Shea
Dan Warwick

Maggie Adams
Meghan Adams
Jennifer Alexander
Nicholas Apostoleris
Heather Arrighi
Laura Assade
Lauren Barber
Noah Berger
Lori Berry
Kitty Bowman
Joanne Blum
Blair Brown
Susan Buchholz
William Buckley
Steven Budd
Andrew Bundy
Gail Carberry
Jennifer Carey
Nancy Carpenter
Danielle Carrigo
Peter Christopher
Tim Collins
Stefan Czaporowski
Chad d'Entremont
Helena DaSilva Hughes
Robert David Sullivan
Jennifer Davis-Cary
Sylvia de Haas Phillips
Kerry de Jesus de Jesus
Ann DiBenedetto
Marie Doehler
Julie Donovan
Titus DosRemedios
Kate Fenton
Elaine Fersh
Karen Frederick
Mariregis Fusco
John Fusco
Tim Garvin
Geoff Foster
Gail Giambusso
Marguerite Gonsalves
Robert Hildreth
Samalid Hogan
Lori Hovey
Van Hugyn
Bob Jokela
Denise Jordan
Beth Kaake
Joan Kagan
Manjula Karamcheti
Bob Kilkenny
Chris Kingston
Caroline Koch
Glenn Koocher
Miles Lang-Kennedy
Sandra Larson
Saeyun Lee
Emily Levine
Bernard Lynch
Katie MaGrane
Mary Malone
Charlene Mara
Mary Jo Marion
Peter McAndrew
Maria McLaughlin
Andrew Melendez
Albert Mogavero
Mary Anne Morris
Michael Mullen
Linda Noonan
Andrew O'Leary
Amy O'Leary
Susan O'Neil
Elizabeth Pauley
Aldo E. Petronio
Paul Reville
Patrick Roach
Jim Sacks
Nancy Scannell
John Schneider
Tom Scott
Anne Serino
Beth Shevlin Tripathi
Kathie Skinner
Elena Sokolow-Kaufman
Lou St John
Shailah Stewart
John Strauss
Salvatore Terrasi
Paul Toner
Charlie Toulmin
Julianne Viola
Mary Walachy
Abby Weiss
Len Zalauskas

THE GATEWAY CITIES

Vision

for Dynamic Community-Wide Learning Systems

Gateway Cities envision a time in the not-so-distant future when they are leading providers of education tailored to the diverse needs and aspirations of students and families in our 21st-century economy. This Vision is grounded in the conviction that Gateway Cities can leverage their unique assets to build education systems that fuel local economic growth and increase the state's competitive edge. To achieve this Vision, Gateway City leaders are coalescing around a policy agenda that brings recent innovations to scale and weaves them into dynamic community-wide learning systems, generating quantifiable returns for Massachusetts taxpayers.

"Gateway City schools are brimming with innovative new models. We are working to give each student a rich set of individually tailored experiences based on their needs. If we can bring these efforts to scale and clearly communicate our successes, families will seek out our communities for their educational offerings and diversity."

ANDRE RAVENELLE
SUPERINTENDENT,
FITCHBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Two decades after Massachusetts passed the landmark Education Reform Act of 1993, the state has vaulted to the top on national and international measures of academic performance. This exceptional achievement has earned well-deserved recognition from around the globe. But we must appreciate that the changing needs of the economy require us to do even more, particularly for disadvantaged students, a great many of whom are still struggling.[1]

This is most apparent in Gateway Cities, the small to midsize urban centers that are home to one-quarter of all school-age youth in Massachusetts. In the 20 intervening years since education reform, the share of students in these districts who are low-income has risen from less than one-half to more than two-thirds.

Growing poverty makes it more difficult to provide the supports that Gateway City students need to acquire the higher-level skills employers increasingly demand; in a state where 70 percent of all jobs will soon require some form of post-secondary training, fewer than one in four Gateway City students are graduating high school and going on to complete these credentials. Given the state's aging workforce, Massachusetts can ill afford this lost talent.[2]

A more subtle but equally important problem is the impact of growing concentrations of poverty on housing development. High-poverty Gateway City school systems have a difficult time attracting families with greater means. This contributes in a major way to depressed demand for housing in these communities. In many Gateway Cities, the market is simply too weak to build new housing or renovate existing units. So while Massachusetts urgently needs more housing production to support economic growth, these pro-development urban centers—the very communities where it would be most efficient to expand the state's housing supply—have been relegated to the sidelines.

Success in addressing these two challenges will require a strong state and local partnership. State policy must recognize the relationship between housing and education, providing tools that enable these cities to better serve disadvantaged youth, but also tools that will allow them to increase the economic diversity of their neighborhoods. In turn, Gateway Cities must have a multidimensional strategy and a plan to implement it.

Over the past year, Gateway City leaders have come together to brainstorm. Woven together, their ideas form a compelling vision for dynamic community-wide learning systems. This introductory section summarizes the concept, and drills deeper on how the strategy responds to emerging threats and opportunities.

DYNAMIC COMMUNITY-WIDE LEARNING SYSTEMS

The concept of dynamic community-wide learning systems underscores three widely recognized realities:

>> First, public education must be more "dynamic" to adapt to the changing needs of employers in an economy that is shifting more rapidly than ever.

>> Second, giving students the preparation they need to continually adapt their skills to a rapidly changing economy requires a "community-wide" response; pre-K-through-12 schools need strong community support and partnerships to provide the necessary learning experiences and supports.

>> Third, a growing body of rigorous education research revealing developmental milestones and key transitions demonstrates the need for an integrated birth-to-career "systems" approach.

Many efforts to create structures akin to the Gateway Cities Vision for dynamic community-wide learning systems are already underway. The Strive Network supports dozens of cities building cradle-to-career "education pipelines." Massachusetts has advanced elements of this work at a state level through a number of recent efforts, including the 2008 Commonwealth Readiness Project and the 2010 Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness. This fall the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy is launching a major new initiative focused on the development of comprehensive education policies in Massachusetts.

These ongoing efforts align well with the Gateway Cities Vision. There is, however, one important distinction: For most communities and policymakers, closing the achievement gap by providing more comprehensive supports to low-income students is the impetus for building these systems. While Gateway Cities wholeheartedly embrace that objective, they envision and aspire to create systems that can tailor learning to the diverse needs and aspirations of individual students and families, providing a superior experience for all.

Gateway Cities are well positioned to achieve this goal: They all have higher education institutions that can help create multiple pathways to post-secondary education. They all have diverse clusters of regional employers to provide placements for work-based learning opportunities that empower students to explore their career interests. Gateway Cities also have sufficient scale to offer vocational education and other types of specialized learning and student support.

In viewing dynamic community-wide learning systems as a more universal model for 21st-century public education, Gateway Cities are an excellent place to prototype the approach. They have the energy to innovate and many of the components, yet they are not so large that they will get bogged down in the effort. Taking stock of emerging threats and opportunities, the rationale for accelerating the development of such systems in Gateway Cities is even stronger.

EMERGING THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Massachusetts middle class has been squeezed by many adverse forces over the past several decades. But changing residential patterns that concentrate poverty in our Gateway Cities, making it more difficult for them to educate youth and produce housing, are intensifying the pressures on the state's middle class. While this cycle has been apparent for quite some time, up until now there hasn't been an obvious solution. Changing consumer preferences create an opening to break this vortex.

The Middle-Skill Worker Shortage

Throughout the Commonwealth's history, Gateway Cities have produced a large share of the newest members of our middle class. In this role, they have injected a steady infusion of wealth into regional economies across the state. With growing levels of poverty and learning systems that have been slow to scale the robust educational experiences that students need to gain higher-level skills, Gateway Cities are struggling to produce the talent the state's economy requires.

This is most visible in the growing shortage of middle-skill workers. Estimates suggest Massachusetts will need a minimum of 225,000 new workers with post-secondary training up to an associate's degree to support the growth of the economy over the next decade.[3] With a great number of middle-skill workers aging out of the labor force, hitting this target requires more than doubling the previous decade's middle-skill growth rate; despite some progress, the state is still far off the mark.[4]

This presents a major challenge for the economy. The Commonwealth is already struggling to compete for employers; over the past few decades, Massachusetts has added jobs more slowly than states with a similar industrial base. While various factors contribute to lagging job growth, failure to create a workforce for middle-skill employers is only intensifying the problem, forcing out middle-class families, and increasing income inequality.[5]

A growing body of research shows that as inequality grows, residents segregate into upper- and lower-income communities.[6] This pattern has been pronounced across Massachusetts. In the Pioneer Valley, for example, the percentage of residents living in middle-income neighborhoods fell from 68 percent in 1990 to just 42 percent in 2007.[7]

The self-perpetuating spiral whereby we struggle to create middle-class jobs—which leads to further concentrations of poverty, undermining the urban school systems vital to economic mobility, and reducing housing opportunity in neighborhoods with quality housing and schools, making it more difficult for Massachusetts to attract and retain middle-class families—has become a threat to the fabric of our Commonwealth that merits greater attention and new solutions.

Breaking the Spiral

To break the spiral, Gateway Cities must do a better job preparing disadvantaged students for their future in the state's economy, while simultaneously attracting middle-income families to their neighborhoods.

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, these communities have been under enormous pressure to increase the performance of high-need students. Taking advantage of the added flexibility provided by the state's 2010 education reform law, one-time resources available through Race to the Top, and support from all three state education departments, Gateway Cities have developed a data-driven approach to school improvement and many innovative new learning models.

As indicated by test scores, these efforts are producing tangible gains. While this improvement has been obscured by the significant growth in high-need student enrollment that these districts have absorbed over the last decade, controlling for these demographic changes, test scores have grown considerably (see text box, p.8). As detailed in the pages that follow, dynamic community-wide learning systems would position Gateway Cities to build on recent accomplishments and better serve high-need students.

Translating success into an educational experience that attracts middle-class families to Gateway City neighborhoods will be difficult, but two emerging trends brighten the prospects. First, the renewed appeal of urban living presents a genuine opportunity for midsize cities. With strong educational offerings, these communities can draw those looking for value, particularly families leaving larger high-cost cities as they enter their child-rearing years. Second, in sharp contrast to the past, evidence suggests that these parents will look harder at actual school quality and less at the racial and ethnic composition of schools.[8] To the extent that Gateway Cities can demonstrate that their education systems are performing, families are likely to see their diversity as an asset.

In this context, efforts to create high-quality learning systems will be a critical complement to the "transformative redevelopment" policies championed by Gateway City economic development leaders. Transformative redevelopment tools can repair

Crisscrossing the Commonwealth

Massachusetts law defines 26 Gateway Cities. A wide cross-section of leaders from these communities contributed to the development of this Vision. Fourteen of the cities (in bold) provided an especially large contribution, with mayors, superintendents, and community leaders engaging directly in the facilitated planning sessions.

Attleboro
Barnstable
Brockton
Chelsea
Chicopee
Everett
Fall River
Fitchburg
Haverhill
Holyoke
Lawrence
Leominster
Lowell
Lynn
Malden
Methuen
New Bedford
Peabody
Pittsfield
Quincy
Revere
Salem
Springfield
Taunton
Westfield
Worcester

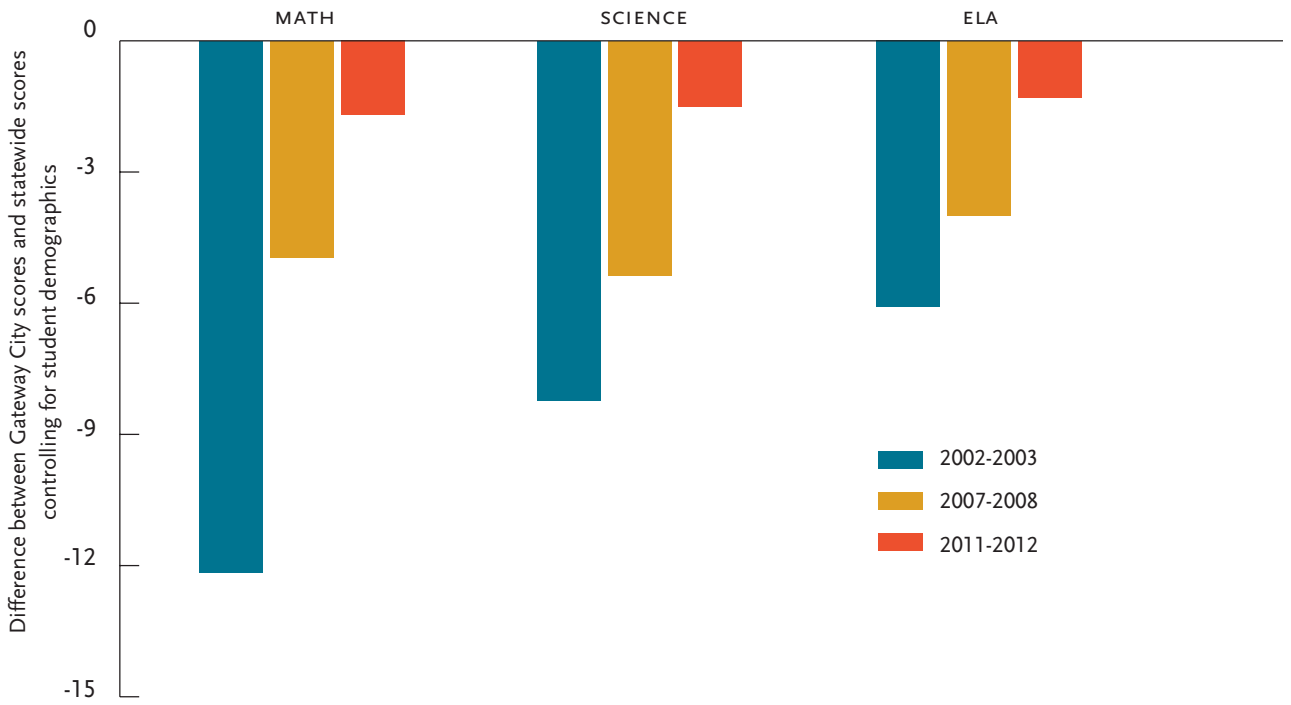
Closing the Achievement Gap

The new models and data-driven approach that Gateway City school leaders have adopted are narrowing the gap between the MCAS scores of Gateway City students and the scores for demographically similar peers in Massachusetts overall.

An apples-to-apples comparison controlling for race, family income, and language abilities shows that Gateway City students scored significantly lower than predicted on all three MCAS tests in 2003. By 2012, Gateway City students had closed this gap. On average, they are now scoring less than two points lower than their demographic attributes would predict.

And this method of adjusting scores based on a district's student characteristics lacks precision because the limited information in student files only give a very basic indication of socioeconomic status. If we include Census data for the community in a statistical model to account for other factors, such as family structure and the educational levels of parents, the small gap that remains between expected and actual performance for Gateway City students disappears entirely.

Gateway Cities have significantly narrowed the performance gap



Source: Analysis of DESE student-level data MCAS files performed by Cape Ann Economics

How to read this chart: We compared the MCAS score of each Gateway City student to the statewide average for students with the same demographic make-up (race/ethnicity, family income, language ability). The bars show these differentials averaged for all Gateway City students. A negative differential suggests Gateway City students are scoring lower, on average, than their peers. To show change over time, scores for earlier years are comparisons to the statewide average in 2011-2012. A 20-point range falls between each level (i.e., needs improvement, proficient, advanced) on the test, so the differentials for 2003 depicted in the figure below represent quite large margins.

the physical fabric of cities, replacing blight with attractive mixed-use projects. But the entire premise of transformative redevelopment is that these projects will in turn catalyze private investment in the surrounding area. In Gateway Cities, much of the activity stimulated by transformative projects will come in the form of residential development. This growth will be stunted if school quality is lagging.

Recognizing the need to couple a strong real estate development strategy with a strong education strategy is critical. Unlike Boston and other big cities that have transitioned from their industrial pasts without a dramatic overhaul of their education systems, the residential character of Gateway Cities makes school quality a prerequisite for stimulating significant reinvestment. (On average, these cities depend on residential property for more than two-thirds of their tax base; Boston, in contrast, gets only about one-third of its collection from residential property.)

THE ROAD FORWARD

At this watershed moment, when the direction of learning will determine both the strength of the Massachusetts economy and our ability to drive growth into the Commonwealth's urban centers, Gateway Cities are primed to lead the way. Together, they can advance the policy dialogue beyond the current conversation's focus on failing schools, which distracts from the true work at hand—bringing to scale models that represent a fundamental change in the way we support learning all across a community, not just in a handful of buildings.

Changing this frame will also create an opening to rethink the role of other sectors in education policy. For instance, while the critical link with housing is widely acknowledged, Massachusetts has no explicit school-centered neighborhood revitalization policy that coordinates capital spending on educational facilities with other public investments. In a discussion about strategies that can make learning systems an asset for growth and renewal, housing and other related policies will come to the fore.

With this Vision as a unifying frame of reference, Gateway City leaders can also engage in a more immediate conversation around specific investments. The Vision outlines policy priorities in four domains: early education, social and emotional growth, pathways to college and career, and support for newcomers. Among a number of action items, high-quality early education and expanded learning time will require significant new spending. Gateway Cities can join the growing chorus of those calling for investments in these areas with a Vision that outlines strategic investments, with state support growing only as programs demonstrate impact.

A Snapshot of the Vision

This Vision identifies a set of policies that would enable Gateway Cities to forge their many educational assets into dynamic community-wide learning systems that fuel local economic growth and increase the state's competitive edge. The Vision outlines four focal points for state policy development: early education, social-emotional growth, pathways to college and career, and support for newcomers. The Vision also highlights key metrics that Gateway Cities must develop and communicate to demonstrate success.

>> EXISTING ASSETS	>> SYSTEM BUILDING POLICIES	>> MEASURES OF SUCCESS
EARLY EDUCATION		
Strategic plans and community coalitions to build early literacy systems that position children for life-long learning	• Authorize funding to fill existing slots in high-quality centers • Increase funding for ELT elementary schools to support early literacy • Provide grants for birth-8 strategy	• % of students enrolling in kindergarten with quality pre-K experience • % of students scoring advanced or proficient on 3rd grade MCAS
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH		
Dense concentrations of regional hospitals, health centers, and nonprofits to weave evidence-based positive youth development models into the community fabric	• Increase the number of school-based health centers • Increase funding for out-of-school-time enrichment • Create "Centers of Excellence" Grant	• % of students participating in structured afterschool activities • % of students who report feeling safe and supported at school and in the community
PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER		
Local colleges and universities to provide early college experiences; a diverse set of employers and economic development organizations to offer work-based learning opportunities	• Increase funding for ELT middle schools with experiential learning • Create funding mechanisms for early college designs • Increase support for work-based learning	• % of students with work-based learning experience • % of students graduating with college credit • % of students completing post-secondary credential
NEWCOMERS		
The fastest growing segment of the state's workforce; linguistic diversity to benefit both native and non-native English speakers	• Expand Summer Enrichment Academics • Create funding mechanisms for early college designs	• # of students in two-way bilingual education • % First Language Not English students completing post-secondary credential