EMBARGOED DRAFT
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#1 FOR SOME

Opportunity & Achievement

IN MASSACHUSETTS

25 years after MERA, Black, Latino, and low-income students continue to have dramatically different experiences in Massachusetts schools than their White and higher-income peers — and these disparities have real consequences for students, their communities, and our state's economy and democracy. If Massachusetts truly wants to be No. 1, the next phase of educational improvement must focus on confronting and addressing these inequities.

At this pivotal time in Massachusetts education, we, the undersigned organizations representing the families, communities, and educators with the most at stake in educational decisions, come together to unequivocally state: **There is no excellence without equity**.

To truly be excellent, and to ensure the long-term health and vitality of our economy, our communities, and our civic society, Massachusetts must do dramatically better by students and families who have been undeserved for far too long.

As the data in this report make clear, underneath Massachusetts' high overall national rankings are glaring and persistent disparities in opportunity and achievement that separate low-income students and students of color from their peers. The fact is that 25 years after the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, Black, Latino, and low-income students continue to have vastly different experiences in Massachusetts schools than their White and higher-income peers — and these disparities have real consequences for students, their communities, and our Commonwealth's economy and democracy.

If Massachusetts truly wants to be No. 1, the next phase of educational improvement must focus on confronting and addressing these disparities. As a diverse group of equity advocates, we stand ready to tackle this challenge head on. And we stand ready to support educational leaders who are willing to do the same, and put pressure on those who aren't.

No. 1 for Some:
Opportunity and Achievement in Massachusetts

This year, Massachusetts celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA). Between statewide Leading the Nation events and celebrations in districts across the Commonwealth, the message from state leaders is clear: Massachusetts has the best education system in the country.

Indeed, Massachusetts does have a lot to celebrate. The Commonwealth has long been a leader when it comes to education: It opened the first public school in the United States in 1635. In 1851, it became the first to pass a compulsory education law. And with MERA, it was among the first to direct more funding to its highest-need districts, and to set rigorous expectations for what all students needed to know and be able to do.

Under MERA, the hard work of educators, students, and communities has paid off. Today, Massachusetts is widely acknowledged as the No. 1 state when it comes to education. It ranks first in the U.S. on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — a highly regarded measure of academic achievement. Its overall reading performance on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) places the state No. 1 in the world. And more high school graduates pass at least one Advanced Placement course in the Commonwealth than anywhere in the U.S.

But as we celebrate these successes, we must also reflect honestly on what we have not yet accomplished. Because underneath that No. 1 ranking are glaring and persistent disparities that separate low-income students and students of color from their peers. The fact remains that 25 years after MERA, Black, Latino, and low-income students continue to have dramatically different experiences in Massachusetts schools than their White and higher-income peers — and these disparities have real consequences for students, their communities, and our state's economy and democracy. If Massachusetts truly wants to be No. 1, the next phase of educational improvement must focus on confronting and addressing these inequities.

CHANGE BEGINS WITH AN HONEST LOOK AT THE DATA.

Consider NAEP, for example. Yes, Massachusetts has made significant gains since the late 1990s, both for students overall and for low-income students and students of color ***(Figure 1)***. And yes, today low-income students and students of color in Massachusetts perform better than similar students in most — and in some cases, all — other states. But is that really something to be satisfied with when our schools got less than 30 percent of Black and Latino students to grade level in reading in 2017? Or when the on-grade-level rate for students of color was less than half that for White students ***(Figure 2)***? Likewise, in eighth grade math, should we be content with our rankings when Massachusetts schools are getting just 28 percent of low-income students to grade-level — less than half the rate for their higher income peers ***(Figure 3)***?

Should we be satisfied when the level of education that Black and Latino students receive in Massachusetts is more similar to that of the average student in the lowest performing states than to that of their more privileged peers in the Commonwealth itself ***(Figure 4)***?

FIGURE 1 **National and Massachusetts' improvement on NAEP**

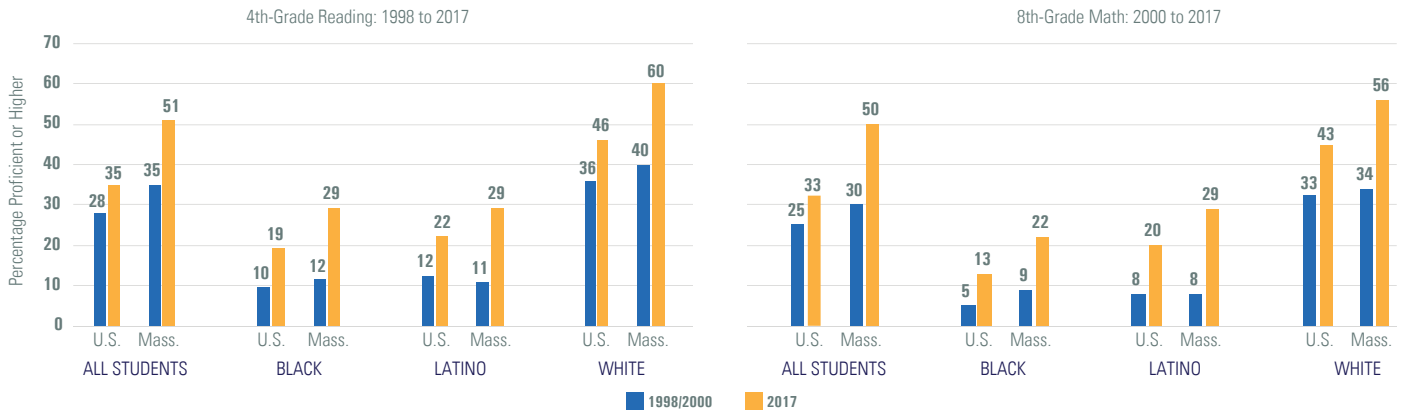

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FIGURE 2 **Massachusetts 4th-grade reading performance on NAEP by student group, 2017**

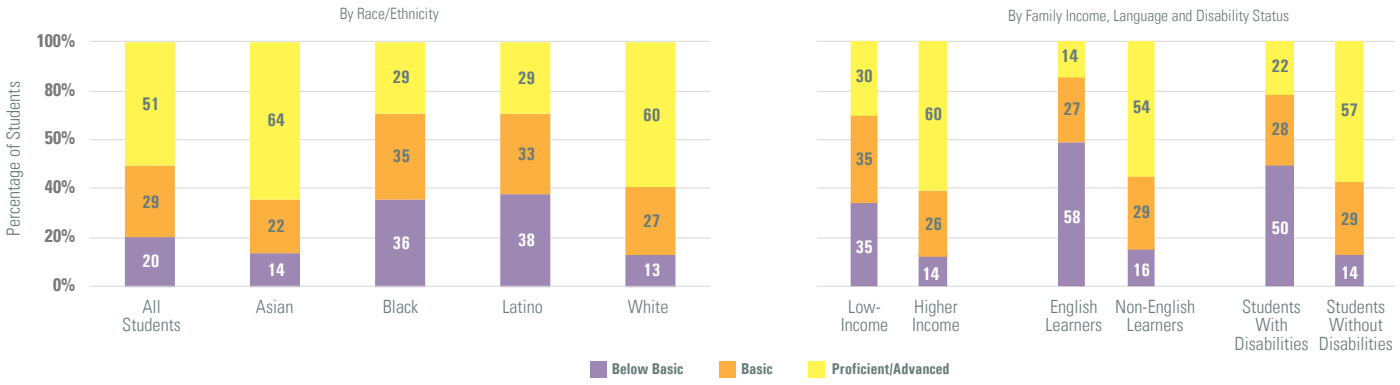
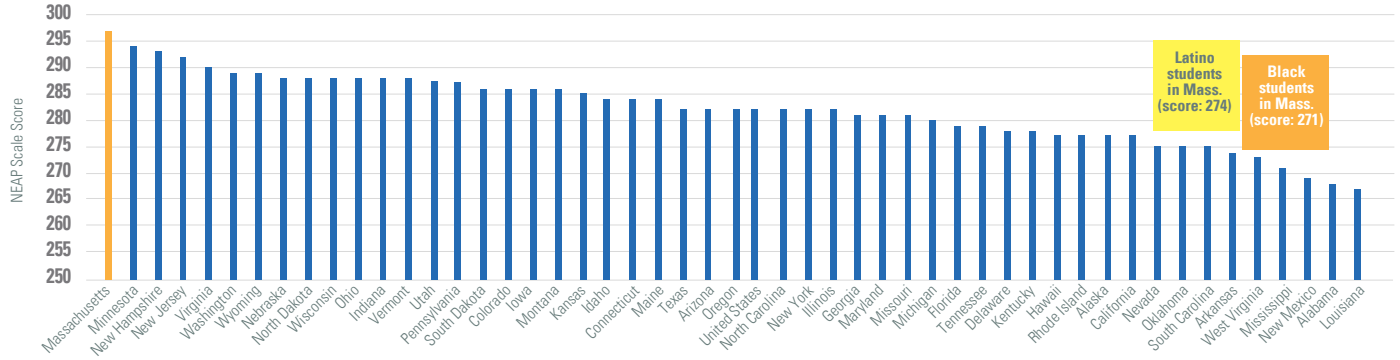


FIGURE 3 **Massachusetts 8th-grade math performance on NAEP by student group, 2017**

FIGURE 4 **8th-grade math NAEP results by state, all students, 2017**



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NAEP is far from the only measure that shows such disparities. Massachusetts' PISA results indicate that Black and Latino 15-year-olds in the Commonwealth score about two grade levels below their White peers.[1] Comparisons between Massachusetts and other PISA participants also underscore the vast differences in students' academic experiences in our state. If Massachusetts were a country, its overall PISA scores would place the state first among the 35 participating OECD nations. But its scores for Black and Latino students would place Massachusetts roughly seventh from the bottom of this list ***(Figure 5)***.

The state's own assessments reinforce these findings. According to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), fewer than one in three Black, Latino, or low-income students are reading on grade-level by the end of third grade — a devastating statistic, given that research shows that students who are not proficient readers by then are four times less likely to graduate high school.[2] In eighth grade, only 11 percent of English learners fully met grade-level expectations in math; nearly 40 percent did not meet them at all ***(Figure 6)***.

And despite progress over the last decade, graduation rates for low-income students, students of color, and English learners in Massachusetts aren't just lower than statewide averages, they are lower than graduation rates for similar students in other states. For example, based on the latest national data, more than 25 percent of the state's Latino students did not graduate high school in four years, a rate than placed Massachusetts 43rd among all states in 2016. For English learners, the state's graduation rate was 64 percent, placing Massachusetts 29th among all states ***(Figure 7)***.

More students graduate in five years. For example, of Latino ninth graders who started school in 2012, 77 percent graduated within five years, as compared to 73 percent within four. Of English learners who started high school in 2012, 71 percent received a diploma in five years, as compared to just 64 percent who graduated within four ***(Figure 8)***.

But too many students do not graduate at all. In the class of 2016, one of every eight Latino students and one of every seven English learners dropped out of high school altogether ***(Figure 9)***.

FIGURE 5 **PISA reading scores by participating OECD country, all students, 2015**

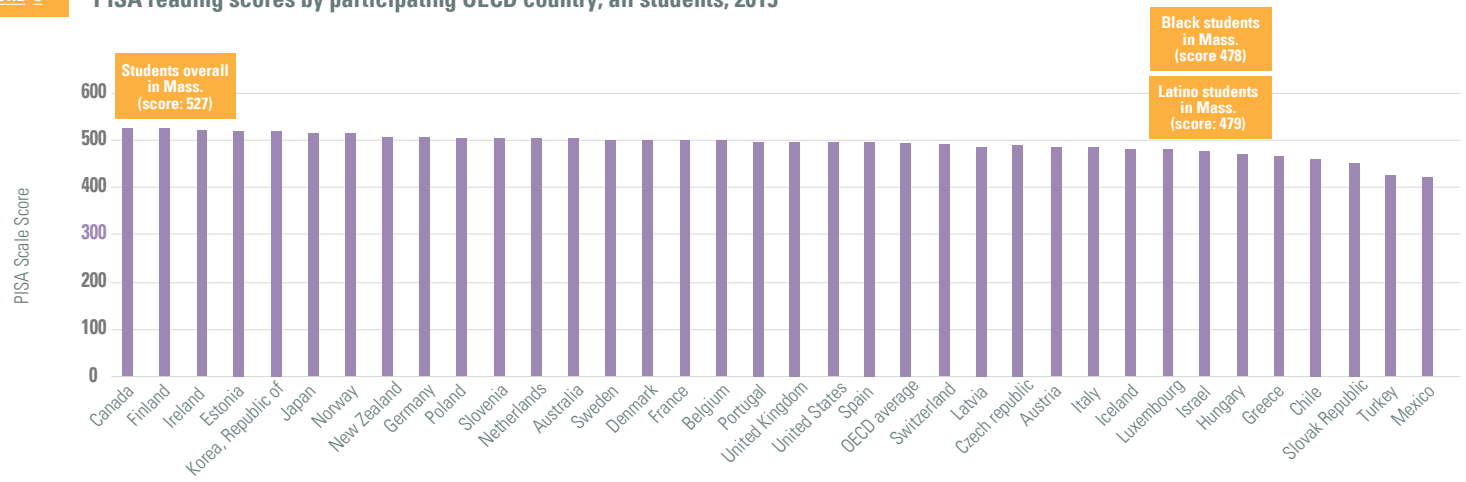

FIGURE 6 **Percent of 3rd graders meeting grade-level expectations in English Language Arts, 2017 Next-Gen MCAS**

Percent of 8th graders meeting grade-level expectations in math, 2017 Next-Gen MCAS

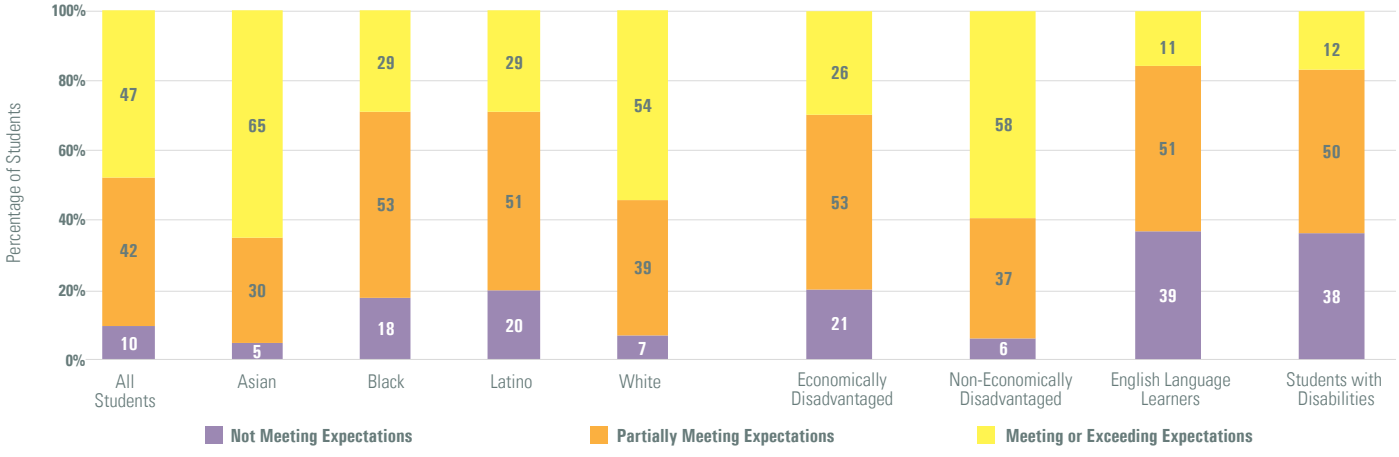

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FIGURE 7 **Massachusetts' 4-year high school graduation rates for the class of 2016 and national rankings**

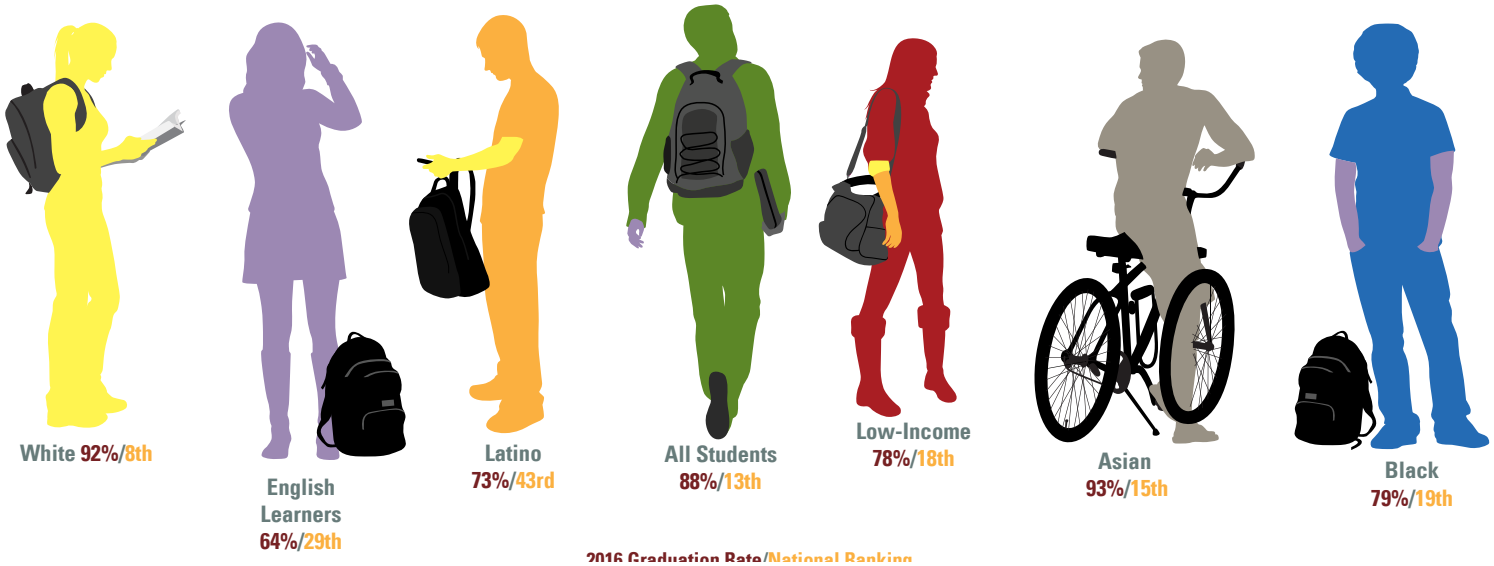

FIGURE 8 **4- and 5-year graduation rates: 2012 9th grade cohort**

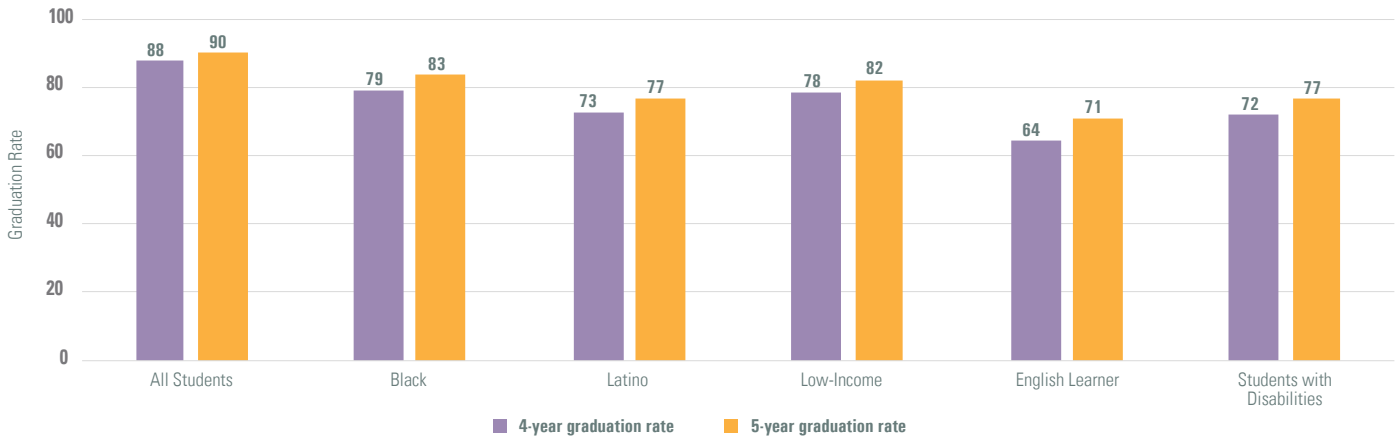

FIGURE 9

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Among those who did graduate, far too many were not prepared for postsecondary education. Less than one in three of Massachusetts' Black and Latino students who took the SAT scored at the college-ready level in reading and math ***(Figure 10)***.

And only 62 percent of Latino and 64 percent of low-income graduates enroll in college at all.[3] Students who do enroll often wind up having to take one or more remedial courses, classes that cost time and money but don't earn college credit. Over a third of Black students and a quarter of Latino students at state universities have to take at least one remedial course, and the rates are far higher in community colleges ***(Figure 11)***.

These additional barriers undoubtedly contribute to challenges with college completion. Only 10 percent of Black and Latino community college students in Massachusetts graduate in three years. Less than half of Black and Latino students attending four-year state universities graduate within six years, and UMass graduation rates aren't much better.[4]

THESE DISPARITIES IN OUTCOMES ARE THE DIRECT RESULT OF INEQUITIES IN OPPORTUNITY, BOTH OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

In Massachusetts, 15 percent of children under the age of 15 grow up below the federal poverty line, defined as an income of just over $24,000 for a family of four. While about 8 percent of White children grow up in poverty, 30 percent of Black children and 36 percent of Latino children do ***(Figure 12)***. Nearly 40 percent of students in Massachusetts have experienced trauma.[5] In 2016-2017, more than 20,000 Massachusetts children were homeless.[6] This unconscionable reality is the result of deliberate policy choices and must be reckoned with.

But educational inequities also have pervasive and systemic causes inside schools and districts that education leaders have a responsibility to confront and correct.

FIGURE 10 **Percent of SAT test-takers meeting college-readiness benchmarks in reading and math, 2017**

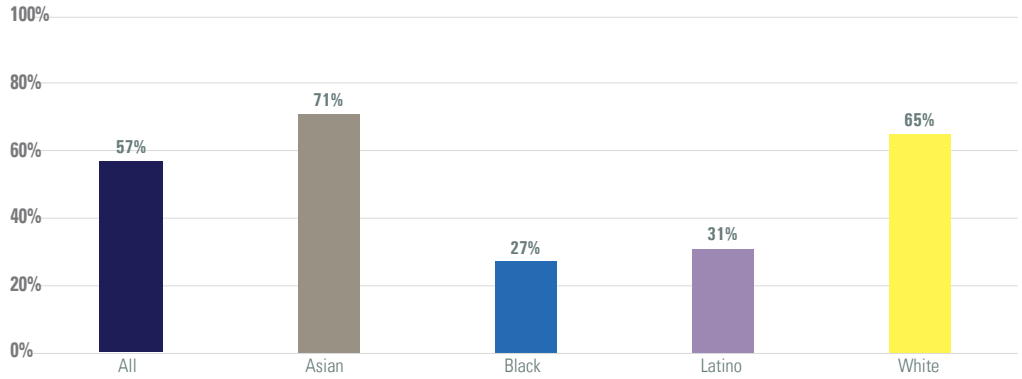

FIGURE 11 **Percent of first-year college students taking remedial courses**

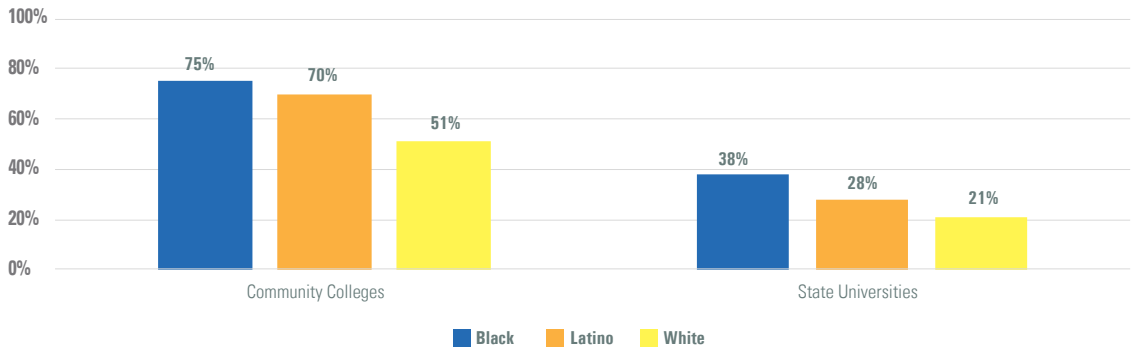

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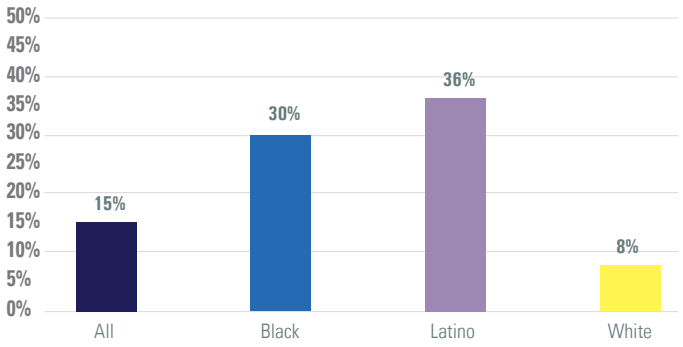
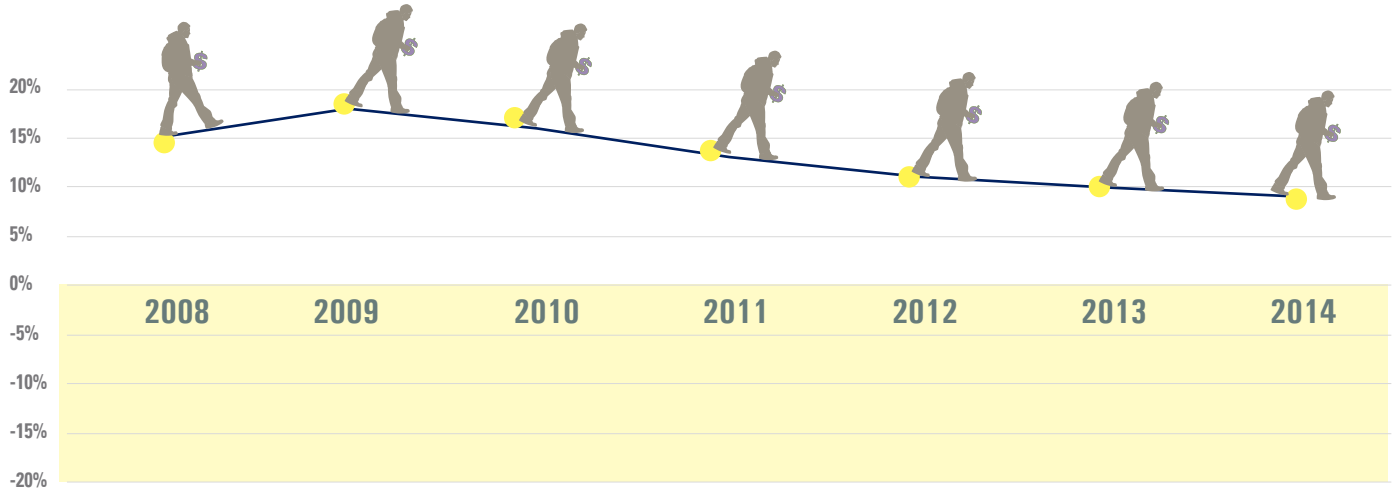
FIGURE 12 **Percent of children 15 and under growing up in poverty in Massachusetts**



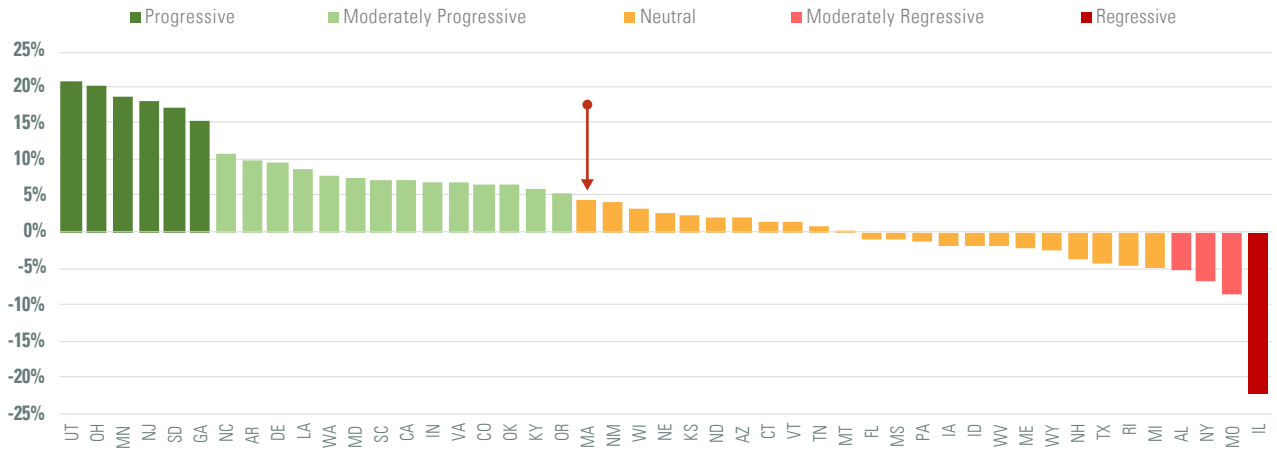
That starts with funding. MERA directed more state dollars to districts serving larger concentrations of low-income students, and for a number of years, Massachusetts was one of the most progressive states in terms of education funding.[7] But in recent years, Massachusetts' funding allocations have become less progressive. In 2008, high-poverty districts received about 15 percent more in state and local funds than low-poverty districts. But by 2014, high-poverty districts received only 9 percent more in state and local dollars ***(Figure 13)***. And in 2015, a slightly different analysis showed that high-poverty districts received roughly the same amount of state and local funding per student as low-poverty districts, removing Massachusetts from the list of even moderately progressive states ***(Figure 14)***.

FIGURE 13 **Difference in state and local funding per student between high-poverty and low-poverty districts in Massachusetts, 2008-2014**



READING THIS FIGURE: In 2009, high-poverty districts in Massachusetts received 18 percent more in state and local funding per student than low-poverty districts. In 2014, they received only 9 percent more.

FIGURE 14 **Gaps in state and local revenues per student between districts serving the most and the fewest students in poverty**



READING THIS FIGURE: In Massachusetts, the highest poverty districts receive 4 percent more in state and local funds per student than the lowest poverty districts. In states shaded in dark green, the highest poverty districts receive at least 15 percent more state and local funds than the lowest poverty districts; light green shading indicates that the highest poverty districts receive between 5 and 15 percent more. In states shaded in dark red, the highest poverty districts receive at least 15 percent less state and local funds than the lowest poverty districts; light red shading indicates that the highest poverty districts receive between 5 and 15 percent less. Orange shading indicates similar levels of funding for the highest and lowest poverty districts. States are ordered and classified as providing more or less funding to their highest poverty districts based on unrounded percentages.

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Of course, money is not the only thing that matters to education quality — but it is critical to remedying all sorts of other inequities in our schools. And in Massachusetts, low-income students and students of color get less of all sorts of resources that research (and common sense) tell us matter for student success.

These inequities begin early — before students reach the kindergarten door. High-quality early education is associated with a greater probability that a child will graduate from high school, earn a college degree, and secure a fulfilling career.[8] It has also been shown to lead to significant decreases in placement in special education and grade retention.[9] In Massachusetts, Latino and low-income students are less likely than their peers to be enrolled in early childhood education ***(Figure 15)***.

FIGURE 15 **Percent of Massachusetts 3- to 4-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education, by race/ethnicity and family income level, 2016**

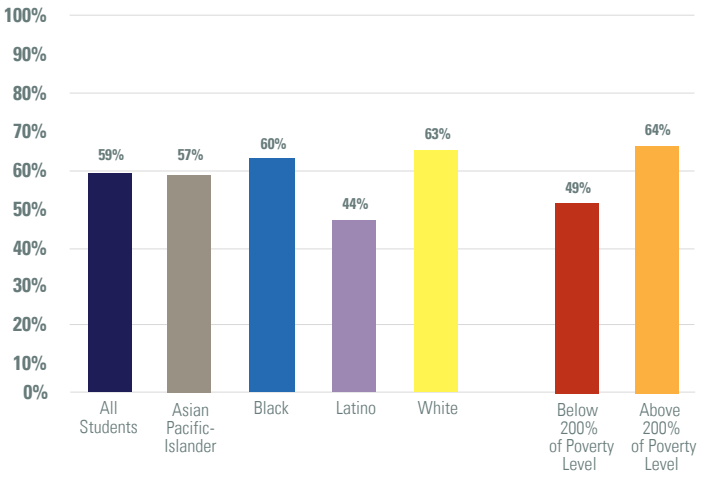
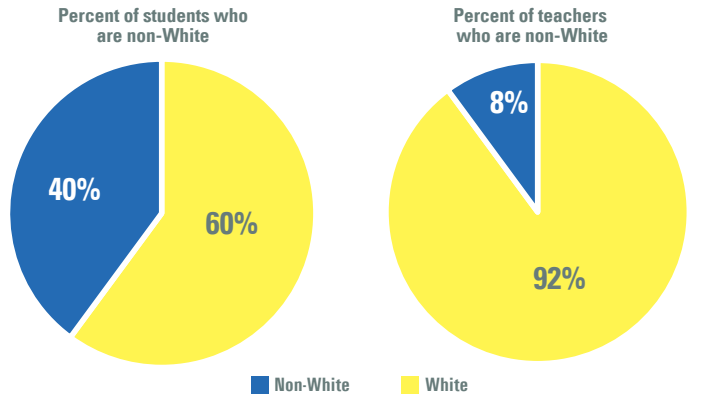


FIGURE 16 **Student and teacher demographics in Massachusetts**



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Research also shows that the quality of a student's teacher is one of the most important in-school factors for student success.[10] But on a range of measures of teacher quality, low-income students and students of color get less. Black and Latino students in Massachusetts are three times more likely than White students to be assigned to a teacher who lacks content expertise in the subject they teach.[11] A student in a high-poverty school in Massachusetts is more than three times as likely as a student in a low-poverty school to be assigned to a teacher who's rated "ineffective."[12]

The research is clear about the benefits of teacher diversity as well. Students of color who have a same race teacher are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on assessments, graduate from high school, and consider college.[13] For White students, diversity can reduce bias.[14] Yet too few Massachusetts students benefit from teacher diversity. While nearly 40 percent of the state's students are students of color, only 8 percent of teachers are non-White ***(Figure 16)***.

Access to rigorous coursework is another key contributor to academic success. According to one seminal study, "The academic intensity of the students' high school curriculum still counts more than anything else in pre-collegiate history in providing momentum toward completing a bachelor's degree." [15] Here, too, there are serious disparities in the Commonwealth.

MassCore is Massachusetts' recommended program of study for high school students. Completing this program of study means a student is more likely to meet admission requirements for Massachusetts' four-year public colleges and the University of Massachusetts.[16] By the end of high school, 81 percent of graduates complete MassCore.[17] But just 64 percent of Black graduates, 71 percent of Latino graduates, and 71 percent of low-income graduates do so ***(Figure 17)***.

Black, Latino, and low-income students are also underrepresented among students taking Advanced Placement exams — another indicator of access to rigorous classes. For example, Latino students comprise 18 percent of the high school population, but only 9 percent of AP exam takers ***(Figure 18)***.

In fact, the one thing low-income students and student of color regularly "get" more of is harsh, exclusionary discipline, such as out-of-school suspensions. Exclusionary discipline is associated with all kinds of negative consequences for students, including lower academic performance and higher rates of dropping out and involvement with the juvenile justice system.[18, 19] In Massachusetts, Latino students are more than twice as likely and Black students are three times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as White students ***(Figure 19)***.

FIGURE 17 **Percent of graduates completing the MassCore program, by student group, 2017**

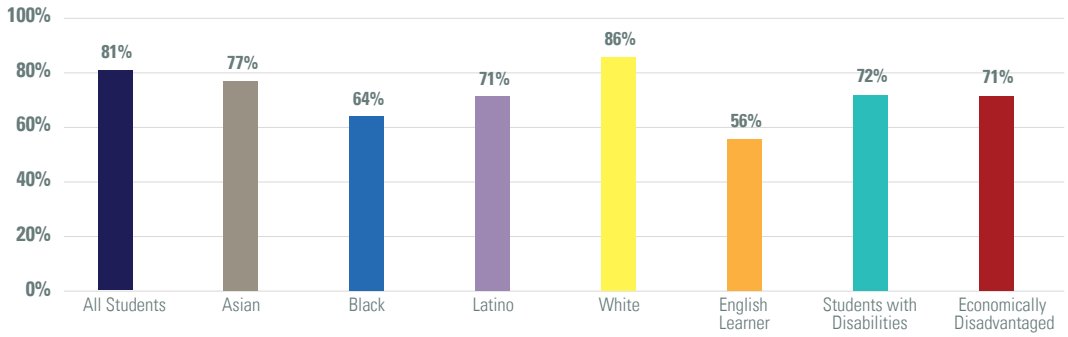


FIGURE 18 **Black and Latino students as a percent of high school students and AP test-takers, respectively, 2017**

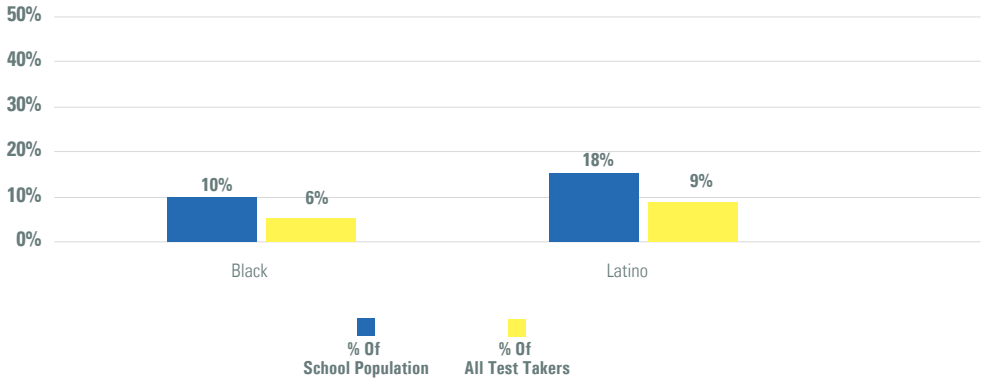
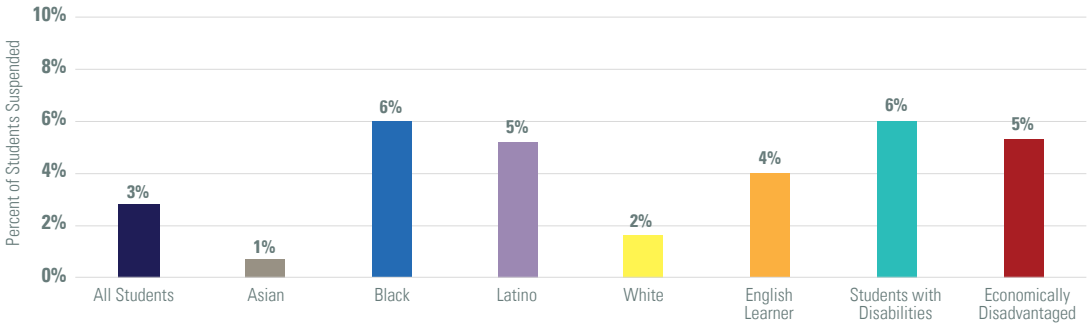


FIGURE 19 **Massachusetts out-of-school suspension rates, by student group, 2017**



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THESE DISPARITIES HAVE PROFOUND AND LASTING CONSEQUENCES FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS, FOR OUR ECONOMY, AND FOR OUR DEMOCRACY.

The relationship between educational attainment and economic well-being in Massachusetts is undeniable. In 2016, the median salary for an adult with a bachelor's degree in the state was more than $60,000. An adult with just a high school diploma stood to earn $35,000; a high school drop-out — just $25,700 ***(Figure 20)***.

What's more, there is a direct correlation between educational attainment and unemployment in the state. Among the largest cities, for example, those with the lowest percentages of adults with a bachelor's degree also have the highest unemployment rates ***(Figure 21)***.

These relationships matter not just for individual students, but for the Commonwealth's future. The population of Massachusetts is changing. Fifty years ago, 95 percent of Massachusetts residents were White.[20] Today, people of color make up 26 percent of the state's population.[21] In fact, Massachusetts is "one of six states in the United States that can attribute all of its population growth between 2000 and 2010 to the increase in its Latino population."[22]

The changes in the state's population are reflected in its schools. Just a year after MERA was enacted, the majority of the student population was White. Twenty-five years later, four out of every 10 students are students of color, with the Latino population more than doubling ***(Figure 22)***. These demographic shifts are likely to continue, meaning ever-greater diversity in Massachusetts schools. The imperative to serve all students well is clear.

FIGURE 20 **Massachusetts median earnings by educational level, population 25 and over, 2016**

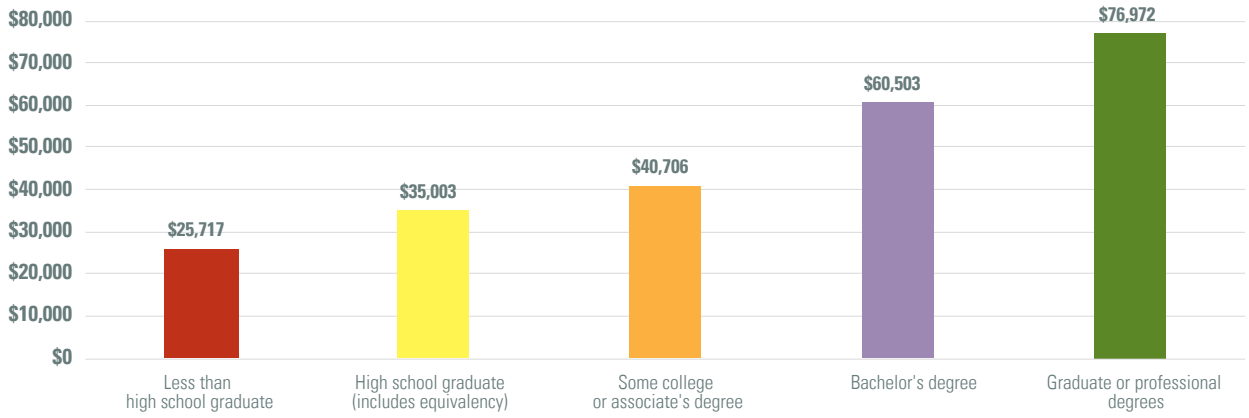

FIGURE 21 **Educational attainment and unemployment in 25 most populous cities in Massachusetts, 2016**

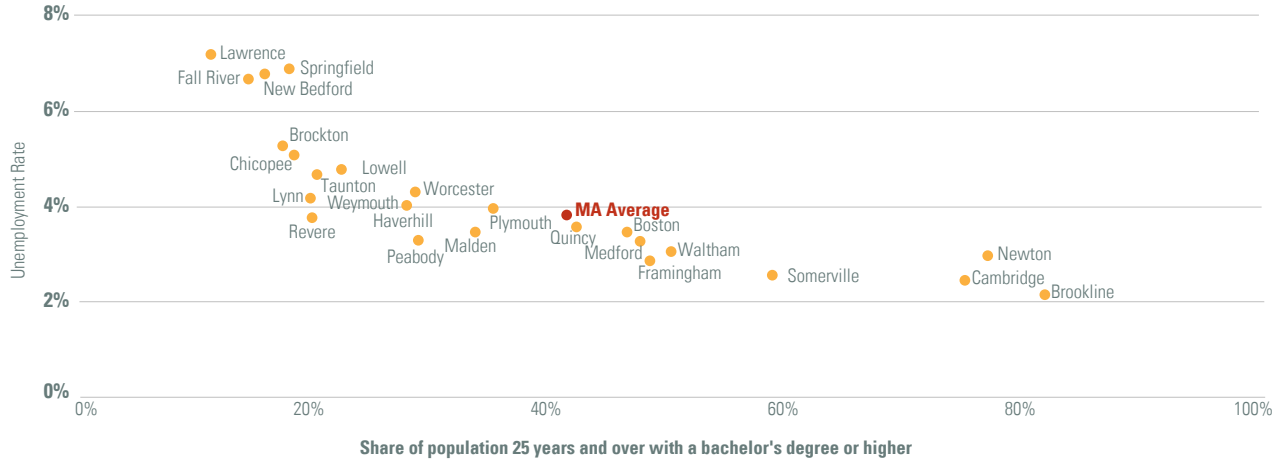

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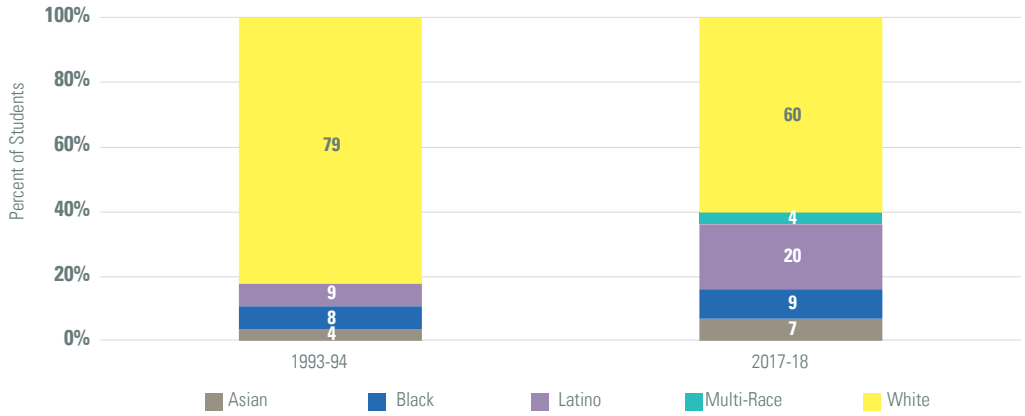
FIGURE 22 **Massachusetts student demographics in 1993-94 and 2017-18**



In both 1993-94 and 2017-18, about 0.2 percent of students in Massachusetts were Native

The Department of Higher Education (DHE) predicts that given the state education system's current performance and ongoing demographic changes, by 2022, the rate at which Massachusetts' young residents earn a degree will "pivot from growth to decline."[23] DHE also predicts that by 2025, the demand for young graduates with bachelors' degrees will far outstrip the share of degrees supplied by the state higher education system.[24]

And ensuring a quality education for the state's changing population matters far beyond the workforce. Education is correlated with all kinds of behaviors that are important to a healthy democratic society. Nationally, adults with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer in their communities and are more likely to vote. In 2016, only about one in three registered voters without a high school degree cast a ballot, compared to more than two in three registered voters with some college education.[25]

In other words, education is the foundation of the healthy, vibrant, diverse Massachusetts we aspire to. By systematically undeserving low-income students and students of color, we fall far short of that collective aspiration.

THERE IS NO EXCELLENCE WITHOUT EQUITY. TO TRULY BE EXCELLENT, WE HAVE TO DO DRAMATICALLY BETTER BY STUDENTS AND FAMILIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNDESERVED IN MASSACHUSETTS FOR FAR TOO LONG.

As long as disparities in opportunity to learn exist, there will be disparities in every outcomes we value as a state.

As long as there are disparities in outcomes, Massachusetts will only be No. 1 for some.

And as long as the population of low-income students and students of color continues to grow alongside the demands of our economy and society, being No. 1 for some isn't enough. It's no exaggeration to say that the future of the Commonwealth rests on how we choose to serve our state's low-income students and students of color.

The good news is, Massachusetts has a track record of identifying and effectively tackling challenges.

We must deploy that energy and those experiences in ways that increase opportunity and achievement for low-income students and students of color. This is the charge as Massachusetts embarks on the next generation of educational improvement.

As a diverse group of equity advocates, we stand ready to tackle this challenge head on. And we stand ready to support educational leaders who are willing to do the same, and put pressure on those who aren't.

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FIGURE DATA SOURCES AND NOTES

Figure 1: National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Data Explorer," 1998 and 2017, available at: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing.

Figure 2: National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Data Explorer," 2017, available at: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing.

Figure 3: National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Data Explorer," 2017, available at: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing.

Figure 4: National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, "NAEP Data Explorer," 2017, available at: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing.

Figure 5: National Center for Education Statistics, "All PISA 2015 Science, Reading, and Mathematics Literacy Tables and Figures for Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Puerto Rico," available at: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/pisa2015/xls/PISA2015_stateresults.xlsx.

Figure 6: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "2017 Next Generation MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade by Subject," available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2.aspx?linkid=25&orgcode=00000000&fycode=2017&orgtypecode=0&.

Figure 7: National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 1. Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by race/ethnicity and selected demographic characteristics for the United States, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia: School year 2015–16," available at: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2015-16.asp.

Figure 8: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Cohort 2017 Graduation Rates," available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/grad/grad_report.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0& and "Cohort 2016 Graduation Rates," available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/grad/grad_report.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&&fycode=2016.

Figure 9: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Cohort 2016 Graduation Rates," available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/grad/grad_report.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&.

Figure 10: The College Board, "2017 SAT Suite of Assessments Annual Report: Massachusetts," https://reports.collegeboard.org/pdf/2017-massachusetts-sat-suite-assessments-annual-report.pdf.

Figure 11: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, "The Degree Gap," 2016, available at: http://www.mass.edu/visionproject/degreegap.asp.

Figure 12: U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, Tables B17001, B17001B, B17001H, and B17001I for Massachusetts, 2016 ACS 5-year estimates, available at: https://factfinder.census.gov.

Figure 13: Education Trust analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau, "Public Elementary and Secondary Education Finance Data," 2005 to 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates by School District," 2008 to 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, "Common Core of Data Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey Data," 2007-08 to 2013-14; Lori Taylor, The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, "Extended NCES-CWI," 2005 to 2014; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Consumer Price Index — All Urban Consumers, U.S. City Average," 2005-2015. *Note: High-poverty districts are those with the highest percentages of students living below the poverty line that together serve roughly a quarter of all students in the state. Low-poverty districts are those with the lowest percentage of students in poverty that together serve about a quarter of all students.*

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