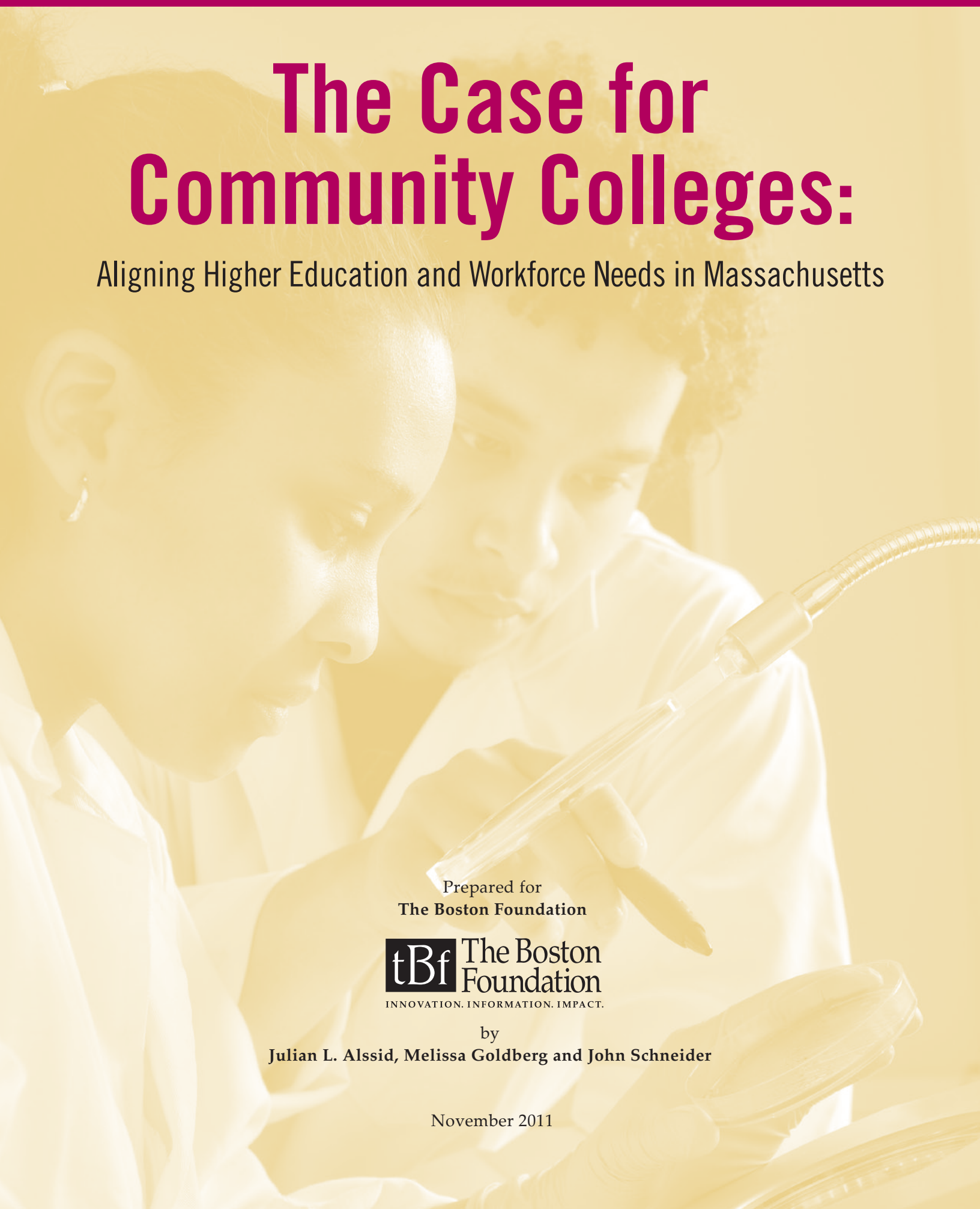
The Case for Community Colleges:

Aligning Higher Education and Workforce Needs in Massachusetts



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The Boston Foundation

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by
Julian L. Alssid, Melissa Goldberg and John Schneider

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About Julian L. Alssid

Julian Alssid, executive director of Workforce Strategy Center (WSC), is a nationally recognized expert in workforce development strategy and policy. He has more than 20 years of experience bringing together employers, workforce agencies, community colleges and clients to help move low-income people into high-wage jobs in key industries. WSC advises state and national leaders on developing effective education and employment policies that complement one another in order to better align public resources with employer demand.

About Melissa Goldberg

Melissa Goldberg, senior associate at WSC, has 20 years of workforce development experience. She has provided strategic planning assistance to education and workforce development leaders and practitioners in states, regions, the federal government and private foundations. She is co-author most recently of "What Works: BridgeConnect Stories from the Field," "Building a Higher Skilled Workforce: Results and Implications of the BridgeConnect National Survey," and "Supporting the Education Pipeline: A Business Engagement Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations."

About John Schneider

John Schneider directs MassINC's policy, civic affairs and public outreach programs and initiatives. His extensive policy background includes groundbreaking work in public education reform, workforce development and urban revitalization, including MassINC's New Skills for a New Economy and Gateway Cities programs. Before joining MassINC, Mr. Schneider directed a regional planning and economic development partnership within the Massachusetts I-90 and I-495 corridors.

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Julian L. Alssid and **Melissa Goldberg**, **Workforce Strategy Center**
John Schneider, **MassINC**

Additional Editorial Contributions from Boston Foundation Staff:

Jill Lacey Griffin
Barbara Hindley
Keith Mahoney
Mary Jo Meisner
Elizabeth Pauley
Timothy Regele
Daniel Sherman
Nahir Torres

About This Report

This report was commissioned by the Boston Foundation in response to a continuing and growing concern about the mismatch between the middle-skilled jobs that are going unfilled in the Massachusetts economy and the opportunities offered by higher education to prepare workers to fill these needs—with a particular focus on community colleges.

The Foundation asked two organizations to develop this report: Workforce Strategy Center (WSC), a nationally recognized expert in workforce strategy and policy; and MassINC, an independent, non-partisan think tank and research group. The authors are Julian Alssid, executive director of WSC; Melissa Goldberg, senior associate at WSC; and John Schneider, director of MassINC's policy and civic affairs programs, with an extensive background in workforce issues and programs.

The project included a brief, top-of-the-line review of the reports and initiatives already tackling this issue, as well as a series of interviews and focus groups with Massachusetts stakeholders—and the development of a series of recommendations for moving forward.

The goal was to contribute to the momentum that is already building in the Commonwealth to strengthen the existing system of community colleges so that they are better positioned to fill the gap between the needs of employers in today's knowledge economy and the workers being trained to fill those jobs.

The 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges

Berkshire Community College
Bristol Community College
Bunker Hill Community College
Cape Cod Community College
Greenfield Community College
Holyoke Community College
Massachusetts Bay Community College
Massasoit Community College
Middlesex Community College
Mount Wachusett Community College
Northern Essex Community College
North Shore Community College
Quinsigamond Community College
Roxbury Community College
Springfield Technical Community College

Stakeholders Interviewed and Consulted with for This Report

Industry Groups

Health Care
Joanne Pokaski, Director of Workforce Development, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Lisa Zankman, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Constance Raleigh, formerly Workforce Development Manager, Boston Medical Center
Diane Loud, Organizational Effectiveness Specialist, Boston Medical Center
Mary Jane Ryan, Workforce Development Manager, Partners HealthCare
Karen Schoch, Manager, Workforce Development & Training Operations, Children's Hospital

Early Education
Mary Reed, Founder and President, Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children

Information Technology
James Rooney, Vice President, Mass. High Tech Council

Financial Services/Business
Richard Curtis, Vice President of Staffing and University Relations, State Street
Bob Caty, Program Manager (Campus Program), Bank of America
Alicia Sasser Modestino, Senior Economist, New England Public Policy Center,
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
André Mayer, Senior Vice President, Communications & Research,
Associated Industries of Massachusetts
Binkley Shorts, Board Member, North Shore Community College
Kevin Doyle, Principal, Green Economy
Maureen Huffam, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, Conservation Services Group
Lance Hartford, Executive Director, Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation
Robert Ross, BioTeach Program Director, Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation

Health Technologies
Ray Campbell, Executive Director, Massachusetts Health Data Consortium
Claritza Abreu, Assistant Commissioner and Chief Information Officer,
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

SkillWorks Partnerships Participants

Loh-Sze Leung, Director, SkillWorks
Ruthie Liberman, Vice President of Public Policy, Crittenton Women's Union
Kira Khazatsky, Director of Healthcare Partnerships, Healthcare Training Institute,
Jewish Vocational Services
Devon Winey, Senior Associate, Mt. Auburn Associates
Casey Recupero, Executive Director, Year Up Boston
Sunny Schwartz, Deputy Director, Asian American Civic Association
Claire Shepherd, Director, Action for Boston Community Development
Gary Kaplan, Executive Director, JFYNetworks
Sandy Goodman, Director of the New England College Transition Project,
National College Transition Network of World Education

City/State Participants

Linda Kowalcky, Deputy Director, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Richard Kazis, Senior Vice President, Jobs for the Future
Francesca Purcell, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner for Academic and P-16 Policy, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
David Cedrone, Associate Commissioner for Economic and Workforce Development, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
Beth Seigel, President and Co-founder, Mt. Auburn Associates
Jennie Williamson, Policy Analyst, Joint Committee on Education
Diana Wogan, Research Director, Joint Committee on Education

Community College Executives

Wayne Burton, President, North Shore Community College
Carole Cowan, President, Middlesex Community College
Mary Fifield, President, Bunker Hill Community College
Terence Gomes, President, Roxbury Community College
Charles Wall, President, Massasoit Community College
Paul Raverta, President, Berkshire Community College
Bill Hart, Executive Director, Massachusetts Community College Executive Office

Individual Meetings

Richard Freeland, Commissioner of Higher Education for Massachusetts
Jonathan Keller, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner for Research, Planning, and Information Systems, Research and Planning, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
Anne Serino, ABE Director, Massachusetts Department of Education
Conny Doty, Director, Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services
Bernard Fulp, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, GoBiz Solutions
Gerald Chertavian, Founder and CEO, Year Up
Jim Klocke, Executive Vice President, Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
Erin Trabucco, Policy Advisor, Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
Richard Lord, President and Chief Executive Officer, Associated Industries of Massachusetts
JD Chesloff, Director of Public Policy, Massachusetts Business Roundtable
Chris Kealey, Deputy Director, Massachusetts Business Roundtable
Michael Thomas, President and CEO, New England Board of Higher Education
Dan O'Connell, President, Massachusetts Competitive Partnership

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I.

Introduction:

The Economic Imperative

In 2010, President Barack Obama set a national goal of increasing the number of community college degrees and certificates by 5 million over the next decade.[1] In his speech to kick off the White House Summit on Community Colleges, the President said that community colleges will play a crucial role in training American workers to compete in the global economy.[2]

"In the coming years," he added, "jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs—or keep those jobs on our shores—without the training offered by community colleges."[3]

A 2010 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston summarized the challenge facing America in this way:

> "The structure of the U.S. economy has changed dramatically over the past few decades, leading to an increase in the demand for more highly educated workers. The reduced role of the manufacturing sector, the increased importance of the professional service and knowledge sectors, advancements in technology, and the spread of globalization are evidence that the ways in which we 'do work' have fundamentally changed."[4]

Throughout the country, policymakers also have been concerned about the fast pace at which new industries are being created and new positions that do not fit into current classifications of occupations. The National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices addressed these questions in a March 2011 report, *Degrees for What Jobs: Raising Expectations for Universities and Colleges in a Global Economy.*

The report cited national surveys showing that 40 percent of the college graduates available to employers do not have the necessary applied skills to meet their needs, and that nearly one-third of manufacturing companies are suffering from some level of skills shortages. In the future, the report estimates that the country will need an additional 3 million postsecondary degrees by 2018, further exacerbating the existing skills gap. The report also cites a study from the Georgetown University Council on Competiveness: Center for Education and the Workforce that shows that in 1973, 29 percent of jobs in the United States required education beyond high school, a figure that rose to 56 percent in 1992 and is projected to grow to 62 percent by 2018. At the same time, the percentage of the adult population, ages 25-64, with up to a two-year degree has declined from 51 percent to 48 percent in the period from 1997 to 2008. This is the first time that a generation of Americans has attained the same or less education than their parents' generation.

The NGA report goes on to identify five strategies adopted by pioneering states that align postsecondary education with economic goals. While the strategies are not limited to community colleges, they do reflect a growing national concern about the need for higher education to integrate economic goals into their missions. The strategies include: setting clear expectations for education's role in economic development; emphasizing rigorous use of labor and market data and other sources to define goals and priorities; encouraging employer input in higher education; requiring that public education institutions collect and publicly report on their impact on students' employment outcomes; and emphasizing performance as an essential factor in funding.

The Obama administration is calling for community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates by 2020 to meet the economic needs of the country. In July of 2009, the President proposed the American Graduation Initiative to invest in community colleges to provide skills training for American workers, with $2 billion in funding over four years to help community colleges and other institutions develop, improve, and provide education and training, suitable for workers who are eligible for trade adjustment assistance. The initiative, housed at the Department of Labor and implemented in close cooperation with the Department of Education, would encourage the nation's community colleges to: build partnerships with businesses to create career pathways; create educational partnerships to expand offerings and promote credit transfer; teach basic skills to accelerate students' progress and integrate developmental classes; develop online courses; and meet student needs through services to encourage college completion and career planning.

Massachusetts at a Crossroads

The national jobs challenge, as articulated by President Obama, numerous economists and studies, has been playing out in Massachusetts for more than a decade now. Since 1999, the Commonwealth has led the nation in transitioning to a knowledge-based economy.[5] The location of hundreds of life sciences and technology firms, world-class colleges and universities, and an infusion of venture capital have transformed the Commonwealth's economy, and helped it to weather the current economic downturn better than most other states.

Massachusetts has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation and has added more jobs throughout the recession than most states. However, this transition has not benefited everyone. Rather, as blue-collar jobs continue their long decline, it is leaving far too many workers on the sidelines. There are great rewards for those with the requisite levels of education and skills—and far fewer options for everyone else, as the economy becomes more and more highly specialized.

While traditional jobs are disappearing, the gap between the needs of the knowledge economy and the educational attainment of the state's residents is growing every year. The recession has been especially tough on those with less than a high school diploma, leading to unemployment rates that are four times greater than those of college graduates.[6] Already there are regions of

Massachusetts where low rates of educational attainment have exacerbated high unemployment levels and stalled economic recovery.[7]

According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development:

> This ongoing trend...will play a significant role in shaping job growth through 2016. Jobs will continue to exist for workers at all levels of education and training, but education requirements will increase and change the skill content in many occupations.[8]

Adding to the sense of urgency about the need for middle-skilled workers is the fact that the Commonwealth is actually losing workers. From 2000 to 2005, Massachusetts was the only state in New England that did not experience growth in its labor force.[9]

Massachusetts is known internationally for its rich mix of public and private colleges and universities, but far too many of the Commonwealth's workers still lack the skills needed to fill the job vacancies that exist in their own communities. And, while the New England region as a whole has led the nation in terms of increasing its highly-skilled workforce, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston argues that "it has consistently performed below average" compared to other regions in creating a workforce that has completed some college or an associate degree.[10]

A projection of the total job openings in Massachusetts—by skill level for the 10-year period from 2006 through 2016—shows that three out of every four job openings in Massachusetts will require the completion of some level of postsecondary education.[11] More specifically, 38 percent will require *more* than a high school diploma but *less* than a four-year degree—virtually the same percentage of jobs that will require a four-year college degree, at 39 percent. Only 23 percent of jobs will be available to those with only a high school diploma or less.

Recent statistics suggest that the reality of the need for middle-skilled workers in Massachusetts may be even more dramatic than these projections. In 2008, jobs that required more than a high school diploma, but not necessarily a four-year degree, represented almost half, or 45 percent, of the state's job base. At the same time, only 32 percent of the state's workers were deemed likely to have the appropriate training for these jobs.

The personal ramifications of these trends for the residents of the Commonwealth are devastating. But, as President Obama indicated in his comments at the White House Summit, a powerful solution can be found in this country's community colleges. In Massachusetts, attaining a degree from a community college and qualifying for one of these middle-skill jobs can transform the lives of workers and their families.

Graduating from a Massachusetts community college more than doubles full-time annual earnings potential, from $21,200 to $42,600—adding up to gains of $330,000 over the course of a working life.[12] And these graduates go on to make not only personal but financial contributions

to the Commonwealth. Nine out of ten community college students live and work in Massachusetts after graduating, contributing to the tax base and strengthening their community's workforce and vitality.[13]

The economic imperative for aligning the workforce needs of Massachusetts with the needs of students attending community colleges is powerful and growing. Massachusetts is at a crossroads in its capacity to compete—and in the ability of its residents to fully participate in the current economy and the rewards that employment brings. For the Commonwealth to flourish going forward, a high priority must be placed on training the workforce that is needed by the industries that are driving the Massachusetts economy. That responsibility falls squarely on the Commonwealth's public higher education system, most predominately its 15 community colleges.

The purpose of this report is not to contribute new data. Rather it relies on and refers to previous studies that have been conducted about community colleges nationally and in Massachusetts, including a Boston Foundation Understanding Boston report, called *Massachusetts Community Colleges: The Potential for Improving College Attainment*, by Mary Lassen. The goal here is to create momentum around a new effort to align the education and training that takes place in the Commonwealth's community colleges with the very real needs of the state's and region's economy.

II.

The Community College Challenge

Community colleges have a number of characteristics that make them highly effective economic development engines with the potential to play a central role in preparing the workforce that Massachusetts needs. Their open-door policy makes them available to students of all educational backgrounds. Their tuition rates are often much lower than their four-year and/or private counterparts. And they are flexible enough to develop and offer programs much more quickly than four-year colleges, allowing for nimble adjustments to the changes in the marketplace—an asset that serves both employers and students.[14]

In Massachusetts, community colleges are attracting and serving an increasingly diverse population—one that reflects the growing diversity of the state's population. In the fall of 2009, ethnic minorities made up 32 percent of the student populations at community colleges.[15]

Community college students are also older than those attending private colleges. More than one-half of the population is 25 years or older—and most students are the first in their families to pursue higher education.[16] Of those enrolled, 35 percent are half-time students, and more than half of those students are age 25 or older—with one in six being over 40 years old.[17] Many students also are low-income: community college students in Massachusetts receive $34 million in annual Pell grants, which are need-based grants to low-income students seeking higher education. Among community college students 18.8 percent are Pell grant recipients.[18]

During the 2009 academic year, the 15 Massachusetts community colleges served more than 127,000 students in credit courses[19] and an additional 82,000 in non-credit workforce programs.[20] But not all of those students thrive.

Overall, graduation rates for Massachusetts community colleges are lower than the national average. The 2007–2008 graduation rate for first-time, full-time students completing a certificate or degree within 150 percent of normal program time was 16 percent (as reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS), compared to 22 percent nationally.[21] The picture is even worse for students in *Boston's* community colleges—only 14.2 percent earned a degree or credential six years after entering.

Graduation rates, however, don't fully reflect the complexity of the challenge confronting community colleges. As higher education and training providers, community colleges attempt to respond to a wide range of student goals and a number of different industries that need employees at a wide variety of different skill levels.

And, while the need for a skilled workforce has grown exponentially in recent years—and enrollment in community colleges has increased—state support for these important institutions has experienced deep cuts. From 2004 to 2009, full time equivalent (FTE) enrollment in public

higher education in Massachusetts increased by 11.2 percent.[22] During the same period, higher education appropriations for each FTE student have decreased by 13.3 percent.[23]

According to a 2008 MassINC report, called *Point of Reckoning: Two Decades of State Budget Trends*, Massachusetts state spending on public higher education fell by 25 percent from 1987 to 2006.[24] Over the years, public higher education has received more severe cuts than many other components of the state budget, forcing community college students to pay higher tuitions and fees.

Another MassINC study, *Paying for College: The Rising Cost of Higher Education*, reported that the average cost of attending a community college in Massachusetts was 59 percent higher than the national average.[25] In 2006, the share of family income required to cover the cost of community college in New England was 16.6 percent, compared with 12.7 percent nationally.

High costs and unmet financial support for community college students create significant barriers to enrollment and completion. And the many students who borrow money to pay for a community college education, but fail to graduate, must still pay off student loans while continuing to be at an educational disadvantage in the labor market.

Even with the growing workforce needs that have existed for more than a decade now, Massachusetts, by law, does not provide state funding to support non-credit continuing education or programs. And developmental, or remedial, education—which is often necessary for students—is considered a credit program for purposes of state funding but does not provide college-level credits toward graduation. This creates serious barriers for part-time and working students who are unable to participate in a regular academic schedule.

In addition, unlike states with community college systems that are focused primarily, or even solely, on meeting the workforce needs of their states, Massachusetts community colleges have a very broad mission statement, which reflects the wide ranging and diverse roles they are attempting to play in higher education.

This is the current mission for the Commonwealth's community colleges:

- The 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges offer open access to high quality, affordable academic programs, including associate degree and certificate programs. They are committed to excellence in teaching and learning and provide academic preparation for transfer to four-year institutions, career preparation for entry into high-demand occupational fields, developmental coursework, and lifelong learning opportunities.

- Community colleges have a special responsibility for workforce development and through partnerships with business and industry, provide job training, retraining, certification, and skills improvement. In addition, they assume primary responsibility,

in the public system, for offering developmental courses, programs, and other educational services for individuals who seek to develop the skills needed to pursue college-level study or enter the workforce.

- Rooted in their communities, the colleges serve as community leaders, identifying opportunities and solutions to community problems and contributing to the region's intellectual, cultural, and economic development. They collaborate with elementary and secondary education and work to ensure a smooth transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Through partnerships with baccalaureate institutions, they help to promote an efficient system of public higher education.

- The community colleges offer an environment where the ideas and contributions of all students are respected. Academic and personal support services are provided to ensure that all students have an opportunity to achieve academic and career success. No eligible student shall be deprived of the opportunity for a community college education in Massachusetts because of an inability to pay tuition and fees.

Governance

It is illuminating to study the oversight and administration of community colleges across the country in order to evaluate the Massachusetts system. Governance of community colleges nationally follows two primary patterns: 1) centralized systems that are run by the state, which provides funding to the colleges based on various criteria and measures; and 2) decentralized systems of independently run colleges with only basic state reporting requirements. In centralized systems, the state typically provides leadership and management in areas such as budgeting, legislative relations, academic and transfer oversight and research.

States with community colleges that are known to be highly successful workforce and economic development engines—including Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia and Washington—all operate through strong centralized, state-run community college systems that are governed separately from other higher education systems. This singular focus allows these systems to advocate for effective policies that can strengthen the ability of community colleges to align their programming with each state's workforce needs.

The Massachusetts community college system is decentralized. The Governor appoints a Secretary of Education to oversee the Executive Office of Education, which is responsible for analyzing and presenting the goals, needs, and requirements of all public education in the Commonwealth, from K-12 through higher education and the University of Massachusetts system.[26]

The Governor also appoints a Commissioner of Higher Education to oversee the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE), a statutorily-created agency that provides overall

coordination and broad policy development for all of the community colleges in the Commonwealth—as well as the University of Massachusetts and the nine other state universities. The BHE submits recommended candidates for the Commissioner of Higher Education to the Secretary of Education, who must approve the candidate. While the Secretary may decline to appoint a candidate, he/she cannot appoint a Commissioner that is *not* submitted by the BHE. Once appointed, the Commissioner reports to the BHE, not the Secretary of Education, and can only be removed by a majority vote of BHE members.

The BHE is responsible "for providing overall direction to public higher education in Massachusetts and helping to shape state-level policies that maximize the benefits of higher education to the Commonwealth and its citizens."[27] Its core responsibilities are to oversee: academic policy and program approval; financial aid; fiscal and capital planning; research and performance measurement; workforce development; and the Commonwealth's Optional Retirement Program."[28]

However, neither the BHE nor the Executive Office of Education has direct authority over the 15 community colleges themselves. Unlike the five-campus University of Massachusetts system, each community college has its own, independent Board of Trustees, which is responsible for "the administrative management of personnel, staff services, and general business of the institution under its authority."[29]

The Board of each community college is responsible for all staff decisions, including the hiring of the President of the college—but it can delegate its statutory authority to the President. These Boards consist of eleven members, appointed by the Governor, with the only restrictions being that one member should be a student, one an alumnus of the institution, and one elected by the alumni association of the institution.[30]

The current governing system for community colleges has been in place for some 30 years. Prior to 1980, community college governance was the responsibility of the Massachusetts Board of Regional Community Colleges. Each community college had a local advisory board, but authority for community college outcomes was vested in one central board with responsibility for the community college system. But governance reforms during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s moved Massachusetts away from a centralized authority for community colleges, vesting more decision-making responsibility in local boards for each of the community colleges and state universities.

In 1991, legislation established the basic framework for the governance system as it exists today. A state-level board (at the time named the Massachusetts Higher Education Coordinating Council) was charged with policy and planning responsibilities, while operational decision-making was decentralized to local boards. This was a significant change, best summarized in the Council's 1994 report:

> "Instead of retaining significant responsibility for governing Massachusetts' 15 community colleges, 9 state colleges, and the 5 campuses of the University of Massachusetts in the hands of a single, statewide board or office of government, the Legislature chose to vest the operational authority for the management of these institutions in a single Board of Trustees for the University and local Boards for each state and community college."[31]

During the late 1990s, the BHE adopted a "carrot and stick" approach to governance, establishing system-wide admission standards, conducting academic program reviews, developing a performance measurement program, and using incentive funding to support BHE priorities. An honors college was established at UMass Amherst, called Commonwealth College, and serious consideration was given to establishing charter colleges. This period of governance has been characterized by observers of the community college system in Massachusetts as "activist." The result was that, by the late 1990s, the public perception was that "higher education was working more efficiently and effectively at all levels."[32]

Funding

The independence of the 15 community colleges in Massachusetts is not merely a function of their governance structure—it is reinforced by the ways in which the schools are funded. The current funding for community colleges consists of 67 percent from direct appropriations from the Legislature, 19 percent from tuition and fees, 9 percent from federal financial aid, and 4 percent from grants and contracts.[33]

The 67 percent from the Legislature is comprised of 15 separate line items in the state budget, one for each community college. These line items are subject to revision each fiscal year but, unlike funding allocated to elementary school districts through the Executive Office of Education, there is no foundation or formula for these appropriations. Like other items in the state budget, the funding is based on historic levels—and other measures, such as square footage of facilities—that do not acknowledge changes in the climate within which the community college system operates or the needs of students or employers. Funding also can vary during periods of fiscal instability for the Commonwealth or due to the effectiveness of the colleges' efforts to lobby the Legislature.

Because the Massachusetts model lumps community colleges together with all of its public higher education institutions, there is no singular focus on community college oversight, advocacy and funding. This is a challenge for stakeholders wanting to improve community college outcomes and strengthen links to the workforce system. In addition, Massachusetts policy around workforce and job training is fragmented, overseen by three different governing boards: the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. With so many interests represented, achieving consensus about how to develop policy, let alone implement it, is extremely hard to accomplish.

This issue is explored in *Investing in Community Colleges of the Commonwealth: A Review of Funding Streams*, a report prepared by Public Consulting Group and the Mosakowski Institute for Public Enterprise and delivered to the Massachusetts Legislature in June of 2011. The report investigated the funding streams available to community colleges in Massachusetts and how they compare to other states.

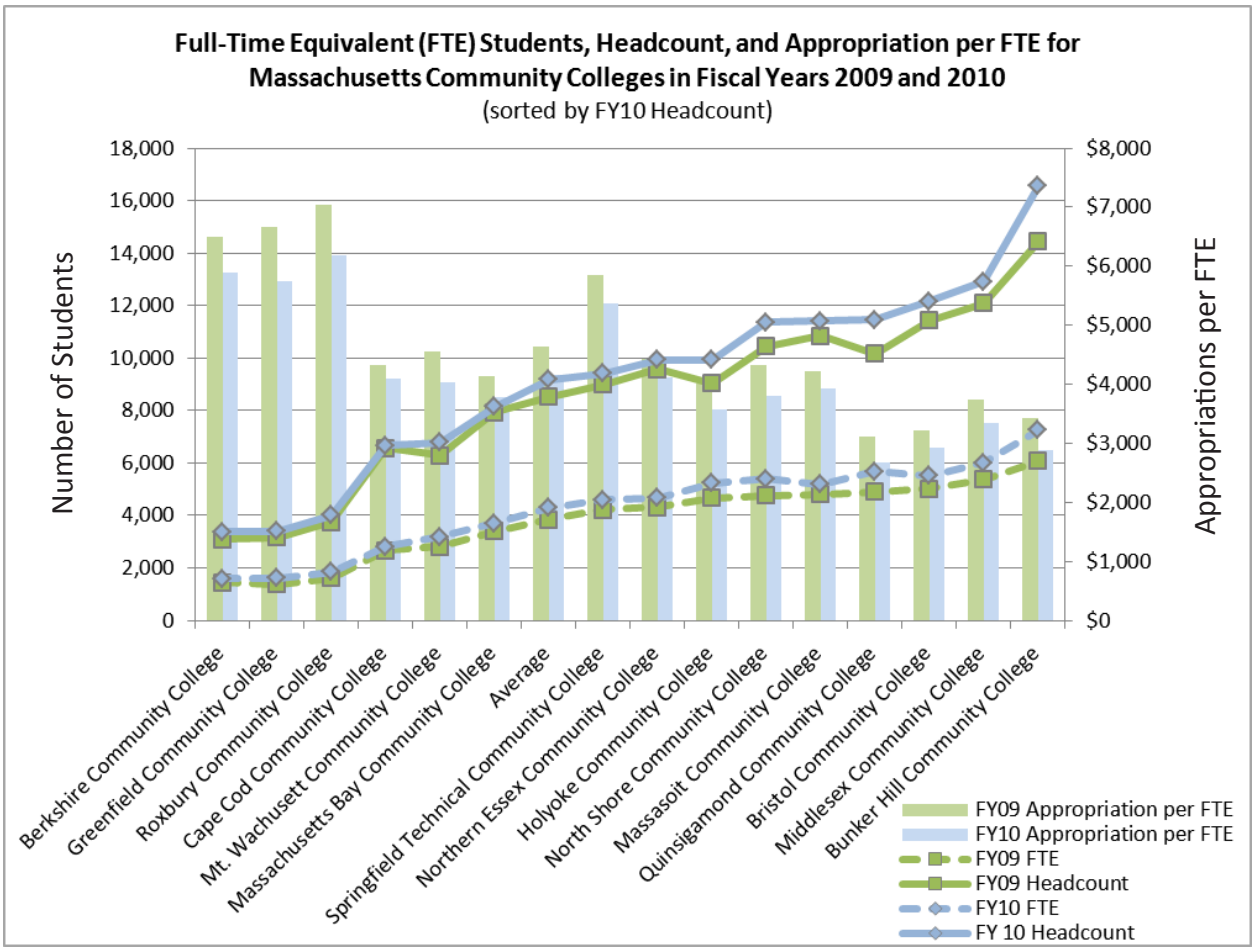
While community colleges across the nation rely on state appropriations, the report found that 32 have a funding formula to determine allocations, although less than half have fully implemented that formula.

The report discusses the decentralized nature of the community colleges in the Commonwealth and notes the extent to which they differ from one another. For example, data compiled from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education show enrollments vary between rural, suburban and urban colleges, with headcounts of close to 3,000 students at Berkshire and Greenfield to more than 16,000 at Bunker Hill.

State appropriations also vary, and since Massachusetts does not currently use a funding formula to determine allocations to each college, it is difficult for the colleges to plan and absorb for cost increases that occur as a result of the changing needs of students and the economy. In fact, the report's authors find that expenditures at community colleges are increasing, driven by increased enrollments, the necessity of remaining responsive to the needs of a diverse student body (including the provision of services to students with disabilities), and upgraded programs to meet industry standards, increased facilities costs and capital expenditures.

These costs are likely to continue to rise, which necessitates that policymakers examine the equity and transparency of funding for Massachusetts community colleges. The report recommends the creation of a funding formula based on performance to encourage innovation and efficiency, and the creation of a minimum "foundation" payment to each college based on the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled. Adequate funding is important, but in this time of diminished public resources, the willingness of the Legislature and the general public to increase public spending is often contingent upon a the implementation of reform within the governing system.

See the chart and table on the following page for a detailed account of funding streams for each community college in Massachusetts. *The chart and the table were adapted from "Investing in Community Colleges of the Commonwealth: A Review of Funding Streams," with Massachusetts Department of Education data.*



	FY09 Enrollment		FY10 Enrollment		Per FTE Appropriation	
	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FY09	FY10
Berkshire Community College	1,444	3,103	1,591	3,372	$6,500	$5,899
Bristol Community College	5,027	11,437	5,515	12,156	$3,218	$2,933
Bunker Hill Community College	6,075	14,448	7,243	16,545	$3,437	$2,883
Cape Cod Community College	2,670	6,562	2,819	6,668	$4,334	$4,104
Greenfield Community College	1,385	3,164	1,608	3,391	$6,658	$5,736
Holyoke Community College	4,667	9,041	5,241	9,937	$4,018	$3,578
Massachusetts Bay Community College	3,387	7,924	3,708	8,151	$4,146	$3,788
Massasoit Community College	4,817	10,844	5,173	11,412	$4,224	$3,933
Middlesex Community College	5,383	12,095	6,004	12,919	$3,730	$3,344
Mt. Wachusett Community College	2,820	6,282	3,179	6,790	$4,552	$4,038
North Shore Community College	4,764	10,451	5,406	11,372	$4,325	$3,811
Northern Essex Community College	4,323	9,586	4,667	9,926	$4,433	$4,106
Quinsigamond Community College	4,894	10,167	5,689	11,456	$3,113	$2,678
Roxbury Community College	1,613	3,747	1,836	4,004	$7,050	$6,192
Springfield Technical Community College	4,223	8,993	4,599	9,410	$5,848	$5,370
Average	*3,833*	*8,523*	*4,285*	*9,167*	*$4,639*	*$4,160*
Total	*57,492*	*127,844*	*64,278*	*137,509*		

III.

A National Perspective

With the growing importance of aligning workforce needs with community college programs in Massachusetts, it is instructive to look to other states that already are having success in this area. Several states have capitalized on the role of community colleges as drivers of workforce needs and economic development and are reaping the results for their residents, businesses and overall economic development. All of the states with success stories have centralized governance, allowing their community colleges to work together toward a common goal.

Ultimately, in each of these states the centralized governance of the community colleges strengthens their capacity to serve as workforce dynamos and allows for a single, clear voice to their state legislatures with respect to budget requests and resource needs. It also allows for system-wide data collection, program oversight, and the ability to implement cross-college reforms.

Systems That Are Meeting Their State's Workforce Needs

Virginia

Virginia topped the list of Forbes.com "Best States for Business" list for five years[34] due in part to its investment in workforce training and community colleges. Virginia's 23 community colleges operate under a centralized system that aligns education and economic development to extend workforce courses, training and programs into the community. The goal of its Workforce Development Services program is to prepare Virginia's emerging workforce by providing students with greater access to career options. It also serves employers through flexible and customized training, and offers portable skills and credentials to the incumbent and displaced workforce.

Dr. Glen DuBois, Chancellor of Virginia's Community Colleges, considers the primary purpose of that state's entire community college system to be meeting the workforce needs of the Commonwealth of Virginia. "I believe," he said in a recent interview, "that national attention should be placed on a major reengineering effort to align all community colleges with the workforce development needs of their states. We're talking about nothing less than saving the American middle class."

Through Chancellor Dubois' decade-long tenure, Virginia community colleges have enhanced their role as the state's leading provider of workforce training and services. Last year, more than 254,000 people benefitted from workforce programs and services across Virginia's community college system.

North Carolina

North Carolina's community college system, also centralized, is recognized worldwide for its success in addressing the customized training needs of local industry and businesses. Community colleges are the primary job training, literacy and adult education providers for the state.[35] North Carolina's tradition of meeting workforce needs and training dates back to 1957 and the creation of the Industrial Education Centers and the nation's first customized training program for business and industry. The Industrial Education Centers were the forerunner of the North Carolina Community College System, and established a unique tradition of meeting the workforce challenge in the state.

While most community colleges in the nation started with an academic tradition, thinking of themselves as junior colleges, North Carolina's system started with workforce roots and has grown into the most comprehensive community college system in the nation. What makes North Carolina unique is its wide array of short-term job training programs that account for approximately three-fourths of all students. Last year the system served 760,764 students, accounting for one out of every six adults in the state.

Tennessee

Tennessee passed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) in 2010. The act is comprehensive in scope, creating a higher education agenda that "establishes the direct link between the state's economic development and its educational system." [36] CCTA places community colleges at the center of a strategy to meet the workforce challenge by insuring that more students complete a college degree.

The law moves Tennessee toward outcomes and performance-based funding by establishing a funding formula and additional financial incentives emphasizing student success—thereby changing "the state funding paradigm from an input to output basis."[37] Tennessee's funding formula also places a premium on the success of low-income students, providing additional funds to institutions that graduate Pell-eligible students. Tennessee's performance-based funding formula "has provided a monetary incentive to schools that succeed at caring for at-risk populations." [38] It also expands common programs and courses across the state's 13 community colleges to create a community college system to better serve students, employers, and taxpayers.

Systems with Strong Governance and Funding Models

Other states have governance and funding models that are worth examination, including specific requirements for the makeup of statewide boards, systems that link funding to performance and approaches that use a series of milestones as ways of measuring performance.

Arkansas

In Arkansas—another community college stronghold—the Department of Higher Education (ADHE) and the Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) govern community colleges as well as four-year colleges and universities. Despite its broader focus, the Arkansas system benefits from effective leadership, with the ADHE as a statutory state cabinet department and the AHECB executive director serving as an appointee of the Governor's office. Special attention also goes to AHECB membership ranks: Three of the 12 board members are required to have experience on a two-year college board. Three others must have served on a four-year institution's board, with the remaining six bringing business and industry experience to their posts. This diverse board composition provides for balanced advocacy for community college needs.[39] [40]

Washington

Some states with a centralized governing system also link funding for community colleges to performance. In Washington, the Student Achievement Initiative (SAI)[41] employs an innovative performance funding system that has twin purposes: to "improve public accountability…and provide incentives through financial rewards to colleges for increasing the levels of achievement attained by their students."[42] Ultimately, education leaders look to SAI to help them achieve their goal of raising "the knowledge and skills of the state's residents" by increasing educational attainment across the state.[43]

Working with the Community College Research Center, Washington set out to identify the key academic benchmarks that students must achieve to complete degrees and certificates. The four categories of achievement measures are:

- Building toward college-level skills (basic skills gains, passing precollege writing or math);
- First-year retention (earning 15 then 30 college-level credits);
- Completing college-level math (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate degrees); and
- Completion in general (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training)."[44]

The SAI system uses college performance on these achievement measures as incentives for financial awards.

Ohio

In Ohio, the Board of Regents elected to use performance funding that is tied to milestone achievements. Under this system, community colleges "accumulate 'success points' based on the number of students who attain the measured achievements."[45] A college's ability to achieve these success points has an impact on its basic funding allocation from the state.[46]

As community college policymakers nationally shift their focus from access to persistence and completion, more and more states are considering strategies that use a portion of public funding as an incentive to improve student outcomes. States that are serious about improving two-year graduation rates are moving away from funding strategies that are based on enrollment and toward systems that emphasize retention, graduation and preparation for the workforce needs of the each state's economy.

National Attempts to Improve Community College Outcomes

While not specifically aimed at linking community colleges to workforce needs, a national movement has taken hold to increase college completion rates and improve community college outcomes in general—with an emphasis on the importance of data in tracking success.

Community colleges and state systems measure success by looking at graduation and transfer rates. But given the community college student population—typically older, lower-income, often non-native English speakers, usually working part- or full-time and juggling work, family, and school—many experts acknowledge that although important, these measures don't tell a complete story. In addition, such data fails to provide enough granular information for colleges and their state systems to use to more effectively provide for student needs and improve student outcomes.

In 2004, The Lumina Foundation for Education led seven national partners as the founding investor in launching *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count*, a national program designed to help community colleges collect and analyze student performance data and use it to inform institutional reform efforts.[47] Four Massachusetts community colleges joined the program in 2007.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested in efforts to better use and collect data from community colleges. Specifically, the Gates Foundation has set out to determine "what students learn and how we can best support them in their educational pursuits…what jobs they get upon graduation and why students of some community colleges do better in the job market than others." Additionally, the foundation aims to break down success rates by student characteristics to determine inequity in completion rates and target interventions.[48]

For its part, the American Association of Community Colleges has developed a Voluntary Framework of Accountability that will focus on student retention, transfer, and completion; student learning outcomes; and workforce, economic and community development.[49]

In June 2010, the National Governors Association released its college completion outcome metrics. Included are such outcomes as degrees awarded, transfer rates, graduation rates, and time and credits to completion. Progress metrics include enrollment in remedial education,

success in remedial education, first-year college courses, credit accumulation, retention rates, and course completion.[50]

In addition to these national efforts, a number of states are adopting more in-depth measures of community college outcomes—and looking at those outcomes as they relate to different student populations. The idea is to create a set of milestones that indicate the potential for student achievement as well as momentum points or success indicators that demonstrate progress along the way to reaching those milestones. A recent report from Jobs for the Future documented a number of these efforts under way in states such as Washington, Ohio, New York, and Tennessee.[51]

In 2007, the Boston Foundation released an *Understanding Boston* report, *Massachusetts Community Colleges: The Potential for Improving College Attainment*. That same year, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education convened a task force on community college completion and retention. Both of these efforts highlighted the need for ensuring that more students complete a postsecondary certificate or degree.

A recent MDRC evaluation of 26 community colleges participating in Achieving the Dream (none in Massachusetts), described just how hard it is for local campus-based projects to significantly change institutional performance:

> Despite colleges' notable efforts to scale up their programs and services, the majority of strategies reached less than 10 percent of their intended target populations. Intensive strategies, such as curricular reforms or intensive advising, which were defined by longer periods of contact time with students, were particularly unlikely to reach large numbers of students. Student success courses (courses aimed at introducing students to college life and enhancing their study skills) were the sole high-intensity strategy to reach a large number of students at a majority of colleges. This finding suggests that colleges often faced a trade-off between the intensity and scale of their interventions.[52]

IV.

Promising Models for Workforce Alignment in Massachusetts

A number of individual community colleges in Massachusetts have created and engaged in innovative models for workforce programs and partnerships. Described below, these programs could serve as a basis upon which other innovations could be built.

Bunker Hill Community College has a Workforce Development Center, which has a proven track record of creating custom training programs that develop workers' skills. Since its inception, the Center has trained at least 11,000 employees for more than 110 Greater Boston companies, from start-ups and small businesses to Fortune 500 Corporations. In addition, one interesting partnership Bunker Hill has is with Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) and Children's Hospital in Boston to help participants bypass remedial courses and enter into college-level, credit-bearing coursework. With funding from SkillWorks and the Boston Foundation, JVS offers reading, English and math classes as well as academic coaching and preparation right on site at Children's Hospital. Bunker Hill Community College then offers participants the educational background they need to advance in the health care field.

At ***Middlesex Community College***, the Academy of Health Professions offers certification in four areas: Nursing Assistant, Medical Receptionist, Medical Secretary and Phlebotomy. In addition to academic coursework, students explore career paths to determine which profession best matches their interests and abilities. With each certificate, students gain skills that prepare them for employment in their chosen health field. Students achieve success through a variety of traditional and non-traditional courses, career counseling and support, tutoring and hands-on experience in health careers.

Middlesex, Quinsigamond and North Shore Community Colleges worked in partnership to apply for and receive a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to develop certificate and associate degree programs in Energy Utility Technology.

Middlesex, Bunker Hill and Roxbury Community Colleges are partners in BATEC (Boston-area Advanced Technologic Education Connections), which works with other partners, including UMass Boston and Tech Boston, to provide workforce development and create career pathways in information technology.

North Shore Community College has an Institute for Corporate Training and Technology (ICTT), which provides customized workforce training solutions for employers that need workers. The ICTT serves North Shore communities with corporate training that is tailored to the specific learning objectives, goals, and budgets of employers–and delivers it whenever and wherever needed.

Major Partnerships

In addition to successful workforce programs at these colleges and many others at community colleges across the state, there are also large public/private partnerships that are working closely with community colleges. ***SkillWorks***, a multi-year initiative created by the Boston Foundation and supported by 14 other funders, is designed to meet the workforce needs of Boston and Massachusetts, brings together philanthropy, government, community organizations and employers to help low-income individuals attain family-supporting jobs. During the first phase, an investment of $15 million was dedicated to skills training for more than 3,000 workers, resulting in hundreds entering the workforce or receiving raises and promotions. During its current phase (through 2013), SkillWorks is emphasizing connections between Massachusetts community colleges and other postsecondary institutions with the workforce system.[53]

Established in 2003, ***CONNECT*** is a partnership among Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Cape Cod Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Massasoit Community College and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Its two basic goals are: to improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of higher education and to advance the economic, educational, and cultural life of southeastern Massachusetts. CONNECT realizes its mission by focusing activities and initiatives on four major areas:

- Enhancing academic programs and the ease by which students can transfer among the institutions
- Fostering economic development throughout the region
- Promoting cultural programs and projects
- Sharing expertise and resources

The executive officers of the CONNECT institutions act cooperatively to strengthen their institutional missions, and to enrich the life of the region."[54]

Another partnership, created in 2010, is the ***Massachusetts Life Science Education Consortium*** (MLSEC), which is a joint initiative of the MassBioEd Foundation and MassBio. The Consortium endorses11 biotechnology degree and certificate programs offered at eight Massachusetts community colleges. The endorsed programs were developed through a partnership between the community colleges and MLSEC, and offer students the skills and experiences they need to enter the biotechnology industry.[55]

These are just a few examples of partnerships between the Commonwealth's community colleges and numerous public and private initiatives. They not only prove the willingness and capacity of community colleges to contribute to meet the critical workforce needs in some of the most vibrant industries in Massachusetts, they serve as models for creating more systemic approaches that can be brought to scale in the future.

V.

Challenges to Systemic Improvement in Massachusetts

To further explore the role that community colleges can play in helping to prepare the future workforce of Massachusetts, the Boston Foundation commissioned Workforce Strategy Center (WSC), a national think tank that advises practitioners and policymakers on how to align higher education with regional economic needs. WSC consults with education, workforce development and economic development organizations and funders to develop strategies that help workers succeed and regional economies grow. It counsels state and national leaders on developing effective education and employment policies that complement one another in order to better align public resources with employer demand.

WSC has more than a decade of experience working in some 20 states. Its clients, including state governments, national and regional foundations, community colleges, workforce development boards and other workforce stakeholders, have successfully helped workers climb the workforce ladder to better jobs and better pay, while contributing to the overall economic development of their communities.

Between September of 2010 and February of 2011, WSC conducted a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews among 50 higher education and workforce experts, civic leaders, community college presidents, employers, industry group representatives, workforce agency professionals, community-based organization leaders and representatives of state and local government.

The discussions examined the role of Greater Boston community colleges in preparing today's workforce, the challenges they face as they strive to play this role, and the opportunities they have moving forward. A number of themes emerged during the focus groups and interviews, including efforts underway both by the Commonwealth and by the colleges themselves to create links between community colleges and the needs of the labor market.

One finding, unanimous across stakeholder discussions, was that as currently organized, the system for utilizing community colleges effectively for workforce development is broken. Other findings are detailed below.

1. Lack of Alignment Among Community Colleges

Almost every focus group discussion and interview cited the lack of alignment among community colleges as a major challenge for Massachusetts. While this problem is not unique to Massachusetts, it is exacerbated by the governance structure with nearly all decision-making, from course numbering to curriculum and content, taking place at the local level. One workforce intermediary indicated that "individual programs are working, but it isn't systemic." An employer observed that "there is no system, no oversight." Another pointed out that "there is no

clear system in place for transferability." One community college president acknowledged that course-numbering and database maintenance is a nothing less than a "quagmire," while another pointed to the "strong history of local control in Massachusetts" as a particular challenge.

Both employers and workforce intermediaries cited the need for leadership at the top to help resolve problems, such as difficulties in communications from one college to the next and inconsistencies across course content and delivery. As one employer put it, "there doesn't seem to be great information-sharing among the colleges." A civic leader remarked that "(the) system of higher education institutions is anything but a system."

Employers, some investing in their employees' education—others eager to hire graduates of community college programs—expressed frustration with the fact that courses are offered in different ways from college to college. Some courses are credit programs at one institution and non-credit programs at another. In addition, differences in course content mean that neither students nor employers know what to expect from one program to the next or which is the best option.

Workforce intermediaries and civic leaders expressed concern that the lack of alignment among colleges makes it difficult to transfer credits from one institution to another. In addition, according to workforce intermediaries, good relationships and good programs seem to rely on staff and personalities at individual colleges, not on formalized agreements or understandings.

2. Fragmentation and the Larger System

Focus group participants described a lack of a sense of partnership between community colleges and prospective workforce, economic development and employer partners. This is a contrast to the way colleges in Virginia and North Carolina, for example, operate. In those states colleges are encouraged to partner, in some cases becoming eligible for grants as a result of their partnership. As one workforce intermediary described the situation in Greater Boston: "There is not a lot of incentive for the colleges to partner with community-based organizations (CBOs)." A civic leader said: "Right now colleges and CBOs are competing for the same resources." Another civic leader indicated that "community colleges are essentially vendors in the workforce system." Yet another described experience with Greater Boston community colleges in this way: "hard to work with, not flexible; [we have undertaken a] number of efforts to try to connect local community colleges to some of the industries and haven't always found them receptive."

Employers expressed frustration with Boston area community colleges, describing curricula that were either out of date or lacking necessary elements to make them effective workforce developers. According to one employer: "The community colleges don't talk to one another, nor are they talking to employers…(and) there is no good system for curriculum development." Employers and other stakeholders described the lack of flexibility and cooperation among faculty at community colleges as challenges they face in partnership efforts.

According to a community college president:

> "We totally embrace the idea of community colleges, workforce development and economic development working together. We have been fighting for a seat at the table for 20 years. We do workforce development totally without resources."

3. Lack of Preparation for College-Level Work

The nation-wide knowledge gap, forcing high percentages of incoming community college (and other college) students to take remedial courses, was also identified as a major challenge in Massachusetts. Among focus group participants, college presidents in particular noted the large numbers of students who come to their campuses unprepared to succeed in college. According to one community college president:

> "A huge part of our mission is to deal with the underprepared student... We are working to ensure that students who come into our gateway courses have an opportunity to succeed and go on."

Yet, as one workforce intermediary indicated: "...students are placed in developmental education and burn up financial aid before they ever take a class for credit." While remediation is a major challenge for community colleges, focus group participants said that it is not clear that a singular focus on remediation would alleviate it, referring to a recently published study about *Achieving the Dream*, the multi-year initiative focused largely on strengthening developmental education, which found no substantial change in student outcomes over the initiative's seven years, despite significant investment of resources.[56]

Those interviewed suggested that community colleges might have more success by encouraging students to enroll in credentialing and other programs that will help them advance their college and career prospects.[57] However, one employer indicated that: ...[there are] limited numbers of workforce programs at community colleges...that are offered at times that are good for working adults. As a civic leader told a WSC focus group, "It shouldn't be that we just put courses out there and expect people to make choices… [We] need a system to connect the dots."

4. Declining Public Investment in Community Colleges

Massachusetts community colleges, like their counterparts across the country have experienced deep cuts in recent years. A civic leader observed: "...limited state funding for credit programs forces [community colleges] to be entrepreneurial and offer more non-credit" courses, which do not always lead to a credential." One community college official summed up the funding situation rather directly when commenting during a WSC focus group: "Secondary education has been funded consistently for 20 years. Higher education has not."

Some of those interviewed suggested that consolidating the 15 line items, now voted on by the Legislature, into one, administered by a the Commissioner of Higher Education or another central authority, would allow for efficiencies in resource distribution that could account for variations among the campuses in enrollment, capital needs and labor costs—and develop a clear and transparent funding formula.

One model suggested for this approach was the recent change in the way the Commonwealth's 62 district trial courts are funded. Until fiscal year 2010, each court was voted on as a separate line item. Resource allocations and caseloads were only loosely related, and back office efficiencies and statewide purchasing were inconsistent at best. In the 2010 budget, the central administration of the trial court was considered as one line item, which gave the Chief Administrative Justice of the Trial Court the ability to properly allocate resources among the seven trial court departments.

5. Systemic Reform Remains Elusive

The concerns expressed in these focus groups and interviews echo those documented by various commissions, task forces, initiatives and reports over the years. While several pilot and campus-based projects have attempted to improve educational and career outcomes for community college graduates, systemic reform targeted specifically at the state's community colleges remains elusive. Public higher education reform initiatives often take on all three of the public higher education systems: the five-campus UMass system, the nine-campus public university system, and the 15 community colleges, even though these state universities and community colleges have very different missions, student bodies, funding sources and governance issues. In addition, the state's entire system designed to meet workforce needs, with its own separate policy board, secretariat and workforce regions, has its own priorities.

VI.

Conclusion: Moving Forward with Reform

In coming together to develop this report, the authors and stakeholders were inspired by groundbreaking K-12 education reform legislation that was passed in Massachusetts as the result of a powerful coalition of educators, business and civic leaders and others. Major education legislation, first in 1993 and then again in 2010, would not have passed without the significant involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders in framing the debate and keeping pressure on the Legislature to act.

With the progress that is being achieved as the result of the legislation aimed at closing the achievement gap for students in the K-12 system, it is time to mount a similar effort to strengthen Massachusetts' community colleges. The ultimate goal is for community colleges to play the role of powerhouses when it comes to meeting critical labor market needs, as they do in a number of states. To date, Massachusetts has not been successful in achieving the significant, large-scale system reforms that would be necessary for them to fulfill that role. Little public and political pressure has been exerted in a coordinated fashion to generate the sense of urgency needed to pass an ambitious reform agenda. Higher education reform proposals in recent years, most notably 2002 and 2006, did not result in significant systems change in the three areas that matter most: funding, accountability and governance.

The last significant legislative reform initiative aimed at higher education ended in failure in 2006 because disagreements about funding, accountability and governance could not be resolved between the House and Senate. That effort was first framed by a report released in March 2005 by a special Senate Task Force on Public Higher Education. The task force charge was straightforward: "…to examine the role of public higher education in developing the Commonwealth's economy and workforce."[58] The report described the many new demands and competitive threats being placed on public higher education, and called for the system to be more responsive to the state's changing economy and workforce. In a bit of an understatement, the task force described public efforts to respond to these threats as "sluggish."

The report did generate legislation, a comprehensive bill designed to address gaps in funding, build quality and capacity, encourage innovation, and enhance system performance. But the absence of organized and sustained external pressure, most notably from employers and business leaders, resulted in the clock expiring on the legislative session without the passage of a bill. And despite the recent creation of a Joint Committee on Higher Education to oversee state higher education policy, legislative efforts for system reform have generally stalled. This is due in part to the downturn in the economy, as well as important and successful efforts to pass the K-12 achievement gap bill, a major piece of legislation. It may also reflect the need for new ideas to emerge that reframe the public debate.

One promising initiative has been the "Vision Project," which was established by Governor Deval Patrick to serve as a vehicle through which representatives of public higher education can come together and focus on preparing the Massachusetts workforce to compete in the knowledge economy. A Department of Higher Education official outlines the Vision Project's objectives as:

- Improving college readiness;
- Improving student completion rates;
- Aligning degrees with workforce needs;
- Improving student learning; and
- Decreasing gaps between different groups of students

As some other states across the country are doing, Massachusetts has developed the Vision Project to use data to align higher education with workforce needs. The Vision Project aims "to demonstrate that public higher education can act in a unified and focused way to ensure the future well-being of the Commonwealth and that we are ready to hold ourselves accountable for results to the people of the state."[59] Approved in May of 2010 by the Board of Higher Education, the Vision Project represents the new public agenda for higher education in Massachusetts—and may serve as a lever for systemic reform. Its first report will be released in 2012.

For the Vision Project to succeed, it will need support from a broad coalition of stakeholders. So far, it has not generated the sense of urgency of other successful education reform efforts in Massachusetts. It also appears that the Legislature is not fully engaged and is not likely to act any time soon. With its emphasis on outcomes, the Vision Project can be an important component of a strategic plan for Massachusetts public higher education. Until the Legislature gets involved with a reform plan of its own, this issue will not receive the attention it deserves.

It is quite possible that efforts designed to change the entire University of Massachusetts system, the state university system and the community college system are too complex. The three state systems of higher education have very different missions, serve very different students and meet different economic and workforce needs, ranging from entry-level technical education to advanced graduate study in cutting edge fields of research.

Changing demographics, rising skill requirements, an economic downturn and a well-documented skills gap continue to highlight the need for a reform initiative aimed specifically at community colleges. As reflected in the focus groups and interviews conducted for this report, community college and workforce systems remain fragmented with no coordinated capacity to meet statewide goals, direct resources or improve outcomes. Ultimately, systemic improvement remains elusive.

Recommendations

The recommendations embraced by the authors of this report reflect a broad array of activities that have the potential to transform the Commonwealth's decentralized community college network into a nationally-recognized system meeting Massachusetts' workforce needs.

Develop a Blueprint

Massachusetts needs an actionable plan—a strategic blueprint—for building a system that effectively leverages the capacity of community colleges to be leaders in meeting the workforce needs of Massachusetts. Focus group participants and interviewees agreed that such a system would involve:

- Strong partnerships with employers and the economic development community, bolstered by legislative support;
- Effective governance across institutions and silos;
- Clearly defined performance metrics, through which institutions would be held accountable to a set of standards, and funding would follow success; and,
- The use of financial incentives to spark innovation and appropriate financial support to bring programs at scale.

The blueprint could focus on the following priority areas:

- **Clarify the mission of community colleges, with a priority on preparing students to meet critical labor market needs.**

  The current mission statement for Massachusetts' Community Colleges, as adopted by the Board of Higher Education (BHE) in 1999, is a 252 word statement with four bullet points. When you compare that with those of North Carolina (102 words) or Virginia (18 words), it is indicative of a lack of focus, and an attempt to be all things to all people. While each aspect of the Commonwealth's community college mission—excellence in teaching and learning, providing academic preparation for transfer to four-year institutions, career preparation for entry into high-demand occupational fields, developmental coursework and lifelong learning opportunities—is important, prioritizing around one focus is essential.

  It is time that community colleges recognize and embrace their role as the link between elementary education and career. This encompasses transfer to a four-year college, technical education, certificate programs and career re-training programs. The mission should be providing the Commonwealth's residents with the education and skills necessary for a productive career with a family supporting wage.

  The BHE is also required under current law to engage in advocacy on behalf of public higher education. That is not the ideal role of BHE, unless effective oversight and accountability is

considered advocacy, so that language should be repealed. If anything, a more assertive board can serve as the best advocate by ensuring that the 15-campus community college system is graduating more students and meeting the needs of the state's employers.

- **Strengthen overall community college system governance and accountability**.

  The existence of 15 community college governing boards, to whom the presidents report, completely independent from the Board and Commissioner of Higher Education (BHE), is not conducive to achieving state and regional workforce development goals. The governing authority of the Commissioner and the BHE should be enhanced, with direct authority over the colleges and the presidents, including budgetary authority through the consolidation of line items which will then be distributed to the colleges based on a fair and transparent formula. The local boards should be maintained as advisory councils, appointed by the presidents and approved by the BHE, to provide advice and counsel and provide a link to the local community. Community college mission statements should also be subject to BHE approval in addition to the Secretary of Education. The Board should also retain the power to award community college degrees and certificates, approve tenure decisions, and develop a system of student assessment to determine learning gains, especially in situations where a college is underperforming. This would strengthen system alignment and accountability.

  In addition, the BHE and local boards should have more representation from the business community, especially employers. Under current law, the BHE has 13 voting members. However, just one member is required by law to represent the state's business community. Given the strong link between higher education and economic development, business should have a stronger voice on the Board, with three BHE slots mandated for business representatives. A provision that mandates representation on the Board from the trustees representing the three higher education segments could be eliminated. This appears to be a conflict of interest between effective system oversight and the interest of the public campuses.

- **Adopt performance metrics.**

  Community colleges that meet or exceed state performance goals could be provided more autonomy. But colleges that fail to meet state goals should be subjected to much more oversight. The BHE currently has the statutory authority to require local trustees to prepare performance improvement plans in cases where campuses fail to meet performance goals and may, if campus outcomes do not improve, assume more control over the college's budget.

  Legislation should be developed that would establish a rigorous—and transparent—system of performance evaluation. Community colleges that consistently fail to meet their performance expectations would be declared "underperforming" and subject to more extensive state management. For those colleges that are underperforming, the powers and duties of the local board could be reduced so that it serves only in an advisory capacity, campus management

could be replaced, and the college held in receivership during the turnaround phase. All options should be on the table, including campus consolidation or merger.

In addition, the Legislature should utilize its oversight authority to shine a light on the strengths and weaknesses of the public higher education system. One place to start is to conduct an annual public hearing with the chair of BHE, the Commissioner, campus representatives, students and employers to explain annual performance data published by the Board. Too often this rich source of data receives little public scrutiny. A public hearing, similar to the public hearing recently held by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education to assess K-12 education and the changes made as a result of 2009's Achievement Gap Act and the federal Race to the Top funding, would draw attention to the annual performance report, highlighting what is working and what needs more attention.

- **Better prepare students for community college-level work and graduation.**

Reducing the number of students enrolled in developmental education programs should be a major focus of the strategic blueprint. This issue is well known, but has yet to be adequately addressed. Research documents the ways in which developmental education affects degree completion, but our state policy response has been inconsistent at best.

The Boston Foundation, the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Private Industry Council and other area nonprofits, colleges, and universities have partnered with Mayor Thomas M. Menino for Success Boston, a new college completion initiative aimed at dramatically increasing the number of Boston Public Schools students completing college. Success Boston is focused on three key areas to ensure that the Boston Public Schools is preparing all students for college by expanding Advanced Placement and dual enrollment opportunities and offering new academic programs such as International Baccalaureate and credit recovery courses. Area nonprofit partners are helping Boston's high school students make the transition to two-year and four-year colleges by providing summer preparation for college, ongoing financial aid advising, and year-long transition coaching and mentoring. Boston area colleges and universities are offering BPS graduates the support they need to earn a higher education degree, including tracking student outcomes, setting measurable goals and encouraging students to use on-campus services that are known to be effective in helping them get through college. This comprehensive effort can be a model for addressing the needs of community college students and highlights the need for system-wide coordination with K-12 and 4-year colleges.

High school students should be assessed at an earlier stage for their capacity for college-level work, providing targeted intervention—funded by state and local dollars—for those who need more help. This starts with making the ACCUPLACER assessment available to more high school sophomores and juniors and using the results to advise students about their options. Efforts to strengthen the high school core curriculum, including STEM education, and align it with college entrance requirements are also important and should be supported. Additionally,

better advantage should be taken of online and computer assisted learning and tutoring opportunities.

Massachusetts has made great strides in recent years in using data to assess and track student progress. Data must be better analyzed to understand who succeeds and who fails in transitioning from high school to community colleges. Graduating seniors with MCAS scores and diploma in hand who are not ready for college level work should have an option of a "13th year" to become college or career ready. The state should consider piloting a charter school type model of post-secondary education for students who are not college or career ready, perhaps in collaboration with vocational/technical schools that currently offer some post-secondary programs for students, and targeted in Boston and the Gateway Cities where the need is most extreme. Work and learning should be integrated through a co-op model so that students not only sharpen their academic skills but also get opportunities to develop real-world experience. Students could earn a post-secondary credential, and receive college credits along the way, making them qualified for a job and signaling that they are ready to complete college level work.

For adult students, where a community college education is so often the difference maker in career advancement, ABE educators and community college faculty must work more closely to better identify pathways to college success. Community colleges should partner with adult education programs so that students are prepared to directly enter college. This type of alignment, which has occurred in several other states, will require more coordination from adult education, workforce development and higher education bureaucracies in order to forge new partnerships. Colleges will need to be much more consistent in their class and program entry requirements across programs and campuses, so that working adults don't waste their time repeating classes in order to progress to a degree. Consideration should be given to establishing a special statewide "college within the college" for adult students concentrating on "stackable" certificate and degree programs, closely aligned to industry, that allow working students to attain valuable credentials that add up to degrees on their own time. At a minimum, the BHE should engage more in policy issues affecting the ABE system, working with the Board of Education to strengthen program alignment and outcomes.

Once students begin their college studies, a "roadmap" should be developed that provides a detailed term-by-term course of studies for students. The roadmap should be easily accessible online, student friendly, interactive, and seen as opportunities for conversations with students all the time. It should provide information about where students can get tutoring assistance and other support, provide links to career information, and offer other useful information. Rather than each community college developing a roadmap, the community college **system** should create one that can be used by all students. The process of developing a roadmap will help resolve lingering issues such as common course numbering and degree pathways that are holding the system back.

- **Stabilize community college funding.**

  Governor Patrick, the Legislature, and key stakeholders need to achieve consensus on a viable funding plan for community colleges. Currently each of the 15 community colleges has their own line item in the budget. Consolidating the funding into one line item managed by the Commissioner will increase the ability to find efficiencies in the system and develop a disbursement formula to the colleges that is transparent and fair, as opposed to the budget process that relies upon historic funding levels. The plan should provide a consistent base of financial support and reward improved performance, primarily in credit bearing and degree programs aligned with industry.

  More aggressive implementation of the excellent common sense recommendations by a BHE task force on collaboration and efficiency should also be pursued. In 2010, the task force identified almost $12 million in cost savings that could be achieved by actions ranging from setting copiers and printers to a default double-sided mode (estimated savings: $400) to aggregating the purchase of power (estimated savings: $1.5 million). Too often task force reports like these are accepted but not acted upon. However, the recommendations in this report deserve much more consideration. The BHE should regularly review progress being made in implementing the recommendations in this report. Savings generated through such a program should be invested in additional support services for students to increase degree completion.

  The FY2012 budget includes $2.5 million in performance incentive funding tied to the goals of the Vision Project. In some ways, this is a welcome return to the policies of the 1990s when the BHE used incentive funds to drive system reform. These funds will provide the Board with some leverage to more closely align campuses with system goals. But it is not enough. As other states are beginning to do, the Legislature should at least consider using funding incentives targeted to improving graduation rates. Rather than line-item funding as is done now, the Legislature should appropriate community college funding to the BHE, which would then distributed it based on a formula that would factor in base needs plus performance. Funding would be weighted to reward retention, with additional weight given for successfully educating low-income students. At the very least, a task force should be established to study performance-based funding models being implemented in other states and to recommend how to incorporate this concept into community college budgets. Massachusetts is behind the curve with this policy innovation.

  Finally, Massachusetts should establish a campus consolidation commission to review opportunities to establish a multi-campus community college districts, first in Boston, then elsewhere, if feasible. The merging of public campuses is not unprecedented in Massachusetts. In the 1970s, Lowell Technical Institute and Lowell State merged to form University of Lowell, now UMass Lowell. The last consolidation, in the 1980s, folded Boston State College into UMass Boston. The commission can be charged with determining if Boston area students and employers would be better served through merging Bunker Hill

and Roxbury Community Colleges into a new "Boston Community and Technical College" with multiple campuses, work study and co-op programs, and strong industry partnerships. The commission could also study other opportunities statewide for system consolidation.

The blueprint would help Massachusetts graduate more students with credentials in fields where there is clear labor market demand, in a reasonable timeframe, and for a reasonable cost. It should focus on community colleges and their workforce development role and responsibilities, targeting resources to improve innovation, productivity, and outcomes. And it should be aligned with the recently launched Vision Project. A community college system must be constructed that competes with the best in the nation, benchmarking results with comparisons to competitor states, looking to consistently improve performance, while, at the same time, reducing racial, ethnic, and gender disparities that exist throughout higher education.

Form a Community College Coalition

Community colleges cannot transform themselves without support from the broader community and government. It is time to bring together a high-powered leadership coalition to craft a bold strategy to reform the community college system and anchor workforce development efforts for these important institutions.

Fortunately, there are several successful models of legislative reform to study that will help generate both a greater sense of urgency and a significant scale of system change. The 1993 and 2010 education reform campaigns in Massachusetts linked new investment in education to improving outcomes and greater system accountability.

As demonstrated in this and other research, as well as by the success in Massachusetts of passing two major reform bills for K-12 education, business leaders are powerful advocates for education reform. They support Massachusetts' efforts in promoting education and a healthy economy and can wield great strength as advocates for an effective community college system. They are consumers of community colleges—they hire graduates, use them as contractors for training, or have experiences (positive and negative) working with the colleges. They are outsiders looking in who can supply a fresh perspective to these difficult challenges. And ultimately, members of the business community want action to support their own growth efforts, which will lead to a healthy economy in Massachusetts.

This won't be the first time that the public sector has turned to the private sector to make the case that education reform is linked to economic development. Leaders from both sectors must galvanize a reform effort with the same vision, collaboration, and energy that led to dramatic changes in Massachusetts' K-12 system. In 1993, a coalition of business leaders worked with legislative leaders to achieve passage of the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993*. That law put in place a comprehensive system reform strategy to improve public education, including funding, assessment, and accountability.

But with evidence showing that reform efforts were stagnating and the achievement gap was growing, the coalition revisited the issue. In 2009 and 2010, the Race to the Top Coalition, a broader and even more inclusive coalition, came together to fight for the passage of *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*. Because of the greater sense of urgency brought about by the widening achievement gap, this bill took more risks, zeroing in on policies to spark innovation, choice, and reforms to make schools work better for students in low-performing districts. The Race to the Top Coalition continues to advocate for the effective implementation of the legislation and the federal funding that came to Massachusetts.

It is now time to turn this same attention and sense of urgency to reforming the state's community college system. Because community colleges are central to economic growth and to helping students achieve family supporting jobs, any plan for systemic reform must be bold in scope and significant in scale. Fundamental governance, accountability and funding issues facing the community colleges must be addressed in order to move Massachusetts toward a stronger system of performance and accountability and to establish a community college system better positioned to serve as a central driver of workforce development. Nothing less than the future economic vitality of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts—and the ability of hundreds of thousands of individuals and families to realize the American dream—is at stake.

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