



Executive Summary

By 2031, nearly 75% of jobs in Massachusetts will require education beyond high school—making higher education not just a pathway to opportunity, but a cornerstone of the state’s economic future.¹ Yet deep and persistent disparities in college enrollment, retention, and completion continue to leave too many students behind, especially those from underserved communities.

Massachusetts has taken bold steps to address these gaps. Recent initiatives—including historic investments in the expansion of MassGrant Plus, the launch of MassReconnect, the passage of tuition equity legislation, and the introduction of MassEducate—have laid a strong foundation for a more accessible, inclusive, and affordable public higher education system across the state.²

However, shifting federal policies now threaten to undermine this progress. Proposed cuts to student aid—such as reductions in need-based grants and support services—and changes to federal loan programs and policies could significantly diminish the financial assistance that thousands of Massachusetts students rely on to complete their degrees. At the same time, evolving immigration policies have created fear and uncertainty for undocumented students and those from mixed-status families, driving many out of the college pipeline entirely. Furthermore, the termination of essential federal grants, along with new proposals tying institutional funding to federal mandates, risks further eroding academic freedom and efforts to cultivate inclusive, welcoming campuses where all students can thrive.

These federal threats also come at an inopportune time. Higher education, both public and private, is grappling with a long-term enrollment cliff. Such enrollment declines pose particularly severe challenges for Massachusetts, given the commonwealth's large number of institutions and the state's dependence on the sector.

Fortunately, Massachusetts has the resources to protect and enhance access to high-quality public higher education at this challenging crossroads. With billions in new revenue generated through the state’s Fair Share tax—funds dedicated to education and transportation—the Commonwealth has a historic opportunity to build on recent gains, safeguard against setbacks at the federal level, prepare for the enrollment cliff, and lead the nation in advancing higher education access, affordability, and excellence.

Fair Share Projections

In FY25, Massachusetts collected

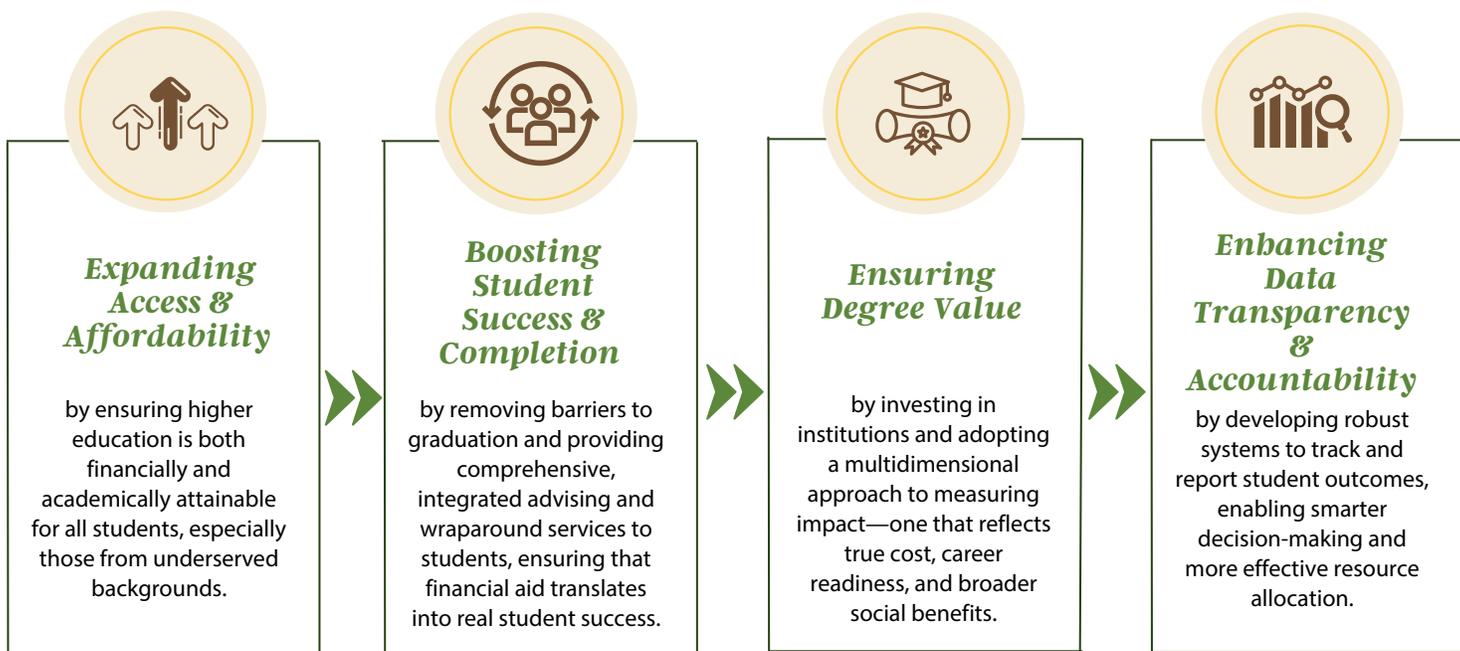
\$2.98 billion

in revenue from the voter-approved Fair Share surtax, a recurring annual revenue dedicated to education & transportation.³

About the Roadmap:

The following pages outline an initial pathway toward a bold, shared vision for the future of public higher education in Massachusetts—one that is accessible, affordable, transparent, and designed to help every student succeed in meaningful careers while contributing to a thriving state economy. This document offers a **preliminary roadmap** for how the state can build on recent progress and investments and take the next steps toward creating a system that delivers real value for students and communities.

Grounded in four core pillars—**Access & Affordability, Student Success & Completion, Degree Value, and Transparency & Accountability**—this roadmap presents a comprehensive framework for strengthening higher education across the Commonwealth. Each pillar serves as both a lens and a lever: identifying barriers within the current system while offering strategic direction for future policy considerations, including:



Importantly, this roadmap is intended as a starting point—not a final destination. It's designed to spark deeper dialogue, foster collaboration, and guide collective problem-solving that will lead to concrete, actionable recommendations capable of driving meaningful change. Achieving a more inclusive, responsive, and student-centered higher education system will require sustained innovation and authentic engagement with students, families, educators, institutional leaders, and policymakers across Massachusetts. In the months ahead, we're committed to expanding these community-driven conversations, refining this framework, and translating shared ideas into strategic investments and policy reforms that ensure every student across the state has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

