

Formula for Success

Key Ingredients for Achieving Higher Education Equity in Massachusetts



Expanding Access and Affordability

by ensuring higher education is both financially and academically attainable for all students, especially those from underserved backgrounds.



Boosting Student Success & Completion

by removing barriers to graduation and providing comprehensive, integrated advising and wraparound services to students, ensuring that financial aid translates into real student success.



Ensuring Degree Value

by investing in institutions and adopting a multidimensional approach to measuring impact—one that reflects true cost, career readiness, and broader social benefits.



Enhancing Data Transparency & Accountability

by developing robust systems to track and report student outcomes, enabling smarter decision-making and more effective resource allocation.



Student & Economic Impact

by taking these steps, we move closer to building a truly equitable, student-centered higher education system, while strengthening our state's workforce in high-wage, high-growth industries.



Preparing students with the **opportunities** and **skills** they need to succeed in tomorrow's economy.

Expanding Access & Affordability



Where we are:

Despite increased investment in state financial aid, persistent gaps in college enrollment for low-income and underrepresented students remain. Existing barriers include:

- Ongoing affordability challenges
- Underutilization of financial aid
- Insufficient college and career planning opportunities; &
- Unequal access to rigorous high school coursework.

Where we should go:

- Expand and streamline financial aid to cover the full cost of attendance,
- Adopt universal FAFSA policies
- Improve access to college and career counselors and require postsecondary plans for graduation
- Ensuring equitable access to advanced coursework in high school - including AP, dual enrollment, and early college programs.

Improving Student Success & Completion



Despite recent increases in enrollment, student persistence and completion at public higher institutions remain low and inequitable.

- Only 35.2% of students enrolled in community colleges earn a degree within 6 years, with widening gaps across demographic groups.
- Completion rates at State Universities are also declining, while equity gaps are widening.
- Interim student success metrics are also stagnant or declining.

To improve student success and completion, the state should invest in a dual-track approach:

- (1) Integrate, streamline, and scale the SUCCESS program across all Community Colleges; and
 - (2) Expand ACE for full-time students at state universities.
- Both models should be grounded in integrated, proactive, and equity-driven support systems.

Ensuring Degree Value



- Value exists within the Massachusetts higher education system, providing strong economic returns for both individuals and the state.
- However, degree value is hard to measure due to inconsistent cost estimates across institutions and incomplete data on what students actually spend.
- While degrees boost lifetime earnings and yield broader public benefits, the financial payoff is slower for students who face structural barriers and those with limited resources.

To ensure and assess the value of postsecondary degrees, the state should:

- Ensure adequate and sustained base funding to strengthen institutional quality
- Ensure “cost of attendance” calculations are accurate and transparent
- Regulate non-degree credentials
- Align postsecondary programs with workforce demands

Enhancing Data Transparency & Accountability

- The state lacks coordinated data systems across education and workforce agencies, with fragmented technologies, inconsistent policies, and no unified oversight to manage cross-agency data efforts.
- Equity gaps are obscured by limited data disaggregation and weak public reporting,
- Transparency around financial aid and student outcomes is poor, with inconsistent cost reporting, complex aid programs, and limited accountability for institutional performance.

- The state should establish a centralized education-to-career data center, independent of any other agency, to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and efficiency.
- Furthermore, the data must be disaggregated across subgroups and accessible to the general public.

Higher education is at the heart of Massachusetts' success; we must continue the momentum so every student can not only participate, but **persist, complete, and benefit from the upward mobility** that a strong public higher education system delivers