

Mass Partnership for the Diversity in Education Conference

Regis College

Thank you for that warm welcome.

Today I want to reflect for a moment why we, all of us, are here, not in this room today, but here gathered as a collective union to talk about our shared work, our mutual industry, our commitment to education. We are here because each of us has heard the call to serve.

For me, the heart of our work, our mission; our core – is learning and teaching. The magical interaction that happens in classrooms between a teacher and a student – the place where meaning is made. Any talk about education or reform, or future innovation must always start at the center of our work; the classroom – the unit of change – the true unit of measurement. Regardless of legislation, regulation,

and policy, regardless of NCLB and RTT, regardless of MCAS, PARCC, TIMMS, and SAT, regardless of DOE, DESE, and EOE, regardless of all the friction in the ether of reform, what actually makes a difference in the lives of young people – and in fact, the only thing that ever has - is a caring, thoughtful, talented, and highly skilled teacher who understands the call to serve and operates from a deep understanding of core values, driven to succeed and try through sacrifice, effective effort, grit, blood, sweat, and tears. You are all committed to building these kinds of teachers – these kinds of educators – these kinds of leaders. It's in all of our DNA– to serve – and it's what brought all of us here to learn and grow, and it's what will drive all of us back into the field to further our collective mission and leave this world a better place for not only our children, but for our children's children.

I may be the Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts but I am a student of teaching - I am a student of learning. I visit classrooms, I study practice, I watch teachers teach, and I observe students learn. The best teachers, and believe me, I have seen some exceptional ones, the kind that make the sun rise, they all seem to share a belief that they have been “called” to teach and they attack the work with missionary zeal- not reckless abandon, but thoughtful purposeful and disciplined practice. I have been thinking about this calling to teach and to serve a lot lately as we think about our goal to close long existing and stubborn achievement and skills gaps and increase opportunities for all learners.

When I think about closing the achievement gap – I think about the fact that the importance of student diversity – and teacher diversity in our schools has never been greater.

I think that the need to appreciate and navigate the ever increasing diversity of our nation and the world is an essential part of the education of our students.

School is where children go to learn to appreciate, respect, and collaborate with people different from themselves.

But as we celebrate our differences, it is important that we turn to each other and recognize that these differences make a stronger and more vibrant Commonwealth.

As Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in overall student achievement, we push to set the bar higher each year because, as the governor says, “for this

Commonwealth and this country to be true to her civic

ideals, opportunity has to be accessible to all our residents, not just the favored few.”

The Commonwealth will persevere in its mission to ensure that all children, regardless of background, receive a high quality education that will prepare them for them for a future filled with endless possibilities.

The Governor’s always talks about “brainpower” being our signature economic edge and compares Massachusetts investing in education and youth to Texas investing in oil or Iowa in corn. I didn’t want to steal from the Governor, but that remark serves as a crystal clear example of why this matters. Simply put, our future depends on us investing now.

By most measures, Massachusetts is leading the country in student achievement. In fact, in some measures, if

Massachusetts were its own country, we'd be second in the world in 8th grade science and 6th in the world in 8th grade mathematics.

Massachusetts public high school students are among the top performing students in the nation on the SATs. And among those states where at least 60 percent of students took the SAT, MA students tied for the top score in Mathematics.

In 2010, we designated 34 schools in our state as “underperforming” because, despite great effort, the needle wasn't moving.

We can't be complacent. That is our greatest risk for failure.

It is clear: our student achievement results in K-12 have been impressive and 20 years of education reform in a

standards-based environment has allowed us achieve great things, but we still have work to do.

One of the areas that we have room to significantly grow is helping to move the conversation forward about the importance of recruiting, employing and retaining a diverse group of teachers, administrators and other support positions in our schools across the Commonwealth.

Our society has become increasingly diverse, but many of our school communities don't reflect that diversity.

Of the new teacher hires in 2012-13, 89.7% were White, not Hispanic and only 10.3 % were minority hires.

Clearly, we need to do more.

Governor Patrick has been successful with his efforts to create a state government that reflects the diversity and inclusiveness of communities throughout Massachusetts.

Under Governor Patrick's leadership, over one quarter of executive branch employees are people of color and over half are women.

During his first month in office, Governor Patrick signed Executive Order 478 which reestablished the Commonwealth's commitment to hiring a diverse workforce by promoting inclusion in hiring and board appointments, and providing enhanced access to state services and contracts for all Massachusetts residents.

That executive order also outlined a specific process to implement the hiring of people with disabilities, resulting in the creation of the Disability Task Force to establish and

implement best practices for recruiting, hiring and promoting persons with disabilities.

So what can we do?

A recent report from the Center for American Progress found that while the overall number of minority teachers has increased across the nation, turnover rates are significantly higher for minorities than for white teachers.

We know that traditional teacher-education programs produce the majority of teachers in this country and their use should not be overlooked as a strategy.

However, states and districts have also begun to use other programs in an effort to attract candidates not typically found in traditional teacher education.

I've been thinking about why are there so few teachers of color in proportion to students. Much of the shortage problem starts with the low rates of academic achievement for students of color.

High school graduation, an absolute requirement for entering the teaching field, continues to elude many black, Latino, and Native American students.

The rate of high school and college completion for students of color immediately minimizes the number of eligible candidates for the teaching field.

This is why Governor Patrick's efforts to close the achievement gap – to make sure that all students have access to a quality education no matter their race or zip code - is so important.

I want to talk a little bit about EOE – and what it is we do.

EOE sits at the center of the Commonwealth's public education system, and coordinates the development and implementation of initiatives across our early education, K-12, and public higher education institutions. Governor Patrick established the office as a Cabinet level secretariat in 2008 as a way of ensuring his bold and comprehensive vision for public education in our state would be achieved.

To do that we know that we must serve all of Massachusetts' students, regardless of their age, by creating a 21st century public education system that provides access to high-quality and inspirational educational opportunities that will transform their lives. But we also know that we must foster the development of well-educated and engaged citizens who will contribute to and strengthen the Commonwealth.

Our Theory of Action is fairly straight forward: If EOE aligns our educational agencies and institutions to create one seamless, focused, and accountable public education system, we will accelerate student achievement; close achievement and attainment gaps that disproportionately affect students of color, those with learning disabilities, those living in poverty, and English language learners; and increase opportunities for all students across all levels.

EOE works in partnership with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), the Department of Higher Education (DHE), the University of Massachusetts (UMass), and their four respective governing boards to develop policy and legislation and implement statewide initiatives and regulations that deliver measurable results in support of our strategic goals for public education in

Massachusetts. We use multiple indicators of student growth and achievement from birth through postsecondary education, educator effectiveness, and college and career readiness to assess our progress.

We have three strategic goals:

- 1.) Accelerate innovation throughout our public education system
- 2.) Create Direct Pathways to college and career
- 3.) Expand access and quality of our Early Education Services

Who builds our neighbors? Who builds the future citizenry of our nation? Who builds the guardians of our past and the shapers of our future? Teachers do. Schools do. You do.

This is our work; it's about mission, it's about a calling, it's about core values, but it's really only about love, that's all it is. We need you at the table to help us get it done.