

**Condition
of Education**
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Looking Back
to Look Ahead

10TH ANNIVERSARY



Introduction

In 2013, when the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy released our first annual assessment of the *Condition of Education in the Commonwealth (COE)*, the state was just two decades removed from the landmark 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act. Barack Obama had recently been sworn in for his second term as President, Elizabeth Warren was in her first year as the junior senator from Massachusetts, and Deval Patrick was entering the final two years of his governorship. As the country continued to emerge from the Great Recession, budgets were tight—state funding for education had just ticked up after three straight years of declines and was approaching the amount spent in 2007. After the 2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap authorized state receivership as a remedy for chronically underperforming districts, observers were seeking signs of progress across Massachusetts schools and especially in Lawrence, which had been the first district placed in receivership two years prior. News stories focused on a potential increase in the statewide charter cap, the pilot of the new computer-based assessment system, and a growing national backlash against the Common Core State Standards, among other topics.

This was the backdrop for the Rennie Center’s first COE release, a data report focusing on 25 statewide indicators that sought to provide a snapshot of the state’s progress to date—and areas in need of continued investment—from birth into adulthood. The project aimed to present data and information to encourage more nuanced discussions of potential strategies for improving student learning outcomes.

Ten years later, much has changed within our education environment. Schools and educators have faced unprecedented challenges as they have confronted and emerged from a global pandemic. The Student Opportunity Act and various COVID relief measures have brought never-before-seen levels of funding to K-12 education. Early education and care has moved into the forefront of public attention, in no small part due to pandemic-era disruptions that highlighted how essential high-quality care is for young children (and their caregivers). Meanwhile, new pathways have opened up for students to participate in college and career experiences while still in high school, even as many institutions of higher education continue to grapple with pandemic-related enrollment declines. Social-emotional learning and mental health have taken center stage in education debates, with student wellbeing recognized as an integral component of learning and a core responsibility for schools to nurture.

Through COE, the Rennie Center has played a key role in many of these shifts. Our first Condition of Education action guide, released in January 2015, highlighted the expansion of early childhood programming, holistic student supports, and early college models—all reforms that have been at the forefront of policy conversations in recent years. More recent COE guides have zeroed in on social-emotional learning, student voice, linking schools with community resources, and supporting teachers, among other topics. Throughout, we have sought to examine how bold and effective strategies for overcoming barriers to learning may be scaled and integrated throughout our public systems to achieve large-scale improvement.

Ten years after the start of COE, our focus on reviewing statewide data and highlighting promising strategies remains critical: despite numerous changes in policy and practice over the past 10 years, we continue to see many of the same trends in student outcomes that were present prior to 2013. Too few students are achieving proficiency in reading, math, and science. Persistent opportunity gaps affect access to affordable early childhood education, advanced coursework, college and career pathways, and other resources. Our teaching force remains predominantly White, even as the student population across the Commonwealth becomes increasingly diverse. Too many students leave school before accessing a high school diploma, or graduate from high school only to find themselves with limited on-ramps to career opportunities.

In our [inaugural COE data report](#), we wrote, “The Condition of Education project asks whether our entire education system is properly structured to ensure *all* students succeed.” Ten years later, the answer has become emphatically clear: our current system is *not* designed to ensure success for each and every student. Looking to the future, we must work collectively to transform our education system into one that offers equity and excellence for all.

As the Rennie Center enters the second decade of the Condition of Education project, we aim to build on the bright spots that have emerged over the past ten years while recognizing the need for new approaches to education in Massachusetts. As a starting point for this conversation, we’re looking back over ten years of the Condition of Education project to highlight programs and practices with particular relevance in our contemporary education landscape. Some of these examples were featured just last year, while others date back to our earliest COE reports, but each one is worth revisiting—and replicating—in light of current conversations on policy and practice.

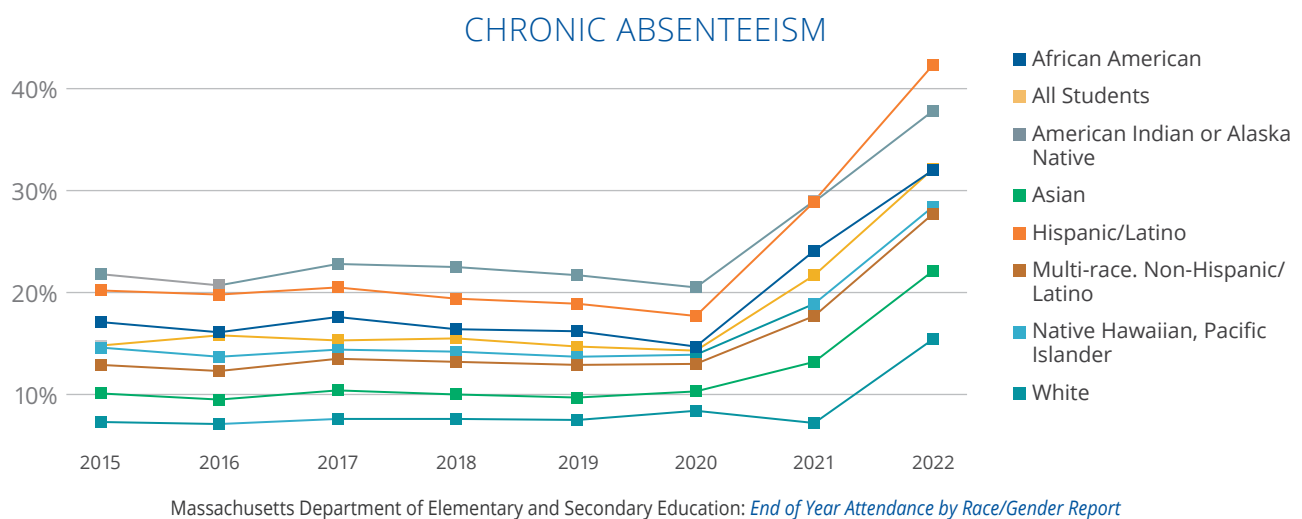
Beyond this retrospective, our work over the coming year will aim to set a new vision for education in Massachusetts. In particular, we will focus on how to rethink and redefine people, place, and time to build learning environments that match what we know about how students thrive and the types of support they need to succeed. We look forward to working with a diverse array of students, families, educators, community members, and policymakers to identify the most promising opportunities for the next ten years—and beyond.

AN EXAMPLE OF COE’S IMPACT: EARLY COLLEGE

Our work on early college has played a critical role in advancing this strategy in state policy conversations. In 2015, our Condition of Education action guide explored the promise of early college as an evidence-based strategy to promote college and career success. Following the release of this report, officials from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) sought the input of Rennie staff while shaping the plans for an early college designation. In September 2019, the Rennie Center released [Early College Blueprint: A Guide to Getting Started with Early College in Massachusetts](#), a hands-on guide to planning and implementing early college programming based on successful examples from across the state and nation. Since its release, this blueprint has been widely shared with high school and university staff statewide—for instance, DHE has asked Rennie to share it with sites that are considering early college programming, and DESE linked to it in their Early College Program Designation Application Companion (a guide for applicants seeking an early college designation from the state). The Rennie Center currently works with multiple districts and schools to support the design and implementation of early college programs.

Responding to the Current Moment

The ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have placed new demands on schools, students, families, and communities, requiring them to problem solve and adjust instructional practices while responding to unprecedented, ongoing trauma. Despite the fact that the education system has navigated nearly three years of the pandemic, school communities are still managing surging COVID-19 cases, rising absenteeism, mental health and behavioral challenges, and critical academic recovery needs. Across Massachusetts, the chronic absenteeism rate has risen approximately ten percentage points between 2021 and 2022. With rising absenteeism comes missed instruction, inconsistent assessment of student progress, and a loss of school-based resources such as school counselors and healthy school meals. Alongside rising absenteeism rates, the Commonwealth has also seen skyrocketing churn rates—the percent of students transferring in or out of a school within a school year—which also contributes to inconsistent routines, breaks in instruction, and daily shifts in classroom attendance and culture.



These challenges, among many others, have led to increased pressure for Massachusetts school leaders and educators to support students' development—both academic and social-emotional—as they work to juggle their own needs, professional responsibilities, and mental health. To add to this increased pressure, school and district leaders have been called upon to make critical decisions regarding the unprecedented \$2.9 billion federal investment in the recovery and redesign of our schools through federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding. Making strategic, high-impact decisions around a sum of funds this large would be challenging at any time, let alone with the spending deadline of September 2024 quickly approaching.

Rather than releasing a report with a new strategy, or a deep-dive focus on one specific area, we've decided that these unprecedented times call for a concise, easily digestible report with research and models for improvement that practitioners and district leaders can implement now. As we simultaneously work to repair the harm done through COVID-19 school disruptions and plan for the future of education, stakeholders in schools and communities would benefit from innovative strategies and urgent action to address students' academic recovery and wellbeing. This guide digs into past Condition of Education reports to identify examples of programs and initiatives that meet the moment.

The best practices and program models highlighted in this year's retrospective fall into four categories: Early Education and Care, Instructional Practices, Student Wellbeing, and College and Career Pathways. In our years of conducting research, sharing evidence-based data, developing policy proposals, and facilitating communities of practice with the field, we have found that these four categories represent critical stages of a student's developmental and academic journey that require holistic support from all stakeholders, from birth to career. Though not every important component of students' educational experience can be included in this report, we hope the strategies outlined below offer high-leverage starting points for schools and communities to consider.

Early Education and Care

From birth to age 5, children’s learning experiences have a significant impact on their future success. One core component of children’s healthy development is high-quality early education and care. In these settings, children gain social-emotional, cognitive, and developmental skills that are essential for navigating kindergarten and beyond. Over the past ten years, we have researched key elements of early childhood experiences that prepare children to enter kindergarten with foundational learning and social skills. The following section highlights key strategies for strengthening our state’s early childhood system that we have uncovered from the program exemplars featured in our COE reports.

EARLY EDUCATION & CARE

Provide Accessible & Affordable High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

- Braid public and private resources through collaborative partnerships that build on existing public school and community offerings
- Connect early educators with opportunities for ongoing professional training that align with their schedules and current responsibilities

Support Two-Generation Programming

- Create partnerships that support career pathways for parents and caregivers (such as job training and mentorship) along with learning experiences for young children

Assess Kindergarten Readiness

- Use consistent, locally adapted screeners to determine how schools can best support students’ acclimation and adaptation to the school environment

Boston Universal Pre-kindergarten

FOCUS: High-Quality Pre-kindergarten Programs

FEATURED: [2015 Condition of Education Report](#)

High-quality early education and care is essential for preparing our youngest students for success in school and in life. Boston K1DS, a pilot program launched in 2005, was created to expand access to the effective pre-kindergarten programs in both the city’s public schools and community-based programs. Research into Boston K1DS revealed a substantial impact on participants’ growth in language, math, decision-making, and self-regulation skills. According to Boston Public Schools, the district’s [Universal Pre-Kindergarten \(UPK\) program](#) builds on this foundation, aiming to ensure that high-quality pre-k is accessible to all three- and four-year-old children living in the city at no cost to families. Boston UPK continues to support a mixed delivery portfolio of programs, offering both public and private pre-k options, and it plans to expand to include family child care options in the 2023–24 school year. This community-wide effort serves as a national model for prioritizing and fostering young children’s healthy development, wellbeing, and academic preparedness.

Springfield WORKS

FOCUS: Two-Generation Programming

FEATURED: [2021 Condition of Education Report](#)

Two-generation approaches to child and family development are a noteworthy way in which communities and schools have partnered to support the whole family. Defined by the [Aspen Institute](#) as “approaches that build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together,” two-generation approaches

typically provide both early education and care and adult education services. These models create a caring and supportive environment for young people while providing resources that help adults gain parenting skills and train for a career.

[Springfield WORKS](#), a community-wide initiative with the Economic Development Council of Western Mass, takes this type of two-generation approach for families in the region. Springfield WORKS recruits parents and caregivers of children enrolled in Head Start programming and other community partner agencies, connecting the adults with job training, support services, and career opportunities while ensuring that children have access to a safe and healthy learning environment.

Somerville Family Learning Collaborative and Summer Explore

FOCUS: Kindergarten Readiness

FEATURED: [2021 Condition of Education Report](#)

Entering school is a seminal moment in the lives of students and families. Ensuring they feel welcomed and well-prepared during this time is critical to starting school strong and setting a path to continued success. Recognizing the importance of this period, Somerville has developed a comprehensive approach to supporting students' transition into kindergarten. According to Somerville Public Schools, the [Summer Explore Kindergarten Transition Program](#) is a "free, four-week-long program that exposes young students to the school community and its routines to better prepare them for a more comfortable and familiar experience." Summer Explore prioritizes a strong literacy curriculum, access to arts and creative hands-on experiences, and healthy meals and eating habits, as well as increased opportunities for family engagement in the classroom. Programs that effectively transition students into kindergarten while assessing their readiness enable schools to anticipate and tailor learning activities and supports for incoming students. In Somerville, the Explore Program, along with other complementary initiatives offered through the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative, helps the entire community get a jump start on children's learning while forging lasting relationships between families and schools.

Instructional Practices

Over the ten years of COE, we have learned from countless schools, districts, and community partners about the importance of strong instructional practices. Past reports have focused on topics such as centering learning on students' passions and strengths, promoting student voice in instruction, and supporting teachers to hone their craft. Through our research, we have found that implementing and maintaining a robust instructional environment requires a multi-faceted approach. High-quality instructional practices draw on the full assets of a school community—from the materials used to the support offered by (and for) adults—to ensure all students achieve academic success.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Support Educators

- Empower educators to identify their own learning priorities and provide time and resources for developing appropriate supports
- Establish professional learning groups that are culturally responsive and designed to intentionally connect educators across schools and communities

Adopt High-Quality Instructional Materials

- Select instructional materials using evidence-based sources such as CURATE, an initiative that convenes MA educators to review evidence on curricular quality

Provide After-School and Out-of-School Enrichment

- Connect students with programs that emphasize the importance of social-emotional and academic enrichment, especially when school is not in session

Coordinate Data & Assessment

- Develop a framework bringing together academic results, surveys, school administrative data, and other sources of information to provide a fuller picture of students' experiences

Revere Colleague to Colleague Program

FOCUS: Supporting Educators

FEATURED: *2022 Condition of Education Report*

Revere Public Schools has long prioritized [teacher involvement in decision-making](#) as a strategy for instructional improvement and district-wide reform. This commitment is exemplified by the “Colleague to Colleague” (C2C) program, a peer-to-peer teacher consultant initiative that provides teachers with job-embedded support through peer assistance and coaching, giving Revere faculty the agency to identify their own learning priorities and needs. Consulting teachers (CTs) identify areas for growth within their schools and meet with participating colleagues once or twice a week to provide resources, observe classroom practice, and share guidance and feedback. CTs take on their role for two years and are promised a return to their original classrooms when finished. The C2C program has resulted in increased wellbeing and feelings of support among teachers, as well as intentional and meaningful collaboration across classrooms.

Curriculum Ratings by Teachers (CURATE)

FOCUS: High-Quality Curriculum

FEATURED: [2020 Condition of Education Event](#)

Strong, culturally responsive curricular materials have been shown to close opportunity gaps, improve student learning, and create more equitable, contextualized, real-world learning experiences for students. [Curriculum Ratings by Teachers \(CURATE\)](#) is a partnership between the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Rennie Center to respond to the widespread need for high-quality curricular materials aligned with state standards. CURATE convenes teachers from across the Commonwealth to review and rate various curriculum materials on the basis of their standards alignment, classroom application, and cultural responsiveness. Once a panel of teachers reaches a consensus on a rating and rationale, their findings are published in a report that supports schools and districts in making data-informed curriculum choices. Teachers are compensated for their time and receive professional development through their participation in the program, while their insights (captured in CURATE reports) have a direct impact on district decision-making and classroom instruction across Massachusetts.

Boston After School & Beyond 5th Quarter of Summer Learning

FOCUS: Out-of-School Time

FEATURED: [2016 Condition of Education Report](#)

The [Boston After School & Beyond](#) 5th Quarter of Summer Learning, a collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, brings together stakeholders in support of learning and skill development during the summer. Boston schools and community-based organizations come together to provide a wide range of summer learning experiences that help students develop both academic and social-emotional skills. As of the [summer of 2022](#), Boston's 5th Quarter of Summer Learning included more than 240 programs serving nearly 16,000 students, and the model is being extended to Springfield. Beyond promoting applied learning and enrichment for students, this initiative demonstrates the power of community-based approaches to support year-round holistic youth development.

Carlton Innovation School

FOCUS: High-Quality, Grade-Level Content

FEATURED: [2017 Condition of Education Report](#)

The [Carlton Innovation School](#), located in Salem, Massachusetts, serves students from grades K-5—but grade levels mean something different at the Carlton than at other schools. Rather than relying on a traditional grade-level structure, the school provides intensive, personalized, and diagnostic instruction that recognizes children as individuals with varying academic and non-academic strengths and needs. The Carlton uses a multi-age approach, allowing students to move through the educational experience without grade-level distinctions, all the while progressing at a developmentally appropriate rate. Students receive intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math and engage in inquiry-based learning in science and social studies. Educators at the Carlton apply a continuous progress model, which allows for the individualization of significant aspects of learning (i.e., relationships, objective, content), while working in close collaboration to help young learners take ownership of their personal and academic trajectories.



Student Wellbeing

With the COVID-19 pandemic turning the education system upside down, academics cannot be the sole focus for recovery—schools must also prioritize support for student, educator, and family wellbeing. To carry out this work, schools must think systemically about how to organize internal resources and build bridges to external providers, recognizing that collaboration (both among staff and with community-based providers) is essential in a holistic approach to learning. As the following section will describe, building a comprehensive system of social-emotional and mental health support, and equipping educators to promote student wellbeing, requires a deep commitment to fostering authentic experiences within—and beyond—academics.

STUDENT WELLBEING

Develop Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems

- Build a multi-tiered system of support to foster students' mental health and success across all developmental domains, including social-emotional, behavioral, and academic

Create Holistic Learning Experiences

- Pair children with adults who can help them access tailored supports and opportunities inside and outside of school

Engage & Elevate Student, Family, and Community Voice

- Rather than attempting to develop social-emotional skills in isolation, ensure social-emotional learning is infused within curricular materials, including by adopting curricula that promote student voice and are led by students' own passions and interests
- Form Children's Cabinets to bring together local stakeholders to develop a shared and collective vision for supporting children's learning, healthy development, and wellbeing

Methuen Public Schools

FOCUS: Mental and Behavioral Health

FEATURED: [2020 Condition of Education Report](#)

The prevalence of mental health concerns among students is at an all-time high following the pandemic, and school staff are on the front lines of responding to these unprecedented challenges. In [Methuen Public Schools](#), for instance, [nearly 35% of students](#) were at elevated risk of moderate to severe depression and anxiety in the 2020–21 school year. The fact that Methuen can measure these rates—and take action in response to student needs—is due to the years of work district leaders have put into building a comprehensive school mental health system. As it worked to build this system, Methuen started small, recognizing the valuable lessons that can be gained from using a single screening measure with just a few students before scaling up. The district currently uses a universal screening approach and offers a range of tiered interventions, including Tier 1 (whole-school and whole-classroom) strategies, Tier 2 services for students with a higher level of need, and Tier 3 supports for a small number of students facing significant challenges. Crucially, the district also has systems in place for organizing staff to target interventions to student needs and gathering data on the success of those interventions. The multi-tiered system of support currently operating in Methuen serves as a model for other districts seeking to take action in the face of persistent mental health needs.

City Connects

FOCUS: Personalized and Integrated Student Support

FEATURED: [2015 Condition of Education Report](#)

All students need support that schools can't provide alone, ranging from enrichment activities such as art classes and robotics workshops to connections with vital community services such as food pantries and healthcare providers. The mission of City Connects is to help schools build systems of integrated student support designed to connect each student with the in-school and out-of-school resources they need to thrive. At the core of the model is the City Connects Coordinator, a full-time member of the school's student support team. The Coordinator consults with teachers, staff, and families to review individual student strengths and needs, develop action plans, ensure implementation of those plans, and use data to inform school- and community-level decisions responsive to the needs and interests of students and families. [City Connects](#)—which grew out of a partnership between Boston College and several local Boston schools—continues to have a strong footprint within Massachusetts, even as it has grown to serve more than 36,000 students across (and beyond) the United States.

Generation Citizen

FOCUS: Student Voice

FEATURED: [2019 Condition of Education Report](#)

When students feel like they have a voice in their own learning, they are more likely to engage deeply in academic work and develop critical skills such as creativity, communication, and collaboration. [Generation Citizen](#), a national nonprofit that partners with a number of districts across Massachusetts, aims to cultivate student voice through action civics. Through Generation Citizen, students select a community-based issue, research the topic, generate an action plan for addressing the issue, and put their plan in motion through activities such as outreach to legislators or coalition-building with local groups. Generation Citizen also supports teachers in partner districts as they build their ability to integrate student voice within the classroom in meaningful ways. By participating in Generation Citizen, students develop their civic efficacy—the feeling that they can make a difference—and benefit from authentic learning experiences within their community.



Children's Cabinets

FOCUS: Community Connections

FEATURED: [2019 Condition of Education Report](#)

Just as schools alone cannot provide every service that students need, school systems aren't the only entities responsible for the healthy development of children and young people. Instead, families engage with a wide range of agencies and organizations. Within this environment, the role of [Children's Cabinets](#) is to bring together representatives from across various sectors to build a more well-aligned and comprehensive set of services for children and caregivers in their community. EdRedesign located at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (which was established by the Rennie Center's founder and former Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville) has been at the forefront of efforts to create Children's Cabinets in cities around the country, including many in Massachusetts. Investing in formal collaborative efforts like Children's Cabinets can help leaders identify and address gaps in services while promoting stronger links between schools and community resources.

College & Career Pathways

Our education system does not always prepare students for college and career success, frequently lacking coordinated methods of supporting students as they explore their interests, build networks and social capital, refine their skills, and identify their next steps. In Massachusetts, new college and career learning options have begun to emerge, along with opportunities for experiential or competency-based learning, demonstrating ways to help students prepare for a future aligned with their individual goals and talents. Whether in school-based programs, through out-of-school-time opportunities, or in partnerships between institutions of higher education and the broader community, the programs we've highlighted through COE have begun to make it possible for students to define and seek out what success means to them.

COLLEGE & CAREER PATHWAYS

Offer Competency-based Learning Experiences

- Shift to more personalized academic programming that enables students to progress based on their mastery of skills and content, not seat time
- Provide opportunities to earn high school and college credits and/or certificates through a variety of in-school and out-of-school learning experiences

Forge Career Pathways

- Support students to chart their own path to a career by exploring their individual skills and interests and how those align with potential professions
- Develop collaborative partnerships with local MassHire boards and employers to offer in-person, virtual, or hybrid options for career exploration, paid internship experiences, participatory assessments, and vocational-technical opportunities

Establish Early College Programming

- Create sustainable systems for partnership between high schools and institutions of higher education to prioritize building early college programs that feature equitable access, robust academic pathways, student support, and connections to careers

ACE at Brookline High School

FOCUS: Competency-based Learning Experiences

FEATURED: *2017 Condition of Education Report*

The [Alternative Choices in Education \(ACE\) program](#) at Brookline High School is designed for 55 self-selected students in grades 10–12 to engage in a non-traditional education setting for their academic and personal success. The competency-based program splits students into small, multi-age advisory groups who meet with each other and their advisors twice a week for academic progress check-ins and team-building activities. To meet students' academic needs, ACE has students enter a college-preparatory pathway, where they are placed in multi-age classes based on their skill levels. These paths are flexible, centered on six-week thematic courses that enable students to go at their own pace and demonstrate their mastery of content in a variety of ways. For the students' personal development, the [ACE program](#) prioritizes clear expectations, restorative justice practices, student voice, and mutual accountability through the ACE Student Leadership Team, community-building trips, and service projects.

LEAP for Education

FOCUS: Forging Career Pathways

FEATURED: [2016 Condition of Education Report](#)

Planning for post-secondary and career is a challenging process for any student, particularly those living in underserved communities where opportunities for career exploration and gaining social capital are frequently limited. Students on the North Shore of Massachusetts can turn to [LEAP for Education](#) to serve as a connector and support network in this process. Currently serving over 600 youth, LEAP offers programming to students starting in middle school, arranging after-school, school day, summer activities, and work-based learning activities that expose them to new fields while building connections with peers and mentors. As they move through high school, students work with LEAP staff and volunteers from LEAP's Business Partner Network, to develop education and career plans that help guide their decisions about coursework and out-of-school activities, jobs, and post-secondary pathways. Students can also access career workshops, skill-building opportunities, and field trips to local employers, along with summer jobs and paid internships. By offering personalized support, LEAP helps students navigate school and life transitions in order to access a path aligned with their skills and interests.



Early College

FOCUS: Forging College Pathways

FEATURED: [2015 Condition of Education Report](#)

Classroom, school, and district leaders across the nation now recognize the value of exposing high school students to college-level learning. Early college programs allow students to take a series of college-level courses while still in high school and earn credit for both. Offering this experience to students helps them build the habits of mind that lead to postsecondary success and gives them the opportunity to earn credits that count toward a degree, making college more accessible and affordable. However, collaboration between high schools and colleges can be challenging, and so can ensuring that early college options are known to all students. [Project Healthcare](#) at Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) has aimed to address both of these obstacles. In 2019, in partnership with Leominster and Fitchburg High Schools, Project Healthcare created a survey to gauge student interest in health professions. MWCC visited every 9th grade biology class to describe the program and explain the survey. Every student who met a certain level of interest based on this survey received a Project Healthcare application. The college also partnered with guidance counselors at the high school to identify students and encourage them to apply. Collaborative efforts like this offer an inclusive college-level learning experience that helps students gain both new knowledge and confidence in their ability to tackle advanced coursework.



Conclusion: Looking Ahead

Massachusetts is fortunate to have so many programs and initiatives that aim to promote long-term success for students. Every day, all across the Commonwealth, dedicated educators, school staff, families, and community members work to offer high-quality early learning experiences, provide authentic and rigorous instruction, support children's wellbeing, and construct effective pathways to college and careers. While practitioners and policymakers can benefit from reexamining the models described here, these represent just a small sample of the innovative and promising programs that have demonstrated their value over the past ten years.

Yet amid the richness of our education landscape, we also recognize that for effective program models to lead to meaningful, widespread changes in student outcomes, they must be linked with fundamental changes to our education system. Indeed, many of the strategies described above inevitably lead to a blurring of “traditional” school roles and responsibilities and point to a new conception of how schools could—or should—operate. When students lead the way by investigating and reporting on topics that matter to them, or when they spend their final years of high school participating in college classes, how must we reconsider the role of educators in guiding the learning process? When families prepare their children for the transition to kindergarten, or students participate in community-based enrichment opportunities, how must we reconsider where learning takes place? And when young people progress through coursework based on their understanding of the material, rather than in traditional age-based groupings, how must we reconsider concepts like grade levels and school calendars?

Grappling with these types of thorny questions on the roles of people, place, and time will not be easy, but it will be necessary. As Massachusetts continues to face persistent inequities in student opportunities and outcomes, we must think broadly about how to shift our education system so it leads to success for all learners. At the Rennie Center, we see this as our charge for the future. Building off of the programs featured here and the innovative strategies they employ, we will engage the field on how to advance a new vision of education. Through events, research, and outreach to a wide range of stakeholders, we will seek input on the future direction of our education system and identify new practices and policies that can support necessary changes. We look forward to building on our work to date as we open the next chapter of the Condition of Education in the Commonwealth.

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We are grateful for their time, their candor, and—most especially—their commitment to sharing what they have learned so that others may better serve all students in Massachusetts with innovative programming.

About the Rennie Center

The mission of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy is to improve public education through well-informed decision making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policy making and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life.



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