

Massachusetts: Jurisdiction Profile

System Demographics

Geography

Massachusetts is an economically healthy and generally wealthy state with a rich history and culture dating back to its pivotal role in the founding of the United States. Driven by strong information technology and biotech industries and the presence of some of the world's best universities, Massachusetts has recently seen strong economic growth and an increase in high-wage jobs.

With a 2015 population of 6.8 million,¹ Massachusetts is the 15th largest state in the United States and the most populous of the six states that comprise the country's northeastern New England region. It is also the third densest state in the country, with a land area of only 10,500 square miles. Its capitol and most populous city is Boston, and over 80 percent of the state population lives in Boston or one of its suburbs in the Greater Boston metropolitan area. As such, only 8 percent of its population lives in rural areas, one of the lowest rates in the country. The state is fairly racially diverse, with 76 percent of its population being white, 10 percent Hispanic, 7 percent African American, and 5 percent Asian Pacific Islander.²

More information about Massachusetts can be found at:

- <http://doe.mass.edu>
- www.mass.gov

Number of schools and students

In 2015-2016, Massachusetts had 953,429 students in 1,869 K-12 public schools across 409 school districts.³ Of these students:

- 27.4 percent were socioeconomically disadvantaged
- 9.0 percent were English language learners
- 17.2 percent were students with disabilities⁴

Of the 1,869 public schools, 80 are charter schools, which operate independently of local school boards under a charter granted by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census (2015). American Fact Finder.

<http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 2012, Table 19,

<http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/all-states/asian-population-percentage#map>

³ http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/enrollmentbygrade.aspx

⁴ http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reported that districts employed 72,309 teachers in 2015-2016, for a student-teacher ratio of 13 to 1.⁵

System structure

In Massachusetts, compulsory school starts at age six and continues until a student is at least 16. There is no gateway exam between elementary and secondary school and, as in most states, students progress through school by getting passing grades in their classes. There is, however, a gateway exam at the end of high school in Massachusetts. Prior to 2016, in order to graduate from high school, all students had to earn a passing score of at least 240 on the grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in English Language Arts and mathematics, and at least 220 on one of the MCAS tests in Science, Technology, or Engineering. In 2014, 88 percent of 10th graders met these benchmarks.⁶ Now that Massachusetts is transitioning to a new statewide exam system, which is a hybrid of MCAS and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), it will set new cut scores on those exams. Students who fail to meet the passing standards can retake the tests or apply for a waiver.

In 2015, 72 percent of secondary students in the state completed the MassCore curriculum, the state's recommended program of study for college readiness.⁷ It includes four years of English, four years of mathematics, three years of a lab-based science, three years of history, and two years of a foreign language. The state has shown that students who complete MassCore are more likely to meet admissions requirements for selective universities.⁸

Governance arrangements

State Governance

Massachusetts separates oversight of early childhood education, higher education and K-12 education between three separate agencies: the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education. A Commissioner, appointed by the Governor, runs each. The Executive Office of Education, situated within the office of the state's governor and led by a State Secretary for Education, has

⁵ http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/teacherdata.aspx

⁶ WBUR News and Wire Services (2014). 88 Percent Pass MCAS, But Achievement Gaps Remain. 90.9 WBUR. <http://www.wbur.org/2014/09/19/mcas-achievement-gap>

⁷ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). 2014-2015 MassCore Completion Report. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/masscore.aspx

⁸ U.S. Department of Education (2014). Massachusetts Districts Adopt Rigorous MassCore Course Requirements for High School Graduates. <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/progress/2014/01/massachusetts-districts-adopt-rigorous-masscore-course-requirements-for-high-school-graduates/>

some authority over these three principal agencies in order to promote overall coordination of priorities within the comprehensive education system. As such, the work of the Executive Office focuses on issues that cut across the three agencies, such as sharing information and data among them.⁹ The Executive Office is not the only body to which the Departments are accountable: several boards with both elected and appointed members also oversee the work of the Departments. The responsibilities of each department, and the corresponding board to which they are accountable, are outlined in more detail below.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has oversight of K-12 school districts, charter school authorizing, teacher licensure and teacher education programs through their Office of Educator Licensure. A 12-member Board of Elementary and Secondary Education oversees the Department. It has the authority to set policy for licensure, assessment, teacher quality, interventions for underperforming schools, governance and other matters. Ten members are elected (including one student member), the chair is appointed by the governor, and the governor also appoints the Secretary of the Board, who by law also serves as the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Department of Early Education and Care is responsible for licensing and regulating childcare providers and adoption and child placement agencies, providing professional development to early education and care providers, distributing financial assistance to families for early education and out-of-school-time programs, and matching needy families with additional services, as required. It is also accountable to a Board of Early Education and Care, consisting of 11 members appointed by the governor (including the Secretary of Education), which is responsible for financial oversight of the early education system and setting policy for the quality rating and improvement system that evaluates providers.

The state Board of Higher Education consists of 11 voting members: nine are appointed by the governor (including the State Superintendent of Education,) and two are university representatives elected by the trustees of the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and the State Community Colleges and Universities. There are also two nonvoting student members. The Department of Higher Education reports to the Executive Office of Education and the state board, and implements the policy set by the board in partnership with the UMass system. The state board also oversees the University of Massachusetts Board of Trustees and the Board of State Colleges and Universities. The University of Massachusetts and State College Boards have broad authority for setting

⁹ Massachusetts Executive Office of Education (2016). The Executive Office of Education. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/>

programmatic and strategic policies for their organizations, but they are expected to submit all of their five-year plans, including strategic plans and budgets, to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

Although the United States does not have a constitutional right to equal education in its national Constitution, Massachusetts is one of 30 states where the state constitution outlines such a right. As such, state courts have authority for determining whether students' rights to educational equity and adequacy are being violated.

National Governance

As a state, Massachusetts is also accountable to the federal United States government. However, the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act sharply circumscribed the authority of the U.S. Department of Education. As a result, the United States is in a period of transition from historically stronger federal control over elementary and secondary education, when the federal government used its funding authority to compel states to adopt common standards for student learning, school and teacher evaluation systems, and school closure policy for low performing schools, to a period of more relaxed federal control. This is not to say that the federal government has no authority over Massachusetts: as with all states in the United States, Massachusetts receives approximately 10 percent of its funding from the federal government, and is required to spend that money according to certain guidelines attached to the grants they receive. The state is also required to be in compliance with federal law and regulations.

Local Governance

All states in the United States have a strong tradition of local control. Individual school district offices do most of the oversight of individual schools. District superintendents who are appointed by elected or appointed local school boards lead these offices. Local school boards also have authority for funding, procurement, and some curricular decisions, although these are subject to standards and other requirements laid out in state board regulations and state statute.

Funding and expenditure

In the United States, the states have the primary responsibility for funding public schools, though, as a practical matter, most states expect the cities, towns and county governments to provide a good deal of the funding for their schools through local property taxes. The federal government supplements this funding, mostly to provide additional funds for schools serving low-income, minority and special needs students. States vary by not only the formula by which funds are allocated to schools, but also the ratio between state and local district funding. Since much of education funding is traditionally raised and allocated at the district level based on local property taxes, the level of funding has traditionally

correlated to the wealth of the district, resulting in gross inequalities in funding between the rich and the poor in some U.S. states.

Massachusetts is traditionally one of the top spending states in the country. In 2012, Massachusetts spent \$14,142 per student, the 8th highest level of state spending in the nation.¹⁰ Like most states, Massachusetts sets a base amount of spending per pupil and then adds additional funds for demographic factors that require more resources. The state adds between 7 and 34 percent additional funding for English language learners, depending on the grade level; 127 percent additional funding for special education students; and 26-33 percent additional funding for low-income students.¹¹ Massachusetts's additional funding for disadvantaged students is among the highest across the country. Overall, Massachusetts spends 7.3 percent more state and local dollars on each student in a low-income district than in a high-income district, the 6th highest percentage of *additional* spending among states. The figure is 14.8 percent when federal funding is counted, again the 8th highest among states.¹²

Accountability and Transparency

Massachusetts tracks progress of its education system by issuing public reports on student outcomes. Annual school profiles report scores on statewide tests, as well as other demographic and achievement data such as high school graduation rates. The state also publishes district and statewide reports comparing outcomes for specific schools with “peer” schools that have similar demographics.¹³

Massachusetts has implemented a teacher evaluation system that requires all teachers to develop their own personalized professional development plans, based on goals they set for improvement. Like most states, teacher and principal evaluations rely on a combination of ratings of professional practice, generally consisting of observations and student or staff surveys, and student outcomes, including scores and improvements on teacher-determined measures of learning as well as standardized tests for tested grades and subjects. Positive teacher evaluation results can give teachers more autonomy to choose how they develop

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education (2013). Cited by Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Center. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5199-per-pupil-educational-expenditures-adjusted-for-regional-cost-differences?loc=1#detailed/2/2-52/false/868,867,133,38,35/any/11678>

¹¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016). School Finance – Chapter 70 Program. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/chapter70/>

¹² Brown, E. (2015). In 23 states, richer school districts get more local funding than poorer school districts. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/03/12/in-23-states-richer-school-districts-get-more-local-funding-than-poorer-districts/>

¹³ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016). School/District Profiles. <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

these plans; negative evaluation results mean that teachers are required to develop improvement plans with supervisors that consist of additional professional development.¹⁴ There are school districts experimenting with rewarding teachers who have effective performance ratings with monetary bonuses, although the specifics of these incentives are determined at the district level. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2016, the federal requirement that teacher evaluation be based, in part, on student test scores is removed. It is not clear yet whether Massachusetts will revise its evaluation system.

As required by federal law, Massachusetts identifies poorly performing schools by looking at test scores and improvement in scores overall and for subgroups of students as well as other measures like graduation rates. The state requires schools to develop improvement plans. Schools that are persistently low-performing are required to choose among several turnaround models with strategies such as replacing school staff and leadership, granting schools autonomy to restructure and choose staff, assigning mentors and coaches to schools, providing intensive professional development focused on understanding data and instructional strategies, and setting up learning communities of teachers to ensure that the school continues to improve. It remains to be seen how the recent passage of ESSA, which abolishes previously enforced federal requirements related to school turnaround, will affect the state's policy on turnaround models for low-performing schools.

Massachusetts also identifies the lowest performing 10 percent of districts in the state. The state has five levels of tiered supports for districts depending on their level of need. The state provides robust assistance to these districts through its network of regional District and School Assistance Centers as well as on-line tools and supports. The Department's Office of District and School Turnaround also provides targeted assistance to the 10 largest urban districts in the state. Massachusetts has a provision in law to take over any districts that are critically low performing. There are currently two districts in this status.¹⁵

¹⁴ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>

¹⁵ Executive Office of Education (2016). Office of District and School Turnaround. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/>

System Performance

NAEP

Massachusetts is consistently the top-performing state in the United States on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the national assessment system for comparing the educational progress of states. In 2015, it ranked:

- First among states in 4th grade math, with a scale score of 251
- First among states in 8th grade math, with a scale score of 297
- First among states in 4th grade reading, with a scale score of 235
- Second among states in 8th grade reading, with a scale score of 274, not statistically different from New Hampshire's score of 275¹⁶

Statewide Tests

In order to graduate from high school, all students have had to earn a passing score of at least 240 on the grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in English Language Arts and mathematics, and at least 220 on one of the MCAS tests in Science, Technology, or Engineering. As of this year, the state is transitioning to a new exam and will set new corresponding cut scores. In 2014, 88 percent of 10th graders met these benchmarks in 10th grade.¹⁷

PISA

Massachusetts was one of three U.S. states to administer the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading, math and science in 2012. This enables it to be compared to the United States average, as well as to 64 other international jurisdictions. The state's scores were impressive: it scored the highest of the three U.S. states (the others were Connecticut and Florida,) and far above the United States and OECD average scores. In math, Massachusetts scored 514, ranking 16th among 65 jurisdictions and well above the U.S. average of 481. In reading, Massachusetts scored 527, ranking 6th among all jurisdictions and well above the U.S. average of 498. In science, Massachusetts 527, ranking 9th among international jurisdictions and well above the U.S. average of 497.^{18 19}

Reform priorities

Massachusetts has among the highest per capita incomes in the nation, and generally has among the top per-pupil spending costs. But its success is due to more than spending. It has a long history of focusing on education improvement

¹⁶ National Center for Education Statistics Institute for Education Sciences (2015).

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>

¹⁷ WBUR News and Wire Services (2014). 88 Percent Pass MCAS, But Achievement Gaps Remain. 90.9 WBUR. <http://www.wbur.org/2014/09/19/mcas-achievement-gap>

¹⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences (2012). PISA State Results: Massachusetts. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/pisa2012/pisa2012highlights_8b.asp

¹⁹ NCES. 2014. PISA 2012 Data Tables, Figures and Exhibits. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014024_tables.pdf

and developing the infrastructure at the state level to support steady reform. In the middle 1990s, Massachusetts' students were performing right in the middle of the pack on national tests. In 1992, 23 percent of the state's 8th graders met proficiency standards in math according to NAEP. Business leaders worried that students would not be globally competitive and pushed legislators to take action. In 1993, Massachusetts passed the Education Reform Act, which put in place rigorous, statewide standards in English language arts, math, history/social science, foreign languages, health, and science, technology and engineering. The Massachusetts Common Core of Learning outlined what students were expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduated from high school. The state also created a high school exit exam, known as the MCAS, which was first implemented in 1998.

Massachusetts continues that tradition of state-driven, system-wide reform today. Recent major reform priorities include:

High Standards for All Students

Massachusetts' Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2010. The state is also a member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In school year 2014-2015, the state gave districts the option to use either PARCC or the state's homegrown Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, in order to see which one better served their needs. However, in November 2015 the State Board decided to develop its own new assessment that will incorporate parts of the PARCC tests along with parts of MCAS. The state will use the new, hybrid test starting in 2017.²⁰ Massachusetts also adopted the Next Generation Science Standards. The state provides districts and teachers with curriculum frameworks, aligned to the standards, for each subject at each grade level as well as professional development opportunities and supporting instructional materials based on those frameworks through an online portal.

Building Stronger Teacher Preparation Systems

In Massachusetts, earning an initial teaching license, valid for five years, requires a bachelor's degree from an approved institution and passing the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure. Teachers can earn a Professional License, which grants tenure protections, after three years on the job, but only after obtaining a master's degree in teaching (which can be waived for National Board-certified

²⁰ Fox, J. (2015). Education board votes to adopt hybrid MCAS-PARCC test. *The Boston Globe*. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/11/17/state-education-board-vote-whether-replace-mcas/aex1nGyBYZW2sucEW2o82L/story.html>

teachers).²¹ However, as with most states, Massachusetts has an enormous number of approved teacher education programs, 82, and a variety of alternative routes into teaching for college graduates, including Teach For America and a set of accredited charter schools that offer preparation courses for their first-year teachers.²² Furthermore, the program of study in teacher education is not standardized.

Given this variability in program offerings and the difficulty of ensuring program quality at the state level, Massachusetts has taken several steps in order to improve the quality of its teaching pool. First, the state requires a more difficult and demanding test for licensure than any other state in the country. In order to be certified, candidates must take the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL), which the state commissioned from Pearson as a more rigorous alternative to the notoriously easy-to-pass Praxis, which is required in most other states. All candidates are required to take the MTEL for Literacy Skills, along with additional tests depending on the subjects they will teach. Elementary school generalists may be required to take up to six tests, including special education, English as a Second Language, math, general curriculum, literacy and writing, and foundations of reading, depending on the populations they serve.²³ The pass rate for the required Literacy Skills test was 84 percent in the most recent administration (winter 2015,) but the pass rates for the special subject tests averaged to only 64 percent.²⁴ Those that pass all tests required of them receive an Initial License, which is valid for three years.

Furthermore, once new teachers are placed in schools, they have access to additional supports and opportunities to learn in their first year. Massachusetts has a statewide induction program that requires new teachers to be mentored for one year following certification. Mentors are required by state regulation to be trained and to receive release time to observe and coach.²⁵ However, there is no statewide, formal process for identifying these mentors: recruitment and hiring practices for mentors are left to individual districts.

²¹ Massachusetts Executive Office of Education (2016). Teacher License Types and General Requirements. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/educator-effectiveness/licensure/academic-prek-12/teacher/teacher-license-types-and-general-requirements-.html>

²² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). Search Results: Organizations. <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11238>

²³ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL) General Information: Subject Matter Test Requirements. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/testrequire.html>

²⁴ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) Number of Examinees and Percent of Examinees Passing Each Test by Examinee Category. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/results/2016-0117.html>

²⁵ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2002). Teacher Induction Programs. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/mentor/teachers.html>

Improving Early Childhood Education

Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to bring early childhood services under one roof in 2005, when the Department of Early Care and Education was created with a mandate to better coordinate services and expand access.

Governor Deval Patrick came into office in 2008 with a “readiness” agenda that resulted in an Education Action Plan committing the state to work towards universal preschool, free community college for early childhood educators and new curriculum and program standards for birth to age 3 programs.

Massachusetts created the Universal Pre-K grant program, established an Early Childhood Educator Scholarship program, developed a set of state-level professional development programs for early childhood educators including a Peer Assistance and Mentoring Program, and created a “career ladder” for early childhood workers as a tool to organize compensation and professional development. They have also notably created a post-Master’s degree program in early childhood to increase state expertise in the field. With its federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and Preschool Development grants, Massachusetts is continuing to expand access to preschool for low-income families and raising the quality of the early education teaching force.

Massachusetts requires districts to offer at least half-day kindergarten, although attendance is not mandatory. Massachusetts does not offer statewide Pre-Kindergarten, although many districts offer Pre-Kindergarten and the lowest income children in the states are offered Head Start programs and subsidies for private preschool or childcare. Statewide, 59.5 percent of 3-4 year olds are enrolled in pre-school while only 44 percent of low-income children are enrolled.²⁶ Like most states, data on childcare for children age 2 is not reported, as most childcare providers are private and many are not licensed.

²⁶ Education Week (2015). Preparing to Launch: Early Childhood Academic Countdown – Massachusetts State Highlights 2015.

<http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/2015/shr/16shr.ma.h34.pdf>