

# Don't Hesitate, Legislate!

**This is the year to pass dropout prevention and recovery legislation!**

**The Youth Transitions Task Force, the Multi-Cultural Dropout Outreach Collaborative and state partners say:**

Let's pass a dropout reduction bill this session!

- Raise the legal dropout age in phases
- Fund graduation coaches and outreach to dropouts
- Reduce the negative impact of suspensions and expulsion

***We ask the Ways & Means Committee to report out S.2173, the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Act***



## **Why this issue is so urgent:**

- On average, graduates will earn **\$445,000 more** in their lifetimes than those without a high school diploma.
- Dropouts comprise **70% of the incarcerated population** in MA, at an average operating cost of \$46,000 per person per year.
- Dropouts are twice as likely as high school graduates to **depend on public spending**.
- The cost to the tax payer for each dropout is **\$307,000 over a lifetime**: \$71,000 in public spending costs and \$236,000 in lower tax payments.
- Over **7,899 Massachusetts students** dropped out in 2011.

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**We know what to do.** In October of 2009, the Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission published a report for the Commonwealth to substantially lower the dropout rate and support more students to successful graduation with a set of comprehensive recommendations:

- Reduce the dropout rate by half over the next five years.
- Raise the legal dropout age from 16 to 18 through a phased-in approach.
- Develop an early warning indicator data system to identify those likely to drop out.
- Target interventions to individual students who are struggling.
- Establish active dropout outreach and recovery.
- Create more alternatives to traditional high schools.
- Support regional coalitions to organize a local dropout reduction plan.
- Connect school to college and career.

**Many districts have started to work on the issue and have lowered the number of students dropping out.** Working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), 20 key districts have lowered their dropout rate using some of these recommendations. Since 2007, the state has reduced its dropout rate from 3.8% to 2.7%, and its dropout number from 11,436 to 7,899.

**We need legislation to bring us the next substantial decrease.** It is time for the state government to show it supports local efforts. We are recommending the following three “strategic pillars” to underlay the next dropout bill:

**1) Increase the legal dropout age using a phased-in approach.** 40 states now have 17 or 18 as the legal dropout age. Recently, New Hampshire cut its dropout rate in half by raising the compulsory age in tandem with a statewide action plan. New Hampshire legislated a phased-in approach that raised the age to 17 in 2 years, and 18 in the third year to give the state time to prepare. The message here is that underage youth should not be allowed to compromise their economic futures by dropping out of high school.

**2) Fund graduation coaches and outreach to dropouts.** A graduation and re-engagement coach program would allow the Commonwealth to jumpstart these promising practices throughout the state. Graduation coaches keep struggling students in school, attending regularly, and on a path to academic achievement and graduation. Well-designed outreach and re-engagement activities bring students back to school far more effectively than traditional enforcement approaches. The most effective models nationally fund nonprofit partners to do this work in collaboration with schools and school districts.

**3) Reduce the negative impact of suspensions and expulsion.** The alienation associated with suspensions and expulsions is a key piece of the dropout puzzle. Districts would be required to report on all suspensions and expulsions; the ESE would report annually on these exclusions; and school districts would provide suspended and expelled students with alternative education options.