

Massachusetts Governor Proposes Free Attendance to Community Colleges

By Brooke Heath



Last week, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick (D) announced new public education plans for his state at the University of Massachusetts-Boston commencement ceremony. This proposal would allow all Massachusetts high school graduates to attend the state's community colleges free of charge for two years.

The proposal is part of Patrick's vision for a "cradle-to-career" public education. According to Channel 7 News in Boston, the governor's plan also includes lengthening the school day by at least two hours, lengthening the school year, creating a universal pre-kindergarten program, strengthening curriculum requirements in math and English, and launching new teacher training programs.

Governor Patrick anticipates that the free community college funding proposal would take effect by 2015.

Currently, Massachusetts' community colleges are some of the most expensive to attend in the country, according to *The Boston Globe*. But the plan considers the community colleges to be critical to helping the state's economy, as educating Massachusetts' citizens will help to fill the 20,000 empty jobs in the state that require a two-year degree.

Of the governor's proposal, Senator Robert A. Antonioni, co-chairman of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education, said, "I can say that those are all ideals or goals that I would support. One question that comes to mind is 'What sort of structure are you going to have to oversee all of this?' and, number two, 'How do you pay for it?'"

Governor Patrick's proposal did not go into detail about how he plans to fund this venture. He did, however, speak of a commission that would recommend ways to pay for the changes.

According to *The Globe*, Michael J. Widmer, president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, estimates that the governor's proposal to allow students to attend the community colleges for free would cost "roughly \$50 million to \$75 million a year."

"It's the right kind of priority, and it's a bold statement," said Widmer. "But the tough decision of how to pay for it is unanswered."

Allowing students to attend community college for two years at no cost would be a first for any state in the country, according to *The Globe*. However, critics are unsure if the state's community colleges would be able to help the governor execute his plan in only eight years, as approximately 200,000 students attend Massachusetts' 15 community colleges.