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Secretary of Education Dr. Patrick Tutwiler
State of Education Address
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Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Chad d'Entremont, Alexis Lian, and the entire Rennie Center team for bringing us together again. This annual gathering is always a moment to pause, reflect, and re-ground us in the work. I'm grateful to be here and honored to share where we stand and where we are headed.

My name is Patrick Tutwiler, and I have the privilege of serving as Secretary of Education. It's remarkable to realize that we are already three years into the Healey-Driscoll Administration—and six years beyond the start of the pandemic. As we take stock today, I want to look ahead with optimism but also look back with appreciation for how far we've come.

From the day I stepped into this role, our work has been guided by a simple framework: stabilize, heal, transform. It has been our North Star, steering our decisions and ensuring we remain focused on building a more equitable, affordable, and accessible education system. Recovery, as I've said many times, is a process, not an event—and one we approached with intentionality and urgency.

Today, that framework continues to guide us. And as we transition into discussing our accomplishments, I'm proud to share that many sectors of our education system have stabilized, are healing, and—in some exciting places—are truly beginning to transform.

Let me begin where everything begins: early childhood.

The research is clear, and the stories from families and educators echo it—birth to age five is the most consequential period of learning in a child's life. That's why early education and care

remain at the center of our strategy to ensure Massachusetts is a place where families can thrive.

Yesterday, Governor Healey's House 2 budget proposal recommended nearly \$1.9 billion for early education and care—an extraordinary investment that builds on our previous commitments. This funding is the foundation of the Gateway to Pre-K agenda, which strengthens the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program, expands financial assistance, and continues our march toward universal preschool.

As we reflect on these investments, it's important to pause and acknowledge the leadership behind them. I want to express my deep appreciation for our Commissioner of Early Education and Care, Amy Kershaw, whose steady hand and relentless dedication have helped keep our early childhood system stable, growing, and more accessible than ever.

With more than 22,000 new child care seats added since the beginning of this administration, and universal preschool nearing reality in Gateway Cities, the transformation underway in early education is both real and lasting.

And as we consider how early childhood lays the groundwork for learning, it becomes clear how essential our next area of focus must be.

Just as early childhood lays the groundwork, literacy cements it.

The data is unambiguous: too many students are not reading on grade level by grade three. That's why we launched Literacy Launch, our multiyear, evidence-based strategy to change that trajectory.

This year, we're requesting \$25 million to expand this work—an investment that builds on more than \$10 million already awarded to 45 districts for high-quality instructional materials, professional development, and coaching. Our sustained investment in high-dosage tutoring—another \$25 million—means thousands of young learners will receive the one-on-one support proven to accelerate reading growth.

These efforts are only possible because of strong cross-agency collaboration between the Departments of Early Education and Care and Elementary and Secondary Education. Let me take a moment to recognize and thank our Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Pedro Martinez. He's new—and I have appropriately advised him to continue using that descriptor for as long as people will accept it. Seriously, his leadership, partnership, and commitment to coherence across the pre-K–12 system have helped drive this work forward in a meaningful way.

As we strengthen literacy and foundational skills, we must also ensure that as students grow, the system grows with them.

That brings us to our next phase of transformation: reimagining high school.

The pace of change in the world far exceeds the pace at which our systems were originally designed to change. Our students feel this deeply—they’re asking for learning that feels relevant, connected, and purposeful.

Today, more than 80,000 high school students—one in four—participate in Early College, Innovation Career Pathways, or other College and Career Pathways programs. Enrollment in these programs has grown nearly 20 percent since Governor Healey took office, and our proposed \$53 million FY27 investment will allow us to expand Early College to more than 100 high schools.

As we accelerate this transformation, we must also examine what it means to finish high school prepared for the future.

That’s why, throughout 2025, the K–12 Statewide Graduation Council worked to answer a pivotal question: What does it truly mean to prepare every student for the life they choose?

The result is our Vision of a Graduate, which goes beyond academic content to center the skills and experiences essential for success—critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, civic engagement, and social-emotional readiness.

In December, we released our initial recommendations for a statewide graduation requirement. Organized around three principles—learning experiences, mastery, and preparedness for what’s next—this package outlines the importance of coursework, expands opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in ways that reflect their strengths, and supports them in planning for the next chapter of their lives, whether that’s higher education or entering a career.

This process has been inclusive, thoughtful, and community-driven. And our work continues as we refine recommendations with advisory groups and invite further public input ahead of the final report in June.

This renewed vision of readiness leads us naturally to the next stage of the educational journey—higher education, where opportunity and economic mobility come into clear focus.

Our 29 public colleges and universities are engines of mobility and promise. According to the Department of Higher Education’s recent earnings report, graduates earn \$20,000 to \$30,000 more per year than peers who do not pursue higher education.

Working with the Legislature, we have doubled funding for financial aid, made community college free for all, and eliminated tuition and fees for Pell-eligible students at any public college in the Commonwealth.

These are monumental steps, and they are the result of strong, principled leadership. I want to express my gratitude to our Commissioner of Higher Education, Noe Ortega, whose eternally optimistic orientation and commitment to access, affordability, and student success have fundamentally reshaped what is possible for students across Massachusetts.

Across early childhood, pre-K–12, and higher education, our progress is real—and it is accelerating. But it is also unfinished. As we look to the year ahead, I am deeply optimistic—because I’m wired that way, and because I see every day what is possible when educators, students, families, policymakers, community partners, and employers work together with shared purpose.

As we chart that path forward, I’m reminded of the words of James Baldwin. As one of my DESE colleagues recently said, “everyone should be consulting James in the present day”—and I agree. He offered a truth that speaks directly to this moment:

“Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

These words capture the spirit of the work before us. In Massachusetts, we are choosing to face our challenges—honestly, urgently, and collaboratively. And because we are facing them, we are changing them. We are opening pathways, closing gaps, and transforming lives.

Our students deserve nothing less. And together, we will continue this work with clarity, courage, and conviction.

Thank you. Let’s keep moving forward.