



Massachusetts

Crafting Clear Goals for All Massachusetts Children and Youth

How a statewide team created a shared set of desired outcomes for youth.



Cover of the state's *Call for Collaborative Action* for youth

Despite impressive accomplishments in education, employment and social services, Massachusetts has been unable to shake a persistent threat to its future growth and the strength of its families: huge gaps in well-being and readiness among different youth populations. It was not fulfilling its promise 'to prepare all students to be lifelong learners and successful, contributing citizens in a world economy and global society.'

Every State Can Identify with the Troubles That the Bay State Saw:

- High school graduation rates of 87% in one town, 40% in another
- 20% of white children live in single-parent families, while 58% of African-American and Latino children do
- 32% of children live in homes where no parent has a full-time, year-round job.

In the past, policymakers had consistently thrown money and programs at individual problems, with uneven and short-lived results. To fulfill its duty to its citizens, the state needed better returns on its investments. Improving outcomes for all youth

required statewide, systematic improvements for young people and their families. Massachusetts needed a new approach.

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Convening the State's Youth Serving Leaders

In 2008, leaders from the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services assembled players in youth and family services from across the state to craft shared goals and a shared plan to achieve them. The group formed the Massachusetts Action Planning Team and chose Ready by 21 to provide the framework for establishing common goals. The group of over 100 organizations – including nearly all Massachusetts United Ways, many state agencies, local and regional leaders, and youth – comprised an unprecedented coalition committed to improving the odds for Massachusetts youth.

The group partnered with the Forum for Youth Investment to launch what a state report later called "a series of groundbreaking conversations." The conversations brought together leaders from a wide range of sectors (such as government, business and nonprofit), disciplines (such as medical and law



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conversations: business people, government officials, advocates, academicians, front-line youth workers and youth. These conversations went beyond just talk; they produced marching orders for the Action Planning Team.

Choosing what to Aim for

The Action Planning Team created working groups to use the findings from the conversations to define desired youth and family outcomes in specific areas such as education, job-readiness, health and societal connections. The groups brought those outcomes back to the whole team to create consensus around a set of outcomes, which include:

“All children and youth will have access to a 21st century education, complete high school and be ready for college, career and lifelong citizenship.”

“All families will be economically stable, resilient and have access to safe, appropriate and affordable housing, as well as pathways toward upward mobility.”

Defining Success

The Action Planning Team identified specific indicators to measure progress toward each outcome, such as retention of highly qualified teachers; higher education enrollment and persistence; summer youth employment; violent crime arrests; obesity and voter registration. The team then determined the

enforcement) and locales to establish a common language and common principles to achieve results. Some 600 people participated in these

availability of the needed data to track progress on those indicators. This data, from a range of sources, is assembled and analyzed regularly.

Making Measurable Progress

To make strides in the right direction, the Action Planning Team crafted strategies that organizations and individuals are now adopting according to where they fit in the process. These strategies include creating more links among employers, high schoolers and mentors; expanding the state’s dropout early warning system to include data from younger ages and from agencies beyond the schools; connecting youth in need with outreach workers, employers, health care providers and other community supports; and increasing access to substance abuse treatment. Government and private organizations providing services now must define how their activities impact different indicators. These organizations have been coached on how their roles impact outcomes.

Taking the Work to Scale

“No single actor can generate the scale of reform required, and no single action will yield the scope of advancement needed. Working together, however, we can press ahead, implementing actions and strategies that will help get us all ready for success in the 21st century.”

Governor’s Education Action Agenda

The Action Planning Team submitted the final plan, *Ready for Lifelong Success*, to Gov. Deval Patrick in June 2009. The plan is in the early stages of implementation. Increased commitment, buy-in and passion are already evident across the state. Organizations that work with youth and families now collectively aim for outcomes that are achievable, measureable and consistent state-wide.

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For more information, visit www.readyby21.org