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# Mass. education leaders set sights on boosting college graduation rates

By **Matt Rocheleau**

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | OCTOBER 01, 2014



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A group of leading education officials and organizations in Massachusetts will unveil a new push Wednesday to improve local college graduation rates.

The College Success Campaign boasts nearly three dozen collaborators — a mix of executives, administrators, and teachers from public, private, and charter K-12 schools, colleges, businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations from across the state — and is seeking to recruit others.

The group is urging politicians to commit to two key goals over the next decade: doubling the number of low-income students graduating from college, and doubling the number of students earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, or math, also known as the STEM fields.

“We know that a high school diploma is not enough to gain the

kind of skills and income most students aspire to,” said William Guenther, chairman, chief executive, and founder of Mass Insight Education, a Boston-based education research, consulting, and advocacy nonprofit that is organizing the campaign.

“The general need to raise college completion rates can only be solved through a new compact of higher education presidents, superintendents from local school districts, and community and business leaders,” Guenther added.

He said data about student success should be closely monitored to track progress toward meeting the goals.

Almost half of students at four-year public colleges in Massachusetts do not graduate within six years, and about 84 percent of students at two-year public colleges in the state do not graduate within three years, according to federal data.

Each additional year it takes to earn a degree can cost a student thousands of dollars, a problem that can affect poor students in particular.

Just 14 percent of low-income students in Massachusetts earn any type of degree within six years after graduating from high school, state records show.

The coalition plans to announce the campaign Wednesday at a forum at the Harvard Club in Boston. Panelists will include several partners involved in the campaign, including University of Massachusetts Lowell chancellor Martin Meehan; UMass Boston chancellor J. Keith Motley; and the Boston school system’s interim superintendent, John McDonough.

Daniel Asquino, president of Mount Wachusett Community College and another coalition member, said collaboration between higher education institutions and K-12 schools can pay dividends for students.

“These partnerships are critical to giving an early college experience to students while they are in high school, so that they can be successful in college, graduate, and move on to meaningful careers,” he said in a statement on the campaign.

A recent study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce estimated that nearly 75 percent of the jobs in Massachusetts will require education beyond a high school diploma.

Many of the jobs are expected to require STEM training, but nationally, only about 14 percent of college undergraduates major in science-related fields. Many switch to a non-STEM major before graduating.

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