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Dear Friends,

As I reflect on the work of the past year, I truly believe that 2010 will be remembered as an outstanding year for education in Massachusetts. We collectively accomplished so much on behalf of our students and made measurable progress on our goal to provide an excellent education to all children. Now, we have an even stronger foundation on which to accelerate our efforts and make 2011 even better for our students and schools.

The 2010 calendar started with Governor Patrick signing the historic Achievement Gap Act at the Children's Museum just one year ago on Martin Luther King, Jr. day in January. This is the single biggest action in education in Massachusetts since the landmark Education Reform Act of 1993 and will help ensure the state delivers on the promise of a strong education system for all students. The legislation was the result of collaboration with the Legislature, with educators and unions and with business partners and provides new rules, tools and supports to help close achievement gaps and ensure all students are prepared for a bright future. The bill is bold and acutely focused on removing obstacles from student learning while holding all of us accountable for their achievement. I am especially thankful to my staff at the Executive Office of Education who helped to draft and advocate for this important legislation.

The impact of the Achievement Gap Act was almost immediate. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education moved swiftly to identify the state's 35 highest needs schools and to begin to work with them to design turnaround plans that included opportunities for new curriculum, new support and training for teachers, longer school days and new approaches to staffing and leadership. We were bolstered in this work with a \$59 million School Improvement Grant from the US Department of Education. The first installment of the grants has arrived and plans are in place to deliver the rest of the funds. A key reform strategy outlined in the law and in line with our theory of action is the inclusion of wraparound services to address the non-academic needs of students. I chair with Health and Human Services Secretary Judy Ann Bigby the Governor's Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet which is charged with identifying solutions to bring these valuable resources to students in school to ensure they are prepared to take advantage of an optimized learning environment.

The second impact of the Achievement Gap Act was near record high interest in new charter schools. The Governor's legislation included the doubling of the spending cap on charter schools in the state's lowest performing districts in partnership with proven providers who committed to working with traditionally underserved students. This was the first charter cap lift since 1997 and yielded the highest amount of prospectuses and applications since that time. The process continues into February but we are proud of how quickly and powerfully the community responded to this opportunity.

The final portion of the Achievement Gap Act that has provided immediate results is the authorization of Innovation Schools. We designed Innovation Schools to utilize the best practices of our most successful charter and pilot schools – such as autonomy and flexibility in budgeting, staffing and scheduling - but within school districts to protect funding. I am proud to report that the first two Innovation Schools opened in September. The quick turnaround, just nine months after the legislation was signed, is a real testament to the hard work on our educators and community leaders. The Paul Revere Innovation School in Revere and the Pathways Early College Innovation School, a partnership between the Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District and Mount Wachusett Community College, are both off to a strong start this year thanks to the buy-in of the teachers, staff and families and the leadership of the superintendents, principals and the teachers' unions.

The impact of Innovation Schools is reaching beyond Revere and Orange. My staff held information sessions and technical assistance seminars. Over 200 interested educators and partners attended the information sessions and hundreds more took part in the seminars. We are heartened by this tremendous turnout and remain committed to providing support to help new Innovation Schools develop even as we focus on transforming underperforming schools and expanding charter school options for families.

This was the year that Readiness Centers really hit their stride. The six centers are being operated by over 40 regional partners including all of the state universities, most of our community colleges, the UMass campuses, and private higher education institutions; K-12 institutions and networks; early education and out-of-school-time programs; educational collaboratives; non-profit organizations; and business and community partners, each of whom have been creative and entrepreneurial in identifying and dedicating resources at a time when the state does not have room to support their work financially. In just their first year of existence, they have offered professional development sessions related to implementing differentiated instructional strategies, discussing how to better evaluate educators, and increasing students' engagement in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) fields (among others), and they have convened stakeholders about implementing our Race to the Top plan, and increasing alignment of curricula and standards between K-12 and higher education institutions.

Speaking of STEM, we also took a major step forward in increasing our capacity to teach and engage students in these valuable fields under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Murray when the Governor's STEM Advisory Council released its report and recommendations for fostering partnerships between business and education to generate a greater buzz for students to tackle the challenges inherent in these subjects.

The 2010 year in education also confirmed our national leadership in education reform and student achievement.

Massachusetts students this year led the nation for the third time in a row on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in English and Math. They had the highest score on the SAT exams. They had the highest score on the ACT exams. This is further proof that the high expectations we have set, the hard work of our teachers, and the motivated effort of our students are combining in a manner that is expanding success.

We also cemented our role as the leader in education reform. Based on the support of our school districts and the hard work of our staff, Massachusetts earned the top score in the nation for our Race to the Top proposal. We earned high marks for our bold reform efforts and were recognized for our track record of success. The two factors combined to prove to national reviewers that we had the right plan and the right environment for implementation.

Our curriculum writers and content specialists helped to write, edit and finalize the Common Core standards in English and Math which have now been adopted in 44 states. These standards raise expectations for what students should know and be able to do in these critical subjects and help Massachusetts increase the rigor of our curriculum. Likewise, Massachusetts, under the leadership of ESE Commissioner Chester, was selected as the lead state in developing a national test that will measure the Common Core standards and utilize technology and other developments in assessment to provide near instant feedback to teachers on the performance of their students to better and more immediately inform instruction and target interventions. Massachusetts is leading the development and we look forward to future opportunities to continuously improve our tests but we remain firmly committed to our MCAS for measuring student success and holding students and schools accountable for results and as a graduation requirement. The new test should be available in four or five years and we'll determine how best to utilize it when it's ready for review.

In addition to Race to the Top, Massachusetts earned federal support to prevent dropouts and promote graduation through the High School Graduation Initiative. Ensuring students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education and successful careers has been a top priority for the Patrick-Murray Administration and these funds will help accelerate our efforts. Our leadership was also solidified in our school districts who secured federal support for their reform efforts. Three Massachusetts districts have been selected for Promise Neighborhood grants to integrate health and human services into the school day as outlined in the Massachusetts reform vision and two districts were selected for the Teacher Incentive Fund grants to provide financial incentives and awards for teachers who succeed in our lowest performing schools.

Thanks to the leadership of the Governor and his willingness to make difficult decisions while governing by principle, 2010 was also a year of deep investments in education. Despite a global economic crisis that slowed revenue generation and challenged spending, the Governor remained firmly committed to providing financial support for education. By taking an all funds approach and combining state and federal dollars, we were able this year to provide the highest level of support for school districts, save teaching positions, increase the number of children served in

early education programs and save higher education programs. This is the year that we also began delivering on the Governor's record \$2 billion bond bill for higher education to improve infrastructure and bring facilities into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I attended a number of groundbreaking and grand opening ceremonies over the course of the year. Many of our campuses have gone too long without these valuable upgrades and we were proud to deliver.

We are facing the challenge of the fiscal constraints by identifying opportunities for greater efficiency. We are talking not just about spending less but spending smarter. Across the three education departments, we have consolidated Informational Technology (IT) departments from four separate agencies into a single organization, reduced total number of education department data centers from five to three generating efficiencies and savings, consolidated contracts, Desktop support services and converted contractors to full-time employees to achieve savings. School districts are also creatively meeting this challenge. The Patrick-Murray Administration committed valuable federal stimulus dollars to assist districts explore and implement new regionalization partnerships to increase capacity to offer a high quality education and achieve greater efficiency in budgeting. The three new regionalized districts represent the first new partnerships since 2001.

Our Boards, Departments and Commissioners also accumulated a great amount of accomplishments this year beyond their support for the above mentioned items.

In Early Education and Care, we have updated Pre-Kindergarten learning standards and a brand new Quality Rating and Improvement System that will ensure children have access to high quality programs that will prepare them for success in school.

In Elementary and Secondary Education, we have strengthened our accountability measures for schools while ramping up our support for planning and effectively implementing school turnaround strategies.

In Higher Education, we have a Vision Project designed to set and measure new outcomes for student learning. We have seen an explosion in enrollment across the campuses because the public recognizes the high quality opportunities available across the 29-campus system. The Vision Project will lead to increased student achievement and help build better public understanding of the high quality education available statewide while holding all accountable for student success.

Finally, we ended the year on a high note. One of the main goals of the Executive Office as designed by the Governor was to bring together for the first time the three sectors of education to build a seamless and integrated Pre-Kindergarten through Higher Education system that prevents children from falling through the cracks or getting lost along the way. We have convened working groups comprised of members of the Boards and Departments of Early Education and Care (EEC), Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), and Higher Education (HE) to increase our efforts in two key areas: early literacy and college readiness.

Research shows us that the ability to read and read well by the end of third grade is a strong indicator of future academic success. Working with EEC and ESE, we are focused on providing

students with dynamic instruction and teachers with new supports to ensure students are ready to read and continue learning through identifying and disseminating best practices and effective strategies.

With ESE and HE, we are much more acutely focused on learning from faculty and staff in higher education what skills and abilities students are lacking as they arrive on campus so we can design programs to ensure students are prepared for the academic challenges of higher education as well as develop the other skills and aptitudes necessary to study and succeed independently.

There is little doubt that 2010 was a banner year for education in Massachusetts. Our challenge now is to fully implement all of the programs and policies we enacted in a way that makes a difference for students. I am confident that we will be successful with your continued partnership in 2011 and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S. Paul Powell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.