



Expanding Higher Education Access for Students with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

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Background

In our current education system, the vast majority of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) stop learning when they leave high school. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), they are entitled to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) until age 22. However, youth between the ages of 18-22 are often limited to segregated special education programs, housed within high school buildings.

In 2007, the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment (ICE) initiative was launched in Massachusetts to allow older students with IDD to participate with their same-age peers in public Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), rather than face increasing isolation from their community.

Since ICE was launched, hundreds of youth with IDD have been successfully included in MA public college campuses. As this program supports students with Down syndrome (DS) amongst other disabilities, the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC) and the 3-21 Foundation are collaborating to further this initiative.

Project Goals

1. Communicate this post-secondary education option to families of youth with DS
2. Advocate for the year-to-year renewal of funds for this program as a specific line item in the MA state budget
3. Advocate for H.481 *An Act to Expand Inclusive Transition Programs for Students with Severe Disabilities*, to be enacted, thus permanently establishing the ICE initiative

The Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC) is a state advocacy organization committed to ensuring that individuals with Down syndrome in Massachusetts are valued, included, and given opportunities to pursue fulfilling lives.

The 3-21 Foundation is an educational non-profit, best known for The Learning Program Boston, a parent-focused educational intervention program for families of students with Down syndrome.

Why does this matter?

The current higher education and employment outlook for individuals with IDD is grim:

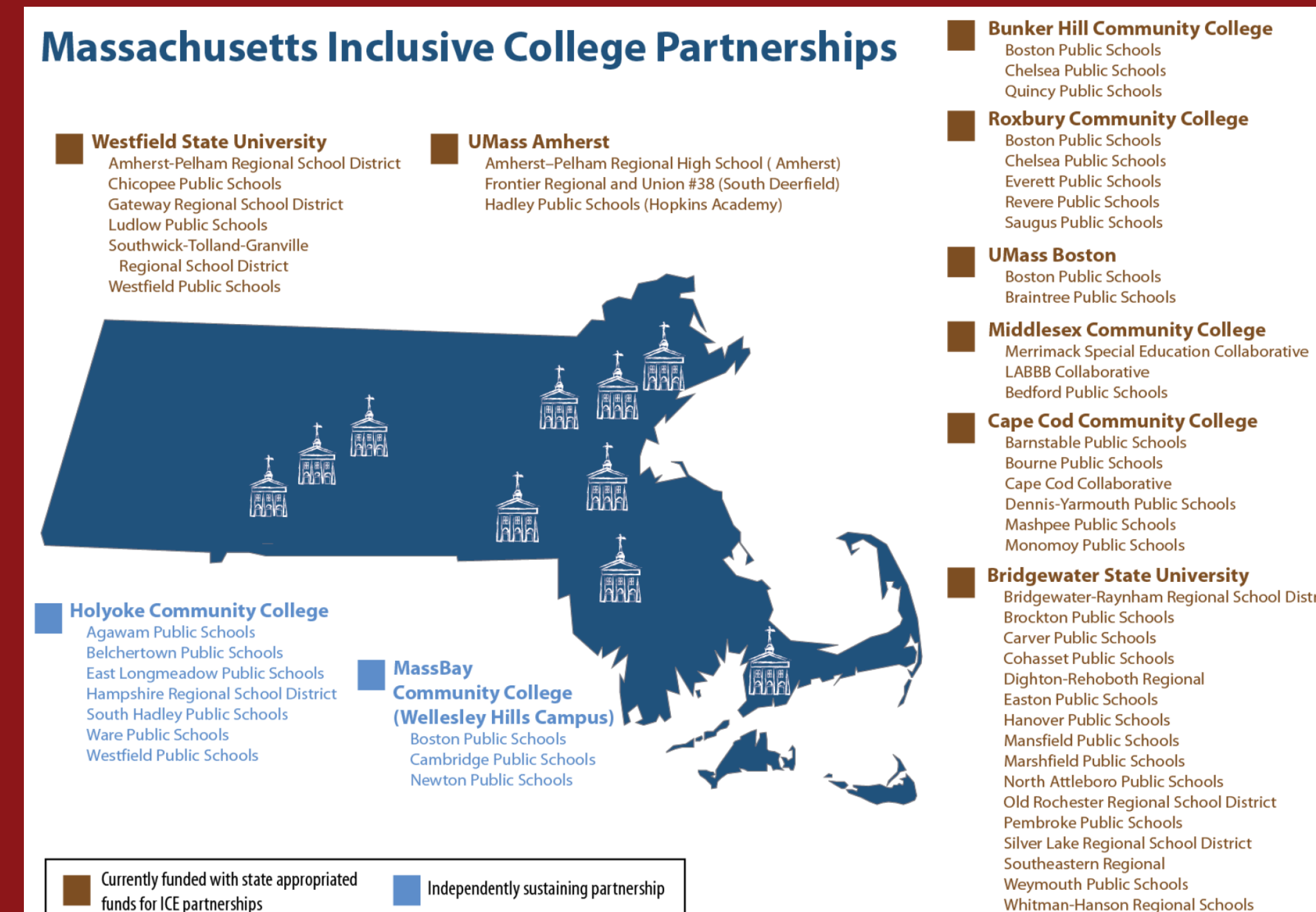
- Only 23% move on from high-school to post-secondary education at IHEs
- The vast majority do not enter the workforce
 - 81% are in facility-based/non-work settings
 - Of those employed, most are underemployed (not working full-time or earning less minimum wage, or both)
 - MA will spend over \$1B per year to support these individuals

College attendance correlates to greater employment and higher wages. Given the opportunity and support, students with IDD who receive transition services in college are thus likely to achieve better outcomes.

What are we going to do?

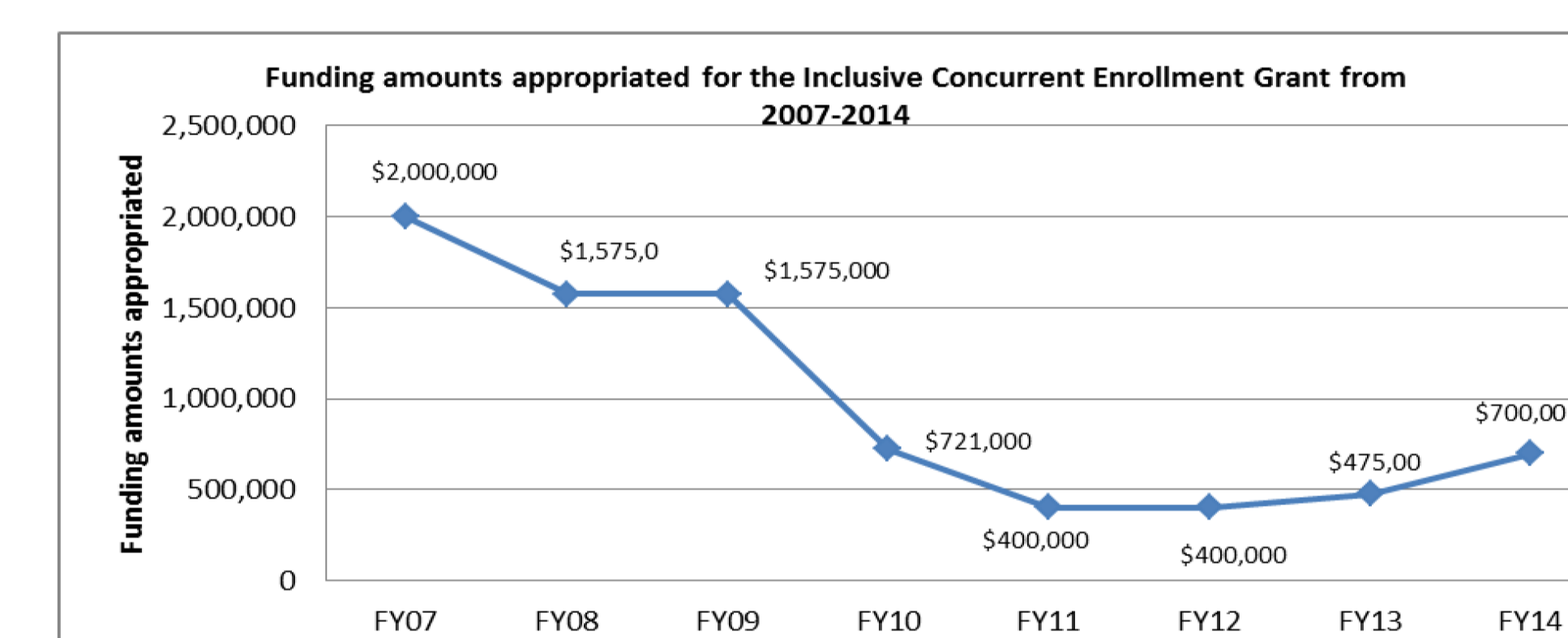
1. Education
 - Obtain brochures & registration materials from participating colleges
 - Develop an ICE Q&A webinar with the ICE State Coordinator
2. Promotion
 - Feature an ICE student's "Day on Campus" in the MDSC website/newsletter
 - Interview an ICE Employment Coach about ICE job opportunities
 - Host a reception for families to meet alum and ICE representatives
 - Organize an ICE panel at the MDSC Educator's Forum to increase educator awareness
 - Assemble a database of ICE alum with DS to facilitate family connections
3. Advocacy
 - Coordinate a consistent ICE message with other advocacy groups
 - Support the re-introduction and enactment of H.481 in the 2015-2016 MA legislative session

Results & Discussion



Over time, legislative appropriation for the ICE program has decreased from the FY2007 high of \$2,000,000 to a low of \$400,000, increasing to \$700,000 in FY2014.

Figure 1: Funding for the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Grant from FY 2007-2014



Source: The 188th General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, <https://malegislature.gov/Budget>

What have we done so far?

1. Coordinated with Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) to increase ICE funding in the 2014-2015 state budget
 - House: The original \$800K budget was increased 25% to \$1M
 - Senate: The original \$700K budget was increased 43% to \$1M
2. Organized *Down Syndrome Advocacy Day* at the MA State House on May 27. ICE information was shared with state legislators
3. Added ICE as a topic to the MDSC 2014-2015 Education Webinar series and the MDSC 2014 Educator's Forum

Vision

By 2019 we hope to:

- ✓ Increase the number of students with IDD pursuing IHE options from 23% to 68%
- ✓ Expand the ICE program to all 29 MA IHEs and increase student enrollment 4x from 75 to 300

"This is a social justice issue. This is a civil rights issue. This is the right thing to do."

- Dr. Trudy Knowles, Professor of Education
Westfield State University (ICE Program)

ICE Outcomes

Student outcomes:

- ✓ Development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills
- ✓ Participation in career planning, vocational skill-building and community-based employment opportunities
- ✓ Improvement of academic, social, functional and other transition related skills

Program outcomes:

- ✓ Clear demonstration that students with IDD can successfully complete inclusive credit and non-credit college courses, participate meaningfully in campus life and make progress towards individual educational and career goals
- ✓ Transform belief systems and raise expectations of IHE educators, school district educators, families and students
- ✓ Build bridges between historically disconnected school districts and IHEs, improving information exchange, understanding and alignment

Source: A Task Force on Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder (2014), *A Report to the Massachusetts Legislature*, April 2014

See attachment for complete list of references:
Braddock, D. et al (2013); Butterworth, J. et al (2013); Grigal, M. et al (2011); Siperstein G.N. et al (2013) Human Services Research Institute (2012); Think College (2014)