

Massachusetts Policy Agenda

While a college degree is the most powerful driver of economic mobility, students from low-income communities and communities of color experience face disproportionate structural and financial barriers to postsecondary pathways. This results in reduced access to educational and employment opportunities, increased debt, and narrower opportunities for a more economically mobile life, further exacerbating the racial wealth gap in the state. Informed by the experiences of the high school and college students in our advising programs, uAspire seeks to transform systems of financial aid and higher education to be more equitable, simple, and transparent.

Policy Priorities



Universal FAFSA ([HD2891](#) / [SD1680](#))

College students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine federal student aid eligibility. Completing the FAFSA is linked to increased levels of enrollment and college persistence, but income and racial disparities exist in FAFSA completion. By not completing the FAFSA, Massachusetts students left over \$53M in financial aid on the table in 2023¹. To ensure equitable access to financial aid, high school seniors should be required to submit the FAFSA or state equivalent with school district support.

¹ [“NCAN Report: In 2023, High School Seniors Left Over \\$4 Billion on the Table in Pell Grants”](#). National Student Attainment Network. January 11, 2024.



MASFA implementation and improvements

In Massachusetts, it is estimated that there are [about 12,000](#) undocumented students in higher education with an estimated 3,000 undocumented high school students graduating from our MA high schools each year. The meaningful changes for undocumented student population in the FY 2024 budget have created an opportunity for a more affordable college degree for eligible students. Additional work must be done to ensure that these students have equitable experiences when attempting to access state financial aid. Additionally, it is critical that these students, their families, and their personal information remain safe in the Commonwealth.

Budget Priorities²



Enhance and expand the scope of SUCCESS programs

To ensure that our financial aid investments are leading to more students obtaining a degree, the state must do more to boost graduation rates by providing essential wraparound services that help support completion. We recommend expansion and the close alignment of student support services with evidence-based practices, like the City University of New York's ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) program and the CUNY ACE (Accelerate, Complete & Engage) program, both of which have demonstrated impressive outcomes in improving graduation rates.

² EdTrust MA, Hildreth Institute, uAspire, OneGoal Massachusetts, and Latinos for Education [FY2026 Budget Recommendations](#). October 6, 2024.



Increase basic needs supports

It is imperative that we continue providing more targeted support to cover the continued indirect costs and unmet needs of students who face the greatest financial challenges. uAspire supports the continued expansion of state financial aid programs to further enhance basic needs supports for low and middle income students in Massachusetts, including but not limited to increasing students' book & supply funds and stipend amounts.



Increase financial aid for low and moderate income students

Currently, the MassGrant Plus Program Expansion covers 100% of tuition and fees for Pell-eligible students and 50% of tuition and fees for low-to-moderate-income students attending the 2-year or 4-year public institution of their choice. We recommend expanding the program to cover 100% of tuition and fees for low-to-moderate-income students whose Student Aid Index (SAI) does not exceed \$15,000 and who continue to face significant financial barriers. This proposed increase in funding will ensure that more students have the option of attending an institution that best meets their unique needs, whether that be a 2-year or 4-year program. This change would benefit approximately 3,200 State University students and 4,300 UMASS students with moderate incomes.

Supported Legislation



Hunger Free Campus Initiative ([HD2096](#) / [SD1567](#))



College Coursework in High School ([HD3161](#) / [SD1303](#))



Education to Career Data Center ([HD498](#) / [SD824](#))



Equitable Admissions Policy ([HD346](#) / [SD819](#))



Access to Academic Transcripts ([HD737](#))