

Economic Empowerment for Massachusetts Families

Policies designed to expand financial literacy, lower the cost of higher education, and train our workers to close the skills gap

Massachusetts has recovered from the recession ahead of the rest of the country. Our economy is strong and businesses are creating jobs at a steady clip. But across the state Massachusetts families still face challenging economic times. Working parents are struggling to pay their mortgage. Students want to find a job that pays a living wage but can't afford the skyrocketing cost of college. Entrepreneurs are looking to hire but unable to find the skills they need in the workforce. We need bold, innovative policies to give working families a fair shot to get ahead. Deb is running for treasurer to give every woman, every man, and every family the financial power and skills they need to get ahead in this tough economy. Below is an economic agenda designed to empower Massachusetts families.

Provide Convenient Access to Financial Literacy for Students

- ❖ **ESTABLISH** a fundamental principle: no Massachusetts student should graduate from high school without some basic financial literacy education. Students need greater access to information about budgeting, credit cards, and student loans in order to make responsible financial decisions as they prepare to enter the job market or attend college. The education needs to start early in elementary and middle school. Depending on the challenges and resources of local school districts, basic financial literacy skills and principles can be taught in existing classes or through new courses.
- ❖ **LAUNCH** a \$50 college savings account for kindergartners, modeled on the success of Nevada's College Kick Start Program and funded through a public-private partnership with financial institutions, companies, or philanthropic organizations.¹ Beginning the conversation about saving for college early pays dividends down the road. In fact, research demonstrates that children with a college savings account are seven times more likely to attend college.²
- ❖ **SET UP** a new customer service hotline in the Treasurer's office, serving as a resource for concerned citizens to call and receive guidance on a wide range of financial issues, including student loan repayment options.

Innovative Solutions to Make College Affordable

- ❖ **EXPAND** the Commonwealth Covenant Fund to award additional loan assistance for college graduates who are working in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math related fields, shifting the focus from STEM to STEAM to incorporate the arts. The Fund, overseen by the Treasurer’s office, currently awards \$5,000 grants to help college graduates who are working in STEM related fields pay off their loans.
- ❖ **ENHANCE** the Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership (CDEP), which enables Massachusetts high school students to take college-level courses for free and simultaneously earn college credit as they work toward their diploma. Deb believes we need a continued focus on increasing marketing and outreach to communicate with students, particularly in low-income communities where college feels distant and out of reach. A series of budget cuts halted the program in the early 2000s, but it was reestablished in 2008.³

Closing the Skills Gap – Training our Students for 21st Century Jobs

- ❖ **WORK** closely with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to better align technology, equipment, and capital projects – particularly in our 64 vocational-technical schools and programs – with business demands in a rapidly-evolving 21st century economy. This will involve extensive labor market analysis to understand the unmet needs of today’s skills gap. A recent study by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education found that 69 percent of employers surveyed found a mismatch between available job applicants and the skill set their company sought in new hires.⁴
- ❖ **CREATE** new agreements, working collaboratively across state and federal agencies, to enable apprenticeship training to count as college credits toward an associate’s degree or technical certificate at community colleges.⁵

¹ Reid Wilson, “How \$50 makes kids seven times more likely to attend college,” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2013.

² William Elliott III and Sondra Beverly, “The Role of Savings and Wealth in Reducing ‘Wilt’ Between Expectations and College Attendance,” *Center for Social Development* (January 2010): 2.

³ Matt Rocheleau, “Ad blitz set for college initiative,” *Boston Globe*, July 21, 2014.

⁴ Michael Barber and Simon Day, “The New Opportunity to Lead,” *Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education* (March 2014): 15.

⁵ Ben Olinsky and Sarah Ayres, "Training for Success – A Policy to Expand Apprenticeships in the United States," *Center for American Progress* (December 2013): 46-47.