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## 2ND ANNUAL VISION PROJECT REPORT: SIGNS OF CAMPUS PROGRESS ON GRADUATION RATE GOALS, NEW EFFORTS TO REFORM COSTLY REMEDIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

*UMass Lowell, Framingham State Lead System with 6-Year Graduation Rate Gains*

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Boston, MA -- October 21, 2013 -- In keeping with the Patrick Administration's commitment to invest in public higher education, Massachusetts community colleges, state universities and UMass campuses are reporting initial signs of progress in their efforts to graduate more students and better prepare them for jobs in the Commonwealth's knowledge-based industries, according to a major new report released today by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. A copy of ***Within Our Sights: Inside Campus Efforts to Achieve National Leadership in Higher Education*** is available [here](#).

*Within Our Sights* is the second in a series of annual reports tracking progress through the [Vision Project](#), a Board of Higher Education-approved strategic plan to achieve national leadership among state systems of public higher education. Across Massachusetts, public campuses are working to expand college access, raise graduation rates, improve the quality of student learning, align degree and certificate programs with the needs of local employers, prepare future citizens, close achievement gaps and pursue research that drives economic development.

"Brainpower is our signature economic edge, and failing to invest in that in Massachusetts would be like Texas failing to invest in the oil industry or Iowa failing to invest in corn," said Governor Deval Patrick. "We know that in order to grow jobs and unlock economic opportunity we must put a college education in reach of all of our students. That's why we will continue to push to fund our public higher ed system at record levels."

While much of the data remains unchanged from the previous year, *Within Our Sights* notes specific performance gains in several areas of Vision Project-related work. The University of Massachusetts Lowell and Framingham State University have achieved impressive increases in graduation rates; UMass Lowell's six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen increased 9.8 percent between fall 2007 and fall 2012, while at Framingham the rate increased 8.9 percent during the same time period (Source: USDOE/IPEDS).

"It's good to see some early signs of progress, although we still have a lot of work ahead of us in our quest for national leadership," said Education Secretary Matthew Malone. "Through the Vision Project the presidents of our public campuses have shown real courage, acknowledging improvements that need to be made, rolling up their sleeves, getting the job done. That's what leadership is all about."

"We believe the goal of national leadership in public higher education is truly within our sights," said Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner of Higher Education. "Although it is still too early to see major movement in system-level data, this report contains powerful examples of campus work drive real change through innovations in teaching and learning, successes that we intend to bring to scale."

Among the report's highlights:

- **Community Colleges Revamp Remedial (Developmental) Education:**  
While Massachusetts leads the nation in the number of young people it sends to college, one in three students who enroll in a public campus place into costly remedial programs during their first semester on campus. *Within Our Sights* reveals that of the 11,000 community college students who must take non-credit remedial coursework before they are deemed ready for college-level work, 9,000 never make it into a credit-bearing course. Many students simply drop out, discouraged to be stuck in “educational quicksand” – including those who aspire to enter high-need fields like engineering and information technology, where jobs are plentiful and companies often can’t find enough qualified applicants. Massachusetts is in the vanguard of states beginning to score impressive results with new approaches to “developmental” coursework. *The story on page 34.*
- **Campuses Address Looming Shortage of High-Skilled Graduates:**  
Data contained in *Within Our Sights* indicate that Massachusetts faces a shortage of graduates in critical areas of workforce need. In the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields alone, the public campuses are forecast to produce 35,000 fewer associate and bachelor’s degrees than needed by 2020. The report offers numerous examples of campus efforts to attract students into high-demand fields, while also creating programs to boost the educational credentials of incumbent workers in health care and other fields. *The story on page 50.*
- **Massachusetts Leads National Effort to Assess, Improve Student Learning Outcomes**  
Working with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), Massachusetts is leading a multi-state effort to develop an inter-state assessment system based on real student work, not standardized tests. *The story on page 42.*

To arrange interviews with Commissioner Freeland or to request a print copy of *Within Our Sights*, please contact Katy Abel at [kabel@bhe.mass.edu](mailto:kabel@bhe.mass.edu).

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