

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

a briefing series for new england's educational leaders

"The persistence of these educational achievement gaps imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession. The recurring annual economic cost of the international achievement gap is substantially larger than the deep recession the United States is currently experiencing."

—*The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*

Education, Prosperity, and Economic Competitiveness

Across all time periods, cultures, and countries, education has been an enduring, universal gateway to prosperity, health, and social stability. In study after study, researchers have connected education to better economic and life outcomes. Where education is scarce, we tend to find widespread poverty, ill health, violence, and insecurity. But where literacy rates are higher and public education is provided, people are nearly always wealthier, healthier, and happier.

Yet when unemployment rates rise dramatically, as they have over the past two years, job growth becomes an urgent state and national priority. Even though more effective schools and higher graduation rates yield more productive and employable workers, education rarely presents the kind of quick-fix solutions that play well on the evening news. Consequently, tax cuts, economic stimulus, or other strategies intended to promote business growth are generally deployed, while investments in education remain a much lower priority. In fact, in times of economic crisis, educational investments tend to be cut or frozen, not redoubled and expanded.

In today's knowledge-driven economy, however, where our students will be competing for jobs alongside highly educated and motivated graduates from every corner of the globe, education has never been more necessary or vital to our country's economic competitiveness.

What We've Learned

- ✓ **Education is an investment, not an expense.** Education is often seen as a short-term cost, not a long-term investment. Because the benefits of education are not always immediate, it's easy to forget that what we invest in our schools today will pay much larger dividends tomorrow. For this reason, education leaders and policy makers face a daunting task—convincing the public of the critical importance of educational investments today even though the full return on those investments may be years down the road. Making the case for education is never easy, but few investments hold as much promise for our children, citizens, and communities.
- ✓ **Education drives today's economy.** The manufacturing industries that fueled American economic growth in the 20th century have either shipped most of their lower-skill jobs overseas or transformed their business so radically that even assembly lines are now populated with robots controlled by highly skilled engineers. Either way, the majority of new jobs being created in the United States require more education, more specialized training, and more sophisticated skills than ever before. In the 21st century, a strong economy requires a strong education system.
- ✓ **Education benefits everyone.** Less-educated adults are far more likely to end up in prison, find themselves unemployed or uninsured, engage in unhealthy lifestyles (smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse), and consume public resources such as welfare, unemployment benefits, or health care. High-quality education provides far-reaching benefits to society—even to those who never graduated from high school or college.
- ✓ **Education is the foundation of a strong democracy.** College graduates are fifty percent more likely to vote than adults with only a high school diploma, and high school graduates are fifty percent more likely to vote than those who only completed eighth grade. Socially beneficial behaviors such as charitable donations and volunteerism also rise along with educational attainment. Education inspires greater civic awareness and participation, which contributes to a stronger and more democratic society.

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