

Pioneer's Agenda for Leadership: A Blueprint to Keep the Commonwealth Competitive

Improve Our Schools

Innovate through Choice and Competition

- Lift the caps on charter schools in districts where 60 percent of students score below standard on the MCAS test.
- Expand system-wide parental choice.
- Offer METCO to all children in districts where 60 percent of the students score below standard on the MCAS test.

Let Schools Manage Themselves

- Apply public charter school principles of autonomy and accountability to the largest and poorest-performing districts in the state.
- Develop and evaluate Turnaround School options, from which the poorest-performing districts must choose.

Hold Schools and School Leaders Accountable

- Undertake a managerial audit of the DOE to gauge how it uses data and exercises accountability and fiscal oversight of its own functions. The audit should focus on reshaping the DOE so it can marshal the talent and resources to support local district reform.
- Ensure independence for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and empower the EQA to continue to monitor the progress of education reform in the lowest performing districts.
- Ensure the Commonwealth is prepared to comply with federal mandates by raising the MCAS test passing score by three points in each of the next eight years.
- Require data be provided in a uniform manner across districts, timed to coincide with parental decisions (school assignment, METCO, charter) and based on a clear scoring method.

Reduce the Cost of Living and Doing Business

- Implement the income tax rollback for fiscal year 2008.

Reduce the Cost of Unemployment Insurance

- Bring benefits in line with other states.
- Reduce Unemployment Insurance rates generally, but increase them for companies that abuse the system.
- Give the Department of Unemployment Assistance power to garnish wages.

Reduce the Cost of Housing

- Give municipalities incentives to allow more housing to be built.
- Create exceptions from local zoning to make "smart growth" more attractive to developers.
- Give local permitting bodies regulatory tools to facilitate more and better development.
- Amend the state Subdivision Control Law to include standards for road design.

Streamline Licensing

- Review all licenses issued by the state and consolidate unnecessary requirements.
- Consolidate administrative functions for licensing.
- Shift state workers to more significant functions by increasing the number of online transactions.
- Integrate databases so citizens with multiple licenses can, with a single action, make all needed changes to their licenses.
- Link license databases to other state systems.

Revitalize Our Middle Cities

Make Subsidized Housing a Pathway Home

- For neighborhoods with an affordable market price equal to 80 percent of median income, eliminate affordability deed restrictions. Index the resale price to increases in the median income and reduce resale restrictions.
- Simplify resale restrictions.
- Redeploy state resources to invest in market-rate units in weak markets.

Streamline Regulation and Permitting of Urban Neighborhood Businesses

- Promote one set of regulations and permits for businesses across the Middle Cities by creating an online portal for transparent information.

Reorganize State Economic Development Agencies

- Examine Direct Investment and State Loan programs to ensure they fill an actual 'capital gap' that the private market would not address, provide a benefit to the state economy, and do not crowd out private investment or subsidize inefficient or otherwise unbankable businesses.
- Based on these findings, restructure the programs to fund actual 'capital gaps' that can be addressed by state intervention.
- Work with the business community to determine current and projected skill gaps in the state's workforce.
- Assess how current job training efforts are connecting the unemployed and underemployed to these opportunities.
- Reallocate job training resources to address gaps.

Coordinate the State's Approach to Urban Revitalization

- Benchmark progress on key education, public safety, business development, community redevelopment and fiscal management measures.
- Pay for performance on the basis of a municipal scorecard covering the benchmarked categories.
- For each target city, establish a governor's designee to work with city and neighborhood groups to determine 'anchor neighborhoods', coordinate technical assistance and steer program funds from state agencies.

Secure the State's Future Solvency

Make the Pension System Fair

- Enact language to require full funding of legislative changes.
- Base benefits on contributions, not the four-factor formula.

Reform the Local Pension System

- Centralize public pension assets.
- Enhance local pension oversight.

Address the Looming Post-Retirement Healthcare Benefit Liability

- Consider OPEB costs when applying General Law Chapters 32A and 32B.
- Consider Administrative Reform options:
 - Creating an Irrevocable Trust.
 - Consolidating OPEB management for all state and municipal entities.
 - Amortizing unfunded obligations over a longer time horizon.
- Consider Benefit Adjustment options:
 - Changing the health benefit structure.
 - Increasing cost sharing.
 - Considering OPEB costs in all collective bargaining negotiations.
 - Considering the Utah model for unused sick and vacation time.

Reduce the Cost of Government through Reasonable Competitive Contracting

- Review service delivery performance.
- Eliminate the requirement that employers pay the same health benefits for private employees working on state contracts as the Commonwealth pays state employees.
- Eliminate the foregone tax revenue addition to private bid costs.
- Limit the Auditor's ability to reject a privatization proposal.

Keep Massachusetts' Healthcare Reform Affordable

- Assess the Connector as a market and, as needed, alter incentives to improve it.
- Determine the new reform's impact on and alter incentives to maximize the private insurance market.