



A YEAR IN REVIEW

FY 2025

**RENNIE CENTER FOR
EDUCATION RESEARCH
& POLICY**

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Now, more than ever, the world needs independent, unbiased information they can trust. The Rennie Center has been that voice for the past 20 years. Each year since our founding, our team has adapted our work to meet the changing needs of students, educators, school leaders, and state policymakers. This year was no different. Our team made great strides to keep the public informed about the shifting education policy landscape by providing evidence-based research to key decision-makers and offering hands-on training and support for practitioners across Massachusetts and beyond.

This year our research team explored and evaluated critical issues facing public education, from early education funding, to STEM learning opportunities, to early college expansion. Our practice team provided professional development opportunities to practitioners from more than 250 Massachusetts school districts and expanded beyond Massachusetts to support educators in 6 states. And our policy team provided valuable resources to help voters decide on the MCAS graduation requirement ballot question in November and keep the public informed of the impacts of recent White House executive orders related to education.

This is just a small glimpse of what our team has accomplished over the past year. The pages below make up our first end-of-year report and provide more detail on the initiatives and efforts we led during Fiscal Year 2025 (July 2024 – June 2025). We're proud to share these achievements with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chad d'Entremont". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chad d'Entremont
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Antoniya Marinova". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large, looping "A" and a long, sweeping "S" at the end.

Antoniya Marinova
Chair of the Board



OUR MISSION

The mission of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life.

OUR THEORY OF ACTION

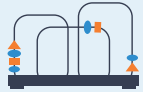
We use a three-pronged approach to carry out our mission, weaving together independent research and on-the-ground support for practitioners to inform large-scale policy change:

Research: Our team conducts research in the field to uncover successful models for improving public education in Massachusetts. Spanning the educational pipeline, our independent research explores a variety of innovative practices from early education and care through college and career. We analyze successful programs across the state and nation to understand how they can be used and scaled in the Massachusetts context. Designed to be used by practitioners, our research is rooted in the perspectives of educators, students, families, and community members.

Practice: Putting our research into action, we team up with schools and districts to help design, implement, and evaluate evidence-based reforms with a focus on equity. Our team provides direct support to build the knowledge and capacity of communities, districts, and schools, so that new programs become sustainable and locally led.

Policy: We bring lessons learned from our research and practice work directly to policymakers to drive systemic change. From hosting individual meetings with state leaders to informing public conversations on critical issues to testifying in front of the legislature, we ensure that decision-makers have the evidence-based knowledge and community perspective they need to make the best decisions for young people across the Commonwealth.

FY2025 FOCUS AREAS



EARLY CHILDHOOD

This year marked a major step forward in our early childhood work. We have added significant expertise to our organization, researched potential system improvements, and launched a new policy fellowship to build the field's capacity to drive meaningful change. Together, these efforts have established a strong foundation for us to foster continued progress and lasting impact in early childhood.



WHOLE-CHILD SUPPORT

A decade after publishing our pioneering SEL blueprint, the Rennie Center has emerged as the go-to partner in Massachusetts for supporting student health and well-being. We're helping hundreds of schools and districts ensure students thrive both inside and outside of school. At a time of enormous stress for young people, we're proud to be supporting schools in meeting the full range of students' needs.



ACADEMIC LEARNING

We continue to put high expectations and strong outcomes for all students at the forefront of everything we do. From early literacy to high-quality curriculum, our work continues to shape the state's approach to teaching and learning. As a trusted voice in policy and practice, we are helping to ensure Massachusetts remains a national leader in education.



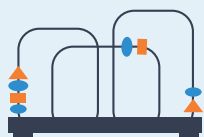
CAREER PATHWAYS

We're expanding how people think about education—connecting classrooms to communities, colleges, and careers. Our work is building more inclusive, real-world pathways that support students every step of the way. In doing so, we're helping ensure students are prepared to keep up with the increasing demands of a rapidly changing world.



RETHINKING EDUCATION

The Rennie Center is setting the vision for the future of education in Massachusetts. Through our Condition of Education initiative, we are leading a statewide conversation about what school can and should look like to meet the needs of today's learners and tomorrow's world. We are not just imagining the future from a distance—we are shaping it by working directly with schools to co-design new approaches to learning. Rennie is stepping forward to lead the way in rethinking education in Massachusetts, setting a bold course for what is possible in schools across the Commonwealth.



Early Childhood

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY25

Fellowship for Impact in Early Childhood Policy (FFI)

This year our team began recruiting for a new [fellowship](#) that will bring together a diverse group of individuals from across the early childhood field to understand the intricacies of the policy process and work to advance more equitable systems for Massachusetts' youngest residents. In collaboration with the Commonwealth Children's Fund, we will kick off our first FFI cohort in September 2025.

Early Education Needs Assessments

Our team is helping the cities of Salem, Framingham, and Worcester better understand the needs of families and providers when it comes to early education. Our comprehensive, community-wide needs assessments offer critical insight into the quality, availability, and accessibility of preschool opportunities in each city. We also outline recommendations for improvements through continued partnerships between school districts and community-based early education providers, strengthening these cities' collaborative efforts supported by the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI).

Early Childhood Research Consortium Planning Grant

This year we received funding to develop the Massachusetts Early Childhood Research Consortium, a collaborative initiative dedicated to advancing research, innovation, and best practices in early education and care. This funding supports the planning phase of establishing a strong and sustainable consortium.

New Board Members Focused on Early Childhood

Over the past year, we've welcomed three new board members with expertise in early childhood: Kimberly Lucas is a Northeastern University Professor whose research focuses on early childhood policy; Joan Wasser-Gish is a Director at the Boston College Center for Thriving Children and served on the MA Board of Early Education and Care for over a decade; and Tom Weber is a Foundation Fellow for Early Childhood at Eastern Bank Foundation, Executive Director of the MA Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education, and (prior to these positions) the longest-serving Commissioner of the MA Dept. of Early Education and Care.

SPOTLIGHT

REPORT: INVESTMENT IN EARLY EDUCATION & CARE

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a crisis within the early education and care sector. The essential role early educators play in helping families and communities thrive was brought into stark relief. The federal government responded by providing Massachusetts with millions of dollars in relief funds to help stabilize the sector and support its recovery.

In the years since, the Massachusetts state government has maintained heightened investments in early education and care, resulting in significant system improvements. Seat capacity, access to child care subsidies, and early educator compensation all saw increases.

Our report, *[Investment in Early Education and Care: Celebrating Successes, Looking Ahead](#)*, provides an extensive examination of funding streams to serve as a resource for decision-makers on how to build a more coordinated and sustainable funding model going forward. The report, released in October 2024, was the result of a collaboration with The Boston Foundation and pulls together a comprehensive list of funding sources supporting early education and care, analyzes their current impact, and offers recommendations for improving coordination and effectiveness to lay the groundwork for future investments.



Whole-Child Support

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY25

Systemic Student Support (S3) Academy

Over the past year our team supported 28 schools from 13 MA school districts in their efforts to implement systems of Integrated Student Support. This approach, which assesses the strengths and needs of every student and connects them with in-school and out-of-school resources to support non-academic needs, is linked to long-term positive outcomes. Our [S3 Academy](#)—a joint venture between the Rennie Center, Boston College's Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children, and the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education—includes full academy gatherings and individualized coaching for school teams. Since launching in 2018, the S3 Academy has worked with more than 100 schools across more than 30 districts.

Case Study: Empowering Students, Transforming Schools

This year we conducted a case study on how five Boston schools worked to make Transformative Social Emotional Learning (tSEL) practices a priority. The report, *Empowering Students, Transforming Schools: Lessons from Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (SEAD) Coaching in Boston Public School*, looks at how these schools implemented inclusive classroom routines, co-created Think Spaces with students, and supported educators to model social-emotional competencies. For district and school leaders, these examples offer a roadmap for advancing tSEL in ways that foster lasting change.

Resource Guide for Homeless Liaisons

To help schools support students experiencing homelessness, we created a [comprehensive resource guide](#) to enhance and support the work of school homeless liaisons. It includes information about signs of trauma in students, ways to heal from trauma, compassion fatigue, partnerships between school personnel and liaisons, obstacles specific to immigrant families and those who are undocumented, and strategies to improve family outreach. We released this guide alongside a [policy brief](#) offering guidance for state and district leaders in maximizing support for students and families experiencing homelessness.

SPOTLIGHT

THRIVING MINDS

Students need mental health support now more than ever. Nationwide, 42% of high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Schools provide a valuable source of mental health support: of the adolescents who receive mental and behavioral health services, two-thirds do so only in school.

Our [Thriving Minds](#) initiative aims to support schools in their efforts to address students' mental health needs, particularly by helping them build comprehensive mental health systems. A partnership between the Rennie Center, the Massachusetts School Mental Health Consortium, and bryt, Thriving Minds trains and coaches school staff on a wide range of core mental health concepts, from building an effective student support team to promoting trauma-sensitive classroom practices to utilizing evidence-based counseling practices and monitoring students' progress.

Thriving Minds has hosted more than 75 professional development sessions, facilitated 6 professional learning communities, overseen 3 year-long coaching cohorts, and supported more than 250 practitioners across more than 200 Massachusetts school districts.

In FY25, Thriving Minds expanded beyond Massachusetts to support practitioners in Maine, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania!



Academic Learning

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY25

Growing Literacy Across Massachusetts (GLEAM)

For the past 5 years, we've been working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to support nearly 30 Massachusetts school districts in implementing equity-driven and sustainable improvements in literacy programming. Districts reported substantial positive impacts for the combined 25,000 students served. Over the course of five years, the number of preschool students on track for kindergarten in these districts increased by 28 percentage points. The number of K-5 students not at risk for reading failure increased by 17 percentage points. And the number of high school students not requiring intervention increased by 13 percentage points.

Student Changemakers

Our [Student Changemakers](#) program—which we brought to three schools this year—empowers students to identify challenges in their community, investigate its root causes, and develop a solution grounded in original research. We provide an 18-lesson curriculum, rooted in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) process, and provide support for educators. Preliminary evaluation data from this year's program shows promising results. Participants reported an average 12% increase in confidence in skills like identifying a problem, conducting research, collecting data, and presenting information. The percentage of participants who felt “empowered” or “very empowered” to shape school decisions rose by 36%.

Literacy Launch Institutes

As a core component of the Healey-Driscoll Administration's *Literacy Launch: Reading Success from Age 3 through Grade 3* initiative, the Commonwealth is offering free training opportunities focused on preschool through third grade literacy. Our team is working with HILL for Literacy to design and implement these statewide professional learning institutes and follow up with targeted support for educators on effectively implementing evidence-based practices. The first two [Literacy Launch Institutes](#) being held in August 2025 will each offer four full days of training for 600 educators total.

SPOTLIGHT

CURRICULUM REVIEW

The curriculum used in classrooms can have an immense impact on student learning. Research finds that access to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) leads to improvement in student outcomes comparable to more than half a year of additional learning. But understanding which curriculum will best serve a classroom or school can be a challenge for educators and school leaders. That's why we've been partnering with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on a number of [curriculum review projects](#).

Our Curriculum Ratings by Teachers (CURATE) initiative convenes panels of Massachusetts teachers to review and rate the quality and alignment of specific core curricular materials. Since 2018, CURATE panels have produced more than 80 reports on curriculum for Math, ELA/Literacy, Science and Technology/Engineering, and Digital Literacy and Computer Science.

We've also partnered with DESE to perform baseline reviews for K-12 History Social Science Curriculum and Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum, and we are currently working on a review of Arts Curriculum. These reviews put a specific focus on culturally and linguistically sustaining practices. The Rennie Center is now expanding this work beyond Massachusetts. Our team is currently helping the state of Maryland develop their own curriculum review process similar to CURATE.



Career Pathways

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY25

Building a Foundation for Early College Success

Early college programs, which allow students to take college courses while still in high school and earn credit for both, present a unique opportunity to support students in developing foundational skills needed to access college-level coursework, particularly in English language arts (ELA) and math. As Massachusetts looks to expand early college programs, we released a [practice brief](#) to help practitioners support students' development of foundational skills in ELA and math with the goal of building strong on-ramps to college-level coursework.

Competency-Based Approaches to Graduation

As Massachusetts policymakers look to define what it means to earn a diploma in Massachusetts without an MCAS requirement, we think it's important to consider what we can learn from our neighbors. Several of the New England states are recognized leaders in competency-based education and offer examples for how Massachusetts can rethink graduation requirements. Over the winter, we released a [summary](#) of New Hampshire's Competency-Based Credit Accumulation, Rhode Island's Readiness-Based Graduation Requirements, and Vermont's Flexible Pathways Initiative.

Integrated Student Support in Higher Education

This year, our team received funding to produce a policy paper on how colleges and universities can implement systems of Integrated Student Support. Research shows that this approach to holistic student support has long-term positive impacts. Through this project, our team will explore policy levers that would support institutes of higher education in efforts to systematize student support services.

SPOTLIGHT

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS: STEM INTERNSHIPS & WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This year we released a [report](#) that delves into the current landscape of state-funded STEM-focused internships and work-based learning opportunities available to high school students in Massachusetts. It explores the offerings of Regional STEM Networks across Massachusetts, assessing how these networks support students in a variety of cities and towns and the disparities that exist in terms of access and quality. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the strengths and limitations of each STEM-focused initiative, identifying best practices and successful models that can be replicated and scaled.

The guide points out critical areas for growth, emphasizing the need for a more coordinated and inclusive approach to STEM work-based learning experiences across the Commonwealth. It also offers policy recommendations aimed at bridging the gaps in access and quality, such as ensuring students have access to paid internship opportunities, enhancing transportation options for rural students, standardizing quality, and fostering statewide collaboration among stakeholders.



Rethinking Education

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY25

Condition of Education in the Commonwealth

Our world has changed so vastly over the last century, from the way we communicate, to the way we get around, to the way we work. But schools and classrooms today remain strikingly similar to those of the 1920s. And data shows us that the current model of education is not meeting the needs of the 21st century. We believe it's time to rethink our education system entirely, reimagining when, where, and how students learn. Our [Condition of Education week](#) in January served as a state-wide jumping-off point for this conversation. We released updates to our [data dashboard](#) that offer an opportunity to see where Massachusetts is succeeding and where work needs to be done. We hosted an [event](#) featuring all three state education commissioners and the Secretary of Education that offered a chance for attendees to hear state-level thoughts on the future of education. And our [Action Guide](#) dug into ideas and examples of ways to rethink education to truly prepare students for college, careers, and life in 2025 and beyond.

Rethinking Grading

Schools have used essentially the same grading system for more than 100 years. This system is no longer aligned with what we know about the learning process, child and adolescent development, and the demands of career, college, and community life. But traditional grading is so deeply ingrained in our culture that making changes to this system can seem like an insurmountable task. That's why we partnered with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and reDesign on [Rethinking Grading](#), an initiative to support five unique high schools across Massachusetts as they interrogated their traditional grading practices and made shifts towards new systems that better measure student learning and growth.

SPOTLIGHT

R&D LABS

In many sectors, research and development (R&D) is an integral part of day-to-day operations. In healthcare, for example, research often happens in hospitals right alongside patient care. This gives researchers and practitioners the ability to test evidence-based innovations in real-life situations, draw lessons from those experiences, and apply the results in the hospital setting in a sustainable and scalable way. Research doesn't look like this in K-12 education.

We launched the [Rennie R&D Labs](#) as a way to change that. This first-of-its-kind endeavor aims to fully embed research processes within our mainstream public school system. Our team is currently working with educators at five schools to test new practices and apply lessons learned, while working closely with policymakers and practitioners to scale successful outcomes.

We're working with the McDevitt Middle School in Waltham to assess and refine its recently developed Newcomer Program; the Boston Adult Technical Academy to develop impact metrics for alternative schools; the Fenway High School in Boston to support students in building academic self-efficacy and persistence in early college programming; the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership to create simulated internships for students to experience healthcare careers; and the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers in Boston on their efforts to develop an incentive-based scholarship program for college, career, and life readiness skills.

THANK YOU

Our work to improve public education in Massachusetts and beyond would not be possible without the generous contributions of our funders and partners. We are truly grateful for the support of the following organizations as well as all those who follow and engage with our work.

Foundations

Arnold Ventures
Barr Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Commonwealth Children's Fund
Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation
Joyce Foundation
Linde Family Foundation
The Boston Foundation
W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation

Project Partners

The Brookline Center for Community Mental Health
Conscious Ed
Federation for Children with Special Needs
HILL for Literacy
Lighthouse Wellness and Health Education Consulting
Mary E. Walsh Center for Thriving Children
Massachusetts School Mental Health Consortium
reDesign
RMC Research Corporation
Teach Plus

Funding Partners

Advanced Education Research & Development Fund
American Student Assistance
Belchertown Public Schools
Bellingham Public Schools
Boston Public Schools
Campus Without Walls
Framingham Public Schools
Lewiston Public Schools
Maryland State Department of Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Massachusetts Partnerships for Youth
Media Literacy Now
Medway Public Schools
Montgomery County Intermediate Unit Project AWARE
Northshore Education Consortium
Regional School Unit 73
School Administrative District #1
Providence Public School District
Salem Public Schools
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley
Worcester Public Schools



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