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## State using Web site to help students prepare for college

By Associated Press

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**BOSTON-** High school students in Massachusetts have rising MCAS passing rates and higher SAT scores than the national average, but only about half of ninth graders start college and fewer than 30 percent earn a degree.

The state's top education leaders hope a new online campaign - and an expanding partnership between K-12 and higher education officials - will start to reverse that trend by telling students: "Think college isn't for you? Think Again."

The Department of Education and the Board of Higher Education is spending \$250,000 to promote a new Web site, ReadySetGotoCollege.com. The campaign, running through April, includes advertisements on buses in Boston and Springfield, radio, movie theater and television ads across the state and posters for every high school directing students to the Web site.

The ads rolled out last week, and the schools were to receive the posters later this month.

Once clicked onto the site, middle school and high school students see eight steps to get into and be successful in college, including taking the right high school classes, applying for financial aid and thinking about what careers they are interested in.

Buyer Advertising of Newton designed the ad campaign using Boston public school students. The Web site has information and links provided by the education agencies, such as what courses are required for Massachusetts' public universities and how to sign up for the SAT or ACT exam.

Though strictly informational now, officials hope to expand the site over time to include everything from links to online college and financial aid applications to student testimonials and tuition calculators.

Matthew Mays, a sophomore at the Boston Arts Academy who is in the commercial, said the Web site got him thinking more about college and offered information he didn't know.

"It definitely gave me more choices. I didn't realize that I could have certain types of scholarships," said Mays, 16, who recites the ad's "Think again" tag line.

One of his co-stars, 15-year-old Michael Casey, said he hoped the ad's diverse cast would appeal to students of varying backgrounds and academic standing.

"I hope it brings them to the site, even if they're not into college at the time," he said.

The state is paying for the Web site and advertising with funds from a National Governors Association grant received in 2005, which gave the state \$2 million to increase high school graduation rates and the number of students ready for college.

"Sometimes students, when they pass the MCAS in the 10th grade, see it as an end point," Board of Education Chancellor Patricia Plummer said. "It's making sure they're aware of the level of preparation they need to go to college."

Both Plummer and Education Commissioner David Driscoll said the project symbolized a greater partnership between their two agencies.

Members of the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Education and the Board of Higher Education met in August for the first time to work together to create education policy. So far, work has been done to create a state

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curriculum and establish a database that can track students from kindergarten through college, among other things.

But the ad campaign is the most visual product yet.

“This is the most significant partnership we’ve had with higher education in a while,” Driscoll said.

Plummer said the goal was to make it as easy as possible for students to succeed at all levels of public education.

“It’s important for the students and actually for the commonwealth,” she said. “The more we can have a seamless transition from K-12 to high education to the work force the better it is.”

Driscoll said the state must expand its reform beyond standardized tests and complying with the federal No Child Left Behind law.

Driscoll pointed to the increased need for higher education in the job market and the number of Massachusetts students that do attend college but are unprepared for the work. Remedial courses costs taxpayers money and, because they delay progress toward a degree, can cause frustrated students to drop out.

“Everything we’re talking about is going to the next level,” Driscoll said. “We’ve had a lot of success for the first decade of education reform.”

But he added: “At the time we’ve made progress, the world has kind of gone by us.”

--- On the Net:

<http://readyssetgotocollege.com>

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