

***For a Great State of Mind: Invest in Public Higher Education***  
**A multi-year grassroots campaign with an initial focus on the 2010 election**

In January, PHENOM is launching “***For a Great State of Mind***”, a multi-year state-wide campaign, whose goal is to have Massachusetts dramatically increase its investment in public higher education to reach the national average, and to decrease student tuition and fees so they too are no higher than the national average.

Only four states spend a smaller percentage of their revenues on public higher education than Massachusetts. Where the national average is 6.5%, Massachusetts only spends 3.9% of its budget on higher education. Massachusetts spends almost 40% less per resident on public higher education than the national average. Among the states that do better are not only California, Michigan and New York, but also Mississippi, Alabama, and Alaska. Net average tuition (tuition + fees - state and college financial aid) is 40% higher than the national average, pricing college out of reach for many qualified students.

If this campaign is successful, we could guarantee students a high-quality education with reasonable class sizes and a stable full-time faculty. We could turn financial aid into a tool of equal access instead of a stopgap against out-of-control costs. We could increase access for lower income families, people of color and immigrants, insuring that our campuses, our graduates, and our workplaces are as diverse as our state. We could grow our economy by giving more Massachusetts residents the skills needed to get high-paying jobs, spend more at local businesses, and pay more in taxes. We could take steps toward free community colleges, adequately funding them so they can be a pipeline to four-year colleges or fulfilling careers. We could give hard-working faculty and staff overdue raises and reasonable workloads allowing them to better serve students.

“***For a Great State of Mind***” will have its initial focus on the 2010 election, and a longer-term focus on the FY 2012 state budget.

The campaign will officially be launched January 31 at a festive Kickoff at the end of an intensive 2-day training collaboratively run by PHENOM and Wellstone Action. Immediately thereafter, we will begin gathering thousands of signatures on a statement calling on candidates for public office in 2010 to endorse the goal of the campaign, with a commitment to make significant progress toward that goal no later than the FY 2012 budget. Gathering signatures will also help PHENOM decide about the possibility of placing a referendum question on the ballot in 2011.

I ask every candidate for statewide and legislative office to endorse the following and to take steps toward making it a reality:

*Massachusetts must provide top-quality public higher education and must make it affordable for all. To these ends, the Commonwealth must ensure that **per capita spending on public higher education is no less than the national average, and that student costs are no higher than the national average.** Significant and measurable progress toward these benchmarks must be achieved by FY 2012.*

PHENOM Campus Councils, consisting of students, staff, and faculty, are at the core of our organizing strategy. They will help PHENOM implement the campaign on their campus by gathering signatures of support, holding informational and educational events, and reaching out to others on their campus and in surrounding communities.

During the election campaign, beginning in the spring of 2010 and continuing through the summer and fall, our campaign will have a presence at all major candidate events across the state. We will meet with candidates to present signatures gathered in their district and ask them to pledge their support. We will insist that candidates concretely address the crisis in public higher education. At the same time, PHENOM will be meeting with editorial boards of local and state-wide media outlets and other opinion leaders, and will air public service announcements to gain broad public support for our campaign.

We have been working with some legislators to create a Public Higher Education Caucus in the Legislature. Over half of current legislators either graduated from a Massachusetts public higher education institution or have one in their district. Throughout this campaign, we will continue to build the Caucus and coordinate our work with theirs.

In the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011 we will meet with the newly elected political leaders to remind them of their campaign promises and hold them accountable. Our focus will be on getting them to translate their pledges into concrete action in the form of public higher education spending in the 2012 budget.

PHENOM, founded in February 2007, mobilizes students, staff, faculty, alumni, parents, community organizations and others to advocate for an affordable, accessible, and well funded public higher education system in Massachusetts. At a time when the nation's public higher education system is in deep crisis, PHENOM is unique and can serve as a model by bringing all the stakeholders in public higher education together into a huge grassroots movement to preserve a public option in higher education for the benefit of students, potential students, and a bright economic future for our state.

We are also in discussions with various unions and community organizations to explore a progressive revenue campaign – critical if Massachusetts is to dramatically increase its investment in public higher education. This will not initially be an explicit part of the campaign, but is clearly necessary for the campaign to be a success.

There are several reasons why “For a Great State of Mind” is the right campaign now and why we believe our chances of success are higher than at any previous time. We see that there is, and will continue to be, a broader understanding that higher education, and especially public higher education, is key to a prosperous future for our residents and the state. This awareness is being reinforced in many ways: President Obama's pronouncements, PHENOM's work, the imminent establishment of a public higher education caucus in the legislature, countless published reports, a growing understanding of economic realities, and pressure from students and their families who are being iced out of higher education opportunities.

We also believe that over the next two to three years the state's economy will begin to turn around. As that happens we need to have built broad support for increased state investment in public higher education.

