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MASSACHUSETTS  
BUSINESS ALLIANCE  
FOR EDUCATION

May 24, 2010

Honorable Arne Duncan  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) is a policy advocacy group representing employers in Massachusetts. We are committed to a high quality public education system that will prepare all students to engage successfully in a global economy and society. We bring together business and education leaders to promote education policies and practices based on measurable standards of achievement, accountability for performance, and equitable educational opportunities for all students. As the organization that provided the conceptual framework and advocacy for the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, MBAE, and the employers we represent, have a long history of supporting education reform focused on student achievement. We are proud that such reform efforts have resulted in our students' sustained academic performance at the top of the nation and we unequivocally support the Commonwealth's application for the Race to the Top to accelerate our state's progress.

While MBAE celebrates our accomplishments, we recognize that we have much work ahead to close persistent achievement gaps and to prepare all students to compete in a rapidly changing global workforce. MBAE enjoys a proud reputation for effectively communicating the business perspective to policy and program initiatives in Massachusetts and will capitalize on our established relationships with state leaders and other stakeholders to actively support state efforts to implement and sustain the strategies outlined in the state's application. Our organization's strategic goals are aligned with the four assurances you are seeking from all Race to the Top applicants, and the proposals Massachusetts is putting forward. We believe that Massachusetts Race to the Top proposals are also aligned with those four assurances and warrant an award of Race to the Top funding, particularly applied to the following:

- Graduate all students ready for college, career and citizenship

MBAE has advocated for increasing college and career readiness and believes that the state's Race to the Top commitments to increasing rigorous college and career pathways, with an emphasis on STEM, rightly target issues identified by the Massachusetts business community as critically important. We believe that having a chance to revise the first round application has given us an opportunity to strengthen our proposal in this area to drive the statewide reform necessary to raise graduation rates and ensure that all students acquire the applied skills and content knowledge essential for college and career success. Business leaders have been engaged by MBAE in the development of the MassCore graduation standards and initiatives to develop performance-based assessment of college and career readiness. We remain committed as the business partner in these endeavors to intensify our campaign to make MassCore the minimum graduation requirement for all students as part

of a continuum of school reforms. We also support a comprehensive approach to increasing graduation rates based on ambitious goals and evidence-based solutions, and endorse the Commonwealth's Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission's plan to reduce the dropout rate as part of the state's Race to the Top program.

- Ensure effective teachers and leaders in every school and classroom

Reaching the goals of high standards and achievement can only be accomplished with changes in our school management and human resource systems. Since the state's January application was submitted, MBAE released a study of human capital policies in the Boston Public Schools and identified areas where improvements can be made that are applicable to districts across the state. Our organization has supported a comprehensive approach to improving the system for educator recruitment, development and management. We strongly endorse the state's commitment to require districts to evaluate all teachers annually, with student achievement as a major factor. The Massachusetts business community has significant experience evaluating professionals that can be brought to bear on this challenge. MBAE has initiated a project to share private sector expertise in performance evaluation, and its relation to compensation, with state policymakers. We have convened experts to review these issues and recommend action. With a record of success in framing discussion that leads to solutions of complex educational questions, MBAE and the employers we represent are committed to collaborative efforts to develop multiple measures of effectiveness anchored in student performance.

- Turn around Massachusetts' lowest performing schools

MBAE has defended high standards and equitable opportunities for all children against both legal and political challenges and will continue to do so. At the district and school level, MBAE considers accountability for performance essential to raising student achievement and making the case for state investment in education. Our efforts have resulted in the preservation of a proven system for evaluating and reporting on district management and operational systems essential to quality teaching and learning. This is now linked to a new structure for providing the assistance needed to support school improvement. The Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council charged with design of this system is chaired by an MBAE Board member and MBAE also fills the business representative seat. We are confident that with this system, coupled with statutory changes that provide greater autonomy and management rights to school leaders, which we have championed, will enable Massachusetts to finally bring our lowest performing schools up to the level of quality that our students need and deserve.

Most Massachusetts companies have experienced rapid and extensive changes in their industries and professions as a result of technological advances and the globalization of the marketplace. Educational institutions have been slower to adapt. MBAE is keenly aware of the unique opportunity that Race to the Top, in coordination with other economic stimulus grant programs, provides for systemic changes rather than incremental advances. Our commitment to working with state leaders, and to holding them accountable for results, is demonstrated by the recent "Leaders and Laggards" report on educational innovation in the states. Massachusetts was the only state in the nation meeting all four conditions for a strong state reform environment because of MBAE's membership in the Policy Innovators in Education network. MBAE and our allies in the business community believe that our state's second application is significantly stronger than the very compelling application that led us to be designated a finalist in the first round. We pledge to monitor and report on progress

toward the goals and promises set forth in our Race to the Top application and urge you to support the selection of Massachusetts for a Race to the Top award.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Richardson, Chairman  
East Coast Education Program Manager, Intel  
(Business Representative on Science, Technology and Engineering Curriculum Frameworks Review)

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