



**TESTIMONY OF MBAE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBERS JOSEPH ESPOSITO AND DAVID MANCUSO TO SENATE CHAIR SONIA CHANG-DIAZ, HOUSE CHAIR ALICE PEISCH, AND MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
September 12, 2017**

*Opposing all bills containing any of the provisions of **S.308** An Act strengthening and investing in our educators, students, and communities and **H.2844** An Act to place a moratorium on high stakes testing*

Thank you for the opportunity to present the perspective of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, where each of us are Members of the Board of Directors. MBAE is committed to a high quality public education system that will prepare all students to engage successfully in a global economy and society. As the organization that crafted the framework for the Education Reform Act of 1993, a national model for change that has catapulted the state's education system to the top of the nation, we are gravely concerned about bills before you today that would dismantle the very system that is responsible for our state's success.

MBAE's record of commitment to education equity makes us acutely aware that our Commonwealth is not providing a uniformly high quality education to every child. S.308, H.2844 and other bills containing similar provisions would contribute to the growth, not the elimination, of achievement gaps and make it impossible to ensure that every student has access to equitable education opportunities that prepare them for full participation in our economy and society.

Accountability

The Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council that was charged in 2008 with advising the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on a new framework for school and district accountability was chaired by MBAE Board member Joseph Esposito. MBAE was appointed to represent the business community on the council that included representatives from every education stakeholder group. Careful, deliberative work by DESE staff that involved consideration of public input and the expertise shared by educators led to our current system. Changes have been made and improvements should continue to be offered through that process.

Tampering with our accountability system must be done with extreme caution. Proposals contained in these bills to transfer authority for regulation of accountability from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to an Education Task Force or for legislative approval of BESE regulations would gut the state's well-functioning education accountability system and pose bureaucratic roadblocks that limit future progress.

Similarly, provisions that would require the state to fund for two years at least three services chosen by those who have been involved in or responsible for past failures before a school is designated as underperforming or chronically underperforming is simply a dilatory tactic that is not in the best interests of students trapped in that school. There is also no research or evidence that indicates this approach will yield any results. It is a blatant attempt to undo the reforms of the Achievement Gap Act of 2010 and the gains that have resulted from that law.

Under the system developed from 2008 to 2010, and authorized by that Act, 14 out of 34 schools designated as "underperforming" or Level 4 in 2010 exited that status after meeting

their turnaround goals by 2013. Without an accountability system holding those schools responsible for ensuring students learn, providing teachers valuable support and feedback, and giving educators and school leaders the authority to determine what's best for their students' learning needs, these gains would not have been realized.

Assessments

Statewide standardized tests, on which our accountability system partially relies, ensure that the same bar is set for every student, in every school and district across the state. Since 2010, Massachusetts has been implementing learning standards to better prepare students for college and job training by focusing on the critical thinking, communications and problem-solving skills they will need to succeed in the real world. Now, a new, next generation assessment system, developed with substantial involvement of Massachusetts educators, is ready to measure a student's ability to apply their learning to solve real world problems, rather than simply recall information by filling in bubbles on an answer sheet.

This is not the time for a moratorium of any kind or length on MCAS testing or suspension of passing this exam as a graduation requirement. Statewide standardized tests are essential because they provide critical information to parents and educators about whether students are meeting those real world expectations; shine a light and therefore create urgency to address persistent racial and socio-economic achievement gaps; and, provide essential data about school and district performance that can be used to correct course if necessary, or to highlight best practices that can be replicated.

By 2020, 72% of jobs in Massachusetts will require some postsecondary training or a 4-year degree. The bio-technology industry alone will need to fill 11,600 *additional* jobs by 2022. If, as both H.2844 and S.308 propose "the requirement that a student must demonstrate mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge as measured by MCAS or another standardized test shall not be required as a condition for high school graduation" what would a diploma mean? And, more importantly, what kind of future will a student who fails to demonstrate that mastery face?

Limitations on Use of Data

Restrictions on the generation and use of actionable data that has proven essential for school improvement would slow progress or make it impossible to achieve entirely. Our most recent employer poll found that 95% cited "making sure we have the best teachers for our schools" as the state policy the business community should focus on to improve public education. Evaluating teachers fairly was highly valued, yet the distinction between the current system of teacher evaluation and tenure, and the more performance-driven way their own employees were evaluated, was noted. 82 percent favored "using performance, rather than seniority, for personnel decisions" as one way to improve our schools.

So, we strongly oppose anything that would eliminate the state's ability to require that districts evaluate teachers, at least in part, on their impact on student learning, growth or achievement. Data essential for district and school leaders to make personnel decisions that are in the best interest of students, particularly in struggling schools, must be available to ensure we have the most effective teachers in our classrooms.

Just as the mastery of competencies, skills and knowledge is a legitimate requirement for high school graduation, "data that is intended to measure an individual educator's impact on student learning, growth, or achievement" is a legitimate – in fact a significant – consideration for teacher evaluation and should not be revoked.

Education Equity and Economic Opportunity

Massachusetts employers depend on a well-educated, highly-skilled workforce. 75% report difficulty finding qualified employees for jobs ranging from technical and finance to manufacturing and retail positions. High quality standardized tests that measure the knowledge and skills that are relevant to employment are a critical tool in ensuring students are on track for college, the workforce and ultimately, meaningful lives as valuable citizens in our commonwealth. Business supports annual statewide standardized testing and works to ensure the state is testing the right things while setting the bar for learning high enough to ensure students lifelong success in the real world they all have to live in.

This is more than a matter of securing a qualified workforce, it is also about equitable access to economic opportunity. In 2016, less than 1% of Massachusetts high school students took the AP Computer Science exam. Of the 1,151 test takers, 321 were female, 65 were Black, 80 were Hispanic, and 150 were low-income. With over 100,000 openings in computer science, information technology and related jobs, in Massachusetts access to AP Computer Science is just one indicator of inequity that exists in preparing ALL students for opportunities that exist in our workforce.

As employers and citizens, we recognize that an excellent education is the foundation **EVERY** student needs to live productive lives, join and lead the workforce, and earn a family sustaining wage that will enhance their own as well as our state's economic well-being. Any rollback of assessments, accountability, improved teacher evaluation measures or intervention to turnaround chronically underperforming schools would be a grave mistake that would irreparably set our students, particularly our most vulnerable, and our schools back decades.

My fellow MBAE Board members and the employers we represent strongly urge you not to approve these bills. Associated Industries of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and 22 additional, affiliated business organizations from across the Commonwealth join us in our opposition. The statement attached to our testimony lists the Chambers of Commerce and statewide trade associations that share our commitment to educating every student for success and ensuring that each one can access the employment opportunities we provide. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

For more information, please contact:

What contact information, if any, do you want listed?

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