

**Comments Regarding Massachusetts School Report Card Prototype**

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), and our Affiliates listed below, believe that report cards are a powerful tool for community-driven school improvement. We are pleased that DESE has sought public input on the prototype report card. In addition to responding to the Massachusetts School Report Card Prototype Survey, and in the spirit of making sure that report cards are “a useful tool for families and communities and include the most important information about schools and districts,” we offer these comments as a supplement to our survey responses.

The report card prototype expands and deepens the data currently provided online. It is more interactive and inviting than the web-based iteration as well. The top-level questions used to structure the information are good ones, and are a useful way to present the information. However, we think that the current design will not be as strong a tool for community engagement as necessary.

The way data are presented will pose challenges to many users. The report card needs to explain what each indicator measures and why it is valuable as a measure of school performance. This is not done consistently in the prototype. The indicator “9th Grade Course-Passing” is an example of a strong explanation. It explains both what the indicator is measuring and what it tells us about students’ opportunity for success. Explanations are weaker or nonexistent for many other indicators. For example, in the school environment section, it will not be clear to many what the indicators attendance rates, number of days absent, and school discipline incidents actually tell us about the school environment’s impact on students’ opportunity to learn. The current format appears to suggest that attendance is a driver of school climate, not a proxy for it, and begs questions like “below what attendance rate does the learning environment start to inhibit learning?” and “will my child benefit if the attendance rate at her school increases?” If the reason that an indicator matters is not clearly explained, many parents, employers, and other community members will be inadvertently denied an opportunity to understand how well their schools are performing and to communicate any concerns to school leaders.

We also have concerns related to the following items:

1. **The prototype provides too little information on whether students are prepared for career success**. Opportunity in today’s economy requires that students earn a degree, certificate or credential beyond their high school diploma. Focusing only on intermediate outputs like high school graduation rates and rates at which students enter college deprives communities of information on the outcome that ultimately matters for their students’ career opportunities. Because the quality

of education received in the K-12 years is a determinant of students’ chances to persist through whatever form of post-secondary education and training they choose, the rates at which graduates go on to earn a credential is an appropriate indicator of how well schools are serving students. Information on how many students persist in post-secondary education and earn a degree within six-years is already publicly available through the DART for Success After High School and should be included in the report card.

Beyond high quality academics, high schools can have a direct impact on student success after graduation by providing exposure to the world of work and opportunities to earn college credits. Conversely, students who require remediation once enrolled in higher education are less likely to persist. Information on how many students participate in career readiness activities, earn college credits while in high school, and require remediation in college is available, but is currently buried in the DART for Success After High School spreadsheet on DESE’s website. It should be publicized through the report card.

1. **The prototype does not provide enough information about how money is allocated within school districts**. How and on whom education dollars are spent matters. The section on finance states that it provides information on “The total dollars spent per student, broken down by the source of funds and the type of spending.” However, the report card only provides information on the source of funds, not how it is spent. This denies the public any insight into whether schools and districts are spending in ways aligned to goals for quality and equity. The current prototype should be extended to show how much money is spent centrally and how much makes it to students in the classroom, especially those that need it most. In addition, the report card should provide links to detailed, interactive reports of spending by category hosted on the DESE website, extending and making accessible information currently housed in the RADAR spreadsheets.
2. **Comparisons to other schools and districts in the report card should be more meaningful.** Within districts, schools should be compared to others that serve the same grades, not the district as a whole. The prototype appears to pool all grades together, setting up comparisons between 3rd graders and 10th graders. Parents will want to know how the education that their child receives compares to that of similarly-aged children in other parts of their community. The report card design should not obscure this comparison.

Across districts, comparisons to the state average should be supplemented by comparisons to similar districts. This will provide greater information on how schools and districts that have similar opportunities and challenges work within these constraints to serve their students. DESE already recommends comparisons to

similar districts and schools and allows users to select comparators in its RADAR and DARTs tools. These capabilities should be extended to the report cards as well.

1. **Report cards should empower parents and community members to take action.** The report card rightly states that “Families and communities are critical partners to a school’s success.” However, the prototype does not provide any information about how parents and community members can work with schools to support improvement and promote student success. The report card should include clear explanation of how to communicate with the school or district about concerns, and provide links to conversation guides and suggested questions to help parents engage productively with schools.
2. **The opportunity for public comment is limited based on the materials DESE has made available.** In many schools, the proportion of ELL families exceeds 20%. Without a prototype and survey available in other languages, many intended users of the report card are not being provided with an accessible means to provide feedback.

The public should have the opportunity to comment on prototypes for other versions of the new report cards as well. The prototype provided is for high schools. Report cards for elementary and middle schools will presumably be different, as some indicators like graduation rates will not apply while others like hitting early milestones in ELA and math proficiency will. A summary report card for the district as a whole will also be necessary. The public should be able to comment on the content of these report cards, which can only be done by seeing prototypes.

Thank you for your consideration on behalf of MBAE and Affiliates listed below.

For more information, please contact:

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**MBAE AFFILIATES**

1Berkshire

Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce

Bristol County Chamber of Commerce

Cape Cod Canal Region Chamber of Commerce

Concord Chamber of Commerce

Economic Development Council of Western Mass.

Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce

Greater Westfield Chamber of Commerce

Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce

Massachusetts Competitive Partnership

Massachusetts High Technology Council

Mass. Technology Leadership Council

Massachusetts Society of CPAs

MetroWest Chamber of Commerce

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National Federation of Independent Business Massachusetts

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Newton-Needham Regional Chamber

North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

Orleans Chamber of Commerce

The Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce

Retailers Association of Massachusetts

SouthCoast Chamber

Springfield Business Leaders for Education

Springfield Regional Chamber

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