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## **Report Finds Massachusetts Education System Needs Major Overhaul to Prepare Students to Compete in Global Economy**

***Gaps and Stagnation Threaten State's Leadership Position;***

***Poll Says Business Leaders Agree Change is Needed***

**(Boston) -- March 24, 2014** – Massachusetts business leaders today released a comprehensive assessment of the Commonwealth's education system, sounding the alarm that student achievement has levelled off and the state risks falling behind global competitors who are outpacing the Commonwealth in educating a highly skilled workforce and informed, engaged citizens.

The [report](#), "The New Opportunity to Lead: A Vision for Education in Massachusetts in the Next 20 Years," concludes that districts, schools and instruction must be transformed if students are to compete successfully in the global economy and if Massachusetts is to remain a hub of innovation.

Brightlines, a partnership of international education experts led by Sir Michael Barber acting in a personal capacity, studied the performance of Massachusetts schools and today recommended significant steps to make progress against other high-performing systems around the world. The report, released today at a forum of educators, policy makers and business executives at Microsoft's Innovation & Policy Center in Cambridge, takes aim at Massachusetts' persistent education achievement gaps and growing workforce skills gaps, two dangerous trends business leaders say will threaten the long-term economic well-being of the Commonwealth.

The study was commissioned by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), which also released a new [poll](#) of business executives that found employers support changes in the state's schools, saying that Massachusetts schools, while better than their national counterparts, do not produce enough graduates prepared for college and the workforce. Sixty-nine percent of employers said they are having difficulty hiring employees with the right skills for the positions they have available.

MBAE is convening state education, policy, and business leaders to develop a comprehensive strategy to rapidly address the challenges highlighted in the report and pursue a public policy agenda designed to make Massachusetts schools the best in the world within the next two decades and to sustain that lead thereafter.

“We have grown complacent about public education and have failed to recognize the risk that without significant changes our schools will increasingly fall behind those of our global competitors,” said Henry Dinger, chairman of the Board of Directors at MBAE and a partner at Goodwin Procter LLP. “It is imperative that Massachusetts lead not just the nation, but the world in the educational achievement of our children, or we will suffer economic stagnation and decline.”

Recent standardized test results suggest that the state’s rate of improvement has slowed and in some cases stalled; the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that Massachusetts’ performance in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading has actually slipped backwards in the last two years. The 10-year improvement trends in NAEP between 2003 and 2013 show Massachusetts in the middle, not the front, of the pack in the U.S.

International comparisons from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that Massachusetts is a long way behind the world’s top performing systems. Meanwhile, other nations, including Poland and Germany are making faster progress and could surpass Massachusetts in the coming years.

“With the determined pursuit of the right strategies over a decade or more, the creation of the world’s leading school system in Massachusetts – a system which meets all these requirements and enables all students to succeed – is an ambitious and achievable goal,” Barber asserts.

Rick Lord, president and CEO of Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), the state’s largest business association, endorsed the findings and urged employers to become engaged in the campaign to improve educational outcomes. Lord, who is also an MBAE board member, observed: “High quality public schools are the bedrock of our knowledge-based economy. The job of sustaining Massachusetts’ global leadership in innovation belongs to everyone, and that will require a thoughtful, long-range plan to maintain our competitive advantages, including our education system.”

Barber’s report calls for a new approach to education reform, one that moves away from state mandates and compliance to one that drives authority and accountability down to the schools and creates the conditions in which schools continuously advance their own performance. It proposes collaboration to support integration of technology, improving teaching skills and expanding blended learning.

The report finds that with the state’s unique assets – a large and vibrant technology sector, a centuries-old commitment to excellence in public education, and a home to some of the world’s leading colleges and universities – it has an opportunity to lead the world in education. Barber recommends the state take bold steps to transform the education system including:

- Giving autonomy, including budget and staffing authority, to schools and school leaders including the flexibility to choose among school models that best meet student needs, eliminating the need for a charter school cap and encouraging innovation;
- Initiating a district redesign competition that will lead to new models of district operation fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and consistent with growing school autonomy.
- Developing and adopting new models of schooling that are student-centered and personalized: where students can learn anytime, anywhere; where teaching is more tailored to student needs and aspirations; where students play a more active role in their own learning; and where they move ahead once they master relevant knowledge and skills.

- Establishing a state-wide network to provide opportunities to enable gifted and talented students, whatever their background, to excel in a wide range of fields.
- Focusing on the importance of teachers through aggressive recruitment, intense in-classroom training, higher standards for licensure and re-evaluation of tenure, new career ladders that support master teachers and a more systematic approach to identifying, developing and deploying strong principals.
- Incentivizing the rapid development and application of innovative technologies that close the gap between what students are taught and what they need to know and do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an Accelerated Learning Challenge, bringing together educators, the State's growing education technology innovators and venture capitalists to develop new pedagogical tools.
- Investing in high-quality universal pre-K education and expanding extended learning time with longer days and years, especially in low-income communities.
- Prioritizing implementation of new assessments of college and career readiness.

“Massachusetts has an opportunity in the next decade to build on the foundations in place and create conditions where students can achieve greatness and compete with students anywhere in the world,” said Barber. “It would be tragic for the state not to seize its opportunity to lead. Complacency is the enemy. By striving for greatness along the lines we propose, the state could lead the way and become a beacon for others around the world. By contrast, if the state fails to move ahead, it will inevitably fall further behind the world’s leading systems.”

Barber’s report identifies and includes recommendations for addressing six “gaps” that currently exist in Massachusetts schools including a top talent gap, which refers to the gap between top-performing students in Massachusetts and top-performing students in the best-performing countries in the world. The latest PISA data shows that the top performer in math, Shanghai, has nearly three times as many students achieving the highest levels of performance on PISA than Massachusetts does. Advanced performance in math matters because we know it is critical to future economic success.

The employer opinion [research](#) project, conducted by MassINC Polling Group for MBAE, AIM and the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, included an online poll of Massachusetts businesses, three focus groups of senior business executives and interviews with a select group of prominent Massachusetts CEOs. The results showed a high level of concern over schools’ performance in preparing students for careers.

The MassINC Polling Group research found that 84 percent of businesses said the state’s schools need moderate (52%) or major (32%) changes. Only 20 percent gave the K-12 school system an A or B in preparing students for the job market.

“As our survey data showed, if we are going to achieve our goals in science, technology, engineering and math fields, business and education must work together to address the needs of employers, students and teachers,” said JD Chesloff, executive director of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and a member of the MBAE Board.

MBAE’s “The New Opportunity to Lead” campaign, driven by a non-partisan group of business, education and civic leaders across the state, will focus on generating widespread support among the public and elected officials to enact meaningful changes suggested in the Brightlines report. The campaign will seize the extraordinary opportunity Massachusetts has to build on its strong foundation by adopting proven innovations and initiatives that will prepare all students to be globally competitive.

MBAE will release its policy agenda, based on these findings, within the next 30 days and over the coming months will work with stakeholders across the state to refine it.

**This project was made possible with grants from the Barr Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.**

### **About MBAE**

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) was established in 1988 by employers concerned about the educational attainment and skills of graduates entering the workforce. Our core work – improving public schools by influencing state policy – is driven by the business community’s commitment that all students graduate prepared for success in college, career and citizenship.

### **About Brightlines**

Brightlines, led by Sir Michael Barber acting in a personal capacity, brings together unrivalled global education experts who have advised, researched and written extensively on the subject. Moreover, they have also led highly successful large-scale transformations in education systems across the world. Brightlines partners have worked with states and cities across the US to deliver education improvements including in Ohio, Louisiana, California, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and New York City. In addition collectively they have developed, delivered and/or advised on education strategy and reforms across 6 continents and in many different countries including the United Kingdom, Ontario province in Canada, a number of states in Australia, in Hong Kong, Singapore, Brazil, Chile, India and Pakistan.

### **About the lead authors**

Sir Michael Barber is a globally renowned education reformer who has worked on education reform in over 40 countries and has led this work for MBAE in a personal capacity. Formerly Head of the British Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, Sir Michael was also an author of McKinsey’s influential reports on global education systems ‘How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better’ and ‘How the World’s Best Performing Education Systems Come Out on Top’. With Katelyn Donnelly and Saad Rizvi, he was co-author of the influential reports ‘Oceans of Innovation’ and ‘An Avalanche is Coming’. He is also leader of Pearson’s worldwide program of research into education policy and efficacy.

Simon Day worked with Sir Michael Barber in the British Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit where he led work on improving the performance of secondary and primary schools and supported the implementation of the highly successful London Challenge program. He has also worked in the UK Department of Education. He is currently working as a consultant on education reform in the UK in England and Wales, and has worked with a number of states in the US supporting the implementation of Race to the Top and other reforms.

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