

Dear Senators and Representatives,

As Massachusetts confronts the damage wrought by COVID-19 and its disparate impacts, some special interest groups are seeking to pause or end assessments of student learning in the pandemic's wake. We write to strongly oppose this idea. Now is exactly the wrong time to discard assessments; on the contrary, with students learning differently than ever before, and more differently than each other, we need comparable data to understand learning gaps and help students get back on track.

This moment calls for a redoubled commitment to equity-driven student assessment in Massachusetts. To address learning gaps caused by COVID-19, we need to measure them. For this reason, we respectfully urge you to safeguard Massachusetts' commitment to equity and excellence in K-12 education by maintaining the state's only common assessments by which the Commonwealth holds itself and districts accountable for providing high-quality education to all students.

We understand the myriad challenges educators face, which is why we believe that tests administered in the spring of 2021 should not be used in the state's school and district accountability system or in performance evaluations. Our focus this year should be diagnosing students' academic needs.

COVID-19 may have interrupted in-person learning, but it does not invalidate each student's right to a high-quality education. We set high standards in Massachusetts because we believe that every student is a capable learner and that it is our responsibility as a state to affirm that. Now is no time to back down from that commitment.

Nor should we deny families, teachers, and communities information on students' academic progress. Families have the right to know whether their children are learning on grade level. We need to ensure they have the information they need to advocate for their children's education. Retreating from assessment would deny them this right.

Finally, many have advocated for us to use this time for innovation and experimentation in our education system. We encourage such forward thinking and also hope to learn from these pilots and new methods of engaging students. However, we need the results from these assessments to determine if the innovations and heavy reliance on education technology are having the positive impact we hope for.

We know that you face pressure from groups whose agenda would deny families this crucial information. On the contrary, we must continue to uncover disparities and work to address them. This crucial moment calls for us to renew the commitments we have made to the children and families of Massachusetts - not to turn back on them.

Chuck Longfield, Steering Committee Member
Boston Leaders for Education

Liam Kerr, State Director
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James E. Rooney, President and CEO
Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

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