



August 10, 2020

Senator Jason Lewis, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
24 Beacon St
Room 511-B
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Alice Peisch, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
24 Beacon St
Room 473-G
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Lewis and Chairwoman Peisch,

On behalf of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to oppose S.2814 *An Act Responding to the COVID-19 Emergency by Instituting a Moratorium of the MCAS*. This legislation seeks to dismantle a system that has stood as the cornerstone of advancing educational progress in the Commonwealth for nearly three decades. Last year the Chamber and others supported the Student Opportunity Act because it included accountability measures. This bill would strip accountability from our education system.

A moratorium on MCAS testing, of any length of time, even one year, is bad for students, particularly our most disadvantaged, and the Chamber urges you oppose it.

Forced school closures from the COVID-19 pandemic have only intensified the need to objectively measure how much students are learning to determine whether they are meeting expectations or need extra support to stay on track. This spring school principals, teachers, and parents worked hard to ensure that students continued learning, but not every district was equipped to provide high-quality instruction and engagement during the school shutdown, and our most vulnerable students have been hit hardest. Without the comparable and consistent data that we get from statewide assessments, we won't know the extent to which this crisis has impacted students' learning; the loss of this important information would hinder the state's ability to respond appropriately and would disproportionately impact students who are most in need of support.

MCAS is an indispensable tool for promoting greater equity in education, an essential goal that recent events have driven to the top of the public agenda, because it provides a common measurement to evaluate every student, in every school across the state. Before learning standards and MCAS were established, districts set their own disparate expectations leading to gross inequities in opportunity and wide gaps in student achievement.

Data from MCAS is the only consistent and objective source of information about disparities in educational outcomes. It forms the factual basis for the decisions that lead to action for greater equity in resource allocation in schools, and COVID-19 underscores rather than negates the need for MCAS. The pandemic has severely increased pre-existing and stubborn educational

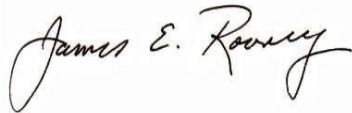
disparities and could have profound long-term impacts on both students and the health of the economy. McKinsey & Company estimates the learning loss for Black and Latino students could be as severe as ten months. MCAS data will help to identify those disparities and inform the path to eliminating them.

We also strongly oppose eliminating school and district report cards, as this bill proposes. While we recognize that performance during this period should be looked at within the unique context of the times, it is unacceptable to deprive parents and taxpayers of essential information about school and district performance. At a time when all arms of government are expected to provide greater levels of transparency, we cannot allow schools to be exempt from reporting on crucial performance data.

Eliminating the high school Competency Determination, as this bill would do, removes the requirement that a student demonstrate mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge. Without it, a high school diploma loses its value and we risk having students graduate without important skills. Recent Brown University research released by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shows that since the Competency Determination policy went into effect, grade 10 MCAS scores and educational attainments have increased and Grade 10 MCAS scores are an early indicator of long-term success.

The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce continues to strongly support the compact forged as part of the Education Reform Act of 1993 – establishing high standards for student achievement, holding districts accountable for meeting these, and allocating funds sufficient to ensure educational equity for all students. Without a comprehensive and objective evaluation system, this education compact, which has led to significant improvements in student outcomes, would be broken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James E. Rooney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

James E. Rooney
President & CEO