



March 22, 2019

The Honorable Jason Lewis, Senate Chair
The Honorable Alice Peisch, House Chair
Members, Joint Committee on Education
State House, Rooms 511-B and 473-G
Boston, MA 02133

RE: AN ACT PROVIDING RIGHTFUL OPPORTUNITIES
AND MEANINGFUL INVESTMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION
HOUSE 586 / SENATE 238

Dear Senator Lewis, Representative Peisch, and members of the committee:

I write to offer neutral testimony in regards to *An Act Providing Rightful Opportunities and Meaningful Investment for Successful and Equitable Education*.

As a nonpartisan public policy researcher who has spent over a decade studying the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities, I recognize how critically connected this legislation is to our shared prosperity. Gateway Cities play a crucial role supporting the upward economic mobility of Massachusetts residents. If their public school systems remain severely under resourced, they simply will not be in a position to perform this vital function in the future.

The Foundation Budget Review Commission accurately identified the major challenge. Since 1993, Gateway City school districts have seen dramatic growth in low-income, ELL, and special needs students. It is more difficult and costly to serve students in schools with large concentrations of need. Senate Bill 238 and House of Representatives Bill 586 call for a significant infusion of state funds to ensure that our inclusive urban schools have the resources necessary to place their students on pathways to succeed in our increasingly knowledge-drive economy.

In financial terms, these bills represent an unprecedented state commitment to public education. This outlay of taxpayer funds should be accompanied by strong accountability mechanisms to ensure that this investment produces the largest gains in student achievement possible. New accountability provisions are especially vital because the interventions proven to close achievement gaps that the Foundation Budget Review Commission singled out as most likely to close achievement gaps all demand difficult, systemic change to effectively implement (e.g., early education, extended learning time, early college, and wraparound supports).

MassINC's latest research shows Massachusetts already has robust state accountability frameworks in place; our present weakness is at the school and district level. Too many communities lack strong school councils and school committees to provide oversight locally. As a result, the school and district improvement plans communities develop do not allocate resources to meet priorities, they lack measurable goals to hold leaders accountable for results, and they are neither clear nor accessible, which leaves parents with little grasp for what their school is trying to improve upon, and how they can support the effort.

Compelling evidence from turnaround schools in Massachusetts suggests that this is exactly the kind of practice that leads to problems. Rather than focusing new accountability on a small number of struggling schools that already receive ample attention, Massachusetts should tie additional Chapter 70 funds to local accountability provisions that will position hundreds of schools for success from day one.

Schools that seek upper-tier increments (e.g., low-income increments between 65% and 75%) to implement complicated new models should be able to demonstrate that they have strong improvement plans, built with deep engagement from their parents and school councils. These plans should clearly identify the resources they will invest toward their strategic priorities and lay out how they will monitor and evaluate the success of these new initiatives.

Accountability policy fashioned in this manner will give communities incentives to prepare parents and community leaders to play a larger role in school governance. In this way, the state can target the root of the problem, helping communities grow a diverse pipeline of citizens prepared to serve on school committees, as well as other boards and commissions that play a vital role in democratic governance.

There are various ways to implement such a policy as the state phases in the new Chapter 70 funding formula. A practical approach might be to begin immediately through grants, such as the Public School Improvement Trust Fund Governor Baker has proposed. As the new Chapter 70 formula is fully implemented and funds for an optional upper-tier increment are available, the program could scale. This pathway would also allow the state to build capacity to review and monitor a larger number of school and district improvement plans, perhaps by forming teams made up of parents, teachers, principals, and community leaders that have had early success deploying the approach in their schools.

Beyond accountability, these bills place two additional issues before the committee that have strong implications for Gateway Cities that I would like to call attention to: identification of low-income students and charter school reimbursements. Recent policy challenges in these two areas have been enormously disruptive to Gateway City education leaders. Because they impact so few communities, these issues have been especially difficult to resolve.

Gateway Cities should not be penalized for openly serving immigrants and refugees. Nor, in the case of charters, for providing testing grounds for innovative educational models. We strongly endorse efforts to adhere to the Foundation Budget Review Commission's recommendation to ensure that all low-income students are accurately counted. We also support efforts to ensure that charter school reimbursements are fully funded in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and for all of your leadership on these important issues. We recognize the difficult task before the committee and welcome any opening to be of assistance to members and their staff.

Respectfully yours,



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