

2024 MASC Resolutions

RESOLUTION 1: **DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE HIGH-STAKES MCAS TEST**

Summary:

The MASC Board of Directors has introduced a resolution advocating for the development of an alternative to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test. This initiative emphasizes that access to high-quality, publicly funded education is a constitutional right and calls for an educational framework that supports diverse learning styles and promotes holistic student development from preschool through higher education.

The resolution outlines several detrimental impacts of the MCAS testing system, including curriculum restrictions, negative effects on student emotional well-being, and disproportionate targeting of underfunded schools. It highlights how MCAS has hindered many students from graduating, interrupting their educational and career paths.

To address these issues, the resolution urges Massachusetts to adopt a more inclusive evaluation strategy with input from relevant stakeholders, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of potential biases in the MCAS system, and implement an immediate moratorium on MCAS testing. This approach aims to foster a more equitable public education system that prioritizes student success and well-being.

Benefits of Developing an Alternative to the High-Stakes MCAS Test

- An alternative to the MCAS test could allow for a more holistic approach to education, emphasizing diverse learning styles and subjects beyond the current standardized testing framework.
- An alternative system might address inequities created by MCAS, particularly in underfunded communities, by promoting more tailored and supportive educational practices rather than punitive measures.
- By removing the high-stakes graduation requirement, students who struggle with standardized tests but excel in other areas might have a better chance to graduate and pursue further education or careers.

Challenges of Developing an Alternative to the High-Stakes MCAS Test

- Designing and implementing an alternative assessment system would be complex, requiring extensive resources, time, and collaboration among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.
- Moving away from the MCAS system would involve a significant transition period, which might initially create confusion and inconsistency in evaluating student achievement.
- Developing and maintaining a new assessment system could require substantial financial investment and resources, which might be challenging in an environment of budget constraints.

Recommendation

While I fully acknowledge the potential benefits of developing an alternative to the high-stakes MCAS test, particularly in addressing inequities in underfunded communities and supporting diverse learning styles, I recommend that this resolution not be considered as it is currently written. The resolution rightly points to concerns about the limitations of MCAS in measuring holistic student achievement and the adverse effects it can have on students' well-being and educational opportunities. However, the significant challenges of designing and implementing a new assessment system, particularly in the context of our current financial constraints, cannot be overlooked. The transition from MCAS to an alternative system would require a substantial investment of time, collaboration, and resources, all of which would need to be thoughtfully managed to avoid disrupting student evaluation processes. Without a more detailed framework on how this new system would be developed, funded, and implemented, we risk creating inconsistency and confusion. I encourage the committee to consider these challenges and seek more clarity on the operational and financial aspects before moving forward with this resolution.

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RESOLUTION 2
INCREASE COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE

Summary:

The Brockton School Committee has sponsored a resolution urging the Massachusetts legislature to increase the compulsory school attendance age from sixteen to eighteen. This change acknowledges the evolving demands of the 21st century, where higher education levels are essential for economic and social mobility, particularly for students facing poverty.

The resolution highlights that extending the compulsory attendance age can significantly reduce racial and socioeconomic disparities in educational attainment. Research indicates that students who remain in school until eighteen are more likely to graduate and achieve better life outcomes, including higher employment rates and decreased likelihood of poverty or incarceration.

Benefits of Increasing the Compulsory Attendance Age

- Improved Graduation Rates: Raising the compulsory attendance age to 18 can lead to higher high school graduation rates by keeping students engaged in their education longer.
- Reduced Dropout Rates: By mandating longer attendance, students are less likely to drop out of school, which correlates with better long-term life outcomes.

Challenges of Increasing the Compulsory Attendance Age

- Implementation Costs: There could be significant financial implications for districts in terms of funding for additional support services and infrastructure.

Recommendation

The majority of States currently have a compulsory education age of 17 or 18 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab1_2-2020.asp). Based on the benefits and challenges outlined, it is advisable to support the increase in the compulsory attendance age to 18, with careful consideration and planning for implementation (school resources, support programs, etc).

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RESOLUTION 3 **SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS**

Summary:

Sponsored by the Framingham School Committee, this resolution emphasizes the urgent need for secure firearm storage practices to protect students, teachers, and staff from the threat of gun violence in schools. Gun violence is the leading cause of death among children and teens in the U.S., with a significant number of incidents involving firearms that are unsecured and accessible in homes. Research indicates that secure storage can dramatically reduce the risk of firearm-related injuries and fatalities among young people.

The resolution calls on Massachusetts school districts to direct their superintendents and staff to communicate with parents and guardians about the critical importance of securing firearms. It highlights the legal requirements for firearm storage in Massachusetts and underscores the need for families to comply with these laws to prevent unauthorized access. Furthermore, it encourages collaboration between schools, local law enforcement, health agencies, and community organizations to raise awareness and educate families about safe storage practices.

Benefits of Promoting Safe Storage of Firearms

- Encouraging secure firearm storage can significantly reduce the risk of gun-related accidents and suicides among children and teens by preventing unauthorized access to firearms.
- By reducing the likelihood that students will access guns at home or from friends, schools can help prevent incidents of gun violence on school grounds.
- Promoting safe storage practices can raise awareness about the risks associated with unsecured firearms and encourage responsible gun ownership.
- Aligning with national programs and recommendations, such as the Be SMART Program, integrates local efforts with broader public safety initiatives, enhancing overall effectiveness.

Recommendation

Given the benefits associated with promoting the safe storage of firearms, it is advisable to support this resolution.

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RESOLUTION 4

SCHOOL BUS STOP ARM SURVEILLANCE ACT AND ENFORCEMENT PENALTIES

Summary:

The Peabody School Committee has sponsored a resolution advocating for enhanced safety measures to protect students boarding and disembarking from school buses in Massachusetts. Currently, it is illegal to pass a stopped school bus with its stop arm extended, yet the penalties for such violations remain minimal unless witnessed by a police officer. A survey revealed that millions of illegal passes occur annually, highlighting a significant risk to student safety.

The resolution proposes the implementation of digital video violation detection systems on school buses to monitor and record violations. These systems would enable local authorities to enforce penalties commensurate with those issued by police officers, addressing the shortcomings of current enforcement mechanisms. This approach aims to provide a more effective deterrent against reckless driving around school buses and enhance accountability for offenders.

Benefits of the School Bus Stop Arm Surveillance Act and Enforcement Penalties

- Digital video detection systems can help prevent dangerous situations by accurately identifying and recording vehicles that illegally pass stopped school buses, thus protecting students during boarding and disembarking.
- The threat of being caught and fined through video surveillance can deter motorists from illegally passing stopped school buses, thus reducing the incidence of violations.

Challenges of the School Bus Stop Arm Surveillance Act and Enforcement Penalties

- Implementation Costs: The installation and maintenance of digital video detection systems on all school buses can be costly for cities and towns.

Recommendation

Based on the benefits and challenges outlined, it is advisable to support the resolution for the School Bus Stop Arm Surveillance Act with a structured and phased approach, understanding that implementation costs would be a factor.

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RESOLUTION 5

ALIGNING TAXING AUTHORITY WITH THE REQUIRED LOCAL CONTRIBUTION

Summary:

The Arlington School Committee has introduced a resolution advocating for legislative changes to align municipal taxing authority with the required local contributions for education in Massachusetts. Under the current framework, the required local contribution is determined by a municipality's equalized property wealth, but municipalities are constrained by Proposition 2½, which limits tax levy increases to 2.5% plus new growth. This discrepancy creates financial strain for communities that struggle to meet increasing educational funding requirements.

Recent data highlights significant year-over-year increases in the required local contribution, with projected increases in FY25 reaching approximately \$7.97 billion. Such increases exceed what towns are allowed to raise under the 2.5% limit, placing additional pressure on municipalities without excess levy capacity, creating financial stress for communities that can't increase their tax revenue enough.

The resolution calls on the Massachusetts legislature to enact a law that would permit municipalities to increase their levy limits by the amount that the required local contribution exceeds the 2.5% threshold. This legislative change would empower municipalities to raise necessary local revenues, ensuring that they can adequately support educational funding while maintaining overall fiscal stability.

Benefits of Aligning Taxing Authority with Required Local Contribution

- By allowing municipalities to raise additional revenue to meet increased local contribution requirements, schools can receive necessary funding without compromising other local services.
- This approach would relieve municipalities from the pressure of cutting other essential services or dipping into reserves to meet their education funding commitments.
- With an adjusted levy limit, municipalities can better plan and forecast their revenues and expenditures, leading to more stable and predictable financial management.

Challenges of Aligning Taxing Authority with Required Local Contribution

- Increasing the levy limit may lead to higher property taxes for residents, which could be unpopular and financially burdensome for some taxpayers.
- There may be resistance from local governments or taxpayers who are concerned about increased taxation or the potential for misuse of increased revenue authority.
- Different municipalities may have varying capacities to raise additional funds, leading to disparities in how effectively they can address educational funding requirements.

Recommendation

Given the benefits and challenges, it is advisable to support the resolution with a careful and strategic approach. It would be worth engaging with local governments, taxpayers, and other stakeholders to gather input and address concerns about the proposed changes. Planning should also consider implementing changes in phases to allow municipalities time to adapt to new levy limits and address any unforeseen issues that may arise during the transition. A financial impact analysis should probably be conducted, analyzing the potential financial impact on municipalities and taxpayers to ensure that the benefits of increased taxing authority outweigh any negative effects. Equity considerations should also be examined, ensuring that the legislative changes take into account the varying financial capacities of different municipalities to avoid exacerbating disparities in education funding.

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RESOLUTION 6

SUPPORT OF LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE THE FISCAL HEALTH OF RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Summary:

Sponsored by the Deerfield, Sunderland, Whately, and Frontier Regional School Committees, this resolution addresses the pressing financial challenges faced by rural school districts in Massachusetts. Despite the state's increased education funding following the 2019 Student Opportunity Act (SOA), these districts have received less than 1% of that funding, leaving them under-resourced and unable to provide equitable educational opportunities for their students compared to their urban counterparts.

Multiple state commissions have identified the crisis in rural education, noting that districts with low student enrollments incur significantly higher operational costs. The Commission on the Fiscal Health of Rural School Districts highlighted that these districts spend 16.7% more per student than the state average, with small regional schools facing costs that are 22.7% higher. Rural districts have already taken steps such as closing schools and regionalizing services to mitigate financial strain, yet these measures are insufficient for long-term sustainability.

The resolution calls on the Massachusetts legislature to enact comprehensive legislation that incorporates all recommendations from the Commission's report, "A Sustainable Future for Rural Schools." By doing so, the resolution seeks to enhance funding mechanisms, expand rural school aid grants, and address the unique financial challenges faced by rural districts, ultimately ensuring that all students in Massachusetts have access to quality education.

Benefits of Supporting Legislation to Improve the Fiscal Health of Rural School Districts

- Rural schools face higher per-student operational costs due to factors like low enrollment and geographic isolation. Targeted funding can help offset these costs and support effective education delivery.
- Comprehensive legislation can help ensure the long-term sustainability of rural schools by implementing measures like the rural school aid grant program.

Challenges of Supporting Legislation to Improve the Fiscal Health of Rural School Districts

- Determining how to allocate increased funding fairly and effectively among rural districts can be complex.
- Ensuring that the new legislation achieves its intended goals will require monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
- Even with increased funding, disparities may persist if the allocation is not carefully designed to address the specific needs of the most under-resourced rural districts.

Recommendation

Given the benefits and challenges, it is advisable to support the resolution with a strategic approach to ensuring increased funding is allocated fairly and effectively among rural districts, that the new legislation achieves its intended goals, and an evaluation mechanism is put in place.

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RESOLUTION 7

FULLY ADJUSTING CHAPTER 70 AID FOR INFLATION

Summary:

The Everett School Committee has proposed a resolution aimed at ensuring that Chapter 70 school aid in Massachusetts is fully adjusted for inflation. Chapter 70 provides crucial funding based on Foundation Budgets, which reflect the financial needs of school districts. However, the current structure limits annual adjustments to the Foundation inflation index to a maximum of 4.5%, even when inflation rates exceed this threshold. This cap has led to a significant reduction in the base used to calculate future Foundation Budgets, diminishing the purchasing power of schools.

In fiscal years 2023 and 2024, the application of this cap has resulted in an approximate 6% shortfall in the funding necessary to maintain adequate purchasing power for Massachusetts schools. This situation underscores the need for legislative changes to fully account for inflation in the Chapter 70 formula and eliminate the existing cap on adjustments. By doing so, the state can restore the intended funding levels established by the Student Opportunity Act.

The resolution calls on the Massachusetts legislature to implement "Catch Ups" for Chapter 70 Foundation Aid that accurately reflect realized inflation since the enactment of the Student Opportunity Act.

Benefits of Fully Adjusting Chapter 70 Aid for Inflation

- Adjusting Chapter 70 aid for actual inflation ensures that school budgets retain their purchasing power, allowing districts to keep pace with rising costs for goods and services.
- Schools will benefit from more stable and predictable funding, which can improve long-term financial planning and resource allocation.
- Adjusting aid for actual inflation upholds the original intent of the Student Opportunity Act by ensuring that the funding formulas reflect current economic conditions and adequately support educational equity.

Challenges of Fully Adjusting Chapter 70 Aid for Inflation

- Fully adjusting for inflation could increase state budgetary pressures, requiring additional revenue or reallocation of funds from other areas.
- Enacting changes to the Chapter 70 aid formula and removing the inflation cap requires significant legislative action and consensus, which will be challenging to achieve.

Recommendation

Given the benefits and challenges, it is advisable to support the resolution with a cautious and strategic approach. It may be best to develop a phased approach, considering implementing the inflation adjustments in phases to manage the budgetary impact.

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RESOLUTION 8

EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR NON-REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH HIGH TRANSPORTATION COSTS

Summary:

The Plymouth School Committee has introduced a resolution addressing the significant financial challenges faced by non-regional school districts in Massachusetts, particularly regarding high transportation costs. These districts often bear extensive expenses due to longer transportation routes necessary to serve their students, yet they do not receive the same financial reimbursement benefits afforded to regional districts. This disparity creates an inequity in funding and resources, hindering the ability of non-regional districts to provide quality education.

To promote fairness and equity in education, the resolution advocates for the establishment of the "Extraordinary Routes Relief Fund." This special fund would provide financial assistance to non-regional school districts experiencing extraordinary transportation costs, ensuring they have access to the same level of support as regional districts. Funds from this program would be designated exclusively for transportation-related expenses, such as bus purchases, maintenance, fuel costs, and driver salaries.

The resolution further proposes the creation of an oversight committee comprising representatives from both non-regional and regional districts, along with the state's education department. This committee would be responsible for ensuring the fair and transparent allocation of funds from the Extraordinary Routes Relief Fund, thereby fostering an equitable educational environment for all students in Massachusetts.

Recommendation

It is advisable to support the resolution.

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RESOLUTION 9

MSBA GRANTS EVALUATION FOR CHAPTER 74

Summary:

The Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical High School Committee has proposed a resolution urging the Massachusetts Legislature and the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to implement a tiered evaluation system for assessing school building costs under Chapter 74. This resolution highlights that vocational-technical and agricultural high schools incur higher expenses for building and renovating educational training spaces compared to traditional schools, yet the MSBA currently evaluates all projects at equal value. By establishing a differentiated assessment system for elementary, comprehensive high schools, and vocational-technical schools, the resolution aims to ensure accurate and fair cost reimbursement, alleviating financial burdens on sending districts and local budgets.

Benefits of Evaluating MSBA Grants for Chapter 74

- A tiered evaluation system would provide more accurate reimbursement rates based on the specific costs associated with building or renovating different types of schools.
- By providing more accurate reimbursements, local districts will face reduced financial burdens related to funding the construction and renovation of vocational and technical facilities.
- A tiered reimbursement system could incentivize more investments in vocational and technical education facilities by ensuring that the costs are adequately covered.

Challenges of Evaluating MSBA Grants for Chapter 74

- Creating and implementing a tiered reimbursement system could be complex and time-consuming, requiring adjustments to existing MSBA policies and procedures.
- Ensuring that the new system is fair and equitable across all types of schools may be challenging, as it requires careful consideration of varying needs and costs.
- Changes to the reimbursement system may require additional funding or adjustments to the existing budget, which could impact other areas of school funding.

Recommendation

Given the benefits and challenges, it is advisable to support the resolution with a strategic approach to address potential hurdles. More specifically, before implementation, it would be advisable to carry out a feasibility study to assess the potential impacts and logistical requirements of a tiered evaluation system. This will help identify any challenges and develop strategies to address them.

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RESOLUTION 10

EXPANSION IN CAPACITY IN CHAPTER 74 VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL PROGRAMS

Summary:

The Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical High School Committee has introduced a resolution addressing the increasing demand for Chapter 74 vocational-technical programs in Massachusetts, where unprecedented application rates have led to a significant number of students being waitlisted. This situation not only affects students from sending districts but also limits opportunities for non-member and school choice students seeking vocational education. With 92 Chapter 74 schools in the state, there are still regions lacking access to these essential programs, which are crucial for developing the skilled workforce needed to support industry growth and address workforce retirements.

The resolution emphasizes that every student in Massachusetts should have the opportunity to pursue a quality secondary education, particularly in vocational and technical fields, to ensure a robust future workforce. In response to these challenges, the resolution calls on the Governor and the Massachusetts Legislature to support the expansion of capacity in existing Chapter 74 schools and collaborate with districts that currently lack access to vocational programs. Additionally, it requests the formation of a special commission to explore changes to laws and regulations governing the Massachusetts School Building Authority, aiming to enhance funding structures, eligibility standards, and financial assistance tailored to the unique needs of vocational technical education.

Benefits of Expanding Capacity in Chapter 74 Vocational-Technical Programs

- Expanding capacity will reduce waitlists and provide more students with the opportunity to enroll in vocational-technical programs.
- Vocational-technical schools often serve a higher percentage of students with IEPs and 504 plans, as well as economically disadvantaged students. Expanding capacity can provide these students with valuable educational and career opportunities.
- More capacity in Chapter 74 programs will offer additional educational pathways, allowing more students to pursue specialized training that aligns with their career interests and goals.

Challenges of Expanding Capacity in Chapter 74 Vocational-Technical Programs

- Expanding existing programs and establishing new ones will require significant funding and resources.
- Building or upgrading facilities to accommodate increased capacity involves logistical challenges and potential delays. Ensuring that new and existing facilities meet educational standards will be essential.
- While expanding capacity is beneficial, ensuring that all regions, especially underserved areas, receive equitable support and resources will be challenging.
- It will be important to ensure that any expansion is sustainable over the long term, including ongoing funding, staffing, and maintenance of facilities.

Recommendation

Given the benefits and challenges associated with expanding capacity in Chapter 74 vocational-technical programs, it is advisable that the following recommendations are considered:

1. Begin with a comprehensive assessment to identify specific regional needs, current gaps in vocational-technical education, and potential locations for new programs.
2. Explore various financing options, including state budgets, federal grants, and private partnerships.
3. Create a detailed strategic plan that outlines the steps for expanding existing programs and establishing new ones. Include timelines, budget estimates, infrastructure requirements, and staffing needs.
4. Pay close attention to equity in the distribution of new programs and resources. Ensure that underserved areas and economically disadvantaged students benefit from expanded opportunities.
5. Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the expanded programs.