



**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS, INC.
URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS' NETWORK**

Friday, March 26, 2021

Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
c/o Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Members of the Board of Education:

The Urban Superintendents' Network is comprised of 25 urban school districts located in various regions across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and educating 279,653 students, making up approximately 31% of the entire public-school student population in our state. We write to you today as the chief child education advocates in our respective school districts with grave concerns regarding the decision to proceed with the requirement of administering the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test this year to students in grades 3-8 and high school. We write to you today to give voice to the students and their families who do not have voice; we write to you today from the lens of equity and fairness. Finally, we write to you today from the core value of putting the needs of our children first; we contend, a state-wide assessment is not an immediate need this spring.

We are struggling to understand the point of diverting our time, energy, and talent from the very real work of ensuring that urban students and their families are supported to combat ongoing food and housing insecurities, physical health and safety issues, social -emotional and mental health concerns, and academic gaps and foundational learning losses. In urban school districts in particular, we must wraparound our students and families and do all of these things. This is equity work, this is putting students first this spring. This is meeting students where they are first, and then moving them forward to success.

The core value of putting students first upon return means we are deploying our teachers to support our students socially and emotionally, establishing routines, comfort, relationships, and beginning to accelerate in a growth-mindset and forgiving environment where learning can occur. Whether we as the adults say the tests are or are not high stakes, our students will internalize the MCAS as a judgment. A judgment on students who have felt the greatest impact of Covid – 19; have spent the greatest number of days in remote learning compared to other

students across the Commonwealth. Results of the tests will be publicly available – comparisons will be made district to district—and conclusions will be drawn, and stereotypes reinforced about urban schools and urban students. This is inequity at its most harmful to our next generation.

The argument that the MCAS test is needed to assess learning loss and can be used as a diagnostic, is invalid. As school district leaders, we have at our fingertips in our school districts, multiple formative and benchmark assessments, as well as the district determined measures developed a few years back. Local assessments are more nuanced and are able to truly be diagnostic as the local tests determine the learning progressions missing along the way to proficiency on the Standard. MCAS results are not timely and only tell us if the Standard was met—MCAS is a summative assessment, not formative, and not diagnostic. There are inconsistencies to the Commissioner waiving the Competency Determination (CD) for seniors (three MCAS tests) and allowing in lieu of the CD, course grades, and yet not allowing for those same course grades to be used in combination with local, district determined measures already being used by numerous school districts to assess learning loss.

Ultimately, there is no valid purpose for administering MCAS this spring to our students that we are able to present to you—other than the administration of the test will fulfill a perfunctory compliance task that is disruptive and stealing our valuable time away from efforts toward a healthy return, recovery, and acceleration of learning for all. Stealing time from our students.

Therefore, we ask that you join us in putting students first this spring; in providing students what they need through an EQUITY lens. Join us in requesting Commissioner Riley and Secretary Peyser petition Secretary of US DOE Miguel Cardona to waive the federal requirement for state testing this year. We are Massachusetts, number one in the nation for education. When we talk, our federal leaders do listen. We ask for the Massachusetts Board of Education members to join us in putting our students first.

Signed:

Dr. Brenda Cassellius	Superintendent of Schools	Boston Public Schools
Kenneth Salim	Superintendent of Schools	Cambridge Public Schools
Almudena G. Abeyta	Superintendent of Schools	Chelsea Public Schools
Lynn Clark	Superintendent of Schools	Chicopee Public Schools
Priya Tahiliani	Superintendent of Schools	Everett Public Schools
Matthew Malone	Superintendent of Schools	Fall River Public Schools
Robert M Jokela	Superintendent of Schools	Fitchburg Public Schools

Robert A. Tremblay	Superintendent of Schools	Framingham Public Schools
Margaret Marotta	Superintendent of Schools	Haverhill Public Schools
Paula Deacon	Superintendent of Schools	Leominster Public Schools
Dr. Joel D. Boyd	Superintendent of Schools	Lowell Public Schools
Patrick Tutwiler	Superintendent of Schools	Lynn Public Schools
John Oteri	Superintendent of Schools	Malden Public Schools
Thomas Anderson	Superintendent of Schools	New Bedford Public Schools
Dr. Dianne Kelly	Superintendent of Schools	Revere Public Schools
Daniel J. Warwick	Superintendent of Schools	Springfield Public Schools
Maureen Binienda	Superintendent of Schools	Worcester Public Schools
John J. Cabral	Superintendent	Taunton Public Schools

Cc:

Secretary of Education
James Peyser
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