

MASSACHUSETTS  
HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL

*Dedicated to Growth... Committed to Action*

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

**To:** Members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives

**From:** Christopher R. Anderson



**Date:** January 5, 2010

**Re:** HB 4410 – An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap



---

Thanks to the recent efforts of House leadership, the Commonwealth is nearing the goal line in its efforts to bring meaningful education reform to Massachusetts. On behalf of the CEO members of the Massachusetts High Tech Council, I urge House members to finish the important work of transforming our public education delivery system for the benefit of Massachusetts' teachers and students by passing H.4410 and rejecting amendments that weaken the charter and intervention provisions. Attached, please find a Boston Globe opinion piece by me and Boston Foundation CEO Paul Grogan on how, with this bill, Massachusetts can be a leader in innovative schools.

Creating new innovative and effective schools and providing educators with new tools to close the minority and low-income achievement gaps are critical to Massachusetts from a social, economic, fiscal and moral standpoint. States and nations with whom Massachusetts competes are advancing innovations that better prepare their students for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Meanwhile, we are seeing widening achievement gaps within Massachusetts and a rejection of proven innovations by an education establishment whose leadership is vested in the status quo.

The level of support from business, civic and education leaders, parents and students has reached a crescendo in recent months and this sense of urgency has been tapped into by President Obama, who has made educational reform and investment a top priority.

Students, teacher and parents – especially those in urban districts – have been waiting far too long for lifelines out of broken school systems. Neither House Bill 4410, nor the bill passed by the Senate in November, is perfect. But they do provide the basis for making a real difference for Massachusetts students and teachers.

As you have heard before, your swift and effective action on the education reform bill will better position Massachusetts to receive federal Race to the Top education funds. Given the Commonwealth's dire fiscal condition, the up to \$250 million in RTTT funding is critical to help offset the inevitable local aid cuts next year.

It is important to note that, despite Massachusetts' top status in some education performance variables, our receipt of RTTT funds is far from guaranteed. While Massachusetts is satisfactory in some of the four key criteria of the RTTT process (standards, data systems, teacher excellence and turnaround) we are weaker in others.

- over -

Twenty percent of the “points” on which the Commonwealth’s RTTT application will be judged depends upon the state’s commitment to intervening in low-performing schools and to support innovative school models like charter schools. In fact, the current version of the bill will not result in the expansion of Horace Mann charter schools, which takes one innovative school option off the table. This is currently an area of real weakness for Massachusetts.

With this in mind, the final version of the bill needs to:

- **Ensure that the final bill language allows for charter school expansion as intended.** If at the end of the legislative process charter schools still do not have the ability to expand, then our reforms efforts will fail to produce meaningful results. For this reason, the final bill must not include any language that will impede – intentional or otherwise – the expansion of charter schools in districts where they are most needed. The current version of the bill achieves this objective, but many of the amendments filed by members would defeat the purpose of the entire reform bill.
- **Eliminate the current union veto on Horace Mann charter schools.** Horace Mann charters are an effective way to deliver innovative school options to many of the communities that need the most help. A final bill must remove the union veto that has stifled all measurable Horace Mann charter growth since 1993.
- **Provide superintendents with clear tools for intervention in the lowest performing schools.** The Council supports new intervention powers for superintendents in the five percent of lowest performing of schools (Level 4) as well as the new powers for the Commissioner of Education in the lowest two percent of schools (Level 5).

The public remains squarely behind dramatic education reform with approximately two-thirds of Massachusetts residents saying they would support the proposed ballot question to eliminate the state’s charter school cap. Ballot question supporters, including the Council, have met the deadline for collecting signatures and are also raising money for the ballot question in November. The ballot question is a backup plan if the Commonwealth fails to adopt meaningful reform during this session.

We urge you to support H4410. Passage of legislation that enhances our Race to the Top application and expands access to charter schools in the districts where they are most needed are central to our expectations for this legislation. If those two goals are clearly achieved, the proponents of the proposed ballot question have committed to suspending the campaign and rolling up our sleeves to implement the reform bill in the best possible way.

Once again, on behalf of the Council, I thank you in advance for your consideration of the aforementioned components to successful and meaningful education reform. The relevant votes on this legislation this week will be considered MassTrack votes for the 2009-2010 session.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.