

MASSACHUSETTS
HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL

Dedicated to Growth... Committed to Action

TESTIMONY

Statement before the Joint Committee on Education

In Support of:

HOUSE BILL 70

AN ACT TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

March 22, 2019

Mark J. Gallagher, Vice President Massachusetts High Technology Council

Thank you, Chairman Lewis, Chairwoman Peisch and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding legislation that would strengthen public education in the Commonwealth. My name is Mark Gallagher and I am Vice President for Policy and Government Relations at the Massachusetts High Technology Council.

The Mass. High Tech Council is the Commonwealth's oldest and only cross-sector association of CEO-level leaders of technology-focused organizations. The Council has a 42-year history of non-partisan advocacy in support of one overarching mission: To make Massachusetts the world's most attractive place in which to live and work, and in which to create, operate, and grow high technology businesses.

The Council has a long history of supporting and advancing education policies that:

- Balance appropriate state financial support with high standards of accountability for students, teachers and administrators and;
- Ensure that all public school students and parents have access to innovative and high performing schools.

On behalf of the Council and its members, I want to offer testimony today in support of House Bill 70, An Act to Promote Equity and Excellence in Education, and highlight this legislation's impacts on our technology economy and expanding the availability of economic opportunities for our fellow citizens.

The Council is a proud affiliate of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education. Earlier this week we joined with more than 40 other MBAE members, affiliates and collaborators in a letter urging you and your colleagues to advance legislation that balances state investment, student assessment standards and educator empowerment and accountability. The Council believes that House Bill 70 embodies those key principles and we ask that you and your colleagues support the bill.

In 2015, Council leaders joined with economic development experts and graduate data science faculty and students at Worcester Polytechnic Institute to develop the Massachusetts Technology, Talent and Economic Reporting System or "MATTERS," a 50-state competitiveness dashboard which is freely available to anyone via our website.

The MATTERS system allows anyone to access key talent, cost and economic data and to use that data to benchmark Massachusetts against any other state or group of states. When it comes to talent, Massachusetts has a lot to be proud of.

- Massachusetts ranks first in the MATTERS' Talent Index. (Source: MATTERS)
- The percentage of the Massachusetts workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher is the highest in the nation at more than 44%. (Source: MATTERS/NSF)
- Technology employment makes up 15% of overall employment in Massachusetts, the 6th highest level in the country. (Source: MATTERS/NSF)

But MATTERS-based analyses of talent data have shown that Massachusetts can be one of the most difficult states in which to hire technology talent due to enormous demand that is outstripping the available supply of talent. This imbalance presents an ongoing and significant challenge for our local technology employers and is a primary focus of the High Tech Council's efforts. These elevated levels of demand and hiring difficulty are indicators of the tech sector's strength, but if left unaddressed they could be a constraint on our region's ability to expand and remain a leader.

Today, we respectfully ask you to view these talent supply-demand dynamics through an additional, related frame. One that is focused not only on the challenges it presents to employers but on the

opportunities it presents for our citizens, including today's school age children. The growing demand for technology talent is rapidly expanding the opportunities available to those who have the necessary STEM and other career-readiness skills.

Council leaders recognize that the continued improvement of Massachusetts' public schools is one of the most important challenges and opportunities we face in our efforts to both meet this economic need and address important social challenges faced by the Commonwealth. Specifically, Massachusetts must maintain and enhance the quality achieved by many public school districts, while redoubling efforts to close and eliminate persistent achievement gaps that cause too many school children to be ill-prepared for employment in the 21st century economy.

The Commonwealth is blessed with a public school system that is the envy of the nation. On the whole, our public schools outperform those in other states and the Education Reform Act of 1993 was a driving force in creating that success. Through the Education Reform Act, the Commonwealth made a renewed commitment to its public schools by increasing resources, applying rigorous assessments, enhancing accountability and catalyzing innovation through the creation of public charter schools.

Since 1993 Massachusetts leaders, including many of you, have chosen to take other key steps to improve our public schools, including the passage of the Race to the Top legislation in 2010, which have allowed our public school system to make additional incremental improvements.

But two troubling facts remain today. First, all our children will live in a world where global competition and the 21st Century economy require evermore complex skills and evolving knowledge to succeed. Second, far too many of our children remain trapped in underperforming schools that can hamper, rather than enhance, their chances of success. The social and economic consequences of failing to meet these challenges are enormous.

These challenges, however, also present an incredible opportunity that we are well-positioned to seize if we are willing to do so. We must choose to pursue that opportunity relentlessly, so that 21st Century employers will think it unimaginable to not locate in Massachusetts and all our children and their parents will know that our public schools provide a clear path to limitless opportunity.

House Bill 70 takes a significant and timely step in that direction. The legislation would:

- Maintain and modernize the Commonwealth’s financial commitment and support to public schools and students.
- Update state aid funding formulas to reflect 2019 circumstances and costs including:
 - Persistent achievement and opportunity gaps between schools and students in higher-income and lower-income communities
 - Higher costs borne by local school districts for healthcare and special education.
- Commit to a multi-year, \$1.1 billion investment that:
 - Addresses known cost deficiencies
 - Targets more money towards the highest need children and schools
 - Strengthens state-local partnerships to close opportunity and achievement gaps
 - Ensures appropriate state oversight and authority to enable improvement in underperforming schools

Most importantly, House Bill 70’s most impactful reforms and expanded financial supports can be implemented now and can be funded with existing available revenues or at no additional cost to the Commonwealth. They are not dependent on the identification of new resources or revenue streams that may or may not materialize in the future. House Bill 70 also recognizes that resources alone and “blank check” spending policies without assessment and accountability are not a silver bullet for improved outcomes or closing achievement and opportunity gaps.

In closing I ask you to consider a typical 6th grader sitting in a failing school today and the enormous obstacles to future opportunities they face. But fast forward ten years and show me that child graduating with a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering from UMass Lowell or in data science from WPI, and I will show you a young adult with a boundless future.

Together we can make the forward-looking decisions necessary to ensure ALL our children receive a 21st Century education that prepares them for a lifetime of success and provide our innovation economy with the talent-based fuel that powers it.

On behalf of the Mass High Tech Council, I thank you for your time and respectfully urge you to act favorably on this critically important and immediately achievable public school improvement proposal.