

## **Why MCAS Matters: Upholding Standards for Our Students and Economy**

As the Commonwealth's voters go to the polls in less than a month, we at the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce are deeply concerned about [Massachusetts Ballot Question 2](#), which proposes to eliminate the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) statewide standardized tests as a primary high school graduation requirement. While well-intentioned, this measure threatens to undermine the educational progress our state has made and could have far-reaching consequences for our students, businesses and regional economy.

MCAS has been a cornerstone of the Massachusetts education system since passage of the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act. This law was a bipartisan effort resulting in significant new funding for education, accompanied by high statewide standards for learning, and a system for measuring progress. More than thirty years later, schools in Massachusetts are the envy of America, propelled from the middle of the pack to the very top of the national education rankings today. But this achievement is more than just a point of pride—it's a key driver of our state's economic competitiveness.

In North Central Massachusetts, we've seen firsthand how a strong education system attracts businesses, creates jobs and helps build thriving communities. MCAS plays a crucial role in maintaining accountability and high standards, ensuring that a Massachusetts high school diploma signifies a basic level of academic achievement.

Proponents of Question 2 argue the MCAS creates undue stress and doesn't accurately measure student abilities. They also contend the system unfairly impacts students facing various challenges, including those with disabilities, from low-income households, and experiencing other forms of educational disadvantages. While we acknowledge MCAS isn't perfect, we believe eliminating the state's only graduation requirement is an overreaction that could have unintended negative consequences.

Removing the MCAS could lead to a patchwork of standards across the state, potentially exacerbating educational inequities. Without a common benchmark, it becomes challenging to ensure all students, regardless of their zip code, receive a quality education that prepares them for future success. The MCAS also serves as an important assessment tool, providing valuable data to help identify and address achievement gaps. Losing this tool could make it harder to pinpoint areas where additional resources and support are needed, ultimately disadvantaging the students who need help the most. Our region's economic growth depends on a skilled workforce. Weakening our education standards could also make us less attractive to businesses looking to invest and expand.

Instead of scrapping the MCAS and eliminating uniform, statewide standards, we should focus on improving it. We can work to make the test more inclusive and representative of diverse learning styles while maintaining high standards. We can also enhance support systems for students who struggle with standardized tests without lowering the bar for everyone.

As business leaders, we understand the importance of measurement and continuous improvement. The MCAS has played a significant role in Massachusetts' rise to educational prominence, benefiting students, families, and our economy.

We urge voters to consider the broader implications of Question 2 carefully. A "No" vote will help preserve the high standards that have served our students and economy so well. Abandoning uniform

statewide standards and a commitment to educational excellence would be a great disservice to our young people and their future success.

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