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May 7, 2026

## **A Group of Civil Rights and Education Advocates Calls for Strong Equity Guardrails in Massachusetts Graduation Framework — While Maintaining High Expectations**

**BOSTON** – As Massachusetts moves to finalize new high school graduation requirements, a group of civil rights, social justice, and educational equity organizations from across the Commonwealth urges state leaders to uphold the promise of [the initial proposed framework](#): ensuring every student—regardless of background or zip code—graduates truly prepared for college, career, and civic life while maintaining high expectations for all learners. The group warns that without robust equity guardrails, the new framework could widen existing opportunity gaps and reinforce disparities in access to rigorous learning and opportunities.

[In a memo](#) to the [K–12 Statewide Graduation Council](#), the group offers recommendations to strengthen and build on the state’s preliminary framework released in December 2025, with a particular focus on equity-centered implementation guardrails. The initial framework put forth by the council is anchored in three core pillars —establishing a strong learning foundation, demonstrating mastery, and preparing students for postsecondary success—and offers initial strategies for advancing each area. The council’s final report is due in June.

### **Key Recommendations**

The memo highlights a central concern: access to educational opportunity remains uneven across Massachusetts. Without intentional design, new requirements risk reinforcing disparities—particularly for Black and Latino students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds. In Boston Public Schools, for example, [MassCore implementation has been inconsistent](#) across schools. In 2022–23, 83.4% of all students statewide completed MassCore, compared to just 71.7% of Black students, 74.6% of Latino students, and 65.3% of English learners—these gaps limit students’ ability to meet the framework’s expectations for college and career readiness.

To ensure the framework delivers both rigor and equity, the coalition calls for:

- **Guaranteed Access to Rigorous Coursework (MassCore):** Ensure all students—regardless of zip code—have access to a full, high-quality, college-aligned course sequence. This includes targeted support for under-resourced districts that don't currently offer MassCore, stronger state oversight of MassCore-aligned coursework to ensure quality and consistency, and modernizing MassCore to include digital/AI and AI, as well as financial literacy.

- **Support for End-of-Course Assessments:** Ensure that the new End-of-Course (EOC) assessments, as proposed in the preliminary framework, carry meaningful weight, include strong interventions and retake opportunities for students, are fully integrated into the state’s accountability system, and provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- **Maintain High Standards for Capstones and Portfolios:** Establish clear statewide guidance and oversight to ensure consistency, rigor, and equitable implementation.
- **Strengthen College and Career Planning (MyCAP):** Establish a clearly defined, fully- resourced, and equity-driven MyCAP system—one that sets consistent statewide expectations, supports a wide variety of postsecondary pathways, and provides the staffing and structural shifts needed to ensure all students receive high-quality guidance.
- **Expand Access to Financial Aid:** Require FAFSA or MASFA completion—with a clear, stigma-free opt-out—alongside robust family support, multilingual resources, and equitable implementation strategies.
- **Deliver Meaningful Financial Literacy Education:** Embed financial literacy across coursework, focusing on real-world skills such as budgeting, credit, and student loans.
- **Ensure Equitable Access to Seals of Distinction:** Guarantee access to advanced recognition opportunities with transparent data tracking and meaningful postsecondary incentives.

The coalition also emphasizes that effective implementation of the framework will determine whether it expands opportunity or exacerbates inequities. Advocates also call for:

1. Ongoing, authentic engagement with students and families through transparent communication, inclusive outreach, and systems that ensure all families have a meaningful voice.
2. A phased rollout supported by clear guidance, adequate funding, and sustained collaboration to ensure no student is disadvantaged during implementation.

Parents also strongly reinforce many of the issues raised in the memo. In a focus group conducted last fall by EdTrust in Massachusetts, parents called for requirements that align with college entry expectations while also supporting multiple pathways—including four-year colleges, vocational programs, apprenticeships, and direct entry into the workforce. They also recognized existing gaps in preparation and made clear that lowering expectations will not lead to better outcomes.

As one parent shared: “Since COVID, they haven’t had homework, they don’t have finals, and they really don’t have midterms either. There’s not much help in preparing them for whatever comes next, whether it’s college or a career. My nephew went on to college. When I saw him a few years ago, midway through his freshman year, he said, they didn’t help me at all. I wasn’t prepared for the tests, the amount of studying you have to do, or the homework you need to prepare for college. It’s really frustrating.”

Additionally, across organizations, there is a shared belief that high standards must be matched with equitable access to rigorous coursework and the supports students need to succeed.

## Voices From the Coalition

“What the Council has proposed so far is an encouraging step toward ensuring that a Massachusetts diploma truly opens doors for students—but there is still significant work ahead,” **said Jennie Williamson, State Director for EdTrust in Massachusetts.** “We cannot claim to lead the nation in education while students graduate without the preparation they need for college or high-demand careers in fields like STEM and healthcare. If the state is serious about improving outcomes and opportunities for all students, the final framework must pair high standards with real support, intentional implementation, and meaningful engagement of families, students, and community leaders. This is the moment to ensure the voices of those most affected help shape the path forward.

“Massachusetts has long set a high bar for academic excellence, but the world our students are preparing for is changing rapidly, and our graduation requirements must keep pace,” **said Migdalia Diaz, COO and Interim Executive Director, Massachusetts, Latinos for Education.** “The skills students need today look very different than they did even a decade ago. Updating MassCore to reflect real-world skills, such as digital and AI literacy, is essential to ensuring students are truly prepared for college, careers, and civic life. By integrating these skills into rigorous, college-aligned coursework, we would provide students with a path to the relevant and meaningful skills needed to navigate our new reality. Every student, regardless of background or zip code, deserves access to an education that equips them to think critically, navigate technology responsibly, and succeed in a rapidly evolving economy.”

“In developing new graduation standards, state leaders must account for a rapidly changing economy and ensure every student in the Commonwealth has the knowledge and skills to thrive in adulthood,” **said Kerry Donahue, Executive Director of Teach For America Massachusetts.** “This is a defining moment to align our expectations with the realities students will face—honoring Massachusetts’ legacy of public education as a pathway to economic mobility and full civic participation, regardless of zip code. Delivering on that promise will require deep, sustained partnership between the state and our local school districts.”

“Massachusetts has always prided itself on setting a high bar for students, and this framework is an opportunity to make that promise real for every child—not just those in well-resourced communities,” **said Romie Robertson, Co-Executive Director of Journey in Education and Teaching.** “High expectations are not a burden—they are a belief that every student is capable of achieving greatness. But expectations alone are not enough. Educators and paraprofessionals on the front lines know better than anyone that rigor must be matched with the right supports, resources, and preparation to make those expectations achievable for all students. Getting this right matters deeply—for our students, for our educators, and for the future of public education in Massachusetts.”

We should hold high expectations for every student, while also ensuring they receive the individualized, high-quality support required to reach those standards,” **said Alan Safran, CEO and co-founder of Saga Education.** “As a Boston-founded nonprofit and a leader in the high-dosage tutoring movement, I have seen how powerful this

combination can be. We set ambitious milestones—from reading proficiency by third grade to mastery of algebra by the end of ninth grade—but a one-size-fits-all approach has not delivered the results students deserve. When the stakes are this high, getting it right is both important and necessary.”

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