PIONEER
INSTITUTE

A Vision for Excellence

Edited by Jim Stergios

Agenda For Leadership
2026

Table of Contents

Pioneer Institute empowers Americans with choices and opportunities to live freely and thrive. Through expert research, educational initiatives, legal action, and coalition-building, we advance human potential in four critical areas: K–12 Education, Health, Economic Opportunity and American Civic Values.

Introduction

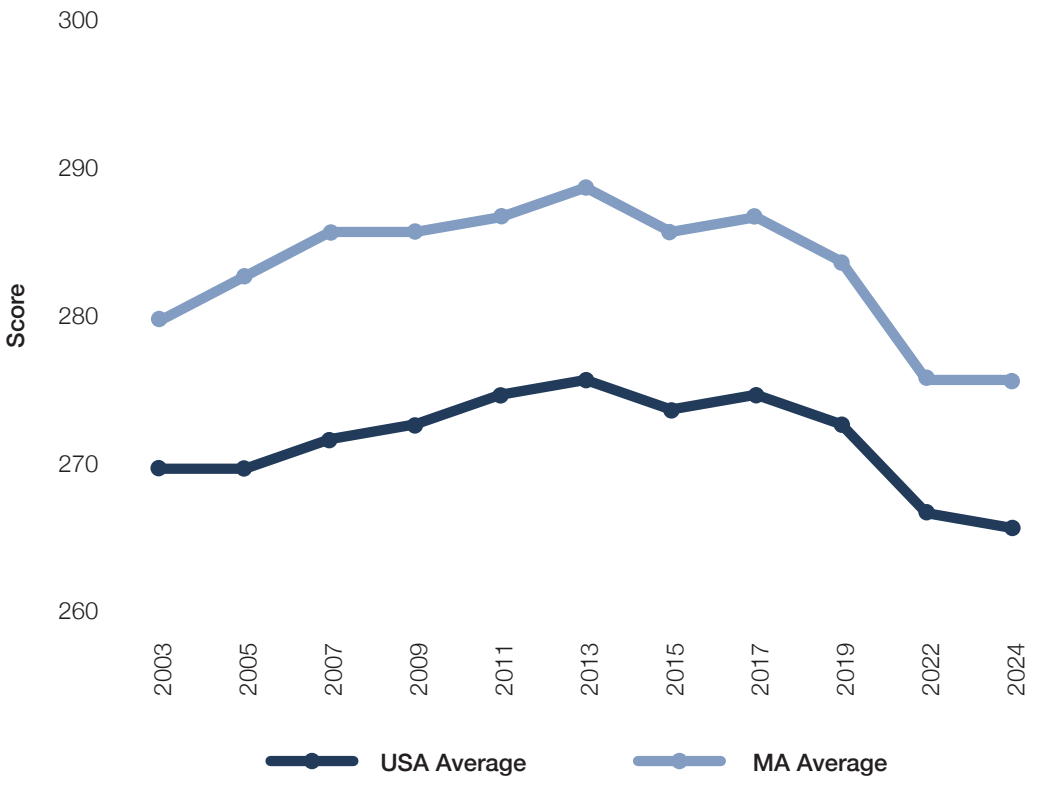
Massachusetts once stood as the undisputed policy leader in K–12 education. That rise began in earnest with the landmark 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA), which instituted rigorous academic standards, strong accountability mechanisms, and a groundbreaking funding formula. These state policies helped propel the Commonwealth from mediocrity in the early 1990s to best-in-the-nation National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores by the middle of the 2000s, with consistently strong performance across grades and subjects. For over 20 years, Massachusetts was the national model for state-level education reform.

Our hard-won education progress is unraveling.

But that hard-won progress is unraveling. Since 2013, Massachusetts' NAEP performance has declined sharply (see figure 1). Eighth-grade math scores, which rose from 279 in 2000 to a peak of 301 in 2013, have now fallen back to 283, nearly erasing a decade of gains. Reading scores have followed a similar pattern. The state's education system has regressed to late 20th century levels.

The fall 2024 repeal of the MCAS graduation requirement—the capstone of the state's standards-based reform—marks a substantive break from the MERA era. Despite Massachusetts still ranking near the top nationally, that position now masks steep decline on NAEP, known as the nation's report card. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) outperformed Massachusetts in every tested subject in 2022 and 2024, and other states such as New Jersey and Minnesota have caught up or surpassed Massachusetts on several measures.

Figure 1. Average NAEP Scores, Massachusetts and the U.S.[1]



Meanwhile, reform-minded states like Mississippi and Louisiana have seen remarkable progress. Mississippi's commitment to the science of reading, targeted teacher training, and data-informed interventions has elevated it from the bottom to 21st in 4th-grade reading. In just five years, Louisiana has leapt from 42nd to 16th on the same metric through similar literacy reforms, accountability, and school choice policies.

Massachusetts has many advantages those states do not—world-class universities, robust biomedical, and technology sectors, and a long-standing civic commitment to K–12 education reform. Massachusetts also has the best charter, public, vocational-technical, private, and parochial schools in the nation. But those assets are being squandered as our public education system increasingly succumbs to anti-intellectualism, bureaucratic inertia, and a refusal to reckon with poor performance. The widespread adoption of ideologically driven, academically empty "social justice" curricula in many schools—even urban charter schools—has compounded pandemic-related learning loss, especially for the students most in need of rigorous instruction.

It is time for renewal. We must recommit to academic excellence, reject distractions that devalue core learning in the liberal arts, and expand access to the kinds of educational opportunities—charter schools, vocational-technical programs, inter-district choice, and METCO—that once made Massachusetts a leader in public school innovation. The following recommendations outline a path forward for the next governor to restore Massachusetts' education policy standing and build a system worthy of the Commonwealth's history, aspirations, and schoolchildren.

Civic Education to Restore Civil Public Discourse

In 1993, the Education Reform Act called for rigorous instruction and testing in U.S. history and civics to ensure that students could fully participate in public affairs as informed, responsible citizens. The law emphasized foundational content—such as the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Massachusetts and U.S. history, and labor history—to ground students in the workings and principles of our democratic system.

But today, civic knowledge is alarmingly low. Pioneer Institute polling shows many Massachusetts students cannot identify the three branches of government or explain basic constitutional rights. This vacuum of civic knowledge has fueled rising political polarization, as emotion and ideology replace shared facts and a wider sense of common good. Many other states now do a better job preparing students for citizenship than does Massachusetts—a state steeped in American history. As the birthplace of the American Revolution and constitutional self-government, the Commonwealth has a special responsibility to lead in teaching U.S. history. Reestablishing rigorous civics instruction is essential to self-government in our democracy.

Providing Adults a Pathway to Career Success

Massachusetts has a problem: an exodus of talent and capital due to poor state fiscal and economic policies. Compounding the issue is a workforce development system that is bureaucratic and expensive; spending $2.5 billion annually. Dozens of opaque state agencies and publicly funded programs operate with no unified leadership, inconsistent data reporting, and limited alignment with actual labor market demand. As a result, many residents cannot access—*or even find*—training that leads to sustainable careers.

The state has several options to redefine the workforce development system, including the centralization and alignment of programs with employer needs, standardized outcome tracking, and creating a clear public inventory of workforce programs to improve access and eliminate duplication. With savings from centralizing programs, the state can invest in expanding the number of seats in our vocational-technical high schools and after-school adult career training on the campuses of the state's nation-leading voc-tech schools.

Excellence

Recommit to Academic Excellence & Accountability

Since 2013, Massachusetts has experienced a marked decline in academic achievement, especially in math and English language arts. Between 2013 and 2019, New England saw the steepest NAEP declines in the country—4th grade math dropped 5 points and 8th grade math by 7 points, compared to national declines of only 2–3 points. The downturn accelerated after Massachusetts replaced its nationally benchmarked academic standards with Common Core-aligned frameworks in 2010 and again in 2017.

These newer standards degraded high-quality academic content in favor of vague skill-building objectives based on educational fads. In English, the amount of classic literature students read was cut by 60 percent, and the curriculum became dominated by fragmented excerpts and process-based learning. Math progression was similarly delayed: Algebra I was pushed from 8th to 9th or 10th grade, and students are no longer introduced to key concepts like ratios and division until years later than in high-performing countries. As a result, Massachusetts students are now 2–3 years behind peers in Singapore, Japan, and South Korea in math achievement.

This pedagogical shift has eroded Massachusetts' previous gains. From 2005 to 2013, Massachusetts led the nation on NAEP across all tested subjects. In 2007, its 8th graders tied for first globally in science on the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) exam. But since adopting Common Core, Massachusetts' NAEP and SAT scores have declined steadily. Eighth-grade reading scores dropped from 277 in 2013 to 268 in 2024—nearly back to 1998 levels.[2]

By rejecting mediocrity and rebuilding a culture of academic rigor, Massachusetts can again lead the nation in education outcomes.

Recommendation: *Restore academic excellence by:*

- *Reinstating strong, content-rich standards for English, math, and science modeled on pre-2010 frameworks. Require students to read full texts—not excerpts—and prioritize classic literature, poetry, drama, history, and foundational knowledge.*
- *Returning to phonics-based reading instruction and structured literacy, which have proven to be most effective across demographic groups.*
- *Reintroducing traditional math sequencing, including early mastery of multiplication, division, fractions, ratios, and Algebra I by 8th grade.*
- *Using transparent statewide assessments aligned to these standards to hold schools accountable, without necessarily tying passage to graduation. Assessments should serve as a check on systemwide performance and drive targeted improvement efforts.*

Rebuild External Quality Control for Our Public Schools

The 2024 repeal of the MCAS graduation requirement ends a central element of Massachusetts' post-1993 accountability system. While the Commonwealth remains a high performer, student achievement has declined sharply, with 8th-grade NAEP reading and math scores falling toward early-2000s levels. At the same time, other states—notably Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana—have improved outcomes through early diagnostics paired with targeted intervention. The end of a single high-stakes exit exam creates an opportunity to replace a "lonely, low, late" measure with a more coherent, systemwide quality-control framework.

Research shows accountability works best when it relies on fewer, strategically placed external checkpoints rather than frequent testing or a single high-stakes endpoint. Massachusetts' reliance on a lone 10th-grade exam forced a low bar and limited its usefulness

for improving instruction or readiness. At the same time, replacing statewide assessments with portfolios, capstones, or district-certified competencies would undermine reliability, comparability, and public confidence. Decades of experience show such approaches do not scale for statewide accountability.

Massachusetts should rebuild accountability around a small number of external checkpoints, state-designed end-of-course assessments, clearly bounded local discretion, and independent oversight. As the state asks districts to assume greater responsibility for determining competency and graduation pathways, it must correspondingly strengthen its capacity to monitor district performance and ensure consistent standards statewide.

Recommendations

- *Establish Fewer, Strategic External Checkpoints: Limit statewide standardized testing to grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, and seek a federal waiver from NCLB/ESSA to return to the original testing model under the 1993 education reform law.*
  - *Grade 3 should serve as a formal checkpoint in English language arts and mathematics, explicitly tied to robust, state-supported intervention to ensure students reach grade-level proficiency.*
  - *Grades 5 and 8 should confirm foundational skills and guide placement and supports, while grade 10 serves as a diagnostic transition point to high school coursework.*
- *Replace MCAS with State-Designed End-of-Course Exams: Adopt state-developed end-of-course exams in core high school subjects, allowing students to meet diploma requirements through a defined menu of rigorous assessments.*
- *Rebuild Remediation Funding: Restore state funding for tutoring, summer programs, and reading intervention to $60 million annually, in line with pre-2010 levels (adjusted for inflation).*
- *Reject Local Substitutes as Accountability Replacements: Do not rely on portfolios, capstones, or district-certified coursework as substitutes for statewide measures.*
- *Restore Independent School Inspection and Oversight: Reestablish an Office of Educational Quality and Accountability-style authority to provide independent review of school and district performance, especially as local discretion expands.*

Reestablish an Independent School District Accountability Office

State and local taxpayers now invest around $18 billion annually in public K–12 education through a combination of state and local funds, yet it lacks an effective and independent mechanism to ensure that these dollars are spent to improve student outcomes. From the late 1990s until 2008, the Commonwealth operated the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA)—an independent audit office that reviewed more than 50 school districts per year, evaluating not only financial practices but also MCAS performance, curriculum alignment, instructional quality, leadership, management, and use of resources. These reviews helped spotlight both high- and low-performing districts, offering a roadmap for improvement and driving a culture of results.

In 2008, EQA was dissolved and replaced by a small unit embedded within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a state agency it was intended to hold accountable. This unit was tasked with conducting just 15–20 reviews per year, but even that modest target has not been met consistently. Worse, its scope is narrower, and its work is overseen by a 15-member advisory council that includes representatives from school committees, superintendents, and teachers' unions—the very constituencies the unit is supposed to audit. Since the elimination of EQA, Massachusetts has seen both a loss of basic accountability, transparency, and a noticeable erosion of educational excellence.

The original EQA office operated at an annual cost of approximately $3 million—roughly $4 million in today's dollars, or about 0.02 percent of total state and local K–12 education spending. With Massachusetts public schools serving roughly 900,000 students and spending tens of billions in taxpayer funds each year, a well-functioning audit and accountability office represents a modest investment to ensure dollars are producing results in classrooms, rather than being lost to mismanagement, inefficiency, or complacency.[3]

Recommendation: *Reestablish a fully independent Office of Educational Quality and Accountability as a stand-alone agency, with its own governing board, structurally separate from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.*

- *The office should be empowered by statute to conduct comprehensive instructional and financial audits of at least 40 school districts per year, with a focus on student achievement, curriculum quality, instructional practices, leadership effectiveness, and fiscal stewardship.*
- *To ensure impartiality, governance must omit trade organizations with a direct stake in the districts under review, including representatives from teachers' unions, school committees, and superintendent associations. The office should publish clear, data-driven public reports with findings, recommendations, and comparative benchmarks to support academic improvement. Restoring this independent state education audit function will bring much-needed oversight to education spending, increase transparency for taxpayers, and reinforce the Commonwealth's commitment to academic excellence.*

Restore Academic Accountability for Charter Public Schools

Massachusetts' charter public schools were once the gold standard in urban education reform, delivering transformative academic outcomes for low-income students. But since 2020, several charters have abandoned rigorous, liberal arts-focused models in favor of ideological or therapeutic approaches—what *The Lost Decade,* a book Pioneer Institute published in 2025, terms "political and therapeutic evasions." The result has been a sharp decline in student performance. For example, at Boston Collegiate Charter School, the percentage of 8th graders scoring proficient or higher in ELA fell from 22 points above Boston Public Schools in 2019 to 9 points below by 2024. These schools, chartered with explicit commitments to high academic standards, must be held accountable for delivering on those promises.[4]

Recommendation: *Direct the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to enforce rigorous academic accountability for all charter schools, including:*

- *Interventions for schools showing sustained academic declines;*
- *Probation or non-renewal of charters that fail to meet student performance goals; and*
- *A return to proven models rooted in the classical liberal arts, structured discipline, and teacher-led instruction in English, math, civics, and science.*

Ensure Curriculum Transparency for Parents & Taxpayers

Parents and municipal taxpayers currently lack meaningful access to instructional materials used in public schools. Without timely transparency, families cannot effectively monitor curriculum content or exercise their right to understand what their children are being taught. Posting curriculum online ensures accountability and builds trust.[5]

Recommendation*: Require public schools to post all instructional materials—including books, lesson plans, and multimedia—online within seven days of classroom use and make curricula available to families and residents. Enforce compliance through state guidance, public reporting, and proportional state funding adjustments.*

Public Options

Grow High-Performing Charter Public Schools in High-Need Areas

While some charters have drifted from their academic mission, Massachusetts remains home to proven, high-performing charter networks that produce exceptional results for low-income students—particularly in Boston. Research from the Brookings Institution, Harvard, MIT Duke and Stanford Universities shows that Boston charter schools deliver some of the largest academic gains ever recorded for any educational intervention. Yet over 25,000 students remain on waitlists, even though charters in cities like Boston are still under their enrollment cap. Despite demand, the Department and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE/DESE) have effectively imposed new bureaucratic moratoria by stalling approvals, creating burdensome review processes, and failing to actively recruit proven charter providers.[6]

Recommendation: *Direct the commissioner and the BESE to:*

- *Identify and invite applications from top-performing charter management organizations;*
- *Prioritize replication and expansion of charters with strong academic track records;*
- *Use charter replacement authority to bring in higher-quality operators when underperforming charters are closed; and*
- *Streamline DESE/BESE review processes to accelerate the approval of academically focused charter schools in underserved urban areas.*

Repeal the Lottery Mandate for Vocational-Technical School Admissions

Massachusetts' regional vocational-technical high schools outperform traditional high schools by nearly every academic and workforce measure. They boast higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, and stronger post-graduation job placement. Demand far outpaces supply: over 10,000 students are currently on waitlists. In 2022, BESE and DESE imposed a lottery-based admissions mandate, replacing the previous selective admissions process. This rule change threatens to undermine the schools' success by removing important indicators like attendance, behavior, and grades from the admissions process. The result may be greater mismatch between students and programs and weaker outcomes.[7]

Recommendation: *Repeal BESE's lottery mandate and restore local control over admissions criteria. At the same time, voc-tech schools should be held to high transparency standards to ensure fair, merit-based admissions. Policymakers must also address demand by funding capital expansion in high-need areas.*

Redirect Workforce-Development Funds to Expand Vocational Opportunities

Massachusetts spends approximately $2.5 billion annually on workforce development across more than two dozen programs, yet lacks meaningful coordination, consistent performance metrics, or transparency. According to a 2023 Pioneer Institute study, the system "suffers from fragmentation, insufficient accountability, and a mismatch between training and market needs." Despite this spending, employers still report difficulty filling middle-skill jobs—roles for which vocational-technical schools are especially well-suited to prepare students.

Vocational-technical high schools in Massachusetts have a proven record of academic excellence, higher graduation rates, and strong postsecondary and job place-

ment outcomes. They also boast deep partnerships with local employers, making them an ideal hub not only for secondary education but for workforce training across age groups. Importantly, more than 7,000 Massachusetts students are on waitlists for admission.[8]

Recommendation: *Redirect 10 percent of the Commonwealth's workforce development funding—$250 million—to expand capacity in the vocational-technical system by creating 10,000 new seats in underserved regions. This "right-from-the-start" strategy offers a higher return on investment than fragmented workforce programs and meets both student and employer needs.*

Transform Madison Park Technical Vocational High School

In Boston and across Gateway Cities, vocational-technical demand remains unmet due to limited physical space, outdated facilities, and political neglect. Madison Park Technical Vocational High School—once a promising institution—has struggled with leadership churn, weak employer partnerships, and poor graduation outcomes. By contrast, leading regional voc-tech schools achieve 99 percent graduation rates, strong MCAS performance, and robust postsecondary placement. Pioneer's comprehensive 2024 plan outlines how to remake Madison Park into a flagship urban vocational school aligned with 21st-century workforce needs.[9]

Recommendation: *Adopt a multi-year plan to transform Madison Park into a premier career and technical education institution. This includes recruiting experienced leadership, modernizing curricula, expanding industry and post-secondary partnerships, and investing in state-of-the-art facilities. Simultaneously, the state should incentivize voc-tech growth in urban areas by leveraging public-private partnerships and aligning capital outlay with labor market needs.*

Expand METCO to Include Gateway City-Suburban Partnerships

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) is one of the nation's longest-running voluntary school desegregation programs. It improves academic outcomes, fosters greater social cohesion, and benefits both urban and suburban students. Research from a Tufts University professor and the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) shows that increased exposure to racial and socioeconomic diversity leads to measurable academic gains, fewer disciplinary incidents, and long-term economic benefits, especially for white suburban students. Yet, METCO serves just 3 percent of Boston and Springfield's student populations and does not currently include partnerships between Gateway Cities and nearby high-performing suburbs.[10]

Recommendation: *Expand METCO by creating new regional compacts that allow for participation by Gateway Cities such as Brockton, Lawrence, and Fall River.*

- *To facilitate this, the state should remove statutory and administrative barriers that limit cross-district enrollment and prioritize funding increases that fully cover transportation and tuition reimbursement costs. These changes would improve access to high-quality education for underserved students and promote more meaningful racial and economic integration across Massachusetts.*

Reinvigorate Interdistrict Public School Choice

Massachusetts' interdistrict school choice program, launched in 1991, allows families to enroll their children in public schools outside their home districts. Yet fewer than 2 percent of the state's K–12 students participate, and only about half

of school districts opt in. The program suffers from weak financial incentives: receiving districts are reimbursed just $5,000 per student—far below actual per-pupil spending—and there is no state transportation support. As a result, participation has stagnated, with sharp declines in urban and rural regions where students would benefit most from greater access to high-performing schools.

A 2023 Pioneer Institute report found that between 2009 and 2021, statewide participation in the program dropped by nearly 30 percent, from over 15,000 to fewer than 11,000 students. In some counties, participation fell by over 70 percent. Meanwhile, the average per-pupil expenditure in Massachusetts public schools exceeded $18,000, revealing the $5,000 reimbursement as a major disincentive.[11]

The recommendations below would unlock opportunities for thousands of students, particularly those in low-performing districts or underserved rural areas, and encourage healthy competition and innovation in public education.

Recommendation: *Revive the interdistrict choice program by:*

- *Raising the per-pupil reimbursement rate to reflect actual educational costs;*
- *Providing transportation aid for low-income and rural families;*
- *Creating incentives for regional district collaboration in under-enrolled areas; and*
- *Launching a public awareness campaign to inform families of their options.*

Expand Access to High-Quality Digital Learning

Over three decades, virtual learning has shifted from a niche option to a scalable part of K–12 education. States like Florida and Michigan built the laws, funding structures, and quality systems that enabled virtual learning to grow, while states with enrollment caps, narrow funding rules, and heavy approval processes saw limited growth, low public awareness, and strong opposition from unions and district leaders. Massachusetts reflects this pattern: only two statewide virtual schools operate because of strict caps, unstable funding, and bureaucratic resistance, despite clear student demand.

High-quality virtual education serves students with medical needs, bullying concerns, accelerated learning goals, and specialized interests, and expands access in rural and underserved areas. Research shows that well-designed virtual programs with strong accountability and trained online teachers can match or exceed traditional outcomes. Virtual learning also supports homeschool, microschool, and hybrid models. To capture these benefits, policymakers must update regulations through transparent provider vetting, predictable funding, online-specific teacher preparation, and clear performance metrics.[12]

Recommendation: *Strengthen and expand the existing virtual school framework to function like successful systems in Florida and Arizona.*

- *Lift enrollment caps and stabilize funding.*
- *Adopt nationally recognized quality standards.*
- *Allow district and charter partnerships to pilot full- and part-time virtual models for students with disabilities, those facing bullying or mental health challenges, and students in Western Massachusetts and on the Cape.*
- *Streamline regulations to distinguish high-quality virtual programs from pandemic-era remote instruction.*
- *Integrate virtual learning into the broader school-choice strategy, including hybrid microschools and homeschooling support.*

Private Options

Remove the Blaine Amendment Barriers to Private School Choice

Massachusetts remains an outlier in resisting private school choice, even as academic performance declines and parent demand for alternatives grows. While 34 states and Washington, D.C. offer private school choice—including 17 states with universal or near-universal eligibility—Massachusetts remains blocked by its 19th-century anti-Catholic Blaine Amendment. These "anti-aid" provisions bar public funds from being used by religious school parents, denying families the flexibility now available in much of the country.

Neighboring New Hampshire provides a compelling model. Its Education Freedom Accounts (EFAs), launched in 2021 with just 1,600 students, have expanded to serve over 5,300 students with legislative authority to reach 10,000 and grow 25 percent annually. Rhode Island has also piloted an education tax credit program. Nationally, enrollment in private choice programs has more than doubled since 2020—from 540,000 to over 1.2 million students. Meanwhile, Massachusetts families remain stuck in a now-declining one-size-fits-all public school system.

This constitutional constraint is increasingly out of step with modern legal precedent. In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* and *Carson v. Makin*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that states cannot exclude religious schools from otherwise neutral public benefit programs.[13]

Massachusetts families deserve access to the same flexible, parent-driven education solutions now available to millions of students across the country. Removing outdated anti-religious barriers is a constitutional, moral, and policy imperative.

Recommendation: *Mount a coordinated legal, legislative, and public campaign to remove Blaine Amendment barriers and enable access to education savings accounts (ESAs) and tax-credit scholarship programs. Specifically:*

- *Educate the public and policymakers on how Blaine's 19th century bigotry continues to limit opportunities for Massachusetts students.*
- *Mount a legal challenge to Massachusetts' Blaine Amendment, citing Espinoza and Carson as precedent that makes such exclusions constitutionally untenable;*
- *Organize plaintiffs—such as low-income or special-needs families—who have been denied access to educational alternatives;*
- *Draft enabling legislation to create ESA and tax-credit scholarship programs structured to meet both constitutional and programmatic best practices;*

Reform the Adams Scholarships to Include All Massachusetts Students

The John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, created to reward academic achievement, provides tuition waivers at Massachusetts public colleges and universities for students scoring in the top quartile on MCAS exams. Yet the program excludes entire categories of high-achieving students—those educated in private or parochial schools, Catholic schools, Jewish day schools, microschools, and homeschool environments—many of whom are from modest-income families.

The Adams Scholarship program operates without legislatively adopted rules, leaving its true guidelines and governing criteria effectively unknown. Although the MCAS was created solely as an assessment, it has effectively become a scholarship gatekeeper, with eligibility determined by a tool designed for a different purpose and by agency interpretations rather than authorized standards. As a result,

the scholarship rests on uncertain statutory footing, with eligibility determined through administrative discretion.

This selective access undermines the scholarship's stated mission of recognizing and retaining academic talent in the Commonwealth. It also perpetuates inequities, denying thousands of students equal opportunity for state-supported postsecondary education based solely on their school type.[14]

Massachusetts should reward academic excellence wherever it is found. Expanding the Adams Scholarship to include all students would advance fairness and help stem the outmigration of talented young people to more welcoming states.

Recommendation: *Reform the Adams Scholarship to ensure that all Massachusetts students—regardless of schooling model—can compete on equal terms and receive tuition benefits if they excel. Specifically:*

- *Require all public-school districts to offer MCAS testing slots to eligible non-public students;*
- *Allocate state funds to facilitate test administration and outreach to private and homeschooled students;*
- *Remove administrative hurdles that discourage participation by non-traditional learners;*
- *Amend scholarship guidelines to include all MCAS scorers in the top 25 percent, regardless of school enrollment status.*

Adult Vocational-Workforce Development

Streamline & Set Clear Metrics

Massachusetts maintains one of the most expansive workforce development systems in the country—but also one of the most fragmented. Dozens of agencies administer programs with overlapping goals, often without standardized reporting or outcome tracking. As a result, the system lacks transparency, efficiency, and accountability, undermining its ability to connect residents to in-demand skills and careers.[15]

Recommendations

- *Appoint a statewide workforce development leader to coordinate policy, funding, and performance across agencies and regions.*
- *Mandate a unified annual reporting framework that tracks key metrics—such as employment outcomes, wage growth, and program completion—across all workforce programs, public colleges, and training providers.*
- *Direct the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to publish a publicly accessible inventory of all workforce offerings by target population and program type, reducing redundancy and helping job seekers navigate available resources.*
- *Build a longitudinal data system to evaluate program success over time and ensure taxpayer dollars are driving measurable upward mobility.*

Endnotes

1 National Center for Education Statistics. The Nation's Report Card: 2024 State Results—Massachusetts Grade 8 Mathematics. U.S. Department of Education, 2024, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2024/pdf/2024219MA8.pdf.

2 Cara Stillings Candal, "Examining the Academic Achievement Decline in New England Prior to COVID-19," February 2021, https://pioneerinstitute.org/blog/blog-education/examining-the-academic-achievement-decline-in-new-england-prior-to-covid-19/; Theodor Rebarber and Neal McCluskey, "Study Finds Declining Student Achievement and Increased Harm to School Choice Since Common Core," February 2020, https://pioneerinstitute.org/common_core/study-finds-declining-student-achievement-and-increased-harm-to-school-choice-since-common-core/; Mark Bauerlein, James Milgram, Jane Robbins, "Mediocrity 2.0: Massachusetts Rebrands Common Core ELA and Math," December 2017, https://pioneerinstitute.org/academic-standards/mediocrity-2-0-massachusetts-rebrands-common-core-ela-and-math/.

3 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "FY2025 Budget Summary," https://www.mass.gov/doc/fy25-budget-summary-department-of-elementary-and-secondary-education/download. Cara Stillings Candal, "MCAS, NAEP, and Educational Accountability," February 2024, https://pioneerinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/PNR-548-MCAS-NAEP-Accountability-WP-v04.pdf Pioneer Institute. Sam Davis, "How Massachusetts Let School Accountability Slip—and Student Achievement With It," Pioneer Institute blog, August 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/academic-standards/how-massachusetts-let-school-accountability-slip-and-student-achievement-with-it/. Massachusetts Department of Revenue, "Municipal Databank – Cherry Sheet Education Aid FY2025," https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cherry-sheet-estimates. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Enrollment and Expenditures Statewide Report," https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx.

4 Steve F. Wilson, "The Lost Decade: Calls for Replacing Social Justice Education with Education Rich in Liberal Arts," May 2023, https://pioneerinstitute.org/charter_schools/the-lost-decade-calls-for-replacing-social-justice-education-with-education-rich-in-liberal-arts/.

5 Karen Effrem and Jane Robbins, foreword by Kevin Ryan, "Social-Emotional Learning: K–12 Education as New Age Nanny State," March 2019, https://pioneerinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/SEL_WP.pdf.Mary-Michelle Upson Hirschoff, https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2968&context=facpub.

6 Cara Stillings Candal, The Fight for the Best Charter Schools in the Nation, 2023, https://pioneerinstitute.org/bestchartersbook/.

7 William Donovan and David Ferreira, "Hands Off Voc-Techs' Success: Lottery-based admissions proposal is a mistake," Mary 2024, https://pioneerinstitute.org/featured/study-expand-voc-tech-seats-dont-require-lottery-based-admissions/.

8 Eileen McAnneny, "An Overview of the Massachusetts Workforce Training Infrastructure," November 2023, https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/the-massachusetts-workforce-abundant-resources-steep-challenges/; Eileen McAnneny, "A Comparative Analysis of States' Workforce Development Programs," January 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/pioneer-institute-study-compares-ma-workforce-development-system-to-those-in-peer-states/; William Donovan and David Ferreira, "Hands Off Voc-Techs' Success: Lottery-based admissions proposal is a mistake," Mary 2024, https://pioneerinstitute.org/featured/study-expand-voc-tech-seats-dont-require-lottery-based-admissions/; Elana Feinberg and David Ferreira, "Urban Voc-Tech Toolkit," May 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/pioneer-research/education-pioneer-research/pioneer-institute-releases-toolkit-to-transform-bostons-madison-park-technical-vocational-high-school/.

9 Elana Feinberg and David Ferreira, "Urban Voc-Tech Toolkit," May 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/pioneer-research/education-pioneer-research/pioneer-institute-releases-toolkit-to-transform-bostons-madison-park-technical-vocational-high-school/.

10 Ken Ardon and Roger Hatch, "METCO Funding: Understanding Massachusetts' Voluntary School Desegregation Program,"June 2022, https://pioneerinstitute.org/press_releases/metco-works-well-small-tweaks-could-make-it-even-better-study-says/; Elizabeth Setren, "The Impact of Increased Exposure of Diversity on Suburban Students' Outcomes: An Analysis of the METCO Voluntary Desegregation Program," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 33623, https://www.nber.org/papers/w33623.

11 Roger Hatch, "Interdistrict Choice in Massachusetts," May 2018, https://pioneerinstitute.org/pioneer-research/education-pioneer-research/inter-district-choice-in-massachusetts/.

12 Julie Petersen and Julie Young, eds., Virtual Schools, Actual Learning: Digital Education in America, forthcoming Fall 2025.

13 Jason Bedrick, "Tax–Credit Education Scholarship Toolkit," 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/featured/pioneer-institute-releases-2025-toolkit-to-guide-policymakers-on-education-tax-credit-scholarship-programs/; Dr. Cara Candal, author of "Modeling an Education Savings Account for Massachusetts," January 2022, https://pioneerinstitute.org/press_releases/study-finds-massachusetts-would-benefit-from-adopting-education-savings-accounts/.

14 Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, "John and Abigail Adams Scholarship," https://www.mass.edu/osfa/programs/adams.asp.

15 Eileen McAnneny, "An Overview of the Massachusetts Workforce Training Infrastructure," November 2023, https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/the-massachusetts-workforce-abundant-resources-steep-challenges/; Eileen McAnneny, "A Comparative Analysis of States' Workforce Training Programs," January 2025, https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/pioneer-institute-study-compares-ma-workforce-development-system-to-those-in-peer-states/.

PIONEER
INSTITUTE

185 Devonshire Street, Suite 1101 Boston MA 02110 | 101 Constitution Ave NW, Washington, D.C. #2000
617.723.2277 pioneerinstitute.org Facebook.com/PioneerInstitute Twitter.com/PioneerBoston