

AN ACT TO IMPROVE DROPOUT PREVENTION AND REPORTING OF GRADUATION RATES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. The department of elementary and secondary education shall provide public school districts with a standardized format for the accurate reporting of high school graduation and dropout data.

- The data shall facilitate the department's implementation of a longitudinal data collection system and reporting of graduation rates and shall include, but not be limited to, a 4-year graduation rate, 5-year graduation rate and adjusted graduation rates.
- The data shall be disaggregated in the following categories: limited English proficiency, low-income, special education, race or ethnicity and gender.
- Data shall be coded within the Student Information Management System to reflect various withdrawal designations.
- The department shall provide each district with technical assistance to help them gather and analyze data.
- The department shall publish annually the reported data by various means, including on its electronic website.

SECTION 2. There shall be a graduation and dropout prevention and recovery commission to survey dropout prevention and recovery best practices and programs nationwide and to evaluate dropout prevention and recovery programs currently in use.

The commission shall consist of 27 members including

- the secretary of education, or his designee, who shall serve as chair;
- the secretary of labor and workforce development, or his designee;
- the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, or his designee;
- the commissioner of higher education, or his designee;
- the commissioner of social services, or his designee; the commissioner of youth services, or his designee;
- the commissioner of transitional assistance, or his designee;
- the commissioner of mental health, or his designee;
- the commissioner of public health, or his designee;
- the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means, or their designees;
- the chairs of the joint committee on education, or their designees;
- 1 member to be appointed by the speaker of the house;
- 1 member to be appointed by the senate president;
- 1 member to be appointed by the minority leader of the house;
- 1 member to be appointed by the minority leader of the senate;

- 11 members to be appointed by the secretary of education,
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Boston Private Industry Council;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators Association;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative from the committee for public counsel services;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Commonwealth Corporation;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative selected from a list of 3 nominees proposed jointly by the American Federation of Teachers of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Teachers Association;
 - 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools; and
 - 3 of whom shall have experience in successful dropout prevention efforts including, without limitation: public schools, the non profit sector, law enforcement, or municipally administered after-school and recreation programs.

SECTION 3. (a) The commission shall examine and make recommendations on:

- (1) setting a goal and timeline for reducing the statewide annual dropout rate;
- (2) further developing early indicator systems to identify students who are at risk of dropping out, or who are not likely to graduate on time from high school without receiving additional support, and school policies that exacerbate dropping out;
- (3) expanding the definition of “structured learning time” to include internships and work-study programs and exploring ways to encourage school districts to incorporate quality internships, work and learning programs into structured learning time to engage all students in relevant and rigorous curriculum;
- (4) developing a reimbursement mechanism for districts sending students to alternative education programs;
- (5) exploring the connection between school discipline policies and students’ level of engagement or alienation from school, with emphasis on school referrals for discipline purposes and court-involved youth;
- (6) providing financial incentives for districts that are effective in graduating at-risk students and recovering high school dropouts;
- (7) raising the compulsory attendance age from 16 years of age to 18 years of age;

- (8) creating a dropout prevention and recovery grant program to:
 - (i) provide school districts with funds to implement early indicator systems;
 - (ii) create capacity within regions by engaging local workforce investment boards for outreach to dropouts and referral to local school districts and alternative education programs; or
 - (iii) provide funds to local districts or nonprofit programs to develop alternative routes to a diploma or its equivalent to prevent students from dropping out and to meet the needs of those returning to education;
- (9) district activities in compliance with section 18 of chapter 76 of the general laws and any regulations or administrative directives of the department regarding required and appropriate measures to identify, locate, interview, and counsel high school drop-outs; provided, however, that the commission shall also make recommendations regarding mandatory reporting by districts on activities in fulfillment of statutory requirements and administrative directives; and
- (10) establishing a threshold annual dropout rate for each school district such that rates in excess of threshold levels would establish a mandatory requirement on districts to adopt and implement a districtwide action plan to reduce dropout rates and effectively track students.

(b) The commission's recommendations regarding the standards and requirements for such action plans shall include:

- (1) an outreach and referral strategy;
- (2) a comprehensive listing of alternative education options and other pathways to earn a diploma offered within the public school system;
- (3) plans for collaboration with teams of community stakeholders including, but not limited to, workforce investment boards through their youth and adult learning centers to develop a comprehensive approach to address the dropout issue; and
- (4) alternative options to enable students who have dropped out to return and receive a high school diploma, including options delivered directly by the public school district or by nonprofit organizations approved by the public schools.

SECTION 4. The commission shall conduct its first meeting not less than 90 days after the effective date of this act and shall conduct not less than 3 public hearings in geographically diverse regions of the commonwealth.

The commission shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations together with legislation, if any, to the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on education and the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means no later than May 15, 2009.