

**Testimony of American Student Assistance on
H. 550 and S. 241, An Act Relative to Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement, and
H. 416, An Act to Require School Attendance Up to Age 18 or Until Graduation**

American Student Assistance (ASA) is a Massachusetts non-profit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals.

We know that a critical milestone to achieving higher education and career success is graduating from high school. According to the American Bar Association, students who drop out are more likely to be unemployed and on average earn only 65 percent of what their graduating peers earn.¹ This is why at ASA we believe that when young people can access resources that will provide them with the supports to explore their educational and career options, and open their eyes to the myriad opportunities that await them with a high school diploma, they are more likely to succeed in school and beyond. To achieve that outcome, we urge you to support H.550 and H.241, An Act Relative to Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement, and H. 416, An Act to Require School Attendance up to Age 18 or Until Graduation.

H. 550 & S.241 An Act Relative to Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement

Currently in Massachusetts too many students are failing to successfully pursue education or career training post-high school. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in the 2017-2018 school year 5,408 students dropped out of Massachusetts high schools. In addition, in 2016 over 16,000 students failed to continue their education after high school into some form of higher education, training or credential. Of those students who've dropped out, 30 percent said that they do not have a plan for what they will do when they leave school and 20 percent of students have an unknown status.² Massachusetts can combat both the dropout rate and the lack of planning that many dropout students are experiencing through passage of legislation like H.550/S.241, An Act relative to dropout prevention and re-engagement.

Programs like the Success Mentors proposed in S. 241/H. 550 would provide students most at risk for dropping out with wrap-around services. The original Success Mentors pilot program, part of a New York initiative to reduce school dropout rates that has now been scaled nationally, had over 60,000 students participating. Schools participating in this program consistently outperformed their non-participating peers, and Success Mentors specifically were the most effective component of this initiative. Students with Success Mentors were 52 percent more likely to remain in school the following year than those without mentors.

We believe that this additional support system is crucial to helping Massachusetts engage students most at risk of drop out and ensure that all students receive the education and training necessary for future life success.

H.416

In addition to mentorship programs, it is clear students need more support to prevent them from leaving high school before graduating. Passage of H. 416, An Act to Require School Attendance up to Age 18 or Until Graduation, would create a commission to explore how to prevent students from dropping out. We need a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to tackling this problem, and ASA supports the establishment of a commission to study barriers to high school graduation.

¹https://www.americanbar.org/groups/gpsolo/publications/gpsolo_ereport/2013/april_2013/executive_summary_report_truancy_dropout_prevention/

²<http://www.doe.mass.edu/info/services/reports/dropout/>