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A path for every student. A plan for every future.™

October 1, 2019

The Honorable Jason Lewis
Chairman
Senate Committee on Education
State House, Room 511-B

Dear Chairman Lewis,

American Student Assistance would like to applaud the effort and commitment you have demonstrated in the development on this education reform bill. Senate (S. 2350) is a potentially transformative opportunity to ensure that every Massachusetts student has access to a high-quality education. The infusion of \$1.4 billion into the Massachusetts public school system is a major step in the right direction. However, we believe that more can be done to improve equity and educational standards by focusing on preparing every student for success in college and career. Without focused attention on college and career outcomes, the bill as written may fall short of its full potential. That is why we respectfully request **your support of amendments 31, 39, 46, 47 and 58 to *An Act relative to education opportunity for students***.

Innovation Pathways and Early College programs are part of the High Quality and Career Pathways Initiative, which was launched in 2017 to connect high school students to career and educational pathways vital to the Massachusetts economy. Through this initiative, a general education high school can receive an “Early College” or an “Innovation Pathways” designation from the state. The Innovation Pathway designation allows a school to restructure learning to provide students with hands-on experiential education opportunities and college-level coursework in up to five high-demand career pathways. There are currently 38 Innovation Pathways designations at 21 schools in the Commonwealth and many more are seeking this designation. Unfortunately, the long-term sustainability of these programs is threatened because the designation is not codified as part of the Chapter 70 formula. Through different approaches, the two amendments below would allow for Innovation Pathways and Early College to be included as part of the funding formula. This is vital to the expansion and sustainability of these programs.

Amendment 46 (Senator Gobi) & Amendment 47 (Senator Finegold)

Passing one of these amendments would ensure that Innovation Pathways and Early College programming receive a sustainable source of funding. Amendment #46 by Senator Gobi would change language to classify Innovation Pathways and Early College designations as “vocational programs” and they would be entitled to receive funding under that enrollment category. Sen. Finegold’s amendment (#47) would create a new enrollment category for these programs, allowing funding under an “early college/innovation pathways” category.

Sustainable funding for Innovation Pathways and Early College is vitally important to ensure more Massachusetts students can access these innovative hands-on learning experiences. We urge your favorable consideration of these amendments.

However, in addition to ensuring sustainable funding for hands-on learning opportunities like Innovation Pathways, the bill before you must include metrics that push our schools to prepare students to succeed in college and beyond. The metrics outlined in Amendment #31, introduced by Senator Moore, would do just that.

Amendment 31 (Senator Moore)

This amendment will require districts to create a plan for engagement with local business and hold districts accountable for how they will prepare their students for the workforce. This amendment would require accountability measures to include a focus on career exploration; college acceptance **and** completion rates as well as all forms of post-high school education and training; and conclude with employability metrics. Metrics like these ensure that the education bill helps to align students for long-term success by linking what they are doing in the classroom to their trajectory after high school.

Amendment 39 (Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz)

Similar to Sen. Moore's desire for outcome metrics, this amendment would ensure that districts are held accountable for not only how many kids get into college, but also on how successful they are in persisting through to completion of a credential. In order to ensure far greater college completion numbers, we must help districts assess how well their students are doing once they leave high school. Knowing the data on how successful students are at the colleges and universities they are attending can help inform policies for long-term success.

Finally, we must support all paths to education after high school—not just traditional college. That is why we support the amendment put forward by Senator Moore to support expansion of industry-recognized credentials.

Amendment 58 (Senator Moore)

This amendment would ensure additional funding to schools with students who have earned an industry-recognized certification. Additionally, this amendment mandates the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce development to share a list of high demand careers in Massachusetts that either require a certification or for which a certification would enhance the chance of employment or compensation.

American Student Assistance strongly supports the above amendments because we believe that students need more resources to ensure they can make informed choices about their higher education path and the career journey they may want to pursue. Higher education should not just be what's next, but a deliberate choice driven by interests, aptitudes and goals that our kids are all too often failing to discover prior to leaving high school.

The amendments noted above are a way to ensure that the Commonwealth's high school students can explore their interests and aptitudes and prepare our students for success both in post-secondary education and their career. By supporting these amendments as a part of this very important legislation, Massachusetts can provide a high-quality education for all students that gives them the skills they need to succeed in college and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie M. Lammers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

Julie Lammers