



Massachusetts
Taxpayers Foundation



Business Perspectives on a New Statewide High School Graduation Standard

October 1, 2025

Agenda

- Introduction
- Current Status of Graduation Requirements
- Key Goals of the Business Community
- EOE Proposal: Vision of a Graduate
 - Learning Experiences
 - Showing Mastery
 - College, Career, and Civic Readiness

Today's Goal

Offer an update on the work of the Statewide Graduation Council and collect actionable and constructive feedback on the key elements of a new high school graduation standard.

Current Context

- Ballot Question passed in 2024 eliminated the requirement that students earn a qualifying score on the MCAS to earn the competency determination required by state law to graduate from high school.
- This measure was opposed by business leaders, the Healey Administration, legislative leaders, the Attorney General and others
- In January, Governor Healey created the K-12 Statewide Graduation Council to “advise the Governor and the Legislature on the development of a statewide graduation requirement.”

How strongly do you agree with the following statement:

“Students across Massachusetts should be held to the same high-quality, rigorous, and equitable standard to determine readiness for high-school graduation.”

POTENTIAL ANSWERS:

Strong Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strong Agree

What do we want students to know and be able to do when they graduate from high school?

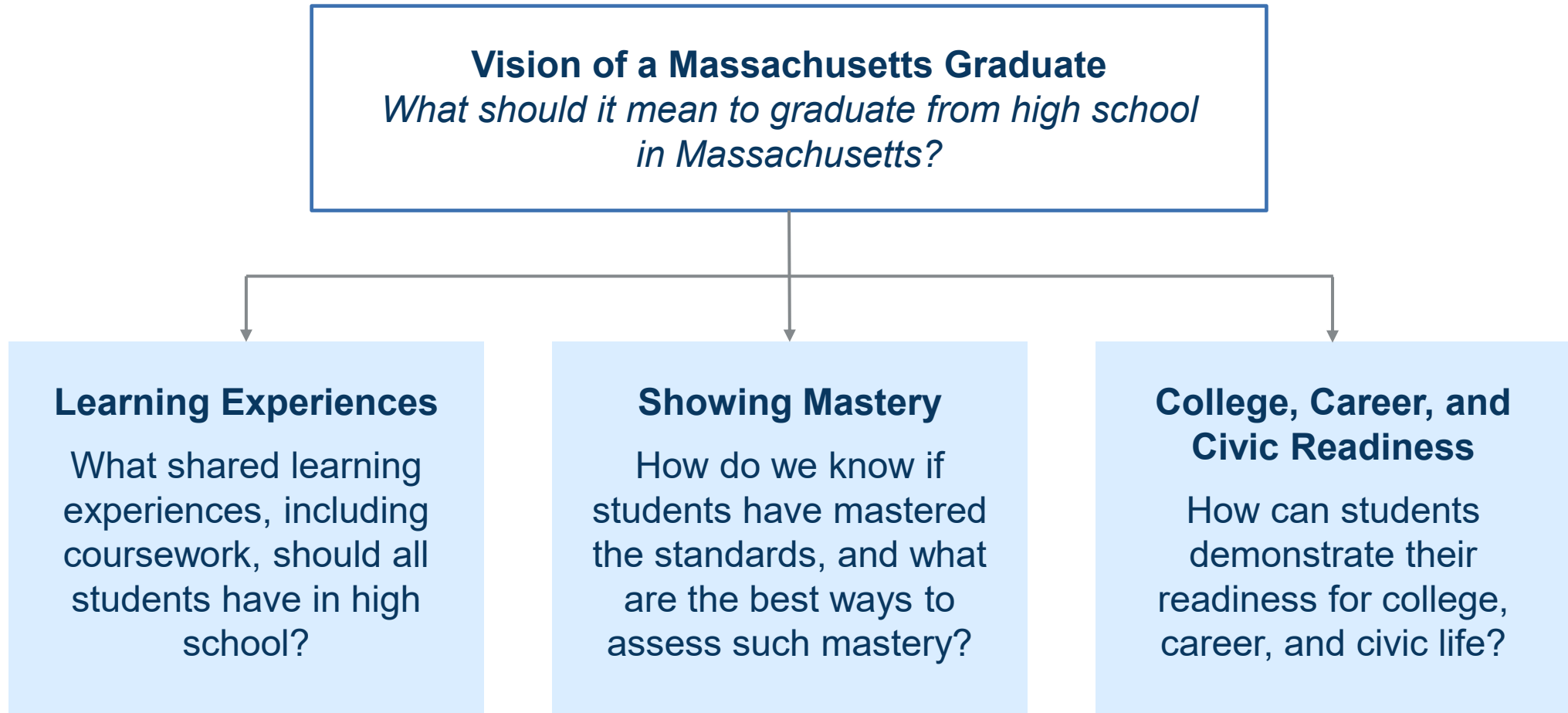
Choose three in order of priority

- ☐ Achieve a strong academic foundation in core subjects like Math, English, Science and History
- ☐ Greater focus on STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)
- ☐ Work-based learning opportunities (CTE, Internships, Innovation Career Pathways)
- ☐ College level coursework (Early College and Dual Enrollment)
- ☐ Course work with real-world applicability (i.e. Personal finance)
- ☐ Arts and cultural educational experiences
- ☐ Community service
- ☐ Soft/durable skills like communication, collaboration, and problem solving

Key Goals of Business Community

- A high school diploma is meaningful and connected to real world expectations
- All students are meeting a minimum benchmark of academic achievement
- All students are provided equitable access to educational experiences including work-based learning and career counseling that lead to career and economic opportunities

EOE Proposal: Vision of a Graduate



Learning Experiences

Course of study aligned with 4-year public higher ed requirements

- 4 years of English Language Arts
- 4 years of Math (Computer Science could count)
- 3 years of Lab-based Science (Technology/Engineering & CS could count)
- 3 years of History
- 2 years of World Language
- Physical Ed (as required by law)
- 1 year of Art
- Additional core courses

Would allow flexibility to pursue alternative pathways, including CTE, Early College

How strongly do you agree with the following statement:

“To graduate from high school, MA students should complete a rigorous program of study that meets minimum requirements for post-secondary enrollment (i.e. course requirements for 4-year state colleges and universities) while allowing flexibility for students pursuing alternative pathways, including career technical education and Early College.”

POTENTIAL ANSWERS:

Strong Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strong Agree

Showing Mastery

- Course completion & GPAs
- Common, objective assessments
 - Exit exams (MCAS model)
 - End-of-course exams
- Performance-based, subjective assessments
 - Capstone projects
 - Portfolios

Course Completion & GPAs

State Law

- In 6 states, including MA, four-year graduation rates increased between 2007-2022, even as test scores fell.
- Graduation gains were greatest in high schools with the lowest test scores.

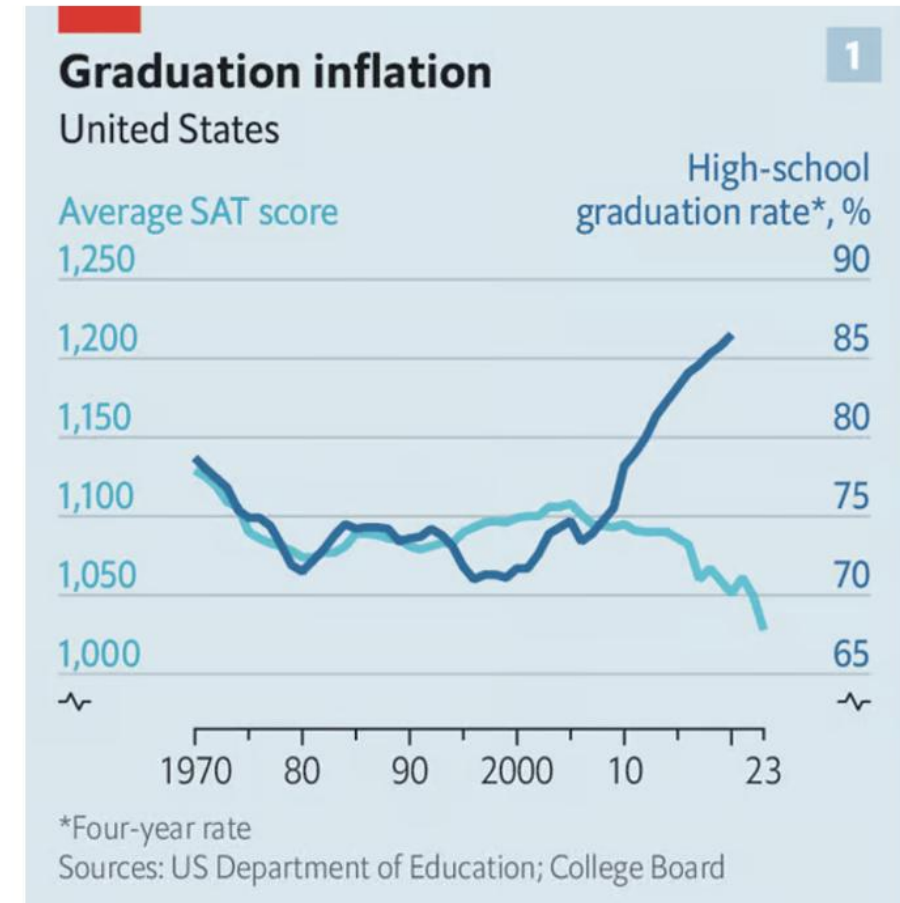


CHART: THE ECONOMIST

Common & Objective Assessments

Exit Exam

- MCAS Model
- Standardized test to assess a student's achievement in core academic subjects.
- Typically administered at the end of the school year.

End-of-Course Assessment

- Commonly used as an alternative to exit exams.
- Administered at the conclusion of specific high school courses (like a final exam).
- Serve as an objective benchmark of content knowledge

Performance-Based Assessments

Capstone Project

- Culminating experiences to allow student to apply learning across disciplines.
- Student-driven; often involve research, writing, and public presentation.
- High degree of variability in design and implementation

Portfolio

- Curated collections of student work.
- Focus on flexibility and alignment with personalized learning.
- Includes student reflects and goal setting.
- High degree of variability in design and implementation

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

“The MA high school graduation standard must include a standardized, objective assessment tool, like an exit exam or end-of-course assessments.”

POTENTIAL ANSWERS:

Strong Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strong Agree

Demonstrating College & Career Readiness

- Individual College and Career Plans
- Diploma Seals and Endorsements
- FAFSA Completion

Diploma Seals and Endorsements

EXAMPLES:

- Academic/Honors Seal
- Career & Technical Education Seal
- Seal of Biliteracy
- Seal of Financial Literacy
- Seal of Digital Literacy
- Civic Engagement Seal
- Military Enlistment Seal



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Thank you for participating today.

Appendix

Historical Context on Graduation Requirements

State Law

- In Massachusetts, state law requires that a student must earn the statewide competency determination and meet local graduation requirements to receive a high school diploma.
- In 1993, the MCAS system was authorized for the state's competency determination and became a state graduation requirement for the class of 2003.

Federal Law

- In 2001, the federal government passed a similar law called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that requires all states to administer standardized testing for students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in high school in order to receive federal school funding through Title I.

Constitutional Obligation

To meet its Constitutional obligations, Massachusetts must guarantee a baseline of educational quality for all students; the [Supreme Judicial Court](#) has repeatedly affirmed that this duty requires the state government to monitor and ensure that all high school graduates attain competency in core academic subjects, and that it may not delegate this duty to local districts.