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MBAE Statement on the Conference Committee's Education Funding Legislation

November 19, 2019 – The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education is pleased that the conference committee reconciling differences in the versions of the education funding and reform bill released a final bill today that prioritizes increases in funding for students and communities that need it the most, includes sufficient guardrails to ensure the money is thoughtfully and strategically deployed to close persistent achievement gaps, and increases state and district focus on preparing students for college and workforce opportunities.

MBAE applauds the work of House Speaker DeLeo, Senate President Spilka, Representative Peisch and Senator Lewis to create a compromise bill that addresses the needs of students and reflects the priorities of critical stakeholders. From the moment they introduced the Education Committee bill two months ago, they have worked tirelessly to get this right. We appreciate their commitment to the students of the Commonwealth.

This is a very strong bill that meets the needs of students and communities, and takes steps toward an education system more reflective of, and responsive to, the demands of the workforce.

The bill requires districts to set targets for closing achievement gaps aligned with state targets, develop three-year plans for how they will meet those targets including how they will allocate funding and utilize evidence-based best practices, and gives the Commissioner the authority to review and require changes from districts whose plans do not meet the requirements of the law, giving the bill the appropriate “teeth” needed and supported by the business community.

We are also very pleased that the business community’s call for greater emphasis on preparing students for college and the workforce has been met. The Conference Committee bill strengthens these provisions which are critical given the declining opportunities for students with only a high school diploma.

The bill requires districts to consider how they might better prepare students for college and careers in their three-year plans. For the first time, the state will collect, and report on, data that will allow us to know whether we’re preparing students for success after high school. The Secretary of Education will be responsible for monitoring progress on college and career readiness at the state, district, and school

level and begin the process of establishing targets to be achieved in better preparing students for a successful future.

The bill also establishes an innovation fund, the 21st Century Fund, that gives the Commissioner a tool to spur and support greater innovation in education to close achievement and skills gaps. MBAE championed innovation funding and is pleased that this bill meets that important need.

Finally, MBAE sees this bill as a beginning, not an end, to an urgent effort to ensure students graduate prepared for success in the 21st century. There is still much important work to be done to close racial and socio-economic achievement gaps and bring more career-connected learning to Massachusetts schools and MBAE is eager to continue the work with the Commissioner, the administration, and legislative leaders to build off the foundation this legislation represents.

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