

July 2014

State Senate Rejects Education Reform Legislation

Boston's 60 Level 3 schools remain without the flexibility needed to improve performance

The legislative effort to achieve modest educational reform in low performing school districts in Massachusetts died on July 16th when the Senate voted (26-13) to reject the Senate bill and also the more preferable House [bill](#) (30-9) that had been approved by the House (114-35) in June. For the next legislative session, a stronger bill with proven measures to turn around underperforming schools and keep quality options open should be introduced and enacted. Boston students cannot wait any longer.

Why Reform is Important for Boston

Of Boston's 128 schools, 101 were assigned a state performance level in 2013, with 60 or 59.4% being assigned Level 3 designation. These schools, which rank in the lowest 20% statewide, serve 29,547 students or 51.8% of total enrollment. Boston students deserve to attend schools that have the tools to improve student achievement.

Level 3 "Challenge Schools"

Future reform needs to extend the flexibility currently given to Level 4 turnaround schools to Level 3 schools or a subset of Level 3 schools. Turnaround plans allow schools greater control over teacher hiring and staff selection, budget, and scheduling, all proven components to improving underperforming schools. Extending turnaround flexibility allows for district schools to compete with charter schools while still using union teachers and without

losing Ch. 70 funds that follow students to charters.

Horace Mann In-district Charters

In the 2010 Achievement Gap law, districts were given the ability to convert low performing schools to Horace Mann in-district charters. This is a key tool to reform, as there is no cap on Horace Mann schools created through conversion. Boston created the two Up Academy in-district charters through this method, but, while not needed to create the schools, BTU approval will be needed when these charter schools come up for renewal after five years. Future reform should give the districts sole authority in deciding renewal of the Horace Mann charter schools with state approval.

Commonwealth Charter Tuition Cap

The public debate on education reform in Massachusetts has focused heavily on increasing the charter cap for the lowest 10% of districts. As Boston has already reached its 18% charter cap when planned expansion is taken into account through 2017, a modest increase in the charter cap is important in continuing to provide that option to parents and students seeking high performing alternatives. The Commonwealth charter school issue is exacerbated by the fact that the Commonwealth is not meeting its obligation to fully fund its charter school tuition reimbursement account. Full funding should be a high priority for the FY16 state budget and each year thereafter.