



**“Back to School: The Next Step in Education Reform”
A Statewide Listening Tour – 2005**

Joint Committee on Education

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Submitted by:

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Chairman Antonioni, Chairwoman Haddad, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony about the next steps of education reform. This is an issue near and dear to the Massachusetts Business Roundtable (MBR). In 1991, our Education Task Force released a report proposing a long-range agenda for K-12 education reform under the leadership of then Task Force Chairman, Jack Rennie. That report called for fundamental changes in the education system including: a clearly defined planning process to set aggressive goals and measure progress against those goals; the flexibility and authority necessary for educators to allow their schools to thrive; and strong leadership at all levels to implement these changes. Through Jack Rennie’s leadership and MBR’s partnership with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), we were able to provide input and give significant support to the education reform movement of 1993.

Now, twelve years later, your Committee is to be commended for asking the appropriate question: “What’s next?” The national Business Roundtable, in a March 2004 report entitled “Securing Growth and Jobs: Improving U.S. Prosperity in a Worldwide Economy” warns that “without deliberate focus and intervention, the talent pipeline for research and innovation in the United States, especially in engineering and physical sciences, is in jeopardy.” As we think about what types of “focus and intervention” we need in Massachusetts, we must be mindful that we are competing against other states and, indeed, other countries. MBR believes that the most effective intervention – with the greatest return on investment – is education.

MBR suggests four areas of focus that are consistent with our previous recommendations, builds upon the exceptional work of the legislature over the past decade, and prepares our students for a new, global economy: 1) a sustained commitment to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teaching and learning; 2) improving teacher quality throughout the

Commonwealth; 3) building a solid foundation by supporting early childhood education; and 4) investing in public higher education to prepare today's workers and ensure a pipeline of workers for tomorrow's economy.

STEM Teaching and Learning. At a time when our economy is shifting to be more globally competitive and innovation based, Massachusetts is seeing troubling trends in the preparation of its students for this new economy. In 2004, only 19% of students who took the SAT identified STEM fields as their probable career path. This mirrors what is happening nationally. According to the Council on Competitiveness National Innovation Initiative (NII), only 5.5% of the 1.1 million high school seniors who took the college entry exam in 2002 planned to pursue an engineering degree. Countries with which we are competing – South Korea, Australia, Singapore, Japan and Canada – are identifying their best math and science students, nurturing them, and educating them in STEM fields so they will be prepared for the global marketplace. To remain competitive in the future, we need to be making similar investments in the United States and Massachusetts. As the data shows, we are not.

Recognizing this challenge, the Legislature created the STEM Pipeline Fund to increase the number of youth who prepare for and enter STEM careers; to recruit, retain and develop more STEM qualified teachers; and to improve student performance in STEM subjects. MBR supports this effort. Similarly, we serve on the Steering Committee of the Great Schools Campaign, and agree that the state should invest in Massachusetts' math and science teachers. The national Business Roundtable recently released a report, "Tapping America's Potential: The Education for Innovation Initiative," which sets a goal of doubling the number of science, technology, engineering and math graduates in the United States by 2015. Nationally, business leaders are united around this agenda. We at MBR share the urgency of this issue at the state level and look forward to working with you to address it.

Educator Quality. As business leaders, Roundtable members are concerned that far too many of our young people are leaving school without acquiring the kinds of skills and knowledge that are a prerequisite for success in today's increasingly global economy. To address this, our 1991 report called for "improved professional development programs for teachers." This was based on research that has consistently shown a strong correlation between teacher quality and student achievement. In fact, Stanford University's Hoover Institution recently found that "the most effective teachers were able to boost their pupils' learning by a full grade level more than students taught by their least successful colleagues." Teaching, and the leadership that supports it, is the most significant variable in student achievement.

The most comprehensive proposal to address educator quality is being coordinated by Teachers 21 (Teachers for the 21st Century). That proposal, H.4157, addresses the issues of teaching and leadership in a way that is both comprehensive in scope and positive in nature. It seeks to develop educational leaders who can build and sustain professional learning communities by increasing the rigor of supervision and evaluation for teachers and administrators,

while upgrading the skills and requiring greater accountability of the evaluators. The bill also focuses professional development funds on direct improvement of instructional leadership, teaching, and learning and aligns professional development with school and district improvement goals and student results. The investments in H.4157 are designed to help support and build successful careers for our most important capital assets in public education – our teachers – and subsequently improve outcomes for children which, of course, is our ultimate goal. MBR supports this approach.

Early Childhood Education. The national Business Roundtable report recognizes that “*Past national efforts to improve U.S. math and science achievement clearly demonstrate that they cannot be isolated from the need to improve the overall quality and results of the entire U.S. education system, pre-K through 16. That is why the business community supports high-quality early childhood education...*” If we are serious about maintaining our preeminence in innovation and competitiveness – nationally, regionally, and statewide – it is imperative that we build an education system with high-quality early childhood education as its foundation.

MBR is a member of the Early Education for All (EEA) Campaign because we share in the belief that for Massachusetts to remain competitive in an increasingly global economy, we must make targeted investments in the education of our children that yield the most positive returns. Research has conclusively shown that early childhood education is one of these areas. The Legislature clearly understands this, and is to be commended for the leadership and commitment it has made in creating the new Department of Early Education and Care. We urge you to continue to build on this commitment and support EEA’s vision of high-quality universal early childhood education.

Coordination with Public Higher Education. In today’s economy, more and more job vacancies require certificates, associate degrees or full degrees. As employers look to fill today’s jobs and ensure a pipeline of workers for the future, it is imperative that our public higher education institutions are provided the tools necessary to meet those demands. Consistent investments in operating funds, expansion of capital funds and changes in general law that allow public higher education to become more entrepreneurial provide those tools.

Through MBR’s work with the Reach Higher program, we learned that there are over 1,000,000 adults in Massachusetts in need of education to perform in the workplace. With some overlapping in the following statistics: between 180,000 and 200,000 adults are categorically unemployed in Massachusetts; over 750,000 adults do not have the requisite reading skills; another 150,000 are without basic English speaking skills, and at least 10% to 20% of the workforce, perhaps up to 700,000 workers, lack the basic skills that would allow them to move up a career ladder. The K-12 system must work collaboratively with the public higher education system to ensure that graduates of the Massachusetts public school system are prepared for the demands of the new economy.

MBR's 1991 report urged business to "do whatever we can to directly assist education professionals in the implementation of change." More than a decade later, we still believe this to be true and stand ready to assist your Committee as you embark on the next phase of education reform.