

1

EDUCATION

The two principal drivers of student success are parental involvement and the quality of the teacher-student interaction. As a result, Pioneer's priorities and recommendations are focused on a portfolio of choice options for parents and on the quality of classroom content. Our third priority area is ensuring that the state's education leadership and governance focus on strategy, policy and accountability, while preserving local control and flexibility.

Massachusetts should be proud of the progress it has made over more than two decades since the start of education reform efforts. The commonwealth has risen to stand as the top performer in the country in all subject areas tested on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Massachusetts as a state places in the top six countries in math and science on the two international tests, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and highly respected Trends in Math and Science Study (TIMSS). The performance of all student subgroups has risen over time, although in the past four years we have seen some backsliding among groups in early grade reading, both on the state (MCAS) and the national (NAEP) tests. These are areas of concern and may reflect the first impacts of lowering our academic goals through the adoption of weaker-quality content standards.

Education is the most effective way to address limits on social and economic mobility, as it immediately improves the condition

of an individual and carries forward important intergenerational impacts.

Breaking Monopoly Structures With Innovative Models

Massachusetts has the highest quality charter public schools in the nation; that is particularly true in Boston. Today, with cities like Washington, DC sending nearly half their students to charter schools, there is no excuse for Boston and other cities to limit parental choices to the current 18 percent cap stipulated in law. Nor is there any excuse to layer unhelpful regulations onto charters in an attempt to make them look and feel more like traditional district schools.

If Massachusetts has the sense of urgency around student learning that so many claim, we should not stop there. The state and localities should invest in more regional or urban autonomous vocational-technical schools. Nearly a third of the students served in these schools are special needs and they boast annual dropout rates of less than 1 percent. They also outperform state averages despite the fact that Massachusetts leads the nation in student performance.

Given data suggesting strong student outcomes, Massachusetts should also boldly embrace models like METCO, which were created to address historic racial wrongs, but today could be amended to ensure transparency and expanded to other parts of the state. Breaking down monopoly structures entails serious thinking about virtual learning opportunities.

Finally, district reform must be undertaken with an eye toward empirical evidence. National research and the federal School Improvement Grant have sadly demonstrated the inability of school leaders to achieve success on any scale through individual school “turnarounds.” Fortunately for Massachusetts, the state has demonstrated great value in its attempt to create a district turn-