

May 19, 2020

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education applauds the effort of the Massachusetts House to address some of the impacts and challenges that come with the delivery of remote learning to students in the Commonwealth through initiatives included in House Bill 4708, which is scheduled for debate this Wednesday, May 20th, 2020. **We are writing to voice our strong support for expanding on that effort to meet the statewide need more fully and equitably by adopting amendments #68, #73, and #95, sponsored by House Education Chair Alice Peisch.**

These adjustments to the current language will go further in addressing the \$50 million need that Education Commissioner Jeff Riley quantified during last week's legislative oversight hearing. They will also increase funding for addressing broadband and connectivity issues for students and families, allow for funding to improve remote learning plans at the school district level, and ensure that the distribution of funds is based on the need to address the inequities currently identified in access to devices, internet connectivity and technical support that have led to significant disparities in keeping learning moving forward for all students.

The closure of school buildings due to COVID-19 is one of the most detrimental results of this public health crisis. School closures threaten the progress and success of students across the state. State leaders must act quickly and leverage every resource and opportunity to limit learning loss and prevent the widening of socio-economic and racial achievement gaps that could leave a generation of students behind.

Maximizing remote learning for students is an urgent priority, yet access to technology and internet connectivity continues to be a barrier for many students. These amendments will not only increase funding for improvements to remote learning strategies and increase access to the devices and connectivity that make learning possible, they will rightly focus the distribution of this funding on ensuring equity to prevent the further exacerbation of achievement gaps.

In MBAE's review of the remote learning plans being implemented in the state's twenty largest districts, it is clear that each has placed a premium on the distribution of devices and increasing connectivity, sometimes at a significant local expense. This effort shows their commitment to providing universal access and closing the clear digital divide that exists in high-need neighborhoods, schools and districts. They need the assistance this bond bill can offer, at the amended amount, to address this issue quickly and fully.

The investments we make now in technology and internet connectivity will have immediate benefits and pay dividends into the future. High quality remote learning will enable, and enhance, summer learning opportunities that give students a chance to catch up. Further, given the strong likelihood of school disruptions in the next school year due to the lack of a vaccine, it is essential students and schools are equipped to continue remote learning in the fall and winter of next year.

The state and districts must act quickly, effectively and with authority and purpose to prevent dramatic learning loss from holding a generation of students back. We appreciate your consideration of these amendments as an opportunity to fully maximize the opportunity this legislation represents for the state's students and their families.

Sincerely,

Ed Lambert, Executive Director

Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education