



September 27, 2021

Dear Representative Peisch, Senator Lewis and Members of the Joint Committee on Education,

On behalf of the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education's (MABE) Working Group on School Accountability, a coalition formed to further advance the implementation and growth of DLE programs in the Commonwealth, we would like to express support for bill S.293/H.612, also known as *An Act expanding opportunities to demonstrate academic achievement* but recommend that the bill include a bilingual version of the MCAS as one of the alternative assessments. The exclusive focus of English in the current MCAS is in direct contrast to the goals of the Dual Language Education (DLE) program that focuses on bilingualism and biliteracy.

MABE provides advocacy and support for DLE programs in Massachusetts. It is a mission of MABE to promote widespread implementation of the LOOK act which enables districts to develop DLE programs; a proven way to increase academic achievement for all students and especially for English learners. MABE has witnessed reluctance for implementing DLE programs, particularly in districts with large language minority populations such as the Gateway Cities. Due to this, MABE conducted a survey and conducted interviews of leaders in districts to learn about the barriers they face and perceived obstacles for considering DLE programs. A recurring concern we heard from district leaders was the mismatch between the current accountability system that focuses on English only and the goals of Dual Language Education that focuses on bilingualism and biliteracy. Here is a summary of the [online survey and phone interviews](#).

Currently, the MCAS is administered in English only, while instruction in bilingual education is delivered in English plus another language (most often Spanish). As a result, the MCAS too often becomes a measure of English proficiency and not knowledge of the standards that the MCAS is supposed to assess. This is problematic for two reasons:

1. Monolingual assessment paradigms simply underestimate what our bilingual students know, which affects how teachers can authentically use data to inform their instruction;
2. MCAS scores are used to make determinations for turnaround status and other punitive state actions tied to school-level underperformance. The problem of monolingual assessments described above also has the unintended consequence of discouraging districts from wanting to open new bilingual programs for fear that their students and schools will be inaccurately labeled as underperforming and thus subject to punitive action.

While the LOOK Act was designed to make expanding bilingual education simpler for districts, using English-only MCAS testing underestimates performance of bilingual students, schools, and programs. An English-only MCAS framework gets only half of the picture. We must capture a complete picture of students' progress in both languages for true accountability. Otherwise, districts and schools facing the potential consequences for low English-language test scores will be less likely to plan and implement dual language models. This acts as a deterrent, runs contrary to the evidence-based practices supporting dual language that undergirds the LOOK Act, and results in this legislation not being able to fulfill its promise.

To realistically expand bilingual education in Massachusetts, we need a systems-level approach. The primary goal of the MCAS is to measure whether content standards are being met. From a bilingual perspective, this means that the language of the assessment should vary. This has two implications for bilingual MCAS test development. The first is to develop separate MCAS tests for other languages. That is, any given MCAS test would be available in English and the language of a given bilingual program. The second is to develop language flexibility into each MCAS test. That is, each MCAS test would be developed so the testing student can switch between English and the other language at the item level within the test. This is the format used in previous MCAS versions prior to 2003 before the Question 2 referendum passed and was implemented.

The following chart offers some additional considerations for accountability in grades K - 8:

Indicators	Measures	Weighting (3:1)	
		With EL	No EL
Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELA, math, & science achievement values • Bilingual LA, Math, Science 	60%	67.5%
Student Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELA & math SGP • Incorporate target language in SGP 	20%	22.5%
English Language Proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of ELs making progress towards attaining English language proficiency 	10%	
Additional Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic absenteeism rate • Social Cultural Competence • Family Engagement 	10%	10%

We believe that the current use of the MCAS to evaluate bilingual students, schools, and programs across the Commonwealth poses a threat to the efficacy and expansion of DLE programs. Considering the inequity of access to quality education that has been starkly exposed during the pandemic, we believe bilingual test development will not only have positive impacts for multilingual students in our state, but will help eliminate barriers to implementation of new DLE programs. We strongly urge you to include the development and use of bilingual assessments in the state’s assessment and accountability system as one of the alternative options in bill S.293/H.612, also known as *An Act expanding opportunities to demonstrate academic achievement*.

We thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Respectfully,

Susan McGilvray-Rivet, Retired Principal, Barbieri School, Dual Language Education, Framingham, MA
9 Sherbourne St., Andover, MA 01810

Yael Zakon-Bourke, Retired Dual Language Education Teacher, MABE Consultant for implementing new DLE programs
75 Oak Point, Wrentham, MA 02093

Phyllis Hardy, Executive Director, MABE
45 Lakeview Terrace, Ashland, MA 01721