

Position Paper: The Graduation Standard

May 2026

Following extensive discussion and review, the MASC Board of Directors has adopted official positions on the recommendations contained in the Statewide High School Graduation Framework Interim Report.

MASC supports efforts to create meaningful and equitable pathways to graduation while maintaining local control, protecting student opportunity, and ensuring that any new statewide expectations are accompanied by adequate and sustainable state funding.

MASC supports MassCore, financial literacy, capstones and portfolios, and Seals of Distinction when implemented with local control and adequate state support. MASC opposes End of Course Assessments (EOCs) as currently defined. In addition, MASC would need to see guaranteed funding and appropriate local flexibility before moving forward with MyCAP (Individual Career & Academic Plan) requirements or making FAFSA/MAFSA completion mandatory graduation requirements.

As this process continues, MASC remains committed to advocating for graduation policies that uphold academic excellence while respecting the will of Massachusetts voters, the diversity of local districts, and the practical realities facing schools and communities across the Commonwealth.

Detailed positions on each recommendation are outlined below.



Rigorous Program of Study (MassCORE) Support with Local Flexibility and Full State Funding

MASC supports using MassCore to help ensure that a diploma from any Massachusetts public high school reflects comparable rigor and prepares students to access higher education, career training, and the workforce. However, the state cannot mandate MassCore until the significant “access gap” is closed. Independent analysis shows that more than a quarter of Massachusetts students currently do not meet MassCore requirements.

Before any mandate is adopted, the Commonwealth must conduct a careful study of course availability, staffing, scheduling, program design, student need, and district capacity in order to determine the true cost of implementation. MASC cannot support mandated implementation of the MassCore Program of Study until the Commonwealth can ensure every district has state funding to provide the staffing and resources necessary to meet it.



End-of-Course Assessments Reject as Currently Defined

MASC remains deeply concerned by the lack of clarity regarding the role and consequences of state administered End of Course (EOC) assessments. Without explicit safeguards, these tools risk becoming new barriers to graduation and potential instruments for punitive state intervention in local school districts.



Capstone or Portfolio Support with Local Implementation/Grading and Full State Funding

MASC supports capstones and portfolios because they are better aligned to the Graduation Council’s own Vision of a Massachusetts Graduate. That vision calls for students to be academically prepared, create problem solvers, effective communicators, self-aware navigators, intentional collaborators, and responsible decision makers. It envisions students as thinkers, contributors and leaders. Those skills are difficult to measure well through an end-of-course test, but they can be demonstrated through authentic student work.

The state should provide frameworks, model rubrics, guidance, professional development, and funding. Implementation and grading, however, must remain local. Capstones and portfolios should strengthen the diploma and deepen student learning while preserving local authority and flexibility over how students demonstrate mastery.

If the Commonwealth is serious about building a new federal accountability tool, this is a generational opportunity to move away from the old standardized testing model and toward a more holistic assessment system aligned to the Vision of a Massachusetts Graduate.

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Individual Career & Academic Plan *Reject as a Graduation Requirement without Guaranteed State Funding*

MASC supports and encourages school districts to adopt career and academic planning models, such as MyCAP, which helps students make deeper connections between coursework and interest with college, vocational apprenticeships, military service, and workforce opportunities.

However, for this work to be meaningful, it takes staffing, scheduling, training and ongoing student support. Some districts already have strong local models, and some districts could onboard with relative ease. Still, it cannot be ignored that our current fiscal reality of schools across the Commonwealth has led to staffing and programming cuts, and the implementation of mandated Individual Career and Academic Plans would create a significant, new unfunded mandate for the public school districts of Massachusetts.

MASC cannot support a statewide MyCAP requirement unless the Commonwealth provides guaranteed state funding and preserves local flexibility in how districts implement career and academic planning.



Applications for Student Aid *Reject as Graduation Requirement, Support Opt-in Model*

MASC supports helping students and families access financial aid and better understand college affordability. However, FAFSA or MAFA completion should not be a condition of graduation. A student's diploma should not depend on submitting family financial information to the government or completing a process that may not apply to the student's future plans.

MASC would support an opt-in model that encourages outreach, counseling, and assistance while preserving student and family privacy and choice.



Financial Literacy *Support with Local Flexibility*

MASC has long supported efforts and legislation to expand financial literacy education. MASC advocacy reflects our understanding of the importance of ensuring students graduate with practical financial knowledge. MASC believes students should leave high school with a basic understanding of budgeting, saving, credit, debt, taxes, loans, financial aid, and long-term financial decision making.

MASC supports financial literacy as part of the high school experience. However, districts must retain flexibility in how it is delivered. Districts must be allowed to offer stand-alone courses, also allowing districts to choose to embed financial literacy into math, social studies, advisory, career readiness, business, or other local programming. Any statewide expectations should include implementation support and avoid creating another rigid or unfunded mandate.



Seals of Distinction *Support*

MASC supports Seals of Distinction as optional recognitions that preserve local flexibility, strengthen student pathways, and help students communicate their accomplishments to colleges, employers, and future opportunities. These Seals of Distinction could recognize areas such as civic engagement, biliteracy, career and technical Education, ROTC, STEM, the arts, or other areas of strength.