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New Report Tracks Progress, Areas for Improvement in Mass. Education

Research Highlights Need to Identify New Methods of Measuring Student Success

(BOSTON, MA) January 24, 2020 – The [Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy](#) released its annual status report to an audience of 300 state leaders, legislators, students, and educators yesterday morning. The [Condition of Education in the Commonwealth](#) report looks at school performance in Massachusetts, highlighting successes while zeroing in on areas in need of improvement.

The annual series includes a [data dashboard](#) that looks at a range of state-level indicators of school performance and highlights disparities in student outcomes based on factors including income and race. New additions this year include indicators on access to the arts, advanced coursework, and student homelessness, as well as a data resource guide with links to additional district- and community-level data sources.

The report's [Action Guide](#) examines the need for new ways of measuring student success. Academic test scores are just one method of measuring student success, offering an incomplete picture of student learning and growth. A more comprehensive and equitable approach to assessment requires innovative ways of thinking about how to capture the full scope of students' experiences and understanding. The report focuses on three key areas: supporting the whole child, serving all students, and building multiple pathways to college and career.

“Educators and state leaders recognize that serving all students well requires focusing on their individual needs, including mental health and social-emotional development as well as academic progress, but our assessment system has not kept pace with these demands,” said Chad d’Entremont, Executive Director of the Rennie Center. “Especially with the passage of the Student Opportunity Act, schools and districts require new approaches to assessing student success that supplement existing methods of testing, allowing educators to see whether investments in programs or initiatives are addressing persistent disparities in student outcomes and supporting all students to thrive.”

“Assessment processes are deeply influenced by historical inequities and biases in our education system and larger society. In order to truly understand what students can do, we must first recognize and value each student’s cultural background, lived experiences, and knowledge they bring into the learning environment. Only by learning who our students are can we fully appreciate their individual strengths and areas for growth,” said Dana Thompson

Dorsey, Associate Director for Research & Development and Associate Professor of Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education, and the keynote speaker at the Rennie Center's event.

The Condition of Education Action Guide features local programs that demonstrate innovative approaches to measuring success. Examples include the mental health assessment model in Methuen Public Schools, a kindergarten readiness evaluation in Somerville Public Schools, the "portrait of a graduate" developed in Natick Public Schools, the transition assessment process in Newton Public Schools, and the process of awarding students "digital badges" for skills built through out-of-school programming in Boston and Providence. Looking outside of Massachusetts for lessons from other states, the report also highlights culturally responsive assessment practices in Hawaii and the evaluation of college and career readiness in Vermont.

The release event also featured remarks from Education Secretary James Peyser who spoke about the importance of measuring success within the education system. "While increased investment is incredibly important, how we spend it is equally important to ensure we are using strategies and providing programs that accelerate learning for all students and close achievement gaps," said Secretary Peyser.

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy's mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life. For more information, please visit www.renniecenter.org.

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