

## Report on Worcester People's Forum on September 29, 2029

In November 2024, Massachusetts voters decisively rejected using MCAS as a high school graduation requirement, with 59% voting yes statewide. (In some cities and towns, particularly those with more diverse, low-income residents, the yes vote was as high as 75%.) In response, Governor Healey convened a Graduation Council that held meetings of its 31 appointed members as well as public listening sessions around the Commonwealth to solicit views on new requirements. The governor's council's preliminary report is due in November 2025, with a final report expected in June 2026.

To take advantage of this rare opportunity to set a new and better course for our public schools and to encourage more in-depth, grassroots participation in deciding how to determine graduation readiness, Citizens for Public Schools and its partners have organized a series of **People's Forums on Graduation Readiness**. Three have been completed as of late September and at least five more are planned before mid-November.

In-person forums held last spring and this fall in Cambridge, New Bedford and Worcester drew more than 165 educators, parents, students, and other community members to discuss what they think graduation readiness and requirements should look like in the future. Working in small groups, participants have addressed three critical questions:

1. What should students know and be able to do by the time they graduate?
2. How should students demonstrate their readiness to graduate?
3. How can schools, pre-K to 12, support these goals?

The most recent forum was in Worcester on September 29. Here is a [synthesis](#) of the results of the Worcester discussions of the three questions.

In Worcester, as in Cambridge and New Bedford, participants said they expect and want students to develop a wide range of skills and capacities, many of which are not measurable with a multiple choice, standardized exam like the MCAS. Participants also said they wanted students to be literate in math, English language arts, science, and history. The skills and capacities fell into seven categories:

- Real world skills
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking
- Civic-mindedness and cultural competency
- Social-emotional health
- Collaboration skills
- Being a lifelong learner

In Worcester, as in New Bedford and Cambridge, participants prioritized students acquiring life skills such as distinguishing fact from fiction, knowing how to problem solve and make informed decisions, financial, media, and digital literacy, knowing how to search and apply for jobs and being able to navigate unfamiliar systems. Many favored giving students the opportunity for internships and apprenticeships in their community.

Civic knowledge and participation was another major priority. Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration, students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, and respecting diverse cultures and different opinions.

Regarding how to measure these skills and capacities, Worcester participants echoed those from Cambridge and New Bedford, and emphasized the need to focus on student work, projects, portfolios and performance-based assessments. Recognizing the diverse strengths, interests and goals of our public school students, participants saw the need to offer multiple measures and pathways to graduation.

Among the ideas proposed by Worcester participants to measure readiness for graduation were these:

- Portfolios showing growth over time and student progress, with an 8th grade baseline assessment
- End-of-year qualifying project with a presentation/performance
- Research studies and presentation
- Capstone projects
- Self-assessment/interviews

In recognition of the substantial number of multilingual learners in our state, participants emphasized that students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills in their language of choice.

Looking forward to schools that can deliver high-quality learning experiences for every student, Worcester participants emphasized the fundamental and still unmet need for adequate educational funding and resources statewide. They want schools with the staffing and capacity to support student agency, passion and engagement, teacher professionalism and autonomy.

Discussions addressed the need to move away from privatized, "scripted curriculum" and a daily focus on boosting standardized test score results. Parents and educators want to see smaller class sizes, better family engagement, "community schools," and more time for educators to collaborate and share successful practices.

A version of this report is being shared with Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler, the Governor's Council on Graduation Requirements, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Joint Committee on Education of the Massachusetts Legislature.

At least five more People's Forums will be held in cities and towns across the state and by Zoom. The next People's forum will be in East Boston on October 16th at 6pm, followed by a Zoom forum on October 22 at 6:30pm aimed at Western Massachusetts and rural residents. (Details and registration for these and other forums can be found [here](#).)

Results of all these forums will be compiled and a final report will be made public and presented to the Governor's Council and the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Sponsors of the Worcester People's Forum include:

- Citizens for Public Schools
- Education Association of Worcester
- Worcester Education Collaborative
- Worcester Education Justice Alliance (WEJA)
- Free Worcester Coalition
- Senator Robyn Kennedy
- Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)
- AFT Massachusetts.

For more information about upcoming People's Forums, contact:

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