



An Act Empowering Students and Schools to Thrive (Thrive Act) Summary by AFT Massachusetts

A major education bill, the Thrive Act, was filed in both the [House](#) (H.495) and [Senate](#) (S.246) on January 20, 2023. The lead House sponsors are Reps. James Hawkins and Sam Montañó. The lead Senate sponsors are Sens. Jo Comerford, Adam Gomez, and Liz Miranda. Several other legislators have signed on as co-sponsors. AFT Massachusetts appreciates the leadership of these legislators and urges others to sign on as co-sponsors.

The bill would transform education in the Commonwealth, empowering communities with the tools and resources that students and schools need to thrive, and dramatically reducing the harm caused by the high-stakes, punitive use of standardized tests, such as state takeovers and denying diplomas. The bill would:

1. End the state’s harmful, failed, and undemocratic practice of taking over entire school districts.

The bill would end all existing receiverships of school districts (i.e., Lawrence, Holyoke, and Southbridge) within one year of enactment of the Act. The bill would also eliminate the statutory authority for district receiverships, thereby prohibiting future state takeovers of districts.

2. Provide real help to high-need schools by eliminating the state’s failed and punitive state intervention/takeover system and replacing it with a more democratic and locally driven process for supporting schools and students.

- The state’s harmful and failed practice of designating schools “chronically underperforming” and taking them over would end. The new system would strike the proper balance between state oversight and local control while fully complying with federal law.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) would identify schools for support consistent with criteria in federal law (Every Student Succeeds Act). The district would then convene a representative local stakeholder group (including educator, union, and parent representation) to develop a support plan for the school. The plan must tackle the root causes of the school’s challenges, examine resource inequities, and include evidence-based programs, such as smaller classes, one-on-one tutoring, and community schools. Following a public hearing, the school committee would approve each plan before submitting it to DESE.
- DESE must prioritize identified schools for additional funding above and beyond Chapter 70 allocations to support the evidence-based programs contained in the plan.
- Educators would have their employment and collective bargaining rights restored.

3. Support students by establishing a modified high school graduation requirement in which coursework as certified by the student’s district would replace the MCAS as the basis for showing student mastery of the skills, competencies, and knowledge required by the state standards.

4. Create a special commission with a range of education stakeholders to shape a positive future vision for student/school assessment that is authentic, equitable, and focused on supporting the whole child.