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Six Massachusetts Districts Launch Consortium to bring Alternative Measures to Schools

Senator Patricia Jehlen hosts legislative briefing to introduce the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), a partnership creating a new approach to student assessment and school accountability

Boston, MA — On January 30th, [Senator Patricia D. Jehlen](#) (Second Middlesex District) hosted a briefing at the Massachusetts State House to introduce the [Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment](#) (MCIEA) to the state legislature. The briefing was sponsored by the 2015-2016 Senate Special Committee on Innovative and Alternative Education. Senator Jehlen, leaders of MCIEA, and key partners introduced the newly launched initiative and discussed how their work will redefine the way we measure student learning and school quality in Massachusetts. MCIEA is a partnership of six MA public school districts and their local teacher unions from [Attleboro](#), [Boston](#), [Lowell](#), [Revere](#), [Somerville](#), and [Winchester](#).

Senator Jehlen kicked off the event with a brief introduction, speaking to the importance of assessment reform to benefit schools and students. “Though Massachusetts has been an innovator in many aspects of education, it has yet to innovate in the way it measures the progress of students and the quality of schools due to the one-size fits all accountability required under NCLB and Race to the Top,” observed Senator Jehlen. “Now that those restrictions have been lifted at the federal level, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to explore creating and utilizing broader and more accurate measures rather than high-stakes multiple choice tests in essentially two subjects.”

Judy Evans, Superintendent of Winchester Public Schools and member of the MCIEA Governing Board, affirmed Senator Jehlen’s statement. “MCIEA is taking a look at multiple factors to assess how well schools are doing, with the goal of not just holding ourselves accountable, but working on continuous improvement. This very careful work by this group of six districts, which I hope will expand, will net huge rewards for the participants. We will learn from and with each other.”

Erik Fearing, President of the Revere Teachers Association and co-chair of the MCIEA Governing Board, was next to speak about how MCIEA will measure the quality of participating schools. “We want to make sure that every school can reach a mark of proficiency, and can reach the goals that their communities set for them. And we want to make it clear that this goes beyond just a test score.”

Jack Schneider, professor at the [College of the Holy Cross](#), followed Mr. Fearing to discuss MCIEA's School Quality Measures framework, which includes multiple academic, social-emotional, and school culture measures. Professor Schneider explained that the consortium's work "is rooted in the idea that school quality cannot be captured fully or fairly by standardized test scores." Data, he observed, "can do a great deal to inform a school's stakeholders and to strengthen educational outcomes, but only if those data are valid, comprehensive, and clear."

Dan French, Executive Director of the [Center for Collaborative Education](#), was next to introduce MCIEA's new approach to assessing student learning that is focused on teacher-created performance assessments. "Performance assessments," he explained, "are activities that allow students to show what they know and can do through real-world application. Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in ways that will be expected of them later in college, career, and life." Teachers in MCIEA districts are participating in professional development institutes and school-based coaching focused on the creation of curriculum-embedded performance assessments.

The legislative briefing then transitioned to a panel discussion with MCIEA Governing Board members, featuring two superintendents and two teacher union representatives. The panel members spoke about why their district decided to join the consortium and their goals for rethinking assessment and accountability in their schools. As Adeline Bee, President of the Attleboro Education Association, put it: "We are all pushing to get these kids challenged, to ask them questions, to make them really think about the world out there, and to use the resources to solve problems. It's not a test score; it's so much more."

Paul Tritter, Director of Professional Learning at the Boston Teachers Union, added: "We're going to keep doing the work, and as we keep doing the work, we will show people about our students, about our teachers, about our schools, and about the great work that we can do by integrating real-world application and valuable assessment for learning and of learning."

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About the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

The [Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment](#) (MCIEA) is a partnership of six public school districts and their local teacher unions working together to redefine assessment and accountability in Massachusetts. MCIEA seeks to create a fair and comprehensive picture of school and student performance that leads to an increase in achievement for all students and a narrowing of prevailing achievement gaps among subgroups. The MCIEA governing board is comprised of superintendents and teacher union presidents from [Attleboro](#), [Boston](#), [Lowell](#), [Revere](#), [Somerville](#), and [Winchester](#). MCIEA is partnering with the [Center for Collaborative Education](#) and the [College of the Holy Cross](#), and is funded by the Massachusetts Networks Initiative and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

About Senator Patricia Jehlen

Massachusetts Senator Patricia Jehlen (Second Middlesex district) served as chair of the Special Senate Committee on Innovative and Alternative Education and is a key supporter of MCIEA. Through her legislative activities, Sen. Jehlen is addressing concerns around over-testing and over-reliance on limited measures of students and schools in the Commonwealth.