Testimony regarding MA House Bills 1941 and 1945

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1. Chair Peisch and members of the Joint Education Committee, thank you for offering this opportunity to comment on House Bills 1941 and 1945. For the past 3 years I have been studying the nature of personal learning plans as well as studying whether personal learning plans hold promise for supporting students’ academic success and college and career readiness. This research and technical assistance project is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy.

2. There is no doubt that today’s high school graduates need a post-secondary degree or credential in order to compete for occupations offering livable wages. Using unemployment wages data, research has demonstrated that within six years of leaving school, high school graduates and high school dropouts who have not engaged in post-secondary education or training have nearly identical outcomes including lower wage earnings, haphazard employment patterns, and a restricted range of occupational opportunities\(^1\). The European Union has already adopted policy language designed to maximize one’s employability throughout the lifespan\(^2\). Member countries are actively designing and testing new student-centered learning opportunities that result in all secondary students graduating with the career planning and management skills needed to become self-regulated learners\(^3\). In the United States, 23 states have already adopted legislation related to the implementation of personal learning plans\(^4\). The fact of the matter is that in order to address our future economic and workforce development challenges in Massachusetts: Today’s youth must graduate with the skills and dispositions needed to actively manage their careers by selecting into and completing a post-secondary education pathway and continuing throughout the lifespan to actively search for learning opportunities that continue to develop their competitive workforce skills\(^5\).

3. House Bills 1941 and 1945 represent the type of legislation that is critical to supporting the economic and workforce development interests of Massachusetts.
4. There are a number of indicators that engaging in personal learning plans are a promising practice.

a. Our research with 14 schools from four states around the country indicate that parents, educators, and students find personal learning plans to result in students completing a more rigorous program of study because students find out that school is relevant and post-secondary education critical to supporting them in achieving their career and life goals. Principals report hearing parents talking about their child’s personal learning plans with other parents during football games. We have reports of businesses taking the lead to coordinate the work day in order to give each parent the time needed to go to school for the personal learning plan parent-teacher conferences. Parents have even reported that engaging in personal learning plans have helped them create a stronger relationship with their child.

b. Personal learning plans have been endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals as well as the American School Counseling Association.

c. Our research has found that engaging in high quality academic preparation will likely result in students receiving better course grades. However, engaging in personal learning plans results in not only better grades but also career decision-making readiness and stress and health management skills which indicate that personal learning plans support students in becoming both college and career ready.

d. Our research also indicates that school counselors, career and technical education, and special education coordinators in each school need to be lead the personal learning plan efforts but to be truly effective it is critical that all teachers engage in personal learning plans with students and that each year these plans are used to engage in student-led parent-teacher conference and a senior exit interview with educators and local business leaders. House Bill 1941 is critical in order to validate and verify these types of practices in order to maximize the potential of personal learning plans in every district. House Bill 1945 should directly include a commissioner from special education to be part of the advisory committee.

e. Personal learning plans are best defined as both a process and a document. The process includes three phases: self-exploration, career exploration and career planning and management. Opportunities to engage in self- and career-exploration are critical to allowing the student to define their own career and life goals. Career planning and management then supports students in designing and aligning the middle school, high school, and post-secondary education and training courses needed to realize those goals. As a document, personal learning plans that are part of the college and career web-portals
that are available within Massachusetts or are currently being used by most school
districts. These webportals allow students to manage these course plans as well as
documenting the workforce readiness skills students have gathered. This document can
then be shared with parents, employers or admissions personnel to tell a more complete
study about their emerging skills and abilities. This documentation can be stored in the
form of pictures, video as well as traditional written or pdf documents\textsuperscript{11}.

f. In closing, creating and maintaining a competitive workforce is the most important non-
partisan issue of our time. House Bills 1941 and 1945 are critical to supporting the future
economic and workforce development interests of Massachusetts because they will
support all youth in developing the career planning and management skills needed to
navigate toward occupations offering high wages. As a result of these respective bills,
students will enter post-secondary education pathways with clear identified career goals
which will result in their incurring less debt because they will be taking less remedial
courses and be more deliberate in selection of college courses that support their career
goals. Not only will they be enter the workforce with higher wages, they are more likely
to enter more quickly and when job changes occur, will be more likely to bounce back
thus decreasing their length of unemployment.


