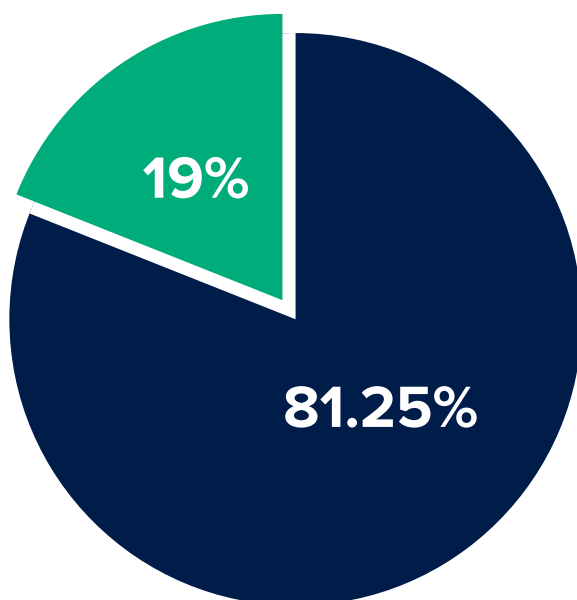


## ***The Healey administration is making decisions about the future of Massachusetts education, but what do the Graduation Council's listening sessions tell us about what the public has to say?***

In 2025, Governor Healey issued an executive order to establish the Statewide K-12 Graduation Council, and from April through June, eight listening sessions were created to gather feedback from the public to inform the council's recommendation for graduation requirements. The public's comments conveyed positive visions for what education in Massachusetts could look like. Speakers encouraged deeper learning, learning through inquiry and experience, and inviting creativity and flexibility into the classroom for both students and educators. They emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for students to powerfully demonstrate their learning, believing this is how students learn best. Despite this feedback and the Massachusetts public being vocal in its desire to move away from standardized tests with a 59-41 vote in the 2024 election, the Healey administration continues to push standardized tests as part of its proposed graduation requirements. Although these listening sessions were supposed to help guide policy, the administration continues to ignore what the public wants, and instead, has moved forward in making recommendations that do not reflect the public's feedback.

### **Where did the public stand on the topic of standardized testing during the Governor's K-12 Graduation Council Listening Sessions?**

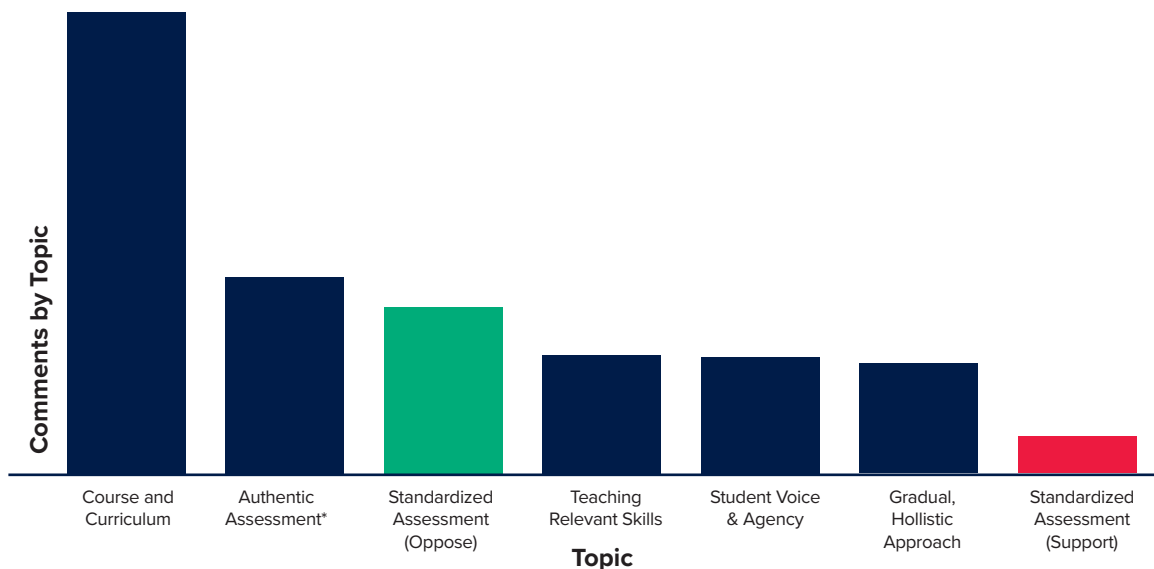


#### **Of those who commented on standardized testing:**

- Comments opposing standardized testing
- Comments supporting standardized testing

Across eight sessions, there were a total of 436 comments. Of the comments focused on standardized testing, the vast majority were opposed. Only nine comments favored standardized testing, and five of those were from one speaker. People spoke about their relief about the elimination of the MCAS as a graduation requirement, believing it was a failure, reducing “students’ academic journey to a single snapshot that ignores the[ir] learning styles and backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. One student put it more boldly: “Stay away from MCAS<sup>2</sup>”. Like this student, many speakers argued that the administration should move on from the standardized testing, as “there are other things we can do<sup>3</sup>”. The bar chart below shows the top six topics that were discussed in listening sessions. Each of these topics shows that the public has creative ideas about reimagining education and assessment for Massachusetts students, and the administration should take them into account.

### What were the top 6 topics discussed, and how do they compare to comments made in favor of standardized testing?



\*Authentic assessments include performance assessments, capstone projects, and portfolios.

The listening sessions revealed that the public had varied ideas about changes to courses and curriculum used in Massachusetts schools. Comments on curriculum focused on technology, artificial intelligence, digital literacy, academic rigor, training/curriculum/standards, health education, world languages, civic education, the arts, equitable access to specialized programs, courses on diversity, equity, bias and privilege, and climate and financial literacy, with financial literacy being one of the most highly suggested course requirements. Speakers were concerned particularly about the impact of technology and AI on student learning, and suggested mandating courses on digital literacy to ensure students are prepared for this changing landscape.

<sup>1</sup> Quote from a retired educator, May 28, 2025 listening session

<sup>2</sup> Student, May 28, 2025 listening session

<sup>3</sup> Andover educator, May 28, 2025 listening session

Additionally, many comments emphasized the importance of requiring courses focused on civic education. Said one former educator: “Civic life needs to be as important, if not more, than college and career... I don’t prepare students for civic life; I help equip them...because they’re already involved in civic life”.<sup>4</sup>

Authentic assessment was the next most- discussed topic, and elicited comments related to performance assessments, capstone projects, and portfolios. This feedback demonstrates that the public is ready to move on from the MCAS and any other form of standardized testing the administration may seek to introduce, as such tests do not do what authentic assessments can: center around inquiry and learning, and require students to apply their knowledge to real-world experiences. Regarding performance assessment, one speaker commented that “performance assessment aligns with the purpose of graduation requirements. Create opportunities for students to build skills like collaboration, problem-solving, etc. When these are organized into collections, they provide powerful, authentic demonstrations of student readiness. We value deeper learning, and we think performance assessment has the capacity to do this.”<sup>5</sup>

Speakers voiced their concerns with the disconnect between what students are expected to know to pass standardized tests and the skills needed for both academic success and success after graduation. Many speakers maintained that students need opportunities in school to develop a variety of skills, including the ability to conduct research, to communicate effectively, to think critically, to collaborate and to network.<sup>6</sup> These are skills that, as one speaker explained, “can’t be assessed on a test.” The general consensus was that we should maintain high academic standards for students, while also recognizing that standardized tests often fail to measure the most critical skills our students need to be successful in college, in their careers, and as members of their communities.

These listening sessions included a wide range of voices; there were current, former and retired educators, parents/guardians, researchers, community leaders, and students. The last session, held on June 30, 2025, was reserved solely for students to share their thoughts on a number of topics and themes. In prior sessions, however, non-students spoke about how crucial it was that the administration consider centering students’ voices to give them agency in making decisions about their education. In the June 14, 2025 session, for example, 14 people commented on involving students in not only the graduation requirements process, but in their broader educational journey. One speaker from the Youth Voice Project highlighted the consistent theme of students feeling unprepared for life after high school, and not having proper support, nor resources to find this support. Another speaker implored the administration to take these listening sessions to schools because “there are not enough students in the room to make these decisions [about students].”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Former educator and current education researcher, June 25, 2025 listening session

<sup>5</sup> Speaker from MCIEA, June 3, 2025 listening session

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous speaker, April 10, 2025 listening session

<sup>7</sup> A speaker from School Facts Boston, June 3, 2025 listening session

The listening sessions provided the Healey administration with more evidence that the Massachusetts public’s vote to eliminate the MCAS as a graduation requirement was the right one. The public has expansive, creative ideas about what education should look like in to ensure our students are deep learners, able to both to show and apply their skills and knowledge within and beyond the classroom. However, as these sessions have shown, many variables are involved in reimagining assessment and education in Massachusetts. Much of the feedback underscored the need for a gradual, holistic approach that would involve engaging more voices in the conversation to ensure high- quality education for all students. In slowing the process, Massachusetts would be aligned with other states that took a similar approach. If we want our students to be critical thinkers, community-oriented, and engaged in deeper learning, the administration should take the lead in deeply thinking about implementing new graduation requirements that capture what the public wants for Massachusetts students. As one parent commented: “Reimagining graduation requirements is really reimagining our education system. What does education mean for Massachusetts?”<sup>8</sup> According to the public, education in Massachusetts should be authentic to students’ learning experiences, with ways to engage meaningfully in what they are learning, and providing them with different methods to show what they know and can do in ways that demonstrate they are truly prepared for post-graduate life.

<sup>8</sup> Founder of a youth nonprofit organization & parent, June 3, 2025 listening session