



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education  
In support of S.251 – An Act relative to dropout prevention and recovery  
By Terry Yoffie, LWVMA Education Specialist and LWVMA Education Committee Chair  
June 1, 2015

The League has long stood for equity in education. Today Hispanic, African-American, limited-English-proficient, special-education, and low-income students make up a disproportionate number of the 5,764<sup>1</sup> who drop out annually in Massachusetts. There has been a persistent equity gap in Massachusetts education that will not change without effective interventions.

Without a basic level of education, many of our students will be less likely to have a job and more likely to serve time in prison and/or to receive public assistance. They are also the least likely to vote. It is incumbent then for us to ensure that all children have the opportunity, within their individual capacities, to live and participate productively in society.

The League's position that "equality" and "quality" ultimately are inseparable means that we must do all we can to address the achievement gap. Therefore, LWVMA strongly supports S.251 and the recommendations of the Massachusetts Graduation Dropout and Prevention and Recovery Commission, in particular their call to action:

*We can no longer tolerate the dropout crisis, nor can we remain passive observers when we have the capacity to change the course of these students' futures. We have the tools to identify students who are at risk of dropping out, and successful prevention, intervention, and dropout recovery strategies to learn from and replicate.*

*We must demonstrate our commitment to preventing students from dropping out in the future – and welcoming back students who have left school without a diploma – by offering learning environments that promote academic excellence and provide students with the teaching, support, and guidance they require to become engaged lifelong learners and productive and fulfilled citizens.<sup>2</sup>*

Today the minimum requirement for a decent future is a high school diploma. The economic implication of the loss of human potential and the societal burden that the high dropout rate creates need to be addressed.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/gradrates/> Data are from 2013-2014, the most recent report date.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/edu/dropout-report.html>



We would like to share three concerns about the implementation of S.251. The first is that the data collection required for the Early Warning Indicator System may be onerous for already overburdened schools. The second is that the Legislature will not provide sufficient funding to address the needs of students once they have been identified as “at-risk students.” Third, we are particularly concerned that the resources will not be available at the elementary school level, since the Graduation Coach Program does not start until Grade 7. Therefore, we would like to see implementation firmly tied to state funding. We have seen initiatives that were well intentioned but have put further pressure on local school budgets when they lost their funding. We urge that the funding approach be consistently provided for our most vulnerable students.

LWVMA strongly urges the Joint Committee on Education vote favorably on S.251, advocate for sufficient funding to implement the program, and ensure schools receive the resources to identify “at-risk students” early, assist students before they drop out and provide resources for alternative education options for those who leave high school before graduation.

Thank you for your consideration.