



March 22, 2019

Senator Jason Lewis, Senate Chair  
Representative Alice Hanlon Peisch, House Chair  
Joint Committee on Education  
MA State House, Room 511-B  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Lewis and Chairwoman Peisch:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Betty Francisco and I am the co-founder of Amplify Latinx, a non-partisan, collaborative convener that builds Latinx economic and political power by significantly increasing Latinx civic engagement and representation in leadership positions across sectors. We collaborate with over 70 Latinx organizations in the Commonwealth. One of our priorities is advancing educational access and Latinx leadership representation in our schools.

Today, 20 percent of Massachusetts public school students and 42 percent of Boston Public School Students are Latinx. And yet, Latinx and other students of color in Massachusetts are receiving significantly less funding per pupil than is necessary to achieve educational success and parity with their peers. Lower income districts like Holyoke and Worcester which have a higher population of Latinx children, spend under \$13,000 per child while wealthier and less diverse districts like Lexington, spend over \$18,000 per student each year. As a result of these funding disparities, only 30% of Latinx kids are reading at grade level, and only 33% of high school students are scoring as college ready on the SATs. Our community partners who serve poor children increasingly report deteriorating conditions in K-12 schools. Many schools lack adequate supplies, teacher diversity is lacking, bilingual teachers and other specialty supports are frequently cut due to budget reductions, and school facilities are inadequate and unhealthy for children to thrive.

High quality education is one of the most effective equalizers that allows Latinx families to overcome the historical financial inequalities and break the cycle of poverty. This has implications on the entire family structure. However, access to quality education is predicated on equitable funding.

We know that Massachusetts children living in low-income districts and English language learners are not receiving the quality public education that is required. The problem is further compounded by the reality that these schools are also over-burdened with additional challenges not present in more affluent, less minority represented school districts. Schools, where there are majority minorities face greater difficulties attracting qualified teachers, face many more challenges in addressing student's needs, and receive less support from parents.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to do right by our children and pass a bill that *equitably* funds our historically underserved low income communities and directly addresses historical, pre-existing inequalities. We urge you to pass a bill that address the structural



budget issues that affect all districts, and significantly increases funding to adequately support our English language learners and low-income students and eliminates inequities in spending between high-poverty districts and their wealthier counterparts.

The PROMISE Act (S.238/H.586) is the proposal best positioned to provide effective, equitable finance reform for students of color, students from low-income families, English learners and students with disabilities. It is also the only bill that would implement all five recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC). In contrast, the Governor's bill and the Tucker bill both fail to include adequate funding for low-income students, and lack the transparency and data-tracking measures to ensure the money is reaching the intended populations.

The Promise Act is an important step forward but it is truly the baseline and the bare minimum we need at this time and we ask that the Promise Act also ensure that:

- New funding comes with greater transparency around both spending and student outcomes; and
- District leaders work with students, families, and community advocates to select and implement innovative strategies that are research and evidence-informed for improving opportunity and outcomes for students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Massachusetts prides itself on its public education. But a system that leaves our most vulnerable children behind is an unjust system and leaves the Commonwealth vulnerable. As an organization whose mission is to advance Latinx leaders into decision-making roles, we have a vested interest in ensuring that our Commonwealth is providing the quality public education and supports necessary for our Latinx children to succeed in school and the workplace. The implication of poor student achievement on future leadership capacity is apparent. We urge this Committee to act, and to invest in communities of color and position our Latinx children to thrive and reach their full potential as leaders of tomorrow.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Francisco  
Co-founder  
Amplify Latinx