

**Springfield Republican**  
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**Bay State high schools must achieve more**  
**By David Driscoll**  
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Nationwide, our high school students are not measuring up when it comes to possessing the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college and the workplace.

Gathering momentum for this issue has never been more important. As chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress — also known as The Nation’s Report Card — I know our efforts to improve education must be more expedient.

There is good news here at home. The recently released NAEP Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009 assessment shows Massachusetts 12th graders are excelling at higher rates than their peers. Our students had the top reading and mathematics scores among those in 11 states participating in a NAEP pilot study.

This is encouraging, but we must do more to ensure all students receive a quality education. The education debate has placed a national spotlight on the complicated issues producing inequities in schools across the nation, including the need to improve teacher quality and curricula. As a former math teacher, education commissioner, and local and state schools superintendent, I understand an excellent teacher in every classroom is crucial to school reform.

Quality teachers and curricula pave the way for preparing all of our students for today’s global, competitive economy to ensure not only their personal success, but also the success of our state and our nation.

We need a productive, efficient workforce: adaptable people with a capacity for critical thinking and a strong foundation of math and communication skills. While the recession has affected people at all education levels, Americans with less education are more likely to be without a job.

The current unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma is nearly 15 percent, compared to 4.4 percent for those with a college degree. Traditionally, a high school diploma was a primary goal of education; a sufficient prerequisite for getting a job that could sustain an entire family. Today, this is rarely the case. There is a widening gap between the earnings of high school graduates and those with postsecondary education and training.

Here at home, the state Office of Labor and Workforce Development projects that nearly one million jobs will need to be filled in Massachusetts by 2016. Technological advances

are spurring the demand for more highly educated workers: of the 30 fastest-growing occupations in Massachusetts, 23 require at least an associate's degree. But the sad truth is many high school graduates simply are not prepared for college or job training.

To figure out why, we must determine what exactly our high school graduates need to know and be able to do to succeed in higher education and the workforce. It may astonish many to learn that America has no credible indicator to measure whether high school graduates are prepared for postsecondary education and training.

That is why the Governing Board created the NAEP 12th Grade Preparedness Commission, spearheading an effort to use NAEP 12th grade assessments as an indicator of how well our nation's high school graduates are prepared for college and job training. The Governing Board's research and analysis on student preparedness will not single-handedly transform American student achievement overnight.

But it will tell us whether the approximately 2.2 million young people graduating from high school every year are prepared academically for college or job training — and provide evidence and information critical to making reforms for the benefit of students who are not. It is up to all of us to take action in whatever ways possible to finally confront this crisis rather than just talk about it.

*David Driscoll is National Assessment Governing Board Chair and former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education.*