

“There is not just a question of money. It will take a partnership of teachers, parents and administrators to improve student achievement. No one and no thing can accomplish this monumental task alone.”

“Treat all students equally, provide high-quality teaching, have high expectations and students will succeed.”

“In today’s world it is absolutely necessary for students to achieve at the highest level their ability allows, and then go beyond.”

# PRIMARY SOURCES: AMERICA’S TEACHERS ON AMERICA’S SCHOOLS MASSACHUSETTS

A PROJECT OF SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

“Everyone should finish high school and move on to something higher. I think they all can.”

“Give them standardized tests, but not all the time, and their lives shouldn’t depend on it; and neither should ours.”

“Learning is a lifelong project and all students

are capable

being lifelong learners.”

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation

“How do we prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist?”

“Our best schools are those that provide all students with equal educational opportunities, provide all teachers with quality resources, and provide all parents with the information they need to keep kids growing and learning.”  
– *Elementary School Teacher in Massachusetts*

***Primary Sources: Massachusetts* is meant for use in conjunction with the complete *Primary Sources* report available at [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).**

# A NOTE FROM SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

In March 2010, Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the landmark study, *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*, placing the views of our nation's public school teachers at the center of the discussion on education reform.

More than 40,000 teachers participated in the survey – from every state and at every grade level – and the unprecedented size and scope of the study allows for the release of new, state-level data from Massachusetts. *Primary Sources: Massachusetts* is based on the responses of more than 800 public school teachers across Massachusetts who participated in the national survey.

We asked teachers about the state of American education, the challenges facing students and the variety of supports and tools that teachers need to tackle those challenges. They responded with powerful, nuanced opinions on a number of issues, from student and teacher performance, to classroom innovation and academic standards, to the importance of the school-to-home connection.

As is the case with their peers nationwide, teachers from Massachusetts had important opinions about the critical issues in education at the national and state levels. Specifically, teachers in Massachusetts:

- Are more likely than their peers nationwide to believe that their students will leave high school prepared to succeed in college.
- Generally say the level of difficulty of Massachusetts' standards is about right, but of those who disagree, many more say standards are too high rather than too low (23% vs. 8%)
- Say clearer and common standards across states would make a strong impact on student achievement.
- Are less likely to say that monetary performance rewards for teachers make a strong impact on either student achievement or teacher retention.

It is important to note that *Primary Sources: Massachusetts* is a small subset of the data we collected on Massachusetts' teachers. Although we have selected the most statistically significant and state-relevant data for inclusion in this mini-report, we encourage you to look at the additional data on Massachusetts available in the appendices of the complete *Primary Sources* report.

While *Primary Sources: Massachusetts* reflects the wide range of voices and opinions of teachers across the state, one thing is constant: Teachers teach for the love of their students and the chance to make a difference in those young lives. Our goal should be to do all we can to support them in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



**Margery Mayer**

President, Scholastic Education, Scholastic Inc.



**Vicki L. Phillips**

Director of Education, College Ready, United States Program

# THE CHALLENGE

---

## Massachusetts's Teachers Recognize the Challenges Facing Their Students

Teachers in Massachusetts are keenly aware of the limitations of a high school diploma and the disconnect between students' current levels of achievement and the levels at which they must perform to achieve success beyond high school.

Specifically, in Massachusetts:

- Teachers say that a high school diploma is not enough for today's students. Ninety-two percent of teachers in the state say that the most important goal of schools and teaching is to prepare students for success beyond high school (93% nationally).
- Nearly nine out of 10 teachers say that not all their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (91% nationally).
- Only one in five (21%) of teachers strongly agree that their students enter their classroom prepared for on-grade-level work and an additional 45% "somewhat agree" (in comparison to 16% and 44%, respectively, among teachers nationwide).
- Only 30% of teachers rate student academic achievement at their schools as "Excellent" (28% nationally).
- Fewer than six in 10 (58%) say that more than three quarters of their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college. This measure is higher than the percentage of teachers nationwide (46%)—likely reflecting Massachusetts' relatively high high school graduation rate (75.9 vs. the national average of 69.2).

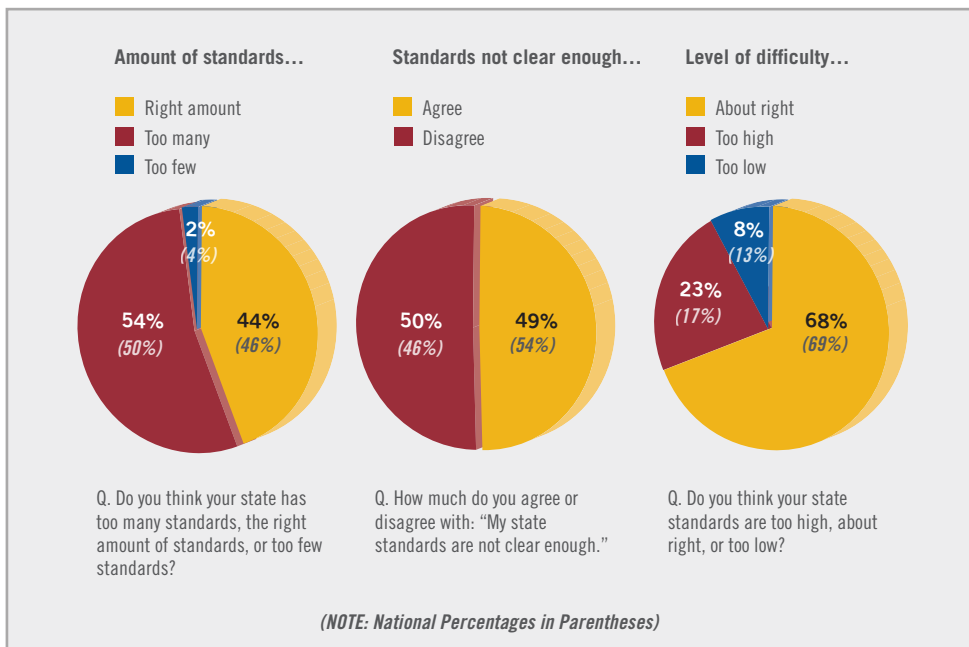
# STATE AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Current Massachusetts State Standards

As is the case with their peers across the nation, teachers in Massachusetts recognize the role of academic standards in improving student achievement and preparedness. They are divided, however, in their opinions on the amount and clarity of their state standards:

- Teachers are split in their opinions on the amount of state academic standards, with more than half saying that Massachusetts has too many standards (54%) and fewer than half saying that the number of standards is “about right” (44%), (50% and 46% nationally, respectively).
- A very small number of teachers in Massachusetts (2%) believe that the state has too few standards (4% nationally).
- Teachers are split in their opinions on the clarity of state academic standards, with half saying that Massachusetts’ standards are clear enough, and half saying they are not.
- While most teachers (about seven in 10) say the rigor of their state standards is about right, the remaining three in 10 teachers are more likely to say standards are too high (23%), rather than too low (8%).

## Teachers' Views on Massachusetts State Standards



## Massachusetts Teachers Support Clearer Standards, Common Across States

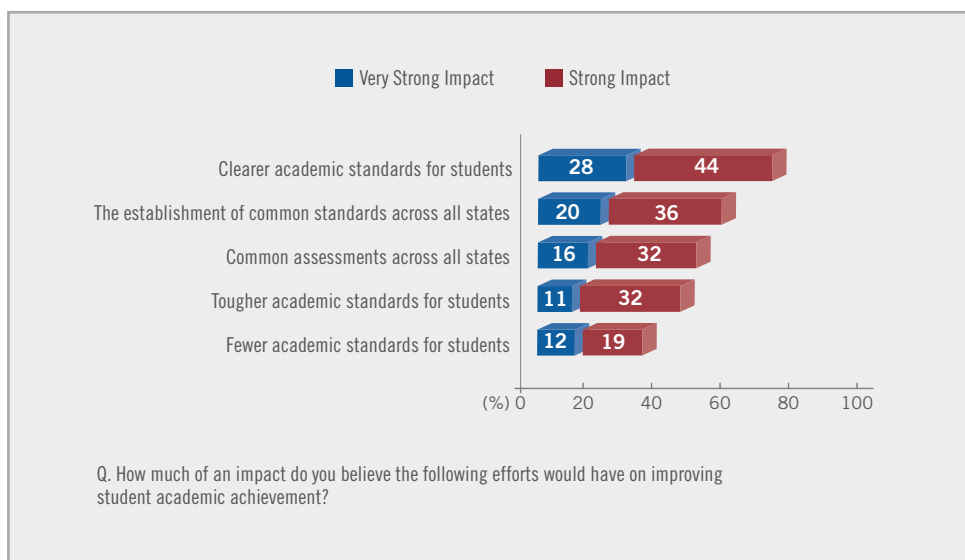
Massachusetts's teachers support the establishment of clear and common standards across states. They say the following measures would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Clearer academic standards for students (72% in Massachusetts, 74% nationally)
- The establishment of common standards across all states (56% in Massachusetts, 60% nationally)

In keeping with the views of teachers across the country, Massachusetts's teachers are far less certain that fewer and more challenging standards would make a strong or very strong impact on improving student achievement. While their views on tougher standards essentially mirror the views of teachers nationally, they are slightly less likely than the nation to believe that fewer standards will help achievement:

- Tougher academic standards for students (42% in Massachusetts, 45% nationally)
- Fewer academic standards for students (30% in Massachusetts, 34% nationally)

### Massachusetts Teachers' Views on the Impact Changes to Current Standards Would Have on Improving Academic Achievement



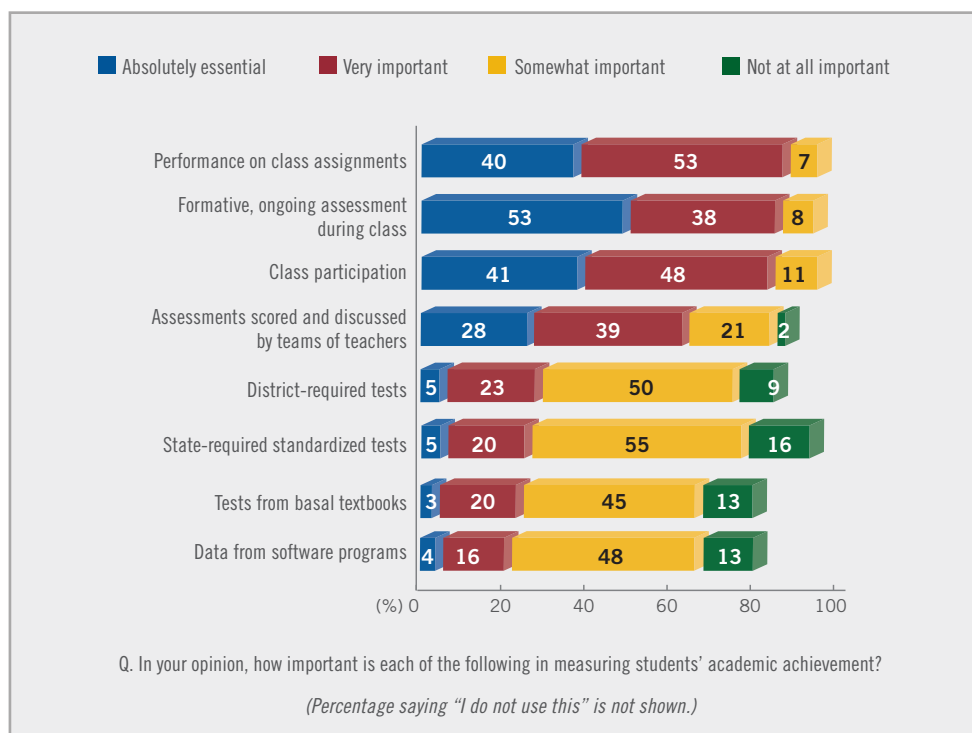
# EVALUATING STUDENT AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Evaluating Student Performance

Massachusetts's teachers are similar to the nation's teachers in their firm belief that student assessment should be driven by in-classroom experiences, including formative ongoing assessments, class participation and performance on class assignments.

Teachers in Massachusetts also see value in standardized tests as a way to evaluate student performance. Only 9% and 16% of teachers say district- and state-required tests, respectively, are “not at all” important in measuring student academic achievement (11% and 16% nationally).

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Importance of Student Performance Measures



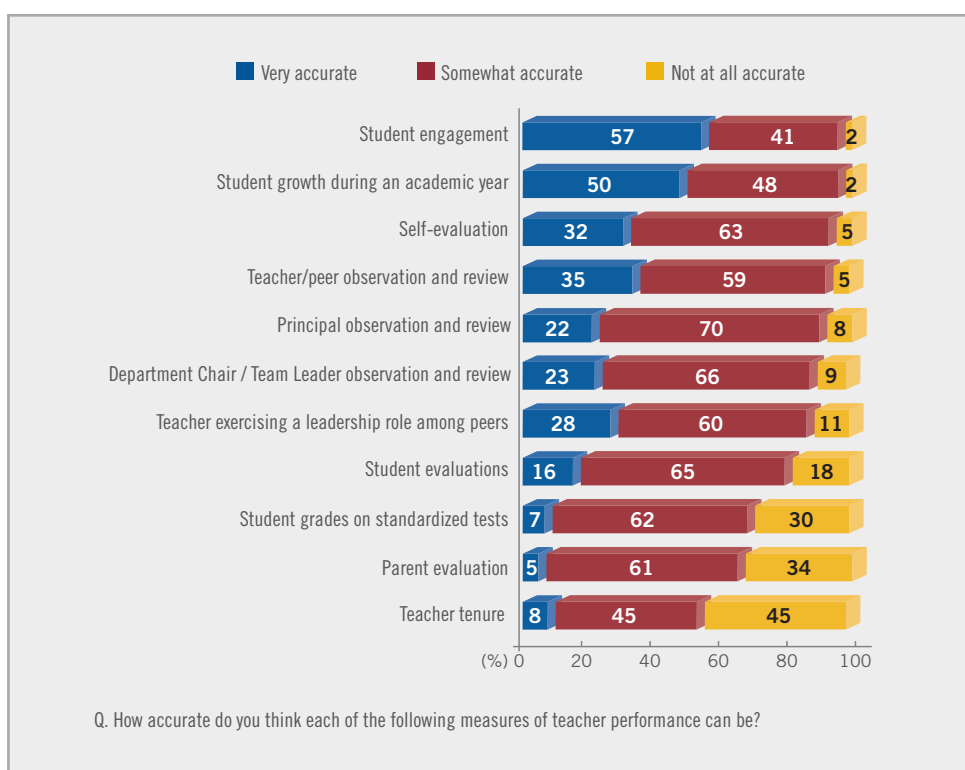
Further, as noted on page 4, 48% of Massachusetts's teachers say common assessments across states would have a very strong or strong impact on improving student achievement—with an additional 37% saying these would make a moderate impact.

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Measuring Teacher Performance

In qualitative conversation, teachers stress a desire for their performance to be based on factors they can impact directly—like student growth and student engagement—and not on factors that fail to consider the realities of individual students in individual classrooms.

This is clearly borne out in *Primary Sources* data at both the national and Massachusetts levels. By far, teachers say that student growth over the course of an academic year and student engagement are the most accurate measures of teacher performance.

### Massachusetts Teachers' Views on the Degree of Accuracy of Measures of Teacher Performance





# TEACHER RETENTION

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention

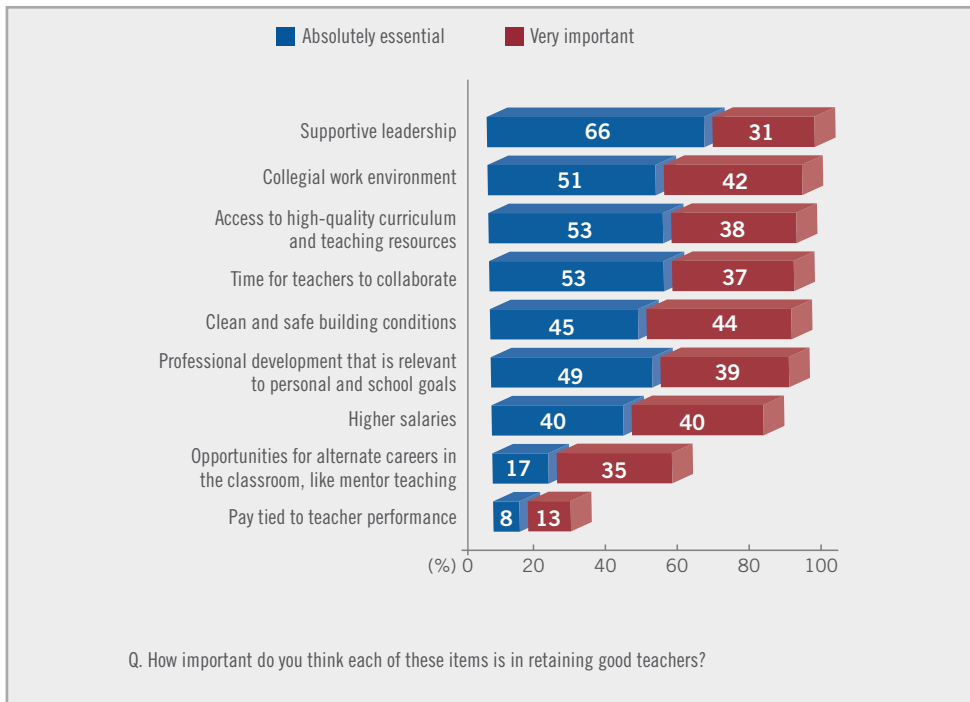
Overall, Massachusetts's teachers feel similarly to their peers nationwide when it comes to the importance of various factors in retaining good teachers.

In nearly every state in the nation, supportive leadership is ranked as the most important factor in retaining good teachers, and Massachusetts is no exception. In Massachusetts, 66% of teachers say that supportive leadership is absolutely essential in retaining good teachers (68% nationally).

Higher salaries shows a good deal more variation across states, but overall ranks far lower than non-monetary measures. In Massachusetts, teacher pay ranks seventh out of nine items asked about, with 40% of Massachusetts teachers saying it is absolutely essential in retaining good teachers. This is slightly lower than the national average of 45%.

Additionally, teachers in Massachusetts are significantly more likely than their peers nationwide to say that having a collegial work environment is absolutely essential in retaining good teachers (51% in Massachusetts, 42% nationally).

## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention

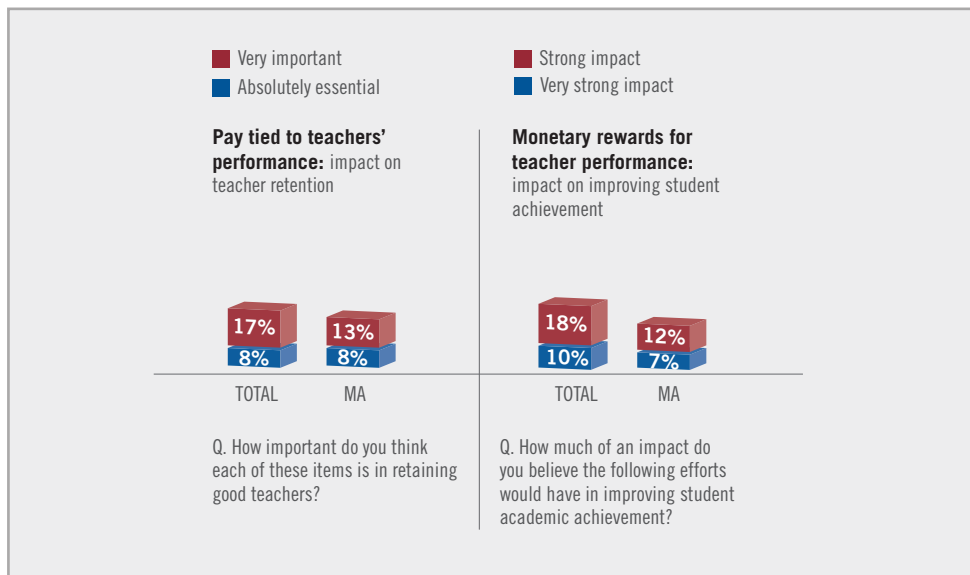


## Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Monetary Compensation

Teachers in Massachusetts are less likely than teachers nationwide to view pay-for-performance systems as making an impact on either teacher retention or student achievement:

- Only 21% (26% nationally) say that pay for performance is a critical component of retaining good teachers.
- Only one in five (19% in Massachusetts, 28% nationally) say that monetary rewards for teacher performance would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student academic achievement.

### Massachusetts Teachers' Views on Monetary Issues



---

## **Methodology**

This report is based on the responses of the 809 teachers in Massachusetts who participated in the national survey for *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*. The data reflect a cross-section of Massachusetts' teachers across many teacher and school characteristics, including grade level(s) taught, years of teaching experience and community income.

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted in March through June of 2009 by phone (n=281) and online (n=528). For more details on the methodology of this study, please see the full *Primary Sources* report at: [www.scholastic.com/primarysources/](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/)

---

“This job doesn't pay much but I always want to go to work”

“Teaching is not like any other job. It's a passion.”

“Standards are about equity and expectation.”

“Value should be placed on education. Every job, career, and occupation starts here.”

**PRIMARY SOURCES** is the beginning  
of an ongoing dialogue with America's Teachers.

We welcome your thoughts and opinions on the report at  
[www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).

“If you're not tech-savvy, you can't compete in the global marketplace.”

“Role model the skills, believe in the students, and never give up.”

“If we are going to compete as a nation we should be learning as a nation.”

“We have a great system for getting them through the system. We don't have a great system to teach them to think outside the box.”