



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS  
JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Student Opportunity Act**  
**Fact Sheet**

September 19, 2019

The Student Opportunity Act makes an unprecedented \$1.5 billion new investment in Massachusetts public education, ensuring public schools have adequate resources to provide a high-quality education to students across the state, regardless of zip code or income level. Assuming inflation, over time the bill could provide an estimated \$2.2 billion.

The Student Opportunity Act significantly helps school districts that serve high percentages of low-income students. At the same time, school districts across the Commonwealth will benefit from updates to the existing funding formula, along with increased state investment in other vital education aid programs such as transportation, school buildings and special education.

These new investments, coupled with policy updates, are designed to monitor and measure progress, support effective approaches to closing opportunity gaps, and deliver results for all students.

This bill modernizes the K-12 education funding and policy landscape in four areas:

1. **Fully implements the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC) to ensure that the school funding formula provides adequate and equitable funding to all districts across the state.** Provides an estimated \$1.4 billion in new Chapter 70 aid over and above inflation when fully implemented over the next seven years. The foundation budget is updated as follows:
  - Estimates school districts' employee and retiree **health care** costs using up to date health insurance trend data collected by the state's Group Insurance Commission (GIC).

- **Increases special education** enrollment and cost assumptions to more accurately reflect district enrollment.
  - **Increases funding for English learners (EL)** that is differentiated by grade level to reflect the greater resources required to educate our older EL students.
  - Addresses the needs of districts educating high concentrations of **students from low-income households** by:
    - Providing additional funding based on the share of low-income students in each district; districts educating the largest percentage of low-income students will receive an additional increment equal to 100% of the base foundation;
    - Returning the definition of low-income to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, as opposed to the 133% level that has been used in recent years.
2. **Provides additional state financial support to help public schools and communities deliver a high-quality education to every student by:**
- Increasing foundation rates for **guidance and psychological services** that will support expanded social–emotional supports and mental health services.
  - Fully funding **charter tuition reimbursements**, which provide transitional aid to help districts when students leave to attend charter schools, within a three year timetable.
  - Expanding the **special education circuit breaker**, which reimburses districts for extraordinary special education costs, to include transportation costs in addition to instructional costs, phased in over four years.
  - Lifting the annual cap on **Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)** spending for school building construction/renovation by \$150 million (from \$600 million to \$750 million), enabling more projects across the state to be accepted into the MSBA funding pipeline.
3. **Implements policy updates designed to maximize the impact of new funding in improving student outcomes and closing opportunity gaps.**
- Establishes the **21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Trust Fund** to provide flexible funding to districts and schools pursuing creative approaches to student learning and district improvement.

- School districts must develop and make publicly available **plans for closing opportunity gaps**. These plans will include specific goals and metrics to track success.
- The Secretary of Education will collect and publish data on **student preparedness in each district and high school for post-graduate success** in college and the workforce.
- Establishes a **Data Advisory Commission** to help improve the use of data at the state, district, and school levels to inform strategies that strengthen teaching, learning and resource allocation.

4. **Identifies education policy areas requiring further analysis.**

- The Department of Revenue (DOR) and DESE are directed to analyze the method of **determining required local contributions** in the Chapter 70 formula for the purpose of improving equity, predictability and accuracy.
- Establishes a **Rural Schools Commission** to investigate the unique challenges facing rural and regional school districts with low and declining enrollment. The Commission will make recommendations for further updates to help impacted districts and communities.