*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

### 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906 Telephone: (781) 338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Farzana Mohamed, Board Budget Committee Chair |
| **Date:** | November 10, 2022 |
| **Subject:** | FY24 Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Priorities |

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) Budget Committee met in October and November to discuss the priority areas of focus for the Board’s FY24 state budget priorities for presentation to the full Board. The Committee’s discussions recognized the current state of K-12 public education funding with the infusion of unprecedented federal funding support and the Commonwealth’s commitment to the funding schedule called for in the 2019 Student Opportunity Act.

As I summarized at our October Board meeting, the Committee focused its discussion on advancing financial resources that support the Commissioner’s priorities and areas of focus identified by Budget Committee members. This discussion outlined a number of areas the Commissioner and Department are actively working on to continue advancement for all students as we continue to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As always, the Committee recommends that the Board support the maximum funding available to support the state education accounts (Chapter 70, Special Education Circuit Breaker, Charter School Tuition Reimbursement, and other district transportation reimbursement accounts).

The Commissioner has asked the Budget Committee to support a structural budget shift for its Early College work in the FY24 state budget. Currently the main appropriation that funds the Early College programming is appropriated to the Executive Office of Education. As the primary funder of Early College grants, this requires that funds be moved internally within the state budget from EOE to DESE before funding can be delivered to grantees to carry out the work. It would be administratively simpler to have the funding appropriated by the Legislature to DESE in the next state budget, saving unnecessary budget process work in administering the program.

Additionally, Budget Committee members highlighted a number of specific areas, including:

* An emphasis and continued focus on early grade literacy. We specifically discussed the need to highlight early literacy as a priority item, particularly recognizing learning loss related to the pandemic, so that attention can be paid to foundational outcomes.
* Pilots and initiatives for alternative assessment frameworks
* Support to expand educational offerings to provide enhanced career and vocational technical education programs.
* Targeted assistance to underperforming schools and districts. (That would include, for example, the $10 million committed to the Boston Public Schools earlier this year.)
* A number of initiatives to address the learning loss resulting from the pandemic, including grants for tutoring and other interventions
* Several initiatives underway at the department to provide multi-tiered elements of support to schools, including professional development opportunities for educators.
* Furthering the department’s efforts to strengthen curriculum review and develop recommended best practices for adoption by school districts (e.g, CURATE and EdReports).

The committee also discussed the importance of providing adequate rural school aid. Finally, the committee touched upon Social and Emotional Learning, noting a need to focus on addressing chronic absenteeism, perhaps via a program of matching funding.

The Department noted in the two Committee meetings that these specific priorities are consistent with the Commissioner’s priorities for the current school year.

* Provide Supports to Accelerate Student Learning
* Build a Diverse and Culturally Responsive Workforce
* Cultivate Safe and Healthy Learning Environments
* Align DESE Supports to a Shared Academic Vision of Deeper Learning

In addition to these priority areas, the Budget Committee expressed support for and an interest in learning more about Gifted and Talented Education in Massachusetts. While we feel that the Board as the policy-making body should be informed of this interest, I note that we have not received a full exposition of the subject, nor has the staff offered a full review of the issues surrounding it. We look forward to having the Commissioner present a report on this topic, and we welcome further staff review and a fuller discussion by the Board.

The Budget Committee recommends that the Board authorize the Commissioner to work with the Secretary, Governor, Governor-elect, and Legislature to finalize an FY24 state budget for the Department that supports our collective priorities for the 2023-2024 school year.