*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Farzana Mohamed, Board Budget Committee Chair |
| **Date:**  | November 20, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | FY25 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 FY25 state budget priorities for presentation to the full Board. The committee’s discussions recognized the current state of K-12 public education funding, noting the Commonwealth’s commitment to the funding schedule called for in the 2019 Student Opportunity Act.

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).

We also noted that recent budgets have included substantial tranches of federal funding support related to pandemic recovery, and that these resource infusions will taper off in the coming months. The preponderance of the state budget is programmed through specific formulaic aid distributions; the biggest share of those funds are automatically allocated to fund Chapter 70, circuit breaker reimbursements, district transportation reimbursement accounts, and rural aid.

In the committee’s discussions in October and November, we supported the concept of funding a strategic commitment to and investment in three crucial topical areas that underpin a foundation for broader student success:

**Early Literacy Teacher Training**

* Strategically targeted funding to support improvements in early literacy programming that will increase rates of reading proficiency by third grade. The committee advocates that all teachers and administrators statewide would receive training, with intensive support for certain school districts.
* Specifically, the committee’s discussion highlighted the following areas of effort needed to bolster existing initiatives:
	+ More funding is needed to provide districts with assistance towards professional development costs as they adopt recognized high quality instructional materials. If such targeted and widespread assistance is not made available, beyond that provided by Chapter 70, it is unlikely that the purchase of these high quality instructional materials will have the desired impact.
	+ Oversight of educator preparation programs: The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) needs more opportunities to improve the workforce at the pre-service stage, through its oversight and authorization of educator preparation programs. While DESE has been active in this work, there is a need to accelerate efforts so as to reach all 70 educator preparation programs, as well as to stimulate new initiatives such as the apprenticeship models currently underway in other states. The costs of such an expanded effort will need to be borne by new funding.
	+ DESE’s Center for Instructional Support (CIS), through its Mass Literacy program, has made positive progress towards scaling up the efforts of DESE’s statewide literacy strategic plan. Its CURATE program aligns quality curricula with Massachusetts frameworks, and reviews and vets existing curricular resources. DESE oversaw the development of open-source curricula, a review of screening tools to ensure high quality, and the disbursement of grants to offer professional development. It also engages in educator preparation and professional development. A dedicated higher funding level for DESE’s CIS would allow it to accelerate these efforts.

**Systems of Support for Social Emotional Learning, Mental and Behavioral Health, and Wellness**

* Funding would support expanded SEL/Mental Health grant efforts, as well as new efforts to support implementation of the newly approved Comprehensive Health and Physical Education framework, and continued implementation support for DESE's social emotional learning indicator system (SELIS) and service-learning academic integration initiatives. This work supports the Administration's goals around systems to support mental health and wellness, and helps advance DESE's Educational Vision, specifically Whole Student strategic objective efforts to "cultivate systems to support the whole student and foster joyful, healthy, and supportive learning environments so that all students feel valued, connected, nourished, and ready to learn."

**Teacher Diversification and Pipeline**

* The committee recommends expansion funds in response to high demand for the Teacher Diversification Grant and for new research around recruitment and retention of teachers.

Further, Budget Committee members highlighted the importance to students of financial literacy programs, as well as initiatives to further college and career readiness.

Members of the Budget Committee also received some correspondence from advocates for particular education programs. While the Board as the policy-making body should be informed of these ideas, I note that we have not received a full exposition of the concepts, nor has the staff conducted a full review of them.

The Budget Committee looks forward to discussing its recommendations with the Board at the November 21 meeting. We recommend that the Board authorize the Commissioner to work with the Secretary, Governor, and Legislature to finalize an FY25 state budget for elementary and secondary education that supports our collective priorities for the 2024-2025 school year.