

Education Leaders Quarterly Webinar

Winter 2026

Commissioner Martinez

Wednesday, March 4, 2026



Agenda

- Welcome
- Secretary Transition
- Commissioner Priority Updates
 - Accelerating Achievement
 - Statewide Graduation Council
 - Mass Literacy
- Federal Funding Update
- Time-Out Regulations Guidance
- Impact of Snow Days on Student Learning Time Requirements
- Immigration Guidance
- Upcoming Regulations
- State Student Advisory Council
- Questions

Secretary Transition



Commissioner Priority Updates

Accelerating Achievement

- Accelerating Achievement is a statewide learning partnership between DESE and a large and diverse group of districts, focused on evidence-based school improvement practices.
- DESE's charge is to provide more responsive learning supports to the field, while also meeting statutory assistance requirements.
- DESE seeks to develop deeper understandings of local school improvement efforts and to strategically partner with districts in areas where DESE can add value.

Commissioner Priority Updates

Statewide Graduation Council

- Launched three external advisory groups in January to advise the Co-Chairs and Council on implementation of the recommendations and inform the final report
 - Learning Experiences and Mastery
 - College, Career, and Civic Readiness
 - LEA Leaders
- Over 60 practitioners from across 50 LEAs

Commissioner Priority Updates

Statewide Graduation Council

- External advisory groups, DESE working groups, and the Council will continue to meet throughout the spring
- Recently launched public input form is online: [Statewide Graduation Council Input Form](#)
- The final report is due to the Governor and the Legislature in June 2026

Commissioner Priority Updates

Mass Literacy: What's happening in early literacy

- 15 districts participating in PRISM I
- 31 districts selecting and adopting new curriculum in PRISM II
- 333 schools participating in statewide high-dosage tutoring
 - 10,000 students primarily in first grade
- DESE is updating the list of approved early literacy screening assessments, to be released this summer

Commissioner Priority Updates

Mass Literacy: Current and upcoming opportunities

- Registration is open for summer Literacy Launch Institutes
 - Open to any preK-3 educator who works with literacy
 - www.Literacylaunchinstitutes.org
- PRISM Grant opportunities are coming this spring
- Pending appropriation, opportunity to apply for tutoring will be coming this spring

Commissioner Priority Updates

Mass Literacy: Potential Legislation

- Legislation on early literacy has passed both MA House and Senate
- We will communicate details if and when a bill is signed into law
- Any input for DESE on literacy implementation? Contact literacyandhumanities@mass.gov

Senate and House aligning on evidence-based reading instruction

President Spilka announces committee, Senate plans for early literacy reform



by SAM DRYSDALE | STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

January 21, 2026



(Photo by Anastasia Shuraeva via Pexels)

Federal Funding Update

- On February 3, Congress appropriated federal education funds for FY27.
- No federal education programs were consolidated or eliminated, as had been proposed by the President last year.
- In response to the Trump administration's attempt to withhold certain federal education funds last summer, Congress reaffirmed, in statute, that funds must be granted to states on July 1, as had been the norm.
- All annual entitlement programs were level-funded at the federal level, but state and district allocations can vary, sometimes dramatically, based on swings in Census poverty data.

Anticipated Title I Reduction

- The preliminary Census data we received from USED indicated a **10% drop** in Massachusetts' share of the national poverty total (1.45% to 1.31%), and therefore we anticipate a significant decrease to Massachusetts' Title I award for FY27.

Title I – The Numbers that Drive our Allocation

Title I allocations are driven by Census poverty data. Census is the one measure the federal government has that is consistent across all states.

- Jan – federal government issues preliminary annual Census poverty data to states for “Census tract” districts (not for regional CTE, Charter, or Virtual)
- March – DESE provides this data to districts with a memo and a “warning” chart that projects potential reductions.
- June – federal government issues final Census poverty data to states
- July – DESE issues Title I grants (fund code 0305)

The data are lagged 3 years (so FY2027 allocations are driven by 2024 updates to the 2020 decennial Census data)

Defining poverty

- Two different definitions of poverty
 - FEDERAL DEFINITION
 - The feds use poverty estimates based on the US Census income data (refreshed annually).
 - STATE DEFINITION
 - DESE now uses a *modified* “low income” metric, which identifies students whose families are in state assistance program databases and make up to 185% of the federal definition
- Federal Poverty Guideline for 2024, for a family of 4: \$31,200
- Massachusetts federal poverty rates have been declining since 2013.
 - Between 2019-2023, MA minimum wage went from \$12/hr. to \$15/hr.

How does the Census poverty estimate work?

The federal government uses various data sources to arrive at their estimates:

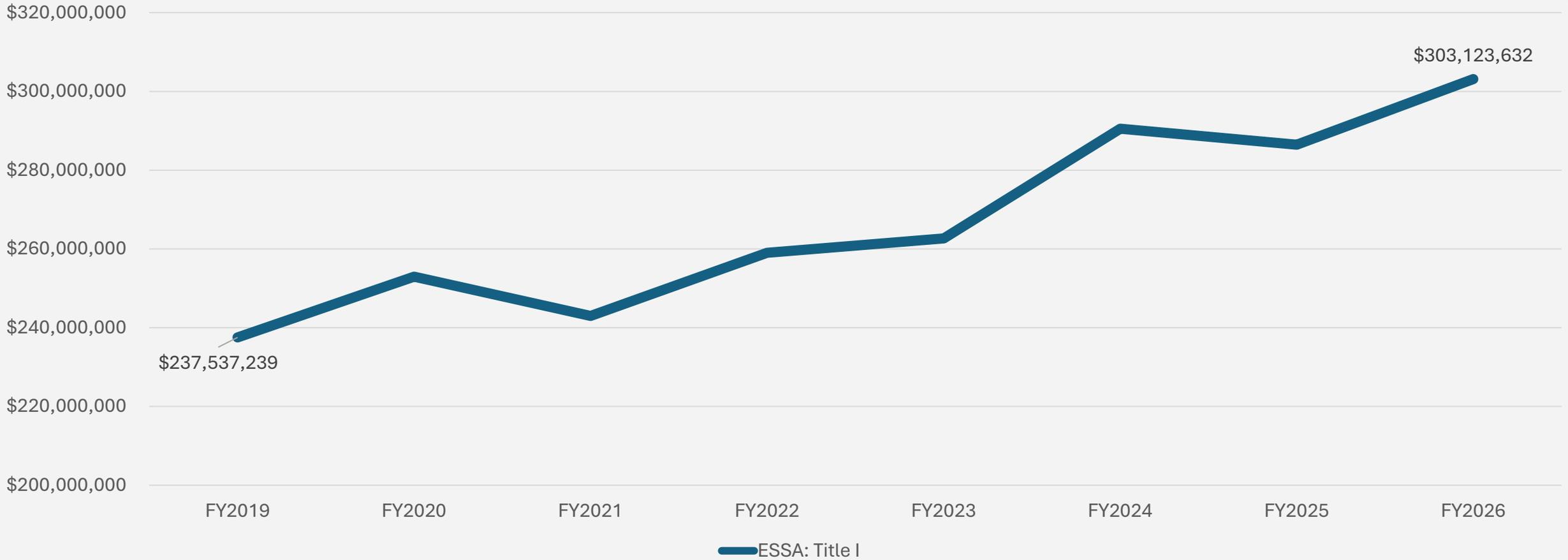
- 2020 Census
- 2024 American Community Survey
- 2023 IRS tax filings
- 2024 SNAP benefits
- Other economic data points

Note: the federal government only uses our state counts of low-income students that the Census cannot get themselves (neglected, delinquent, foster). Otherwise, they rely *solely* on Census data.

Several factors influence how much a district ultimately receives

- Overall amount appropriated by Congress (we usually see increases, but Title I was effectively level-funded this year)
- Census estimates – MA's share of poverty compared to all other states
- Changes to other districts (who becomes eligible and who loses eligibility).
- Who gets held harmless (the amount needed to hold districts harmless is taken from all of the non-hold-harmless districts)
- Required state reservations

ESSA Title I-A in MA since pre-COVID



What DESE is doing

- Formally inquired with Census Bureau to confirm data
- On The Desktop to districts scheduled for this week
 - Memo explaining the situation to districts
 - Excel document with projections based on preliminary Census data to districts
 - Projections of potential loss of eligibility for any of the 4 components of Title I and what an 85% hold harmless amount might look like

Again, these are projections.

What Districts can do

- Review memo from DESE
- Review the Excel document from DESE
- Look at 85% hold harmless projection amount (in the right-most column) and tentatively budget using that figure

Time-Out Regulations Guidance

- Time-out [guidance document](#) released on February 5, 2026
 - Clarifies definitions and regulatory requirements related to time-out practices; distinguishes time-out, a behavioral support strategy, from seclusion and other prohibited practices;
 - Provides implementation guidance and examples to support compliance and appropriate use;
 - Addresses common questions related to documentation, oversight, and monitoring; and
 - Supports schools and programs in developing policies, training, and systems aligned with the amended regulations

Time-Out Guidance Implementation Support

Grant Funding

- 78 grants awarded to public school districts, charter schools, collaboratives and approved special education schools
- \$3 million in funds disbursed

Training

- Spring 2026 – procedures and training regarding reporting requirement to the Department effective August 2026
- Summer 2026 – release of asynchronous online training modules to support staff training

Impact of Snow Days on Student Learning Time Requirements

- DESE released [guidance](#) on the 180-day requirement in November 2024
 - Days missed before April 1st must be made up with full school days
 - Waivers for days missed after March 31st will be considered if all snow days have been used
- Increase in 2026 snow days has compressed the school year calendar in some districts
- Student Learning Time regulations require BOTH a 180-day school year and 900/990 instruction hours
- Commissioner may waive the day requirement, but not the instructional hour requirement
- Charter leaders with questions should reach out to Alison Bagg
Alison.W.Bagg@mass.gov

Impact of Snow Days on Student Learning Time Requirements

- Based on the weather events of 2026, DESE will consider waivers to the 180-day requirement if districts demonstrate they have met the following criteria:
 - District used all five snow days; and
 - Will still meet the instructional hours requirement; and
 - Scheduled out through Friday, June 26, 2026 with snow days rescheduled as full school days; and
 - Repurposed any remaining districtwide professional development days and any remaining school closure days (e.g. Good Friday) outside of April vacation and required holidays
- Districts may maintain the original release date for seniors in accordance with the SLT regulations: "up to 12 school days before the regular scheduled closing date of that school."

Immigration Guidance

- On February 26, DESE hosted a webinar with the state Office for Refugees and Immigrants and the Attorney General's Office of Immigration
 - Over 450 district and school staff attended
- The webinar provided a refresher on basic immigration rules, practical guidance for schools to consider, and additional resources
- ✓ Attorney General's Advisory Regarding Equal Access to Public Education for All Students Irrespective of Immigration Status (updated April 2022)
- ✓ Upholding the Rights of Immigrant Students to Enroll in School: Guidance for School Committees and Districts (December 2024)
- ✓ Guidance Regarding K-12 Schools' Obligation to Protect Students and their Information (January 2025)

Regulatory Updates

- Seal of Biliteracy Regulations 603 CMR 31.00
 - Adopted in January 2026, guidance forthcoming
- Alternative Licensure Pathways Regulations 603 CMR 7.00
 - Board is scheduled to vote in March 2026
- Special Education Regulations 603 CMR 28.00
 - Currently out for public comment, Board is scheduled to vote in June 2026
- NEW Interpreter and Translation Regulations 603 CMR 57.00
 - Currently out for public comment, Board is scheduled to vote in June 2026

Submit public comment: [Public Comment Submission Page - Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education \(BESE\)](#)

State Student Advisory Council (SSAC)

- Comprised of 5 regional councils and one statewide council.
- Supports the interests of students in MA by building and promoting critical awareness around priority issues of concern to students
- Election and Registration information will be sent out on Wednesday, March 4th.
- Student representative information due by April 10th.

Questions