



FUND OUR FUTURE



Facts about the *Student Opportunity Act*

The Fund Our Future coalition strongly supports the new version of the ***Student Opportunity Act*** and urges the House of Representatives to approve it as adopted by the Senate. It provides an unprecedented level of new funding, particularly targeted to low-income districts. As amended by the Senate, it also ensures that parents and educators are more deeply involved in developing district improvement plans.

FUNDING INCREASES

Under the *Student Opportunity Act*

The historic ***Student Opportunity Act***, approved unanimously by the Senate on Oct. 3, would increase annual Chapter 70 state education aid to local communities by **\$1.4 billion** as of fiscal 2027 by adopting all of the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission and making several additional adjustments. True to the Fund Our Future campaign's goals, districts with the highest concentrations of poverty would receive the most. It would address the real costs of:

- **Educating low-income students.** It defines low-income students as those in families whose incomes are at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, up from the current 133 percent. It would also incrementally increase per-pupil funding above the baseline level, ultimately providing twice as much funding — a 100 percent increment — for low-income students in districts that have the highest concentrations of poverty.
- **Educating special education students and English learners.**
- **Providing guidance and psychological services.**
- **Providing health insurance to employees and retirees.**

The Senate bill would add another estimated \$100 million annually by:

- **Expanding special education circuit breaker reimbursements to include transportation costs** and fixing an unintended side effect that reduces these reimbursements as the foundation budget increases. (**\$90 million**)
- **Establishing a grant program** to support innovative programs. (**\$10 million**)

The bill would also set a three-year schedule to fully fund the charter school reimbursement line item, though it does not address the long-term impact of charter schools. And it would lift the annual cap on the Massachusetts School Building Authority by \$200 million — from \$600 million to \$800 million.



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ACCOUNTABILITY

Under the Senate Version of the *Student Opportunity Act*

The *Student Opportunity Act* as originally drafted included accountability provisions that were unclear or that gave state education officials unwarranted new powers over all school districts, regardless of how they are rated. An amendment sponsored by Sen. Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville) clarified that those who know their schools best — educators, families and districts — will be more deeply involved in school improvement efforts. It also shifts the focus to where it belongs: on providing new opportunities to students who have been denied them for too long. Here are the highlights:

- **The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education may not withhold Chapter 70 or reimbursement funds under this act.**
- **Three-year district plans addressing “persistent disparities in achievement” must be developed with local stakeholder input.** The amendment added that the plans must be approved by the local school committee and must be developed following input from educators and parents, including members of special education, English learner and school improvement councils.
- **District plans must include a description of programs to be adopted, which may include a list of services and programs specified in the law.** The original bill stated that plans must include, but not be limited to, a long list of interventions, such as expanded learning time. It is clearly not a good use of taxpayer dollars to require all districts to adopt interventions that they don’t need or don’t believe are good for students. Therefore, senators passed the amendment to clarify that the inclusion of specified services and programs is at the discretion of districts, with input from educators and parents.
- **District plans must include “input resources” as well as “outcome metrics of success.”** In keeping with the title of the bill, input language was included in the amendment to make sure districts specify what new *opportunities* will be made available to students — for example, more art and music, summer programs, preschool slots, smaller class sizes or extracurricular activities.
- **District plans must be submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the commissioner of education only to review and suggest changes.** The amendment clarifies that the commissioner *cannot* override locally elected school committees to require the adoption of DESE-mandated programs and services, except as already allowed under current law for schools designated underperforming and chronically underperforming. If DESE could simply reject or force all districts — regardless of their ratings — to change their plans, that would abolish the state’s historic commitment to local control of public schools, stifle real innovation and allow the opinions of appointed education bureaucrats to overrule the values and wishes of local residents and their democratically elected school committee members.