

# Spending Plans Required by Recently Enacted Legislation

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Massachusetts School Committee Members  
FROM: Glenn Koocher, Executive Director, MASC  
DATE: January 10, 2020  
RE: Spending Plans Required by Recently Enacted Legislation

As many of you know, the recently enacted Student Opportunity Act will generate additional funding for school districts as soon as the Fiscal Year 2021. Funding will include not only Chapter 70 funds, but also additional reimbursements from the Special Education Circuit Breaker (including transportation costs), Charter School Mitigation, and transportation that will be phased in over the next few years.

The statute also includes a requirement that superintendents forward to DESE a spending plan for the additional funding coming for FY 2021-FY 2023. In brief, the plans must include an outline of how additional funds will be spent to close the achievement gaps and target those students in greatest need. For many districts, this will represent modest additional funding, but in districts with high poverty rates and significant numbers of students at economic risk as well as English Language Learners, the new money will be greater.

MASC has been asked by our members how this will affect the budget process for FY 2021. In fact, the law did not change the school budgeting process, but it does require that key stakeholder groups, parents, and other be consulted to inform the process leading to the spending of the new Chapter 70 money. It is also unambiguously clear that spending plans must be approved by the school committee as part of its policy making function and budgeting authority under the law. How the school committee and superintendent get feedback from the constituencies and stakeholder groups is left to the districts with some recommendations from DESE.

DESE is in the process of preparing guidelines, but many school committee members have been asking for preliminary guidance from us about getting feedback. Many of the budget decisions will involve new or expanded programs that represent policy, new positions and job descriptions, or matters that could impact collective bargaining, and school committees may wish to be more engaged earlier in the process to ensure that feedback is obtained, board priorities pursued, and goals for the district integrated into the spending plan.

Normally, the superintendent would be routinely gathering feedback to inform the next year's budget prior to presenting a proposed budget to the school committee. The school committee would hold at least one public budget hearing. However, because superintendents are required to forward the spending plan for new and additional Chapter 70 funds by April 1, 2020, the process for planning the expenditure of the additional funds might need to be expedited. Also, we are still awaiting information from DESE on how the actual additional funding will be calculated, especially since inflation might impact the constant dollar levels.

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will be offering some guidance on this process, including a recommendation that school committees use the public comment periods prior to meetings to invite stakeholder feedback. We have also recommended that districts use readily accessible survey programs to gather feedback from those who are unable to come out to meetings.

We also know that district educators will want to be more engaged in discussions with both the superintendents and school committees on spending priorities, and this might involve holding more meetings. The fiduciary responsibilities of school committees give the boards as many opportunities to seek feedback as they wish, and, of course, school committees may schedule meetings at their discretion. We recognize that in this short initial time period people will want to be as efficient and economical with the time available at a busy time of year.

Elements of individual district spending strategies include many initiatives that our districts are already exploring, piloting, or using, and may include:

- Extended learning time,
  - Common planning time for teachers,
  - Social/Emotional or physical health services,
  - Hiring personnel to improve student performance,
  - Increased or Improved Professional Development,
  - Curriculum or equipment aligned to state standards,
  - Early Education and Pre-K,
  - Workforce diversification, and
  - Pathways to strengthen college and career readiness
- Other strategies are also possible subject to review.

In summary, we recommend that school committees be actively engaged in hearing from stakeholders and reviewing and approving the spending plans. However, members should also appreciate that, with only 10 weeks to go before the initial plans must be submitted, a close collaboration with the superintendents is essential during one of the busiest times of the year. MASC will alert districts to any further guidance from DESE on the process and requirements of the spending plans for the additional funding. Your superintendents will also receive updates from DESE and our counterparts at the MA Association of School Superintendents.