

# LEGISLATIVE Bulletin

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents

From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel

Date: July 9, 2015

RE: CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORTS BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

## **CHAPTER 70 INCREASED**

After passage of the House and Senate versions of the State Budget by each branch of the Legislature a Conference Committee consisting of three members appointed by each branch to resolve its differences has reported a consensus bill, which was debated on July 8, 2015 and forwarded to the Governor for his approval. The Governor may also exercise his right to veto various line items within ten days. The F.Y. 2016 Senate Ways and Means Committee budget recommendations included an increase of \$111.2 million to Chapter 70 (General Aid to Education) thereby increasing funding in that account to \$4.51 billion. The Governor's proposed budget recommended a \$105 million increase in Chapter 70 funding, which only proposed a \$20 per pupil increase. The House Ways and Means recommendations included an increase of \$3.5 million, therefore meeting foundation budget requirements, and providing an additional \$25 per student increase to every district. The Senate Ways and Means Committee recommended an additional increase to Chapter 70 of \$3.2 million that meets foundation budget requirements, provides \$25 per student aid and will also bring schools closer to their target spending requirements. You will find your district's H.3650 recommended Chapter 70 Aid in the Local Aid section of the budget, which may be found at the MASC website.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER, REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION, CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING**

The Special Education Circuit Breaker provides state funding for the extraordinary expenses associated with certain special education expenses. The final F. Y. 2015 funding for the Circuit Breaker

was \$257 million and due to mid-year cuts was further reduced by \$4 million. The House budget proposed funding the Circuit Breaker at \$261.6 million, which represents an \$8.2 million increase over actual funding for F.Y.2015. The Senate Ways and Means budget recommended fully funding this account at \$271.5 million. The Senate prevailed and the Circuit Breaker will be fully funded. Senator Spilka at the MASC Day on the Hill hinted that the special education Circuit Breaker would receive an increase and we are grateful for the substantial increase in this account.

The Governor's budget proposed that Regional School Transportation be level funded at \$51.5 million. The House Ways and Means Committee budget recommended a \$5 million increase for total funding of \$56.5 million. The Senate Ways and Means Committee budget contained the same funding as the House; however, the Senate by a floor amendment increased its final funding to \$59,021,00. H.3650 reflects the higher Senate number. This account was another priority for MASC and other groups. We appreciate the increase but, note that the final F.Y. 2015 budget funded regional transportation at \$70 million, prior to mid-year cuts.

Monies for districts sending students to charter schools were funded by both the Governor and the House Committee at \$76.8 million. This account in the final F. Y. 2015 budget was funded at \$80 million. The Senate increased funding for this account to \$84.5 million. H.3650 contains the compromise appropriation of \$80.5 million.

## **MANDATED HOMELESS TRANSPORTATION FUNDED AT 50% BY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE**

Over the past few years the issue of school districts mandated transportation costs for homeless students over

dents under the McKinney-Vento Federal Law and the Commonwealth's implementation of same, has been the subject of a the determination by State Auditor Bump through the Division of Local Mandates. The Auditor determined that the requirement for school districts to provide homeless students transportation to their previous schools was an unfunded mandate. MASC and MASS were asked by Auditor Bump to assist in the documentation to determine the cost of such transportation and our joint survey was right on point. The House Ways and Means Committee proposed that the Homeless Transportation account be funded with \$8.3 million, the same amount as recommended by the Governor. The Senate also funded this account at \$8.3 million and, therefore, homeless transportation was not subject to Conference and will have an appropriation of \$8.3 million for F.Y. 2016. MASC believes that this appropriation funds about half of the actual cost for school districts to provide this transportation

#### **KINDERGARTEN GRANTS AND OTHER ACCOUNTS OF INTEREST**

The Governor in his budget recommendations consolidated the Kindergarten Grant line item into Chapter 70. The House Ways and Means continued the Kindergarten Grant account as a separate line item as was preferred by education groups including MASC, and funded the program at \$18.6 million. The Senate budget funded this account at \$1 million. The Conference Committee recommended an appropriation of \$18.6 million for kindergarten expansion, the preferred option for MASC and other education associations.

The Adult Basic Education account had been funded in the House budget at \$30.4 million. The Senate recommended an increase and the Conference Committee further added to this account with a final appropriation of \$31,250,000.

Neither the House nor the Governor's budget contained funding for the pothole account. This line item helps districts fund extraordinary expenses of a non-recurring nature. In F. Y. 2015 this account received a \$3.4 million appropriation. The Senate and the Conference Committee funded the pothole account in the amount of \$2.5 million.

The Conference Committee provided funding in the amount of \$2.2 million for transportation of nonresident students to certain approved vocational programs. Also, regional bonus aid received an appropriation of \$275,000.

The House proposed funding the Racial Imbalance account with \$20.1 million, which the Senate slightly reduced; however, the Conference Committee reflects the House number.

The Conference Committee contained funding for grant programs of \$500,000, concerning the provision of a mental health substance abuse counselor, and \$1.3 million for a reserve to assist communities negatively affected by shortfalls in federal impact aid. Also, funding for alternative education grants to provide continuing education services to students suspended from school was continued with a \$250,000 appropriation. Finally, the Conference Committee encouraged schools to offer AP courses by providing \$2.7 million in funding. You may find other education accounts of interest in the budget as found on the MASC website.

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