

legislative bulletin

Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Inc. One McKinley Square, Boston, MA 02109
(617) 523-8454 fax: (617) 742-4125
www.masc.mec.edu

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents
From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel
Re: H, 1, Governor's Budget Recommendations

Date: March 5, 2015

FUNDING FOR CHAPTER 70, GENERAL AID TO EDUCATION

Governor Baker has recently released his budget recommendations for F. Y. 2016 and, in comparison to most areas of the budget, with notable exceptions referenced below, K-12 education has emerged in relatively decent shape. The budget presented by the Governor was predicated on resolving a \$1.8 billion deficit without raising taxes or raiding the rainy day fund. The Governor proposed a \$38.1 billion annual state budget that represents an increase of \$ 1.1 billion. Most of the budgetary accounts are level-funded and many of them have been eliminated or reduced. H1 proposes a \$64.5 million increase to the state's subsidy for the MBTA. Also, H1 recommends a \$105 million increase to Chapter 70, general aid to education that includes an increase of \$20 per student. Unrestricted local aid, largely Lottery Aid, will total \$980 million that reflects an increase over F. Y. 2015. The Governor seeks to raise revenue through an early retirement program for state employees, and by increasing the percent that state employees (who worked prior to 2003) pay for health insurance from 20% to 25%.

You can find your districts' local aid in the Governor's budget, which is posted on the MASC website. We are appreciative of the Governor's commitment to funding Chapter 70 and will review all education accounts and advocate for appropriate levels of funding. H1 is now before the House Ways and Means Committee and the Committee's recommendations must be voted upon by the House of Representatives, and then this process will be repeated in the Senate.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION, HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER

Regional School Transportation was funded at \$51.5 million in the Governor's F.Y. 2016 Budget, which provides about 60% funding. Last year's budget included \$70.2 million to fully fund this account, although this appropriation was substantially reduced due to mid-year budget cuts. MASC, in concert with several other Associations, will aggressively pursue additional money for Regional

School Transportation.

As you may recall a report by the State Auditor determined that transportation for homeless students was a mandate. MASC and other education and municipal groups are working with the the Auditor to determine the amount necessary to fund the mandate. We began working with the Auditor in December 2014 to determine the proper amount necessary to fund this account for 2016 and we will keep you apprised of this matter. Governor Baker has made the reduction of the homeless population a priority and he has proposed increasing prior year funding by \$1 million for a total request of \$8.3 million.

The so-called Special Education Circuit Breaker account funds the extraordinary costs of certain special education placements. Current law requires that 75% of all the approved costs for such placements that exceed 4 times the state average per pupil foundation budget for the previous fiscal year shall be reimbursed to eligible school districts. The Governor recommended that the Circuit Breaker account be funded at approximately \$257, million which represents two-thirds of the statutory requirement. MASC will advocate for increased funding for this account.

METCO AND CHARTER SCHOOL REIMBURSEMENT

The Governor proposed restoring METCO funding to \$19.1 million. We will work with other groups to further increase the funding for this account.

Communities whose children have chosen to attend commonwealth charter schools receive reimbursement from the state for several years after their departure from the district of residence. The proper funding of this account was a major bone of contention during last session's charter school debate. MASC will continue to push for full funding of this account that in H1 has been funded at \$76 million which is less than the appropriation of the current year.

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ACCOUNTS NOT FUNDED IN H1

H.1 does not contain funding for the so-called Pothole account, which helps districts fund extraordinary expenses of a non-recurring nature. This account received an appropriation of \$3.4 million in the 2015 budget. Other accounts not found in the Governor's budget are as follows: federal impact aid (F.Y. 2015) appropriation \$1.3 million; Innovation School grants (F.Y. 2015) appropriation \$1 million; support for MCAS students (F.Y. 2015) \$8.2 million, (this account may have been merged with another—stay tuned); alternative education pursuant to recent school

discipline legislation (F.Y. 2015) appropriation \$246,000; and regional bonus aid (F.Y. 2015) appropriation \$280,000. Also, I did not find the kindergarten line item in the Governor's budget. MASC will check to see if this is an oversight or intentional and will respond accordingly.

SPECIAL ED INFLATION RATE FREEZE

Rates for F. Y. 2016 are frozen at F.Y.2015 rates, except for programs that qualify for extraordinary relief. Also, programs for which prices were lower than the full amount in F.Y. 2015 may charge the full F.Y.2015 rate in F.Y. 2016.

DAY ON THE HILL

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

The State House, Boston

ARE YOU FEELING...

over-regulated? under fire? over-tested? under-funded? all of the above?

Join us for this high energy **DAY ON THE HILL** program that will include information and background on key issues, insights from legislators on FY16 projections, a chance to meet with your legislators and discuss your concerns and enjoy a fantastic lunch prepared by students from many of the state's vocational-technical schools.

REGISTER NOW AT WWW.MASC.ORG and check your mailbox and online for more details.

NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION: CHARTING THE COURSE

March 14

King Philip Regional High School
201 Franklin Street, Wrentham, MA

REGISTER NOW AT MASC.ORG

March 21

Assabet Valley Voc. Tech.
215 Fitchburg Street, Marlboro, MA

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