

# LEGISLATIVE bulletin

To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents  
From: Stephen J. Finnegan Esq., MASC General Counsel  
Re: **H.4200, House Ways & Means Budget Recommendations**  
Date: April 14, 2016

## **FUNDING FOR CHAPTER 70, GENERAL AID TO EDUCATION**

The House Ways and Means Committee released its F.Y. 2017 budget recommendations on the late afternoon of April 13th. H4200 recommends that Chapter 70 be increased by \$95.8 million dollars over the F.Y. 2016 budget. This funding contrasts with the Governor's recommendation of \$72 million over prior year amounts. Chapter 70 funding consists of foundation budget and per pupil components. The House Ways and Means budget recommends a guaranteed minimum aid increase to each school district of \$55 per pupil, which is more than double prior year funding. MASC asked for more per pupil aid and we are pleased with the Ways and Means recommendation. While we are concerned that the Foundation Budget Review recommendations have not been addressed in H4200, we recognize the difficulty of balancing the budget with the rising costs of pensions and health care. Most of the non-elementary and secondary education budgetary accounts are level funded and many of them have been eliminated or reduced. In comparison to most areas of the budget, with notable exceptions referenced below, K-12 education has emerged in relatively decent shape. Unrestricted local aid, largely Lottery Aid, will total \$1.022 billion which reflects an increase over F.Y. 2016 of \$42 million—the same amount as contained in the Governor's budget recommendations.

You can find your districts' local aid in the Governor's budget, which is posted on the MASC website. The Ways & Means recommendations must be voted upon by the House of Representatives, and then this process is repeated in the Senate.

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION, HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION CIRCUIT BREAKER**

Regional School Transportation was funded at \$60 million in the House Ways and Means budget recommendations. MASC will be joining other associations in support of recommendations to increase this amount in the House deliberations to at least \$63 million, which will amount to an 80% rate of reimbursement.

As you may recall a report by the State Auditor determined that transportation for homeless students was a mandate. Both the Governor and House Ways and Means have recommended funding this account at \$8,350,000, which represents level funding over the prior year final budget.

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 \$271 million, and H.4200 has recommended adding \$5 million to this account bringing the total appropriation to \$276.6 million. MASC will continue to advocate for increased funding for this account as necessary.

We will, also advocate for a fair reimbursement for Non- Resident Pupil Transportation. This account has been eliminated from H.4200; however, historically the Senate has been more favorable to this matter.

## **METCO AND CHARTER SCHOOL REIMBURSEMENT**

H.4200 proposed METCO funding to \$20.1 million.

Communities whose children have chosen to attend commonwealth charter schools receive reimbursement from the state for up to six 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 funding of this account that in H.4200 has been funded at \$85.5 million, which is \$5 million more than the Governor recommended. Rep. Steve Ultrino, a former member of the Malden School Committee, will be filing an amendment to fully fund this account. You may choose to contact your legislators to register your support and encourage them to sign on to this amendment. Also, MASC advocated for the retention of the current six-year formula as opposed to a three-year formula proposed by the Governor that resulted in less funding for this program, and H.4200 sustained the position of MASC by retaining the current formula.

### KINDERGARTEN GRANTS

This program has been recommended for level funding by both the Governor and House Ways and Means, in the amount of \$18.5 million. The language contained in the kindergarten line item appears to be the same as found in the prior year budget. We will continue to monitor this account.

### LOW INCOME DEFINITION

The third paragraph of Section 3 of the budget as found in H.4200 contains a rather lengthy definition of low income students. You may find this paragraph on the MASC website under "low income" definition. Section 46 of H.4200 requires that a study on the calculation of low income students shall be concluded by December 19, 2016.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION RATES

Section 31 in the Governor's budget H.2 freezes the rates of special education providers at the same price as F.Y. 2016, except for those programs that qualify for extraordinary relief under Operational Service Division Regulations.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 26**

**DAY ON THE HILL**

The House Budget will be debated the week of April 25.

**BRING YOUR CONCERNS TO YOUR LEGISLATORS at MASC'S DAY ON THE HILL.**

Register online at [www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org).

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