

## Governor signs 2026 budget; \$130 million in vetoes

On July 4, Governor Maura Healey signed the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) \$60.9 billion state budget, a \$60.9 billion plan that the administration calls fiscally responsible, lowers costs, protects essential care and services, and moves the Massachusetts economy forward.

However, the Governor also vetoed \$130 million that had been included in the conference committee budget, resulting in a final budget that is more than \$1 billion less than the H1 proposal and \$130 million less than the final conference budget. The administration is also continuing an Executive Branch hiring freeze, halting a planned non-union manager pay raise scheduled for January, saving \$17 million, and delaying payment on earmarked

funds for local projects in the budget totaling approximately \$125 million until later in the year when more is

The FY26 budget extends successful initiatives to make housing, transportation and education more affordable by funding universal free school meals, free community college and fare-free regional transit. The budget lowers child care costs for families—with \$475 million in support for Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) to early education and care providers—and alleviates financial pressure on college students by providing an \$85 million expansion of scholarships through the MASSGrant Plus financial aid program. The budget also codifies Governor Healey's proposal to drive down housing costs by banning renter-paid broker's fees,

and extends the ConnectorCare expansion pilot program, which increases access to affordable health care.

The budget spends \$2.4 billion in revenues in FY26 from the voter-approved Fair Share surtax, which the Administration is deploying to make transformative, strategic investments in transportation and education. Initiatives that will be funded by Fair Share in FY26 include MassEducate, the MBTA's Income-Eligible Fare Relief program, and regional transit grants.

The FY26 budget makes additional strategic investments in schools. The budget fully funds the fifth-year implementation of the Student Opportunity Act, with \$7.362 billion in Chapter 70 education aid. This is a \$460 million,

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## Threats to local school leaders on the increase, research finds

According to a recently released mixed methods study conducted by the Bridging Divides Initiative at Princeton University, and CivicPulse, a non partisan nonprofit, threats against local school officials across the U.S. have nearly tripled since COVID, including threats that spill over into their personal and family lives—undermining their ability to govern effectively and safely.

In the largest and most comprehensive study of its kind, BDI researchers interviewed nearly 40 school board members and CivicPulse surveyed hundreds of others. Using open-source material, investigators documented threats and harassment against school officials from November 2022 through April 2023 and the same period two years later. They found such incidents rose by 170%.

Researchers found that some of the local cases corresponded with national attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as LGBTQ+ policies, but the results showed that the targets held a variety of political views. 36% of school board members reported experiencing hostility

in 2024, while 39% reported worrying about hostility that same year.

### Key findings from the report include:

- School board members are experiencing high rates of hostility (i.e., insults, harassment, threats, or physical attack).
- School board members worry about the spillover effects of hostility on students.
- Women, minority, and younger members report higher rates of hostility and worry.
- Experiences with concerns about hostility can make officials feel vulnerable and powerless, which can reduce engagement in key activities, such as working on controversial topics or running for re-election.
- Officials stress the importance of transparency, professionalism, and collaboration to mitigate the impacts of hostility, but point to insufficient training, outdated policies, and limited law enforcement support as current barriers.

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# Supreme Court allows Trump to resume Education Department layoffs

On July 14, a divided Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump administration to sharply shrink the Education Department, one of the cornerstones of the president's efforts to radically downsize the federal government.

The justices lifted a temporary lower-court ruling that prevented Trump officials from slashing more than a third of the department's more than 4,100 workers and shifting some of its functions to the states and other agencies as litigation over the cuts plays out in the lower courts.

As is common with cases decided on the emergency docket, the majority did not explain its rationale for the decision. Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote a scathing dissent that was joined by the court's two other liberals, labeling the ruling "indefensible" and a major expansion of presidential power.

The ruling continues the president's efforts to trim the federal government and assert his authority over the executive branch. The justices have signed off on Trump's plans to fire thousands of other federal workers, remove the heads of independent agencies and freeze up to \$65 million in grants to alleviate teacher shortages. The administration said those grants promoted diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that discriminate against White and Asian people.

Trump has said he wants to dismantle the Education Department, saying the move would allow "children and their families the opportunity to escape a system that is failing them," but administration officials acknowledge that would require legislation because Congress created the department. He has also argued that trimming the department would make it more

efficient and increase accountability.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon initiated the largest job cut in the department's history in March, soon after she was sworn in. Officials said that more than 1,300 workers would be laid off and that about 600 others had accepted offers to leave.

Soon after, Trump issued an executive order directing McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education." He has also said he intends to move the federal student loan and special-needs programs out of the department.

Trump officials have said that the cuts will affect every aspect of the department's operation but that it will continue its statutorily required functions. McMahon requested an appropriation of more than \$66 billion for next year's budget in June.

More than 20 states, teachers unions and school districts filed challenges to the cuts, and the lawsuits were later consolidated.

In May, a federal judge in Massachusetts, U.S. District Judge Myong J. Joun, issued a preliminary injunction that required the Trump administration to rehire all staff that were cut and reset all changes made at the department to what existed before Trump took office.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 1st Circuit affirmed that decision last month, before Trump officials filed an emergency appeal with the Supreme Court seeking to put a hold on the ruling. Solicitor General D. John Sauer argued that the courts had overreached.

The Education Department was created in 1979 under President Jimmy Carter. It is responsible for administering the \$1.6 trillion federal student loan program, grants to elementary and secondary schools, achievement tests, and civil rights laws in schools.

## MA sues Trump over education funding freeze

The District of Columbia and twenty-four states including MA have filed suit over the administration's decision to withhold \$6.8 billion in funding for grant programs for after school and summer school, adult education and literacy, English language acquisition, migrant education, professional development and teacher training, and academic enrichment.

The lawsuit, filed July 14, characterizes the withholding of billions of dollars Congress appropriated for education in March on attack on the constitutional separation of powers, and violates federal laws governing education programming, administrative procedures, and executive branch spending of funds allocated by Congress. The lawsuit seeks to restore all the federal funding cut from schools in the states listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

The US Department of Education unexpectedly withheld \$6.8 billion in funds to all 50 states, including more than \$100 million in MA education funding, that was slated to be disbursed on July 1. States were notified the day before that the grants were under review to ensure "taxpayer resources are spent in accordance with the President's priorities and the Department's statutory responsibilities" and that the grants are not subsidizing "a radical left-wing agenda" including "illegal immigrant advocacy." The Office of Management and Budget has not indicated when the review will be complete.

Across the Commonwealth districts are reporting that whereas some of their summer programming has already been funded and is therefore unaffected by the freeze, other programs may be seriously impacted if the money isn't released soon.

## Threats to Leaders

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- Despite these challenges, school board members overwhelmingly indicated deep resolve and resilience, remaining committed to engaging the community and fostering student-focused outcomes.

Based on the findings from the interviews and the survey the report presents three recommendations to local and state government leaders and administrators, school board members, and law enforcement. These steps, the report opines, can help reduce risk, strengthen support systems, and better prepare school boards to respond before, during, and after incidents of hostility.

### Recommendations:

- Provide safety training and de-escalation resources for school board members that are proactive, formalized, and tailored to local contexts.
- Create training programs for law enforcement, city/town attorneys, and city/town administrators on specific approaches to identifying and mitigating threats and harassment.
- Support trusted leaders and board colleagues to engage in proactive, unified communication with constituents.

The full report can be accessed on the Bridging Divides Initiative website: <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu>

## SCOTUS decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*: considerations for school district policy

*The following guidance is provided by MASC General Counsel Patrick Francomano, Esq.*

Recently, in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. \_\_ (June 27, 2025), a 6-3 majority of the Supreme Court held that parents were entitled to opt their children out of LGBTQ-supportive books used in the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools language arts curriculum based upon their religious based objections and the Constitution's Free Exercise Clause. The opinion written by Justice Alito, provided in part: "A government burdens the religious exercise of parents when it requires them to submit their children to instruction that poses 'a very real threat of undermining' the religious beliefs and practices that the parents wish to instill."

This case has been viewed as an attack on the LGBTQ+ community and a direct challenge to the fundamental responsibilities of local school committees and their districts. MASC will be examining to what extent this decision requires revisions to our current policy recommendations. Crafting an appropriate policy that will protect districts, and avoid unwelcome results when applied, is challenging given that these cases are so fact specific and the latest decision provides minimal guidance.

MASC does not currently recommend adopting a policy which requires an automatic universal "opt out" provision. There are multiple concerns around such a policy including how to approach the logistical issues of notice and when notice to parents/guardians is required. It is imperative that the district not set itself up for failure by establishing policy which is too burdensome and surrenders its curriculum responsibilities.

In the short term, if your district is confronted with a parental challenge to curriculum, based upon the Free Exercise Clause of the Constitution, you should:

- Identify and confirm the specific basis of the objection and/or request for exemption in writing.
- Consult with the principal, the curriculum director and the classroom teacher in order to thoroughly examine the interplay between the objection/exemption request, the actual curriculum, the curriculum objectives and the logistics of permitting an opt out or alternative approach.
- Prepare alternative assignment(s) if it is determined that an opt out or other alternative is appropriate,
- Develop a substantively well documented rationale if it is determined that an opt out or another alternative is inappropriate and will not be offered.
- Be sure to consult legal counsel before formally responding to any request This area is fraught with too many opportunities for missteps that will be specific to your particular circumstances. Your district counsel is in the best position to protect you from the potential serious consequences associated with a Constitutional violation. MASC will be working with its Federal and state partners and agencies as well as members of MASC's Council of School Attorneys. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns.

## UPCOMING EVENTS: Charting the Course

**Saturday, September 13**

Smith Vocational Agricultural High School  
Northampton

**Saturday, October 4**

Tri-County Voc. Tech.  
Franklin

## FY26 Budget Education Highlights

### Fair Share

- \$1.5 billion for education
  - \$266 million for higher education, including \$96 million for Mass Educate to build upon the success of Mass Reconnect and make community free for all, and \$85 million for MassGrant Plus financial aid scholarships
  - \$759.9 million for K-12 education, including \$180million for access to free school meals for students across the Commonwealth and \$15 million for Literacy Launch
  - \$469.2 million for early education and care, including \$93.7 million for child care financial assistance and \$360 million to help support the C3 program
- \$711.9 million for transportation
  - \$550 million of Fair Share revenue dedicated to the Commonwealth Transportation Fund, which will leverage over \$5 billion in borrowing for transformative infrastructure investments
  - \$470 million operating support to stabilize the MBTA
  - \$115 million for regional transit grants
  - \$35 million for income-eligible reduced fares at RTAs

### Education and Local Aid

- Fully funds the Student Opportunity Act with \$7.36 billion for Chapter 70 funding, a 7 percent increase over FY25
- \$150 in per pupil minimum aid
- \$182 million increase to Special Education Circuit Breaker, a 37% increase over FY25
- \$132.4 million for K-12 education transportation, including \$103.8 million for regional school transportation
- \$50.5 million to Reimagine High School through programs like MyCAP, early college and innovation career pathways
- Provides \$475 million in C3 to early education and care providers
- \$1.06 billion for child care financial assistance to help families pay for care
- \$120 million for Free Community College
- \$28 million for SUCCESS funding for advising, coaching, and wraparound services for higher education students
- \$1.64 billion in direct funding to public institutions of higher education
- \$39 million for local and regional library aid
- \$14.4 million increase to Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA)

### Workforce Development

- Provides \$15.4 million for Summer Jobs Program for At-Risk Youth (Youthworks) to subsidize wages and facilitate career development for at-risk youth
- Provides \$9.0 million for Career Technical Institutes for the development and operation of career technical institutes in vocational-technical schools
- Supports \$8.2 million for MassHire Career Centers to provide regional workforce training and employee placement services across 29 locations
- Includes \$3.3 million for the Registered Apprenticeship Program to expand registered apprenticeships prioritizing manufacturing, health care, and IT industries

## 2026 Budget

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or 7 percent, increase from FY25, and provides a minimum per pupil aid rate of \$150. The budget also provides continued support for the Administration's Literacy Launch Initiative (funded at \$15 million) to improve early literacy education and ensure students receive the highest quality, evidence-based reading instruction available.

Alongside the budget, Governor (still to be taken up by the legislature) Healey filed a supplemental budget that includes \$100 million for FY26 to provide a flexible pool of resources to quickly respond to changing economic conditions and federal spending decisions that will arise over the course of the year. Some of this money can be used for Department of Transitional Assistance caseworkers. The supplemental budget also includes a transfer of \$30 million to the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund and gives Governor Healey expanded emergency budget cutting (9c) authority and line-item transferability that will help the Administration navigate economic uncertainty.

The \$130 million in vetoed spending includes \$19.9 million from charter school reimbursement and \$27.5 million for the GIC to address the high cost of covering GLP-1 weight-loss drugs. The Governor is directing GIC to approve a mid-year health insurance plan change for state employees to eliminate coverage in all cases except when medically necessary, such as for patients with diabetes

The Governor is also signing 130 of the 134 budget outside sections, including the provision she introduced in her FY26 proposed budget (H.1) to end renter-paid brokers fees.

## Past Presidents' Scholarship 2025 Announced

The MASC Past Presidents Council has selected two winners for the 2025 Past Presidents Scholarship award. Congratulations go to **Hazel Garabedian**, a 2025 graduate of Tewksbury High School and **Madeline Rundle**, a graduate of Monument Mountain Regional High School (Berkshire Hills).

Garabedian, who will attend the University of Hartford in the fall, has distinguished herself as a leader in her school and community with her commitment to volunteer efforts and inclusion. Beginning in her freshman year, she joined the International Club, a club dedicated to volunteering, and rose through its leadership positions, increasing participation in programs and events and building important collaborations between town officials, seniors, students and community members for town-wide events. A longtime (since age 10) active member of the district's theater program, as co-president she manages the backstage operations during performances. She is also an active member of DECA, competing and qualifying for state conferences, looking ahead possibly to a future in business. In addition, she is involved with "She's the First" club, which raises money and awareness for girls in underdeveloped countries, and which promotes educational opportunities for young women. Her involvement as a member of the Model UN has engaged her interest in learning about foreign policy and global problems. "it has helped me to be more open to accepting opinions other than my own, and strengthened my skills in leadership conflict resolution, negotiations and public speaking, and reinforced by ability to work as a member of a team." Rundle, who will attend Vassar College as a de-

velopmental psychology major, was first exposed to school committee service and the challenges school leaders encounter at the age of six, when her mother was first elected to the Southern Berkshire Regional School Committee and would take her and her two younger siblings to evening meetings. She sat through meetings during a fraught superintendent search process, through special town meetings as members strategized about getting votes for an MSBA grants, and helped her mom run the booth at community events to promote the local elementary school.

During her high school career, Madeline was chosen as one of two students from her high school to be part of the county-wide Berkshire Youth Leadership program, spending a year learning about entrepreneurship and leading a service-based project for which she was recognized with an award. She also serves as a president of the Key Club, raising money, volunteering at the local food pantry, and organizing her peers on service projects. She spent February break of her senior year volunteering at an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. She also served as a member of the Student/Adult Advisory Board, spearheading a three-year project to increase access and equity for students with disabilities. She has been recognized for her academic achievements with a junior scholarship award in math and science from the Rochester Institute of Technology and she recently developed and delivered a curriculum on chemistry for elementary students in the district. She is also an active performer in the high school Shakespeare theater program and dances with Berkshire Pulse and is a leader in their Young Choreographers Initiative.

**Congratulations to them both.**

## DESE releases Competency Determination guidance; secondary transition services memo

DESE Commissioner Pedro Martinez has announced the release of a new guidance document on the Competency Determination (CD) and an updated special education policy memo regarding secondary transition services and graduation with a high school diploma for students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Both documents can be accessed on the DESE website: [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)

### Competency Determination Guidance

The new Competency Determination (CD) Guidance and Policy Submission Process document outlines the updated requirements following the passage of Ballot Question 2 and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Board's) regulatory amendments.

All districts are required to develop a local CD policy by October 31, 2025. The guidance includes detailed expectations for coursework, mastery, and supports for students, as well as instructions for policy approval and public posting. The guidance also includes the list of questions that districts will be required to answer in GEM\$ when they submit the policy to DESE. DESE will host an informational webinar on Wednesday, August 6, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. to review the guidance; registration details will be shared soon. Additional guidance on submitting the policy in GEM\$ will be available in early fall.

### Secondary Transition Services and Graduation with a High School Diploma Policy Memo

The updated Secondary Transition Services and Graduation with

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# DESE

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a High School Diploma Policy Memo reaffirms the graduation requirements for students with IEPs, including the requirement to provide a “free appropriate public education” or FAPE. It also discusses the recent changes to the Massachusetts state requirements regarding the CD and how it impacts the issuance of a high school diploma to students with IEPs.

Please review the document carefully to further understand topics such as federal and state law as it relates to the issuance of a high school diploma to students with IEPs, the impact of the updated CD requirements, and considerations for students who are receiving a publicly funded education in an out-of-district day or residential school, having been placed in the school by a Massachusetts school district under the special education law.

## MASC/MASS JOINT CONFERENCE 2025

Join. Your school committee and superintendent colleagues from across the state at this year's MASC/MASS Joint Conference. The three information-packed days will be focused on the challenges, and uncertainties, that districts are facing, with an emphasis on share solutions to manage the changes and ensure that all students are prepared to succeed: academically, socially, and emotionally.

Hotel accommodations must be made with the hotel. Hotel reservation and meal registration information is posted on the MASC website.

**REGISTER** online before September 5th for early bird savings.

[www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)

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