

The Future of Our Children

A family toolkit to help you advocate for strategies and interventions to address educational inequities in Massachusetts

THERE IS NO EXCELLENCE
WITHOUT EQUITY



WINTER
2022

Who We Are:

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) is a collective effort of civil rights, social justice, and education advocates from across the Commonwealth working together to promote educational equity for historically underserved students in our state's schools.



For more information, visit www.massduequity.org

Questions? Comments? Get in Touch!
MEEP@massduequity.org.

Join the Conversation



Twitter & Facebook: @MassEduEquity



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

WELCOME

A message from MEEP to the community

2

WHAT'S THE WORD?

Definitions of popular education terms

3

FAMILY 101

Opportunities for your child through SOA planning

4

FUNDING GUIDES

Overview of state and federal funding streams

6

READY, SET, ADVOCATE

Ways to get involved and key questions to ask

7

ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES

Examples of policies and interventions to support students

Letter to the Community

Dear Massachusetts Families,

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted countless challenges for you, your children, and your community over the last two years. Yet through all the disruptions, and the loss, you have shown up for one another, adapted together, and demonstrated the true meaning of resilience.

Many of us in the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership have the privilege of supporting families across our state. All of us have been inspired by all you have done to ensure your kids stay healthy and well and continue learning during these challenging times.

We have also heard your concerns about the impact of the pandemic and all of its disruptions on your kids' mental health and their learning. Many of you have expressed worries that your children are not getting the help they need from their schools. And many know all too well that even before the pandemic, too many students — especially students of color, students from economically disadvantaged families, English learners, and students with disabilities — were not getting the high-quality education they deserve.

Right now, districts have a unique opportunity to improve school experiences for all students across Massachusetts, but especially for students who have long been underserved in our schools. Many districts are receiving millions – sometimes tens of millions – in new federal and state funding to help better support students, families, and teachers. Used right, this money can help make a huge difference in the quality of education that kids receive.

As a parent or community advocate, you know the needs of students and families in your district best. As your district decides how to spend unprecedented state and federal money, your voice is critical -- and the time to weigh in is now. Under a state law called the Student Opportunity Act, districts have to submit a plan to state leaders by April 1, 2022, outlining how they will use at least some of their funding to close equity gaps. In addition, districts are required by law to engage their communities – students, families, educators, and other stakeholders – in creating these plans.

We created this toolkit to help you collaborate with your school and district leaders to make their Student Opportunity Act plans strong. It includes:

- information on the state and federal funding streams available to Massachusetts schools,
- suggestions on how you could get involved; and
- tips on what to advocate for to support students' social-emotional and academic needs.

We are honored to partner with you to build urgency and collective will for educational equity and justice.

In partnership,

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP)

What's the Word?

Definitions of popular education terms that are referenced throughout the toolkit

Student Opportunity Act (SOA):

The Student Opportunity Act (SOA) is a Massachusetts law passed in November of 2019 to help fix learning inequities in our state's schools. Over the next several years, the law will increase state spending in Pre-K-12 education, especially in districts serving the most students from economically disadvantaged families. Once the law is fully implemented, schools will be receiving more than \$2 billion in additional funding each year (compared to before SOA). Districts have to use SOA funds on evidence-based strategies to address inequities in student learning experiences and outcomes.

Federal Relief and Recovery Funds:

Federal relief and recovery funds refer to the federal funding awarded to states and school districts over the last two years to address the impacts of COVID-19 on schools and students across the nation. There have been three rounds of this funding, and they are sometimes called Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) I, II, and III funds.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is a federal law passed in 2021. It provided funding for many different kinds of supports for families, including money for schools to help address the impacts of COVID-19. ARPA's funding for schools is often called ESSER III, and is the third round of federal relief and recovery funding described above.

Evidence-Based Programs or Interventions:

Evidence-based programs are strategies that research or data show can positively impact students. To support districts in identifying specific programs that will best support their student populations, (or students who share similar characteristics, including: gender, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, and English learners), The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has compiled a menu of 21 evidence-based program examples for districts to choose from. District leaders have to use SOA funds on evidence-based strategies to address inequities across their schools.

Family 101:

Opportunities for your child through the Student Opportunity Act (SOA)



SOA is a Massachusetts law that provides additional funding to improve teaching and learning for all students

What is SOA?

The Student Opportunity Act (SOA) is a Massachusetts law passed in November of 2019 that seeks to remedy inequities in opportunity and achievement in the state's schools. Over the next several years, the law committed to increasing state spending in Pre-K-12 education, primarily benefiting districts that serve historically underserved students, including students of color, English language learners, economically disadvantaged families, and students with disabilities. In addition, the law requires districts to develop and implement three-year plans for how they will use SOA funds to remedy learning inequities.

Why is SOA Significant?

SOA funding and requirements provide an essential opportunity to confront the profound disparities in opportunity and outcomes

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Massachusetts' education system was profoundly unequal. The Student Opportunity Act offers a powerful opportunity to improve education for all students in our state, especially students who have already faced a multitude of disparities that the pandemic has only made worse.

District leaders must rewrite plans & engage their school communities to help inform policies and interventions

What's Happening with SOA Right Now?

Districts wrote initial plans outlining how they would use their SOA money before the pandemic. Given how much everything has changed with COVID, The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is requiring districts to update their plans. Districts must submit plan amendments by Friday, April 1, 2022 (Monday, August 1, 2022, for charter schools). Districts have to get input about what they should do with their new funding from students, families, teachers, community leaders, and other stakeholders between now and April 1. [Use our phone and email script to contact your district.](#)

Are SOA Dollars the Only New Funding Available?

Districts are getting both federal and state dollars to help school communities identify creative approaches to support students

No. In addition to SOA funds, which come from the state, districts have also been receiving extra money from the federal government to help address the impact of COVID. Although districts have already spent some of this money, many have a lot left to spend. Districts can and should use these dollars to help pay for the evidence-based strategies in their SOA plans.

If your district is not receiving a large amount of SOA funds, ask your district leader if they can use federal funds to help cover the costs of proposed programs or initiatives.



AT-A-GLANCE FUNDING GUIDE

A GUIDE TO THE DIFFERENT FUNDING SOURCES AVAILABLE TO MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS

	STUDENT OPPORTUNITY ACT, OR SOA	ESSER III (A.K.A. ARPA FUNDS)	ESSER II (A.K.A. CRRSA FUNDS)	ESSER I (A.K.A. CARES ACT FUNDS)
WHAT IS THE FUNDING SOURCE?	New state funding resulting from a change in the school funding formula. SOA funds are meant to address long-standing inequities in MA's education system.	Short-term federal funding to help address impacts of COVID allocated in March 2021 under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).	Short-term federal funding to help address impacts of COVID allocated in December 2020 under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act.	Short-term federal funding to help address impacts of COVID allocated in June 2020 under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
HOW MUCH MONEY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT STATEWIDE?	About \$300 million extra this school year, with similar increases expected for the next 5 years.	\$1.83 billion: \$1.65 billion for school districts and \$180 million for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).	\$814.9 million: \$733.4 million for school districts and \$81.5 million for DESE.	\$214.9 million: \$193.4 million for school districts and \$21.5 million for DESE.
HOW ABOUT FOR MY DISTRICT?	Learn more: bit.ly/MAByDistrict	Learn more: bit.ly/MAByDistrict	Learn more: bit.ly/MACovidFunds	Learn more: bit.ly/MACovidFunds
WHEN DO THESE FUNDS EXPIRE?	They don't. These funds represent permanent annual increases.	September 30, 2024. Most districts have not started to spend this money yet.	September 30, 2023. Districts have planned how to spend this funding and many have already begun spending.	September 30, 2022. Districts have spent most of this funding.
WHAT CAN FUNDS BE USED FOR?	Funds have to be used to address disparities in learning experiences and outcomes. Districts have to work with their school community to create 3-year plans for how to use this funding. See SOA FAQ for more info.	Districts have to use at least 20% of this funding to address the impacts of missed instructional time during COVID. Remaining funds can be used for a wide range of student, educator and school supports.	Funds can be used for a wide range of student, educator and school supports.	Funds can be used for a wide range of student, educator and school supports.



HOW MUCH FUNDING WILL EACH MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL DISTRICT RECEIVE?

The following table shows how much federal COVID relief and Student Opportunity Act (SOA) funds have been allocated to cities across the state. We will be launching a parent-friendly tool that provides all districts' available state and federal funds. Follow us on social media @MassEduEquity to get the first glimpse!

School District	New 2022 state SOA funding	American Rescue Plan Act funding	Total (SOA + ARPA)
Attleboro	\$353,940	\$6,263,639	\$6,617,579
Barnstable	\$154,410	\$6,063,431	\$6,217,841
Boston	\$1,821,120	\$276,339,451	\$278,160,571
Brockton	\$23,148,786	\$34,046,089	\$57,194,875
Chelsea	\$9,322,330	\$20,732,065	\$30,054,395
Chicopee	\$3,417,947	\$22,330,824	\$25,748,771
Everett	\$9,334,212	\$13,453,831	\$22,788,043
Fall River	\$8,166,479	\$39,152,523	\$47,319,002
Fitchburg	\$3,540,254	\$16,664,400	\$20,204,654
Haverhill	\$1,632,480	\$17,167,041	\$18,799,521
Holyoke	\$3,900,517	\$37,135,160	\$41,035,677
Lawrence	\$15,287,211	\$54,108,599	\$69,395,810
Leominster	\$619,211	\$11,193,495	\$11,812,706
Lowell	\$11,599,005	\$40,167,351	\$51,766,356
Lynn	\$14,079,365	\$42,106,523	\$56,185,888
Malden	\$207,630	\$15,825,956	\$16,033,586
Methuen	\$203,010	\$11,594,304	\$11,797,314
New Bedford	\$7,654,680	\$47,482,075	\$55,136,755
Peabody	\$931,511	\$7,515,052	\$8,446,563
Pittsfield	\$1,497,516	\$13,152,064	\$14,649,580
Quincy	\$3,224,569	\$16,043,084	\$19,267,653
Revere	\$10,652,533	\$19,477,086	\$30,129,619
Salem	\$129,450	\$9,246,186	\$9,375,636
Springfield	\$26,179,139	\$156,313,280	\$182,492,419
Taunton	\$2,258,563	\$17,015,439	\$19,274,002
Westfield	\$149,400	\$10,784,275	\$10,933,675
Worcester	\$13,719,650	\$78,224,272	\$91,943,922

Fast Facts:

- Through the **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, Massachusetts schools stand to receive more than **\$1.8 billion in new federal funding**, with the largest amounts going to many of our highest need districts.
- Federal law requires districts to use at **least 20% of their ARPA dollars for evidence-based approaches** to address the impacts of missed instructional time (also known as "learning loss," or "unfinished learning").
- Remaining funds can be used in a variety of ways to address students' **academic and social-emotional** needs and support district operations.
- **The SOA law** commits to investing an additional **\$2.2 billion in Massachusetts schools** and requires all districts to address disparities in opportunity and achievement.
- **The SOA law** directs most of that funding to the **highest-need districts** – those with the largest percentages of economically disadvantaged students and English learners and the least property wealth.



\$2.2 billion

increase in funding for schools under SOA by 2027

Approximately **\$2.9 billion** in COVID relief funds

400+

school districts

26

gateway cities

Advocating for Resources to Support All Students

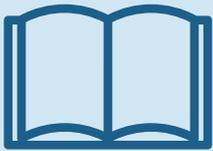
We wanted to provide families with examples of strategies and interventions that they can advocate for to help respond to students' academic and social-emotional needs. We hope this page is helpful to get ideas for things to ask your district to do and ideas for questions to ask your district. For example, will the district provide all students struggling academically with an individualized plan to help them catch up? If not, why?



Prioritizing COVID-19 Response & Support

Ask your district to...

- Increase access to COVID-19 testing and purchase cleaning and disinfecting materials and protective equipment, including high-quality masks and face shields.
- Purchase portable air cleaners, and improve building-wide filtration to increase ventilation in your school.
- Hire more substitutes to cover for teachers who are out sick. Districts may need to pay substitutes more or offer other compensation, like free college classes, to get more people to take these jobs.



Expanding Learning Opportunities & Supports

Ask your district to...

- Hire more counselors to work directly with students and families to develop individualized learning plans detailing the academic and social-emotional supports the child will receive to help them get back on track.
- Offer high-quality one-on-one or small-group tutoring to students. Tutoring works best when done in small group settings and when aligned with classroom learning.
- Create new or expand existing summer and after-school programs that help students catch up on any skills and knowledge that they might have missed out on.
- Expand access to arts, athletics, enrichment, and elective courses like robotics and computer science.



Prioritizing Social-Emotional Health Support

Ask your district to...

- Work alongside students and families to revisit school discipline policies to make them more fair.
- Hire school counselors, school psychologists, and other mental health professionals to support students' social-emotional, and mental health needs— especially professionals of color, staff members who are bilingual, and team members trained in culturally responsive approaches.
- Provide professional development for district leaders and teachers to support teachers' mental health needs and equip educators with knowledge to support students.



Laying the Foundation for Ongoing Improvements

Ask your district to...

- Strengthen communication with families by sharing information in multiple formats and translating information into numerous languages.
- Make sure the curriculum reflects the experiences and accomplishments of people of color.
- Develop workshops and one-on-one training for junior and senior high school students to apply to college and complete financial aid applications.
- Provide all students with tablets or laptops to take home, and free or low-cost high-speed internet for low-income families.



Investing in Long-Term Strategies to Address Inequities

Ask your district to...

- Provide high-quality early childhood education for all students through the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs.
- Invest and dramatically expand access to and preparation for advanced coursework and early college programs for all students.
- Recruit and retain more educators of color to ensure students see themselves reflected in their schools, classrooms, and curricula.
- Open up new career pathways and possibilities to prepare a 21st-century workforce by personalizing educational journeys and leveraging technology to make learning relevant.



Ready, Set, Advocate

As a parent or community advocate, you know the needs of students and families in your district best. As your district decides how to spend unprecedented state and federal money, your voice is critical.

This page suggests steps you can take and questions you can ask of your district and school leaders to make your voice heard and push for change for all students in your community.

Things to Remember:

- ✓ **Students first:** All the district's efforts must focus on supporting our students, both academically and in other ways, including prioritizing their social-emotional and physical health.
- ✓ **Keep equity at the forefront:** Districts should prioritize strategies to improve learning experiences and outcomes for students of color, linguistically diverse students, students from economically disadvantaged families, and students with disabilities.

Ways to Get Involved

- ✓ Call your district and ask them to share current and upcoming virtual and in-person engagement opportunities in relation to the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) available within your community.
- ✓ Call your district to inquire if they have other ways to get involved, such as completing a survey or providing public comment.
- ✓ Attend school board and school committee meetings to advocate for your desired changes.
- ✓ Attend Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) board meetings and committee meetings.
- ✓ Continuously visit your school or district's website to ensure you have the latest information and engagement opportunities.
- ✓ Reach out to community-based organizations throughout your city for support and inquire about their plans to advocate and to see if your community has opportunities to apply for funds to enhance or develop programs.

Questions to Ask District Leaders

- How will funds be distributed to schools across the district?
- How will the district ensure that schools serving students with the highest needs get the most resources?
- What student populations is the district targeting through their plans?
- What evidence-based programs is the district using to address inequities in outcomes between different student populations?
- What outcome metrics will the district use to monitor student progress?
- What supports and interventions will be made available to address students' needs?
- How will funds be used to address social, emotional, and mental impacts of the pandemic?
- How will the district increase and measure family engagement over time?

Keep In Touch!

The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership advocates for policies and practices that improve opportunity and outcomes for historically underserved students. We want to hear from you: What changes do you want to see in your schools? Learn more about our work and share your insights at www.MassEduEquity.com

