

## *Student Opportunity Plans*

### Letter from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley

With the passage of the [Student Opportunity Act \(SOA\)](#) (Chapter 132 of the Acts of 2019), we have once again affirmed that public education is cherished in the Commonwealth. The law implements the recommendations of the 2015 Foundation Budget Review Commission and includes other provisions to benefit our public schools. It is now up to all of us in schools and districts to ensure we spend our resources in the way the SOA intends, so that all students have access to an excellent education.

The goals of the SOA closely track those in the report I issued to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education last summer, “[Our Way Forward](#).” In that report, I recognized the progress our state has made over the past decade in overall student achievement but noted that persistent opportunity and achievement gaps remain for our students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities. **Closing these gaps is our collective work for the next decade, and the SOA will fuel our efforts to ensure all students achieve at high levels and are prepared for success after high school.**

**It is critical that district resources support student subgroups as the legislation intended.** As part of the SOA, districts are required to submit three-year, evidence-based plans aimed at closing persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups. While the law sets forth several requirements for these plans, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will focus primarily on the extent to which districts are implementing evidence-based programs that will close these gaps in their communities.

The Department is charged with creating a template for these three-year plans and providing guidance to help districts complete them. As a former superintendent/receiver, I recognize that districts produce plans under various state and federal laws, and the SOA adds yet another planning requirement. **Over time, we intend to further consolidate and streamline requirements for these plans, so that the workload is more manageable.**

In recognition that over 80 percent of new Chapter 70 funds are going to approximately 35 districts, we will take a bifurcated approach to the SOA plan templates. There will be a “short form” for most districts and a “longer form” for those districts receiving substantial new funds. At the same time, it is critically important that **all districts use their SOA plans as an opportunity to ensure that strong programs are in place to support the needs of student subgroups**, as virtually all districts have achievement and opportunity gaps that limit our students’ potential.

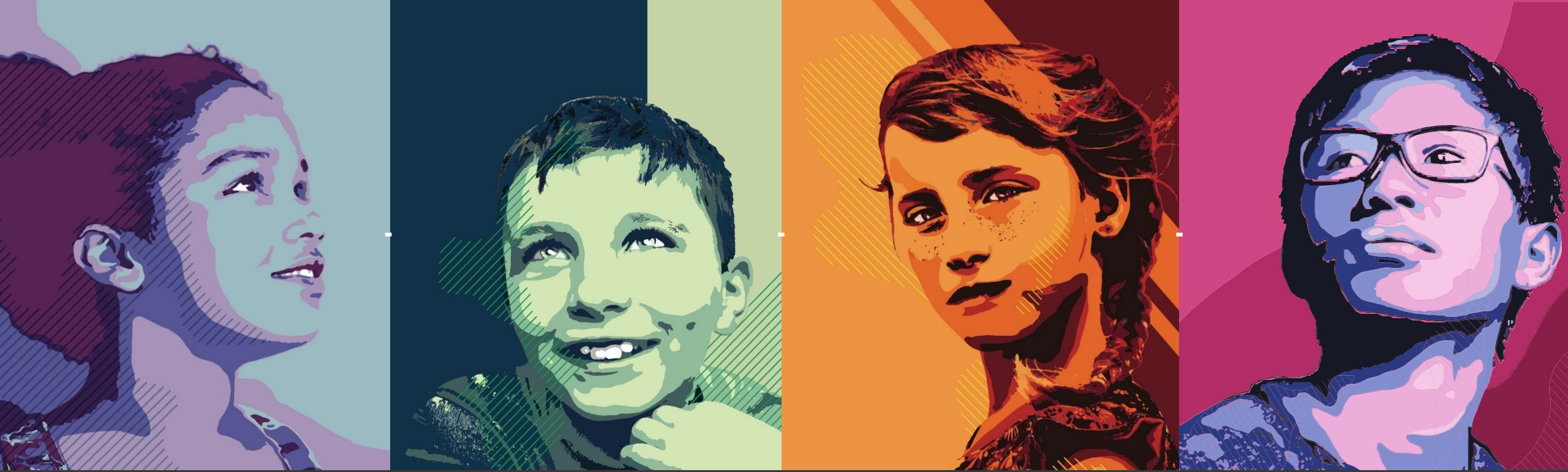
Two final points. First, I understand the timeline is extremely tight. In recognition of that, we are asking for short, succinct plan documents, even for districts using the long form. **Fundamentally, each district’s plan should be a commitment to do a few things well; it should not be a comprehensive strategic plan.** Second, we are especially interested in accelerating the adoption of three programs statewide: 1) expanded pre-kindergarten and evidence-based early literacy, 2) Early College programs, and 3) diversifying the educator and administrator workforce. In our guidance, DESE is also providing a larger suite of evidence-based program examples for districts to consider when formulating their plans.

The SOA is truly a historic opportunity for Massachusetts to propel our state to become a national leader, not just in overall achievement, but for all children in the Commonwealth. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of our students, and I look forward to reviewing your plans in April.

Sincerely,

**Jeffrey C. Riley**

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education



**When students go deep in their learning, they turn every challenge into an opportunity to shine.**

## **Student Opportunity Act February – March 2020**

# Student Opportunity Act (SOA) headlines

**The SOA is providing a minimal increase to 185 districts in Chapter 70 funding of \$30.00 per pupil. This may result in no increase to school district appropriations.**

**As a result of this progressive school funding formula, 35+ districts are receiving 85% of the new Chapter 70 money.**

**In an effort to close persistent achievement gaps, all districts are required to submit three-year evidence-based plans to the Commissioner.**

**Recognizing that the funds are not evenly distributed across all districts, DESE will have a “short form” plan (~2 pages) for most districts and “long form” plan for those receiving significant funds**



# Enhanced Core Instruction

- ✓ Expanded access to full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds, including potential collaboration with other local providers ★
- ✓ Research-based early literacy programs in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades ★
- ✓ Early College programs focused primarily on students under-represented in higher education ★
- ✓ Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum
- ✓ Expanded access to career-technical education, including “After Dark” district-vocational partnerships and innovation pathways reflecting local labor market priorities

An illustration of a hand holding a large book over a chasm. Three students are walking across the book bridge. The background is orange. The text 'Targeted Student Supports' is at the bottom.

## Targeted Student Supports

- ✓ Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs
- ✓ Acceleration Academies and/or summer learning to support skill development and accelerate advanced learners
- ✓ Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities and English learners
- ✓ Dropout prevention and recovery programs



# Talent Development

- ✓ Diversifying the educator and administrator workforce through recruitment and retention ★
- ✓ Strategies to recruit and retain educators and administrators in hard-to-staff schools and positions
- ✓ Leadership pipeline development programs for schools
- ✓ Increased staffing to expand student access to arts, athletics, and enrichment and strategic scheduling to enable common planning time for teachers



- ✓ Community partnerships for in-school enrichment and wraparound services
- ✓ Labor-management partnerships to improve student performance
- ✓ Parent-teacher home visiting programs
- ✓ Facilities improvements to create healthy and safe school environments

## Conditions for Student Success



# Guiding principles for district SOA plans

**Incentivize adoption of 2-3 “Commissioner Priority” strategies** across districts, ideally through competitive grants

1. Full-day, **high-quality Pre-K** for all four-year-olds & **evidence-based early literacy**
2. Increase percentage of high school students enrolled in **early college**
3. Recruitment and retention strategies to **diversify the educator and administrator workforce**



# Key dates this year for SOA plans



## **Late January:**

- Jan. 22: Governor Baker releases House 2 budget numbers
- Plan templates & guidance document released to districts

## **February - March:**

- Districts work with local stakeholders to develop plans
- DESE supports with technical assistance
- Local school committees should vote on plans before they are submitted to DESE

## **April 1:**

Plans due to DESE for review

## **May - June:**

Inform districts if plans require amendments

