Report to the Legislature: Student Opportunity Act Three-Year Evidence-Based Plans

This report provides information on the implementation of three-year evidence-based plans pursuant to G.L. Ch. 69 §1S (d)

January 2021

This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

January 2021

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Department) report on the progress made in addressing persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups in the aggregate and within subcategories on a statewide basis through the collection of three-year district plans.

At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the Legislature provided key relief on the April 1, 2020, deadline for plan submissions. The Department expects to receive all district plans by January 15, 2021. While this work was interrupted by the pandemic, the following report summarizes the foundation established by this new process and initial results from the plans collected thus far.

Massachusetts has been recognized for the progress our students have made over the last decade in overall student achievement, but persistent opportunity and achievement gaps remain, especially for our students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities. Closing these gaps is our urgent and collective work; the Student Opportunity Act supports our efforts to ensure that all students are prepared for success after high school.

I look forward to providing future updates to you regarding the implementation of the Student Opportunity Act. Please contact Associate Commissioner of Statewide System of Support Daniel Anderson at daniel.anderson@mass.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature pursuant to Chapter 132 of the Acts of 2019, The Student Opportunity Act:

Annually, not later than December 31, the commissioner shall submit a report to the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate and the chairs of the joint committee on education on the progress made in addressing persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups in the aggregate and within subcategories on a statewide basis; provided, however, that district and school-level data shall be made available on the department's website along with the report. (M.G.L. Ch. 69 § 1S (d))

A key goal of the Student Opportunity Act (Act) is to address persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups in the Commonwealth. The Act directs the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish statewide targets for addressing persistent disparities in achievement among student subgroups. Districts and charter schools are charged with identifying student achievement gaps and developing three-year, evidence-based plans to address those gaps by April 1, 2020.

By early February 2020 districts received guidance and templates from the Department to support the development and submission of the three-year evidence-based plans. Following the March 2020 statewide school closures due to the COVID pandemic and the prospect of extended impacts on districts and schools, the legislature granted the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner) the authority to postpone the April 1 due date through Chapter 56 of the Acts of 2020. The due date for three-year plans for districts is now January 15, 2021.

This report describes the implementation of the three-year evidence-based plan process to date, a summary of plans that have been submitted to date, and outlines the next steps.

Implementation

Directly following the enactment of the Student Opportunity Act, the Department created a district plan template and detailed guidance document for districts to follow while developing their three-year evidence-based plans to assist them in meeting the original April 1, 2020, submission deadline. The Department established a bifurcated process for plan submissions: a "long form" process that would be applied to districts receiving substantial new funds and a "short form" process that would be applied to the remaining districts. Districts receiving more than $1.5 million in incremental Chapter 70 funding in FY2021 House 2 would be required to complete the long form, and districts receiving less than $1.5 million in incremental Chapter 70 funding would complete the short form. In FY2021 House 2, 37 districts were required to complete the long form and accounted for over 82 percent of incremental Chapter 70 funding.

Building from the evidence-based program categories outlined in the Student Opportunity Act, the Department identified 17 examples of high-quality programs that the Commissioner encouraged districts to consider.[1] These programs were:

Enhanced Core Instruction
1. Expanded access to full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds, including potential collaboration with other local providers (SOA categories D, E, F, and G)
2. Research-based early literacy programs in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades (D, E, F, and G)
3. Early College programs focused primarily on students under-represented in higher education (E, F, and I)
4. Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum (E and F)
5. Expanded access to career-technical education, including "After Dark" district-vocational partnerships and innovation pathways reflecting local labor market priorities (I)

Targeted Student Supports
6. Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs (C and D)
7. Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities and English learners (D and E)
8. Acceleration Academies and/or summer learning to support skill development and accelerate advanced learners (A)
9. Dropout prevention and recovery programs (I)

Talent Development
10. Diversifying the educator/administrator workforce through recruitment and retention (D and H)
11. Leadership pipeline development programs for schools (D and E)

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[1] A) Expanded learning time in the form of a longer school day or year; B) Increased opportunity for common planning time for teachers; C) Social services to support students' social-emotional and physical health; D) Hiring school personnel that best support improved student performance; E) Increased or improved professional development; F) Purchase of curriculum materials and equipment that are aligned with the statewide curriculum frameworks; G) Expanded early education and pre-kindergarten programming within the district in consultation or in partnership with community based organizations; H) Diversifying the educator and administrator workforce; I) Developing additional pathways to strengthen college and career readiness; J) Any other program determined to be evidence-based by the commissioner

12. Increased staffing to expand student access to arts, athletics, and enrichment, and strategic scheduling to enable common planning time for teachers (B)
13. Strategies to recruit and retain educators/administrators in hard-to-staff schools and positions (D)

Conditions for Student Success
14. Community partnerships for in-school enrichment and wraparound services (C)
15. Parent-teacher home visiting programs (E)
16. Labor-management partnerships to improve student performance (E)
17. Facilities improvements to create healthy and safe school environments (C)
18. Managing declining enrollment to ensure robust programming at all schools (J)

The Department provided several supports for districts to complete this new requirement. These supports included: webinars, presentations, a dedicated email address for support, and a designated section of the DESE website. In addition, an accompanying document was provided to districts with examples of evidence-based programs that included high-quality program components and implementation considerations.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Chapter 56 of the Acts of 2020 granted districts an extension to submit their three-year plans to the Department beyond the April 1, 2020 deadline. This deadline was ultimately extended to January 15, 2021.

Progress

While districts and charter schools have until January 15, 2021, to submit their plans, many already have. The following information is a synopsis of the plans submitted to date. Please note that these districts may still amend their previous submissions.

As of January 11, 2020, 201 plans had been submitted from districts, 63 percent of the total expected. Of these, 180 plans were "short-form" (64 percent of total short form plans) and 21 plans were "long-form" (57 percent of total long form plans). In addition, 23 of 78 charter schools submitted plans. Due to the sample size, charter school information has not been presented in this data but will be available once all plans have been submitted.

In accordance with the Student Opportunity Act, the Department requested that districts make four commitments as part of their three-year plans:
1. Intentionally focus on student subgroups who are not achieving at the same high levels as their peers;
2. Adopt, deepen, or continue specific evidence-based programs to close opportunity and achievement gaps for student subgroups and allocate resources to support these programs;
3. Monitor success in reducing disparities in achievement among student subgroups over three years with a small number of metrics and targets; and
4. Engage families, particularly those families representing student subgroups most in need of support and how best to meet their students' needs.

Commitment #1: Focusing on Student Subgroups
Districts were asked to analyze student learning opportunities and student outcomes for groups of students in their schools and then identify within their plans which group or groups the evidence-based approaches would target. On average, districts selected 3.5 subgroups. Table 1 shows the student groups that districts are prioritizing.

Table 1: Student Subgroups Selected

Student Subgroups	Total 201		Long Form 21		Short Form 180	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
Students with disabilities	159	79%	18	86%	143	79%
High needs students	115	57%	16	76%	105	58%
Low-income/economically disadvantaged students	111	55%	15	71%	99	55%
English learners and former English learners	95	47%	18	86%	86	48%
First language not English students	47	23%	11	52%	36	20%
African American/Black students	42	21%	6	29%	37	21%
Hispanic or Latinx students	41	20%	8	38%	37	21%
White students	19	9%	5	24%	14	8%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx students	17	8%	2	10%	15	8%
Asian students	16	8%	4	19%	12	7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native students	11	5%	2	10%	10	6%
Other - Write In	10	5%	0	0%	10	5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students	9	4%	3	10%	8	4%

Commitment #2: Using Evidence-Based Programs to Close Gaps
The Department identified 17 examples of high-quality evidence-based programs that the commissioner encouraged districts to consider when selecting evidence-based programs to support student subgroups. Each program is aligned to one or more of the program categories outlined in the language of the Student Opportunity Act. Table 3 indicates the number of evidence-based programs selected by districts. Please note that districts could select multiple programs.

Table 2: Evidence-Based Programs Selected

Evidence-Based Programs Selected by Districts	Total 201		Long 21		Short 180	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Inclusion/co-teaching for students with disabilities and English learners	99	49%	15	71%	84	47%
Increased personnel and services to support holistic student needs	89	44%	15	71%	74	41%
Supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum	74	37%	11	52%	63	35%
Research-based early literacy programs in pre-kindergarten and early elementary grades	64	32%	4	19%	60	33%
Early College programs focused primarily on students under-represented in higher education	21	10%	6	29%	15	8%
Expanded access to full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds, including potential collaboration with other local providers	20	10%	5	24%	15	8%
Diversifying the educator/administrator workforce through recruitment and retention	16	8%	8	38%	8	4%
Other evidence-based program proposed by the district	16	8%	2	10%	14	8%
Increased staffing to expand student access to arts, athletics, and enrichment, and strategic scheduling to enable common planning time for teachers	14	7%	8	38%	6	3%
Dropout prevention and recovery programs	13	6%	3	14%	10	6%
Expanded access to career-technical education, including After Dark, district-vocational partnerships, and innovation pathways reflecting local labor market priorities	13	6%	1	5%	12	7%
Community partnerships for in-school enrichment and wraparound services	11	5%	2	10%	9	5%
Facilities improvements to create healthy and safe school environments	8	4%	5	24%	3	2%
Acceleration Academies and/or summer learning to support skill development and accelerate advanced learners	5	2%	1	5%	4	2%
Leadership pipeline development programs for schools	2	1%	0	0%	2	1%
Strategies to recruit and retain educators/administrators in hard-to-staff schools and positions	2	1%	0	0%	2	1%
Labor-management partnerships to improve student performance	2	1%	1	5%	1	1%
Parent-teacher home visiting programs	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Since the financial commitments as part of these evidence-based programs are still uncertain, we are not currently presenting summary financial information. After the final submission, we will provide summary information on districts' financial commitments.

Commitment #3: Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets
Districts identified the outcome metrics they plan to use to measure success in addressing persistent disparities among subgroups. The SOA plan template developed by the Department included a dropdown menu where districts could choose from 13 different data points that the Department collects. These metrics include student achievement and growth, high school completion, post-secondary success, and other measures. The Department is setting annual targets for these metrics and will track districts' progress in meeting them.

Districts also had the opportunity to provide custom metrics that they planned to use to measure progress. Seventy percent of districts indicated that they plan to utilize custom metrics. Districts are responsible for setting their targets for measuring progress on these metrics. The information on targets will be collected in the April 1, 2021 updates from districts.

Commitment Three: *Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets*	Total		Long		Short	
	201		21		180	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student Achievement as measured by average scaled score on MCAS						
English language arts (ELA)	130	65%	16	76%	114	63%
Mathematics	97	48%	15	71%	82	46%
Science*	43	21%	11	52%	32	18%
Student Growth as measured by mean student growth percentile (SGP)						
ELA	138	69%	19	90%	119	66%
Mathematics	115	57%	18	86%	97	54%
High School Completion						
Four-year cohort graduation rate	45	22%	8	38%	37	21%
Annual dropout rate	27	13%	5	24%	22	12%
Extended engagement rate**	21	10%	7	33%	14	8%
Post-secondary Success						
Enrolled in college during the first year after high school	17	8%	10	48%	10	6%
Persisted in college into the second year	8	4%	5	24%	3	2%
Other DESE Outcome Metrics						
English Language Proficiency	58	29%	13	62%	45	25%
Chronic absenteeism	37	18%	6	29%	31	17%
Percentage of 11th and 12th graders completing advanced coursework	29	14%	9	43%	20	11%

Commitment #4: Engaging All Families
Districts and charter schools submitted their ongoing plans for engaging families and how they would measure increases in family engagement based on these efforts. Frequently cited strategies included community conversations and input sessions, surveys, and school committee engagement.

Closing

With the collection of all remaining plans in January, the Department will be able to update these figures to include all districts and charter schools. In accordance with the law, district plans will be available on the DESE website. Additional details, including targets and annual updates, will be included in the April 1 update.