



MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of Elementary  
and Secondary Education

## **Rural School Aid**

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***Report to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means***

Submitted pursuant to Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023, line item 7061-9813.

**November 2024**





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

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
135 Santilli Highway, Everett MA 02149  
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  
[www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)



## ***Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education***

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135 Santilli Highway, Everett MA 02149

Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

November 29, 2024

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit this Report to the Legislature on *Rural School Aid*. The information provided in this report was compiled by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) from state budget data, plans submitted by aid recipients, and expenditure data from school district End of Year Reports.

The recommendations in the report were developed by Department program staff based on their experience working on the program for the past six years.

If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to contact Rob O'Donnell, Director of School Finance at [Robert.F.O'Donnell@mass.gov](mailto:Robert.F.O'Donnell@mass.gov) or at 781-338-6512.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. C. Riley".

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education



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## Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) respectfully submits this report to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means on rural school aid pursuant to Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2023, [line item 7061-9813](#):

*For rural school aid to eligible towns and regional school districts, excluding vocational schools, independent agricultural, technical schools and charter schools; provided, that a school district shall be eligible for rural school aid if a school district has a student density of not more than 35 students per square mile and an average annual per capita income of not more than the average annual per capita income for the commonwealth for the same period; provided further, that rural school aid shall be allocated equitably in the following priority order: (i) school districts serving less than 11 students per square mile; (ii) school districts serving not more than 21 students per square mile; and (iii) school districts serving not more than 35 students per square mile; provided further, that not later than December 1, 2023, the department shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means detailing: (a) its recommendations for additional adjustments to the rural school aid calculation for fiscal year 2025 to improve the accuracy and equity of the student density component and the per capita income component; and (b) the calculation and planned distribution of funds to school districts; provided further, that not later than February 1, 2024, any district receiving funds under this item shall submit a plan to the department of elementary and secondary education outlining steps the district will take to increase regional collaboration, consolidation or other efficiencies over the next 3 fiscal years; and provided further, that funds distributed from this item shall not be considered [chapter 70](#) aid for the calculation of the minimum required local contribution for fiscal year 2025.*

Rural school aid (line item 7061-9813) was initially funded in fiscal year 2019 at a level of \$1.5 million. Under the initial appropriation, 33 school districts (districts) were eligible for funding. The program was subsequently funded at \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2020, \$3.0 million in fiscal year 2021, \$4.0 million in fiscal year 2022, and \$5.5 million in fiscal year 2023. Over the same period the number of eligible districts grew from 47 to 65. The fiscal year 2024 budget authorized \$15 million for rural school aid.

## Rural school aid recipients

Eligibility for rural aid is currently based on two criteria: per capita income and student density. School districts were eligible for rural school aid in fiscal year 2024 if they had a student density of not more than 35 students per square mile and a per capita income less than the state average of \$58,820 based on Massachusetts Department of Revenue data.<sup>1</sup> After determining income eligibility, the Department calculates student densities (current foundation enrollment divided by district square mileage) and assigns districts that meet the density criteria to priority groups. In fiscal year 2024, there were three priority groups, consistent with FY2024 budget language:

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<sup>1</sup> In fiscal year 2022, the Department began using Department of Revenue data to determine per capita income. Previously, U.S. Census data was used.

- Priority 1 included districts that serve no more than 11 students per square mile.
- Priority 2 included districts that serve more than 11 and not more than 21 students per square mile.
- Priority 3 included districts that serve more than 21 and not more than 35 students per square mile.

Consistent with the line-item language, the Department set aside more of the available FY2024 funding for Priority 1 districts, leaving the remaining balance for Priority 2 and 3 districts. The rural school aid that the districts in each priority group receive is based on a prorated share of their FY2024 Chapter 70 target aid. The Department allocated \$7.5 million of the available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$4.8 million for Priority 2 districts, and \$2.7 million for Priority 3 districts. The total FY2024 line-item amount has been divided across each priority group in the same manner as FY2023.<sup>2</sup>

For all three groups, the Department calculated the target aid amounts for each district based on current Chapter 70 aid, summed these amounts, and gave the districts in each priority group a prorated share of their target aid totals based on available funding. Priority 1 districts received a higher percentage of aid than priority 2 districts, and priority 1 and 2 districts received a higher percentage of aid than priority 3 districts.

Sixty-eight districts received rural aid in fiscal year 2024. Awards ranged from \$17,438 for Savoy to \$1,325,077 for Central Berkshire Regional School District, see Table 1 for the funding distributions for the last six years.

**Table 1: Rural aid distributions, FY19–FY24**

Org	School district	FY19 (n=33)	FY20 (n=47)	FY21 (n=50)	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)
0043	Brimfield	\$0	\$67,768	\$63,749	\$59,851	\$82,382	\$230,706
0068	Conway	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$8,151	\$14,611	\$26,088
0074	Deerfield	\$0	\$0	\$28,966	\$28,126	\$38,525	\$97,107
0098	Florida	\$10,029	\$17,357	\$13,230	\$9,978	\$26,847	\$63,725
0121	Hancock	\$4,679	\$8,129	\$7,598	\$8,247	\$11,916	\$33,697
0154	Leverett	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,056	\$15,846	\$0
0230	Pelham	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,889	\$9,192	\$24,065
0234	Petersham	\$7,124	\$14,746	\$13,519	\$13,628	\$23,200	\$65,973
0253	Rowe	\$3,913	\$5,916	\$5,536	\$5,111	\$7,999	\$20,813

<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year 2023, the Department allocated \$2.75 million of available rural school aid funding for Priority 1 districts, \$1.75 million for Priority 2 districts, and \$1 million for Priority 3 districts. In fiscal year 2022, the Department allocated \$2 million of the available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$1.25 million for Priority 2 districts, and \$750,000 for Priority 3 districts. In fiscal year 2021, the Department allocated \$1.5 million of the available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$870,000 for Priority 2 districts, and \$630,000 for Priority 3 districts. In fiscal year 2020, the Department allocated \$1,750,000 of the available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$1,000,000 for Priority 2 districts, and \$750,000 for Priority 3 districts. In fiscal year 2019, DESE allocated \$1 million of the available funding for Priority 1 districts and \$500,000 for Priority 2 districts.



Org	School district	FY19 (n=33)	FY20 (n=47)	FY21 (n=50)	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)
0263	Savoy	\$11,336	\$22,595	\$12,895	\$4,774	\$13,719	\$17,438
0272	Shutesbury	\$0	\$34,282	\$25,019	\$22,847	\$30,967	\$86,318
0300	Truro	\$12,644	\$23,325	\$19,749	\$19,836	\$26,973	\$63,724
0306	Wales	\$36,480	\$55,101	\$49,168	\$49,205	\$75,174	\$156,814
0312	Warwick	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$51,113
0318	Wellfleet	\$7,431	\$11,573	\$10,815	\$11,216	\$19,645	\$44,604
0327	Westhampton	\$15,095	\$22,504	\$16,290	\$10,748	\$14,858	\$35,460
0337	Whately	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$9,369	\$14,898	\$41,949
0340	Williamsburg	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$37,232	\$49,533	\$109,086
0349	Worthington	\$0	\$0	\$11,821	\$10,466	\$15,442	\$43,455
0618	Berkshire Hills	\$21,275	\$46,036	\$38,981	\$105,274	\$154,940	\$388,569
0632	Chesterfield-Goshen	\$17,962	\$24,840	\$20,129	\$16,580	\$29,396	\$78,321
0635	Central Berkshire	\$246,056	\$395,150	\$336,916	\$359,344	\$532,168	\$1,325,077
0662	Farmington River	\$16,150	\$23,465	\$19,685	\$21,174	\$33,088	\$82,272
0670	Frontier	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$59,129	\$88,826	\$196,954
0672	Gateway	\$157,048	\$260,836	\$223,214	\$219,254	\$300,721	\$832,654
0683	Hampshire	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$109,247	\$134,143	\$313,001
0685	Hawlemont	\$23,096	\$34,645	\$27,643	\$24,294	\$35,130	\$140,229
0717	Mohawk Trail	\$132,932	\$244,156	\$192,644	\$161,077	\$262,497	\$621,345
0728	New Salem-Wendell	\$21,657	\$33,977	\$30,611	\$36,581	\$47,935	\$131,484
0750	Pioneer	\$92,593	\$157,654	\$123,612	\$116,848	\$175,088	\$373,025
0755	Ralph C. Mahar	\$183,774	\$291,982	\$247,192	\$260,024	\$362,430	\$904,898
0765	Southern Berkshire	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$70,159	\$101,911	\$256,284
0041	Brewster	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$19,879	\$27,944	\$77,187
0045	Brookfield	\$14,760	\$34,567	\$31,976	\$36,780	\$46,891	\$135,329
0063	Clarksburg	\$13,877	\$28,808	\$24,222	\$32,168	\$49,869	\$120,327
0085	Eastham	\$3,199	\$7,093	\$0	\$9,423	\$13,569	\$38,925
0091	Erving	\$4,153	\$8,702	\$7,654	\$9,566	\$12,539	\$35,903
0117	Hadley	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$7,878	\$30,172	\$84,364
0127	Hatfield	\$6,375	\$5,547	\$4,371	\$15,745	\$20,656	\$56,658
0135	Holland	\$7,461	\$18,969	\$14,694	\$14,258	\$25,933	\$68,013
0191	Monson	\$43,130	\$38,627	\$29,833	\$101,995	\$132,216	\$359,323
0223	Orange	\$51,458	\$117,085	\$97,140	\$110,214	\$174,503	\$506,019
0240	Plympton	\$0	\$12,514	\$12,272	\$13,506	\$22,629	\$55,294
0250	Rochester	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$38,711	\$58,122	\$138,732
0275	Southampton	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$35,817	\$42,596	\$117,963
0289	Sunderland	\$4,840	\$10,857	\$6,997	\$15,151	\$12,536	\$53,922
0605	Amherst-Pelham	\$42,609	\$93,807	\$75,979	\$90,086	\$111,447	\$282,824

Org	School district	FY19 (n=33)	FY20 (n=47)	FY21 (n=50)	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)
0660	Nauset	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$57,890	\$81,045	\$229,717
0715	Mount Greylock	\$27,988	\$64,723	\$52,303	\$71,452	\$92,683	\$286,448
0753	Quabbin	\$119,758	\$242,603	\$212,420	\$261,905	\$379,603	\$1,042,092
0766	Southwick-Tolland-Granville	\$52,292	\$113,343	\$106,610	\$113,358	\$141,379	\$385,334
0770	Tantasqua	\$86,825	\$200,892	\$171,748	\$208,631	\$273,669	\$779,547
0077	Douglas	\$0	\$47,130	\$36,177	\$37,104	\$47,298	\$115,500
0111	Granby	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$24,168	\$27,375	\$71,511
0150	Lee	\$0	\$12,708	\$9,363	\$9,903	\$12,879	\$32,461
0215	North Brookfield	\$0	\$33,183	\$25,025	\$28,805	\$39,705	\$94,188
0287	Sturbridge	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$26,086	\$35,681	\$94,437
0331	Westport	\$0	\$23,841	\$18,465	\$22,851	\$31,548	\$77,723
0343	Winchendon	\$0	\$90,912	\$66,144	\$81,258	\$110,190	\$278,866
0603	Hoosac Valley	\$0	\$81,569	\$60,145	\$72,938	\$93,982	\$228,600
0610	Ashburnham-Westminster	\$0	\$96,328	\$78,182	\$89,702	\$121,856	\$300,130
0615	Athol-Royalston	\$0	\$118,896	\$97,446	\$113,416	\$163,225	\$410,639
0674	Gill-Montague	\$0	\$55,095	\$44,973	\$48,340	\$69,708	\$156,181
0720	Narragansett	\$0	\$72,572	\$57,747	\$63,992	\$92,798	\$235,165
0760	Silver Lake	\$0	\$0	\$47,952	\$58,972	\$71,203	\$173,581
0778	Quaboag	\$0	\$73,592	\$54,177	\$64,586	\$82,552	\$204,945
0224	Orleans	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$8,614	\$0	\$58,559
0700	Marthas Vineyard	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100,134	\$0	\$531,274
0767	Spencer East Brookfield	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$226,071
0089	Edgartown	\$0	\$0	\$17,004	\$0	\$0	\$0
9999	State totals	\$1,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$5,500,000	\$15,000,000

## District Progress Reports and Regional Efficiencies Plans

Rural school aid recipients each year have been required to submit regional efficiencies plans (herein also referred to as “plans”) detailing how they would undertake efforts to increase regional collaboration, consolidation, or other efficiencies, focusing on the next three fiscal years. The Department has informed districts that they could use their rural school aid awards to support these activities, but that they were not required to do so. The Department first collected plans in February 2019 and required districts to submit progress reports on their plans by the end of the fiscal year. Progress reports and plans have been submitted in recent years by means of a survey. Recipients will be required to submit surveys by February 1, 2024.

## Recommendations

The Department respectfully makes the following recommendations.

### ***Require districts to submit a short survey detailing how rural school aid was utilized at the end of each fiscal year instead of submitting a three-year plan every year in February***

The legislature should streamline planning requirements for districts that receive rural school aid to reduce administrative burden and standardize the information that the Department collects. The program currently requires that districts submit three-year plans to the Department each year that they receive rural school aid. However, as densities and income levels tend to be stable from year to year and as our previous recommendations above would address any fluctuations that might arise, we do not expect that the group of eligible districts will change much over time, which makes it less necessary to collect three-year plans every year. Starting in fiscal year 2022, the Department began collecting these plans through an online survey that also includes general and specific questions that each district is required to answer on their use of the previous fiscal year's funds.

We recommend that the Legislature consider eliminating the requirement that districts submit three-year plans and instead direct the Department to collect a short survey from participating districts after the end of each fiscal year, by July 30 rather than February 1, to determine how rural school aid was used that year. This survey could also be used to gather updates on each district's efforts to improve efficiencies and promote shared services and regionalization, report on the district's related plans for the upcoming fiscal year, and help identify steps that the state can take to assist with these efforts.