



Rural School Aid – FY2025 Report 1

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means
Submitted pursuant to Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024, line item 7061-9813

December 2024

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Patrick Tutwiler, Interim Commissioner

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December 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 and survey responses submitted by aid recipients. This is the first of two reports due this fiscal year under Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024, line item 7061-9813.

The recommendations in this report were developed by Department program staff based on their experience with the program for the past seven years.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact Jessica Leitz, Director of External Partnerships at Jessica.Leitz@mass.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "PT", with a flourish at the end.

Patrick Tutwiler
Interim Commissioner

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Rural school aid recipients	1
Table 1: Rural Aid Distributions, FY2021–FY2025	2
District Progress Reports and Regional Efficiencies Plans	4
Regional Efficiencies Plans – FY 2024 Surveys:	4
Recommendations	5

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 140 of the Acts of 2024, [line item 7061-9813](#). The line item states, in relevant part:

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, 2024, 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 2026 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 January 31, 2025, 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;...

The [fiscal year 2025](#) budget authorized \$16 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 2025](#) 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 \$61,935 based on Massachusetts Department of Revenue data.¹ 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 2025, there were three priority groups:

- Priority 1 included districts that serve less than 11 students per square mile.
- Priority 2 included districts that serve 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 FY2025 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 FY2025 Chapter 70 target aid. The Department allocated \$7.920 million of available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$4.752 million for Priority 2 districts, and \$3.168 million for Priority 3 districts. The total FY2025 line-item amount has been divided across each priority group in the same manner as FY2024. 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-five districts will receive rural aid in fiscal year 2025. Awards ranged from \$23,427 for Warwick to \$1,731,205 for Central Berkshire Regional School District, see Table 1 for the funding distributions for the last five years.

Table 1: Rural Aid Distributions, FY2021–FY2025

Org	School District	FY21 (n=50)	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)	FY25 (n=65)
0043	Brimfield	\$63,749	\$59,851	\$82,382	\$230,706	\$ 301,713
0068	Conway	\$0	\$8,151	\$14,611	\$26,088	\$ 32,423
0074	Deerfield	\$28,966	\$28,126	\$38,525	\$97,107	\$ 118,667
0098	Florida	\$13,230	\$9,978	\$26,847	\$63,725	\$ 63,795
0121	Hancock	\$7,598	\$8,247	\$11,916	\$33,697	\$42,506
0230	Pelham	\$0	\$6,889	\$9,192	\$24,065	\$30,443
0234	Petersham	\$13,519	\$13,628	\$23,200	\$65,973	\$81,063
0253	Rowe	\$5,536	\$5,111	\$7,999	\$20,813	\$26,234
0263	Savoy	\$12,895	\$4,774	\$13,719	\$17,438	\$32,224
0272	Shutesbury	\$25,019	\$22,847	\$30,967	\$86,318	\$82,085
0289	Sunderland	\$6,997	\$15,151	\$12,536	\$53,922	\$69,483
0300	Truro	\$19,749	\$19,836	\$26,973	\$63,724	\$76,656
0306	Wales	\$49,168	\$49,205	\$75,174	\$156,814	\$183,179
0318	Wellfleet	\$10,815	\$11,216	\$19,645	\$44,604	\$48,389
0327	Westhampton	\$16,290	\$10,748	\$14,858	\$35,460	\$44,209
0337	Whately	\$0	\$9,369	\$14,898	\$41,949	\$37,612
0340	Williamsburg	\$0	\$37,232	\$49,533	\$109,086	\$0
0349	Worthington	\$11,821	\$10,466	\$15,442	\$43,455	\$53,509
0618	Berkshire Hills Regional	\$38,981	\$105,274	\$154,940	\$388,569	\$0
0632	Chesterfield-Goshen Regional	\$20,129	\$16,580	\$29,396	\$78,321	\$72,512
0635	Central Berkshire Regional	\$336,916	\$359,344	\$532,168	\$1,325,077	\$1,731,305
0662	Farmington River Regional	\$19,685	\$21,174	\$33,088	\$82,272	\$108,459
0670	Frontier Regional	\$0	\$59,129	\$88,826	\$196,954	\$230,732
0672	Gateway Regional	\$223,214	\$219,254	\$300,721	\$832,654	\$1,041,541
0683	Hampshire Regional	\$0	\$109,247	\$134,143	\$313,001	\$318,674
0685	Hawlemont Regional	\$27,643	\$24,294	\$35,130	\$140,229	\$83,677
0717	Mohawk Trail Regional	\$192,644	\$161,077	\$262,497	\$621,345	\$743,173
0728	New Salem-Wendell Regional	\$30,611	\$36,581	\$47,935	\$131,484	\$143,445

0750	Pioneer Regional	\$123,612	\$116,848	\$175,088	\$373,025	\$385,001
0755	Ralph C. Mahar Regional	\$247,192	\$260,024	\$362,430	\$904,898	\$1,134,158
0765	Southern Berkshire Regional	\$0	\$70,159	\$101,911	\$256,284	\$304,763
0312	Warwick	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$51,113	\$23,427
0154	Leverett	\$0	\$10,056	\$15,846	\$0	\$47,071
0249	Richmond	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$55,544
0774	Up-Island Regional	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$172,328
0041	Brewster	\$0	\$19,879	\$27,944	\$77,187	\$77,420
0045	Brookfield	\$31,976	\$36,780	\$46,891	\$135,329	\$122,899
0063	Clarksburg	\$24,222	\$32,168	\$49,869	\$120,327	\$145,906
0085	Eastham	\$0	\$9,423	\$13,569	\$38,925	\$37,436
0091	Erving	\$7,654	\$9,566	\$12,539	\$35,903	\$35,657
0117	Hadley	\$0	\$7,878	\$30,172	\$84,364	\$80,349
0127	Hatfield	\$4,371	\$15,745	\$20,656	\$56,658	\$53,920
0135	Holland	\$14,694	\$14,258	\$25,933	\$68,013	\$56,288
0191	Monson	\$29,833	\$101,995	\$132,216	\$359,323	\$366,325
0223	Orange	\$97,140	\$110,214	\$174,503	\$506,019	\$495,590
0240	Plympton	\$12,272	\$13,506	\$22,629	\$55,294	\$64,471
0250	Rochester	\$0	\$38,711	\$58,122	\$138,732	\$122,630
0275	Southampton	\$0	\$35,817	\$42,596	\$117,963	\$85,273
0605	Amherst-Pelham Regional	\$75,979	\$90,086	\$111,447	\$282,824	\$248,516
0660	Nauset Regional	\$0	\$57,890	\$81,045	\$229,717	\$222,960
0715	Mount Greylock Regional	\$52,303	\$71,452	\$92,683	\$286,448	\$277,630
0753	Quabbin Regional	\$212,420	\$261,905	\$379,603	\$1,042,092	\$1,000,205
0766	Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional	\$106,610	\$113,358	\$141,379	\$385,334	\$372,939
0770	Tantasqua Regional	\$171,748	\$208,631	\$273,669	\$779,547	\$774,762
0150	Lee	\$9,363	\$9,903	\$12,879	\$32,461	\$110,824
0077	Douglas	\$36,177	\$37,104	\$47,298	\$115,500	\$136,998
0111	Granby	\$0	\$24,168	\$27,375	\$71,511	\$101,598
0215	North Brookfield	\$25,025	\$28,805	\$39,705	\$94,188	\$126,634
0287	Sturbridge	\$0	\$26,086	\$35,681	\$94,437	\$143,832
0331	Westport	\$18,465	\$22,851	\$31,548	\$77,723	\$117,204
0343	Winchendon	\$66,144	\$81,258	\$110,190	\$278,866	\$400,764
0603	Hoosac Valley Regional	\$60,145	\$72,938	\$93,982	\$228,600	\$340,948
0610	Ashburnham-Westminster Regional	\$78,182	\$89,702	\$121,856	\$300,130	\$400,161
0615	Athol-Royalston Regional	\$97,446	\$113,416	\$163,225	\$410,639	\$598,559
0674	Gill-Montague Regional	\$44,973	\$48,340	\$69,708	\$156,181	\$223,903
0720	Narragansett Regional	\$57,747	\$63,992	\$92,798	\$235,165	\$324,763
0760	Silver Lake Regional	\$47,952	\$58,972	\$71,203	\$173,581	\$0
0778	Quaboag Regional	\$54,177	\$64,586	\$82,552	\$204,945	\$252,636
0224	Orleans	\$0	\$8,614	\$0	\$58,559	\$0
0700	Marthas Vineyard Regional	\$0	\$100,134	\$0	\$531,274	\$0
0767	Spencer-East Brookfield Regional	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$226,071	\$0
0089	Edgartown	\$17,004	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
9999	State totals	\$3,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$5,500,000	\$15,000,000	\$15,840,000²

District Progress Reports and Regional Efficiencies Plans

Each year rural school aid recipients are required to submit regional efficiencies plans (herein also referred to as plans and three-year plans) describing how they plan to undertake efforts to increase regional collaboration, consolidation, or other efficiencies over the next three fiscal years. The Department informs districts that they can use their rural school aid awards to support these activities, but that they are not required to do so.

Progress reports and plans are submitted each year through an online survey.

Regional Efficiencies Plans – FY 2024 Surveys:

In FY2024, districts reported their intent to use funds in the following general categories of activities:

Value	Percent		Responses
Funded study or studies to explore the establishment of a new regional school district or the expansion of an existing regional district.	25.4%		17
Convened internal discussions with district stakeholders to explore options for collaboration or regionalization with other school districts.	56.7%		38
<u>Convened discussions with other districts to explore options for collaboration or regionalization with other school districts. Please list the districts involved in these discussions: (click to view)</u>	38.8%		26
<u>Initiated shared service/staff agreements. Please briefly list the services or staff shared and indicate the districts involved: (click to view)</u>	34.3%		23
<u>Other activities not listed above. Please briefly describe them and, if applicable, indicate the other districts involved: (click to view)</u>	29.9%		20

The Department collected surveys for FY2025 and will update the legislature on the current steps that districts are taking to improve regional collaboration in the second legislative report required by the line item, entitled Rural School Aid – Fiscal Year 2025 Report 2. Both reports will be posted on the Department's website at:

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/category.aspx?section=legislative&yr=All>.

Recommendations

The Department respectfully makes the following recommendations for consideration for future adjustments to the rural school aid line item.

Require districts to submit a short survey at the end of each fiscal year instead of a three-year plan every year in January.

The legislature should streamline reporting 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, we do not expect that the group of eligible districts will change much over time, making 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.

Therefore, we recommend that the legislature eliminate the requirement that districts submit three-year plans and instead direct the Department to collect a short survey from participating districts 60 days after the close of each fiscal year to:

- Report on how rural school aid was used;
- Describe efforts to improve efficiencies and promote shared services; consolidation, and regionalization; and
- Identify steps the state can take to assist with these efforts.

Use three years of data to determine income eligibility and student density to minimize the impact of year-over-year changes.

We recommend that the legislature allows districts to qualify for rural school aid based on income and student density data from the most recent three years to address the impact that small changes in a district's income or enrollment can have on their eligibility to receive funds from year to year.