



Rural School Aid – FY2026 – Report 1

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means

Submitted pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Acts of 2025, line-item 7061-9813

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Pedro Martinez, Commissioner

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December 1, 2025

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. The second report due this fiscal year will follow the required January 30, 2026 submission of plans by Rural School Aid recipients and will include details concerning planned and actual expenditure of funds.

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

If you have any questions about this report, please contact Rob O'Donnell, Director of School Finance at Robert.F.O'Donnell@mass.gov or at 781-338-6512.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pedro Martinez".

Pedro Martinez
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Introduction	6
Rural school aid recipients	6
Table 1: Rural Aid Distributions, FY22–FY26	8
Recommendations	9
Require that a portion of rural school aid be used for efforts that increase regional collaboration, consolidation, or other efficiencies.	9
Require districts to submit a short survey at the end of each fiscal year instead of a three-year plan in January.....	10
Allow the Department to submit one comprehensive report to the legislature following the annual survey collection.....	10
Use three years of data to determine income eligibility and student density to minimize the impact of year-over-year changes.....	10
Allow districts that receive rural school aid to carry over unexpended funds for one fiscal year.	10
Allow a portion of rural school aid to be used by DESE to support emerging regionalization efforts.	11

Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) respectfully submits this Report to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means on rural school aid pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Acts of 2025, 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, 2025, the department of elementary and secondary education 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 2027 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 30, 2026, 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;...”

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, \$5.5 million in fiscal year 2023, and \$15 million in fiscal year 2024, and \$16 million in fiscal year 2025. The fiscal year 2026 budget authorized \$12 million for rural school aid.

Rural school aid recipients

Eligibility for rural school aid is currently based on two criteria per the line-item: per capita income and student density. School districts were eligible for rural school aid in fiscal year 2026 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 \$57,834 based on Massachusetts Department of Revenue data.¹ After determining income eligibility, the Department of Elementary and

¹ See: https://dls-gw.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdpage.aspx?rdreport=dor_income_eqv_per_capita

Secondary Education 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 2026, there were three priority groups:

- Priority 1 included districts that serve not 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 FY2026 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 FY2026 Chapter 70 target aid. The Department allocated \$6 million of available funding for Priority 1 districts, \$3.6 million for Priority 2 districts, and \$2.4 million for Priority 3 districts. The total FY2026 line-item amount has been divided across each priority group in the same manner as FY2025. 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 school aid in fiscal year 2026. Awards ranged from \$13,518 for Warwick to \$1,164,818 for Central Berkshire Regional School District; see Table 1 for the funding distributions for the last five years.

Table 1: Rural School Aid Distributions, FY22–FY26

Org	School District	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)	FY25 (n=65)	FY26 (n=65)
0043	Brimfield	\$59,851	\$82,382	\$230,706	\$284,213	\$175,487
0068	Conway	\$8,151	\$14,611	\$26,088	\$30,542	\$0
0074	Deerfield	\$28,126	\$38,525	\$97,107	\$111,784	\$79,358
0098	Florida	\$9,978	\$26,847	\$63,725	\$60,695	\$35,432
0121	Hancock	\$8,247	\$11,916	\$33,697	\$40,041	\$28,422
0154	Leverett	\$10,056	\$15,846	\$0	\$44,340	\$29,635
0230	Pelham	\$6,889	\$9,192	\$24,065	\$28,677	\$23,176
0234	Petersham	\$13,628	\$23,200	\$65,973	\$76,361	\$65,026
0249	Richmond	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$52,322	\$40,655
0253	Rowe	\$5,111	\$7,999	\$20,813	\$24,712	\$16,003
0263	Savoy	\$4,774	\$13,719	\$17,438	\$30,355	\$17,286
0272	Shutesbury	\$22,847	\$30,967	\$86,318	\$77,323	\$63,089
0289	Sunderland	\$15,151	\$12,536	\$53,922	\$65,452	\$47,561
0300	Truro	\$19,836	\$26,973	\$63,724	\$72,210	\$0
0306	Wales	\$49,205	\$75,174	\$156,814	\$172,554	\$115,476
0312	Warwick	N/A	N/A	\$51,113	\$22,069	\$13,518
0318	Wellfleet	\$11,216	\$19,645	\$44,604	\$45,582	\$30,468
0327	Westhampton	\$10,748	\$14,858	\$35,460	\$41,644	\$0
0337	Whately	\$9,369	\$14,898	\$41,949	\$35,431	\$31,125
0340	Williamsburg	\$37,232	\$49,533	\$109,086	\$97,425	\$51,789
0349	Worthington	\$10,466	\$15,442	\$43,455	\$50,405	\$39,262
0618	Berkshire Hills Regional	\$105,274	\$154,940	\$388,569	\$0	\$351,411
0632	Chesterfield-Goshen Regional	\$16,580	\$29,396	\$78,321	\$68,306	\$46,207
0635	Central Berkshire Regional	\$359,344	\$532,168	\$1,325,077	\$1,630,882	\$1,164,818
0662	Farmington River Regional	\$21,174	\$33,088	\$82,272	\$102,168	\$75,571
0670	Frontier Regional	\$59,129	\$88,826	\$196,954	\$217,348	\$157,540
0672	Gateway Regional	\$219,254	\$300,721	\$832,654	\$981,127	\$652,479
0683	Hampshire Regional	\$109,247	\$134,143	\$313,001	\$300,189	\$244,972
0685	Hawlemont Regional	\$24,294	\$35,130	\$140,229	\$78,824	\$53,001
0700	Marthas Vineyard Regional	\$100,134	\$0	\$531,274	\$441,969	\$342,480
0717	Mohawk Trail Regional	\$161,077	\$262,497	\$621,345	\$700,066	\$541,540
0728	New Salem-Wendell Regional	\$36,581	\$47,935	\$131,484	\$135,125	\$84,904
0750	Pioneer Regional	\$116,848	\$175,088	\$373,025	\$362,669	\$262,712
0755	Ralph C. Mahar Regional	\$260,024	\$362,430	\$904,898	\$1,068,372	\$785,237
0765	Southern Berkshire Regional	\$70,159	\$101,911	\$256,284	\$287,085	\$214,774
0774	Up-Island Regional	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$162,332	\$119,587
0041	Brewster	\$19,879	\$27,944	\$77,187	\$78,202	\$58,818
0045	Brookfield	\$36,780	\$46,891	\$135,329	\$124,140	\$92,482
0063	Clarksburg	\$32,168	\$49,869	\$120,327	\$147,380	\$116,126
0085	Eastham	\$9,423	\$13,569	\$38,925	\$37,814	\$27,190
0091	Erving	\$9,566	\$12,539	\$35,903	\$36,017	\$24,038
0117	Hadley	\$7,878	\$30,172	\$84,364	\$81,161	\$63,781
0127	Hatfield	\$15,745	\$20,656	\$56,658	\$54,465	\$38,514
0135	Holland	\$14,258	\$25,933	\$68,013	\$56,857	\$38,125
0191	Monson	\$101,995	\$132,216	\$359,323	\$370,026	\$233,632
0223	Orange	\$110,214	\$174,503	\$506,019	\$500,596	\$349,905
0240	Plympton	\$13,506	\$22,629	\$55,294	\$65,122	\$45,635
0250	Rochester	\$38,711	\$58,122	\$138,732	\$123,869	\$70,544
0275	Southampton	\$35,817	\$42,596	\$117,963	\$86,134	\$84,263
0605	Amherst-Pelham Regional	\$90,086	\$111,447	\$282,824	\$251,026	\$194,608

Org	School District	FY22 (n=67)	FY23 (n=65)	FY24 (n=68)	FY25 (n=65)	FY26 (n=65)
0660	Nauset Regional	\$57,890	\$81,045	\$229,717	\$225,212	\$0
0715	Mount Greylock Regional	\$71,452	\$92,683	\$286,448	\$280,434	\$182,863
0753	Quabbin Regional	\$261,905	\$379,603	\$1,042,092	\$1,010,308	\$678,804
0766	Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional	\$113,358	\$141,379	\$385,334	\$376,706	\$257,895
0770	Tantasqua Regional	\$208,631	\$273,669	\$779,547	\$782,588	\$552,903
0150	Lee	\$9,903	\$12,879	\$32,461	\$111,943	\$85,133
0077	Douglas	\$37,104	\$47,298	\$115,500	\$138,382	\$90,311
0111	Granby	\$24,168	\$27,375	\$71,511	\$102,624	\$59,231
0215	North Brookfield	\$28,805	\$39,705	\$94,188	\$127,913	\$95,901
0287	Sturbridge	\$26,086	\$35,681	\$94,437	\$145,285	\$100,191
0331	Westport	\$22,851	\$31,548	\$77,723	\$118,388	\$97,629
0343	Winchendon	\$81,258	\$110,190	\$278,866	\$404,812	\$321,856
0603	Hoosac Valley Regional	\$72,938	\$93,982	\$228,600	\$344,392	\$276,824
0610	Ashburnham-Westminster Regional	\$89,702	\$121,856	\$300,130	\$404,203	\$293,725
0615	Athol-Royalston Regional	\$113,416	\$163,225	\$410,639	\$604,605	\$502,306
0674	Gill-Montague Regional	\$48,340	\$69,708	\$156,181	\$226,164	\$404,740
0720	Narragansett Regional	\$63,992	\$92,798	\$235,165	\$328,043	\$276,289
0760	Silver Lake Regional	\$58,972	\$71,203	\$173,581	\$0	\$0
0778	Quaboag Regional	\$64,586	\$82,552	\$204,945	\$255,188	\$216,903
0224	Orleans	\$8,614	\$0	\$58,559	\$0	\$0
0767	Spencer-East Brookfield Regional	\$0	\$0	\$226,071	\$0	\$0
0089	Edgartown	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
0118	Halifax	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$68,834
9999	State totals	\$4,000,000	\$5,500,000	\$15,000,000	\$16,000,000	\$12,000,000

Recommendations

The Department respectfully reiterates some recommendations made in its fiscal year 2025 report and makes additional recommendations for consideration for future adjustments to the rural school aid line-item.

Require that a portion of rural school aid be used for efforts that increase regional collaboration, consolidation, or other efficiencies.

While the current legislation requires that rural school aid recipients submit a plan indicating the steps they will take to increase regional collaboration, consolidation, or other efficiencies, the use of these funds is not directly linked to these efforts. We recommend that the legislature mandate that a portion of rural school aid be used directly in support of these efforts, consistent with the Commonwealth's longstanding commitment to promoting consolidation, greater efficiencies, and collaboration in school district operations.

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

Allow the Department to submit one comprehensive report to the legislature following the annual survey collection.

The current budget language requires the Department to submit two reports to the legislature each year, one report two months before rural school aid recipients are required to submit their three-year plans via an annual survey, and one report two months after plans are submitted. Consistent with the previous recommendation, we recommend that the Department submit one legislative report each year in October following an annual survey of recipient districts conducted after the close of the fiscal year. This approach will simplify report requirements and give the legislature the information that it needs regarding districts' use of funds and efforts at collaboration, consolidation, and other efficiencies to assist the legislature in planning for the upcoming fiscal year.

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 rural school aid from year to year.

Allow districts that receive rural school aid to carry over unexpended funds for one fiscal year.

Currently, districts that receive rural school aid are required to expend the funds in the same fiscal year that the funds are awarded. We recommend that the legislature allow districts that receive rural school aid to carry over unexpended funds for one fiscal year following the fiscal year in which the funds are awarded.

Allow a portion of rural school aid to be used by DESE to support emerging regionalization efforts.

Consistent with recommendations made by recipients, we respectfully recommend that the Department be provided with the discretion to use a portion of rural school aid to support emerging regionalization studies and efforts.