

STATEMENT ON THE 2020 BUDGET

As organizations committed to educational equity, we commend Gov. Charlie Baker and the Massachusetts Legislature for providing significant funding increases for our state's education system, at both the early childhood and elementary/secondary levels, in the 2020 budget. We are especially encouraged by the historic increase in Chapter 70 support for our state's highest poverty school districts, which will provide critical resources to students who have been underserved in our education system for far too long.

This additional funding, however, does not negate the urgent need for lawmakers to pass comprehensive legislation that would not only guarantee consistent, equitable investment in our highest need districts, but, critically, require district leaders to take concrete steps to improve opportunity and outcomes for historically underserved students.

As documented in our Number 1 for Some report, our state's education system is deeply unequal. Despite some progress in recent years, our low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities continue to have less access than their more privileged peers to every resource that research and experience show matter to student success. These disparities in opportunity to learn have real consequences for students, their communities, and our Commonwealth's economy and democracy.

New dollars alone won't guarantee improvement. Turning these patterns around will require substantial, long-term investment in our highest need districts and schools, many of which are operating on thousands of dollars less per student than their wealthy counterparts. But creating meaningful change for students will also require investing in evidence-informed practices and supports, committing to change, and in some cases, confronting deeply ingrained beliefs about students' ability to succeed.

District leaders have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to use the 2020 budgetary increases to begin or to deepen this work. To foster long-term progress, however, our students need comprehensive legislation that: 1) Guarantees substantial new funding for districts serving our highest need communities; 2) requires district leaders to engage with families and community advocates to develop and implement plans for how new dollars will be used to improve learning experiences and outcomes for historically underserved students – including specific evidence-informed strategies and numeric improvement targets to measure progress; and 3) increases transparency around how well schools are serving individual student groups, including low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and students of different races/ethnicities.

The 2020 budgetary increases are an important step forward for students. We owe it to them to build on that foundation and lay the groundwork for the next phase of educational improvement in the state.

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