

■ JUST THE FACTS

An Act to Fulfill the Promise of Education Reform: Adequate Funding for Student Success (H 153)

LEAD SPONSORS: REP. JASON LEWIS AND SEN. GALE CANDARAS

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Representatives: Ruth Balsler, Jen Benson, Mike Brady, Will Brownsberger, Mike Costello, Steve DiNatale, James Dwyer, Lori Ehrlich, John Fernandes, Michael Finn, Sean Garballey, Ann Gobi, Jonathan Hecht, Kate Hogan, Jay Kaufman, Peter Kocot, Steve Kulik, Paul Mark, Denise Provost, Angelo Puppolo, Tom Sannicandro, John Scibak, Carl Sciortino, Frank Smizik, Tom Stanley, Ben Swan, Cleon Turner and Alice Wolf.

Senators: Katherine Clark, Sal DiDomenico, Jamie Eldridge, Pat Jehlen and Michael Moore.

WHAT THIS BILL DOES

Establishes a Committee (Education Resource Study Committee) charged with contracting for and overseeing an independent study to determine the resources needed for students to achieve state education standards. This “adequacy study” is intended to guide Chapter 70 funding in future years. The Committee, made up of the chairs of the Joint Committee on Education, the Secretary of Administration and Finance, the Secretary of Education, and the Commissioner of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, must seek advice from the public education community and the general public. The bill appropriates \$600,000 for the study, which must be completed no later than September 1, 2012.

STATUS OF THE BILL

The Joint Committee on Education held a hearing on the bill on June 7, 2011. Testimony in support of the bill, in addition to MTA local presidents from Cambridge, Somerville, Methuen, Everett and Malden, included: the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the chair of the Readiness Project Subcommittee on Long-Term Financing (part of the Governor’s Readiness Project) and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE). No action has been taken on the bill by the Committee (as of 9/2011).

Supporters of the bill, including organizations, individuals and legislators, have organized into a coalition (Coalition for Student Success) to advocate for the bill.

PURPOSE OF THIS BILL

Background

Almost two decades have now passed since the Education Reform Act became law in 1993; in the current fiscal year, over \$4 billion in Chapter 70 state aid is going to cities, towns, and regional school districts. Yet, there has never been a systematic analysis of whether the schools have sufficient resources for students to meet state standards as embodied in the curriculum frameworks.

What We Know

An adequate education for all children is constitutionally required by *McDuffy v. Sec. of Education*, 415 Mass. 545 (1993) and that decision was reaffirmed by the Supreme Judicial Court in *Hancock v. Driscoll*, 443 Mass. 428 (2005). Even though all school districts have been brought up to the state-defined minimum level of education spending necessary for education adequacy (the “foundation budget”), the foundation budget is itself not adequate.

This Bill Addresses Adequacy of Funding

When education funding is discussed, the focus is often on the distribution of local and state funding. In FY07, reforms were made to the distribution-side of the formula to be phased in over five years, a process which has slowed down as a result of the recession and resulting fiscal crisis. This bill, however, focuses on the need to provide an adequate level of funding for all school districts. The only way to address this issue is to re-evaluate the components and the assumptions of the current foundation budget.

Why Is this Necessary Now, with the Economy Still Recovering from the Recession?

This bill addresses future funding, so that any recommendations for increased funding could be coupled with a plan to provide the necessary dollars and be phased in over a number of years. (For example, the 1993 Education Reform Act phased in increased state funding over seven fiscal years.) The bill is intended to help the state plan for the future and increase funding when economically feasible.

What is an Education Adequacy Study?

It is a cost study, usually undertaken by education finance experts to “estimate the amount of money needed for the educational services required to provide students the opportunity to meet state learning standards.” Massachusetts was the first state in the country to do an adequacy study, in 1991, as the basis for the foundation budget in the Education Reform Act of 1993. Since then, over 50 cost studies have been undertaken in over 35 states, and the methodology for determining and costing out the necessary resources is much more sophisticated than in 1991.

Why do we need another study?

Because the foundation budget has not been updated in any significant way since it was first developed about 20 years ago, before the content of the Education Reform Act of 1993 was established (the state’s curriculum standards, MCAS, etc.). Today, every student is required to meet state education standards in order to graduate from high school, despite the requirement that our schools in effect be funded only at pre-standard levels.

Who else recommends this study?

In 2007, Governor Patrick established “The Readiness Project,” whose mission was to develop a plan for fundamental and systemic reforms to public education over the next 10 years. The Readiness Project’s Long Term Financing Subcommittee’s report, released in 2008, specifically recommended that a comprehensive “Adequacy Study” be conducted to “quantify the level of resources required to provide an adequate public education to all children as required under the Massachusetts Constitution.”