



## EDUCATION

Massachusetts has a national reputation as “the education state.” Time and again, the Commonwealth is recognized for the emphasis it places on K-12 education. Indeed, states across the nation look to us as a model. But schools in our rural areas are suffering from an outdated Chapter 70 funding formula and the state’s decision not to reimburse 100% of school transportation costs. Let’s work together to ensure that our schools are properly funded. While addressing school funding, let’s fight for the funding to reimburse our towns for the full costs of school transportation. In a state known nationally for its commitment to K-12 education, we cannot fail the children who live in our most rural areas.

And as a Commonwealth, let’s look beyond our K-12 system. Our children deserve quality, affordable higher education right here in Massachusetts. Let’s commit to investing in higher education to attract and retain the young people who will meet the workforce needs of local businesses and industries across the state.

### PRE-K

As your State Representative, I would

#### **Support legislation to fund universal Pre-k**

When it comes to early education, the research is clear: high-quality pre-kindergarten is essential, ensuring school readiness, and optimizing social and academic outcomes for all children.

### K-12

As your State Representative, I would:

#### **Revise the outdated Chapter 70 funding formula and fully fund our public schools**

I believe in fully funding our public schools, and revising the current funding formula is essential to that goal. At 25 years old, the Chapter 70 formula is antiquated. It fails to reflect growing educational costs, and the burden these costs place on local communities, including the 19 communities of the First Franklin District. In its 2015 report, the bipartisan Foundation Budget Review Commission found that public schools in Massachusetts are underfunded by more than \$1 billion annually. The more recent Department of Elementary and Secondary Education “Fiscal Conditions in Rural School Districts” report confirmed that changes are necessary and long overdue, particularly for our rural districts.

I am extremely disappointed in the Legislature's recent inability to update the education foundation budget formula. As your State Representative, I would support implementing the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission.

### **Fully reimburse school transportation costs**

In 1949, the Commonwealth promised to provide 100% reimbursement for regional school district transportation costs but has not fulfilled that commitment.

Additionally, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education "Fiscal Conditions in Rural School Districts" report found that rural districts spend 50 percent more per pupil on transportation costs than districts across the rest of the state.

If elected State Representative, I work to ensure the state fulfills its promise of 100% reimbursement for transportation costs.

### **Cap charter schools, and identify a separate funding stream for existing charter schools**

All children deserve access to a first-rate public education. Under the current funding model, charter schools take money away from public schools, with limited reimbursement to local communities. As State Representative, I would maintain the cap on charter schools and work to identify a separate funding stream for existing charter schools in order to hold our communities harmless.

### **Ensure existing charter schools are transparent and accountable**

Charter schools receive public funding and must be held to the same standards as our district public schools.

### **Oppose high stakes testing**

As evaluation tools, standardized tests offer a very limited measure of student learning. High stakes testing compromises instructional time, narrows curriculum, and provides little value for students. Achievement should be measured by performance based-assessment, evaluation of student work, and school observation. As State Representative, I would support legislation that places a three-year moratorium on the use of high stakes testing as criteria for high school graduation and school accountability.

## **Fund the arts, music, and languages**

Every child should have access to an excellent education, and an excellent education includes the arts, music, and language. The connections between education in the arts and academic achievement are well-documented, as are the benefits of foreign language experience. As State Representative, I will support funding for arts- and language-education for all students in our district and throughout the Commonwealth.

## **Support teachers**

Teachers dedicate their lives to nurturing the minds of our children. They are the life of our public schools, the unsung heroes of our communities, and should receive the fullest support from our legislature.

Education is an essential public good. Let's work together to ensure that every child in our rural areas and throughout the Commonwealth has access to an excellent education.

### RELATED INFORMATION:

[Supporting Student and Community Success: Updating the Structure and Finance of Massachusetts Regional School Districts](#)

[Fiscal Conditions in Rural School Districts](#)

## **PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION**

As a Commonwealth, we must make funding our institutions of public higher education a fundamental priority. According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, the state has cut higher education spending by 14 percent since FY 2001. Additionally, the amount of higher education spending per student has been cut 31 percent in the same timeframe. Finally, we have decreased scholarship programs for targeted student populations by 31 percent since FY 2001. All of these cuts have resulted in sharp increases tuition and fees. This has resulted in an increased burden on students and families who wish to pursue higher education. Today, students pay over half of public education costs. In FY2001, they paid roughly one third. Students are now graduating with more debt. Nationally, the average student (Class of 2016) has \$37,172 in student loan debt.

The benefits of public higher education are clear. According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center,

- States with a greater share of college-educated workers tend to have stronger, higher-wage economies, as shown in the graph below. States with the best-educated workforces

tend to have median wages around \$20 an hour, whereas states near the bottom have wages around \$15 an hour.

- More than half of our state's public high school graduates attend a public higher education campus in Massachusetts within 16 months of finishing high school. Further, graduates of our public campuses are more likely to live and work in Massachusetts after graduation, contributing to our communities and our economy over the longer-term.

As a share of our economy, Massachusetts is spending less on higher education than most other states. As State Representative, I will use the experience I gained as Chief of Staff to UMass Amherst Chancellor Subbaswamy to continue his efforts and support UMass Amherst, our state universities, and community colleges. I will work to increase investment in public higher education in order to meet the workforce needs of the State, stem the tide of young people moving away from Massachusetts and decrease the heavy burden of student debt.

This position paper is meant to be the start of a conversation with voters about education in Massachusetts. If you there are things I have missed or if you have suggestions for ways we can work together, please reach out to me at [info@BlaisForMA.org](mailto:info@BlaisForMA.org).