

[Online forum addresses school funding erosion in Franklin County](#)

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GREENFIELD — The Franklin County Education Funding Committee used its second online forum to explain how the progress of school funding in Massachusetts has eroded over the years, disproportionately affecting lower-income districts, despite the state Constitution guaranteeing an adequate education for all children.

Jesus Leyva took the reins of the forum and mentioned that state aid covers a larger percentage of school funding for low- and moderate-income cities, which also shoulder the weight of School Choice and charter school funding. He explained 15 school districts with the lowest municipal tax bases account for a quarter of the cost of the municipal impact of School Choice and charter school tuition assessments, which were \$321 million in fiscal year 2024. Leyva said these districts include Orange, Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee and North Adams.

For two decades, he continued, the combination of School Choice and public funding for charter schools has triggered a downward spiral characterized by decreasing enrollment and dwindling finances in low-income school districts. He said \$889 million was taken from public school districts and given to charter schools in fiscal year 2023, compared to \$271 million in fiscal year 2010.

Leyva explained that Chapter 70, part of the state Education Reform Act of 1993, is the major source of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. It also establishes minimum spending requirements for each school district and minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. Leyva noted that while Chapter 70 funding slowly doubled in its first decade, it has been cut by \$413 million since fiscal year 2002.

Following the slideshow, there was a virtual breakout session so attendees could share their reactions and responses to the information and notes with one another. Guests then met again as a group to talk about educational justice in Massachusetts and how to address inequality. The Franklin County Education Funding Committee is part of Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution.

Some of the attendees included state Sen. Jo Comerford and state Rep. Natalie Blais, who Sheryl Stanton, superintendent of the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional school districts, praised for their work and efforts in fighting for public education.

“Time and time again, western Massachusetts is leading on this issue,” Blais chimed in. A foundation budget represents the minimum amount a district must spend in its operating budget to provide an adequate education. But Leyva said that budget is substantially less than what all districts need. He explained that a foundation budget shorts critical costs such as health insurance and special education by \$2.63 billion.

In terms of solutions, Leyva suggests that targeted underwriting by the state would directly address the funding needs and funding inequities for the districts most negatively impacted by the flaws in the state's school aid system. The cost to the state would reportedly be \$640 million annually.

Leyva also mentioned the state Student Opportunity Act, signed into law by former Gov. Charlie Baker in 2019. Leyva said it pledges an investment in new funding to public schools by \$1.5 billion annually when fully phased in over seven years. The Student Opportunity Act also adjusts funding formulas to consider health care costs for employees and increases special education funding, providing an additional \$500 million in indirect funding adjustments. Additionally, the law sets a three-year schedule to fully fund the charter school reimbursement line item in the state budget.

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