School Committee Government Relations Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday, January 25, 2024
5:00 PM-6:00 PM
Remote via Zoom

Government Relations Subcommittee Members Present: Valerie Frias (Chair), Helen Charlupski, and Suzanne Federspiel.
Other School Committee Members Present: Sarah Moghtader, and David Pearlman (joined at 5:40pm).
Others Present: Justin Brown, President of the Brookline Educators Union.
Staff Present: Betsy Fitzpatrick.

Ms. Frias called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

1) **Approval of the October 16, 2023 Government Relations Subcommittee Minutes**
On a motion of Ms. Charlupski, and seconded by Ms. Federspiel, the Government Relations Subcommittee voted unanimously, by roll call, with 3 in favor (Ms. Frias, Ms. Charlupski, and Ms. Federspiel) to approve the October 16, 2023 Government Relations Subcommittee meeting minutes.

2) **2024 Legislative Priorities: Discussion and Possible Vote**
In preparation for the Annual Meeting with Legislators (scheduled for February 12), the subcommittee discussed legislative priorities. Members agreed on the following priorities:

Support for school-based early childhood programs. As a Prek-12 school district, we are an integral part of the mixed delivery system for early childhood programs and care. Systems to better support public school districts to access early education funding must be developed so that Massachusetts can reach the goal of universal, high-quality preschool access for four-year-olds. For example, in Brookline, we provide scholarships to low-income residents to enable their participation in our preschool programs. A grant program to subsidize the cost of those scholarships would be beneficial for the school district. The current system of early childhood vouchers does not work for public school district.

Universal Free School Meals: We greatly appreciate that Governor Healey has reaffirmed her commitment to universal free school breakfast and lunch programs, and we ask that this critical program be fully funded to best serve the needs of students throughout the Commonwealth.

Support for Governor Healey's Proposed Literacy Launch
We support Governor Healey's proposed Literacy Launch program, specifically its focus on professional development and educator coaching, and strongly endorse new funds for school districts to implement high-quality literacy instruction.

Full, stable funding for METCO: We are in support of full, stable funding for METCO. We unanimously supported the Massachusetts Association of School Committee's (MASC) resolution, calling on the Governor to create a stable funding structure to support METCO and its partner districts that fully funds the support provided by METCO, and the cost of providing services delivered by METCO's partner districts.

Support for the Municipal Empowerment Act: We support the Municipal Empowerment Act, as announced by Governor Healey, which will, among other things, provide the Town of Brookline with more flexibility to raise revenue through hotel, meals and excise taxes.

MCAS: We support efforts to eliminate MCAS as a graduation requirement, either through legislative action or a ballot question. The Brookline School Committee unanimously supported the Massachusetts Association of School Committees' (MASC) resolution calling for a wider, more consensus-built strategy for an evaluation system with input from legitimate stakeholders; urging the Legislature to launch a comprehensive evaluation to investigate the extent of biases pertaining to MCAS testing and make those results public; urging Massachusetts to enact a moratorium on MCAS testing immediately; and urging Massachusetts to develop an alternative to the high-stakes MCAS tests.

Chapter 70 Funding: We appreciate the school district's Chapter 70 funding in FY24 ($16,035,247), and the preliminary funding expected for FY25 ($16,242,217). We advocate for increased funding for this critical local aid.

Justin Brown, President of the Brookline Educators Union, addressed the subcommittee to advocate for joint support of Senate Bill No. 309 (attached). The bill, sponsored by Senator Jason Lewis, Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Education, seeks to, among other things, expand reimbursement policies to support healthy school facilities for students and staff. The BEU is in support of the bill because of the improved working conditions it will provide to their members and, as a result, the improved learning environments it will provide to PSB students.

Senate Bill No. 309, An act establishing a Special Commission to review the adequacy and equity of the Massachusetts school building program: The Public Schools of Brookline greatly appreciates the work of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). We have successfully partnered with the MSBA on significant school building projects, including the recent Ruffin Ridley School project and the current Pierce School project. We are grateful for the Legislature's work to increase the reimbursement rate on school building projects (to more accurately reflect current and inflationary construction costs); for the Pierce School project, the adjusted rate increases the maximum reimbursement to the Town of Brookline by over $7.5 million (from $37,839,511 to $45,403,459). We join with our partners in the Brookline Educators Union in supporting Senate Bill No. 309, which will enhance the MSBA's work and allow them to fund 21st century solutions to meet the needs of current and future school facility projects. The bill will also investigate and recommend the extent to which current state funding for the authority may need to be increased.

Full funding for the Student Opportunity Act: Federal COVID stimulus funding has made it possible for the legislature to fulfill its commitment to Chapter 70 and incremental adjustments to charter school mitigation, regional transportation funding, and special education transportation. We urge the legislature to continue that commitment, and to advocate for additional funds at the state level as the federal ARPA monies expire but the need continues to cover the extraordinary costs of services to children still recovering from the pandemic. (MASC)

Further fund Special Education: We appreciate the additional funding we have received for Special Education transportation. In addition, we continue to lobby for full funding of

Special Education costs, along with maximum Circuit Breaker reimbursement and insurance participation for medically necessary treatment in school (for example, 1-on-1 nurses).

Electric Bus grants or subsidies: We would like your support to identify funding for a pilot for Brookline. There apparently was a pilot program for 3 communities in 2018.

These legislative priorities will be presented to the full School Committee at the February 1, 2024 meeting for approval, after which they will be shared with the legislative delegation and posted on the School Committee webpage.

3) New Business

There was no new business to report.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.

SENATE DOCKET, NO. 1324 FILED ON: 1/19/2023

SENATE . . . . . No. 309

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Jason M. Lewis

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act establishing a special commission to review the adequacy and equity of the Massachusetts school building program.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
Jason M. Lewis	*Fifth Middlesex*	
Rebecca L. Rausch	*Norfolk, Worcester and Middlesex*	*1/23/2023*
Kate Lipper-Garabedian	*32nd Middlesex*	*2/23/2023*
James B. Eldridge	*Middlesex and Worcester*	*3/13/2023*
Bruce E. Tarr	*First Essex and Middlesex*	*3/27/2023*
Robyn K. Kennedy	*First Worcester*	*4/3/2023*

SENATE DOCKET, NO. 1324 FILED ON: 1/19/2023

SENATE . . . . . No. 309

By Mr. Lewis, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 309) of Jason M. Lewis, Rebecca L. Rausch and Kate Lipper-Garabedian for legislation to establish a special commission to review the adequacy and equity of the Massachusetts school building program. Education.

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE SENATE, NO. *2727* OF 2021-2022.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)

An Act establishing a special commission to review the adequacy and equity of the Massachusetts school building program.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. (a) For the purposes of this section, the word "authority" shall mean the Massachusetts School Building Authority established in section 1A of chapter 70B of the General Laws.

(b) There shall be a special commission to study and make recommendations regarding the: (i) capacity of the authority to meet the needs of current and future school facility projects; and (ii) racial, ethnic, socio-economic and geographic equity of the grant funding formula to ensure that all communities can participate in the program.

(c) The commission shall consist of: 2 members appointed by the senate president, 1 of whom shall be the senate chair of the joint committee on education and 1 of whom shall serve as

co-chair; 2 members appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, 1 of whom shall be the house chair of the joint committee on education, and 1 of whom shall serve as co-chair; 1 member appointed by the minority leader of the senate; 1 member appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; the secretary of education or a designee; the commissioner of elementary and secondary education or a designee; the executive director of the authority or a designee; 2 members appointed by the governor, 1 of whom shall be a representative of a gateway city with knowledge of municipal finance and 1 of whom shall be an individual with demonstrated expertise in the design and construction of cost-effective school buildings; 2 members appointed by the state treasurer, 1 of whom shall be an individual with demonstrated expertise in the design and construction of green buildings and 1 of whom shall be an individual with demonstrated expertise in public health and indoor environmental quality in school buildings; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Inc.; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Inc.; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators, Inc.; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Institute for Architects; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Facilities Administrators Association, Inc.; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association; 1 member appointed by the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts; 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, Inc.; and 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Building Trades Council.

(d) The commission shall investigate and make recommendations on: (i) the current and future need to renovate and rebuild school facilities and the availability of adequate state and local resources, and the extent to which current state funding for the authority may need to be increased to meet this need; (ii) the authority's existing grant formula and potential modifications

to the formula to ensure fairness and equity for all communities; (iii) the alignment of the authority's construction cost reimbursement rate relative to the actual cost of construction and other authority policies that impact eligible project costs for reimbursement; (iv) incentive percentage points, including, but not limited to, how incentive percentage points are calculated for municipalities that qualify for 80 per cent reimbursement; (v) reimbursement policies for regional technical and vocational schools and how to ensure affordability for all member communities; (vi) reimbursement policies to help the commonwealth achieve its environmental and greenhouse gas emissions reductions goals; (vii) reimbursement policies that support healthy school facilities for students and staff; (viii) whether the authority should be authorized to spend money on equipment or the authority should be limited to funding for education structures; (ix) whether the authority should add incentives for educational spaces approved under chapter 74 of the General Laws in programs that align to labor market demand; and (x) any other issues affecting the ability for all students in the commonwealth to attend school in high quality, accessible, safe, healthy and green school buildings.

(e) The authority and any other state agency shall make available to the commission in a timely manner any documents, data or other materials that are reasonably requested by the commission.

(f) The commission shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the clerks of the house of representatives and senate, the joint committee on education and the house and senate committees on ways and means not later than December 1, 2025.