***Student Opportunity Plans***

**Frequently Asked Questions**

*As of March 10, 2020*

**New: Submitting Plans**

*How do I submit my district’s plan?*

Each superintendent has been sent a link to access the submission form along with a specific login and password. Please reference that email to submit your plan.

*What if I didn’t receive the submission link email or can no longer find my login or password?*

Please email SOAPlans@doe.mass.edu before the April 1 deadline, and we can send you another login and password.

*The submission link didn’t work. What should I do?*

Please email SOAPlans@doe.mass.edu as soon as possible if you are not able to access the link.

*Is the submission form different than the template?*

No. The submission form has been designed using the template provided to you in February. If you have been using the template to draft your plan, you will be able to copy and paste your responses directly into the submission form.

*Can more than one person use the login credentials?*

Login credentials can be shared with a designee, however, only one person can be logged in at a time. You can save your work in the form at any point and return later to complete the submission.

*We made a mistake and prematurely hit submit before we were ready. What can we do?*

Please email SOAPlans@doe.mass.edu, and we will work with you to submit an updated plan.

*When will DESE respond to my submitted plan?*

The Department will communicate with districts as soon as possible about their plan and whether their plan will be returned for amendments. We aim to complete these reviews by mid-May, especially for districts completing a long form plan.

*Will my plan be posted publicly?*

Yes. The SOA requires that districts post plans on their websites and that DESE post all plans on its website. The Department will notify a district before it posts the district’s plan.

**Materials, Information, and Requirements**

*Where can I find information that DESE is posting on Student Opportunity Plans?*

All materials and updates can be found at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/soa.html>

*Will exemplars for the SOA plans be provided?*

Exemplars can be found starting on Page 8 of the guidance for short form plans and Page 9 of the guidance for long form plans.

*Is it possible to extend the April 1, 2020 deadline for the submission of plans?*

Because the April 1 deadline is in the Student Opportunity Act itself, the deadline cannot be extended.

*What are the consequences if our district does not submit our plan by the April 1, 2020 deadline?*

The Department will reach out directly to any district that does not submit their SOA plan by the April 1 deadline to discuss next steps.

*What will the amendment process look like after April 1?*

The Department will release more information in the coming months regarding the amendment process.

*Are charter schools required to submit short or long form plans?*

Charter schools are not required to submit an SOA plan by the April 1 deadline. Charter schools will submit related information as part of their annual reports, which are due on August 1. The charter school office will share additional information.

*Do regional school districts with superintendency unions need to create a plan for each district?*

Yes. Each district is required to submit a plan. Every district that is part of a superintendency union will need to submit a plan.

**Evidence-Based Programs**

*What if I am considering a program for my Student Opportunity Plan that is not one of the 17 evidence-based program examples identified by DESE and does not fall within one of the 9 evidence-based program categories outlined in the Student Opportunity Act statute?*

If you are considering a program outside of these 17 examples and 9 program categories, it will be important for you to cite specific research and demonstrate that the program is evidence-based. You should refer to the [“Evidence-Based Program Examples” guidance document](http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/soa-evidence-based-examples.docx) *(download)* DESE released the week of February 10, 2020, which will provide examples of the types of evidence needed to make an effective case for the selected program. Your plan will also need to include a description as to why a program aligned to one of the nine categories in the law would not be effective in reducing disparities in student achievement in your district (this is a statutory requirement).

*One of the priority programs is “expanded access to pre-kindergarten.” If a district does not have free full-day kindergarten and wants to expand kindergarten access, would this program be considered a priority area?*

Yes. Expanded access to pre-kindergarten is one of the 17 evidence-based program examples identified by DESE. In the nine evidence-based categories of the Student Opportunity Act, one is “Expanded early education and pre-kindergarten programming within the district in consultation or in partnership with community-based organizations.” A kindergarten expansion priority would fit nicely within this program category.

**Budget and Finance**

*If our community receives the minimum per pupil amount in Chapter 70 aid, does our district still need to submit a Student Opportunity Plan?*

Yes. The law requires that each school district submit a Student Opportunity Plan by April 1, 2020 regardless of the level of state aid each district expects to receive. The Department created the short form template (two pages) in recognition that many districts are not receiving substantial new funds, but all districts can make progress in closing persistent achievement gaps.

*Our community is expected to receive a small amount of incremental Chapter 70 aid in FY21 and might not see any increase in the school district’s appropriation. What do we put in our plan if we do not receive an increase in our appropriation next year?*

If a district is expected to receive minimal or no increases in Chapter 70 aid, we recommend the district document existing programs targeted to closing achievement gaps for subgroups or reallocate existing funds, whether General Fund or grant funds, to ensure such programs are in place.

*Is there a recommended split for the amount of funding spent on ongoing operational costs versus SOA evidence-based programs for short form districts?*

No. We recommend that you allocate to SOA programs an amount appropriate to address the needs of your student subgroups, but there is no specific dollar figure that we recommend targeting for evidence-based programs. We recognize that many short form districts are not receiving substantial additional funding; in these cases, we recommend districts document existing programs targeted towards closing achievement gaps for subgroups or reallocate existing sources of funds, whether General Fund or grant funds, to ensure such programs are in place.

*Does the “supplement, not supplant” requirement apply to SOA funds?*

“Supplement, not supplant” requirements apply to the use of federal funds. If you have a specific question about the use of your district’s federal funds and its relation to your SOA plan, please email DESE’s Grants Office at federalgrantprograms@doe.mass.edu.

*What happens if the legislature’s final budget is different from the Governor’s House 2 FY21 budget?*

Districts should continue to create their plans based on the Governor’s House 2 FY21 budget. If Chapter 70 information changes as part of the legislative process, we will provide additional information regarding how and if it will impact your district’s plan.

*What is the timing of the “multiplier funds” for Priority Programs identified by the Commissioner?*

We have not yet identified a timeline for the release of competitive grants for districts that chose Priority Programs but expect to make an announcement later this school year.

*What if our long form district is in a unique financial situation and is unable to meet the recommended levels of SOA program spending (long form only)?*

While we expect that long form districts will work hard to make the recommended incremental Chapter 70 funds available for evidence-based programs, we recognize that local districts have individual conditions that will inform the level of funding available. If you expect to deviate from DESE’s recommended funding levels for SOA programs, you should schedule a meeting with DESE to discuss your district’s situation prior to the April 1 deadline. If this applies to you, please email SOAplans@doe.mass.edu.

*What does “incremental Chapter 70 aid” mean? Does it mean the amount over three years or over one year (long form only)?*

Incremental Chapter 70 aid as used throughout the guidance materials means the difference between your community’s Chapter 70 aid in FY2020 and expected aid in FY2021, using the Governor’s FY21 House 2 budget numbers. While Student Opportunity Plans are for three years, districts do not yet have detailed budget information to plan for the second or third years of their plan. Long form districts will submit additional budget information for these later years via an amendment process, which will be addressed in the coming months.

*If we are a long form district funding an evidence-based program in FY20 using private funds that are scheduled to expire in FY20, but we want to continue this program as part of our SOA plan in future years, how should we address this in the budget file? Would this program count in our “Year 0” budget (long form only)?*

Programs that are funded by private funds (not General Fund or state or federal grants) would not count towards your Year 0 budget in the budget template. However, you may include the cost of this program in your Year 1 budget if you expect to continue this evidence-based program using public funds.

**Metrics and Targets**

*How can we effectively plan if targets will not be set until the fall?*

Until targets are set with the latest data from the current school year (SY2019-20), we recommend that districts use their most recent data to plan.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

*What if our school committee’s vote on our SOA plan is scheduled for after April 1, 2020?*

Districts must submit their plan by the April 1 deadline even if the school committee has not yet approved the district’s plan. You will have an opportunity to submit the school committee certification regarding the vote and outcome through an amendment process at a later date. However, districts are strongly encouraged to have school committees vote prior to the April 1 deadline.

*How can our school committee approve the SOA plan if our FY21 budget is scheduled to be voted on after April 1?*

When approving SOA plans, school committees are voting on the four commitments outlined in the plan narrative and an aligned resource plan. However, this is separate from the budget vote that school committees will take on the full budget later in the school year.