



# FY2027 H.2 BUDGET BRIEF

Maura T. Healey, Governor | Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor

## Expanding Access to Quality Education

***Yusuf Bibars and Jacob Hunnicutt, Fiscal Policy Analysts***

Massachusetts is widely recognized as a national leader in education, and for good reason. The Commonwealth provides more than one million students across early education, K-12, and higher education with high-quality, equitable learning opportunities that prepare them for continued success in school, career, and life. This leadership is the result of sustained, strategic investment in students, educators, and schools, as well as a data-driven focus on closing achievement gaps and responding to the evolving needs of learners and the workforce. Through targeted state programming and strong local partnerships, the Healey-Driscoll Administration is committed to ensuring that all Massachusetts residents have access to world-class education, regardless of age, zip code, or socioeconomic status.

The Executive Office of Education has worked to maintain this commitment over several years and remains committed in House 2 through the following actions:

- Fully funding the sixth and final implementation phase of the *Student Opportunity Act*, delivering historic levels of local school aid to towns and cities.
- Sustaining free community college by maintaining the MassReconnect program for students ages 25 and older without a prior higher education credential, and this year, expanding the MassEducate program to ensure tuition-and-fee-free access for eligible students – an increase of \$17 million over FY26 that accommodates continued enrollment growth.
- Guaranteeing universal, free School Meals for all public K-12 students, providing roughly 300 million meals statewide annually and ensuring that every child has reliable access to healthy, nutritious food.
- Continuing expanded early literacy investments, including an additional \$10 million to bring total House 2 funding to \$25 million to support and strengthen the Literacy Launch program, and \$25 million in the Fair Share supplemental budget for the High-Dosage Tutoring program, ensuring students statewide build strong foundational reading skills.
- Expanding the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) with a \$16.5 million increase from FY26 GAA (a total of \$37 million in House 2) to grow access to high-quality preschool and expand the program into every Gateway City by the end of 2026.
- Continuing the historic expansion of financial aid, maintaining \$85 million to keep public higher education affordable for 25,000 students, while sustaining tuition- and fee-free access for all Pell Grant recipients.
- Maintaining \$475 million for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program.
- Preserving higher child care provider rates by increasing Child Care Financial Assistance funding by more than \$221 million from FY26 GAA, sustaining nearly

\$248 million in cumulative rate increases since FY19 and continuing progress toward covering the true cost of providing care.

In total, the administration's FY27 House 2 recommendation deepens the Commonwealth's commitment to student achievement by proposing \$13.23 billion in funding across early education and child care, K-12, and higher education, representing a \$713 million (6 percent) increase over the FY26 GAA.

### **Gateway to PreK: Expanding Early Access Where It Matters Most**

A strong early education and child care system is essential to the healthy development of Massachusetts's youngest learners and to the vitality of the state's economy. When families can access affordable, high-quality early learning and pre-K programs, children gain the cognitive, social, and emotional foundations they need to support long-term success, in school and beyond. At the same time, stable and accessible child care enables parents to work, pursue training, or advance their careers, strengthening the Commonwealth's workforce and economic productivity.

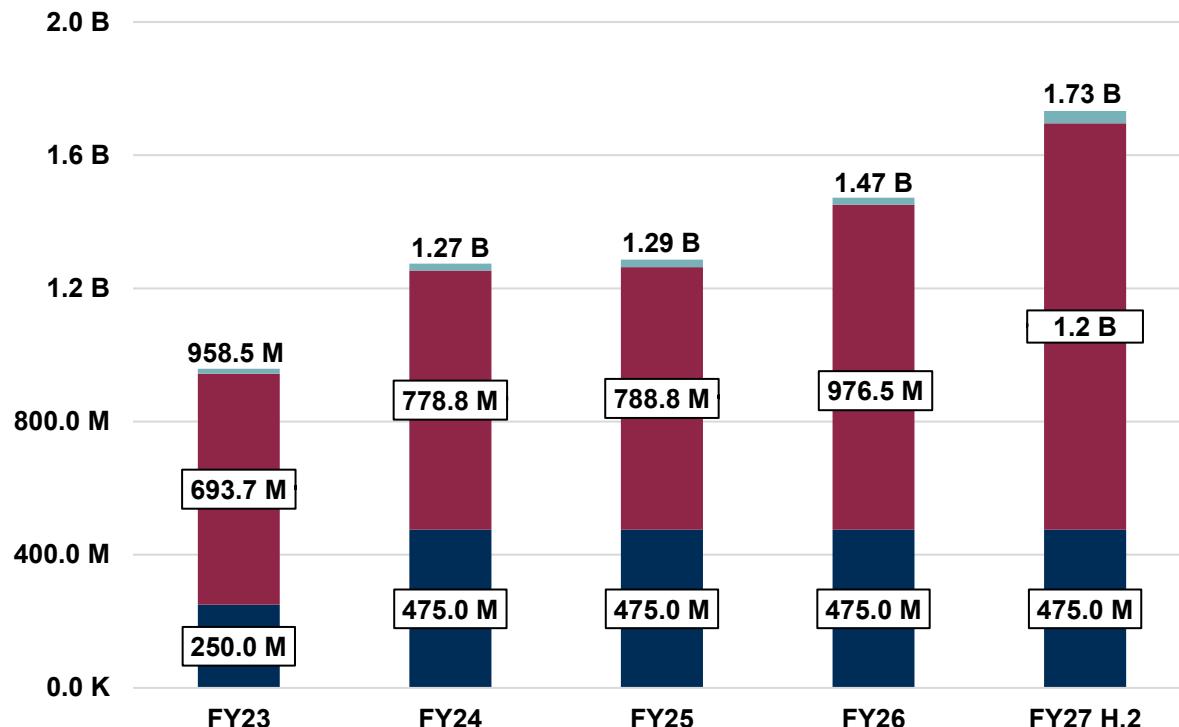
To continue the administration's efforts to expand access and ease the financial pressure of high child care costs, House 2 recommends \$1.9 billion for the Department of Early Education and Care. This includes a historic \$1.2 billion investment in the Department's Child Care Financial Assistance program, which provides critical support for income-eligible families and those served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA).

These programs assist families in affording premier early education programs by covering a portion of tuition costs and promoting stable placements for children facing the greatest barriers to care. The recommendation signifies a \$255 million (26 percent) increase over the FY26 GAA, partially funded by Fair Share revenues, and reflects the administration's commitment to directing a portion of Fair Share resources toward expanding educational opportunity and equity across the Commonwealth.

House 2 recommends sustaining \$475 million in state funding for the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program, bringing total state investment to nearly \$2.2 billion since its inception in FY21. The C3 program provides a stable and predictable financing model for early education by aligning monthly payments with the actual costs of operating high-quality programs, including workforce expenses, classroom capacity, and facility operations. This dependable funding structure allows providers to plan for the long term, improve workforce retention through more competitive wages, and maintain strong learning environments for young learners. As a result, early education programs have been better equipped to expand capacity, add classrooms, and serve more working families.



**State Support for Child Care Continues to Grow**  
Across *Family Financial Assistance* *CPPI* and *C3 Program*



**Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI)**

The Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) is a focused effort to expand access to high-quality preschool programs for four-year-olds across Massachusetts, with a particular emphasis on Gateway Cities. The administration is on track to meet its target of universal pre-K in every Gateway City by the end of 2026. House 2 proposes \$37 million in funding for CPPI, which includes a \$16.5 million Fair Share expansion. This investment will support expansion into the seven Gateway Cities not yet participating, while enhancing services and resources in current CPPI districts. Since its inception, CPPI has enabled thousands of four-year-olds in high-need communities to participate in early learning experiences that build the foundation for long-term academic success.

**Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force**

Established through Executive Order 625, the Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care (IAEECC) Task Force is a pillar of the administration's broader *Gateway to Pre-K* agenda. This agenda, characterized by its historic contributions to Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) and CPPI, reflects a commitment to expanding access to high-quality early education, lowering costs for families, and stabilizing the early education workforce, particularly in communities with the greatest need.

Over the last year, the Task Force made meaningful progress by raising visibility of early education and child care as essential infrastructure for child development, workforce stability, and economic vitality; and developing initiatives to strengthen the state's early education system. Looking ahead to year three, the Task Force will continue to implement its recommendations and explore opportunities to maintain the impact of these efforts, transitioning workstreams to permanent agency ownership and developing lasting inter-agency partnerships, structures, and systems.



### **Literacy Launch: Building Strong Readers from Age 3 to Grade 3**

Literacy Launch is a statewide early literacy initiative designed and implemented by the administration to improve educational outcomes for the Commonwealth's youngest learners. House 2 proposes funding the program at \$25 million – a \$10 million increase from the FY26 GAA – to support the third year of its multi-year implementation.

Literacy Launch integrates proven strategies to provide districts with professional development, technical assistance, assessment and screening tools, and ongoing support in adopting evidence-based, high-quality instructional materials. This comprehensive approach ensures that school districts and community-based preschools have the knowledge, capacity, and resources needed to deliver the strong, effective early instruction envisioned by the state.

### **Fair Share Supplemental Budget: Key Investments in Education**

Alongside the House 2 budget recommendation, Governor Healey filed the second ever Fair Share supplemental budget, directing \$358.3 million of surplus FY25 Fair Share revenue to support early education, K-12, and higher education across the state. The FY26 Fair Share supplemental budget proposal includes the following highlights:

- \$25 million for the High Dosage Tutoring initiative. This funding will continue to provide high-dosage tutoring opportunities for over 10,000 students in grades K–3, with priority given to first graders, helping reduce the number of students considered “significantly below benchmark” on the early literacy screener from the start to the end of the school year.
- \$10 million for Accelerating Achievement, a new multi-year K-12 school improvement initiative focused on rapidly improving student outcomes in the Massachusetts’ lowest-performing schools. This program provides eligible schools with targeted funding and technical assistance to support data-driven instruction, school leadership, teacher retention, high-quality instructional materials, professional development, and a multi-tiered systems of support to drive improvements in student achievement statewide.
- \$5 million to reduce the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program waitlist and expand adult education services. ESOL programs provide language instruction to help non-native English speakers improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, while also offering workforce readiness and career-focused training.

For more information on how Fair Share has been used to expand educational opportunity, please see the **Delivering on Fair Share: Impact Report** brief.

### **The Student Opportunity Act: Delivering on Its Promise**

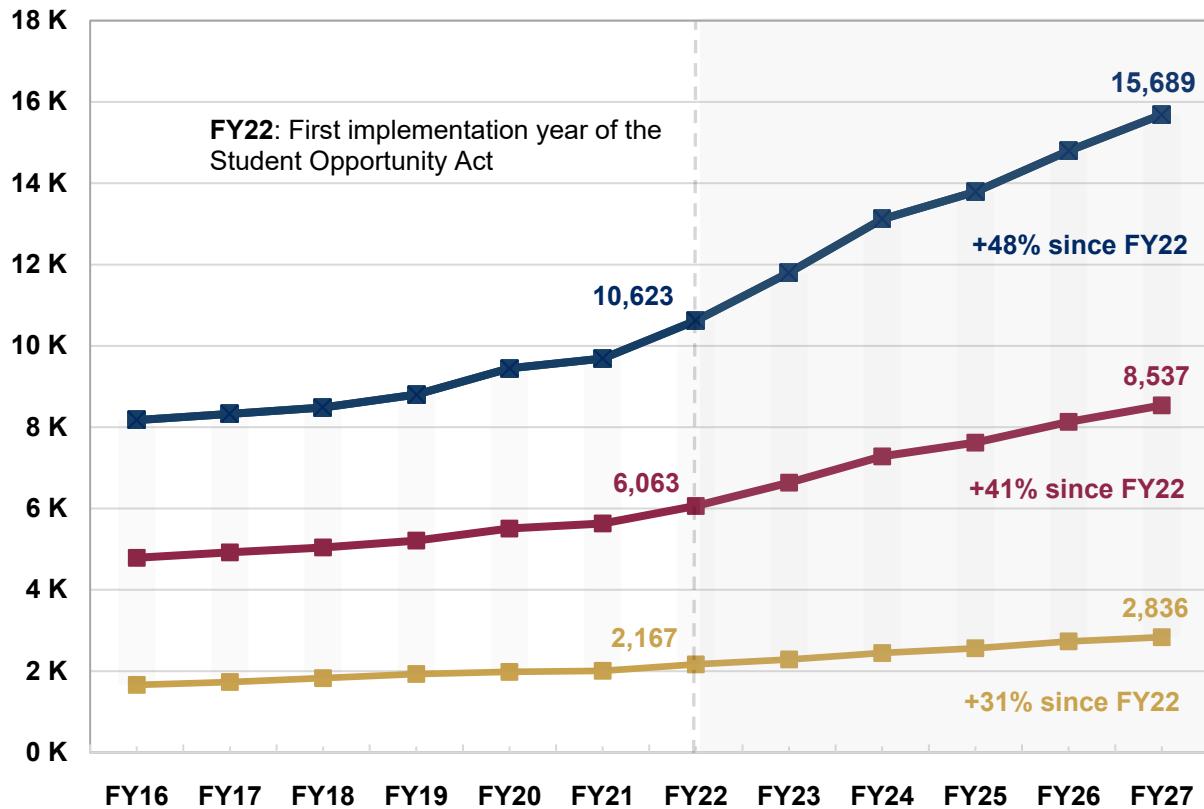
House 2 continues the administration’s commitment to equitable K-12 funding through the full implementation of the *Student Opportunity Act* (SOA). House 2 recommends \$7.6 billion in Chapter 70 aid, a \$242 million (3.3 percent) increase over FY26, ensuring districts statewide can meet their foundation budgets. As FY27 marks the final year of SOA implementation, the Commonwealth has delivered on the law’s promise to close opportunity gaps and target resources to students with the greatest needs. Since taking office, the Healey-Driscoll Administration has supported \$1.6 billion in increased Chapter 70 investment, with the majority directed to historically underfunded districts. Gateway Cities have seen particularly strong gains. Since FY22, average per-pupil Chapter 70 aid in Gateway Cities has increased 39 percent, from \$10,623 to \$14,797. In FY27, average per-pupil funding in Gateway Cities exceeds the statewide average by 83 percent and is more than four times the average in the state’s wealthiest districts, underscoring the administration’s sustained commitment to equity.

House 2 also recommends a historic investment of \$802.7 million in the Special Education Circuit Breaker program – a \$127.5 million (19 percent) increase over FY26, including \$150 million funded through the Fair Share supplemental budget – supporting districts in meeting the rising costs of specialized instructional and transportation services.

Across the FY27 House 2 budget proposal and the FY26 Fair Share supplemental budget, the administration recommends \$57.1 million for Regional School Transportation, \$35.2 million for Homeless Student Transportation, and \$62 for other Education Transportation, including for students studying outside of the districts they live in. School transportation is especially costly for regional and rural districts that must transport students further.



Ch. 70 Aid per Pupil among **Gateway Cities**  
Compared to **State** and **Top 10 Wealthiest Districts** averages

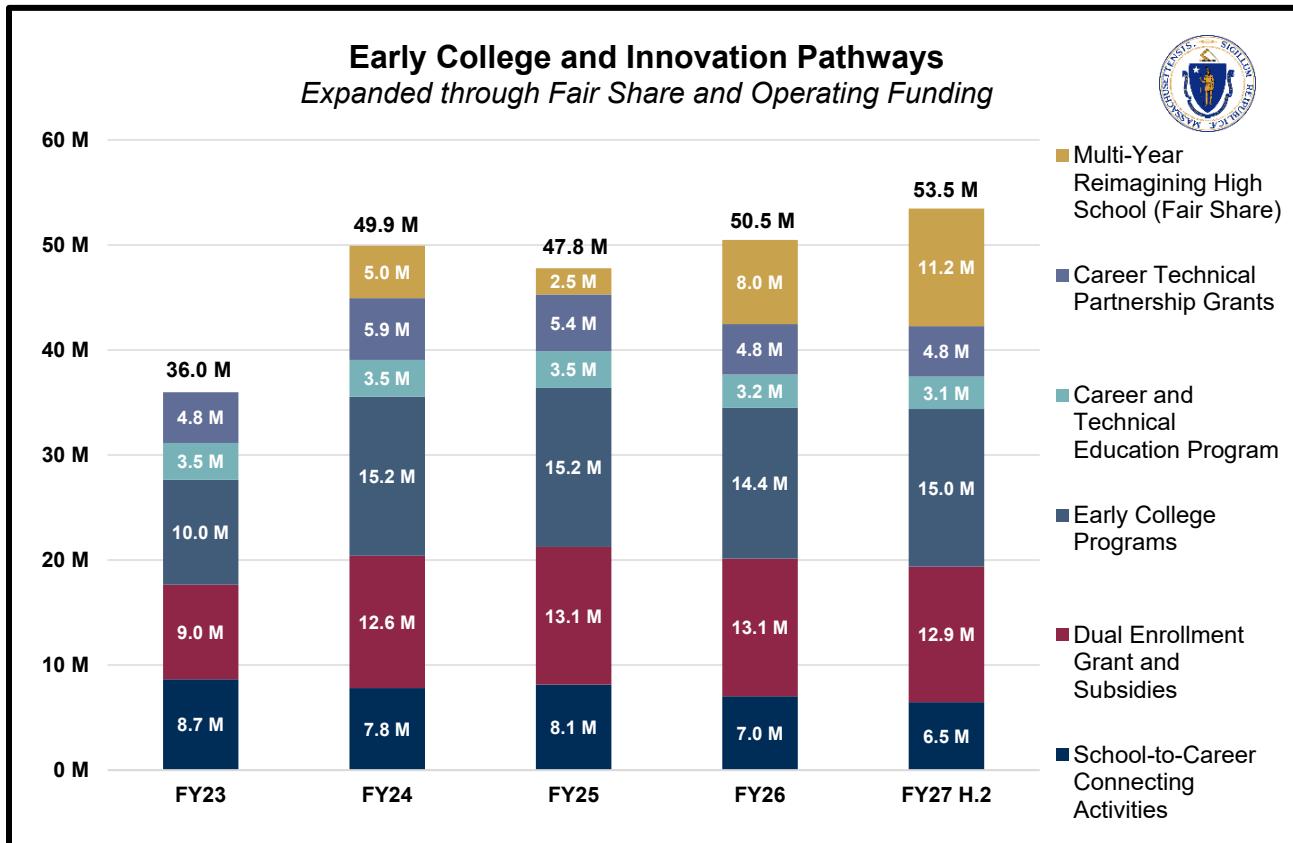


For more information on how House 2 recommends supporting school districts and municipalities, please see the [Local Aid: Partnering with Cities and Towns](#) brief.

### Reimagining High Schools: Expanding Pathways to College and Career

The administration is transforming the high school experience by expanding access to college-level and career-oriented learning opportunities that prepare students for the demands of the 21st century. House 2 recommends \$53.5 million in collective funding for high school pathway programs, including [Early College](#) and [Career Technical Education](#).

[Early College](#) programs merge high school and college coursework through dual enrollment collaborations with local universities, providing students the chance to earn up to 12 college credits at no cost while discovering potential career paths. These programs drastically increase the likelihood that students will pursue and succeed in higher education. As of FY26, 78 Massachusetts high schools participate in more than 70 partnerships with colleges and universities statewide.



House 2 also recommends expanding Fair Share funding for Reimagining High School initiatives from \$8 million to \$11.2 million, a \$3.2 million increase (40 percent) over the FY26 GAA. This investment will strengthen programs that prepare students for college and career success and cover AP STEM test fees for underrepresented communities. It includes funds to support the Innovation Career Pathways program, which provides high school students with applied, hands-on coursework and work-based learning opportunities in high-demand fields such as clean energy, manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology. As of FY26, 117 Massachusetts high schools offer Innovation Career Pathways, serving more than 8,500 students statewide.

### Children's Trust: Strengthening Families Through Prevention

The Children's Trust (CT) is the Commonwealth's lead agency for preventing child abuse and neglect by addressing its root causes and strengthening the systems that support Massachusetts families. Built on decades of research on the importance of providing families support before they reach the point of crisis, CT focuses on redefining how best to support families, the importance of family-centered collaboration, and advancing systems change to better protect children and support families.

House 2 recommends a \$22.3 million investment in Children's Trust to improve outcomes for children and families while reducing long-term costs across the education, child welfare, and healthcare systems. As the agency enters the second year of its new strategic plan, this funding supports a continued focus on the education, family support services, and

home-visiting that promote healthy development and family stability during a child's earliest years. Recent administration appointments of three new early education leaders to the CT Board of Directors further strengthen this work, bringing decades of combined experience and deep commitment to the early education field.

### **Mental and Behavioral Health Supports for Students**

Schools are not only centers of academic learning but also critical pillars of support for children from birth through adolescence. As student mental and behavioral health needs have grown to be increasingly complex, the importance of strong, school-based support systems has become even more apparent. In response, House 2 proposes \$17 million for mental and social-emotional health initiatives, including continued investment in the development and implementation of a statewide, birth-through-higher-education framework for mental and behavioral health.

<b>Account</b>	<b>FY26 H.1</b>	<b>FY26 GAA</b>	<b>FY27 H.2</b>
Social Emotional Learning Grants	5,962,647	3,000,000	2,986,027
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services	5,000,000	5,000,000	4,950,000
Mental Health Framework (Fair Share)	5,000,000	-	6,000,000
UMass Student Behavioral Health Services	4,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
Safe and Supportive Schools	670,086	795,086	648,948
Student Wellness School Supports	-	500,000	495,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>20,632,733</b>	<b>11,295,086</b>	<b>17,079,975</b>

Of particular note is a \$6 million Fair Share investment in the Mental Health Framework, including \$1 million for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to administer a grant program that helps school districts and community-based organizations build comprehensive, integrated, multi-tiered school mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL) systems. The Framework aims to use data to identify student needs, guide program design and equity approaches, and demonstrate impact on student mental health, wellness, and SEL outcomes.

### **A Commitment to Affordable and Quality Higher Education**

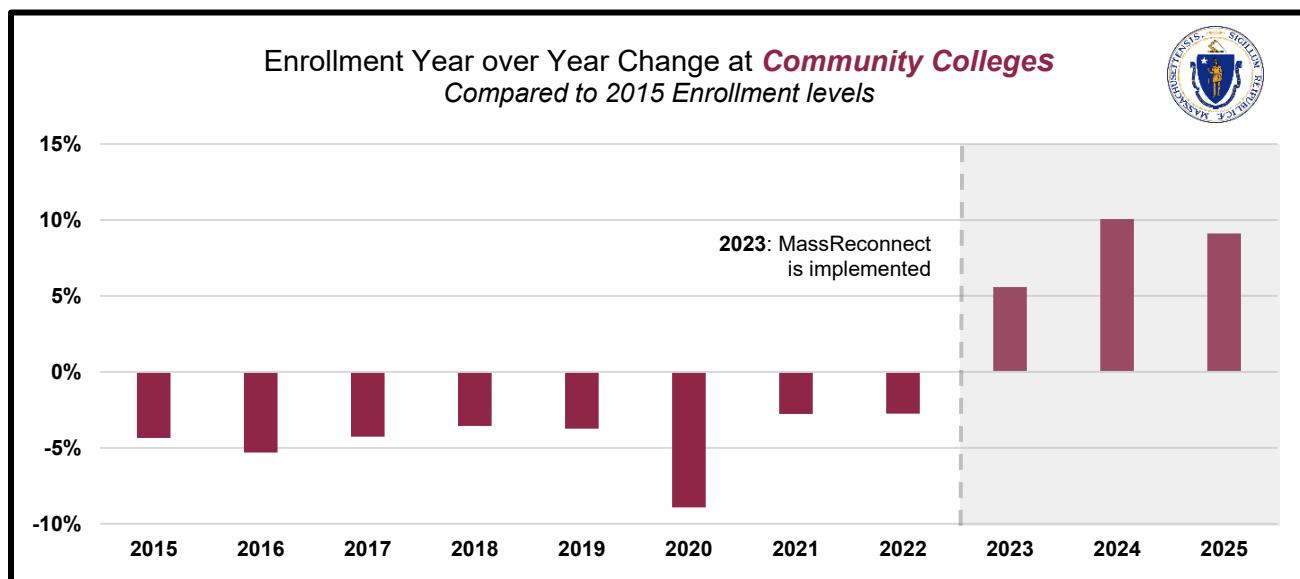
The commitment to an affordable and quality post-secondary education has positioned Massachusetts as a leader in social mobility and economic dynamism. The administration's proposed budget recommends significant investments to Community College, State Universities, and the UMass system for student aid to support college affordability, and provides funding that will transform academic, research, and mental health facilities across the Commonwealth's public universities.

#### ***Affordable Higher Education and Strategic Investments***

In her inaugural address, Governor Healey committed to "free community college to students over 25 who don't have a college degree" and to "increase funding to our state

university system so everyone can afford a higher degree." The House 2 proposed budget maintains this commitment by:

- Expanding college and career pathway opportunities for students (\$1.3 million) and funding for technical grants (\$4.8 million).
- Sustaining historic financial aid expansion to increase affordability through MassEducate and MassReconnect, the free community college programs (\$137 million).
- Providing funding for wraparound supports at State Universities and Community Colleges (\$28 million).
- \$103.3 million in Fair Share funding to sustain the MASSGrant Plus and additional financial aid expansions, offering tuition and fee-free college to Pell Grant-eligible students at all two- and four-year public colleges and universities in Massachusetts.
- \$176.7 million for the Massachusetts State Scholarship Program, which provides financial assistance to students pursuing higher education in any approved institution furnishing a program of higher education.



The administration's investments in MassReconnect and MassEducate have been central to reversing long-term enrollment declines and pandemic-era losses at Massachusetts community colleges. Together, these programs make public community college tuition-free for students without a bachelor's degree and support workforce-critical training such as EMT programs to increase the pipeline of medical professionals and EMTs in Massachusetts. House 2 proposes \$137 million to sustain free community college – \$17 million (13 percent) above the FY26 GAA – supporting nearly 115,000 students statewide. Since FY24, more than 8,400 students have received MassReconnect grants, including over 2,000 new students age 25 and older who enrolled in fall 2023, a 45 percent increase. These investments have helped restore total enrollment to pre-COVID levels and return Black and Latino student enrollment to – and in the case of Latino students, well above – pre-pandemic levels.

***BRIGHT Act***

The Commonwealth's state-of-the-art educational facilities are critical for maintaining our world-class research centers, high-skills workforce, and innovative biotech and climate sectors. The administration aims to support higher education infrastructure through the *BRIGHT Act*, filed with the Legislature in 2025, to leverage Fair Share to unlock \$2.5 billion to support major capital projects that modernize, decarbonize, complete critical repairs, and address the growing backlog of deferred maintenance across higher education institutions. The *BRIGHT Act* will make transformational improvements to our public education system while creating 20,000 jobs.