



## **GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

344 Main Street \* Groton, MA 01450-0729 \* Tel.: 978.448.5505 \* Fax: 978.448.1202

February 26, 2025

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair  
House Committee on Ways and Means  
Massachusetts State House, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Massachusetts State House, Room 212  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Urgent Need for Chapter 70 Reform and Increased State Assistance for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District**

Dear Chair Michlewitz and Chair Rodrigues:

On behalf of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (GDRSD), we wish to express our deep concern regarding the ongoing and significant inadequacies of the Chapter 70 school funding formula. The “hold harmless” and “minimum aid” designation, while originally intended to provide stability, have instead resulted in stagnant funding that fails to keep pace with rising costs of providing an adequate education. As a result, our member towns consistently find themselves in a position of needing to pass a proposition 2 ½ override, just to fund their assessments for our level service school budget. This is not only unsustainable, it is an unpredictable and unreliable way to fund a school budget.

We recognize the complexities of school funding reform, and appreciate the state’s efforts through initiatives such as the Student Opportunity Act. However, for districts like Groton Dunstable, this legislation has virtually no impact. The funding challenges we face are immediate, and without meaningful changes to the Chapter 70 formula, our ability to provide a high-quality education is in jeopardy.

To further illustrate how inadequate our Chapter 70 aid is, in the 15 year period from FY08 through FY22, our Chapter 70 funding went from \$10,757,109 to \$10,987,643. That's an increase of only \$230,534 over 15 years, or an average of 0.14% average increase. In FY08, Chapter 70 aid made up approximately 35% of our funding, while the combined town assessments made up approximately 57%. In FY25, Chapter 70 aid dropped to 24% of our funding, while the combined local assessments have increased to 72%. The financial strain that this places on our taxpayers is unsustainable and without immediate action, there will be dire consequences for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.



## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

344 Main Street \* Groton, MA 01450-0729 \* Tel.: 978.448.5505 \* Fax: 978.448.1202

Over the past several years, the towns of both Groton and Dunstable have put forward multiple Proposition 2 ½ override requests to help fund both the Towns and the regional school district, but these efforts have failed due to the existing tax burden on residents. The failure of these override attempts has forced cuts to critical areas, including teaching and support services. District wide, class sizes have increased, and opportunities and supports that are available to students have decreased. The morale of our remaining staff members has been deeply affected as they are being asked to carry more responsibilities to make up for the loss of personnel.

To add to the challenges that result from stagnant Chapter 70 aid, the constraint of Proposition 2 ½ limits our member towns' ability to raise additional revenue to keep up with the growing cost of providing an adequate education. As small communities, with a limited tax base, seeing an average Chapter 70 increase of 1.5%, tax increase of 2 ½% plus new growth, and a school district assessment increase of 5.6% on average, doesn't work. This is especially true when the FY26 assessments are projected to increase by approximately 8%, in order to maintain the current level of educational services. Based on the revenue the towns have available, GDRSD has a projected budget deficit of approximately \$2.5 million without an infusion of additional revenue. This follows the FY25 budget year, when we were forced to reduce the school budget by over \$2 million, cutting 27 positions including teachers, counselors, specialists, nurses, and others.

GDRSD, along with both the towns of Groton and Dunstable, have been actively engaged in Project 211, a collaborative initiative aimed at advocating for structural reforms to the Chapter 70 formula. Through this effort, we have worked alongside legislative, and other municipal and school district leaders to develop proposals that address the inequities in state aid distribution. We urge the Legislature to consider the input of Project 211 as part of the FY26 budget process and work toward long-overdue reforms to Chapter 70.

To address these issues, we respectfully request that the Legislature take immediate steps to:

1. Reevaluate the Chapter 70 formula to ensure it accurately reflects district costs, including inflationary pressures, regional school district needs, and special education expenses.
2. Provide a meaningful increase in minimum aid to ensure that all school districts, regardless of their current funding status, receive sufficient resources to support student success.
3. For FY26 and until the Chapter 70 formula is amended, support targeted state assistance for school districts struggling to meet their financial obligations, recognizing the unique challenges faced by towns like Groton, Dunstable and more than half of the school districts in the Commonwealth.

Additionally, we urge the Legislature to fully fund regional school transportation reimbursements, as required under Massachusetts General Laws. Regional school districts, like



## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

344 Main Street \* Groton, MA 01450-0729 \* Tel.: 978.448.5505 \* Fax: 978.448.1202

GDRSD, are disproportionately impacted by the high costs of student transportation, and this in turn, places an additional strain on local budgets. While the state has historically committed to reimbursing regional districts for 100% of transportation expenses, actual funding levels have often fallen short, forcing communities to divert resources from classroom instruction to cover these costs. Fully funding regional transportation reimbursements would provide much-needed relief to municipalities, ensuring that students have reliable access to schools without compromising educational programs or further burdening local taxpayers. We strongly encourage the Legislature to prioritize this issue in the FY26 budget.

The Groton Dunstable Regional School District is deeply committed to maintaining a high standard of education for our students. However, without meaningful reform to Chapter 70 and additional state assistance, our ability to do so is at serious risk. We implore you to prioritize these issues in the FY26 budget process and we are committed to working with you to find solutions that will support our schools and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these very serious issues. We welcome any opportunity to discuss this matter further and can provide additional details regarding the fiscal challenges facing the Groton Dunstable Regional School District if needed.

Very truly yours,

Dr. Geoff Bruno, Superintendent of Schools

Lacey McCabe, Chair

On behalf of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee