



Shrewsbury Public Schools

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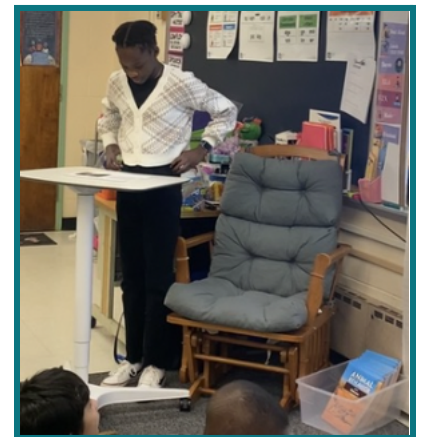
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

To: School Committee
Re: Student Opportunity Act plan
Date: March 27, 2024

Background

The Chapter 70 program is the major program of state funding aid to public elementary and secondary schools. Based on the formula, Shrewsbury's Chapter 70 funding has only increased by "minimum aid" over the last many years. As of this writing, we expect no additional funding beyond minimum aid as a result of this legislation in FY25. Nevertheless, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires all public school districts in the Commonwealth to submit for approval a plan that outlines their plans for closing achievement opportunity gaps. In other words, this is a new state requirement that is no longer linked to Chapter 70 funding. Rather, we will experience the SOA process primarily as a policy change. Going forward we can expect that DESE will expect an annual update on the metrics outlined in our plan until 2027, at which time we will be expected to craft a new one.

"Closing these gaps is our collective work for the next decade, and the SOA will fuel our efforts to ensure all students achieve at high levels and are prepared for success after high school." — Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley



Shrewsbury's Student Opportunity Act Plan

The stated goal of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) is to require districts to describe the ways in which they are addressing disparate learning experiences for students with disparate learning outcomes to their same-age peers and to

“ensure that every student in the Commonwealth has access to a high quality education regardless of zip code.” Accordingly, guidance on the SOA planning encourages districts to expend funds to target improvement in four key areas:

- enhanced core instruction
- targeted student supports
- talent development and
- conditions for student success

Further, this legislation requires that the plan describe the evidenced-based strategies, practices and programs that districts will use to improve outcomes for marginalized students. The plan you are asked to approve shows that Shrewsbury’s SOA funds will be expended on three state priorities that are also depicted in our strategic plan for our district: 1) supporting educators to implement high-quality, aligned curriculum; 2) supporting staff to engage in a cycle of improvement using universal assessment data; and 3) expanding capacity to address social emotional learning (SEL) and the mental health needs of students and families.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) advised districts to select high-impact, evidence-based programs targeted to student supports, clarified that it’s acceptable to “adopt, deepen or continue” evidence-based programs already in use, and encouraged districts to consider initiatives begun in the previous cycle. Shrewsbury’s proposal meets these DESE guidelines.

You’ll likely note that our focus on data-informed cycles of improvement will continue.

Reconfigured Evidence-Based Program Areas

- Expanded learning time for all students in the form of a longer school day or school year
- Increasing opportunities for educators and support staff to engage in a cycle of continuous improvement, utilizing district and school teaming structures
- Increasing opportunities for all students to engage in arts, enrichment, world languages, athletics, and elective courses
- Developing effective family/school partnerships

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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How is the district proposing to monitor progress towards these goals? Briefly, the current SPS plan proposes that we use both the state accountability targets and the metrics already described in our district goals.

The costs associated with Shrewsbury's plan that we are identifying that we plan would be funded within our budget plans in the coming three fiscal years include:

- \$500,000 that will be used to implement high-quality instructional materials for literacy (Please note that half of this funding will be provided to the district as a result of a competitive grant award through DESE.)
- \$266,386 to sustain the use of a universal assessment (the Star assessment program) and related tools that develop Reading and Math skills for students in grades K-8 for the next three years (We are currently in the second year of a two-year contract and can expect to negotiate a new contract in June, 2025 using appropriated FY26 funds.)
- \$145,000 to add the Therapeutic Program recommended by Ms. Belsito, where two full-time professionals would be added to address the clinical and academic needs of K-4 students exhibiting difficulties adjusting to and learning within their school environment.

Community Feedback

As you know, in formulating our strategic plan we engaged all School Council members together with [Focused Schools](#) to discern community priorities. Thereafter Focused Schools held 20 meetings with various stakeholder groups including students, families and staff. Dr. Sawyer sent a follow up communication to SPS families in April, 2023 as well. That document included a link to a survey facilitated by [ThoughtExchange](#) designed to elicit thoughts, concerns and questions from the community. There was nothing in the feedback we received from the community to contradict our initial district goals.

In the time since crafting our first Student Opportunity Act plan, Shrewsbury has successfully implemented free universal full-day Kindergarten. Thanks to the efforts of Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Meg Belsito and her team, co-teaching is well established at every level in the district. For this reason the proposed 2024-2027 plan seeks to use the funds approved for the initiatives outlined in our [current strategic plan](#) to target resources and other supports to programs and practices that will benefit our neediest students, and to sustain investment in the universal screening tools that have helped us to monitor the progress of all students. Shrewsbury remains committed to high expectations for

all students, and I am confident that the programs we have identified will help us to meet our goals.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have about our Student Opportunity Act plan at the upcoming meeting on March 27th.