

LETTERS

School numbers don't add up

Updated March 1, 2020, 12:00 a.m.

Re [“Critics say Baker budget plan counters vow to poor students”](#) (Metro, Feb. 19):
Massachusetts Education Secretary James Peyser exhibits a perverse interpretation of equity and disregards data from his own Department of Elementary and Secondary Education when he contrives to withhold state funding for low-income students authorized by the Student Opportunity Act.

The assertion that SOA will “flood school districts with more than \$300 million in new funds” overstates the case, since that statewide figure includes routine increases for inflation and enrollment. The 26 Gateway Cities need funds immediately to educate growing numbers of low-income students. The average per-student spending among Gateway Cities fell to 91 percent of the state average in 2018, from 98 percent in 2010. This growing gap in school funding amounts to more than \$436 million annually in the 26 Gateway Cities alone. The funding Peyser is withholding (\$66 million in the Gateway Cities) would not “overwhelm” the districts with funds; it would simply help them address longstanding needs and start to close opportunity gaps for low-income students.

For an equitable and consistent phase-in over seven years, the Baker administration (and the Legislature) should provide sufficient funds this first year to close one-seventh of the gap.

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The writer manages the BenchmarkHaverhillSchools.com website, which tracks school spending and performance in Haverhill and other Gateway Cities.



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