

Map of Massachusetts public schools with high economic need and limited access to school-based support

Research Brief and Recommendations



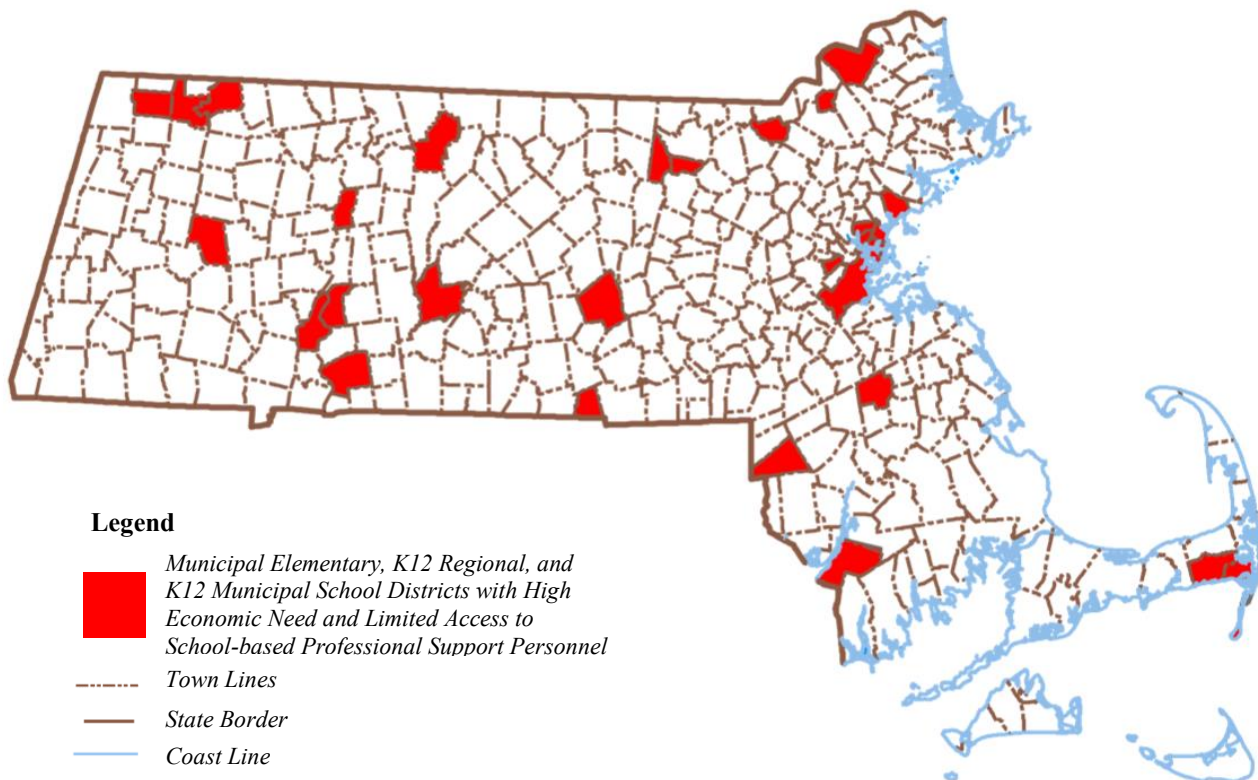
Overview

Students who grow up in areas of high poverty are at greater risk for negative school outcomes such as poor academic achievement, school dropout, and behavioral problems. During the 2018-19 school year, of the 292 local and regional school districts in Massachusetts, 26 were determined to have limited access to school-based Professional Support Personnel and high rates of student economic need¹, collectively serving *a quarter of the Commonwealth's students*. This research brief describes the geographic spread of high needs public-school districts across Massachusetts and addresses policy strategies for more equitable allocation of school-based behavioral health resources.

Findings

- School districts with high economic need span every geographic region and county in Massachusetts (with the exception of Dukes, Nantucket, and Norfolk counties)
- Districts near urban centers and in rural towns are overrepresented among districts with high economic need, and 54% of districts are in “Gateway Cities²” as recognized by the Massachusetts Legislature
- The proportion of Hispanic students in high needs districts is 11.4% higher than the state average and the proportion of students who speak a first language other than English is 7.2% higher than the state average
- School districts with high economic need disproportionately face barriers to high quality behavioral health service delivery due, in part, to workforce shortages and inequitable resource allocation

Map of School Districts with High Economic Need



¹ High economic need is determined by the proportion of students who participate in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC); the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) foster care program; and eligible MassHealth programs (Medicaid) (DESE). Limited access is determined by Professional Support Personnel to student ratio.

² Gateway cities are defined as "midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state," facing "stubborn social and economic challenges" while retaining "many assets with unrealized potential."

Districts with High Economic Need

<i>District Name</i>	<i>District Type</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>District Type</i>	<i>County</i>
<i>Florida</i>	Elementary municipal	Berkshire	<i>Haverhill</i>	K12 Municipal	Essex
<i>Orange</i>	Elementary municipal	Franklin	<i>Holyoke</i>	K12 Municipal	Hampden
<i>Rowe</i>	Elementary municipal	Franklin	<i>Lawrence</i>	K12 Municipal	Essex
<i>Worthington</i>	Elementary municipal	Hampshire	<i>Lowell</i>	K12 Municipal	Middlesex
<i>Sunderland</i>	Elementary municipal	Franklin	<i>Lynn</i>	K12 Municipal	Essex
<i>Monomoy</i>	K12 Regional	Barnstable	<i>Malden</i>	K12 Municipal	Middlesex
<i>Ayer Shirley</i>	K12 Regional	Middlesex	<i>North Adams</i>	K12 Municipal	Berkshire
<i>Attleboro</i>	K12 Municipal	Bristol	<i>Revere</i>	K12 Municipal	Suffolk
<i>Boston</i>	K12 Municipal	Suffolk	<i>South Hadley</i>	K12 Municipal	Hampshire
<i>Brockton</i>	K12 Municipal	Plymouth	<i>Springfield</i>	K12 Municipal	Hampden
<i>Chelsea</i>	K12 Municipal	Suffolk	<i>Webster</i>	K12 Municipal	Worcester
<i>Everett</i>	K12 Municipal	Middlesex	<i>Worcester</i>	K12 Municipal	Worcester
<i>Fall River</i>	K12 Municipal	Bristol	<i>Ware</i>	K12 Municipal	Hampshire

Conclusions

Within Massachusetts, there are 26 local and regional districts that serve students with high economic need that have limited access to school-based behavioral health support services. Hispanic students and students with a first language other than English are disproportionately represented within these districts. Overall, students attending schools with high economic need are at greater risk poor academic achievement, school dropout, and social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Public schools are well positioned to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students with economic disadvantage, but often lack the time, personnel, and funding to do so effectively. To this end, several recommendations are outlined below addressing solutions at the state, community, district, and school levels.

Recommendations

The recommendations are designed to more equitably spread access to school-based behavioral health supports to meet the needs of children in the Commonwealth. These recommendations include:

- **State Budget Funding:** Given the inequity in local resources spanning geographic regions, funding resources provided by the state could reduce barriers for access to social, emotional and behavioral health. Special attention should be directed toward these 26 districts.
- **Adoption of MTSS Framework:** In addition to equitable allocation of resources, an essential key is the implementation of multi-tiered prevention and intervention frameworks. This allows school professionals to complete screenings, implement interventions, and monitor progress for students in need of services.
- **Expanded Behavioral Health Partnerships with Community Agencies:** Schools cannot do this work alone and partnerships can assist in meeting the needs of students and families. Blended funding resources could support the development of behavioral health partnerships between districts and community agencies to expand access to services and enhance capacity of schools.

Authors and Contact Information

The research brief has been created by the Behavioral Health Integrated Resources for Children Project (BIRCh Project). The mission of the BIRCh Project is to provide professional development and resources for schools and strengthen the coordination of behavioral health supports provided by school and community agencies. It represents a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts Boston and the University of Massachusetts Amherst and is funded by Boston Children's Hospital. More information is available at www.umb.edu/birch, or contact us at birch.project@umb.edu.