



April 25, 2024

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I want to provide support and offer some thoughts for SF5252 and the investments and necessary changes it makes for our students, families, educators, communities and schools. This bill contains many proposals that refine and build upon some of the historic work done in the 2023 session. In addition to the resources invested in literacy and attendance and necessary legislation to enact last year's investments in English Learners as well as early education, many of the laudable provisions are technical but necessary statutory changes and no-cost ways the State can continue to improve. And I would like to also thank Chair Kunesh for carrying all of the Governor's supplemental budget recommendations. I am very encouraged by investments made in this bill that fit within the leadership targets and also want to provide some thoughts on some of the other proposals.

Senate File 5252 bill goes a long way to advancing the goals of the READ Act from last year. My team and I have been hearing from educators all around the state, and I know the legislature has as well, about the need for more resources to support teachers to get the training they need to be able to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction. This bill prioritizes that need. It also rightly prioritizes many other needs around interventions, professional development, literacy goals, screeners, and instructional resources. And I truly appreciate the partnership between the Legislature, MDE, and education partners along the way.

I am also pleased with the focus on improving student attendance. This is another area that I have been hearing about all over the state as we continue to face one of the great challenges to our educational recovery from the pandemic: ensuring every student consistently attends school. I am excited to see investments in this space and look forward to collaborating on how we can best leverage the great work of our COMPASS team around multi-tiered systems of support and building capacity and expertise around the state.

Voluntary prekindergarten is a critical program to support our preschoolers across the state, and both families and districts alike are asking for more, so we're excited about the growth of this program over the coming years. Thank you for including the necessary statutory changes to allow for the investment last year to reach the target of 12,360 spots for our four-year-old children one year ahead of schedule. This is much needed progress at no additional cost this year.

I am pleased to see the definition of qualifying services for English Learner cross-subsidy expenditures. More clearly defining these expenditures such that districts and charter schools

are reporting information to MDE consistently makes sure families have clearer expectations on how revenue is used at the local level. The inclusion of this definition is critical to the effective implementation of the English Learner cross-subsidy aid when it comes on line in 2027.

Other changes in the bill will provide more flexibility for grant funds to support the workforce to reach as many educators as possible and streamline implementation of various programs. The team at MDE is appreciative of the inclusion of these items.

Finally, we are absolutely committed to making sure that all of the resources and policies that the Legislature passes are implemented so we can create a safe and supportive teaching and learning environment for all of our students. We want to be good partners in advancing all the goals in whatever solutions the final bill provides, and I commit to working together to finding the right path forward to make sure the department can fulfill those duties.

I believe, with limited resources, as a follow up to the historic work that everyone here did last session, and the reality that there will always be more work to be done, this bill provides a range of very good proposals to meet current needs around literacy, early education, English learners, attendance, and needed technical tweaks. I look forward to our continued partnership as we move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Willie Jett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Willie Jett  
Commissioner of Education