



**Frequently Asked Questions:  
2024-2025 Section 31a (14)(a)(b) - (15)  
New Flexibilities to Reduce Teacher-to-Pupil Ratios & to  
Support Retention and Recruitment Efforts**

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been prepared to assist eligible local education agencies (LEAs) in planning and implementing Section 31a-funded strategies for reducing teacher/student ratios and recruiting and retaining staff. Eligible LEAs for subsection 31a(14)(a) are LEAs in Opportunity Index (OI) Bands 5 and 6 who have schools that have a percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged equal to or greater than the minimum percentage for assignment to OI Band 5. Eligible LEAs for subsection 31a(14)(b) are LEAs in OI Bands 5 and 6.

**Q1: When can LEAs, including public school academies (PSAs), start using the funds as described?**

Funds may be used under subsections 14(a) and 14(b) beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.

**Q2: What percentage of funds can be used for each of the purposes described in subsection (14)?**

Up to 30% of the funds expended under each of subsection, 14(a) and 14(b).

**Q3: What are the two main purposes for which these funds can be used?**

1. Up to 30% may be used to reduce the teacher-to-pupil ratio in grades K to 3 in schools with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils.
2. Up to 30% may be used to support retention and recruitment efforts to reduce staff turnover and vacancies in instructional and support staff.

**Q4: What criteria must be met for a school to use funds to reduce the teacher-to-pupil ratio?**

The LEA or PSA and school must have a percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils equal to or greater than the minimum percentage for assignment to opportunity index band 5. [Here](#) is the 2024-2025 list of eligible schools.

**Q5: What criteria must be met for a school to use funds for retention and recruitment efforts?**

The LEA or PSA must be assigned to opportunity index band 5 or 6.

**Q6: What is the opportunity index score?**

Each year, LEAs, including PSAs, are assigned a score called an “opportunity index score.” This score is calculated by dividing the number of students who are economically disadvantaged by the total number of students in the LEA or PSA from the previous year. Then, this number is multiplied by 100 and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Based on this score, each LEA or PSA is placed into a specific category called an “opportunity index band.” This classification helps determine eligibility for certain funding and support programs aimed at improving educational outcomes.

**Q7: Are there any restrictions on how the funds in Section 31a(14) can be used?**

Yes, funds must align with the needs assessment and the multi-tiered systems of support model. They cannot be used for administrative costs or to supplant existing funding, including maintaining existing salaries or costs.

**Q8: When must a LEA or PSA report its intent to use these funds?**

The LEA or PSA must submit the Intent to Use Form by November 1 of the current fiscal year. Directions for accessing this form are available on the Section 31a [website](#).

**Q9: How long can a LEA or PSA use the funds for the purposes described in subsection (14)?**

An eligible LEA or PSA may use the funds for the purposes described in subsection 14 for the fiscal year in which eligibility was determined plus two additional fiscal years. Funds allocated in FY 2023-24 and carried over to fiscal year 2024-25 are not eligible for use under this subsection.

**Q10: When will the department provide a report listing eligible schools for subsection 14(a) for the upcoming fiscal year?**

The MDE will provide a report listing eligible schools for subsection 14(a) by August 1 of each fiscal year.

**Q11: What are examples of generally allowable strategies to reduce teacher-to-pupil ratios (subsection 14(a))?**

- **Hiring of Additional Teachers:** This strategy involves the creation of new sections in kindergarten through third grade. Increasing the number of certified and endorsed teachers is the most direct way to reduce the teacher-to-pupil ratio. This strategy can be leveraged to avoid split grade-level classrooms.
- **Implement Team Teaching:** This strategy involves two or more teachers working together to plan, teach, and monitor a single group of students. This strategy can help distribute the workload, add new expertise to a team, or diversify teaching styles.

- **Increase Flexible Grouping:** This strategy involves adding teachers to reduce teacher-to-pupil ratios for direct instruction by organizing students into smaller, flexible groups based on their learning needs and abilities. This strategy increases direct instructional time and helps teachers provide more targeted, individualized instruction.
- **Utilize Teaching Assistants:** Employing additional instructional paraprofessionals or teachers can help manage larger classes by providing additional support to the teacher-of-record, allowing for more individualized attention. Consider recruiting retired educators who may welcome opportunities to share expertise and flexible schedules.

**Q12: What are examples of generally allowable instructional and support staff retention strategies (subsection 14(b))?**

- **Collegial Support Systems:** The LEA may choose to implement programs that support teaching and learning and foster positive culture and climate for instructional and support staff. These programs may include learning labs, peer-to-peer coaching and feedback that take professional learning communities to the next level of implementation.
- **Professional Learning:** Continuous learning opportunities, career advancement or professional growth programs, including advanced degree coursework and completion, teacher preparation certification or completion, and licensure support retention and recruitment. An American University's School of Education [article](#), notes that professional learning specifically designed to support teachers can include the following: workshops, courses related to their subject areas or best-evidence practices and mentoring programs.
- **Competitive Compensation:** LEAs may use funding to ensure that salaries and benefits are competitive and reflect the demands of the job, this includes providing reasonable, necessary and allocable monetary incentives to staff. The LEA may not supplant salaries and benefit costs for existing staff.
- **Feedback and Recognition:** Provide regular, positive feedback and acknowledge high-performing teachers and staff, including reasonable, necessary and allocable performance bonuses and stipends. TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project) discussed how encouraging teachers and making them feel appreciated can boost morale and retention in their April 2024 [blog](#).
- **Mentoring and Induction Programs:** LEAs may use funding to establish strong mentoring programs for new teachers to help them acclimate and succeed in their roles. The Learning Policy Institute, in collaboration with twenty-seven affiliate organizations provide guidance, including [Effective Retention Strategies](#).

**Q13: What assurances are required from LEAs and PSAs who fund strategies under the new flexibilities in Section 31a(14)?**

The LEA or PSA must provide assurances that Section 31a(14) will:

- not be used for administrative costs or to supplant existing funding, including, but not limited to, maintaining existing salaries or costs [Section 31a(15)].
- submit a completed intent to use funds for Section 31a(14)(a) to the MDE no later than **November 1** of the current fiscal year [Section 31a(15)].
- utilize funding under Section 31a(14)(a) for schools that are eligible and listed on the “2024-2025 Eligible Schools for Section 31a(14)(a) List” [Section 31a(16)].

**Q14: What are examples of expenditures that would not be allowable under these sections?**

Expenditures that are not allowable include:

- salaries and benefits for staff members previously funded with general fund (e.g., changing the funding for the existing kindergarten teacher from general fund to Section 31a without adding a 2<sup>nd</sup> kindergarten teacher)
- administrative costs
- activities that would not conform to the cost principles of reasonable and necessary (e.g., staff luncheons, entertainment [e.g. staff outing to a sporting event], staff housing)

**Definitions for this FAQ:**

- **Recruitment:** Includes strategies designed to assist an LEA with hiring new teachers, that were previously working in non-teaching professions, recent graduates of institutions of higher education, or working in other LEAs.
- **Retention:** Includes strategies designed to assist an LEA with maintaining currently employed and effective teachers and support staff.
- **Advancement and Professional Growth:** Includes strategies to support currently employed and effective paraprofessionals, teachers to enhance their skills and prepare for expanded roles within the same LEA (e.g., paraprofessional to teacher, addition of EL endorsement).

**Additional Resources and Supporting Research:**

- [Four Insights to Help Find and Keep Quality K-12 Educators \(hanoverresearch.com\)](https://www.hanoverresearch.com)
- [Ways to Overcome High Student-Teacher Ratios and Improve Personalized Learning | EdTech Magazine](#)
- [Teacher Retention: Preventing Teacher Turnover \(american.edu\)](https://www.american.edu)
- [Chapter 3: Effective Retention Strategies — Teaching Profession Playbook \(teachingplaybook.org\)](https://teachingplaybook.org)
- [Ask Them to Stay: Data-Backed Teacher Retention Strategies - TNTP](#)