*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | December 6, 2019 |
| **Subject:** | Competency Determination  |

At the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on December 17, 2019, I will present two topics on the Competency Determination (CD), the state high school graduation standard. First, we will discuss preliminary results from a study that Brown University is conducting. Second, I recommend that the Board vote on amendments to the regulations that govern the CD, to extend the interim passing standard for one additional year to the class of 2023.

**Brown University Study**

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences awarded a five-year research partnership grant to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) and Brown University Professor John Papay. The grant will fund a study of the state’s high school exit exams the use of performance levels and how they relate to long-term student outcomes, and the CD policy, among other topics. Over the course of the five-year partnership, the study should produce valuable information for the Board as it considers updates to the CD policy.

The initial findings from this research partnership can be summarized as follows:

* Since the CD policy went into effect, grade 10 MCAS scores and educational attainments have increased despite changing student demographics.
* Grade 10 MCAS scores are an early indicator of long-term success, even among students with similar characteristics and grade point averages.
* Students scoring at the needs improvement/warning cutoff (a scaled score of 220 on the legacy MCAS), do not appear to be college- or career-ready.
* Gaps in later earnings between higher- and low-income students are explained by differences in grade 10 scores and educational attainments.

We welcome your feedback on these findings and your questions that can inform our next avenues of study.

**Competency Determination Regulations**

On September 24, 2019, the Board voted to solicit public comment on proposed changes to 603 CMR 30.00, the regulations that govern the CD, to extend the interim passing standard for one additional year to the class of 2023.

*Background*

In February 2018, the Board voted to approve amendments to the regulations that established an interim passing standard for the CD for students in the classes of 2021 and 2022, the first two classes to take the new, next-generation grade 10 MCAS tests in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The interim standard on the next-generation tests is defined as a similar level of achievement to the current required standard on the legacy tests: 240 (*Proficient*), or 220 (*Needs Improvement*) and the fulfillment of the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) in ELA and mathematics.

This proposed change to the regulations would extend that interim passing standard for one additional year to the class of 2023. As I discussed with the Board in September, I recommend this extension in recognition of several factors, including the following:

* The need for additional time to consider the results from the first administration of the grade 10 tests in spring 2019;
* The need for additional time to consult with and gather feedback from the educational community, including students, parents, educators, administrators, policymakers, and community and business leaders, regarding a new CD standard; and
* The need to provide adequate notice to students about the state high school graduation standard they are expected to meet. The class of 2023 is currently in 9th grade. This proposed extension of the current CD standard would provide timely notice that the Board is maintaining the interim standard as to their graduating class, and allow time for the Board to consider, adopt, and provide notice of any new standard for future graduating classes.

The public comment period on the proposed changes to the regulations opened after the Board meeting on September 24 and closed on November 14. The Department received no comments.

I recommend that the Board vote to adopt the proposed amendments to 603 CMR 30.00 as presented. A redlined version of the regulations is attached, along with a motion to adopt the amendments. Brown University Professor John Papay, Deputy Commissioner Jeff Wulfson, Acting Chief Strategy/Research Officer Matt Deninger, Associate Commissioner Michol Stapel and Lucy Wall of our legal staff will join us for the discussion on December 17.

Attachments: [Redlined version of proposed amendments to 603 CMR 30.00](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2019-12/item1.1-p603cmr30-redline.docx)

Motion to adopt revised regulations