*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

### 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906 Telephone: (781) 338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

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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:** | April 17, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Update on COVID-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families |

Since our last meeting on March 31, Governor Baker signed legislation that addresses many concerns that municipalities and school districts might have because of the state of emergency related to COVID-19, including this year’s MCAS testing and the competency determination, the deadline for Student Opportunity Act plans, and the process for regional school districts to approve their annual budget.

**MCAS**

We previously requested and received a waiver from the federal requirement for annual statewide student assessment. Now, with the state legislation enacted, the MCAS testing requirement is waived for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

As a result of these federal and state actions and in light of the ongoing health crisis, I have cancelled this spring’s regular administration of grade-level MCAS tests for students in grades 3-10.

In addition, the legislation allows the Board, upon my recommendation, to modify or waive the requirements of the [competency determination](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html) for high school graduation in order to address disruptions caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 or the state of emergency. I am considering various options and will provide an update to the Board at our meeting on April 28.

**Student Opportunity Act**

The legislation that the governor signed gives me the ability to move the deadline for the three-year plans required by the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) to May 15, 2020 or later. I appreciate the work that several dozen districts did to submit plans in time for the original April 1 deadline. I recognize how challenging it is for school districts to complete the SOA district planning work right now. I will announce a new deadline soon.

The Department continues to provide support to our schools and districts in several ways and communicates with stakeholders via conference calls to provide information and policy guidance in response to a situation that continues to evolve. The Department’s COVID-19 Information and Resources website is updated frequently as new information becomes available.

**Other Actions**

I have attached a few of the key guidance documents that we have distributed to the field and posted on our COVID-19 Information and Resources [website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/emergencyplan/covid19.html). These documents include my April 1, 2020 On the Desktop notice extending regulatory deadlines for students seeking to enroll in vocational-technical programs outside their district of residence. I took this action consistent with the emergency regulation that the Board adopted on March 31, authorizing the Commissioner to suspend, extend, or waive timelines and due dates in our regulations for good cause as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, state of emergency, and school closures.

We are continuing to review state education regulations and statutes to determine where further action is needed to address disruptions resulting from the current situation. For example, we are working with the Administration on a legislative proposal to create a one-year emergency educator license, for candidates who hold a bachelor’s degree and have been prevented from completing the MTEL (tests for educator licensure) or course requirements for a license, due to the state of emergency for COVID-19. (In March alone, about 2500 MTEL tests had to be cancelled.) The emergency license would be granted to eligible candidates for the 2020-2021 school year. Hiring and placement decisions would still be up to local school and district leaders. I will keep the Board posted on legislative activity affecting educators, school districts, and students.

At our meeting on April 28, I will review the guidance we have provided to date, update you on new information, and answer any questions you may have. Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston, who is also our state special education director, has been leading the effort to ensure that our special education students are well served, and he will provide an update on that work and be available to answer your questions. Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin and Associate Commissioner Michol Stapel will join us for the discussion on the [competency determination](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html) and recommended steps to address disruptions caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the state of emergency.

Attachments: [On the Desktop:](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html)

March 30, 2020 - USDA Reimbursements for All Districts and Online Advanced Placement Tutoring

March 30, 2020 - Letter to Families

April 1, 2020 - Extension of Deadlines for Non-Resident Chapter 74 Admissions

April 3, 2020 - April Vacation

April 8, 2020 - USED Approves Massachusetts Waiver Request for ESSA Grants Due to COVID-19

April 10, 2020 - Legislation Enacted on MCAS, SOA Plans, and Regional School District Budgets

April 13, 2020 - Tips for Safe Videoconferencing

April 14, 2020 - Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)