*****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:**  | January 16, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Proposed Changes to 2024 District and School Accountability Reporting |

At the [November 21, 2023](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2024/2023-11/item3.docx) meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), I introduced plans for making certain changes to the district and school accountability system which, if approved by the Board, would be included in the calculation of accountability results following the 2023-2024 school year. Specifically, I informed the Board of my intention to recommend an increase to the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator within the system and discussed some of the considerations in doing so. On December 28, under the authority granted by the state’s accountability regulations,[[1]](#footnote-2) the Department solicited public comment on the proposed changes to the system. At the January 23, 2024 meeting, following a discussion of the changes and the comments received, I will ask the Board to approve the proposed changes to the system.

# Increasing the Weight of the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

As we discussed in November our federally-approved district and school accountability system allows the Department to identify districts and schools that require assistance or intervention and those that are demonstrating success by looking at overall district, school, and student group performance across an [array of indicators](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/system-1pager-indicators.docx). Among those indicators is chronic absenteeism, a student attendance measure that represents the percentage of students in a district, school, or group who miss 10 percent or more of the school year (in most cases, at least 18 days).

At present, chronic absenteeism is worth five percent of accountability calculations in the high school grade span and 10 percent in the non-high school grade span. Given the high rates of chronic absenteeism we have seen in the last couple of years, I recommend increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator in the state’s district and school accountability system this year to help identify the districts and schools that may require additional support to address issues that may be preventing students from regularly attending school. The specific details are outlined in the enclosed *Summary of Massachusetts' District and School Accountability System* document.

# Including Three Years of Data in 2024 Calculations

Historically, the Department has included multiple years of data in the calculation of district and school accountability results. In doing so, the Department can ensure that annual accountability results provide a better understanding of changes in district, school, and student group performance over time. The inclusion of multiple years of data also prevents large swings, or volatility, in annual results.

When we implemented the current accountability system in 2018, the results represented one year of data and the Department anticipated expanding the number of years of data included in the calculations over time. From 2019 through 2023, due to the pandemic and the resulting disruptions to assessment and accountability reporting, we were only able to include two years of data in the accountability calculations, weighted at 40 percent and 60 percent. For example, the 2023 accountability results included two years of data, with 2022 data weighted at 40 percent and 2023 data weighted at 60 percent.

The 2023-2024 school year represents the first time since the start of the pandemic that we will have three years of data to include in the calculation of district and school accountability results. At the January meeting of the Board, I will discuss changing the system to include three years of data in the 2024 accountability results, with more recent years weighing more: 15 percent for 2022 data, 25 percent for 2023 data, and 60 percent for 2024 data.

# Discussion with the Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council

The Board’s Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC) discussed the proposed changes to the accountability system on December 8, 2023. Council members discussed the two major changes that were subsequently proposed for public comment:

* Including three years of data in 2024 calculations
* Increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator

Council members voiced general support for including three years of data in the calculation of the 2024 results. With respect to increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator, Council members expressed a range of concerns regarding the change, including how much the indicator would be worth and which indicators might be affected by an increase in weight to chronic absenteeism.

# Summary of Public Comment Received

The Department invited the public to comment on the district and school accountability system, including the proposed changes, during the period from December 28, 2023 to January 12, 2024. The Department received 34 written comments during the public comment period. Most comments received addressed the proposed increase to the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator. In general, commenters expressed concerns regarding this change. A small number of commenters supported the inclusion of three years of data in the calculation of the results but cautioned the Department about the timing of this change.

Attached is a document summarizing the comments that were received, the individuals who submitted them, and the Department’s responses.

# Timeline

The potential changes that the Department is considering would result in a change to the framework for district and school accountability and assistance. Consistent with 603 CMR 2.03(10), these changes require the opportunity for public comment before Board approval. The Department developed the following timeline for this work:

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| **Timeframe** | **Action** |
| December 2023 | * Discussion of potential changes with the Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC)
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| December 2023 – January 2024 | * Public comment on proposed changes
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| January 2024 | * Discussion and Board vote on proposed changes
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Rob Curtin, Chief Officer of Data, Assessment, and Accountability, and Erica Gonzales, Associate Commissioner of Data and Accountability, will be at the meeting on January 23 to discuss the potential changes to the system and respond to your questions.

Encl: Summary of Massachusetts' District and School Accountability System

 Summary of Public Comment Received

1. 603 CMR 2.03(10): *Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools:* The Department shall solicit public comment on proposed changes to the framework for district and school accountability and assistance, including changes to the indicators or the weighting of indicators in the framework. After considering the public comment, the commissioner will forward a recommendation for any proposed changes to the Board for approval. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)