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|  | Digital Learning Advisory Council | |
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| Annual Report  November 2020 | |
| Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906  Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  www.doe.mass.edu | |
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# I. Introduction

The 2013 virtual schools legislation ([Chapter 379 of the Acts of 2012, An Act Establishing Commonwealth Virtual Schools](http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2012/Chapter379)[[1]](#footnote-1)) created the Digital Learning Advisory Council (DLAC) to advise the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Commissioner on:

* The development of policies guiding virtual schools, supplemental online courses, education technology, and other matters related to virtual education.
* The identification of best practices to encourage online education to complement classroom instruction in district schools.
* The assessment of the appropriateness of the fee that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) may retain for the administration of the virtual school program.

The law specifies that the DLAC include representatives from various statewide education organizations, districts and schools including virtual schools (i.e., teacher, administrator, parent), higher education, and non-profit and technology companies. The current DLAC includes a broad range of experts who meet these criteria.

# II. Work of the Council - 2019-2020

The DLAC started the 2019-2020 school year discussing a range of topics from digital literacy professional development offerings and educator preparation, to student and educator privacy and security, to revising the criteria for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS) to reflect national standards, and educational technology issues, including purchasing hardware, software, site licenses, adaptive technology, and broadband access.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the DLAC primarily focused on the performance of the two CMVS based on DESE accountability reviews of each school. As a result, the DLAC held a series of meetings to discuss the results of accountability reviews for the schools. At their May 2, 2019 meeting, the DLAC met with representatives of both CMVS.

As a result of that work, DESE engaged a consultant to update the CMVS Performance Criteria, the site visit protocol, and the site visit report template. During the spring of 2020, members of the DLAC met with the consultants to review the CMVS Performance Criteria and potential CMVS accountability metrics.

Additionally, during the 2019-2020 school year, the DLAC spent considerable energy providing advice to DESE and the commissioner in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, 2020, the Baker-Polito Administration announced suspension of school operations for educational purposes at all public and private elementary and secondary (K-12) schools in the Commonwealth and a series of new guidance and legislation in response to COVID-19 soon followed .

In response, the DLAC focused on providing guidance to DESE on how to best support school districts interested in the delivery of remote and online learning. On March 19, 2020, the DLAC submitted a memo to DESE providing considerations and suggestions to support of school districts in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. See Appendix A.

The DLAC’s March memo outlined a range of recommendations, including but not limited to:

* Reinstating and staffing the Office of Digital Learning (with the possibility of reporting directly to the Commissioner)
* Providing guidance for educators on appropriate practices and mandated reporting requirements for using technology to engage with students and families.
* Developing resources for districts who wish to provide learning tools and activities for students to use at home.
* Providing sample survey tools to districts that can quickly identify the local parameters of and barriers to internet access, devices and learning management systems, resulting in the leveraging of local regional and statewide data to target gaps and areas of need.
* Prioritizing low-tech best practices and guidance for family engagement such as the use of phones, journals, or other community communication systems.
* Identifying opportunities for educators to collaborate and develop a supportive culture in a distance learning environment.
* Communicating the need for age-appropriate routines for all students with the understanding that such routines may or may not mimic a traditional school day /schedule.
* Identifying and supporting high-quality training for coordinators and teachers on remote engagement and distance learning practices.
* Intentionally planning the implementation, a range of learning management systems, resources and supports that will serve to mitigate academic slide for students. Paying particular attention to the consideration of students with limited or no access to the internet and public services.
* Encouraging DESE to partner with Education Collaboratives to disseminate consistent professional development and curricular resources to their member and geographic districts that is aligned with DESE guidelines and stakeholder recommendations.

The DLAC met five times during March and April, and members were deeply engaged in sharing experiences from the field, surfacing issues, and problem solving. At the request of DESE, by the end of April, the DLAC submitted a second memorandum that explored the role of the state, the local district, or a partnership between both to provide guidance, procurement support, or decision making with regard to digital learning. See Appendix B.

# III. Council Details

**Department Administrator:** Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign

**Co-Chairs:** Angela T. Burke and Elizabeth Tripathi

**Members of the 2019-2020 DLAC:[[2]](#footnote-2)**

* Amy Michalowski, Dean, The Virtual High School
* Andrea Wadsworth; Former Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance, Mt. Greylock Regional School District
* Angela T. Burke, Director of Professional Services/CTO, Collaborative for Educational Services
* Bill Silver, Director of Information Communication and Technology Services, Chelmsford Public Schools
* Daniel Murphy, Director of Education Policy and Programs, AFT Massachusetts
* David O’Connor, Founding Executive Director, MAPLE Consortium
* Elizabeth Tripathi, Education Policy Specialist, Massachusetts Teachers Association
* Jared Perrine, Director of Innovation, Technology, and Digital Learning, Benjamin Banneker Charter School
* Keith Ford, Assistant Principal, Needham High School (oversees online learning programs), Needham High School
* Lynn McCormack, Software Engineer, Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)
* Patrick Larkin, Assistant Superintendent, Burlington Public Schools, (MASS)
* Robert Reilly, School Committee Member, Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical
* Sarah Haavind, Senior Research Project Manager, The Concord Consortium
* Sarah Kyriazis, Manager of Instructional Technology and Digital Learning, Worcester Public Schools

**Council Meeting Dates:**

August 13, 2019; September 30, 2019; November 4, 2019; January 24, 2020; March 19, 2020; March 26, 2020; April 2, 2020; April 9, 2020; April 29. 2020; May 22, 2020

# Appendix A:

TO: Commissioner Jeff Riley

CC: Allison Bagg, Director, Charter School Redesign

Ruth Hersh, Assistant Director of Educational Collaboratives, Charter Schools and School Redesign

FROM: Digital Learning Advisory Council

RE: Supporting remote engagement during the COVID-19 situation

DATE: March 19, 2020

We all agree that these are unprecedented times. We are buoyed by the fact that schools and educators are working overtime to maintain connections with students and some level of continuity in learning. However, with all of this said we want to urge caution and provide some guidance as so many enter this remote engagement and possibly segue to distance learning environments for the first time.

The recommendations on behalf of the members of the Digital Learning Advisory Council are not based on a best-case scenario of schools reopening April 7, 2020, but rather that this crisis may go on for an unknown period of time, possibly not having schools even reopen before summer. We think such planning is prudent, but the sooner the Commissioner or the Governor can make a determination on the timeline, the better for all our schools and community members.

Below is the charge of the DLAC and we are highlighting bullet two of our responsibility as we craft this message:

*The 2013 virtual schools legislation (*[*Chapter 379 of the Acts of 2012, An Act Establishing Commonwealth Virtual Schools*](http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2012/Chapter379)*) created a Digital Learning Advisory Council to advise the Board and the Commissioner on:*

* *The development of policies guiding virtual schools, supplemental online courses, education technology, and other matters related to virtual education.*
* ***The identification of best practices to encourage online education to complement classroom instruction in district schools.***
* *The assessment of the appropriateness of the fee that the Department may retain for the administration of the virtual school program.*

**Core Tenets to Consider:**

* Prioritizing Family Engagement and learning enrichment over instructional programming
* Recognizing the needs for social and emotional well-being of students and staff
* A need for unified messaging from the Department addressing barriers to the internet, television and informational systems that impeded schools abilities to communicate with families
* DLAC members should be actively involved in any engagement with the department in reference to remote learning policies and practices.
* Educators at all levels need planning time and patience with themselves while they develop a sense of confidence, and are finding their own online “voice” in distance education settings. This requires safety and low-stakes experimentation for both educators and students.
* Intentional planning must include considerations for diverse student populations, English learners and special education students throughout all phases.

**Phase I: Now until April 3, 2020**

1. Reactivate and effectively staff the Office of Digital Learning (maybe temporarily elevate to report directly to the Commissioner)
2. Guidance for educators on appropriate practices and mandated reporting requirements for educators using technology to engage with students and families.
3. Clear guidance for districts who wish to provide learning tools and activities for students to use at home:
   1. Tools need to have signed either the Massachusetts Student Data Privacy Agreement or other statewide student privacy agreements (for example, [CT student privacy portal](https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTEdTech/Commission-for-Educational-Technology/Initiatives/Student-Data-Privacy)).
   2. Tools are accessible and usable by students using established accessibility standards.
   3. Consideration of using paid resources that are “temporarily free” as they will not be free forever.
   4. Consideration of promotion or sharing of electronic resources that are not district-provided or approved resources.
4. Provide sample survey tools that can be quickly implemented by districts to identify the local parameters of internet access, devices and learning management systems. Such data can be leveraged locally, regionally and statewide to target gaps and areas of need.
5. Prioritize low-tech best practices and guidance for family engagement such as phones, journals or other community communication systems.
6. Support and flexibility for districts to leverage regional and statewide partnerships for purchasing, systems sharing and collaboration in using existing systems.
7. Identify opportunities for educators to collaborate and foster a collaborative culture in a distance learning environment.
8. Communicate the need for age-appropriate routines for all students and that such routines do not need to mimic a traditional school day and schedule. Learning can happen anytime, anywhere and communities should not feel bound by a bell-to-bell school schedule.

**Phase II: Through May 1, 2020**

1. Identify and share model agreements for partnership or regional purchasing of learning management systems and online resources, and support efforts to meet this goal.
2. DESE should redeploy staffing and resources in the Statewide Systems of Support (SSOS) offices to assist districts in longer-term partnerships and planning.
3. Identify and support high-quality training for coordinators and teachers on remote engagement and distance learning practices. Any such professional learning should also provide teachers and support staff separate opportunities to cultivate their online presence *not* in front of students but in small groups or school-level teacher communities.
4. Engage stakeholders to develop a repository of student learning and district employee models for different grade levels, course configurations and learning management systems. Such models should encompass a range of technology and school configurations.

**Phase III: May 3, 2020 - June 30, 2020**

1. Intentional planning to implement a range of learning management systems, resources and supports that will serve to mitigate academic slide for students. Any planning should include consideration of students with limited or no access to the internet and public services.
2. Engage stakeholders to develop common guidelines for grade level progression, completion of sequential courses and placement of students in the 2020-2021 school year.
3. If long term distance engagement and learning are necessary, provide guidance around school day and year flexibility to allow educators to manage personal and family needs while engaging in district-based plans for student engagement. It may be beneficial for the Department to provide common definitions of program designs such as synchronous, asynchronous, teacher-led instruction and computer-based learning so all educators are using the same language throughout the planning.
4. DESE should partner with Education Collaboratives to disseminate consistent professional development and curricular resources to their member/geographic districts. Any such PD or related resources shall align with DESE guidelines and stakeholder recommendations.

**Re-Entry Plan - Intentional Planning for Re-Entry for Schools**

At the time of writing, Massachusetts schools are required to remain closed only through April 6, 2020. Many districts have already announced closures for longer periods of time. Under the current timelines, there will be a staggered reopening of schools in April due to the fact that some districts have already announced closures beyond the April 6th mandate. Regardless if schools reopen in April or September, there will need to be serious considerations to the different experiences of students and educators. Any planning for family engagement and learning enrichment should continue through the transition back into the school routine.

# Appendix B

**Role of state procurement versus local district procurement to improve internet access, devices, learning platforms & professional development.**

During these unprecedented times, we have been forced into addressing the immediacy of a situation without the benefit of time. We do, although, need to think of both the current and future investments that will impact our students' learning for years to come. Although we have an opportunity to capture funds, we need to be strategic when developing recommendations to support “remote learning.”

The teachers are instrumental in developing these digital and remote learning opportunities for the students. The administrative support for educators is uneven. Some school districts are fortunate to have an Educational Technology leader who understands both the educational and technical components of an effective and strategic deployment.

The Digital Learning Advisory Council has long called for leadership from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on educational technology issues. The need for a DESE office with oversight on digital learning throughout the state as well as recognition of the specialized role of district based Education Technology leaders have been articulated through DLAC on several occasions. The hope is that in the near future when we get back to “normalcy,” this is something that DESE will address.

Current and former members of the DLAC have collaborated to develop the following document. Issues related to internet connectivity, devices, learning platforms, and training and professional learning are interconnected. Prior to the Department embarking on state-wide purchasing or recommendations for districts, the following issues should be considered. The issues have been color coded to represent where DLAC members have identified where the state agencies can provide the primary means of support and where local districts can make decisions based on local contexts. We recognize that not all districts have the capacity at this time and areas highlighted in yellow represent issues where districts can benefit from collaboration when necessary.

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Red - State as primary

Yellow - Hybrid based on local needs

Green - District as primary but aligned to industry, national and/or state standards

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|  | Comments/Known Concerns |
| **Internet Connectivity** | |
| Coordinate with state and federal agencies to mandate access to Wifi connections in shelters, public housing and Section 8. Dedicated access points should be available for households with children or adults enrolled in post-secondary educational programs. |  |
| Procure, install, and manage Wi-Fi and other related network services necessary to deliver Internet and network resources accessible **off campus** for educators and students.  Explore opportunities to work with district technology departments and service centers on projects that enhance connectivity and security. | * The cost of initial quotes for large districts has been very high. The procurement of hotspots is difficult for districts as devices are in short supply. * Ability to integrate with existing district network and systems by building off regional networks. * How can school districts including higher ed institutions share resources? * Guest wifi on buses strategically place them throughout the state for access * Ensure CIPA compliant * Communicate and post access locations and instructions in multiple languages and formats. * Many rural areas have last mile issues - this needs to be addressed to ensure equity to access. Hot spots do not always work in these locations. |
| Establish network and cybersecurity standards. Ensure that the network is secure according to current industry best practices. All vendor-provided services must meet these same best practices. | MASS IT could assist by providing details on what the state is using and assist schools with securing their networks. |
| Provide and enhance filtering solution options to Districts for on and off-campus networks. | Cost and establishment of filtering systems can be a challenge to smaller/less prepared districts. |
| Maintain an inventory of all software and hardware systems used in the education environment. | DESE/MassIT can provide assistance with inventory templates, reporting standards and reporting timelines. See Kentucky system documents here  https://education.ky.gov/districts/tech/kpur/Pages/eScrap.aspx |
| Digital Connections Partnership Grant | This was a very successful program, consider doing something similar for districts to purchase devices for K-12 1:1 program. |
| **Devices** | |
| Establish minimum specifications for operating systems and hardware.  Need processes for revising and updating minimum specs. | * School-level learning platforms may vary within the district and different device capabilities may better service specific grades or programs. * Parent/Community stakeholders can provide service as local device purchasing vs. Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). * See Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS) minimum specifications at the end of this document. |
| Instructional device and asset purchasing agreements with vendors.  Negotiated agreements will include, but are not limited to: minimum specifications, professional development, warranty, repairs, replacements, software/operating systems, device cases, battery replacements, and other peripherals. Mobile Device Management Software | State procurement and contracts may reduce costs for initial purchase well as service agreements, streamline replacement and upgrading.  This option also supports schools and districts that have already deployed their preferred system so they may continue to grow their program. |
| Ensure each district has a dedicated administrator to coordinate technology purchasing, deployment and coordination of training prior to full device deployment. | A couple of years ago there were technology grants, and a district earned additional points if they had an Educational Technology Leader who had a METAA CTO Certificate or CETL and DESE Director License (this is the generalist director’s license but still put the emphasis on licensure)  Additional personnel: Instructional Technology Specialist (DESE License) Technical support (appropriate professional credentials) |
| Determine policies for home and/or summer use of the device by students and educators. | Possibly the state could provide some guidance to ensure equity across the state |
| Availability of supported platforms and browsers based on operating systems |  |
| Individual devices and operating systems are compatible with interactive learning tools. |  |
| Policies and procedures for collection, redeployment, recycling and disposal of technology assets | Provide guidance on trading in old devices to fund the purchase of new equipment and green recycling options. |
| Mobile Device Manager Licenses,  White-Glove Service | * Mobile Device Management software is very expensive, and districts need assistance with the funding of these systems. * If the state procures devices, they should consider white-glove service since not all districts have the staff to deploy a large number of devices at once. |
| **Learning Platforms** | |
| Educators, particularly grade level teams and teachers, as the primary architect of content, social skills and instructional practices for leveraging technology in remote learning. | Classroom and specialist educators can collaborate to determine age-appropriate and subject appropriate systems for exchanging student works to meet the needs of students in their community. This may include students working on paper and submitting work via photo or mail.  See Illinois Board of Education Remote Learning Guidelines <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/RL-Recommendations-3-27-20.pdf> |
| Short term and long term costs of platforms/tools.  Statewide contracts for widely used tools. | * Free is not free—how can we ensure that districts are not doing impulse commitments to various vendors offering “free resources” for a few months. * How will the district support these resources once the time has lapsed? * Investment in teachers' time in developing lessons and building resources will be lost unless the district commits to purchasing resources. * See Utah Essential Elements for Technology Powered Learning report: * <https://www.uen.org/digital-learning/downloads/Utah_Essential_Elements_Technology_Powered_Learning.pdf#a=> |
| Negotiate Student Data Privacy Agreements for all vendors and tools that utilize student, family and educator data.  Template language, developed by legal counsel, to protect the security of student data in software contracts.  Vendors listed on state contracts. | * Work with The Education Collaborative (TEC) and Massachusetts Student Privacy Alliance to get all software used in the state signed on to the agreement. * Student Data Privacy—ensure that all data systems/resources comply. Reading contracts; upon separation with the vendor who owns the data and what format will the district receive the data? |
| Map student administrative software platforms that are compatible with EPIMS, SIMS and other DESE data reporting requirements | * The state collects an extensive amount of data on schools. Yet, there is no cohesive mechanism giving the state the ability to leverage this data for some of the recommendations proposed. * A recommendation would be a central repository of critical resources used by districts throughout the state. These data sets have been collected on several occasions in a very rudimentary way by METAA and MAVA. This may include: * COMMBUYS—Districts who have purchased on the state bid lists; useful data on what districts are currently purchasing. * BUDGET—What the districts are currently spending for looking at specific line items created and adopted several years ago by DLAC * PERSONNEL—EPIMs collection outlines the support relating to technology throughout the district including licensure for some of the staff if applicable. * ONLINE PLATFORMS/SOFTWARE/RESOURCES—currently there is no database listing what cities and towns are currently using for operational and educational resources. This can be data for professional development offerings through the state. |
| Identify learning management systems, productivity, rostering and single sign on tools that meet student data privacy standards. | * Work with TEC and Massachusetts Student Privacy Alliance to get all software used in the state signed on to the agreement. * How can we support districts to create single sign-on so that students/parents are not juggling multiple usernames and passwords for the resources given to the students? |
| Bundle preK-12 software licensing. | Using the data gathered from the surveys mentioned above - negotiate with vendors who have a large MA installed base to leverage better pricing for all users across the state. |
| Provide common definitions of ADA compliant interface and content to ensure all systems are compliant (i.e. WC3 compliant, closed captioning, screen reading, transcripts) | Provide PD to district personnel on how to make their systems compliant. Provide statewide systems such as close captioning that all districts could use. |
| Identify embedded multi-language interface, translation, or adaptable for English learners. | The state could work with Districts to negotiate lower pricing for translation services. DESE could partner with HHS to supply a single system for all state users - this would simplify end user access to all state systems |
| Vendor provides training support and adequate release time for technical support personnel to attend and take advantage of training associated with the program.  Create and support a statewide community of technical support personnel and facilitate feedback among parents, educators, district administration and the Department to vendors. |  |
| Consult in procurement processes, including developing RFP’s, evaluating RFP’s, making purchasing recommendations and decisions, leveraging consortium purchases to drive down cost, and implementing products and services that are procured. | DESE could partner with OSD to create some contracts that are specific to school districts. |
| Negotiate and manage contracts with awarded vendors. | OSD and DESE could coordinate on this with input from school business managers |
| Remote learning plans take into account a balance of print and electronic resources. This includes consideration of screen time guidelines. | “‘Screens in Schools Action Kit’ to Help Parents Push Back Against Edtech Overuse”<https://nancyebailey.com/2020/02/21/screens-in-schools-action-kit-to-help-parents-push-back-against-edtech-overuse/> |
| **Training and Professional Learning** | |
| Ensure each district has a dedicated administrator to coordinate instructional technology, planning and professional development. |  |
| Identify instructional technology specialists, technology trainers, and other personnel whose primary responsibility is to support effective technology integration for educators. | * DESE could identify additional pathways for educators to obtain the Instructional Technology Specialist Teacher license and offer professional learning for classroom educators. * Mentor educators in pedagogical practice and efficient use of educational technology, critical digital literacy skills, and strategies for meeting needs of diverse learners. |
| Design and issue licenses, endorsements, license renewal requirements or administrator licensure requirements and identify programs that incorporate best practices with educational technology integration. | Have the Licensure Department coordinate this with Higher Ed and current Instructional Technology Specialists to ensure that the new content/courses is aligned with what is actually happening in classrooms |
| Use the National Standards of Quality Online Courses/Programs/Instruction and ISTE Standards to determine high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers. | Also recommend referencing and sharing National Standards of Quality Online Courses/Programs/Instruction as well as ISTE standards. These were created in 2019 by Quality Matters and the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance. Focuses more on practices for distance learning models and is an update of the iNACOL standards that were developed over a decade ago.  <https://www.nsqol.org/> |
| Host workshops, learning communities, and other ongoing opportunities for purpose-built professional learning activities. | Work with MassCue and METAA and Education Collaboratives to host and coordinate |
| Align educator preparation programs to ensure candidates are well prepared to use technology platforms and the Massachusetts Digital Literacy frameworks. | Have the Licensure Department coordinate this with Higher Ed and current Instructional Technology Specialists to ensure that the new content/courses is aligned with what is actually happening in classrooms |
| Support for districts to share/collaborate on lessons, resources, curating high quality activities | * Potential to build off of shared models used by Chapter 74 Vocational Technical Education programs. * Collaboration with professional associations for subject areas/fields to host shared resources. |
| Scheduling time for educator training, professional learning and assistance in learning and applying new skills for remote learning. | * Educators need to have just in time training and support. What does this look like? Who will support this initiative? Online/remote learning PD, what does this need to look like? A review of available data on professional development may inform these practices. * Districts can support educators in documenting PDPs and self-directed activities to meet the requirements for licensure renewal. * https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OLa1ylHx5k7\_9gqTJk1PSn3aryHvc3NG/view |

1. <http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2012/Chapter379> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There was no parent representation on the DLAC in FY20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)