*****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:** | May 18, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Update on COVID-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families |

Since our last meeting on April 28, we have continued to provide information and support to districts about many aspects of remote learning and related subjects, including the competency determination that the Board approved and the creation of a series of webinars for teachers by content area.

**Remote Learning Survey and Support**

We recently sent districts a remote learning survey to help us understand the current state of remote learning in the Commonwealth and districts’ evolving needs. The survey collects information about remote learning plans from all districts, approved special education schools, and collaboratives across the Commonwealth, and we have asked leaders to respond by Friday, May 22.

The Department’s Center for Instructional Support continues to support districts and teachers in remote learning and has created a series of [content-specific webinars](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/learn-at-home/cis-supporting-remote-learning.html) for teachers.

**Letter to Families**

On May 8, we sent an updated letter to families to both communicate the latest expectations around remote learning and provide information on where to find support for a variety of needs. We will post translated versions on our website.

**CARES Act Funding**

We have posted an [RFP for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/113/). This grant, authorized under section 18003 of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), provides districts with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on elementary and secondary schools. Districts have until Monday, June 15 to apply for funds for FY20 and until Wednesday, July 1, 2020 to apply for funds for FY21. To help districts with their applications, the [ESSER page](http://www.doe.mass.edu/federalgrants/esser/) of the federal grants section of DESE’s website has information and resources on these funds, including a [Quick Reference Guide](http://www.doe.mass.edu/federalgrants/esser/qrg-113.docx) *(download)*, and DESE’s Federal Grants Office is holding webinars to provide more detailed information.

**High School Assessments and Information**

Following the Board’s vote on April 28, we informed the field that the competency determination requirement would be modified for current high school seniors and other actively enrolled students who were on track to graduate in spring or summer 2020. Under the change, seniors who have not passed one or more of the high school MCAS tests will be able to earn the [competency determination](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html) through successful completion of a relevant high school course.

In response to questions from the field about Advanced Placement (AP) testing, we worked with other state officials to draw up guidelines under which a small number of students could take an AP test at a school if the student did not have access to the technology or a suitable testing space at home.

We have also received other questions related to high schools in particular, and we addressed many of those in a May 8 On the Desktop that covered topics including the need for schools to help seniors develop a postsecondary plan if they do not yet have one; the need to continue college and career awareness activities for students in grades 9-11; the fact that remote or in-person summer academic opportunities, particularly those focused on [prerequisite content standards in mathematics and literacy skills](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/learn-at-home/secondary-prerequisite.docx), may be necessary for many students to close gaps and be prepared for the next level; and suggestions about grading.

**Special Education**

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. He continues to meet weekly with special education directors to address topics ranging from timelines to transition planning. The [PowerPoint presentations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html) from those remote meetings are available on our website.

**Adjusting Deadlines**

We continue to adjust deadlines in light of the state of emergency. The Governor previously signed legislation that gave me the ability to move the deadline for the three-year plans required by the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), and I announced on May 15 that the new deadline would be Friday, June 19.

In addition, using the authority of the emergency regulation that the Board adopted on March 31, I have extended certain deadlines in our regulations:

* I extended the deadlines for parents and superintendents relating to admission of students to vocational school programs outside their district of residence.
* I extended the June 30, 2020 deadline for educators who seek a bilingual education endorsement to their educator license through the “grandfather clause.”

I expect to make other adjustments to timelines and due dates in our regulations as needed due to the state of emergency. I will continue to inform the Board about these actions.

**Return to School Working Group**

On May 15, I sent an On the Desktop message to the field about our Return to School Working Group, a group of nearly 30 people representing a variety of stakeholders. They will help shape our approach to any reopening this summer or fall.

**Testimony to Joint Committee on Education**

The Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education, chaired by Representative Alice Peisch and Senator Jason Lewis, held an oversight hearing on K-12 education on May 13, 2020. Secretary Peyser and I testified via remote participation, as did Tom Scott of the MA Association of School Superintendents, Glenn Koocher of the MA Association of School Committees, and several parents, educators, and local school officials. A copy of my testimony is attached. A video of the hearing is available at <https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/3480/Video1>.

I have attached several of the key guidance documents that we have distributed to the field and posted on the [COVID-19 Information and Resources](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/) section of our website. At our meeting on May 26, I will review the guidance we have provided to date, update you on new information, and answer any questions you may have.

Attachments:

* May 13, 2020 Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Oversight Hearing
* [On the Desktop:](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html)
  + April 29, 2020 - Update on Competency Requirements for Class of 2020
  + May 7, 2020 - Advanced Placement Testing Guidelines
  + May 8, 2020 - CARES Act RFP Available
  + May 8, 2020 - Letter to Families and High School Guidance
  + May 13, 2020 - Remote Learning Survey
  + May 14, 2020 – Return to School Working Group
  + May 14, 2020 – New SOA Plan Deadline