*****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:**  | May 21, 2020  |
| **Subject:** | High School MCAS Testing Plans and Proposed Modifications to the Competency Determination Requirement in Science and Technology/Engineering for High School Students Due to the COVID-19 Emergency |

At the April 2020 meeting, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to approve the implementation of modified competency determination (CD) requirements for this year’s high school seniors, the class of 2020. At the May 26, 2020 meeting, I will present my recommendations for modifying the CD requirements in science and technology/engineering for students in the classes of 2021–2023 (students who will be in grade 10, 11, or 12 in the coming school year) and update the Board on high school testing plans.

**High School Science and Technology/Engineering (STE): Recommended Action**

As we discussed at the Board meeting in April, legislation recently enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allows the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, upon my recommendation, to modify or waive the requirements of the competency determination for high school graduation in order to address disruptions caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 or the state of emergency (St. 2020, c.56, §6). A copy of the relevant sections of chapter 56 is attached.

The competency determination regulations require students to pass one high school science and technology/engineering (STE) MCAS test in order to earn the competency determination. Students may take the test in either biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering during their high school career. Most students take and pass the STE test in either 9th or 10th grade.

Because the STE testing program at the high school level is based on an end-of-course test, it has to take into account the variety of course-taking and test-taking patterns in districts around the Commonwealth. Also, while some students in the classes of 2021–2023 have already met the state standard in STE, many others are missing the opportunity to take the end-of-course MCAS test this spring. In the next school year, some students will move on to science classes in which we do not offer an MCAS test. In light of all these factors and considering the best interest of students in these extraordinary circumstances, I am recommending that the Board extend the modified CD requirements for STE to all students in the classes of 2021–2023, as follows.

For students in the classes of 2021–2023, the competency determination in STE would be awarded upon demonstration that the student earned credit for a course in the relevant subject matter and demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) during their high school career. The process and timeline for awarding the modified CD will be announced at a later date.

Students in the classes of 2021–2023 will still be able to qualify for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship and the Stanley Z. Koplik Certificate of Mastery Award, which currently require students to earn certain test scores in all three subject areas (ELA, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering). We are working with the Department of Higher Education to determine a fair approach to modifying the criteria for the scholarship programs and will announce those changes shortly.

Students in the class of 2024, who were in grade 8 this year and are entering grade 9 next year, will be expected to participate in STE testing in 2021 or 2022, according to their school or district plan for high school STE testing.

I have attached a motion for your consideration, to make these recommended modifications to the competency determination in science and technology/engineering for the classes of 2021–2023.

**High School English Language Arts and Mathematics: For Your Information**

Students in the class of 2022, who are in grade 10 this year and will enter grade 11 in the fall of 2020, missed their first-time opportunity to take the grade 10 English Language Arts(ELA) and mathematics MCAS tests in the spring of 2020.

To give students in the class of 2022 the ability to earn their CD and qualify for scholarships based on their test scores, we plan to administer tests in ELA and mathematics to 11th graders in the 2020–21 school year, likely sometime in the winter. The schedule for that testing will be announced shortly, and we will work to balance the need to provide an opportunity to earn the CD with the uncertainties about school schedules and conditions next year.

Students in the class of 2023—tenth graders in school year 2020-21—will take the grade 10 tests in the spring of 2021 as usual. Students in the class of 2021—seniors in school year 2020-21—will have two opportunities to take ELA and mathematics retests, as in previous years, if they have not yet earned their CD in one or both of those subjects.

We recognize that the situation for next school year may change depending on the evolving nature of the pandemic. We will reassess as needed and keep the Board and the public informed about any changes. I look forward to discussing these matters with you at the May 26 Board meeting.

Attachments: Statutory language

Motion