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

Since our last meeting on May 26, we have continued to provide information and support to districts about many aspects of remote learning and related subjects, including initial guidance on summer school, a grant for summer and vacation programming, and acquisition support for safety supplies.

**High School Graduation Guidelines**

In collaboration with the Department of Public Health, we issued high school graduation guidelines to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 while celebrating the graduates of the class of 2020. The guidelines outlined how in-person ceremonies could take place outside and follow social distancing guidelines and proper face-covering protocols.

High schools across the Commonwealth found creative ways to celebrate their graduating seniors, as did Governor Baker. His office worked with WGBH, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and other partners to produce a graduation special that aired on June 9 and included many graduates, including student Board member Matthew Tibbitts. In addition, the DESE homepage has been updated to feature photos of members of the class of 2020 and a link to the Governor’s graduation special.

**P-EBT Cards:**

Earlier this spring, DESE helped the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) ensure that students who qualified for free or reduced-price school meals would receive Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) cards to make food more affordable. Families began to receive those cards on May 29, and DESE has worked with DTA to share information about how families can activate their cards.

**Initial Guidance on Summer School**

On June 4, we issued initial guidance on summer school. Drawing on the current public health and safety guidelines, the guidance outlined many of themost significant parameters and adjustments that districts and schools will need to make to safely open in-person summer programs, such as limiting the number of students in a classroom and in the school overall.

The initial guidance document is focused primarily on the health and safety of students, staff, and the educational community.

**Competitive Team Building Exercise with the Commissioner**

On June 5, DESE invited schools to sign up teams of high school students to join me and Harvard professors Monica Higgins and Uche Amaechi in an online competitive and engaging team-building exercise on June 12. (If any of you attended our Kairos conference in 2019, this particular exercise might be familiar to you.) I enjoyed working with the students and I believe the exercise gave them an additional way to stay engaged during the last days of the school year.

**Required Safety Supplies for Reopening Schools**

On June 5, we issued guidance on key safety supplies so that districts could begin the ordering process for critical items that may be harder to procure and/or have longer potential delivery times. The guidance also detailed the support that DESE and partner state agencies are providing to assist districts with their acquisition work and noted that districts can use federal [Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief Fund (ESSER) grants](http://www.doe.mass.edu/federalgrants/esser/) to fund the cost of supplies. On June 10, we followed up with information on a state sponsored Health Safety Supply/PPE (“big buy”) ordering process through which the state will assist districts by aggregating their orders. This support is made possible through the Massachusetts Operational Services Division (OSD).

**Guidance About Summer 2020 Special Education Services**

On June 8, we issued guidance about special education services during the summer of 2020.

While schools will not be able to provide summer services in the same manner they typically do, all students whose individualized education program (IEP) calls for Extended School Year services, summer programs, or year-round services will have access to the services described in their IEPs, whether remotely for most studentsor in-person on a limited basis for high-priority students. These include:

* Students with the most significant disabilities who have demonstrated substantial regression during remote learning;
* Students who receive multiple services during the summer – such as applied behavior analysis; speech, occupational, and/or physical therapies; and academic instruction – so that at least some of those services can be offered in person; and
* Students who will need more time to learn new procedures and protocols to increase their successful reentry to school in the fall.

**Summer Vacation Learning Program Grant**

On May 22, we told districts about an upcoming summer/vacation learning program grant, and on June 11, we sent them more information and links to express their intent to apply and to [find the grant online](http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2021/114-333/). The purpose of this new, competitive, federally-funded grant is to help school districts, vocational technical schools, and charter schools develop, expand, or enhance high-quality, in-person, remote, or hybrid learning programs for the summer of 2020 and/or school vacations during the 2020-21 school year. The grant can also be used to support the development and implementation of weekend learning programs that will take place during the 2020-21 school year.

**CARES Act Funding**

Due to the ongoing uncertainties surrounding many important fiscal matters for districts, we have extended the FY21 CARES Act:Elementary and Secondary Education Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER; Fund Code 113) application deadline from July 1, 2020 to August 14, 2020. Districts may apply at any time before this new deadline to access their funds.

**Return-to-School Working Group**

Our Return-to-School Working Group helped shape the initial recommendations that we hope to release soon about the reopening of schools this fall. I am grateful to the working group’s members for their time and diligence.

Attachments:

* [On the Desktop](http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html):
  + May 21 – High School Graduation Guidelines from DPH/HHS
  + May 22 – Upcoming Grant for Summer and Vacation Programs
  + May 26 – Update on CD Requirements for Classes of 2021-23
  + June 3 – Help with P-EBT Card Use
  + June 4 – Initial Guidance on Summer School
  + June 5 – Required Safety Supplies for Re-Opening Schools
  + June 5 – Competitive Team Building Exercise with Commissioner Riley
  + June 7 – Message about Summer 2020 Special Education Services
  + June 10 – Acquisition Support for Safety Supplies
  + June 11, 2020 – Summer/Vacation Learning Program Grant
  + June 15, 2020 – New SOA Plan Deadline