*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Katherine Craven, Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | October 15, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Commissioner's Goals and Objectives for 2020-2021 |

This school year, we will continue our intensive focus on supporting schools and districts as they educate students during the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time advancing critical agency priorities to accelerate student learning. We will continue to ground these priorities in my June 2019 [*Our Way Forward* [Download Word Document](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2019/2019-06/item2.docx)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2019/2019-06/item2.docx) report to the Board, which focuses on closing opportunity gaps for our economically disadvantaged students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities – work that has only grown in urgency and importance since the start of the pandemic. In support of these aims, I have identified the following goals and objectives for school year 2020-2021 across five categories:

1. COVID-19 Response and Support for Districts and Schools
2. Support to Students and Families to Address Opportunity Gaps
3. Evidence-based Policies and Practices to Strengthen Teaching and Learning
4. Advancing Deeper Learning and Innovative Assessments
5. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE or Department) Strategic Planning

**1. COVID-19 Response and Support for Districts and Schools**

Throughout the school year, we will continue supporting districts and schools to provide educational programs and services to students consistent with DESE’s COVID-19 related guidance, including guidance issued to date and supplemental guidance that may be required during the school year.

To support school reopening this fall, DESE issued over 200 pages of detailed guidance this summer and assisted districts with procuring safety supplies and equipment, partnering with online learning platform providers, partnering with no-cost vendors for diagnostic assessments, securing Chromebooks for remote learning, and ensuring access to mobile testing units to prevent in-school COVID-19 transmission, among other initiatives. This year, we will continue our emergency health and safety response efforts, including the following goals:

* **Establish the DESE Rapid Response Help Center** to support districts and schools with implementing health and safety guidance and COVID-19 response protocols in schools. Collect and report COVID-19 case data from districts, consistent with privacy protections, to help track statewide trends and support districts in making decisions that are in the best interest of students and staff.
* **Monitor the latest COVID-19 research and issue updates to health and safety guidance** as appropriate, in collaboration with DESE’s medical advisors, the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Governor’s COVID-19 Command Center. Continue to expand health and safety measures as appropriate and available, for instance through expanded access to COVID-19 testing.
* **Strongly encourage districts to align their learning model** (full-time in-person, hybrid, or remote) to COVID-19 health metrics published by DPH, with a focus on prioritizing in-person learning whenever it is safe to do so.
* **Promote student learning time requirements,** recognizing that instructional time is an essential resource for students. Provide guidance on how districts can meet these expectations using best practices across learning models, with accountability for required structured learning time, grading policies, and curricula aligned to state standards.
* **Conduct reviews and audits, where appropriate, to identify best practices and assess the quality of remote and hybrid learning models**. Promote effective practices and sound decision-making regarding which model districts are implementing within their schools.
* **Continue ongoing two-way communication with superintendents and other key stakeholders** to assess COVID-19 implementation efforts and determine additional areas where DESE can provide support.

**2. Support to Students and Families to Address Opportunity Gaps**

We will provide supports to students and families to narrow opportunity gaps and promote strong academic progress among economically disadvantaged students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. This will include new summer programming to accelerate student learning using the Acceleration Academies model, improved special education outcomes through the new IEP process, support for districts to implement the new Interactive Blueprint for English learners, strengthened interpretation and translation services, and direct support for two additional districts requiring assistance.

**Acceleration Academies**. Expand Acceleration Academies programming into the summer months with a large-scale Summer Academy in 2021 that will offer 3-4 consecutive weeks of high-quality instruction in mathematics and English language arts, targeted to students’ specific educational needs. Use diagnostic assessment data to identify students who need this acceleration opportunity to support them to master grade-level content and support readiness for the next grade level. Traditional Acceleration Academies programming will also continue in districts requiring assistance in February and April.

**Improved special education outcomes:** Continue to develop all aspects of a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) to provide robust guidance on the full IEP process, including identification, referral, eligibility, and IEP development. Engage in comprehensive stakeholder engagement on new guidance materials and tools so that the final versions of those resources are helpful to schools and families in promoting effective service delivery and better results for students with disabilities. Engage up to 10 districts as early adopters of the new IEP process with an emphasis on advancing special educational instructional practices that improve student outcomes. The experiences of the early adopters will help to inform further expansion of the new IEP during school year 2021-2022.

**English learners:** Further disseminate and support the use of the [Interactive Blueprint](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/) for English Learner Success, with a focus on providing high needs districts with tools, resources and coaching. Specifically, we will:

* **Design “what-to-look-for” tools** for districts to self-assess their progress in meeting the goals stated in the four pillars of the Blueprint.
* **Develop three professional learning modules** on implementing the Blueprint. DESE will work with three districts serving a high percentage of English learners to pilot the modules – Holyoke, Lawrence and Southbridge – and provide technical assistance and coaching to the districts to support improved teaching and learning of English learners.

**Interpretation and translation services:** Expand interpretation and translation services for parents who are not native English speakersin the 20 districts with the highest prevalence of students who are dually identified as English learners and students with disabilities.

**Districts requiring assistance**: Continue to provide targeted assistance to districts previously performing in the bottom 10 percent of the state’s accountability system, with a focus this year on the learning opportunities available to students during the pandemic. Launch partnership with Brockton Public Schools to support planning for district improvement and continue partnership with Boston Public Schools in the areas outlined in the MOU signed in spring 2020.

**3. Evidence-based Policies and Practices to Strengthen Teaching and Learning**

We will continue to promote evidence-based policies and practices to strengthen teaching and learning. We will expand ongoing efforts to diversify the educator workforce, improve early literacy instruction and outcomes, expand and enhance early college programs, promote the use of high-quality instructional materials, and increase inter-agency research capacity to identify practices that are linked to improved student outcomes.

**Diversifying the educator workforce**:

* **Publish a guidebook that synthesizes promising practices** gleaned from the initial rounds of DESE’s educator diversification pilot grants focused on recruitment, selection, and retention of a diverse workforce in our schools.
* **Refine and continue the educator diversification grant program** to provide further assistance for districts and schools to enhance diversification efforts.
* **Continue programs to support diversification of the administrator and educator workforce and promote culturally responsive teaching** to improve outcomes for students. This includes the [Influence 100 and InSPIRED fellowships](http://www.doe.mass.edu/teach/diversity.html) and professional development through the Diversity Network – a cross-section of school districts, educator preparation programs, and non-profit organizations focused on educator diversification.
* **Pending Board approval, pilot alternative assessments of educators’ content knowledge** to evaluate possible alternatives to the MTEL assessment.

**Early literacy:**

* **Publish the *Mass Literacy Guide***, a compilation of evidence-based information and resources for literacy in grades preK-3, and begin an intensive effort to promote evidence-based literacy instruction in districts and schools.
* **Coordinate up to $8.5 million in early literacy tutoring** for Massachusetts students as part of the Governor’s coronavirus relief support (GEER fund).
* **Design and begin implementing a new intensive district and school literacy support program** funded by a $19.98 million federal grant (awarded in September 2020) to support literacy in grades preK-12 over five years and expand literacy in pre-kindergarten.

**Increased access to STEM coursework:** Launch a multi-year initiative to support more students to participate and succeed in rigorous courses, pursue postsecondary education, and be well prepared to enter STEM (science, engineering, technology and mathematics) professions. Through a five-year, $9 million federal STEM Advanced Placement Access Expansion grant, we will focus on developing a statewide virtual platform and network to expand access to advanced STEM coursework for students who currently have less access, particularly students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities.This year, DESE will identify high schools where low numbers of students engage in AP STEM courses and begin to develop these statewide offerings so students can engage in the coursework at no additional cost to the student, family, or school district.

**Early college**: In collaboration with the Early College Joint Committee, establish performance standards for what constitutes high-quality early college programming, expand high-quality programs through the designation process, and expand the number of early college designated sites offering 30+ credits.

**High-quality instructional materials and professional development:**

* **Continue to produce and publicize the Curriculum Ratings by Teachers (CURATE) reports** to enable more districts and schools to adopt and effectively use high-quality curricula.
* **Clarify expectations for educator preparation programs** so that candidates are effectively prepared to use curriculum skillfully.
* **Provide resources to help districts select high-quality professional development.**

**Action-oriented research for educational equity**: Leverage DESE’s 2020 receipt of the federal Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant award ($3.48 million over four years) to establish a Statewide Research Hub that will support data alignment and evidence-based research across agencies from pre-school to the workforce.

**4. Advancing Deeper Learning and Innovative Assessments**

We will continue to promote deeper learning in schools across the Commonwealth through our Kaleidoscope initiative and development of an innovative science assessment.

**Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning**: Continue the Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning network, which is designed to foster and expand deeper learning instructional models that improve teaching and learning for all students. Within Kaleidoscope,

* In collaboration with Kaleidoscope educators, complete development of the first 25–50 engaging, high-quality student performance tasks aligned to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, including a subset of tasks for remote learning. Implement tasks in Kaleidoscope schools and publish them on DESE’s deeper learning online platform for more widespread access.
* Continue providing professional development for educators focused on creating deeper learning environments for the 21 Kaleidoscope schools through intensive coaching. Provide additional monthly statewide trainings accessible to all educators across the Commonwealth, as well as an extended professional learning series.

**Innovative Science Assessment:** Launch the development and pilot of an innovative science assessment in grades 5 and 8, using DESE’s federally approved plan for the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority and recently awarded federal Competitive Grant for State Assessments ($2.9 million over four years). The science assessment will include performance tasks aligned to Kaleidoscope’s deeper learning focus and will be piloted in over 20 schools, including Kaleidoscope schools and others.

**5. DESE Strategic Planning**

We will implement several critical initiatives at DESE this year, including advancing our agency’s commitment to anti-racism and developing a strategic plan – in collaboration with the Board – to guide DESE’s work in the coming years.

* **Commitment to anti-racism:** Provide over 16 hours of required anti-racism training sessions and follow-up support facilitated by Overcoming Racism for all DESE staff, and hold regular meetings with DESE’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee to advance our agency-wide commitment to anti-racism and equity. To support districts and schools with anti-racism work, DESE will offer two professional development academies to support school and district teams to improve racial equity through culturally responsive practices and by critically examining and enhancing their local pedagogy, policies, and systems.
* **Strategic plan:** Engage the Board and a broad array of stakeholders to build a multi-year strategic plan for the agency, drawing on the vision of *Our Way Forward*, student needs coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recommendations from an external research group on promising practices from across the U.S. and other countries. This work will begin in winter 2021.