*****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:** | December 8, 2020 |
| **Subject:** | Update on IEP Improvement Project |

In January 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) received information on the IEP Improvement Project, one of our initiatives to strengthen the quality of special education in the Commonwealth. We continue to develop all aspects of a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) to create robust guidance on the full IEP process, including referral, evaluation, eligibility, and IEP development and implementation. I want to update you on recent progress on the project.

**Early Adopters:** The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recruited a cohort of early adopter districts and schools to participate in the IEP Improvement Project.

* In the recruitment phase, DESE received an impressive number of competitive applications for the Early Adopter Cohort and selected 19 schools and districts across the Commonwealth. The cohort includes traditional public schools, charter schools, a regional vocational technical school, and approved special education schools representing Massachusetts socio-economically, regionally, linguistically, racially, and culturally, as well as schools with a high incidence of students on IEPs. See appendix for the list of early adopters.
* Early adopters committed teams at the school and district/administration levels to engage in [professional development, coaching, and technical assistance](https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/); participate in the feedback process for guidance materials and tools; use and implement guidance and tools; provide actionable feedback about successes and lessons learned through project implementation; and receive grant funds to support the work.
* The first early adopter meetings are scheduled for December 4 and 18 to go through key considerations for choosing a school or schools to participate and to discuss next steps in forming inclusive teams.
* By January 2021, the Early Adopter Cohort will have begun to examine their local data and practices to prepare for setting their local improvement goals.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** DESE contracted with [EDCO Collaborative](https://edcollab.org/) to comprehensively engage and gather feedback from stakeholders on new guidance materials and tools.

* Nearly **200 new stakeholders** were recruited to join the Stakeholder Engagement groups. These groups will continue to grow as the early adopters identify stakeholders within their schools and districts who will also participate in the Stakeholder Engagement groups. See appendix for a list of stakeholder representation.
* During the summer and fall of 2020, orientation sessions were held for all stakeholders (both community- and school-based) and early adopters.
* Stakeholder groups are currently tasked with reviewing the project’s draft-resources, participating in iterative feedback and refinement cycles, as well as providing recommendations for implementation, operationalization, and sustainability of new guidance.
* In January 2021, stakeholder groups will finalize and provide recommendations to DESE for the main sections of *Is Special Education the Right Service? Referral, Evaluation & Eligibility Guide (ISERS)*.

**Professional Development:** DESE also contracted with [CAST](https://www.cast.org/) and its partners, the [Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy](https://www.renniecenter.org/), the [Federation for Children with Special Needs](https://fcsn.org/), and [BlackPrint Education Consulting](https://theblackprintinc.com/), to engage early adopters in the improved IEP process. The emphasis of this work is to improve student outcomes, by examining the design of educational systems and structures; removing barriers to student engagement; advancing evidence-based policies, procedures, and instructional practices within an improved IEP process; and targeting areas where the instructional design may inhibit student achievement.

Throughout this work, all conversations are grounded in the needs of students with disabilities, particularly those who have been historically marginalized – so that the guidance and tools that DESE produces will be informed by diverse perspectives and are consistent with culturally sustaining practices.

I will continue to update the Board on the IEP Improvement Project as the work proceeds.

# Appendix: IEP Improvement Project

# Early Adopter Cohort

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| Blackstone Valley Regional  Carver Public Schools  Chelsea Public Schools  Clinton Public Schools  Foxborough Regional Charter School  Groton-Dunstable Regional School District  League School of Greater Boston  Lenox Public Schools  Malden Public Schools  Marblehead Public Schools | Mashpee  Medfield Public Schools  New Bedford Public Schools  Norton Public Schools  Perkins School for the Blind  Pioneer Valley  Quabbin Regional Public Schools  The Guild for Human Services School  Waltham Public Schools |

# Stakeholder Engagement

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| **Schools and Districts:** | | | |
| Abington  Acton-Boxborough  Agawam  Alma del Mar Charter  Amego School, Amego, Inc., Boston  Attleboro  Boston  Bristol County Agricultural  Brooke Charter School  Center for School Crisis Intervention and Assessment  Children's Center for Communication  City on a Hill Charter Public School-Circuit Street  Collaborative for Educational Services  Dighton-Rehoboth,  Dr Franklin Perkins School,  Fall River, Frontier  Gloucester | Granby  Hampden Charter School of Science East  Hanover  Harvard  Haverhill  Holbrook  Ipswich  JRI The Victor School  Judge Baker Children's Center  KIPP Academy Boston Charter School  Lawrence  Lee  Lexington  Ludlow  Lynn  Lynnfield  Mansfield  Manville School  Marblehead Community Charter Public  Martha's Vineyard Charter | Medfield  Medford  Milford  Milton  Monomoy Regional School District  Monson  Mystic Valley Regional Charter  Northampton-Smith Vocational Agricultural  Northborough  Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical  Norwood  Old Rochester  Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School  Pilgrim Area Collaborative (PAC)  Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter (District)  RCS Learning Center School | Sabis International Charter  Sandwich  Somerville  South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC)  Southborough  Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational Technical  Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District  Spencer-E Brookfield  Sturgis Charter Public  Sudbury  Sutton  Swansea  Watertown  Weston  Westwood  Winchester |
| **Organizations, Partners and Advocacy Groups:** | | | |
| ARC of Mass or Affiliates Asperger/Autism Network  Autism Alliance  Braille Literacy Advisory Council  Bureau of Special Education Appeals  Burlington SEPAC  Chelsea SEPAC  Community Legal Aid  Decoding Dyslexia  Department of Children and Families  Department of Developmental Services  Department of Youth Services and Special Education in Institutional Settings  Department of Public Health  Federation for Children with Special Needs  Massachusetts Association of Approved Private Schools  MABENE  MASERS | | Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education (ASE)  Massachusetts Advocates for Children  Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change  Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  Massachusetts Mental Health Counselors Association  MHLAC  Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives  MA Urban  NESCA  Special Education Advisory Panel  Special Needs Advocacy Network  SPEDWatch, Inc.  University of Massachusetts  Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts | |