*****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:**  | 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 RegionalCarver Public SchoolsChelsea Public SchoolsClinton Public SchoolsFoxborough Regional Charter SchoolGroton-Dunstable Regional School DistrictLeague School of Greater BostonLenox Public SchoolsMalden Public SchoolsMarblehead Public Schools | MashpeeMedfield Public SchoolsNew Bedford Public SchoolsNorton Public SchoolsPerkins School for the BlindPioneer ValleyQuabbin Regional Public SchoolsThe Guild for Human Services SchoolWaltham Public Schools |

# Stakeholder Engagement

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| **Schools and Districts:** |
| AbingtonActon-BoxboroughAgawamAlma del Mar Charter Amego School, Amego, Inc., BostonAttleboroBostonBristol County AgriculturalBrooke Charter School Center for School Crisis Intervention and AssessmentChildren's Center for CommunicationCity on a Hill Charter Public School-Circuit Street Collaborative for Educational ServicesDighton-Rehoboth,Dr Franklin Perkins School,Fall River, FrontierGloucester | Granby Hampden Charter School of Science EastHanoverHarvardHaverhillHolbrookIpswichJRI The Victor SchoolJudge Baker Children's CenterKIPP Academy Boston Charter School LawrenceLeeLexingtonLudlowLynnLynnfieldMansfieldManville SchoolMarblehead Community Charter Public Martha's Vineyard Charter  | MedfieldMedfordMilfordMiltonMonomoy Regional School DistrictMonsonMystic Valley Regional Charter Northampton-Smith Vocational AgriculturalNorthboroughNorthern Berkshire Regional Vocational TechnicalNorwoodOld RochesterPaulo Freire Social Justice Charter School Pilgrim Area Collaborative (PAC)Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter (District)RCS Learning Center School | Sabis International Charter SandwichSomervilleSouth Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC)SouthboroughSouthern Worcester County Regional Vocational TechnicalSouthwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School DistrictSpencer-E BrookfieldSturgis Charter Public SudburySuttonSwanseaWatertownWestonWestwoodWinchester |
| **Organizations, Partners and Advocacy Groups:** |
| ARC of Mass or Affiliates Asperger/Autism NetworkAutism AllianceBraille Literacy Advisory CouncilBureau of Special Education AppealsBurlington SEPACChelsea SEPACCommunity Legal AidDecoding DyslexiaDepartment of Children and FamiliesDepartment of Developmental ServicesDepartment of Youth Services and Special Education in Institutional SettingsDepartment of Public Health Federation for Children with Special NeedsMassachusetts Association of Approved Private Schools MABENEMASERS | Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education (ASE)Massachusetts Advocates for ChildrenMassachusetts Families Organizing for ChangeMassachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of HearingMassachusetts Mental Health Counselors AssociationMHLACMassachusetts Organization of Educational CollaborativesMA UrbanNESCASpecial Education Advisory PanelSpecial Needs Advocacy NetworkSPEDWatch, Inc.University of MassachusettsJustice Center of Southeast Massachusetts |