*****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:** | January 15, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | Briefing for the January 26, 2021 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on **Tuesday, January 26, 2021**, at the Department ofElementary and Secondary Education’s office in Malden. The meeting will start at **9:00 a.m.** and should adjourn by **1:00 p.m.** As in recent months, the Board will meet in person, following the Commonwealth’s health and safety guidelines, including limiting the number of people in our meeting room, and the meeting will be live-streamed. Helene Bettencourt and Courtney Sullivan will assist with all arrangements; please email or call them if you have any questions.

**OVERVIEW**

Our business agenda leads off with a report on the Department’s recent actions to support schools, students, and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a discussion and vote on proposed modifications to the competency determination (CD) requirement for members of the class of 2021 who have not yet earned the CD. The Board will receive updates on college access data for the class of 2021 and on our ongoing educator diversity initiatives. We will conclude with a review of current education budget matters.

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Statements from the Public**

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven will brief the Board on current issues and activities.

Also, as a reminder and update on evidence-based policy making: In January 2020, our Board and the Board of Higher Education (BHE) each adopted a resolution affirming our broad-based commitment to collect, review, and act on high-quality evidence to inform ongoing and new initiatives intended to strengthen education in Massachusetts. Chair Craven designated member Marty West to take the lead in working on these matters at the board level. For your information, the BHE recently set up a task force on evidence-based policy making and the task force will hold a meeting on February 1. Marty West, Mike Moriarty, and Paymon Rouhanifard, as well as Matt Deninger, DESE’s Chief Strategy and Research Officer, will attend the BHE task force meeting as invitees. Marty will update our Board at our February meeting.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

**Student Opportunity Act: District Plans.** In winter 2020, the Department sent guidance and templates to districts to help them develop the three-year evidence-based district plans required under the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). Districts must identify in their plans which student groups are least well served. Based on the evidence-based program categories outlined in the SOA, the Department identified 17 examples of high-quality programs for districts to consider using to address their identified gaps.

In light of the pandemic, we set January 15, 2021 as the deadline for districts to submit their SOA plans. As of January 14, the Department has received 247 plans, or 78% of the 318 expected. The plans include a range of the approved programs, with districts describing their priorities and the resources they expect to use. I will update the Board on January 26.

**Dyslexia Guidelines.** The Department is continuing to implement An Act Relative to Students with Dyslexia, [Chapter 272 of the Acts of 2018](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2018/Chapter272), and supporting districts in developing and using screening procedures for students demonstrating one or more potential signs of a neurological learning disability including, but not limited to, dyslexia (see [M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 57A](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section57A)). Among other activities, the Department is producing Dyslexia Guidelines in consultation with the Department of Early Education and Care. We released four chapters in December 2020 and the remaining five chapters will be released in the coming weeks. Meetings with stakeholders, including literacy specialists, district literacy and special education leaders, advocates, family organizations, and dyslexia specialists, will occur in January and February. The Department expects to post the final version of the guidelines in March 2021.

**High School Senior Internship in Education Program.** As we have discussed previously, DESE is launching this new internship program to provide work-based learning experiences in the field of education to highly motivated high school seniors in good academic standing, while supporting schools and community-based partners. Here is an update on recent developments:

* As of January 14, 2021, the Department has received 172 inquiries from districts interested in participating.
* The leaders of Connecting Activities at the regional MassHire Workforce Boards are reaching out to districts and learning pods that have shown initial interest. Districts have been asked to send student names and contact information to the Connecting Activities leads by January 19.
* The Department has contracted with a career and technical skills organization called Educators Rising to provide training and skill development to the students.

I will continue to update the Board as this internship program proceeds.

**STEM Advanced Placement Access Expansion Opportunity.** As I informed the Board in the late fall of 2020, the Department applied for and has received a federal grant to expand opportunities for students in Massachusetts who lack access to Advanced Placement (AP) coursework in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The gaps are particularly acute for students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. With the federal grant, and via a partnership with an online course provider, we are establishing a statewide platform to generate greater equity and access in AP STEM course-taking. The STEM Advanced Placement Access Expansion Opportunity (SAPAO) initiative is designed to increase the capacity of schools to offer this advanced coursework that will equip students with skills and competencies they need to pursue postsecondary education and, ultimately, go on to STEM professions vital to the Massachusetts economy. Eligible schools are those with above-state-average rates (33%) of Black, Latino, and/or Economically Disadvantaged student enrollment. The program also aims to serve schools in which low numbers of students engage in STEM AP courses despite demonstrating the skills to participate in this advanced coursework. Later this month the Department will notify schools identified as potential participants in SAPAO and invite them to participate in an information session. I will report to the Board periodically on our progress.

**Comments from the Secretary**

The Secretary will brief the Board on current issues and activities.

**Routine Business: Approval of the Minutes of the December 15, 2020 Regular Meeting**

The Board will vote on approval of the minutes of the December meeting.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

1. **Update on COVID-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families – Discussion**

Since our meeting on December 15, the Department has continued to inform districts of new developments related to COVID-19 and to support schools and districts as they serve students during the pandemic. The memorandum in your materials summarizes some key actions in the past few weeks. I will update the Board further at our meeting.

1. **Proposed Modifications to Competency Determination Requirement for the Class of 2021 Due to the COVID-19 Emergency – Discussion and Vote**

I recommend that the Board vote this month to approve a limited modification to the competency determination (CD) for students in the class of 2021 who have not yet earned the CD. While most high school seniors have already met the CD standard, others have not, and they are missing the chance to take and pass the English language arts and/or mathematics MCAS tests this winter because we had to postpone the January 2021 tests due to the COVID-19 emergency. The proposed action is similar to the decisions the Board made last spring to modify certain CD requirements in light of the pandemic. The memorandum under Tab 2 provides details.

1. **Update on College Access Data for the Class of 2021 – Discussion**

Our Department has been working with the Department of Higher Education and some higher education research partners since early fall 2020, in an effort to prevent gaps in college-going among this year’s high school graduates. The Massachusetts public higher education system experienced a significant decrease in undergraduate enrollment in fall 2020, and completion rates for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) have been declining as well, leading to concern about drops in college enrollment next fall. More information is in the memorandum under Tab 3. At our January 26 meeting, the Board will get an update from Matt Deninger, DESE’s Chief Strategy and Research Officer, and Nyal Fuentes of our College and Career Readiness team.

1. **Update on Educator Diversity Initiatives – Discussion**

Ventura Rodriguez, Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives, and Shay Edmond, Associate Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives, will brief the Board on DESE’s “Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies for a Diverse Massachusetts Teacher Workforce” Guidebook, and how it will be used to support school districts’ efforts to strengthen and diversify teacher recruitment and retention programs. Christina Brown, partner at TNTP, will join Ventura and Shay for the presentation and discussion with the Board.

1. **Update on Education Budget Matters – Discussion**

Senior Associate Commissioner/CFO Bill Bell will update the Board on the latest information we have about federal and state funding for K-12 education in the Commonwealth.

**OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

1. **Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Annual Report for FY2020**

The Board’s annual report highlights key activities and initiatives of the Board and Department for the past fiscal year. We will send the report to the Board in advance of our January 26 meeting. As we do each year, we will forward the report to the Governor, the Legislature, and education stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth as well as posting it on our website.

1. **Legislative Reports: Education-Related Laws Enacted in 191st Legislative Session and the Data Advisory Commission Annual Report for 2020**

The memorandum under Tab 7 lists and summarizes the education-related state laws that were enacted during the two-year 191st legislative session that concluded a few weeks ago. Also enclosed for your information is the first report of the statutory Data Advisory Commission.

1. **Report on Grants Approved by the Commissioner**

Enclosed is information on grants that I have approved since the last meeting, under the authority the Board has delegated to the Commissioner.

1. **Chronically Under-Performing Schools Quarterly Reports**

Enclosed is the second quarterly FY2021 progress report on the four chronically under-performing schools – UP Academy Holland and Paul A. Dever Elementary School in Boston, John Avery Parker Elementary School in New Bedford, and Morgan Full Service Community School in Holyoke.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to meeting with you in person on January 26.