*****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:** | Proposed Modifications to the Competency Determination Requirement for the Class of 2021 Due to the COVID-19 Emergency |

At the [April 2020](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-04/0428reg-minutes.docx) and [May 2020](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-05/0526reg-minutes.docx) meetings, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to approve modified competency determination (CD) requirements for students in the class of 2020 in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (STE), and for students in the classes of 2021-2023 in STE only. At the January 26, 2021 meeting, I will present my recommendations for further modifications to the CD requirements in ELA and mathematics for students in the class of 2021 who have not yet earned the CD.

As we discussed last spring, [legislation](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter56)[[1]](#footnote-1) enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allows the Board, upon my recommendation, to modify or waive the requirements of the CD for high school graduation in order to address disruptions caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 or the state of emergency.

The CD regulations require students to pass the high school ELA, mathematics, and STE MCAS tests in order to earn the CD. Students take the ELA and mathematics tests in 10th grade, and take an STE test in either biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering by the end of 10th grade.

About 5,600 high school seniors, out of over 72,000, have not yet earned the CD in ELA, mathematics, or both. (The Board’s [May 2020 vote](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-05/0526reg-minutes.docx) modified the science and technology/engineering CD requirements for all students in the classes of 2021-2023.) The re-test opportunity in ELA and mathematics for 12th graders originally scheduled for this month has been postponed. While most students in the class of 2021 have already met the CD standard, others will now miss an opportunity to take and pass the ELA and/or mathematics MCAS tests this winter. In light of all these factors and considering the best interest of students in these extraordinary circumstances, I am recommending that the Board grant a limited extension of the modified CD requirements for ELA and mathematics to students in the class of 2021, as follows: For students in the class of 2021, the CD in ELA and mathematics would be awarded upon district certification that the student earned full credit for a relevant course aligned to the appropriate curriculum framework in that subject matter, and has demonstrated competency in that subject.

The recommended modification would allow high school seniors to receive their CD prior to the end of this school year by earning full credit in an approved course and demonstrating competency in that subject, in lieu of earning a qualifying MCAS score. Seniors who still want to take the MCAS tests may choose to participate in the currently scheduled spring administration, and they will also have opportunities to receive additional academic support this spring and summer.

I have attached a motion for your consideration, to make this limited modification to the competency determination for students in the class of 2021. I look forward to discussing this with you at the January 26 Board meeting.

Attachments: Statutory language

Motion

ATTACHMENT 1:

[St. 2020, Chapter 56](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter56), section 6

## AN ACT TO FURTHER ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACED BY MUNICIPALITIES, SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE AUTHORITIES RESULTING FROM COVID-19

…

SECTION 6. Notwithstanding clause (i) of the fourth paragraph of section 1D of chapter 69 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, upon recommendation of the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, the board of elementary and secondary education may modify or waive the requirements of the competency determination for high school graduation, in order to address disruptions caused by the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, or the governor’s March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency; provided, that any grade 12 student that is unable to take or otherwise complete any assessment administered in the spring of 2020 as a requirement of the competency determination pursuant to said clause (i) of said fourth paragraph of said section 1D of said chapter 69 shall have the opportunity to take or retake the assessment during subsequent offerings.

…

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Meeting: January 26, 2021

Agenda Item: Proposed Modifications to Competency Determination

Requirement for the Class of 2021 Due to COVID-19 Emergency

**MOVED:** that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with

   St. 2020, c. 56, § 6, and as recommended by the Commissioner, grant a limited modification of the competency determination (CD) requirements by authorizing a process through which students in the class of 2021 who have not yet earned the CD in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics may earn the CD through successful completion of a relevant course, as follows:

* For ELA and mathematics – upon district certification that the student earned full credit for a relevant course aligned to the appropriate curriculum framework in that subject matter, and has demonstrated competency in that subject.

This action is not intended to be a permanent pathway to earning a competency determination, but rather a limited measure needed in response to the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This process will be implemented when information about students’ course completion is available. The Commissioner shall report to the Board and the public on the results of this process.

1. [St. 2020, c.56, §6](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter56) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)