*****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:**  | March 3, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | Early College Programs and Innovation Pathways  |

# Introduction

On February 22, 2021, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education had a special meeting to discuss Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) programs. Associate Commissioner Elizabeth Bennett noted that CVTE pathways are part of the Commonwealth’s broad initiative to support high quality college- and career pathway programs. At your March 5, 2021 meeting, you will have the opportunity to hear about two other important components of this initiative: Early College and Innovation Pathways.

# High Quality College and Career Pathways

In 2017, the Commonwealth launched a High Quality College and Career Pathways initiative to serve as an overarching strategy for significantly expanding student access to high-quality career pathways. In addition to [Chapter 74](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/cvte/programs/), CVTE pathways, there are two new types of pathways for this effort: **Early College** and **Innovation Pathways**. While more specific sets of characteristics define each pathway, both are anchored in the five guiding principles defined in the [Massachusetts Early College Designation — Preliminary Outline of Key Elements](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/FY2017/2017-01/joint-itemI1.html): equitable access, guided academic pathways, enhanced student support, connection to career, and effective partnerships. The pathways initiative came to full fruition upon the state’s receipt of a highly competitive New Skills for Youth (NSFY) grant in 2016 from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) focused on quality career pathways. Through national research and data, CCSSO identified six core components for these pathways: Career Advising; Labor Market Information; Integrated Instruction; Work-based Learning; Credential Preparation; and Postsecondary Linkages. Ultimately, these components are addressed, along with the five guiding principles, as part of a formal state-level designation process to identify programs that meet state criteria. \ These pathways provide participating students in the Commonwealth with supportive, rigorous academic experiences and career development education relevant to their next steps after high school. The Department, along with the Executive Office of Education, the Department of Higher Education, and the state’s sixteen MassHire workforce boards work collaboratively with schools and districts and regional higher education and employer partners to provide students with equitable access to a pathway deemed a strong individualized fit, with on and off ramps across different pathways throughout high school, ensure that they graduate with a well-designed post-secondary plan, and a robust knowledge of Massachusetts’ workforce opportunities. All pathways are designed to increase access and decrease barriers for students—they all prioritize historically underserved students.

**Early College Programs**

In 2017, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), along with the Board of Higher Education (BHE) voted to approve the establishment of a statewide [Early College Designation](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/early-college/), as well as the formation of an Early College Joint Committee (ECJC) to oversee the development of that designation and to grant approvals of Early College designation to programs. Currently, [35 high schools and 19 higher education institutions have committed to 23 designated partnerships](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/early-college/designees.html) serving almost 3,000 students. Partnerships are well-represented across the state, with the majority of them located in Gateway Cities.

Early college programs, distinct from traditional dual enrollment, are designed to blend elements of high school and college to provide students with the opportunity to experience and complete college level academic coursework on a clearly articulated pathway and simultaneously gain exposure to a variety of career opportunities. Early college programs also reduce the time and expense of earning a college credential while increasing the likelihood of completion. It relies on the concept of prioritizing students who do not historically access and complete college and introduce it to them earlier, free of cost, and with more support while they are still in high school. National data has shown the success of this model, and the emerging data on MA Early College programs are promising.

**Highlights of the February 18, 2021 Early College Joint Committee Meeting**

Several topics were on the agenda for the ECJC’s February 18 meeting. They are summarized below:

* ***Educator Diversity Initiative***: Staff from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education presented an overview of the educator diversity initiative. This was followed by a presentation by Amanda Fernandez, Paul Toner, and Manny Cruz, which outlined the case for intentional strategies to connect the educator diversity initiative with Early College work. The President of Framingham State University, Javier Cevallos, and his colleague, Colleen Coffey, then discussed potential intersections with Early College pathways focused on education.​
* ***Designation Process***: The ECJC approved provisional one-year designations for programs (rather than the usual five-year designation) during 2021, due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, funding changes, and the need to confirm that Designated Early Colleges are able to implement the program design they have planned. The ECJC also approved three new programs for provisional Designation. Please see appendix to this memo for the full list of Early College Designated programs. Programs have a shortened timeframe to demonstrate that their program is fully aligned with the Early College Designation criteria and ready to recruit students for fall 2021 enrollment.
* The ECJC received an update on funding. This year Early College Designated programs received grants to provide supports at the partner high schools, as well as tuition credits of $135 per Early College course credit.
* The ECJC received a data presentation by Strategic Data Fellow, Pierre Lucien. Highlights included demographics of Early College students, MassCore completion rates, FAFSA completion rates, college enrollment rates and other related information, and retention rate of 2nd year Early College high school graduates enrolled in college. ​

**MA Innovation Pathways**

Also begun in 2017, [Innovation Pathways](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/innovation-pathways/) allow both academic and comprehensive high schools to leverage strong partnerships with MassHire Boards and employers. Through these programs, students develop knowledge and skills related to their chosen field of study before they graduate from high school. Innovation Pathway programs consist of 3 to 4 year pathways which provide contextualized learning, aligned with broadly defined high-demand industry sectors. These include:

* Manufacturing
* Healthcare and Social Assistance
* Information
* Environmental and Life Sciences
* Business and Finance

Like Early College, Innovation Pathways have well-defined scopes and sequences including two technical courses, two related advanced courses (AP, dual enrollment, IB, Project Lead the Way), possible industry-relevant certifications and skills, and a focus on career development education, with career awareness and exploration leading up to 100-hour immersive experience (internship or capstone). There are currently [42 participating high schools in 36 districts implementing designated Innovation Pathways](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/innovation-pathways/designees.html), serving over 2000 students. All 16 MassHire Boards have been engaged along with more than 300 employers who have joined in partnering with the 99 pathways that are currently designated. Schools with the Innovation Pathways designation, along with their MassHire and employer partners, regularly participate in [community of practice](https://sites.google.com/view/innovation-pathways/) offerings, designed to support a variety of design, development, and implementation needs.

Department staff, including Kristin Hunt, Early College Director, and Jennifer Gwatkin, Innovation Pathways Lead, will be present at the meeting to address the Board and answer questions.