*****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:** | April 9, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | Update on COVID-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families |

Since our meeting on March 5, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) has continued to inform districts of new developments related to COVID-19 and to support schools and districts as they move toward bringing more students into classrooms.

Following the Board’s vote in March to give me the discretion to end hybrid and remote learning models as district-wide approaches, 90 percent of elementary schools opened for in-person learning five days a week beginning April 5. As of April 7, 2021, we have received 83 requests for waivers from the reopening requirements, and we approved 73 of those. Many were to delay the return of grade 5, because it was in a different building than the other elementary grades, and others were to return first to hybrid learning before moving to five days a week in person. We denied ten waiver requests that sought to delay implementation or stay with exclusively remote learning. The last of the elementary schools with waivers will return to in-person learning five days a week by May 3, although individual families can choose remote learning through the end of the school year if desired. The next step will be to bring students in grades 6-8 back to full in-person learning on April 28, and we hope to make an announcement this month on when all high school students will return. Please keep in mind that some districts have already returned to in-person learning ahead of these deadlines.

The [pooled testing program](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/pooled-testing/) has been one tool to help districts bring students back. On March 29, Governor Baker announced that the program has found low positivity rates – less than 1 percent – among students and staff. In addition, he also announced that the state will use federal funds to continue to pay for the program through the end of the school year. (Previously, state funding was set to end on April 18.) Pooled testing is available to every Massachusetts public school at no cost. The pooled testing program was the first program of its kind nationwide. In the time since it started in February, Massachusetts schools have tested nearly 159,000 individuals. More than 1,000 schools are enrolled in the COVID-19 pooled testing initiative. Of the collected pooled tests, we are not aware of any in which there was more than one positive individual, suggesting that there is extremely little evidence of in-school transmission of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. On a related note, educators and school staff became [eligible for vaccination](https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-announces-k-12-educators-child-care-workers-and-k-12-school-staff) on March 11.

In addition, over the past month the Department has provided information to districts including: guidance on graduation and commencement ceremonies from the Department of Labor Standards in consultation with the Department of Public Health, guidance on proms, guidance on considerations for special education, new FAQs, and updated guidance for culinary and cosmetology programs at career/vocational technical high schools to allow them to serve the public. These documents and others are posted on our website (see links below).

I will update the Board further at our April 20 meeting.

Attachments:

* [Message about Guidance on In-Person Learning Requirements – March 9, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/2021-0309in-person-learning-guide.docx) *(download)*
  + [Guidance on In-Person Learning Requirements – March 9, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/in-person-learning-guide.docx) *(download)*
  + [Plan for Phased Return to In-Person Learning (slides) — March 10, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/in-person-learning-plan.pptx) *(download)*
  + [Overview of Waiver Process (slides) — March 10, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/waiver-process.pptx) *(download)*
* [March 15, 2021 Installment of FAQs (about plexiglass dividers, summer educational services, and library books)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/faq/2021-0315faq-installment.docx) *(download)*
* [Commencement and Graduation Guidance from the Department of Labor Standards in Consultation with DPH – March 22, 2021](https://www.mass.gov/doc/commencement-guidance/download)
* [March 22, 2021 Installment of FAQs (about outdoor recess, guidelines for vaccinated individuals, mask requirements, and the travel advisory)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/faq/2021-0322faq-installment.docx) *(download)*
* [Special Education Transportation Guidance – March 24, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped/transportation-guide.docx) *(download)*
* [Baker-Polito Administration’s First in the Nation COVID-19 Pooled Testing Initiative Finds 0.7% Positivity Rate in Schools Throughout Commonwealth – March 29, 2021](https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administrations-first-in-the-nation-covid-19-pooled-testing-initiative-finds-07-positivity-rate-in-schools-throughout-commonwealth)
* [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Makes Changes to the MCAS Schedule, Graduation Requirements for 11th Graders – April 1, 2021](https://mailchi.mp/doe.mass.edu/press-release-dese-makes-changes-to-mcas-schedule-graduation-requirements-for-11th-graders)
* [Supplemental Guidance for Student Groups and School Events for School Year 2020-2021 (including proms) – Updated April 1, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/return-to-school/supplement/2020-0831student-groups-school-events.docx) *(download)*
* [Career/Vocational Technical Education Reopening Guidelines – Updated April 1, 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/ccte/cvte-reopening-guide.docx) *(download)*

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