*****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:** | Proposed Modifications to the Competency Determination Requirement for the Class of 2022 Due to the COVID-19 Emergency |

At the [April 2020](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-04/0428reg-minutes.docx), [May 2020](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2020/2020-05/0526reg-minutes.docx),and [January 2021](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2021/2021-01/0126reg-minutes.docx) meetings, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to approve modified competency determination (CD) requirements for students in the classes of 2020 and 2021 in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (STE), and for students in the classes of 2022 and 2023 in STE only. At the April 20, 2021, meeting, I will present my recommendations for further modifications to the CD requirements in ELA and mathematics for students in the class of 2022. (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.)

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 and 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 grade 10 and take an STE test in either biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering by the end of grade 10. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, students had two retest opportunities in 11th grade and again in 12th grade.

Students in the class of 2022 have not had any opportunities to take and pass MCAS tests in ELA and mathematics due to the cancelation of test administrations during the pandemic. Testing in these subjects was canceled in spring 2020 and again in winter 2021. The class of 2022 will now have only three chances to test before the end of their senior year, and students who do not pass will have less time to receive additional academic support before graduation. In light of 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 2022, as follows: For students in the class of 2022, 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 students in the class of 2022 to receive their CD by earning full credit in an approved course and demonstrating competency in that subject, in lieu of earning a qualifying MCAS score. Juniors who still want to take the MCAS tests may choose to participate in the currently scheduled spring administration, or in the fall 2021 administration, to qualify for scholarship programs.

I have attached a motion for your consideration, to make this limited modification to the competency determination for students in the class of 2022. I look forward to discussing this with you at our meeting on April 20.

Associate Commissioners Rob Curtin and Michol Stapel will be at the April 20 meeting to respond to your questions.

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

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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.

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