*****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:** | Modification to Board Policy on Certificate of Attainment for the Class of 2021 – Discussion and Vote |

At the April 20, 2021, meeting of the Board, I will present my recommendation that the Board modify the requirements for the certificate of attainment (COA) for the class of 2021.

The COA is a state-endorsed credential that districts may award to students who have completed local requirements but who do not yet qualify for the high school diploma because they have not yet earned a competency determination (CD). The requirements for the COA were established as a Board policy in 2000 and amended in 2002. Among other COA requirements, a student who has not earned a CD in ELA or mathematics must take the MCAS test at least three times in that subject.

In usual times, students have five opportunities to take the ELA and mathematics MCAS tests between their first attempt in spring of 10th grade through the end of their senior year. Because of the cancelation of testing opportunities during school year 2020-21 due to the pandemic, the class of 2021 will have had two fewer opportunities to take and pass these MCAS tests.

The majority of students in the class of 2021 were able to take and pass the MCAS tests in all three subjects prior to the onset of the pandemic. The remaining students are eligible to earn their CD under the [modified requirements](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2021/2021-01/item2.docx), which allow students 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. A small number of these students will still be unable to earn their CD, even under the modified process, and will therefore become eligible for the COA.

Given the circumstances and the reduced number of testing opportunities that were available as a result of the pandemic, I recommend that the Board amend the policy on the COA for the class of 2021, reducing the number of times students need to have taken a test from three attempts to one attempt only. In addition, the requirement to have taken an MCAS test will be waived entirely for students in the class of 2021 who transferred into a Massachusetts public school after the March 2020 MCAS retests, which was the last testing opportunity offered before the onset of the pandemic.

Any changes to the COA policy for the class of 2022 (this year’s high school juniors) will be determined at a later date, given the continued uncertainties and disruptions of the pandemic as it relates to testing opportunities.

A full description of the purpose and criteria of the COA, along with highlighted proposed language for the class of 2021, are provided below and a motion is attached for your review.

**Purpose of the certificate of attainment and proposed amendment**

The current COA policy was set by the Board in 2000 and modified in 2002. Proposed modifications are highlighted below by underscore.

The COA was established alongside the Massachusetts graduation requirements in the early 2000s to provide a credential for students who met their local requirements but had not yet earned their CD. The COA is meant to recognize effort, achievement, and persistence by students who may need more time to meet the grade 10 standards in English language arts and mathematics.

To earn the COA, a student must demonstrate a good faith effort to meet the state standards in English language arts and mathematics and must complete all local graduation requirements, including attendance, course completion, and satisfactory grades. The state-endorsed credential is not equivalent to a high school diploma, but is intended to make available further educational, job training, and employment options for students.

It is important to note that a student with a disability who is eligible for special education and who is awarded the state-endorsed credential is entitled to continue receiving publicly-funded special education. State and federal law give students with disabilities the right to receive a free appropriate public education (special education and related services) until the student turns 22 or receives a high school diploma or its equivalent, whichever comes first.

**Criteria**

Beginning with the class of 2004, to be eligible for a COA, a student must:

* Complete a program of studies prescribed by the school committee or the student's IEP team which satisfies all local graduation requirements, including local attendance requirements, satisfactory grades, and course completion.
* Satisfactorily participate in the tutoring and other academic support services made available by or approved by the school under an IEP or under any other plan designed to strengthen the student's knowledge and skills of the learning standards of the subject(s) at issue.
* Take the grade 10 MCAS ELA or mathematics test in each subject area in which the student did not achieve a passing score at least three times.
  + Provided, however, students in the class of 2021 are eligible for the COA after taking the grade 10 MCAS ELA or mathematics test in the subject areas in which the student did not achieve a passing score one time.
  + In the case of a student participating in the MCAS Alternate Assessment, the student is encouraged to participate in the Alternate Assessment in each subject area in which the student did not achieve a passing score once each year, for each year prior to the student's scheduled graduation date. The final determination on the student's annual participation is left to the student's IEP Team.
* The student must take courses in the subject area in which the student did not achieve a passing score each year following the year in which the student initially did not achieve a passing score on a particular MCAS test. These courses should be designed to help the student achieve the curriculum framework standards, as well as the competency determination.
* The student must maintain at least a 90% attendance level during the senior year of high school, provided that the superintendent may permit a student to qualify by documenting and maintaining evidence of extenuating circumstances such as a student's serious illness that would justify an exemption.

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

Attachment: Motion