*****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:**  | May 14, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | 2021 Massachusetts School Counselor of Year Presentation to Board |

Jessica Descartes, school counselor at TechBoston Academy, has been selected as the 2021 School Counselor of the Year by the Massachusetts School Counselor Association (MASCA), and I am delighted that she will join us at the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting on May 25. Ms. Descartes will represent Massachusetts in Washington, D.C. at the School Counselor of the Year Gala in February 2022 and will compete with other state winners for the 2022 American School Counselor Association’s School Counselor of the Year award.

Ms. Descartes is a grade 6-12 counselor who works with TechBoston Academy students who are in sheltered English immersion and students with limited or interrupted formal education. She supports her students with access to programs and information that can empower them and transform their school experience and their lives. She has been a leader in promoting standards-based school counseling tailored to students’ needs. She has rolled out career, academic, and social-emotional development curriculum for the entire school and supported extended learning by coordinating the school’s Summer Learning Academy for grades 9-12.

During the pandemic, Ms. Descartes contacted every student’s family to assess their needs and provide information and access to resources. She made sure every student in her caseload had access to a computer and internet services and contacted internet providers when necessary. She personally connected students and their families with food assistance, housing resources, academic support, and other services.

Ms. Descartes is also a leader outside of school. She is committed to the Empowering Through Education (ETE) Camp in Haiti, which seeks to prepare Haiti’s most vulnerable youth to become future social justice leaders by strengthening their academic skills, increasing their self-confidence, and promoting community support.

Ms. Descartes embraces the school counselor profession with her heart. She is truly committed to social justice, equity, and service. Her actions, professionalism, and devotion to her students have earned her the admiration of students, parents, faculty, colleagues, and the community. Robert Bardwell, MASCA’s executive director, said it well: “MASCA is proud to honor such a dedicated and passionate school counselor as the 2021 School Counselor of the Year. Jessica is truly an inspiration to all of us.”

We are pleased to welcome Ms. Descartes to our meeting on May 25, when she will make a presentation to the Board sharing her experiences as a school counselor.