*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Katherine Craven, Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | October 15, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | Commissioner's Goals and Objectives for 2021-22 |

For the 2021-22 school year, I have directed Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department or DESE) leadership and staff to focus on two priorities:

1. **Recover,** which addresses needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including ongoing COVID-19 health and safety guidance and real-time assistance, as well as academic and social-emotional supports for students; and
2. **Reimagine,** which frames our continued implementation of initiatives intended to transform education across the Commonwealth, including deeper learning and our innovative science assessment.

Our work on recovery is not only about providing new supports to districts and schools but also about reinforcing work already underway to promote and expand the use of evidence-based programs and practices. Continuing our focus on strategies with a strong evidence base – including the Acceleration Roadmap we launched late last school year, along with previously-established programs like early literacy and diversifying the educator workforce – will be critical to supporting an equitable recovery for all students across the Commonwealth.

In support of these aims, I have identified the following goals and objectives for school year 2021-22:

**I. Recover: Support districts, schools, and students to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 while reinforcing DESE’s commitment to evidence-based programs**

**1. COVID-19 supports to districts and schools.** We will continue targeted COVID-19 response efforts this year, including the following:

* **Maintain the DESE Rapid Response Help Center** to provide districts and schools with COVID-19 operational support and assistance with implementing health and safety guidance, mask requirements, testing and quarantine protocols, and strategies to keep as many students attending school in-person as possible;
* **Provide access to a comprehensive COVID-19 testing program** to districts and schools across the Commonwealth, including “Test and Stay” testing for close contacts of a COVID-19 positive individual, diagnostic testing, and pooled testing;
* **Continue to collect and report COVID-19 case data and issue updates to statewide COVID-19 health and safety guidance and requirements** as appropriate in collaboration with public health agencies and DESE’s medical advisors; and
* **Continue ongoing two-way communication with school and district leaders and other key stakeholders** to provide effective support for safe and healthy learning.

**2. Implementation of the** [**Acceleration Roadmap**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/roadmap/), a tool released to districts and schools last school year that outlines critical practices to accelerate learning for all students. The three priorities of the Roadmap are: 1) fostering a sense of belonging and partnership among students and families (including robust social-emotional supports for students), 2) continuously monitoring students’ understanding, and 3) ensuring strong grade-appropriate instruction with just-in-time scaffolds when they are needed. This year, DESE will reach over 200 districts and schools with tiered support for implementation including:

* **Monthly content-specific workshops for instructional leaders**, published workshop recordings, and associated resources;
* **Targeted coaching and implementation** **support for 15 districts** that requested more in-depth support; and
* **Planning and delivering a learning acceleration training program for school and district leaders in the spring of 2022** to support implementation planning for school year 2022-23.

**3. Accelerated learning opportunities.** The Department will continue to promote accelerated learning opportunities, including:

* **Continuing Acceleration Academies focused on mathematics**. Acceleration Academies take place over school vacations and provide significant doses of high-quality instruction in mathematics and English language arts targeted to students’ specific educational needs. This school year, the academies will focus mainly on mathematics, and all schools and districts will be eligible to apply for implementation funding and support. The Department will also support academies in identified schools within the Boston Public Schools as part of DESE’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BPS.
* **Further expanding the Biggest Winner Math Challenge program**, a summer-long program for students identified as gifted and talented, with a focus on those in Gateway Cities; and
* **Continuing the Acceleration to College program**, which provides recent high school graduates access to credit-bearing math and English courses at no cost to them as they prepare for college.

**4.** **ESSER funding and guidance to districts and schools.** The Department will issue funding applications and guidance to promote effective use of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and distribute funds to districts and schools in a timely fashion. Guidance will continue to focus on using relief funds to support evidence-based programs, and this will be further reinforced in this year’s Student Opportunity Act (SOA) plan amendment process.

**5. Improved IEP guidance to support students with disabilities.** The Department aims to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by revising the current IEP (Individualized Education Program) guidance, developing new data-driven, student-centered IEP forms, and identifying resources to support successful implementation of the IEP process. This includes:

* Developing new referral, evaluation, and eligibility guidance;
* Revising the IEP Process Guide;
* Revising “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education;”
* Creating an online learning tool that provides guidance and resources on the IEP process;
* Engaging the early adopters to identify best practices, strategies, and resources to support the IEP process; and
* Convening stakeholder groups to create opportunities for families, school district staff, and community organizations to inform the development of guidance and resources.

**6. Improved resources for supporting English learners.** The Department will:

* **Continue to promote the use of the** [**Interactive Blueprint**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/) **for English Learner Success**, with a focus on making it user-friendly for districts and developing a clear and cohesive approach to district support for English learners. Specifically, DESE will:
  + **Complete the Blueprint implementation pilot** started last year with teams from Holyoke, Lawrence, Southbridge, and Brockton and synthesize lessons learned from the pilot;
  + **Improve and streamline DESE’s school- and district-facing supports for English learners** by engaging key DESE offices, including the Statewide System of Support, Kaleidoscope, and Digital Learning and Technology, in cross-office planning; and
  + **Finalize a suite of tools to accompany the Blueprint** ("what-to-look-for" tools and professional learning modules) and make them available to all districts across the state.

**7. Early literacy.** The Department will:

* **Provide implementation support for the Mass Literacy Guide**, a statewide effort to empower educators with evidence-based practices for literacy, including an online course that any Massachusetts educator can take for free, and other resources;
* **Continue grant programs** with significant investments in early literacy, including:
  + **Growing Literacy Across Massachusetts (GLEAM**), an intensive district and school literacy program funded by a five-year, $19.98 million federal grant to support literacy in grades preK-12 and expand preschool literacy. The program is helping eight districts serving grades K-5 and ten districts serving grades 6-12 implement sustainable improvements in literacy, including rigorous curricula, professional development, and access to high-quality preschool.
  + **Early Grades Literacy grant**, an effort to increase student proficiency in reading, writing, and effective communication in the early grades through extensive professional development and onsite coaching in evidence-based practices. Twelve districts and sixteen schools are participating.
* **Coordinate up to $8.5 million in statewide early literacy tutoring** as part of the Governor’s coronavirus relief support (from the federal Governor’s Emergency Education Relief fund), as a continuation from 2020-21; and
* **Build and implement a strategy for educator preparation** to align with the principles of evidence-based early literacy instruction outlined in the Mass Literacy Guide.

**8. Districts requiring assistance**. The Department will:

* **Continue to provide targeted assistance** to districts performing in the bottom 10 percent of the state’s accountability system, with a focus on strategies outlined in the Acceleration Roadmap; and
* **Continue the partnership with Boston Public Schools in the areas outlined in the MOU** signed in spring 2020, with a focus on: 1) monitoring district progress on student achievement and operational indicators, and 2) implementing Kaleidoscope professional development, Acceleration Academies, and early college programming in identified schools.

**II. Reimagine education in the Commonwealth through transformative initiatives**

**1. Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning.** The Department will continue the Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning, which is designed to foster and expand deeper learning instructional models that improve teaching and learning for all students. Within Kaleidoscope:

* **Launch work with Kaleidoscope Cohort 2 within the Boston Public Schools**
  + Provide deeper learning professional development and implementation support for 15 BPS schools identified through the 2020 memorandum of understanding; and
* **Launch a third cohort of the Kaleidoscope Collective, open to districts statewide, in spring 2022.**

**2. Innovative science assessment.** The Department will:

* **Expand the number of schools participating in the innovative science assessment pilot** from approximately 20 to approximately 100 in grades 5 and 8 (about 5,000 students per grade) using DESE’s federally approved plan for the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority;
* **Continue to refine the science assessment performance tasks** based on initial results and findings from the first year of the pilot, with continued alignment to the Kaleidoscope deeper learning initiative; and
* **Provide professional development to teachers involved in the pilot** to support them in implementing deeper learning instructional practices in science.

**3. Early college.** In addition to continued designation of new early college programs, DESE will:

* **Expand high-quality programs through competitive grant opportunities and technical assistance** for districts and schools interested in:
  + Significantly increasing the scale of current programs or
  + Establishing school-wide early college programs that are accessible to all students within a school;
* **Further promote early college educator pathways** to encourage a diverse pipeline of high school students to seek roles in education; and
* **Support further innovation through the Fifth Year Early College Promise Program**, a pilot program in which students receive an additional year of early college programming while remaining enrolled in high school and graduate with an associate’s degree.

**4. Diversifying the educator workforce**. The Department will:

* **Provide approximately $3 million in funding through the educator diversification grant program** to continue helping districts and schools enhance diversification efforts;
* **Implement a yearlong professional learning community** **for approximately 100 districts and schools** to support teacher diversification efforts;
* **Continue pilots of Massachusetts Tests of Educator Licensure (MTEL) assessment alternatives** and evaluation of the pilots;
* **Establish partnerships with community-oriented home ownership non-profits** like the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America (NACA) and others to strengthen recruitment efforts; and
* **Continue the Influence 100 fellowship** to support diversification of the administrator workforce.

**5. Career/vocational technical education (CVTE) admissions.** The Department will provide continued support for implementation of the new CVTE admissions regulatory language that the Board adopted in June 2021, including:

* **Monitoring and addressing identified deficiencies in newly submitted admissions policies** to promote equity and access; and
* **Providing professional development and technical support** as districts develop processes to promote equitable access to CVTE exploratory programs and increase opportunities for all students to be admitted to their programs of choice.

**6. Action-oriented research for educational equity.** The Department will establish key components of the statewide research hub funded by DESE’s federal Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant award. To support data alignment and evidence-based research across agencies from preschool to the workforce, work this year will include:

* **Conducting demonstration projects** and engaging in action-oriented research studies in support of agency priorities;
* **Developing public-facing dashboards and reports on priority indicators**, such as educator workforce diversity and use of high-quality curriculum; and
* **Coordinating with EOE IT on improved data infrastructure** to support integrated and user-friendly data access.

**7. Implementation of DESE’s racial equity decision-making tool.** The Department will provide additional department-wide training on its racial equity decision-making tool and customized training and support to identified centers, offices, and staff.