*****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:**  | February 8, 2022 |
| **Subject:** | Update on Competency Determination |

At the February 15 meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), I will update you on our work toward and anticipated timeline for arriving at a recommendation for a new competency determination (CD) standard for students in the class of 2026 and beyond.

**Background on the Competency Determination**

The Education Reform Act of 1993 established a new state standard (called the competency determination, or CD) for high school graduation: Students must meet the standards adopted by the Board through regulation and measured by the MCAS in order to be eligible for a Massachusetts high school diploma. The Commonwealth introduced MCAS testing in 1998. Starting with the class of 2003, all graduating students were required to earn the CD by scoring at the *Needs Improvement* level or higher on the grade 10 ELA and mathematics tests.

The Board subsequently raised the standard for the CD. Students since the class of 2010 must either earn a score of 240 (*Proficient*) on the grade 10 ELA and mathematics MCAS tests, or earn a score of 220 (*Needs Improvement*) and meet the course-taking requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP). They are also required to earn a score of *Needs Improvement* or higher on one of four high school science and technology/engineering (STE) tests.

Consistent with the Education Reform Act, the Board has adopted and periodically amended regulations that establish standards for the CD and MCAS appeals. The Department has implemented the program and related policies, including alternate pathways (MCAS-Alt, MCAS appeals) and retest opportunities.

**Transition to the Next-Generation MCAS Tests**

In November 2015, the Board voted to develop a next-generation MCAS testing program, with the intention of revising and upgrading the assessments to provide clear and accurate signals to students about whether they are on track for work at the next level, and, in high school, for the expectations of colleges, employers, and civic engagement. The transition to next-generation MCAS tests began with the first administration of new tests in grades 3–8 in spring 2017. The first next-generation high school tests were administered in spring 2019 in grade 10 ELA and mathematics.

During the transition to next-generation MCAS tests at the high school level, the Board voted to enact an "interim passing standard" for students in the first several classes to take the new high school tests, so as to ensure fairness, provide opportunity to prepare, and allow students, families, and educators to become familiar with the new tests before revisiting the requirements for the CD. The interim standard is defined as a similar level of achievement to the required standard on the legacy tests: 240 (*Proficient*), or 220 (*Needs Improvement*) and the fulfillment of the requirements of an EPP.

In September 2021, the Board voted to extend the interim passing standard through the class of 2025, in recognition of the unavoidable delays and changes in our plans caused by the pandemic. That vote also updated existing language to accurately reflect the pandemic-related delay in implementing the next-generation STE tests.

**Competency Determination Advisory Committee**

In the winter of 2020, the Department’s Office of Student Assessment began convening an advisory committee—composed of educators, administrators, policymakers, representatives from higher education, and other stakeholders—to assist me in preparing my recommendation to the Board regarding a new passing standard for the CD. Along with this advisory committee, I planned to engage and consult with the public and other stakeholders before presenting my recommendations to the Board in the spring of 2020, ensuring that we gathered information from representatives across the education, business, and community sectors as we decided how to define and implement a new competency determination.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of all testing in spring 2020, and the next-generation tests in STE (planned for that spring) were postponed until the spring of 2022, due to the ongoing uncertainties of the pandemic during the 2020–21 school year. The advisory committee, which had met several times, was also suspended.

The committee reconvened this fall and met three times between November and January. Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria, former president of Bridgewater State University and a former member of this Board, agreed to continue serving as chair, and most of the other members were able to return to serve as well (a list of past and current committee members appears on the next page). The committee recently completed its work and presented a set of considerations to me.

At the February meeting, I will update the Board on the outcome of the committee’s work. I will also present a proposed timeline for the Board to arrive at a decision regarding a new competency determination (CD) standard for students in the class of 2026 and beyond. Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability, and Associate Commissioner Michol Stapel, along with Dr. Mohler-Faria, will join us for the discussion on February 15.

**Competency Determination Advisory Committee Members**

*Members who served in 2019-2020 only are noted in italics*

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| Dana Mohler-FariaChair | Member of the Board of Directors, Cape Cod Foundation, and former president, Bridgewater State University |
| *Allison Balter* | *Director of ENLACE (Engaging Newcomers in Language and Content Education), Lawrence Public Schools* |
| Patrick Daly | Superintendent, North Reading Public Schools |
| Kate Devlin | Coordinator of Student Assessment, Greenfield Community College |
| Lourenço Garcia | Executive Director of Data and Accountability, Revere Public Schools |
| Maria Harris/Kristen D’Avolio | Director, Adult Education Program, Boston Public Schools |
| *Jordan Healy* | *Student, Granby High School* |
| Lorretta Holloway | Vice President of Enrollment and Student Development, Framingham State University |
| Ernest Houle | Superintendent-Director, Assabet Valley Regional Vocational School District |
| Alison Hramiec | Headmaster, Boston Day and Evening Academy |
| *Priti Johari* | *Chief Academic Officer, Academy of the Pacific Rim* |
| Yolanda Johnson | Executive Officer for Student Services, Springfield Public Schools  |
| Edward Lambert, Jr. | Executive Director, Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education |
| Pamela Nourse | Executive Director, Federation for Children with Special Needs |
| Paul Reville | Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and founding director of the Education Redesign Lab |
| Shigehito Tanaka | Assistant Principal, North Middlesex Regional High; former high school math teacher/ department head, Lawrence Public Schools |
| *Henry Thomas III* | *President and CEO, Urban League of Springfield* |
| Martin West  | Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |

**New members in 2021**

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| Jeannette Jimenez | Director of ENLACE, Lawrence Public Schools |
| Sam Offsey | Student, Lexington High School |
| Susan Szachowicz | Interim Deputy Superintendent, Brockton Public Schools |