*****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 19, 2022 |
| **Subject:** | IEP Improvement Project – Progress Report |

At the May 24, 2022 meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, we will present a progress report on the [IEP Improvement Project](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/default.html), a collaborative, multi-stage initiative to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Through the IEP Improvement Project, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is working with schools, families, and other stakeholders to update all aspects of the IEP (Individualized Education Program) process from initial student referral for evaluation through the development and implementation of the IEP.

A key recent step in this ongoing initiative was the release of the new “Referral, Evaluation, and Eligibility Guide” (REE) in fall 2021. The REE Guide replaces previous guidance called “Is Special Education the Right Service?” (ISERS) and is posted to the Special Education IEP Improvement Project [webpage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/default.html) as a [digital learning tool](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/guidance-rlo/index.html#/). In this online format, the information that schools, districts, and families need about the referral, evaluation, and eligibility processes is provided in a user-friendly visual format.

On April 28, 2022, the Department released a new [draft IEP form](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/draft-iep-form.xlsm) for initial public review (<https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/draft-iep-form.xlsm>) to begin the stakeholder feedback process. The new draft form is intended to replace the current IEP 1- IEP 8 forms and is available on the Special Education IEP Improvement Project [webpage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/default.html).

The following key elements guided the design of the new IEP forms:

* Student and family/caregiver voice;
* Data-driven and student-centered process;
* Strength-based approach;
* Focus on Least Restrictive Environment;
* Comprehensive plan for service delivery;
* Transition planning more directly included in the IEP process; and
* Simplification (usability, language, and eliminating redundancy).

In the coming months, the draft IEP form will be improved based on feedback from a variety of sources. An extensive list of stakeholders received notification of the release of the draft IEP form, and Department staff have begun presentations to various stakeholder groups to solicit their input. The sixteen schools and districts that volunteered to be “early adopters” of the new IEP form will receive training on the new form and will begin implementing it in IEP meetings at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Early adopters represent a wide variety of schools and districts from across the Commonwealth. They will give us feedback based on their experience using the form. The Department will continue to promote broad stakeholder engagement and will seek input from the public via a survey.

The Department anticipates that the new IEP form will be finalized by winter 2023. Further action steps will include:

* statewide training on the new form before the end of the 2022-2023 school year;
* updating the IEP Process Guide to reflect the new IEP forms;
* converting the IEP Process Guide to a digital learning tool in the 2022-2023 school year;
* revising “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education” in the 2022-2023 school year to reflect the information provided in REE and the revised IEP Process Guide.

The Department will continue to engage with the early adopters to identify best practices, strategies, and resources and identify additional training, professional development, and support that will be needed to promote successful implementation.

We believe the IEP Improvement Project is a key to improving special education programs and services across the Commonwealth and that it will benefit students with disabilities, their families, and the schools, districts, and educators that serve them. Deputy Commissioner Russell Johnston and Jamie Camacho, Director of Special Education Planning and Policy, will be at the May 24 meeting to answer your questions about the project.