*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

### 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906 Telephone: (781) 338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | January 17, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Improved IEP Guidance to Support Students with Disabilities |

This memorandum provides a brief progress report on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s initiative to improve special education services and outcomes for eligible students with disabilities across the Commonwealth through the [Individualized Education Program (IEP) Improvement Project](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ImproveIEP/default.html). The IEP Improvement Project comprises a suite of resources and supports for schools and families, including the following: guidance on student referral, evaluation, and eligibility; updated IEP forms; technical assistance to support implementation of the updated IEP forms; a process guide with detailed instructions on the updated IEP forms; an updated parent’s guide to special education; and a playbook to support collaboration between general and special education teachers.

The Department continues to make progress towards each of these key deliverables. In 2022, the Department released the “Referral, Evaluation, and Eligibility Guide” as a [digital learning tool.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/sped/eligibility-guide/index.html#/) The Department also created an [interactive guide](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/sped/parents-guide/index.html) that is a complement to “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education,” which will be updated after the updated IEP forms are finalized.

In spring 2022, the Department released new draft IEP forms (translated into multiple languages) and took two key steps to solicit stakeholder feedback: posting a feedback survey publicly so anyone interested in commenting on the draft forms could do so, and conducting multiple focus group sessions with families, school and district staff, advocacy organizations, and professional organizations to solicit direct feedback on the draft forms. Based upon the feedback from the survey and focus group sessions, the Department revised four critical portions of the draft form: *Communication, Concerns and Vision*; *Present Levels, Community/Interagency Connections and Transition Planning; Special Factors, Accommodations and Specially Designed Instruction;* and *Schedule Modification and Transportation.*

Since 2021, the Department has engaged 17 schools from 12 public school districts and 3 private special education schools as Early Adopters on this project. During fall 2022, the Early Adopter schools implemented the revised sections of the draft IEP during IEP meetings and provided the Department with feedback based upon their experiences. During this same time, the Department held additional focus group sessions on the revised sections of the draft IEP. Based upon feedback from the Early Adopters and additional focus group sessions, the Department is currently drafting the final version of the new IEP form which is anticipated to be ready for public release later this winter.

To support implementation of the new IEP, the Department is currently developing a full rollout plan which includes providing technical assistance to schools, districts, and their partners in implementing the new form. A vendor has been hired to provide technical assistance for external stakeholders including synchronous and asynchronous training and professional development on the IEP process. The strategies implemented by the Early Adopter schools will be shared as a playbook in spring 2023 to guide systems-level improvements designed to support improved outcomes for students with disabilities. It is expected that schools and districts will begin using the new IEP forms between fall 2023 and fall 2024.

Department staff, including Deputy Commissioner Russell Johnston and Director of Special Education Planning and Policy Jamie Camacho, will provide additional information on the IEP Improvement Project and respond to your questions at the January 24, 2023 Board meeting.