*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of Advisory Councils to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | October 20, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Update on Chronic Absenteeism |

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recently posted districts’ and schools’ chronic absenteeism rates for the 2022-23 school year. The data shows how many students missed at least 10 percent of the school year (in most cases, 18 days). It is clear that the Commonwealth is not immune from the struggles with chronic absenteeism that have affected schools throughout the country.

While attendance has improved since the pandemic’s peak, Massachusetts public schools’ chronic absenteeism rate grew by 72 percent between 2019 and 2023.

All grade spans – elementary, middle, and high schools – have chronic absenteeism rates well above pre-pandemic levels, and this is particularly true in elementary schools. During the last school year, the chronic absenteeism rate in elementary schools was more than double what it was before the pandemic.

High absenteeism rates are a problem that affects every type of school. Several times, I have heard people incorrectly assume that this was an issue for other schools and did not impact them, but the truth is that chronic absenteeism is a problem in rural, suburban, and urban schools in Massachusetts. It affects almost three quarters of the schools in our state.

Common sense and research both tell us that students’ academic performance suffers when they miss school. Absent students also miss out on the other supports that schools offer, including counseling, extracurricular activities, meals, and the chance to interact with and learn from their peers and trusted adults.

I have decided not to name any new underperforming or chronically underperforming schools this fall and will instead be shining a light and issuing a call to action onchronic absenteeism. I am optimistic that we can effectively partner with districts, schools, families, and students to address this issue. I look forward to sharing more information and discussing this subject with you on October 24.