*****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:**  | November 14, 2023 |
| **Subject:** | Chronic Absenteeism and Accountability Reporting |

At the November 21, 2023 meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board), I will update the Board on the process I will be undertaking to propose increasing the weight of chronic absenteeism in the district and school accountability system.

State and federal laws require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to implement a system of district and school accountability. Our state’s accountability system, as approved in the Massachusetts state plan under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), allows the Department to identify districts and schools that require assistance or intervention and those that are demonstrating success by looking at overall district, school, and student group performance across an [array of indicators](https://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/lists-tools/system-1pager-indicators.docx).

Among those indicators is chronic absenteeism, a student attendance measure that represents the percentage of students in a district, school, or group who miss 10 percent or more of the school year (in most cases, at least 18 days). As we discussed at the [October 2023 meeting](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2024/2023-10/) of the Board, [recent attendance data](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2024/2023-10/item1-powerpoint.pptx) shows that while student attendance has improved since the pandemic’s peak, all grade spans continue to demonstrate chronic absenteeism rates well above pre-pandemic times.

At present, chronic absenteeism is worth five percent of accountability calculations in the high school grade span and 10 percent in the non-high school grade span. These existing weights do not sufficiently highlight the depth and breadth of this issue. To that end, and to strengthen the sense of urgency around this matter, I intend to propose increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator in the state’s district and school accountability system this year.

At the November 21 meeting, I will ask Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability, to explain the process and timeline for bringing forth a recommendation to the Board on this change to the district and school accountability system. The process will include an opportunity for public comment. I look forward to discussing this topic with you.