# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:** | March 7, 2025 |
| **Subject:** | Career Technical Education: Proposed Amendments to Regulations on Vocational Technical Education, 603 CMR 4.0 (Recruitment and Admissions) |

I am presenting to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) proposed amendments to 603 CMR 4.00, the Regulations for Vocational Technical Education, for a vote to solicit public comment. As described in more detail below, these amendments relate to changes in admissions practices. The proposed amendments also address terminology – e.g., updating references to this type of education from “vocational” to “career technical.” With the Board’s approval, the Department will invite public comment on the proposed regulations and then present the comments and any recommended revisions to the Board for final action in May 2025.

Since October 2024, the Board has had three special meetings and three Career Technical Education (CTE) Committee meetings relating to the topic of admissions in CTE schools. As part of these presentations and during public comment, superintendents, parents, school committee representatives, principals, school counselors, and community advocates representing CTE and sending school communities have shared their experiences. Through the discussions, we have considered the full picture of how CTE schools connect with students beginning with recruitment through admission and enrollment.

These proposed regulations differ from the version we brought to you in February. They respond to concerns that Board members raised in February about student attendance and expression of interest. These updated regulations respond to both areas, by introducing a weighted lottery system in which all students who apply enter the lottery for admission, as described below.

**Weighted Admissions Lottery**

A weighted lottery system isa lottery for admission to a career technical education school or program in which all students are entered, and students who meet additional permitted criteria are given one additional weight per criterion.  A student with a weight of two has twice the chance of being selected in the lottery as a student with a weight of one. We have added this definition for “weighted lottery system” to the regulations. (See definition on page 6 of the proposed regulations.)

As proposed in these regulations, all students who apply to a CTE school or CTE program at a comprehensive school would enter a lottery, and students with fewer than 27 unexcused absences over 270 school days would receive an additional weight. Likewise, students who have not had major disciplinary infractions would receive an additional weight. Said another way:

* All students who apply enter the lottery.
* Students without major disciplinary infractions receive an extra weight.
* Students without 27 or more unexcused full school day absences in the prior 270 school days (roughly a year and a half before the date of their application), receive an extra weight.

A student with an extra weight is twice as likely to be admitted via lottery than a student without it. A student with two extra weights is three times as likely to be admitted than a student with no extra weights. This approach would acknowledge students’ positive attendance and discipline records while keeping the pathway to admission open to all who apply. The proposed lottery system for admission, outlined above, would apply beginning with the 2025-2026 admissions cycle, for students entering in fall 2026. (See section (6)(b), page 11.)

The proposed regulations also make clear that CTE schools and programs that choose to use selective criteria for students to enter the lottery process may only use one or both of the specified criteria, and only as part of a weighted lottery system. (See section (6)(d), page 12.)

**Student Interest**

We also heard your concerns that students should demonstrate their interest in pursuing career technical education. Accordingly, we have added language that would permit CTE schools and programs to require students to include an indication of interest in career technical education in their applications, provided that the CTE school or program holds at least two open houses and at least three virtual information sessions each school year. (See section (6)(c), page 12.)

Students will have a choice of ways to demonstrate their interest in CTE by any of the following:

* a non-evaluative interview
* attendance, at the invitation of the CTE school or program, to answer questions about their interest
* participation in a tour
* attendance at a presentation by a CTE school or program, a virtual information session, or an open house
* submission of an audio or video presentation or personal essay
* a letter of recommendation from a non-family member
* or any other measure proposed by a CTE school or program and approved by the Department.

The proposed regulations retain other provisions that were in the February document, including the section that requires sending districts to provide middle school students with information and opportunities to explore CTE schools and programs. (See section (6)(i), page 14.)

CTE schools and programs will be required—just as they are under the current regulations—to maintain waitlists, report data to DESE, and comply with applicable federal and state law and guidelines.

Elizabeth Bennett, Associate Commissioner of College, Career and Technical Education, Rob Curtin, Chief of Data, Assessment, and Accountability, Caitlin Looby of our legal staff, and Nicole Smith, Director of College, Career, and Technical Education, will join us for the discussion.

A redlined version of the regulations is attached, along with a motion to solicit public comment on the proposed amendments.

Enclosures:

603 CMR 4.00 Strikethrough version of relevant portion of regulations showing amendments

Motion: 603 CMR 4.00