Chapter 74 CVTE Emergency Admissions Guidance

The following is guidance from the Department regarding COVID-impacted admissions policy reviews for CVTE pathways. We recommend that this process be completed no later than the end of the calendar year or before you commence the 2021-2022 admissions process (whichever is sooner), to ensure transparency for students, families, and sending districts.

Process

- District submits proposed changes for feedback via email to Associate Commissioner Bennett (Elizabeth.L.Bennett@mass.gov).
- Office of CCTE reviews proposal for alignment with regulations and other current COVID guidance. (Our goal is to return all proposals within 2 business days.)
- District incorporates feedback into their proposed changes. (Technical assistance is available.)
- District school committee votes on changes.
- District submits formal proposal via email to DESE (Elizabeth.L.Bennett@mass.gov) summarizing key deviations from the currently approved policy due to COVID, the effective timeframe (is it just this year), date of school committee vote, and the policy with changes tracked/identified.
- DESE returns an approved or conditionally approved policy. (Again, our goal is 2 business days.)

Considerations

Below are potential considerations for districts as they determine changes to their admissions policies for this year due to COVID-19.

- While reviewing your policies, you may consider (although not required) revising the sections below (most likely impacted by COVID-19): recruitment, application, and selection.
- This guidance is aligned to the Chapter 74 Manual for Vocational Technical Education Admission Policies, with some considerations and ideas from the field in blue following the manual’s language, designed to minimize the impact of the barriers and challenges faced by many families due to COVID-19 to equitable access to C74 programs.

V. Recruitment Process

- Definition: A clear description of the procedures followed by the school to inform and recruit students.
- Requirements:
  1. The admission policy must contain a description of the procedures followed by the school to recruit applicants for the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th (if applicable) grades.
     The description must be clear and presented in logical order.
     The school personnel responsible for each procedure must be identified by position title.

Considerations:

- What events/materials are feasible given current public health and safety guidelines?
- How do you (try to) ensure events/materials reach all potential applicants?
  - Do events/materials take into consideration access to technology?
  - Do events/materials take into consideration home language?
- Whose voices are included in events/materials (students, staff, admin, parents/guardians, etc.)?
Some ideas from the field:

- Virtual Open House / tours
- In-person Open House events in controlled shifts for social distancing
- Promotional videos
- Zoom informational meetings with parents/guardians and students
- Utilize local media stations
- Distribute physical promotional items to public spaces safe for access by students and families
- Have students at the center of your materials/events

VI. Application Process

- **Definition:** A clear, step-by-step description of how 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th (if applicable) grade students actually apply to the school. This section should be presented as a set of instructions that can be used by student applicants. This section should not include specific dates that will vary from year to year. Instead, general dates should be used (i.e., early spring), and the reader should be referred to the school’s annual calendar or schedule for specific dates.
- **Requirements:**
  1. The admission policy must contain a description of how students apply to the school.
  2. The description must be clearly presented and capable of being understood by student applicants.
  3. Where to obtain the applications, where to return the completed application, etc. must be included.
  4. The policy must include the identification by position title of the person(s) responsible for submitting the names of applicants and/or completed applications to the school.
  5. The school’s procedure for collecting applications from sending schools and/or students must be included.

Considerations:

- Where and how can students access applications? Are hard copies still offered for those without access to technology? Are there computers available for students/families to apply online if that is the only format?
- Are applications offered in home language?
- Who is available to field questions about the application process? How?

Some ideas from the field:

- Applications available in guidance offices at middle schools, CVTE high schools, central school offices, public libraries, or other open public spaces where applications may be accessed safely
- Conducting virtual technical assistance (help sessions) between counselors and families as part of the application process

VII. Selection Criteria

- **Definition of Selection Criteria:** The factors used by the school to evaluate applicants for the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th (if applicable) grades. Each selective school in Massachusetts, which is selective in terms of admission, must use a combination of selection criteria to determine which applicants have an ability to benefit, and therefore, be admitted to the school, unless the school opts to use first come-first serve or a lottery for admissions. The criteria used shall include academic grades, attendance record, discipline/conduct record, and recommendations from sending-school personnel and may include student interview. However, no one criterion shall exceed fifty percent of the total. Schools may condition admission on a student having passed courses in English language arts (or the equivalent) and mathematics for the school year immediately preceding their enrollment in a selective vocational technical school or program. The criteria to be used by these schools are listed in this section, accompanied by the standards pertaining to them.
- **General Requirements** that pertain to all criteria have been established to ensure that all applicants are evaluated uniformly. These general requirements are listed in Part A below.
- **Specific Requirements** that pertain to only one criterion have been established to ensure that the school’s use of each criterion conforms to state and federal laws. These specific requirements are listed in Part B below and include:
  - Criteria:
    - Academic grades
    - Attendance record
    - Discipline/conduct record
    - Recommendations from sending-school personnel
    - Students interviews (Optional)

- **Recommendation:** All schools are required to develop a rating sheet to use when evaluating each applicant. Such rating sheets protect the interest of the school and the applicant.
- **All schools should adopt a standard system for defining and using admission criteria. Most schools have paid attention to the following principles for sound admission practice:**
Part A – General Requirements

1. The school must list and describe all the criteria used to evaluate applicants.
2. The school must assign a numerical/percentage weight to each criterion.
3. The school must describe, for each criterion, the specific factors it uses to assign scores to individual applicants.
4. No one criterion may be given a weight of over 50%.
5. No one criterion may have a minimum score required.

Considerations:
- Which terms or specific timelines do you consider in scoring the criteria?
- What have your sending schools done to track grades, attendance, and discipline during COVID? (Use this to best determine your course of action.)

Some ideas from the field:
- Host meetings with sending school counselors to coordinate this process.

Part B – Specific Requirements for each Selection Criterion

1) Academic Grades:
   a. Identify the overall numerical/percentage weight to be accorded for academic grades. A minimum score cannot be required.
   b. Identify the specific factors that will be used to assign scores to the applicant’s academic-grade record.
   c. Identify by name the academic courses that are evaluated for applications to each grade.
   d. Identify by grade level the school years that are evaluated for applications to each grade.

Considerations:
- How do Pass/Fail grades get scored? How do Pass/Fail compare to letter grades, particularly if you have sending schools with a mix of those options?

Some ideas from the field:
- Eliminating scoring of grades for the period of March 16, 2020 – June 2020
- Only utilizing first term for grade 7 (2019-2020) instead of a full year
- Equal points for districts using Pass/Fail and grades A-D/F to not penalize students in either sending district

2) Attendance Record:
   a. Identify the overall numerical/percentage weight to be accorded for the applicant’s attendance record. A minimum score cannot be required.
   b. Identify the specific factors that will be used to assign scores to the applicant’s attendance record.
   c. Identify by grade level the school years that are to be evaluated for application to each grade.
   d. Consider only unexcused absences (and only unexcused tardies, if applicable). As in the case with grades, the procedures for calculating attendance scores become problematic when attendance records need to be equated across sending schools. Excused versus unexcused absences may be defined differently. Some sending schools simply record absences rather than differentiating excused from unexcused absences. It is important to ask a sending school to define its terms. Is an excused absence recorded only when a student has a doctor’s excuse or is it excused if the parent writes a note? How does the school define a legitimate absence? Once you have determined these definitions, you can construct a comparison scale. This means that you need to have a careful and specific definition of what constitutes an excused absence. In conclusion, be sensitive to the justifiable reasons for excessive absence.

Considerations:
- How do different living situations, illnesses, food insecurity, sibling care, and other factors affect students and families in the COVID-impacted context?

Some ideas from the field:
- Not counting attendance for part (or all) of 2019-2020 and/or 2020-2021
3) **Discipline/Conduct Record:**
   a. Identify the numerical/percentage weight to be accorded to the applicant’s discipline/conduct record. A minimum score cannot be required.
   b. Identify the specific factors that will be used to assign scores to the applicant’s discipline/conduct record if the sending school did not use grades.
   c. Identify by grade level the school years that are to be evaluated for application to each grade.
   d. Identify all source(s) that will be used to obtain information about the applicant’s discipline/conduct record.

**Considerations:**
- How will the different delivery methods (in-person/hybrid/remote) impact disciplinary incidents for students across the district? Are the numbers allowing for a fair assessment of applicants?
  - Will stressors from the pandemic have brought occurrences in the current year up (particularly in schools who have returned to in-person learning)?

Some ideas from the field:
- Not counting discipline for part (or all) of 2019-2020 and/or 2020-2021

4) **Recommendation from Sending-School Personnel:**
   a. Identify the numerical/percentage weight to be accorded to the applicant’s recommendation(s). A minimum score cannot be required.
   b. Identify the specific factors that will be used to assign scores to the applicant’s recommendation(s).
   c. Identify by position/title the sending-school personnel responsible for the recommendations.
   d. All schools should develop rating sheets for applicants that are based on a numerical rating system and contain a clear list of the evaluative factors taken into account and an explanation of the importance of avoiding cultural/racial/gender bias.

**Considerations:**
- How has the reduced access to counselors due to COVID impacted counselors’ ability to provide fair recommendations for students? (This may also apply to teachers and teacher teams, who may not have engaged as deeply with each student during altered delivery methods.)

Some ideas from the field:
- Have the recommendation be from any school staff member who knows, and has worked directly with, the student

5) **Student Interviews:**
   a. Identify the numerical/percentage weight to be accorded to the applicant’s interview. A minimum score cannot be required.
   b. Identify the specific factors that will be used to assign scores to the applicant’s interview.
   c. If applicants are required to attend interviews outside normal school hours or away from their school of attendance, describe the accommodations available to applicants lacking their own transportation.
   d. If there are limited English proficient students in the school’s service region, describe the accommodations that will be made for limited English proficient applicants at the interview.
   e. All schools should develop rating sheets that are based on a numerical rating system and contain a clear list of the evaluative factors taken into account.
   f. All schools should develop guidelines for the interviewers, to ensure that the same standards are applied in all interviews. An explanation of the importance of avoiding cultural/racial/gender bias should be included in the guidelines.

**Considerations:**
- How will you conduct interviews safely?
- What medium will you use for interviews? If electronic, how will you ensure access to technology for all applicants?
- Are interviews conducted in home languages?

Some ideas from the field:
- Phone interviews
- Virtual interviews
VIII. Selection Process

Definition: The school’s procedure for evaluating applications and accepting/wait listing/rejecting applicants.

Requirements:
1. The school’s procedure for evaluating applicants for the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th (if applicable) grades must be included.
2. The school’s procedure for notifying all applicants of acceptance, wait listing or rejection and the date by which students will be notified must be included.
3. The school’s procedure for establishing waiting lists, and any other special provisions made by the school to accommodate students not accepted on the first round of applications must be included.

Considerations:
- Who is notifying students of their application status? When? How?
- Are notifications happening in home languages?

Some ideas from the field:
- Communicate electronically, via phone, and by standard mail

IX. Enrollment and Conditional Admission

Definition: The condition that must be met prior to enrollment (commencing classes). Schools shall condition admission on a student having been promoted to the grade that they have been admitted to enter. Schools may condition admission (conditional admission) on a student having passed courses in English language arts or the equivalent and mathematics for the school year immediately preceding their enrollment in a selective vocational technical school or program.

Requirements:
1. The requirement for having been promoted to the grade they have been admitted to enter and passing courses in English language arts or the equivalent and mathematics prior to enrollment (commencing classes) must be stated. If the school will allow makeup of the failed English and/or mathematics courses prior to commencing classes, the policy shall be stated.

Considerations:
- If schools are not back in full in-person learning by summer, how are you taking into consideration credit recovery options/modalities to help facilitate promotion and entrance?

Some ideas from the field:
- Accept remote/virtual summer school courses