



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - August 21, 2020

Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts, Vulnerable Students, Children of Teachers, Regional Calculations, and SOA Deadline

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents,

I would like to update you on several topics:

1. Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts

It is the Department's expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day. Having teachers and critical support staff in the school will be beneficial to students, teachers, staff, and administrators for several reasons, including, but not limited to:

- It allows students to develop and maintain a level of familiarity with a classroom environment, which will be beneficial when students transition back to in-person instruction.
- It provides more consistency for students, which is especially important for some students, including some students with disabilities.
- It allows the teacher to have access to a broad range of instructional materials that may not be available in each teacher's home, allowing the teacher to provide differentiated modes of instruction.
- It assures that the teacher will have reliable internet access and quicker access to technical support and/or backup devices, when necessary.
- It allows teachers to collaborate more easily with colleagues.
- It allows administrators to provide better support for teachers, where they are able to more readily observe instruction and provide real-time feedback and coaching.
- It allows administrators to monitor the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day, ensuring a more consistent experience across classrooms and student cohorts.
- It allows school teams to more quickly problem solve challenges, such as allocating a substitute for an absent teacher, quickly assigning additional support for a class or individual student, and resolving technology issues.
- It provides teachers with dedicated workspace in which to carry out their work duties, which will support equitable working environments for educators.

2. In-Person Instruction for Vulnerable Students

If a district receives a red designation for a high average daily case rate in the [Department of Public Health's weekly update](#), the decision to continue to provide in-person instruction to vulnerable students (including those with disabilities, English learners, and students who have not engaged with remote learning) needs to be made at the local level. Solely receiving a red designation does not in any way automatically mean that all in-person services have to be discontinued. In fact, DESE recommends that districts continue to provide as much in-person instruction as possible to vulnerable students using the key safety protocols outlined in our [reopening guidance](#) (*download*).

3. Children of Teachers

Recognizing the critical need districts are facing to staff their schools this fall, and to provide support to teachers, I am making the following recommendations:

- (i) Our guidance has previously indicated that districts that have adopted a hybrid or remote learning model should prioritize high-needs students for full-time, in-person learning. I recommend these districts also further prioritize children of teachers for full-time, in-person instruction when feasible. Since the models will vary by district, districts will decide locally what constitutes full-time instruction for these students.
- (ii) I am also recommending that districts that are providing remote instruction allow teachers who are reporting to their schools to provide instruction to bring their own children to school with them for child care purposes, if feasible.

More detailed information will be forthcoming.

4. Regional Calculations

The Department of Public Health (DPH) recently began releasing a [weekly, color-coded health metric](#) for all municipalities in the Commonwealth. The majority of school districts align directly with a municipality on the DPH weekly report. However, there are many districts that serve students from multiple municipalities (e.g. regional school districts, charter schools, and vocational districts).

In an effort to assist all districts and schools in aligning with the DPH weekly report, DESE has assigned all school districts a “key municipality” (the city you should reference) that should be used to determine their alignment to the DPH health metric. [The “key municipality” in the attached file](#) (*download*) was derived by selecting the municipality where the greatest percentage of enrolled students in the district reside. While the DPH weekly report will change depending on the course of the virus, the assigned key municipality will remain constant for the 2020-21 school year (i.e. districts should look to this municipality for reference throughout the school year). If you have any questions about this item, please email Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin at Robert.C.Curtin@mass.gov.

5. New SOA Plan Deadline

To allow districts to focus on reopening plans and delivery of robust instruction, consistent with [St. 2020, Ch. 56, § 9](#), I am extending the deadline for school districts and charter schools to submit Student Opportunity Act (SOA) plans. The new deadline is **Friday, January 15, 2021**. We thank those who have already submitted their SOA plans. There will be opportunities to amend the SOA plans if necessary. Current guidance on SOA plans is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/soa.html>, and guidance specific to charter schools is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=soa-plan-temp>.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner