

A message from the
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

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July 27, 2020

Commissioner's WEEKLY UPDATE

News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley and the Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

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1. Additional Staff Training Days this Fall

Educators and staff are essential to our preparations for a safe and successful fall school reopening. Following collaborative discussions with the Massachusetts Teachers' Association, AFT-Massachusetts, and the Boston Teachers' Union, Commissioner Riley announced today that school districts will have 10 additional days at the start of the 2020-2021 school year to prepare for the reopening of schools.

To provide sufficient training for educators and staff, Commissioner Riley is reducing the 180 day and student learning time requirements for the 2020-21 school year to 170 days and 850 hours (for elementary schools) and 935 hours (for secondary schools), so long as districts begin providing instruction to students no later than September 16, 2020.

reopeningk12@mass.gov no later than Friday, August 14, 2020 and must include a full description of the justification for the request.

2. Guidance on Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations, Remote Learning, Transportation, and Facilities:

Over the last week, DESE has released guidance documents on four subjects as supplements to the [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#). Please note that DESE's guidance documents are subject to change depending on COVID-19 trends and as more is learned about the virus from medical research. The recent guidance documents are:

Transportation: The Transportation Guidance is focused on supporting districts as they develop a transportation strategy that provides safe conditions for all students and staff traveling by bus while also maximizing in-person learning. Districts' strategies should:

1. **Follow the medically-advised health and safety requirements** for school bus transportation;
2. **Address bus capacity challenges** created by the physical distancing requirements by considering strategies such as adding bus routes, staggering schedules, and pursuing a waiver for student learning time requirements if needed; and
3. **Take proactive steps to promote safe alternative transportation options** for students, including family-provided transportation, walking, and biking, as appropriate.

Facilities: The Facilities and Operations Guidance provides details and considerations for schools' physical plants and grounds, as well as operational protocols based on the most recent information about COVID-19 and related mitigation practices. The document has sections on preparing spaces, making modifications, and developing operational protocols.

Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations: chorus, band, theater, musical theater, dance, visual arts, and physical education. **The arts, physical education, and other enrichment courses are an integral part of the learning experience for every student at every grade level, and DESE strongly encourages schools and districts to continue providing these classes to students this fall. Adaptations to these courses, however, are necessary to ensure the safety of students and staff.**

Remote Learning: This guidance provides additional detail on remote learning expectations, program models districts may consider, and considerations for implementing various models. The document includes:

- Important information about policy requirements and related guidance for remote learning this fall,

learning option for a school or district.

The Department will continue to issue new guidance and update existing guidance as necessary.

Picture of the Week:

Uxbridge High School was one of several schools that held outdoor graduation ceremonies this weekend. Here, science teacher Tracy Larkin poses with two of the graduates. Congratulations to the Class of 2020! *(Photo courtesy of Tracy Larkin)*



4. Preparing to Transition Young Children Back to School:

As districts prepare to welcome young children and their families to school, there are many questions about how to best support this transition. The Pyramid Model Consortium will hold a webinar at **12:30 p.m. on Monday, August 3** about [strategies for a seamless re-opening in early childhood settings](#), focused on the social emotional needs of young children amid COVID-19. This webinar will specifically look at how to embed the current guidance from DESE into daily interactions, schedules, and routines. Please [register online](#).

5. Food Assistance Resources to Share with Families:

The Baker-Polito Administration has launched a food assistance decision tree

[assistance](#).

6. Center for Instructional Support Program Catalog 2020-2021:

The [Center for Instructional Support](#) Program Catalog for 2020-2021 is now available! Educators from across the state are invited to participate in DESE's 2020-2021 free network and workshop offerings. They will take place both in-person and online, and DESE is prepared to change any offering scheduled as an in-person event to an online format if needed. Please join DESE and collaborate across districts to learn, test and refine tools and strategies, and innovate. Download the entire list of network and workshop offerings [here](#)!

7. Data Collection for the 2020 School Health Profiles Surveys Resumes:

Data collection for the 2020 School Health Profiles (Profiles) have resumed after being halted in order to prioritize the health, safety, and education of the Commonwealth's students during pandemic-related school closures. The coronavirus has made schools' responses to these questionnaires more important than ever before. **Profiles is the only data collected nationally on school health-related policies and practices**, and schools' input will help to inform decisions made here in the Commonwealth and by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Principals and lead health teachers of middle and high schools with outstanding questionnaire responses have received an email with details on completing and submitting the questionnaires. Anyone with questions can email OSFS.Schoolbasedsurveys@doe.mass.edu.

8. For your info:

- **2020 Summer Nights Initiative:** The Baker-Polito Administration recently announced the 2020 Summer Nights initiative, which will provide youth with socially distant programming at Massachusetts state parks and other locations through Friday, August 21. The program operates through 14 local organizations and serves young people in Boston (the
- **Keeping kids active this summer:** [Team Long Run](#), a Maine-Based organization, offers "[Getting Started Running](#)", a free, eight-week, online training program made for ages 12 and up and featuring daily videos that outline the exercises for the day. The organization also has the "[Active Play for Any Age](#)" video series, which

neighborhoods), Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester. A full list of programming and other information is available on the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Summer Nights Initiative [webpage](#).



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