

February 1, 2021

Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant St
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Commissioner Riley,

As organizations committed to education equity and racial justice, we, like you, are deeply concerned about the many ways that the COVID-19 pandemic is widening educational disparities that were vast long before it. Through our own work with students, families and educators, through news coverage and family surveys, we know that there are big differences along racial and economic lines in how students are learning this year. As the school year continues to unfold, however, it is becoming increasingly clear just how much we all – including parents, advocates, and even educators – do *not* know about student learning experiences amidst COVID-19, or what the long-term educational impacts of these disruptions are likely to be.

We do not know, for example, what percent of students are learning entirely online, or what day-to-day attendance looks like. We do not know how many students have become disconnected from school, how many are still lacking internet access, or how any of these critical indicators differ for students of color, students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, or students with disabilities. This lack of data and transparency not only hinders efforts to support students and families in this moment, but undermines planning for a strong recovery – for how can we plan to build back stronger when we do not know what the foundation we're building on looks like?

We appreciate and support the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) recent steps to provide families, educators and the public with more information on student learning experiences and outcomes. The [results](#) of DESE's district survey on synchronous learning offer vital data on schooling experiences of students across the state. Your recently-announced [approach to MCAS assessments](#) this year strikes the right balance between ensuring that families and educators will have important information on student learning during the pandemic, while pausing the stakes that usually accompany the tests.

But synchronous learning hours and MCAS results are just two of the many pieces of data needed to understand what has and hasn't been happening for students this year, how learning experiences vary by student group, and where to go from here. We urge DESE to collect and disseminate data such as those enumerated below to help stakeholders across the state not only improve supports for students and families in this moment, but to plan for a post-pandemic future. We also recommend that DESE require districts to disseminate these data within their localities. While we recognize that such data collection will require staff time at both state and district levels, we hope that both DESE and individual districts can use a small portion of significant new federal stimulus funding to offset these costs.

Specifically, we recommend that DESE collect and publish the following information:

A note on data disaggregation: *The pandemic's disproportionate impacts on historically underserved communities make understanding the disparate experiences of different groups of students and families that much more important. All student count/percentage data should be disaggregated by student group (each major racial/ethnic group, economically disadvantaged status, English learner status, disability status). In districts where students are learning via different models (e.g., some are remote while others are in hybrid learning), data should also be disaggregated by learning model.*

1. Learning format

Where applicable, these data should be collected and reported quarterly for remaining quarters in the 2021 school year, as well as cumulatively (September through end of reporting period)

- How many students are learning completely remotely, in a hybrid model, or in-person?
- How many students enrolled in English learner programs (such as dual language) are learning remotely, in a hybrid model, or in person?
- For districts using hybrid and/or in-person models, how are students who have selected to stay remote learning? (E.g., taking separate live classes, streaming live classes happening at school, learning asynchronously, etc.).
- For districts using hybrid and/or in-person models, how many attend a remote learning center (a group setting run by an out-of-school time or childcare provider)? For how many is the district paying at least part of attendance costs?
- How many remote learning centers has the district formally partnered with?
- For districts that are remote, what are the criteria for identifying students eligible for in-person schooling due to disability or other reasons? How many students fit those criteria?
- How many students who fit criteria for in-person schooling are actually attending school in-person?

2. Student attendance and participation

Where applicable, these data should be collected and reported quarterly for remaining quarters in the 2021 school year, as well as cumulatively (September through end of reporting period)

- How is the district measuring attendance for students who are learning remotely, in hybrid models, and in-person, respectively?
- What is the average student attendance rate, by student group?
- What percent of students are attending school less than:
 - 90% of school days (i.e., are chronically absent)?
 - 70% of school days?
 - 50% of school days?
- What percent of students attending less than 50% of the time has the district successfully contacted via phone or home visit?
- How many students attending less than 50% of the time has the district successfully re-engaged?

3. Access to technology

- What percent of students do not have a personal (including district-issued) laptop or tablet?
- What percent of students have internet speeds below 50 Mbps?
- What percent of students received a district-issued device?
- What percent of students received district-issued internet access (e.g., through a hot spot, or district-paid account)?

- Does the district expect to allow students to keep district-issued devices and internet once in-person instruction resumes?

4. Student learning and postsecondary preparation

Where applicable, these data should be collected and reported quarterly for remaining quarters in the 2021 school year, as well as cumulatively (September through end of reporting period)

- Is the district assigning grades to students this year?
- How many students are receiving a failing grade in at least one class?
- How many students are at risk of failing (i.e., earning a D or less) in at least one class?
- How many students who are at risk of failing or failing at least one class are receiving supplemental support from the district or school (such as one-on-one or small-group tutoring)?
- Did the district administer diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the school year for any grade levels?
 - If so, which grade levels/subjects? What assessments did the district use?
 - Did the district share results of the assessments with families?
- Does the district plan to use diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the 2021- 2022 school year at any grade levels?
 - If so, which grade levels/subjects? What assessments will the district be using?
- How many juniors and seniors, respectively, have had at least one one-on-one call/meeting with a guidance counselor about postsecondary plans?
- How many seniors have submitted their FAFSA (by district and school)?
- *Note: In addition to these new metrics, we urge DESE to continue collecting and publishing existing indicators, such as arts course taking, MassCore completion, 9th grade course passing rates, MCAS results, etc.*

5. Additional student and family supports

- How often does the district require school staff to reach out *to all families*? (No requirement, weekly, twice a month, monthly)
- How often does the district require school staff to reach out to families *whose child is frequently absent or struggling academically*?
- How many students have had at least one meeting or call with a school counselor, social worker, school psychologist or similar this year? More than one meeting?
- Has the district conducted a survey of families to gather their feedback on how school is going this year? How about a survey of students?
- How many students are enrolled in an after-school program, virtually or in person?

6. Teacher support

- Has the district conducted a survey of teachers to gather their feedback on working conditions and support they have received this year?
- For districts that are hybrid or remote, how many hours of professional development on delivering quality remote instruction did teachers receive?
- How many teachers are receiving coaching support to help them deliver hybrid or remote instruction?
- How many hours of professional development on trauma-informed practice or supporting students' social-emotional well-being during the pandemic did teachers receive?

- How many teachers are teaching remotely only, in-person only, in-person and remotely on different days, and in-person and remotely simultaneously, respectively? How many have taken a leave of absence for the year?
- What is the average daily teacher attendance rate?
- On average, what percent of classes are taught by substitute teachers? Does the district have enough substitutes for all classes requiring coverage?
- What percent of teachers (by teacher race/ethnicity) who were employed full-time in each district and school in SY 2020 are still teaching in the same district? In the same school?

By collecting and disseminating these data, DESE would not only help Massachusetts plan for a stronger recovery and better leverage new federal stimulus dollars, but would set an example for states across the country, and for the Biden Administration, which has made increasing transparency regarding education during the pandemic a priority.

As challenges undoubtedly persist and we move through this pandemic and towards recovery, we remain committed to working with you to ensure all students in Massachusetts receive an equitable educational experience, and that families receive the necessary support so that they can thrive.

Respectfully and with gratitude,

