



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

May 8, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

On behalf of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), thank you for your partnership and for helping make education possible for all children in the state during these difficult times. The importance of students' and families' health and well-being is never far from our minds. As a parent, I know that having schools in session, but school buildings closed, can be confusing and upsetting for students. As commissioner of K-12 public education in Massachusetts, my goal is to help all students stay safe and continue their learning.

As you know, in an effort to prevent further spread of COVID-19, the Governor has closed school buildings for the rest of this school year. Teaching and learning continue to take place remotely. The Department has helped schools respond through four phases of work.

1. The **first phase** began in mid-March, when schools were required to close for three weeks. The Department focused on student safety, nutrition, and other basic needs. Meeting these needs continue to be top priorities.
2. The **second phase** started in late March, when schools were required to close through early May. The Department provided initial [guidance to schools](#) (on March 24) and a [letter to families](#) (on March 30) along with a list of [educational resources](#) for remote learning.
3. We are currently in the **third phase**. We now know that schools will be closed through the end of the school year (late June for most schools). Because of this, we released [updated guidance on remote learning](#) (*download*) on April 24 to help schools strengthen local efforts.
4. We are also thinking ahead to the **fourth phase**, when students and staff will eventually re-enter school buildings. We are working with school leaders, and health and safety experts to plan and prepare for this.

Schools and teachers have been doing their best to support your children with remote learning. In your community this may or may not include online learning (using computers, tablets, phones, etc.), but remote learning can include any combination of resources supported by the school and teacher

to help your child make progress in their education while classes are unable to be together.

For more details about the updated remote learning guidance and other resources that may be helpful during school closures, please see the School Connectedness document that follows this letter. This letter will be posted on our [Learning at Home](#) web page, and other information is also available there.

Thank you again for all you are doing to help your children learn, connect with their teachers, and continue important daily routines. If you have other questions for us not addressed here, you can email [COVID19K12ParentInfo@mass.gov](mailto:COVID19K12ParentInfo@mass.gov) or call (781) 338-3700.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

# SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS



Information for Students' Families During the [COVID-19](#) School Closures

Thank you for all you are doing to support your child's **education** during these challenging times!

## REMOTE LEARNING

### *Preparing our students for the next grade level*

- Schools are updating learning plans to include what is most helpful for students to learn so they can be best prepared for next year. You can find on the Department's website some of the most important things students need to know in [elementary, middle, and high school](#).
- Schools are working with students and families to help ALL students engage in remote learning, with various ways of strengthening the learning experience.

### *What happens during remote learning*

- Connections between students and families, teachers, and other school staff.
- Learn what's most important to prepare for the next grade level.
- Practicing what students have learned.
- Movement, exercise, and play.
- Other activities like dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts.
- Examples of [remote learning options for families](#) can be found on the DESE website.

### *Communication and interaction are important during this time of remote learning*

- Many students and educators miss learning in person and being part of a community.
- Students, teachers, and other school staff can develop many ways to communicate with each other. This can support feeling connected, learning, health, and wellness.
- Schools and families are encouraged to support students' learning for approximately one-half the time of a regular school day. For many students this is about 2.5 to 3 hours.
- Some schools may have changed their grading system to try to be as fair as possible to students during the school closures. For example, schools may be awarding class credit (instead of giving grades) for solid effort and giving "no credit" (instead of a failing grade) for no effort. Please ask your teachers if you're not sure what's required, how it will be graded, or what is needed to earn credit for the class.
- Please also ask your teachers or other school staff if you're not sure how to find information or get additional help.
- If your child is having difficulty, is anxious or scared, or if you have other concerns, please reach out to your teacher so that they can help connect you with other resources that the school can provide.

Health, safety, and wellness are our top priorities

If you have questions that are not addressed here: <mailto:covid19k12parentinfo@mass.gov> / (781) 338-3700

# OTHER SCHOOL INFORMATION

## *School Calendar*

- To help keep everyone safe, all public and private schools (except residential special education programs) will remain closed through the end of the school year.
- Remote learning will continue through the end of the current school year (late June for most schools).

## *MCAS Testing and State Graduation Requirements*

- The spring 2020 state MCAS tests for students in grades 3-10 are canceled and will not take place.
- For 12th graders who have not passed one or more of the high school MCAS tests, ask your school for information about how successfully [completing certain courses](#) may fulfill the state's graduation requirement (competency determination).

## *Bullying and Harassment*

- If you believe that you or your children have experienced bullying or harassment related to the COVID-19 outbreak or if this happens in the future, please contact your school's civil rights officer or principal or your superintendent's office.
- You may also contact our Problem Resolution System Office (781-338-3700 or [compliance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:compliance@doe.mass.edu)).

## *Special Education*

- Special education services will be provided differently than they are when school is fully operational. Schools will continue to develop and expand ways to provide special education services remotely.
- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), members of your child's special education team will check in with you (and you can reach out to them) to help you and your child access services. IEP meetings are not needed in order for the school to provide services remotely.
- Additional resources for families of students with disabilities can be found in this April 9 [letter](#) and [toolbox](#).

# ADDITIONAL HELP FOR FAMILIES

## **Food Assistance**

To find a site near you, please visit the [Project Bread meal site finder online](#), or contact them by phone at 800-645-8333. Additional resources can be found through the Department of Transitional Assistance about [benefits](#) and [common questions](#).

## **Childcare**

[Exempt Emergency Child Care Program Guidance for Families](#), [Massachusetts Income Support Programs for Unemployed Workers During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

## **Housing and Homeless Resources**

[Family Resource Centers](#); [Department of Housing and Community Development, Emergency Assistance Shelter Intake](#) (866-584-0653); [Department of Children and Families, Child-at-Risk Hotline](#): 1-800-792-5200; [Massachusetts Migrant Education Program](#).

## **Emotional Health and Well-being**

Resources to help boost emotional health and well-being from the [Department of Mental Health](#), including [resources for reducing stress and healthy coping, tips and activities for children](#), and [mental health crisis support](#), and more.

## **Out-of-School Access & Internet Safety**

[Get help with home internet access.](#)

