

TO: Chairperson and Members, Boston School Committee

FROM: Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent

DATE: January 27, 2021

SUBJECT: Proposal for Flexibility of Policies for School Year 2020-2021

Throughout School Year 2020-2021, the district has been implementing a plan for equitable recovery from learning interruptions resulting from school closures during School Year 2019-2020. Our strategy has focused on a strong, standards-aligned instructional plan that addresses students’ unfinished learning while incorporating social and emotional learning practices. At the same time, we have been assessing the COVID-19 pandemic’s continued impacts on our students, and we recognize the need to temporarily alter some of our policies in order to provide our students with the best possible chance of academic success during this challenging and unprecedented time. As a result, I am recommending a temporary flexibility of the policies governing promotion/retention, attendance, graduation requirements, and Advanced Work Class (AWC) for School Year 2020-2021, and I am recommending that the School Committee grant me the temporary authority to determine the appropriate standards for these policies for the remainder of the school year.

Below is a summary of each existing policy, changes that were temporarily approved by the School Committee or DESE for School Year 2019-2020, temporary changes that have been implemented during School Year 2020-2021 (if applicable), and proposed changes for the remainder of School Year 2020-2021. Additional data will be provided in our presentation to you on January 27, 2021.

Promotion & Retention	
Policy	Policy (implemented by CAO-01 Circular): Students are promoted to the next grade level based on earning a passing grade in identified classes and earning a passing score on identified assessments.



Key Changes for SY 2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No students retained ● Students with academic concerns received a personalized Student Success Plan ● Summer learning provided to students whose parents requested consideration for retention
Proposed Changes for SY 2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retention will require school leader sign off ● Students with academic concerns receive a personalized Student Success Plan ● Summer learning provided to students whose parents request consideration for retention ● Summer school, tutoring or other supplemental learning may be required
Relevant Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1,117 students were identified to be retained between June and October 2020, compared to 1,984 students the prior year. ● Black and Latinx male students, as well as SWD and ELs, account for a disproportionate share of retentions.

Attendance	
Policy	<p><u>Policy</u> (implemented by <u>ACA-18 Circular</u>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A student must attend school for at least a half-day to be marked “present” (~3 hrs) ● A student with 3+ unexcused absences in a term or 12+ unexcused absences for the school year will be graded “No Credit” ● Principals bear final responsibility for improving attendance in their schools and for ensuring staff compliance ● Students with 3+ unexcused absences referred to a Student Support Team (SST) ● Teachers record attendance daily
Key Changes for SY 2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attendance recorded for every day of the week by 11am on Friday ● Present: Student engaged in some or all remote learning opportunities ● Absence: Student was absent from scheduled learning activities ● No contact: Teacher was unable to make any contact with the student
Proposed Changes for SY 2020-2021	<p>See <u>BPS District Protocol SY 2020-2021 Reopening Student Attendance, COVID-19 Pandemic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DESE released a memo in the summer on attendance and clarified that normal attendance expectations & policies apply for SY20/21 ● Teachers are required to take attendance for <u>remote</u> and <u>in-person</u> students

	<p>daily.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers should identify alternative methods to determine asynchronous attendance, although the new DESE structured learning time requirements require daily synchronous learning
Relevant Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The average daily attendance rate (ADA) for SY20-21 is 90%, which is slightly lower than previous years (ADA ranged from 91.9% to 92.9% between 2014-15 and 2019-20).

Assessment	
Policy	<p>Promotion Policy (implemented by CAO-2 Circular)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students must pass certain benchmarks in ELA and Math to be promoted to the next grade level and earn a passing grade Students who do not meet at least one benchmark in required grade levels must attend a summer program Students in grades 11 and 12 who have not passed MCAS should attend a summer program
Key Changes for SY 2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in grades 3-11 complete 2 ELA and 2 Math assessments aligned to DESE-identified prerequisite standards Assessments consist of 5-8 items and take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete K0-2 students have ELA skill development monitored using adaptive learning platforms like Lexia Core5, Imagine Learning, and Exact Path Utilized these and other data for summer learning recruitment
Proposed Changes for SY 2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For SY20-21, schools are expected to administer a common ELA and Math assessment in each grade level at least twice. Schools may use a district-supported assessment (MAP Fluency, MAP Growth, BPS Interims) or choose their own assessment.
Relevant Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>MAP Fluency and MAP Growth Reading</u>: Across grades K2-11, 23,257 students (53%) participated across 99 schools in the fall window. <u>BPS Interims</u>: 29% of BPS students in grades 2-11 participated in ELA Interim 1 across 62 schools and 33% of BPS students in grades 2-11 participated in Math Interim 1 across 64 schools.

Graduation

Policy	Policy (implemented by CAO-01 Circular): Students are required to satisfy the MA State Competency Determination (CD) requirements by passing the MCAS in ELA, Math, and Science.
Key Changes for SY 2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BESE authorized an emergency waiver for the CD requirement by which students could demonstrate competency in a tested subject through district certification of student completion of an aligned course. • 12th grade students who earned “incomplete” for Term 3 were guaranteed the opportunity to participate in summer remote learning and improve their Term 3 grade.
Proposed Changes for SY 2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BESE will be voting on 1/26 to extend the modified process from SY 2019-2020 to the class of 2021.
Relevant Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79% of the current senior class (Class of 2021) have satisfied all CD requirements. • 14 MCAS appeals have been submitted so far this year, with planned submission of 50 more in February. Additional appeals may be submitted through the spring.

Advanced Work Class (AWC)	
Policy	Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility for AWC is determined by the student’s scores on the TerraNova (3rd edition) test, which is offered in the fall to all 3rd grade students. It is also offered on select weekend test dates during the fall for students in grades 4 and 5 without previous TerraNova scores.
Proposed Changes for SY 2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause the current policy for one year. • Fill the 4th grade AWC seats with students in the 5 schools - Condon, Jackson-Mann, Murphy, Ohrenberger and Quincy. • No new students in the grade 5 and 6 classes as very few seats open in these grades. • Launch a working group to look at long term recommendations in light of dwindling demand and enrollment, and prior district determination that AWC is an inequitable program model.
Relevant Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of students entering AWC in 4th grade has declined by over half in the last seven years, from 303 in SY14-15 to 116 in SY20-21, for which there were 141 applicants. • Fewer than 20 students per year enroll in AWC from outside the district,

	<p>and the majority of students enrolling in AWC come from the same school (53%).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Over 90% of the 116 students entering AWC in 4th grade this year are enrolled in three schools: the Murphy K-8, Quincy Elementary, and the Ohrenberger.● For SY20-21, 453 students received invitations and 116 enrolled in 4th grade AWC. 60% of invitations went to white and Asian students. 71% of students enrolled are white and Asian.
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Recommendation:

Based on the information presented in this summary, I am recommending the granting of temporary flexibility of these policies for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. The flexibility of these policies will help to mitigate some of the continued academic challenges faced by our students during the COVID-19 pandemic and will allow us to further develop equity-centered strategies that strive to close opportunity and achievement gaps.