*****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

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | December 8, 2020 |
| **Subject:**  | Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework Draft – Review and Recommendation to Invite Public Comment |

This memorandum provides an overview of proposed revisions to the 1999 [*Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum Framework*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/foreign/1999.pdf) and outlines anticipated next steps in the process, for discussion by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) at the meeting on December 15, 2020. The framework includes learning standards that outline the expectations for what students should know and be able to do, as well as other material such as the vision and guiding principles designed to support effective instruction.

Enclosed with this memo is a draft of the proposed revised framework, henceforward called the *Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework*. This draft includes the introductory materials for the framework as well as new standards emphasizing social and emotional wellbeing and social justice. I recommend that the Board vote to invite public comment on the draft framework. After reviewing the comments and making further revisions as needed, I expect to bring the final revised standards back to the Board for adoption in spring 2021.

Enclosed with this memo is the proposed *Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework*, as well as a summary of the main changes in the revised framework.

**Framework Review Process and Priorities**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) launched the review in August 2019 and set a goal for bringing the final revised framework to the Board in January 2021, then developing resources to support implementation. The work has proceeded well even through the pandemic, although we had to shift the timetable for the final framework by a few months. The review is now in Phase 4 of the five-phase process, as outlined in an attachment to this memo.

The Department solicited public input on the 1999 framework through a study led by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). This study consisted of a literature review, a comparative analysis, and a survey, which invited Massachusetts world language educators to provide feedback on the 1999 framework.

After receiving the results of CAL’s study (attached to this memo), the Department partnered with several key stakeholder organizations, such as the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (MaFLA), the Eastern Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (EMFLA), the State Student Advisory Council (SSAC), and the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). The goal of our outreach to these groups was to involve these partners to the maximum extent possible in the revision process. Key leaders from MaFLA, EMFLA, and SSAC were involved in all levels of the review process. Volunteers from MCDHH reviewed the framework for inclusivity and applicability of the standards as they relate to American Sign Language.

Representatives of these key stakeholder groups joined diverse world language educators to form review panels. These panels included: active and retired K-12 world language teachers, department heads and administrators, higher education faculty, and current high school students associated with the Global Outreach subcommittee of SSAC. The members provided content knowledge and expertise in the teaching and learning of a variety of world languages among diverse age groups and in a variety of program types. They also represented the regions of the Commonwealth, types of districts (e.g., urban, suburban, rural), types of schools (including charter schools and language immersion schools), and professional organizations. The Department selected current practitioners to facilitate these review panels and convene regular meetings.

In addition to the review panelists and facilitators, the Department convened teams of specialized content teachers in the field of world languages to provide feedback about the standards as they relate to less commonly taught languages and various student populations. This content advisory team consisted of educators with expertise in languages with diverse written representations, classical languages, and American Sign Language, and with expertise in teaching heritage speakers/signers, elementary students, and students with disabilities. A complete list of facilitators and members of the review panels and the content advisory team is included on pages 3-4 of the *Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts World Languages Framework.*

Based on input from the field and the CAL study, the priorities for the revision of the 1999 framework are to:

* Align the Massachusetts World Languages Framework to the 2015 World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages produced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), commonly referred to as the ACTFL standards, which are widely used now in Massachusetts schools;
* Increase focus on social and emotional wellbeing and social justice inherent in acquiring languages and gaining familiarity with multiple cultures; and
* Replace the term *foreign* languages with *world* languages.

**Alignment to ACTFL Standards**

A strong majority of Massachusetts educators and other states’ educational agencies recommend and/or use the ACTFL standards. In fact, in the 2019 CAL survey of practitioners, respondents indicated a higher degree of familiarity with key elements of the ACTFL standards than with the 1999 *Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum Framework*. Respondents also indicated that the ACTFL standards convey greater importance, relevance to teaching context, usefulness in planning lessons, guiding assessment, and ease of finding high-quality resources than the 1999 Foreign Language Curriculum Framework. In order to align the Massachusetts framework to the ACTFL standards, the teams recommended two major changes from the 1999 *Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum Framework* and we have incorporated these changes.

1. **Content standards are organized by proficiency level rather than grade level** – Given the varying entry points for world language study and the diverse program types in Massachusetts, this framework organizes the standards by the students’ skill level with the language, rather than their grade level.
2. **ACTFL proficiency descriptors are maintained in the internal structure of content standards –** Characteristics of language that students produce and/or interpret are described and aligned both horizontally and vertically. Color-coded text allows educators to see how student skills will advance through the levels.

**Social Justice (SJ) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**

The Department’s [strategic plan](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/StrategicPlan-Summary.pdf), research-based innovations in world language instruction and methodology, and review panel facilitators representing MaFLA, EMFLA, and SSAC indicated that social justice education (SJ) and social and emotional learning (SEL) should be prioritized within the standards. With such a priority in mind, the Vision, Guiding Principles, and Practices contain explicit references to SJ and SEL practices and characteristics. The review panels were asked to prioritize SEL and SJ as they reviewed the standards. Accordingly, they produced a revised framework specific to Massachusetts, aligned with the ACTFL standards, and enriched with SEL and SJ principles.

***World* languages rather than *foreign* languages**

The Department is moving forward with the term *world languages* rather than *foreign languages*. The CAL study found that an overwhelming majority of Massachusetts educators and other states’ educational agencies prefer the term; the literature review also finds the term *world* to be more inclusive and accurate than the term *foreign.*

**Anticipated Next Steps**

At the Board meeting on December 15, 2020, Senior Associate Commissioner Heather Peske and other members of the staff will present an overview of the revised framework and respond to questions from the Board. I am asking the Board to vote to invite public comment on the draft revised framework. The Department will conduct the comment period via a public survey, which will be promoted through a variety of email communications, newsletters, webinars, and various network meetings.

With the Board’s approval, the Department will review comments received during the public comment period over the next couple of months and revise the draft framework as needed. We plan to present the final version to the Board in spring 2021 for further discussion and a vote on adoption of the revised framework.

The Department looks forward to gaining additional input so that the new *Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework* will support effective teaching and learning for all students in the Commonwealth.

Enclosures: Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum

Framework

Summary of Main Changes from the1999 Framework

5-phase process for World Languages framework revisions

2019 CAL Study

Motion to invite public comment