**Russell Johnston**

Thank you very much. As always, we will record and post today's webinar so that you can come back and look at it again in the future. Let's move to our agenda for today. Just so you can see the topics that we are covering, remembering that we always align these to our strategic objectives and our core functions. I do want to thank the representatives of Moac, the Charter School Association and the Superintendents Association, who provided the agenda topics for today, and of course, a couple that are from dese because we wanna alert you to things that are on the horizon topics that we want you to know about that are emerging and that is true for the student learning time, guidance and attendance recovery that we want to make sure we discuss with you today. Here is an important thing that's not on today's agenda. As many of you are aware, we had a board meeting earlier in November to look at data related to the admissions, policies for career technical education schools and our board members had many, many questions, a lot of questions about the data that we prepared and asked us to come back with updated data. So that meeting is happening this Friday. It will be a special meeting. It's in the afternoon on Friday. The agenda will be posted tomorrow morning and so I just want to give you all a heads up that we will have an additional special Board meeting this Friday and then that'll allow us to stay on track with the already planned Board meeting about CTE admissions that we have planned for next Monday evening, the 18th, where we will have an array of interested parties speaking to the Board about their experiences with the Ct. Admissions policy that we put in place in 2021. Where are we now? What are the reflections on the implications of our current regulations? So again, we'll have an additional board meeting this Friday afternoon. The agenda will be posted tomorrow morning. Just look for that, and I didn't want anybody surprised when you see the posting go up. We knew it was coming. We knew the board asked for it, so we're delivering on what was requested. I think it's important, and we look forward to making that happen this Friday. So let's delve in starting with our 1st strategic objective, our whole student supports and looking at chronic absenteeism and student attendance. So just want to come back to where we left off at our last meeting. We had a presentation from colleagues of mine about how we want to really drive towards looking at root cause analyses of why our students not attending school as regularly as we would like as regularly as they need to succeed in school. And so we have developed a new resource just to follow up what we provided you at our last meeting. We want to stay on message about the importance of addressing chronic absenteeism. So Amrita is putting in the chat where you can find this new resource which just sort of encapsulates a lot of what we have presented previously. Hopefully, it's a reference that you can use as needed locally to, you know, just continue to stay on target with what factors contribute to chronic absenteeism and why we want to make sure that we really look at it locally using a root cause analysis process to determine which strategies we want to invoke, to make change beyond that. We continue on with our power of presence campaign through this fall and we've been very pleased with the submissions we've received. But we really want to amplify the great work that you are doing to bring out the power of each and individual students presence in our schools. And so we ask that, you know, just continue to, to, we hope support further submissions to us so that we can just continue to increase the responses that we have, so that we can share out the great work that you've been doing. And so we had sent you an on the desktop on November 5th to remind you about this process, and if you go back and take a look at that, we've included templates and flyers for you to be able to distribute locally if you would find that helpful, so that we can again just get more responses about the great work that you are doing, and we can broadcast that far and wide to really inspire others to continue to see how each and each and every student's presence is powerful in our schools. The submissions for our campaign will close on December 20th and then we'll do a public service announcement in 2025 to share the winners who are selected. But we are working to amplify the great responses that we are receiving already. And so things like poems, artwork, and videos that we received. We're just going to continue to amplify those and hopefully select among them some great winners to share out about the great work you're doing in our schools. So thank you again for your work on this. Now let's turn to an issue that relates to attendance, which is our student learning time, guidance. And this is important, this is where we're making some changes that I want you to be aware of our uptime upcoming guidance is forthcoming. It will be updated on our website. So today, I'm just sharing with you what's changing about our student learning time, guidance. And so back in 2011 DESE produced student learning time guidance. This was my 1st year as superintendent. I became superintendent in 2010, and if you recall, we had a very, very we had a winter with a lot of snow, and that was the winter. If those of you who were in the role at the time remember that we were worried about roofs collapsing. And so DESE produced this guidance in relation to a particularly bad winter, and it's held it's guidance that we put up in 2011, and we haven't changed it since. But, as we know weather conditions, climate conditions have changed since 2011. We live in a continually evolving era, as it relates to how weather and emergencies affect our ability to hold school. And so we're updating our guidance at this time to be more mindful of where we are now, and to adhere more closely to our regulations. And so there'll be more coming about that in our updated guidance. But and we're really centers on waivers. The you know the guidance, as we all know, requires the days the number of days, the amount of hours for students to be in school and that when those emergencies strike, there is the ability to request a waiver, and we will further provide guidance on the criteria that will be used when considering any requests to waive an absence caused by health, weather, emergency, health, weather, safety emergencies and then we'll also have an accompanying FAQ. To address the questions that you see bulleted at the bottom of this slide. But here's the important thing about what's changing on this next slide. So and it'll be important for you to read this over afterwards, and maybe share it with your teams, just to make sure that you're, you know, really, I think, internalizing these dates. And it's not a huge change, so what I'm sharing, I don't want you to kind of have that blood pressure go up that there's a lot that's different on this slide. The difference is really about days that are missed in June. And so a lot of what's here stays the same. It is one change to days that are missed in June. That is of particular importance, and that I really want to call out so days that are lost up through March 31st need to be made up right. So that's not that hasn't changed. We know that those days need to be made up, and we're saying by rescheduling full days of school. So if you miss a full day we expect that you reschedule a full day to ensure that 180 day school year, and I think that's again. That's why, you are required to build a 185 day school year. Knowing that you provide school for 180 days, and you have that 5 day buffer. And so essentially, you know, then you can go beyond the 5 days. But the idea is that as necessary. But you've already built a calendar that plans for the need to make up some days, and historically, most of those lost days are occurring before March 31st and so we expect you to make them up to ensure that 180 day school year. So after March 31st we still are saying that the days need to be made up until the district has tell this, the district has reached its previously scheduled 185th day or until you hit that 180 day mark. So you either have to make 180 days or exhaust all up to your 185th day, whichever comes first. And so, if the district has previously closed for 5 days because of health, weather, or safety and subsequently closes for additional days. Then I, as acting Commissioner, will consider a waiver in accordance with the Slt regulations. So let's just break that down a little bit we get to that. You've exhausted your 5 days. You've you're not, on course, to making 180 days, because you've exhausted all 5 of your planned we used to call them snow days. So you know you you've used up all of those 5 additional days, and now you're still not hitting 180 days. That's when you could request a waiver but it would need to be approved, and it would need to be pre-approved by the Commissioner, and so taking us back to June. Where has this changed? Well, the old guidance said that days that were missed after June 1st did not require approval from the Commissioner to be made up. That could. That could just happen locally that you would decide to close and not make updates. And I do believe that that creates vulnerabilities both for you and for us. And it's not fully, you know, it's not as adhering as closely to our regulations as we would like. And so scenarios could include. You know, what we're looking at in June is just a lot more heat than what we've had in the past. So let's just say we have a scenario where a district has exhausted all 5 of their days the snow days that they had planned when they get to June. And there's going to be a heat wave like there was last year. That would be where you would then need to reach out to my team. Who would then report to me? You know your request. You can report, you know you can come directly to me. I'll certainly accept the waivers directly as well, but you would need to request then that waiver in order to not make up those days, and it might be that we look at the weather conditions. And we say this heat wave is going to. It's very early June. This heat wave is going to pass in one day in 2 days, and it might be that I, as acting Commissioner, would say, no, I actually do expect you would make up those days or perhaps there's some extenuating circumstances. Maybe this is the last day of school, and the heatwave isn't going to abate, and then we would say, right, it doesn't make any sense for you to make up these days. You do not need to, but I actually think it puts you in. Better stand. You know better standing locally that you have a decision from DESE about this. And again, it's much closer to the existing regulations. So I'm sure there might be questions about this, and we'll certainly save time for QA. At the end. But, Rob, I just wonder if there's anything that I didn't explain correctly. There! If you wanted to. Just add anything that I may have overlooked.

**Rob Curtin**

11:50

No, I think that made sense. Commissioner.

**Russell Johnston**

11:53

Thanks, Rob, and I know that you'll be looking at those questions, and I'll certainly moderate the Q&A at the end of the presentation today. Let's move on, then, to questions that we've had about attendance recovery so unlike the 2011 guidance, there wasn't really one place where DESE had sort of succinctly written that attendance recovery was allowable, or how it was allowable. It did come up last year. It was included, for example, at certain, you know, points in our how vacation academies, acceleration academies were used in the State at certain points. Students who attended acceleration academies were allowed to have those days count towards a full year attendance and but in other cases it was not as clearly written as what we had in the way of the 2011 guidance. And so I've been asked about this. And so I just want to be very clear in today's presentation that we will not be collecting data this year related to student participation in attendance recovery programs for inclusion in our 24-25 accountability calculations. And you know, as we looked at the data that we received from last school year from 23-24 related to attendance recovery. There was a lot of variation in terms of the quality and consistency of the data. And so it did leave some concerns about that. And so we've already tried to be clear. And now I just want to be just, you know, very, very clear and upfront that we will not be including data about attendance recovery in our accountability determinations. And so the chronic absenteeism calculations will be based only on the 180 day school year for all schools and we do encourage, you know, as has always been the case, as was the case when I was superintendent. Attendance and credit recovery programs are encouraged for use at the local level. It just doesn't mean that whatever you're doing for attendance or credit recovery. So, for example, when that student asks for, essentially, in my experience, a waiver related to their attendance in order to promote credit recovery. That can certainly still be a local determination. But again, at a statewide level. We're not continuing on with some of the practices we had related to attendance recovery last year, and I just want to be very clear and upfront about that. And again, glad to answer any questions you might have about this. So just moving on to other topics. We have the election results from last week, and particularly question 2 that I want to delve into with you a little bit further here. Still more to come. I am pleased that I continue to have the opportunity to meet with the Equity leaders of Massachusetts, the Charter School Leader Associate, the Charter School Association superintendents, Association School Committee Association, and both unions we met today to talk about in part of what we discussed was the impact of question 2. And so that's really what I want to just delve into, as it relates to election results today. And just a reminder that we put out guidance, and well, really in the form of an FAQ. Immediately after the election. And so, case if you didn't see it, we're just putting it in the in the chat and I know you can't read it from this slide. But this is this is what it looked like to really describe. When does the when does this new law take effect? And other more immediate questions that you might have about this new law and I know there are many others I know you might have many other questions that you would want to be able to ask about this. And so what I would appreciate is if you could. If there are questions that you came here with today about the impact of question 2. Please put them in the chat. We might not be able to answer all of them today, but we know that there are a lot of you know that there, there's you know there are a lot of things that still need to be clarified about this, and what this will look like in the future, as it relates to additional guidance and any further action that our Board might take. And so, knowing what questions you have, will really help us inform both that guidance and inform additional actions from our board, and so I just hope that you'll take a minute to add anything into the Q&A. That's where you can post your questions for today, and we'll be glad to take a look at them at the end. Rob. I hope you don't mind coming off mute again. But is there anything that's been coming your way that you would just like to sort of clarify right off the bat based on the questions that we've received.

**Rob Curtin**

16:43

No other than the you know we have. We are have been moving forward with the with the retest. I'd say that's been the number one thing. And then the second thing is, and we're going to be, I believe, issuing something about this. But you know what the implications are for the class of 2025 and that's really where our immediate focus is right now. And more to come there. But happy to, you know. Keep. Please keep bringing the questions. You know, because we certainly might not have thought about all the implications here.

**Russell Johnston**

17:21

Definitely and Rob, I know we'll get to the Q. And A at the end. But one thing that is definitely come my way about the retest is you know. Why should students continue to take the retest? And I wonder if you just mentioned the scholarships in particular.

**Rob Curtin**

17:34

Yeah. So why are we still administering the retests right now is because the law hasn't changed the 1st thing. So we want to be really clear there. It has not taken effect yet. So we're still living under the law as it exists right now. The second thing is, we do have students that take the retest for scholarship purposes. So we're going to need to look at how often we do that moving forward. But it is important to us that we do offer that opportunity to students who are taking it for the purposes of potentially earning a scholarship. So that's the big reason why we will continue to do it. We will think about how often we're doing that. But it is important that we offer that opportunity to students.

**Russell Johnston**

18:22

Thanks, Rob, appreciate that, and glad for any other questions that you might have as we go along, both now and don't hesitate to reach out to us here at DESE with your questions so that we continue to provide the guidance that's most helpful to you as we move forward and embrace this new era. So with that, I'm going to move on. But again, we know that there's more to come about this topic, and we look forward to delving into it with you. So a few other updates related to our core functions. Remembering that, you know, Jesse, we have core functions that we are either mainly required to implement and they, we want to make sure these core functions really much, very much aligned to our education vision. And so I'm drawing out some today, some of these additional topics and hopefully providing you information that is timely and relevant to your work so 1st related to the 2024 vocal data you hopefully are aware that the results for at the school and district level are available in the school climate section of Edwin. So that's 1st and foremost. So the results from last year are available and the state level data. So if you wanted to compare your local school or district level data to the state level data, the state level data are available on our dashboard along with an executive summary on our vocal website. And then we held a recording on. We held a webinar. I'm sorry on October 24th and so recording is available in case that's something that would be useful to you to go back in and listen to and sort of have that broader context about the vocal results that were released on October 14th and we also have Brendan's contact information here. Our special specialist in this area so that you could reach out to him with any questions that you might have about vocal but to delve just a little bit more deeply into the vocal results. There is a difference between who has access to vocal results now compared to previous years. And so, as you're likely aware, before 2024 only the district and school administrator for Edwin accounts could access their own district or school results. Now we want to make sure that you're aware that district school and teacher accounts can access the results for their school or district. We want to begin to share vocal results more widely. We think the data are very important telling us about students experiences with culture and climate in our schools. And so we do want the results to be more widely shared, reviewed, digested, understood, acted upon and so we hope that this greater access will lead to greater action, as it relates to using the local data. And we hope that this creates sort of just easier access to support increased use. As we put at the bottom of this slide? So again, just an update here around access. And we continue to think about, you know, how do we? Perhaps? In the future. Begin to create other ways of looking at local data, even, you know, more publicly. But this is the next step that we've taken so far is to make it not really public, but more available to staff members from within your school or district. I just wanna mention also timeout rooms as part of our core functions. So we in our regulations related to restraint and seclusion. There's a description of timeout, and in some cases then there is existence in Massachusetts of rooms that are used for the purpose of timeout. And this is something we've been contemplating. Do we need to make further changes to the regulations that relate to timeout rooms, and so to help to inform that process. I just want you to know that this is something that we are actively in consideration of in terms of changes that that might be necessary. And so to inform that work. We 1st want to. Just remind you all that this is a message that we've been sharing since 2021 that we would like to see the reduction or elimination of the use of timeout rooms in the State. And you know, we built that guidance with broad stakeholder engagement and a few important things that we just want to mention about it is that, you know, we really want to see those proactive strategies. Instead of a reactive strategy, like the use of a timeout room to promote the social, emotional well-being of our students and that we don't use timeout rooms as a behavioral support strategy. That that's where we can really see the ability to greatly reduce or eliminate the rooms and then while additional safeguards are not yet required under regulations such as data, collection and parent notification, we strongly recommend those practices. So considerations for you from our 2021 guidance. Now, in 2024, we have gathered together a working group, and we've been pleased to hear their input. From those who we invited to attend the working group. We've had 3 meetings of this working group to give. Input and you know, this is a, this is a challenging issue. And so this is where we brought together advocacy organizations. And, as you can see, professional organizations, school professional organizations in order to inform where we might go with this in terms of what recommendation I might make to the board. And it's still in development. This is not one where I'm going to preview with you yet what we might be bringing to the board. I just want you to know that it's something that's on our radar and it's something we've been working on. And so again, we'll be glad to answer any questions that you might have about that one more core function that. I want to talk with you about actually, there might be one more after this, but getting close to the end, and plenty of time for your questions is, the use of the Circuit breaker claim system. So all of you aware about the use of circuit breaker to claim expenses for certain students with disabilities. In order to receive the circuit breaker reimbursement. We are changing the system by which you are able to make those claims previously you had your districts have submitted them to dese using an Excel file that you've uploaded to us through the security portal. We are changing that so that the special Education circuit claim process will be made through our online champ system and champ is our new portal that we're building out for lots of the functions that we conduct in terms of our monitoring in particular, our special education, monitoring our monitoring for multilingual learner services and for circuit breaker claiming like I said, it will replace that excel based claim file. And the transition is coming soon that. Your you'll receive fairly soon a list of the updated services, and let me be clear about this. We're not changing what is allowed to be claimed. We are modifying the names sort of updating modernizing the whole system, so that what you, what services you claim more closely reflects the services you provide. So that update updated list of services will be, I think, a clarification and I think, a better naming convention to kind of match your naming conventions of what you call services and so you'll see that you know. What are we going to use as the names of the services you claim in the next few weeks, and then we'll begin training later in the winter. About this new use the use of the tramp portal to be able to submit your claims and Bill. I just wonder if there's anything I missed about that anything that you would want to clarify.

**Bill Bell**

26:56

Thanks, thanks, Commissioner. The only no, I think that's all fine. The only thing I would say is, we do a lot of the communication on circuit breaker throughout list server I can drop that into the chat. But it's basically circuit breaker@mass.gov. Just make sure you're if you aren't, or a member of your team's not on that list, or if you get on that list, sir, because that's how we do our primary communication. But there's gonna be a lot of training a lot of we're not gonna leave folks hanging on how to use the new system. But I would just say, get on the Listserv is the best thing staying in tune with things happening. Thanks, Commissioner.

**Russell Johnston**

27:40

Absolutely thanks, Bill, appreciate that. And then, actually, the final thing is about licensure. And so we do have some licensure updates on the horizon some recommendations that I anticipate making to the board. And so I just want to have these on your radar as we go deeper into the school year. This is our 3rd year of our intel alternative assessment pilot and we've been fortunate to conduct research along the way about the various alternative MTEL alternatives that we've had available for the past 3 years. So we'll be bringing that research to bear to make a recommendation to the Board about which of the alternative assessments we should keep, and by keeping we would also then expand. So some of the alternative assessments are only available in certain areas of licensure right now. And so what we would intend to have happen is for a recommendation to come from me to the board about the ones that have been most successful. You know, again, where our research tells us, have been very effective for you know the work that we want to do to assess educators. Preparation to come into the teaching field. Then we would make them available for all, or most all of the other licensure areas. And we do see some additional updates coming to our regulations, such as the Health Family and Consumer science license based on upon the new frameworks. Some a change to what it takes to get the bilingual education endorsement for. And I'm sorry. Brian, you're gonna have to step in here for a second. But this would be a suggestion about how? The connection between the bilingual education endorsement or the SEI, as it relates to SEI. And then a definitive end on the end of emergency extensions. But, Brian, would you mind just coming on and talking about that 3rd bullet? Real quick.

**Brian Devine**

29:40

Sure. Yeah, no problem, Commissioner. So we have heard from our office of language acquisition that for those that have obtained a bilingual education endorsement that should be a way in which would qualify someone to get the sheltered English immersion endorsement. So that would be a proposal being brought forward to the board. Likely, I think February is our timeline right now. So if somebody happens to have the bilingual education endorsement, we call it B for short, and they don't do not yet have the Sei endorsement. That would be a route for them to earn the Sei endorsement.

**Russell Johnston**

30:19

Excellent. So I appreciate that clarification and look forward to seeing what we're able to bring to the board this winter. So this is just a preview of what we anticipate coming. And in response to questions that we've had about what's changing with licensure. What is DESE doing to address licensure issues. And so we just wanna have these potential rate changes on your radar. So as always, our, these webinars are recorded and posted on the Commissioner's web page. And so for anyone who missed this today. And we certainly we have capacity for lots more people to be able to join these meetings, so don't hesitate to invite other members of your team. But if they can't make it, if you can't make it, just always know that the these will always be recorded and posted here. So one final thing is that we will follow up from today's presentation with an on the desktop that will include today's slides. And then, if there are any other business items not included today for example, I know that we will provide you with. We've made some small, very minor updates to the superintendent's checklist, and so we will send those out separately through and on the desktop so that we didn't pack everything into today's slides. We wanted to see if there were just some things that we would provide you through a follow up where we attach the slides for your re review as necessary, so we'll go ahead and end the recording.