

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**April 29, 2008
9:10 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.**

**Worcester Technical High School
1 Skyline Drive
Worcester, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Reville, Chairman, Worcester
Harneen Chernow, Jamaica Plain
Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge
Thomas E. Fortmann, Lexington
Jeff Howard, Reading
Ruth Kaplan, Brookline
Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater
Sandra L. Stotsky, Brookline
Zachary Tsetsos, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Oxford

Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education,
Secretary to the Board

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Christopher R. Anderson, Westford

Chairman Paul Reville called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Comments from the Chairman

Chairman Paul Reville said the Board was pleased to hold its meeting at Worcester Technical High School, which Board members toured earlier in the morning. He added that the facility is a testament to the leadership in the district and school and to the endeavor of technical education statewide. The chairman introduced James Caradonio, superintendent of schools in Worcester, Sheila Harrity, principal of Worcester Technical High, and Ted Coughlin, chairman of Worcester Technical High's general advisory board, who welcomed the Board to Worcester.

Dr. Caradonio distributed copies of Worcester Educator, the district's publication to chronicle innovative practices and programs across the district. The superintendent said that 11 years ago, Worcester Technical High was an underperforming school. He said now the focus is on high quality instruction and four years of rigor. Dr. Caradonio said

that technology is seamlessly interwoven into the school in every technical-education unit. Dr. Caradonio said that the school mirrors real life for its students, and that the school's partners keep it relevant. He said that the standard operating procedures for vocational education are partnerships with business and industry, organized labor, and colleges and universities.

Principal Harrity said that the school has reached AYP two years in a row in both English language arts and mathematics and in every subgroup. She said that MCAS scores have improved, and that 50 percent of juniors score in the advanced and proficient categories. Principal Harrity said that 800 students apply for 400 seats each year. The principal said the school has the highest attendance rate in the city at 94 percent for grades 9-12, the lowest dropout rate, and disciplinary incidents have decreased in the last year. She added that students and the community are enthusiastic about the school and the opportunities that it provides.

Mr. Coughlin spoke of the importance of having a broad base of advisory support from the community, including business, industry, and labor. Mr. Coughlin said the school was very proud that the Department has asked it to help other schools do a better job with technical education.

Chairman Reville thanked Dr. Caradonio, Principal Harrity, and Mr. Coughlin for their outstanding leadership.

Chairman Reville reported on the Board's special meeting on the State System for School and District Accountability and Support, which was held on the evening of April 28th at the Beechwood Hotel in Worcester. The chairman said the special meeting was part of the Board's continuing review of the state's accountability system and ways to strengthen support and technical assistance to the field. Incoming Commissioner Mitchell Chester made a presentation to the Board at the special meeting entitled, "Accountability Revisited: Key Considerations – Identifying Short & Longer Term Work." The Board also engaged in a roundtable discussion with superintendents James Caradonio from Worcester, Karla Brooks Baehr from Lowell, and Eduardo Carballo from Holyoke. Chairman Reville said the Board seeks to build on the good work of the Department to date, in the spirit of continuous improvement.

The chairman said that U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings will visit Boston on May 6, 2008 as part of the Secretary's state-by-state tour. The Secretary plans to visit a Boston charter school, participate in a roundtable discussion with state educational policy makers at the State House, and meet with Governor Patrick.

Chairman Reville said he is convening a 21st Century Skills Taskforce to advise the Board on how to ensure that all students are prepared in the core academic subjects and in the skills necessary for success in the 21st century, including problem solving, innovation, oral communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. Board member Gerald Chertavian will chair this taskforce, whose membership of 15 or so stakeholders will include Board

members Harneen Chernow and Tom Fortmann. Mr. Chertavian said that the taskforce will present a white paper to the Board in the early fall.

The chairman said that the Readiness Project continues its work and will present its report to the Governor in June. Board member Dana Mohler-Faria said that the process is moving along nicely, and that Governor Patrick was pleased with the preliminary recommendations.

Chairman Reville presented a citation to Jack Herrick, a plumbing instructor at Minuteman Regional Vocational-Technical High School, in recognition of his distinguished accomplishment of being selected as the 2008 National Plumbing Instructor of the Year.

Comments from the Acting Commissioner

Acting Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus noted three informational items included in the Board packet: an interim report on Commonwealth Pilot Schools; an update on the State Review Panels; and a summary of Massachusetts student data.

Comments from the Public

- Mary Jo Ruppert from the Van Sickle Middle School in Springfield addressed the Board on the proposed updated technology literacy standards.
- Sandy Kelly, president of the Massachusetts School Library Association, addressed the Board on school libraries.
- Sheri Leh, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gill-Montague Regional School District's turnaround plan.
- Wendy Bobala, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gill-Montague Regional School District's turnaround plan.

Approval of the Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the March 25, 2008 regular meeting.

The vote was unanimous.

Report on the April 28, 2008 Special Meeting

Chairman Reville addressed the first agenda item during his opening remarks.

Winchendon Public Schools

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said that last month the Board heard from Winchendon Superintendent Peter Azar, School Committee Chair Michael Niles, and the district's turnaround partner, EDC, Inc., about the district's progress since the Board declared it underperforming in November 2003. The acting commissioner noted that the district is not in any accountability status under NCLB, the district has been successful in implementing its turnaround plan, and relations between the school department and town government have improved. Since the March meeting, the district has hired a full-time superintendent to succeed Dr. Azar.

Board member Jeff Howard said that while reading the report, he had a hard time figuring out what the road map was for a district to exit underperforming status. He said this raises questions about the process and the need for clear criteria.

Board member Harneen Chernow echoed Dr. Howard's comments, and asked whether Dr. Azar could provide feedback on whether the criteria to exit underperforming status had been clear to him. Dr. Azar said that the district worked closely with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to define the criteria applicable to the situation in Winchendon, and arrived at the criteria presented in the report. Dr. Azar agreed that the criteria could be clearer at the outset.

Associate Commissioner Juliane Dow said that some judgment is involved in each case. She said that considerable progress has been made in Winchendon so that it is now comparable to other small districts. Ms. Dow said there are still state efforts that can be made in Winchendon, but those entail more regional collaboration to expand the capacity of small school districts.

Chairman Reville said that he anticipates increasing interest at the state level to assist small districts through regional strategies. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus noted that Winchendon was never in corrective action as a district. For districts that are, the exit criteria could include two consecutive years of making adequate yearly progress.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 69, § 1K and 603 CMR 2.04, and upon recommendation of the Commissioner, hereby declare that the Winchendon Public School District is no longer considered to be an underperforming district, based on the progress it has made in addressing the issues that led the Board in November 2003 to declare it an underperforming district. Further, that the Board encourage school and town officials and the entire community of Winchendon to continue working together to implement improvement strategies that will lead to further gains in student performance in the future.

The vote was 8-0-1. Jeff Howard abstained.

Gill-Montague Regional School District

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said that the Board had identified the Gill-Montague Regional School District as an underperforming school district in January 2007. The Department sent a three-person team to the district to examine its leadership capacity and governance structure, and then submitted the leadership evaluation report to the Board in November 2007. Last month, Interim Superintendent of Schools Kenneth Rocke presented the district's turnaround plan to the Board. The district was asked to revise the plan to clarify specific steps it would take to address the identified concerns.

Board member Tom Fortmann asked who served on the three-member team. Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy said Matt George chaired the team, which also included Dan Ahearn and Pamela Bloomfield.

Chairman Reville asked Associate Commissioner Dow to comment on the reorganization proposals, in light of the testimony provided during the earlier public comment period. Associate Commissioner Dow said the Department had not taken a position on the proposals, but reviewed that there was a process for community input. She said the school that the school committee voted to close served 64 students out of a total of 1,100 in the entire district. Chairman Reville asked whether the school committee had followed an open and reasonable process. Associate Commissioner Dow said the superintendent and school committee did so.

Board member Sandra Stotsky asked whether the Department collected information on students who chose to leave through school choice. Associate Commissioner Dow briefly explained the state law on school choice and said the Department would provide data to the Board. Associate Commissioner Dow also said Franklin County would benefit from joining all of these small school districts together into a single unified system, an idea that is currently being studied. Chairman Reville concurred that these problems call for a structural solution.

Board member Fortmann asked whether it was likely that the Department would have to intervene in the district's budget process again this year. Superintendent Rocke said that in view of likely budget cuts, it might be necessary again this year to ask the Commissioner to set the district's budget, as provided by law. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the commissioner typically sets a budget equal to the prior year's budget. Superintendent Rocke said last year's budget was set at the previous year's level with an increase for added costs needed to maintain services.

Board member Chernow said that the public comment provided to the Board raised a number of compelling points about the school consolidation plan. Chairman Reville said that the Board needed to ensure that a reasonable process was in place and followed, but that in the spirit of co-governance, the judgment of local officials had to be accepted. Board member Ruth Kaplan said the community has a democratic process in place in

terms of the school committee, and if the parents are not satisfied, they have the right to vote out school committee members.

Superintendent Rocke said the decision to close the Montague Center School was a question of affordability. He said the intention is to bring good teachers and community spirit over to Sheffield Elementary School.

Board member Chertavian expressed a concern that the plan relies on additional funding. Associate Commissioner Dow said the district lacks the infrastructure to support improvement, but the plan is a reasonable plan from the leadership to address key problems. Board member Chertavian encouraged the district to seek partnerships beyond public entities as a way to secure additional resources and support.

Board member Fortmann encouraged the Commissioner to consider how the Department and Board could support a regionalization study. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said that he had met recently with Senator Rosenberg on this topic. The acting commissioner also said he had written an op-ed piece on regionalization, which was published in the Greenfield Recorder. He said he would send it to Board members.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 69, § 1K and 603 CMR 2.04 (4) (b), and upon recommendation of the Commissioner, hereby accept the Turnaround Plan submitted by the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

The vote was 8-0-1. Harneen Chernow abstained.

Updated Technology Literacy Standards

Chairman Reville said the updated technology literacy standards and expectations are voluntary and are intended to be a guide for schools. The chairman said that technology is pervasive in a 21st century education, and this document represents a modest update to the existing standards.

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the update builds on a very good document from 2001, and he commended Board member Sandra Stotsky for her work on the original standards. The acting commissioner said the updated standards have been reviewed by hundreds of teachers who confirmed that the standards are challenging but reasonable. He said the Department plans to work with school districts and organizational and business partners to support professional development for teachers to assist them in integrating the teaching of technology skills into the general curriculum.

Board member Stotsky said she appreciated the comments made by Chairman Reville and Acting Commissioner Nellhaus. Dr. Stotsky said she was gratified to see the large

number of teachers who responded and who said they can incorporate the standards into the classroom. Dr. Stotsky said that means those teachers have room for arts and music too in the early grades. Dr. Stotsky said she hopes the Department can review arts and music as part of school accountability. Chairman Reville said that the Board and Department would be looking further at arts, music and other dimensions of a well-rounded education.

Board member Kaplan asked whether there is a way to gather information on what kinds of hardware and equipment schools have and what students have at home. The acting commissioner said one of the questions on the grade 8 MCAS student questionnaire asked about computers in the home. The acting commissioner said that 14 percent of low-income students do not have a computer at home, compared to 1.5 percent of non-low-income students.

Board member Mohler-Faria said this is an important issue, and that there has been an aggressive expansion of the use of technology in higher education. Dr. Mohler-Faria said there is a gap that needs to be closed in terms of technology literacy and skills between low-income and non-low-income students.

Dr. Stotsky suggested that a letter be sent to college deans and faculty at teacher preparation programs regarding teaching new teachers how to integrate technology into their lesson plans. Chairman Reville recommended that the Commissioner use informal channels for this by conveying the updated standards to the Commissioner of Higher Education. Associate Commissioner Bob Bickerton commented that use of technology is already included in the standards for approval of teacher preparation programs.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Chapter 69, Section 1D of the General Laws, approve the updated *Massachusetts Technology Literacy Standards* as presented by the Commissioner, and direct the Commissioner to distribute copies to the Joint Committee on Education for their information and to public schools and other interested parties throughout the Commonwealth for use in improving curriculum and instruction.

Further, that the Board extend its appreciation to the Educational Technology Advisory Council, the Massachusetts Technology Leadership Council, and the many individuals and organizations statewide that worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to update the *Massachusetts Technology Literacy Standards*.

The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Reville said that the Board appreciated the excellent staff work that went into this and other materials and recommendations that have come before the Board.

National Mathematics Advisory Panel

Chairman Reville asked Board member Sandra Stotsky to introduce Professor Wilfried Schmid of Harvard University to make a presentation on the final report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel. Both Dr. Stotsky and Professor Schmid served on the national panel.

Professor Schmid reviewed some of the report's recommendations relating to curriculum frameworks, student assessment, and the role of teachers. Professor Schmid said algebra is the gateway to college mathematics, and the panel identified crucial prerequisites (automatic recall of number facts, mastery of arithmetic, proficiency with fractions) for younger students to be prepared for algebra. Professor Schmid read aloud recommendation 23, which states:

“All-encompassing recommendations that instruction should be entirely ‘student centered’ or ‘teacher directed’ are not supported by research. If such recommendations exist, they should be rescinded. If they are being considered, they should be avoided. High-quality research does not support the exclusive use of either approach.”

Professor Schmid said that MCAS should focus on key topics such as fractions, and less on probability at the elementary level and patterns. Professor Schmid also said the mathematics panel suggests trying out full-time mathematics teachers on a larger scale at the elementary level, and that more research on this approach would be useful.

Board member Fortmann said this is a very important report, and he encouraged everyone to read it. Dr. Fortmann underscored the importance of automatic recall of number facts, and he quoted Stephen Pinker in saying that “mathematics is ruthlessly cumulative.” Dr. Fortmann suggested that the Department think about assessing times tables on MCAS, or having teachers certify that students know them. Dr. Fortmann also said that the research on math coaches has to take into account their level of math knowledge.

Board member Jeff Howard said the report reads well and makes eminent good sense. Dr. Howard commended the definition of proficiency that appears in the footnote on page xvii of the report, and noted that this definition could be generalized to other fields. Dr. Howard noted the mention of formative assessments in recommendation 25, and asked whether the state should offer high quality formative assessments to every district. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department is supporting a pilot project in formative assessments, and said that this would be a topic for another day. The chairman said the state has a comparative advantage in resources to do formative assessments, and that the Board and Department could look for ways to support districts in this area.

Board member Kaplan noted that the Board had heard from urban superintendents, during the previous night's superintendents' roundtable, that MCAS mathematics testing did not necessarily assess the actual math skills of students who are English language learners. Accordingly, Ms. Kaplan asked Dr. Schmid to comment on MCAS mathematics questions, which she characterized as very language based, and how to make math education more engaging for students. Dr. Schmid agreed that some mathematics items are too language heavy. Dr. Schmid agreed about the importance of making mathematics engaging. He said there should be a clear message that algebra I and II are essential to access to a 4-year college. Dr. Schmid said that most college students take calculus, and that a student would be hopelessly lost without having taken algebra II.

Chairman Reville said he liked the first recommendation that Dr. Schmid read in regards to flexibility in mathematics instruction, not favoring either student-centered or teacher-centered approaches. The chairman asked whether the Department had data on full-time mathematics teachers. The acting commissioner said the Department would have the data once the Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS) is in place.

Board member Chernow asked how the report would be used, rolled out, and implemented. Dr. Schmid said the math panel was patterned after the National Reading Panel, and that the reading recommendations have been very influential though not universally accepted. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the National Mathematics Panel's recommendations would be very helpful to the work of the Mathematics Curriculum Framework review panel, and that he has invited Dr. Schmid to address the panel.

Board member Fortmann suggested that the state could do more to help districts align math curriculum with the state standards.

Chairman Reville thanked Dr. Stotsky and Dr. Schmid and congratulated them on their work.

English Language Arts Curriculum Framework Review

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said that the Board voted on a revision schedule for all of the state's curriculum frameworks at its August 2007 meeting. The acting commissioner presented a progress report on the work of the English Language Arts Curriculum Framework review panel. The acting commissioner introduced Susan Wheltle, director of the Department's Curriculum Standards office, and Beverly Nelson, assistant superintendent of schools in Medford.

Ms. Wheltle said that the 34-member review panel has met six times to examine how to strengthen the framework academically and make the standards more useful to schools and districts. Ms. Wheltle said the review panel identified five topics that could be strengthened: (1) writing and research; (2) the reading of informational text; (3) communication skills across the curriculum; (4) college readiness standards, especially at

grades 11-12; and (5) increasing content knowledge and literacy in the elementary grades.

Chairman Reville commended the emphasis on writing. Board member Stotsky said she was pleased to see the panel hitting key issues. Dr. Stotsky recommended that the research standards be pulled out and made more visible, and that writing could be expanded more. Dr. Stotsky said the panel should consider building in the notion of expository essays of increasing length at the high school level.

Assistant Superintendent Nelson said that the high school-to-college readiness initiative has been helpful in bringing public schools together with higher education to see the disconnect between the expectations of writing at the high school and college levels.

Dr. Stotsky said that recommendations 4 and 5 were excellent ideas, and noted an article in the latest issue of *American Educator*. She said there needs to be a way to delineate content without telling schools what to do. Dr. Stotsky said she was pleased to see references to addressing the gender gap. She also said the panel should avoid getting into pedagogy since this document is about standards. Dr. Stotsky said that informational content is relevant, but that strategies should be separate.

Board member Mohler-Faria said more discussion is needed between secondary schools and higher education around standards. Dr. Mohler-Faria said standards should emphasize what students should know and be able to do.

Board member Fortmann commended Ms. Whelple and staff for their work on this report. Dr. Fortmann said that informational text is important to developing 21st Century skills. He said he was happy to see recommendation #5 on content knowledge.

Board member Kaplan asked about oral communication skills, to which Ms. Whelple said there was a section in the framework on language. Ms. Kaplan said it would be helpful to keep writing portfolios. Assistant Superintendent Nelson said this gets into a district issue, but would be linked to best practices.

Board member Chertavian said there was a connection between technology skills and recommendation #3.

The chairman said this is an important report, and he commended the work of staff. The acting commissioner said that the mathematics review panel would do a similar report in the fall. The English Language Arts review panel will continue its work and expects to present recommendations to the Commissioner and the Board in June 2008.

Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure: MTEL Pass Rate Task Force Report

Chairman Reville said that today's discussion is part of a larger conversation about attracting the best and brightest into teaching and sustaining them. The chairman noted the imbalances in demographics of teachers and students. The chairman said that a

Rennie Center report found that students who are English language learners did better with teachers with a language background. Chairman Reville said there is a general shortage of the most talented people going into teaching.

In May 2007, former Commissioner Driscoll called upon the Board's Educational Personnel Advisory Council (EPAC) to convene a working group to consider the disparity in passing rates by racial, ethnic, and linguistic subgroups on the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) and develop recommendations for addressing it.

Associate Commissioner Bob Bickerton, Ray Shurtleff, chairman of the Board's Educational Personnel Advisory Council (EPAC), and Sally Dias of Emmanuel College, who served on the study group, made a presentation to the Board. Mr. Shurtleff said the goal is a diverse and well qualified work force. He said that 17 educators served on the task force, which held 8-10 meetings over five months. Mr. Shurtleff said the pass rate on the writing test was of particular concern to the study group. He said that MTEL test takers would benefit from more support and feedback.

Ms. Dias, who served on the technical aspects subgroup, said the test developer has not yet provided the data needed per industry standards, including evidence of reliability. Ms. Dias said the subgroup could not determine whether MTEL was valid or met the criteria for standards in the profession for test development. Board member Stotsky said that the Department several years ago had brought in testing experts, including Dr. William Mehrens, to review the MTEL planning documents, and they gave a clean bill of health to the testing program. Dr. Stotsky said the checks and balances are there, though all documents may not be on file. Dr. Stotsky said these tests are for licensure and are graded pass-fail; they are not diagnostic, and consequently there is a limited amount of information that can go back to preparation programs. She added that a key question is what the preparation programs are doing to prepare their students for the licensure tests. Ms. Dias said there still is a need for publicly available evidence for confidence and credibility.

Board member Howard asked whether additional information would change the pass rates. Ms. Dias said no. Dr. Howard said he did not see feedback to candidates as one of the recommendations. Associate Commissioner Bickerton said that there are only a couple of questions on each objective, so reporting on individual questions could produce false positives and false negatives. Mr. Bickerton said that licensure tests do not support this kind of feedback.

Dr. Howard said if the goal is to ensure we have highly qualified teachers from diverse backgrounds to teach all students, then we need to put our energy into improving the performance of the teacher candidates, not necessarily by changing the test. He asked what the Board and Department could do to increase the number of minority candidates who pass on their first attempt. He said that the pass rates would not be improved if the focus is too much on alternative standards of licensure. Dr. Howard said he would have liked to see more of an emphasis on what needs to be addressed with students and teachers to get more over the bar.

Mr. Shurtleff said that we have a pipeline problem. He said that nationally, only 13 to 17 percent of prospective educators are candidates of color, and more needs to be done. Dr. Howard said that preparation programs are supposed to prepare candidates, and that means the candidates who go through those programs ought to be able to pass the test. Chairman Reville said the questions are similar to those that are sometimes raised about the MCAS tests: if candidates do not pass the test, perhaps they have the skills and knowledge but the test is not measuring those, or perhaps they do not yet have the necessary skills and knowledge.

Ms. Dias said she still believes it is important to vet the issues of test bias and validity. Board member Chernow said that if there are any transparency issues, those should be resolved. Ms. Chernow said she is concerned about the small number of minority candidates and would like a more comprehensive conversation and stronger recommendations around pipeline issues.

Associate Commissioner Bickerton said the pass rates reflect the number of people who take the tests as many times as during that year. Mr. Bickerton said the Department has vetted these issues, and is confident that the test is valid and reliable. He said that the Department has not published all of the relevant information in the technical reports, but has made a commitment to publish this information in future reports. Chairman Reville said this is part of a larger discussion on licensure, teacher preparation, and attracting teacher candidates. The chairman said this issue is the most pressing for the Board next to accountability. Dr. Howard said this is also a conversation about standards, assessment and accountability, and we need to be aligned with adults and children.

Dr. Fortmann asked how many candidates take the Communication and Literacy Skills test three times, fail the test, but score within one standard error of measurement. Associate Commissioner Bickerton said that between September 2004 and August 2007, of the 38,000 people who took the Communication and Literacy Skills reading and writing test, fewer than 600 did not pass the reading test after three attempts, and roughly 1,400 did not pass the writing test after three attempts. Associate Commissioner Bickerton said that of the candidates who failed three times, about half were within one standard error of a passing score. Dr. Fortmann requested that the Board receive for informational purposes representative samples of the writing of candidates who fell into this category of failing three times and scoring within one standard error.

Chairman Reville said the Board and Department's focus should be on getting more people over the bar. The chairman said the real question is the pipeline. He said the Board appreciates the task force's advisory recommendations to the Board. Chairman Reville also stated that neither the Governor nor the Board had endorsed Senate Bill 271 or any other legislation relating to the MTEL.

Grants

The Board approved federal grants totaling \$2,157,214 under the following programs: Title I School Improvement Regional Grant Program and Perkins – Equipment and Instructional Materials.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the grants as presented by the Acting Commissioner.

The vote was unanimous.

Sandra Stotsky asked that the following statement be read into the record:

“Two months ago, as a member of this Board of Education, I received an invitation to participate in an Educator Workshop at the U.S. Marine Corps’ training camp for enlistees on Parris Island, SC. These Educator Workshops, held several times a year since the 1970s, enable educators to learn what the young men and women who choose to enlist in the U.S. Marines undergo in their 13-week training period and the careers that are available to them in the Marine Corps. Along with 70 other educators (members of state and local school boards, high school counselors, teachers, and principals, and others involved in the education of young Americans), I attended boot camp at Parris Island from April 14 to April 18. I am profoundly grateful to the U.S. Marine Corps for the remarkable opportunity to learn about the challenges that the young men and women who choose to become U.S. Marines must address in their training period before they are allowed to graduate, to become familiar with the career options available to those who successfully complete their training period, to talk personally with several young recruits, and to attend an impressive graduation ceremony for 390 new Marines. Those 3 and ½ days were enlightening and awe-inspiring. I highly recommend the experience to any educator who receives such an invitation or would like to receive one. Sandra Stotsky”

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m., subject to the call of the chairman.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Nellhaus
Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**April 28, 2008
5:10 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

**Beechwood Hotel
363 Plantation Street
Worcester, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Reville, Chairman, Worcester
Harneen Chernow, Jamaica Plain
Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge
Thomas E. Fortmann, Lexington
Jeff Howard, Reading
Ruth Kaplan, Brookline
Sandra L. Stotsky, Brookline
Zachary Tsetsos, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Oxford

Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education,
Secretary to the Board

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Christopher R. Anderson, Westford
Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater

Chairman Paul Reville called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m.

Chairman Reville welcomed Board members to the special meeting, and acknowledged two members of the audience who were present, Worcester Mayor Konstantina Lukes and Worcester Superintendent of Schools James Caradonio. The chairman said that the special meeting was part of the Board's continuing conversation on the state's system of accountability, and how that system provides support, technical assistance and guidance to schools that are struggling and in need of help. The chairman said the Department does very good work now, and that work has been accomplished with limited resources. This is a period of transition, marked by scarce resources, and the chairman said the Board is considering how best to advance the work of moving all students to proficiency and above.

Chairman Reville welcomed Incoming Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester, and noted that Dr. Chester will be sworn in on May 19, 2008.

Presentation of Dr. Mitchell Chester

Dr. Chester thanked the Board for inviting him to speak on accountability. He led off his PowerPoint presentation with a photograph of former President Lyndon B. Johnson seated beside his favorite grade school teacher at the ceremony to sign into law the first version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. Dr. Chester said that he designed his presentation to stimulate a discussion with the Board on a policy level rather than a strategic or tactical level.

Dr. Chester noted that Board members bring a range of perspectives, including those who might be concerned about the unintended consequences of assessment and accountability, and those who believe the state has not been aggressive enough. He said this is a good time to review where we are and to identify common ground, which would put the Board in a better position to review and refine its strategies, enlarging the discussion to include more stakeholders.

Dr. Chester said that his presentation would focus on both the short term, which is the direction that the system of support for schools and districts goes over the next several months, and the long term, which is the next year or two and the development of the next generation system of standards, assessment, and accountability. Dr. Chester said we do this work to improve student learning of important academic content, skills, and behaviors, focusing on achievement gaps and ensuring that all students leave high school with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that prepare them for success. The goal is student learning, and to make sure the systems increase the desired outcomes and mitigate the unintended consequences.

Dr. Chester said that among the concerns about accountability systems and unintended consequences are: (1) narrowing of the instructional content and services; (2) restricted teacher authority and professionalism; (3) disproportionate impact for some student groups; (4) narrow notions of “effectiveness;” and (5) inaccurate inferences. Dr. Chester spoke of the importance of setting the right targets. He said that multiple measures do not improve automatically the robustness and consistency of conclusions, and policy goals should drive the use of multiple measures.

Dr. Chester said that success for students in the aggregate could mask low outcomes for some and low results in some areas. He said policy objectives should drive which measures are used and how they are combined. Dr. Chester spoke about the notion of internal accountability (Richard Elmore): the question whether all the adults and students take responsibility for the outcomes in their school building.

Dr. Chester said to the extent we want to do the following, there are both policy goals and implications:

Ensure foundational skills

Policy goal: ensure that all students learn to read, write, *and* do math

Implication: combine measures in a manner that ensures mastery of both subjects

Promote a broad education – foundational skills are critical but not sufficient.

Policy goal: promote participation in science, social studies, the arts, languages and cultures, technology

Implication: adopt the measures that promote the incorporation and assessment of science, social studies, the arts, languages and cultures, technology

Promote 21st century skills – make sure measures we use tap into those skills.

Policy goal: promote 21st century skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration)

Implication: adopt measures that promote the incorporation and assessment of 21st century skills within the content areas

Close achievement gaps

Policy goal: focus on historically underserved students

Implication: combine measures in a manner that prevents the masking of low group performance

Expand beyond test-base accountability

Policy goal: privilege teacher judgments and/or effective school practices

Implication: use teacher judgments of students' work in way that ensures certitude of those judgments; measures of effective school practices

Promote a broad notion of school effectiveness

Policy goal: privilege multiple dimensions of school effectiveness

Implication: incorporate multiple measures of effectiveness – achievement, achievement gains, achievement gaps, effective practices

Identify concerns with increasing numbers of schools & districts

Policy goal: differentiate levels of concern and support/intervention efforts

Implication: consider – degree of concern; length of concern; intersection of district & school concern

Promote a sense of urgency

Policy goal: ensure that ongoing, low performance is not acceptable

Implication: with passage of time – increase level of resources/decrease autonomy; secure turn-around partners; create “safe” spaces that allow innovative practices

Leverage a broader system of improvement

Policy goal: focus on districts, regional entities, and other partners as part of the school improvement process

Implication: ensure – district, regional, and partner resources as part of coherent approach; shared accountability

Chairman Reville thanked Dr. Chester and noted that his remarks were exactly the type of framing of the discussion that the Board wanted. The chairman announced the creation of a 21st Century Skills Task Force to assist the Board in considering how to infuse 21st century learning into the work of the state's public schools. The chairman said that the task force will be asked to recommend how the Board might supplement its work on standards, assessments, accountability, curriculum, professional and teacher development to signal educators across the Commonwealth that 21st century skills should be infused into the curriculum.

Chairman Reville said the issue of student engagement is very promising, noting that former commissioner David Driscoll used to say the biggest issue facing students, especially those in high school, is boredom.

The chairman asked given our complementary system – federal, state, and local – what things should be reserved to the state to consider and measure, and what should the role be for our local partners. Dr. Chester said that local educators could assess a breadth of skills in addition to fundamental academic skills, including teamwork, problem solving, research, planning, collaboration, and communication. Dr. Chester said these skills are all critical but not easily assessed at the state level, and we should rely on local districts. The state could provide exemplars, scoring and training, anchor assignments, and local districts would be responsible for measuring student performance in relation to statewide standards.

Chairman Reville said the notion of a senior year project has come up in the Readiness Project. He said performance could be measured by local districts, and such a project could be complementary not compensatory, in addition to fundamental academic skills. The chairman said the state would not do the actual assessments, but could define the criteria.

Board member Sandra Stotsky asked about students and the role of parents. Dr. Stotsky said that homework, if done right, is a way to extend the school day. Dr. Chester said that parent engagement is critical, and it is important to invest resources in this area. Dr. Chester said the state can be a facilitator and support parent engagement, but local educators are the closest to the issue. Dr. Chester said that in some communities the expertise is not there or the support at home is not there. Dr. Chester said that extended time can provide support that some children do not receive at home. He said the summer break is a gap widener. Dr. Chester said we owe it to youngsters to fill in where families cannot provide support on their own, such as for homework. He said an idea to look at more closely would be a year-round calendar, which does not necessarily mean a longer school year.

Board member Jeff Howard suggested that another purpose of the accountability system is to focus the attention of adults and children across the system. Dr. Howard said we might re-jigger the achievement gap construct, which tends to focus predominantly on gaps for students of color and low-income students. If higher achieving students are performing at mediocre levels, then no one is achieving as they should. Dr. Chester

agreed that this is a critical point, and said the accountability system should signal expectations and where students are in relation to those expectations. Chairman Reville added that we talk about achievement *gaps*, meaning the gaps between student performance and proficiency.

Board member Gerald Chertavian asked what contributes to the unintended consequences we have seen to date. Dr. Chester said schools and districts need a collective sense of responsibility, or else an externally imposed accountability system will lead to unintended consequences.

Board member Harneen Chernow asked about the impact of all of the assessments on students themselves, and about teacher judgments. Dr. Chester said every child should have an intellectually engaging time in school. He said schools do youngsters no favor by telling them they do well when they are not; there needs to be a consistency of judgment. He suggested using anchor assignments and exemplars of proficient work at the district level. These would include two to three rich, engaging assignments over the course of a year, and would include writing as well as discussion and collaboration. The district could provide a common scoring guide and training, and the state could audit the process to verify teacher judgments.

Dr. Stotsky agreed with Dr. Howard that in terms of gaps, it is important to improve all students' achievement. Dr. Chester said he sees two kinds of gaps, an achievement gap and an expectations gap. Chairman Reville said this is exactly why the Board has been interested in a growth model where every student could be focused on improvement and the state could look at growth rather than status.

Board member Ruth Kaplan asked about the development of oral communication and research skills. Dr. Chester agreed, saying he would revise the slide on 21st century skills. Ms. Kaplan also said that student engagement was important, and that it is important to look beyond the schoolhouse to see the kinds of support that students need to remove the social and emotional barriers to learning. Dr. Chester agreed that this is a key point in terms of holding the community accountable.

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department is working to report student achievement in relation to the goal of proficient or advanced performance. He also noted that the state's English proficiency assessments currently use teacher judgments in reporting on the speaking and listening skills of English language learners.

Board member Tom Fortmann said he agreed with the emphasis on 21st century skills, since they reinforce each other as well as academic skills.

Dr. Chester resumed his PowerPoint presentation. He said standards-based systems are necessary, but insufficient; we need systems that promote strong curriculum and instruction and that have an impact on adults' and students' sense of responsibility for practice and results. Dr. Chester said that instruction is the linchpin.

Dr. Chester said that next steps in the short term would be to refine the system of support and intervention for schools and districts to enhance curriculum and instruction and the culture of adult and student responsibility, while the longer term would involve clarifying policy goals, identifying design features that address the policy goals (standards, assessments, accountability), stakeholder engagement, and system refinement.

Dr. Chester said the key factors are: (1) an engaging, high level curriculum, (2) support for each student to be successful with that curriculum, (3) a safe and orderly environment, and (4) a sense of civility. He said he expects more discussion over the next several months, with the goal to propose a redesign of the system by fall 2008.

Chairman Reville said it is quite likely that the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) will be transferred to the Department and that will provide the opportunity to integrate state, district, and school accountability. The chairman said that instruction is the focus, but we need to be mindful of the need for broader social service support for low-income students. Ms. Kaplan said it is important to communicate to the community at large what the Board and Department are doing in a way that is understandable to them.

The Board was in recess from 7 p.m. until 8:05 p.m.

The Chairman called the meeting back to order at 8:05 p.m. and invited Board member Tom Fortmann to present his outline on underperforming schools.

Superintendents' Roundtable

Board member Tom Fortmann made a presentation on the regulations and statutes related to underperforming schools to review the requirements, powers and options available. Dr. Fortmann commended "The Turnaround Challenge," a report from Mass Insight funded by the Gates Foundation. That report presents factors needed to transform an underperforming school, including strong, capable leadership; the best possible staff who support the school's vision; and the authority to act. Dr. Fortmann also described the notion of a turnaround zone, a group of schools that have been given extraordinary powers.

Chairman Reville introduced three superintendents: James Caradonio from Worcester, Karla Brooks Baehr from Lowell, and Eduardo Carballo from Holyoke. The chairman said that as the Board reconsiders the mechanisms around the state's accountability system, the question becomes how do we organize that system, speak about it, and label it. The chairman asked the three superintendents: When the Board and Commissioner have confidence in the leadership of the district, what should we be doing in a co-governance relationship between the state and the district to help build the capacity to improve student learning?

James Caradonio, Worcester

Dr. Caradonio distributed a pamphlet from Mass Insight entitled, “12 Tough Questions: A Self-Audit for States Engaged in School Turnaround,” and asked Board members to consider answers to those questions. He said the ten enabling conditions in the regulations relate to this chart, specifically to questions #4, 5, 6, and 7. Dr. Caradonio talked about the importance of formative assessments as measures of academic progress. In Worcester, formative assessments are administered three times per year, and teachers get results back the day after each administration. The superintendent said the cost is \$7.25 per child. Dr. Caradonio said that teachers have thanked him and the district for providing them with these tools to improve student learning. He noted that teachers need common planning time in order to make good use of the formative assessments, and a cost is attached to that.

Dr. Caradonio said that coaches have been helpful and allow for more planning time for teachers. The district has worked closely with the union to design job descriptions. The district has also benefited from working with a technical partner, Focus on Results (Joe Palumbo).

Dr. Caradonio said the process between the Department and Worcester is more collaborative than ever, with a focus on building capacity. The Department has assisted with walk-throughs to identify high quality instruction and give guidance to coaches; NISL training for principals; the ExEI program; and expanded learning time grants. The district has worked with the Efficacy Institute in two schools to build high expectations. The superintendent said more help is needed on readiness to learn and social services support.

Eduardo Carballo, Holyoke

Dr. Carballo said Holyoke has done many things similar to Worcester. Holyoke has paid for teachers to meet in common planning time, mostly at the middle school level and somewhat at the high school. The district has used federal dollars to bring coaches to schools starting two years ago. Holyoke has conducted walk-throughs, and all principals and the superintendent went through NISL training.

Dr. Carballo said there is no road map to know how to exit from underperforming status, and it would be helpful for districts to know the criteria for success. The superintendent said the underperforming label is negative, and it is hard to inspire staff and students when the press reports that their district is underperforming. Dr. Carballo said it is hard to recruit and keep high quality teachers and administrators with the negative label in place.

Dr. Carballo said the “extraordinary power” to dismiss teachers for “good cause” in a chronically underperforming school is not as useful as he believes a statewide contract for underperforming schools would be. He said it is a burden for the district to have to negotiate each time there is a new plan. He also recommended that the state could lessen the burden of paperwork for districts. Dr. Carballo advocated for policies that would

enable highly mobile students and English language learners to show their progress. He added that students have significant social services needs too.

Chairman Reville asked what Dr. Carballo would substitute to keep track of the progress of English language learners. Dr. Carballo suggested a system in which teachers look at student work every 5 to 6 weeks.

Karla Brooks Baehr, Lowell

Dr. Baehr said that in terms of assessment of English language learners, the state had it right before the federal government told us we were wrong. Under the previous system, an English language learner would have three years before being required to take the MCAS. Dr. Baehr said the system is better now with the tests of English proficiency, but more flexibility is still needed from the federal government.

Dr. Baehr advocated for transparent, effective standards, benchmarks for progress, a means to celebrate successes, and flexible measures. She said the standards should be sensitive to changes in the student population. Dr. Baehr said that middle class families continue to be able to exercise choices, and that the students left behind are the most challenging.

Dr. Baehr recommended ratcheting up the effective use of statewide data to follow individual students' progress over time. She noted that the state has a wealth of data and needs greater capacity to help districts manage and analyze their data and use it effectively to improve instruction.

Dr. Baehr said the accountability system needs greater efficiency and less duplication of effort. The state needs to identify exemplars and model practices, and identify promising prescriptions and strategies to address needs. Dr. Baehr said the goal of the working relationship should be to build the capacity of the state, districts and schools to make good decisions.

Dr. Baehr said there is a role for the state to bring union leadership together with district management. Third party assistance and legislation may be needed to accomplish this.

Chairman Reville asked how much of the challenge relates to collective bargaining or poor management. Dr. Baehr said there are times when management skills are not there to build a collaborative relationship. She added that she could not have made the improvements that have been made in Lowell if her predecessor had not gone to court to support the right of principals to have a say in teachers' transfer rights.

Dr. Baehr said there is a range of reasons for underperformance, and the accountability system has to take into account the variety of reasons in various settings. Dr. Carballo commented that all of the factors could be present – poor teaching, poor leadership, or both.

Dr. Baehr said the Department has begun to develop some common tools, including a survey instrument for teachers to look at how they are experiencing their leadership. This is useful to diagnose issues and figure out next steps. There has also been a survey on how common planning time is used.

Dr. Caradonio said the system demands progress, but it may take two years to get teachers to improve. Dr. Caradonio recommended a closer analysis of schools in which high poverty students are reaching proficiency.

Chairman Reville said there is an element of subjectivity in what counts toward improvement. He said in the pre-standards era, these measures tended to be subjective. Dr. Caradonio said the key is to set the right targets and to use the right measures. He said school and district leaders should be better at taking best practices within a district, and sometimes within a school, and moving them around.

Board member Stotsky said that most schools used to use norm-referenced tests. Dr. Baehr said they were less time consuming, not used every year, and had no consequences attached to them.

Board member Kaplan asked whether test reports should go home to families and results should be shared with students in younger grades. Dr. Caradonio said that when tests are diagnostic, students as well as teachers benefit from receiving the data.

Chairman Reville thanked the panel for their participation in this discussion.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 9:30 p.m., subject to the call of the chairman.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Nellhaus
Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board