

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

**Monday, April 28, 2014
5:05 p.m. – 7:10 p.m.**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Maura Banta, Chair, Melrose
Daniel Brogan, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Dennis
Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, Milton
Harneen Chernow, Vice-Chair, Jamaica Plain
Karen Daniels, Milton
James DiTullio, Designee of the Secretary of Education
James O’S. Morton, Springfield
Pendred Noyce, Weston
David Roach, Sutton

Mitchell D. Chester, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Ruth Kaplan, Brookline

Chair Banta called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

Student Assessment: High School Testing and End-of-Course Tests

Commissioner Chester introduced Higher Education Commissioner Richard Freeland and Senior Associate Commissioner Bob Bickerton to present on the potential transition to new standards for high school graduation and college readiness. Commissioner Chester said higher education has been a great partner in our curriculum and assessment initiatives, with the goal of creating a system that prepares students well through high school for the transition to college and careers. He said tonight’s discussion will be the first of many over the next 12-18 months around two important policy decisions relating to possible implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in high school. The two issues are: options for transitioning the high school competency determination requirements – i.e., the state standards that students must meet to qualify for high school graduation – to include PARCC assessments; and how students could benefit from earning PARCC college readiness certification in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

Mr. Bickerton gave the Board an overview of the current competency determination (CD) system, noting that students through the graduating class of 2018 will continue to take the grade 10 MCAS to meet their CD requirement. He outlined the assessment options for earning a CD in English language arts and mathematics for students in the class of 2019 and beyond, if the Board adopts PARCC in 2015. Mr. Bickerton also presented information on PARCC assessments that are parallel to current MCAS high school assessments, options for students on traditional

pathways, and various re-test plans. Commissioner Chester said there are currently no definitive answers, but he wants the Board to have a sense of all the possible options as the conversation moves forward.

Ms. Noyce asked about students taking Algebra I in eighth grade. Mr. Bickerton said the Department has sent guidance to districts regarding eight grade algebra courses and alignment with PARCC. Chair Banta said that when decisions are made around various assessment options, it will be important to communicate very clearly what the options are and the reasons. Ms. Noyce asked about the percentage of high school students taking calculus. Mr. Bickerton said the Department would send the data to the Board; he added that there has been an increase in the number of students taking the Advanced Placement calculus tests.

Mr. Morton and Ms. Calderón-Rosado arrived at 5:35 p.m.

Higher Education Commissioner Freeland reminded the Board of their vote last year on a joint college and career readiness definition with the Board of Higher Education. He said the definition sends clear signals to the field, parents, and students on the necessary academic knowledge, experiences, and intellectual and personal qualities that are important to success in post-secondary education and careers. Commissioner Freeland said 35 percent of Massachusetts students who earn the CD, meet local graduation requirements, and then enroll in a Massachusetts public higher education institution are placed in remedial courses. He said only 20 percent of those who must take two or more remedial courses earn a college diploma. Commissioner Freeland said having more students graduating from high school ready for college level work will vastly improve graduation and completion rates. He said the Department of Higher Education has endorsed the revised curriculum frameworks that this Board adopted in 2010 and is working to align educator preparation programs to the frameworks. Commissioner Freeland added that his board is encouraging more students to take four years of high school mathematics, and is planning to commit to place PARCC-certified college-ready students in credit-bearing courses.

Mr. Roach asked about the future of the Accuplacer exam. Commissioner Freeland said the Board of Higher Education is currently in a two-year period of experimentation with other standards for college course placement, such as using grade point average or other assessments. Commissioner Freeland added that the public may not be prepared to learn that many students are not ready for college-level work. He said PARCC will deliver early signals to students, families, and schools as to whether students are on track to meet a college-ready standard.

Mr. Bickerton outlined next steps, which include: engaging stakeholders in these conversations; continuing the discussion at upcoming Board meetings; and considering a potential vote to continue with or update the current CD policy. In response to a question from Ms. Chernow, Mr. Bickerton said the Board should decide by September 2014 whether to continue using the grade 10 MCAS for the CD through the class of 2019. Mr. DiTullio asked whether a PARCC score would appear on a student's transcript for college admission purposes. Mr. Bickerton said the decision is open but probably the scores would not be on the transcript since they would be used for college course placement, not for college admission.

Chair Banta thanked Commissioner Freeland and Mr. Bickerton for their presentations.

Accountability and Assistance: Update on ESEA Waiver and Revisions to Accountability System

Commissioner Chester reminded the Board that the Commonwealth is currently operating under a waiver granted under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which has not been reauthorized since 2001. Commissioner Chester said under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 80 percent of schools and 90 percent of Massachusetts districts would have been flagged as failing to meet the standard, if we did not have the waiver. He said the NCLB standard lacked impact and credibility, and thus Massachusetts submitted the waiver request that allows us to use our five-level accountability system. Commissioner Chester said the Department now has the opportunity to extend the waiver through the end of the 2014-15 school year. He clarified that the waiver request and the Board's vote tomorrow do not reference a weighting system that incorporates achievement and growth measures; that issue is related but separate. The commissioner introduced Rob Curtin, Director of Education Data Services, and Matthew Pakos, Director of School Improvement Grant Programs.

Mr. Pakos gave the Board an overview of the changes to the accountability system in 2012, such as: a new goal of reducing proficiency gaps by half by 2017; accountability and assistance levels for schools and districts (Levels 1-5); a new performance measure that includes student growth, science, and other indicators; reporting representative school percentiles; and creating a "high needs" subgroup. He gave an overview of the current school and district level designations.

Mr. Curtin said the Department is proposing to request five enhancements to the ESEA waiver as part of the extension process. He said one modification would require districts that are behind in their implementation of the new educator evaluation system to devote their Title IIA funds towards this effort. He said the proposed waiver also would align the Commendation School methodology with federal Blue Ribbon School methodology. Mr. Curtin said another proposed change to the waiver would grant extra credit to schools who re-engage dropouts. He said the proposed waiver also expands the requirements for persistently low graduation rates; the proposed requirement defines a low graduation rate as a school/group having a five-year graduation rate less than 70% in the previous three years and a four-year graduation rate less than 67% in the most recent year. A school meeting these criteria would be placed in Level 3. He said the final proposed change includes district assessment participation, which would establish that any district or school with a participation rate for any group less than 95% is not eligible for Level 1 and any group with a rate less than 90% is not eligible for Levels 1 and 2. Mr. Curtin said the changes to graduation rates and assessment participation would not be implemented until the 2015 accountability determinations.

In response to Mr. DiTullio's question, Mr. Curtin said thirteen schools would be affected by the enhancement to the graduation rate. In response to Ms. Calderón-Rosado's question, Commissioner Chester clarified that districts, for various reasons, could be struggling with educator evaluation implementation at different stages, such as contract adoption, district determined measures, or professional development. He said Title IIA funds would be used to provide resources to boost implementation. In response to a question from Mr. Roach, Commissioner Chester said delay of implementation would not affect a district's accountability level.

Ms. Chernow asked why the accountability weighting system is not being included. Commissioner Chester said it is not necessary for the waiver application and he would like to continue to discuss it with the Board and understand the various models. The commissioner said the current accountability system weights performance 80 percent and growth 20 percent. He

said he has been considering a shift to a 70-30 percent model, but he is not ready to make a recommendation to the Board at this time.

Mr. Curtin said the current accountability system aims to identify schools with the largest proficiency gaps and very low performing subgroups that are not improving quickly enough, so they will receive state support. He said the question is whether the accountability system is identifying the right schools for support. Mr. Curtin reviewed the current percentile methodology for those included within the lowest 20 percent and those above the lowest 20 percent level. He also presented simulations under the 70-30 and 60-40 weighted models. Mr. Curtin explained the impact on the charter school tuition cap. He outlined several considerations, including: the current methodology for determining the lowest performing 10% of districts is based solely on achievement; the amended Charter School Regulations that the Board approved in March 2014 align the charter cap calculation with the metrics used for the state accountability system; weighting of achievement and growth for school and district accountability levels would be applied to determine the lowest performing 10 percent of districts based on 2013-14 assessments; and the charter school statute only allows use of two years of data, instead of four years of data per the school accountability statute.

Mr. Roach said the Board should consider the greatest good for the greatest number of districts. He noted that our current accountability system is much more credible than the NCLB system and the vast majority of districts are benefitting. He added that political concerns should not be part of the decision making. Ms. Noyce said the Board should consider which schools and districts most need help. She suggested one option could be the bottom 10 percent based on achievement and below the 50th percentile in growth. Commissioner Chester said he would not rule out other methodologies. He said he shares the same concerns as Board members, including not rewarding districts for growth if their achievement is still critically low. The commissioner said this discussion would continue at a future meeting.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 7:10 pm, subject to the call of the chair.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Mitchell D. Chester
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board