

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Tuesday, November 17, 2015
8:40 a.m. – 12:55 p.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge
James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston
Katherine Craven, Brookline
Ed Doherty, Boston
Roland Fryer, Concord
Margaret McKenna, Boston
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
Pendred Noyce, Boston
James Peyser, Secretary of Education
Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington
Donald Willyard, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Revere

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

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. and welcomed members of the Board and public.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the October 19, 2015 Special Meeting and October 20, 2015 Regular Meeting.

The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Chester informed the Board about the recent report issued by the Foundation Budget Review Commission. He reported on the results for Massachusetts fourth and eighth graders in reading and mathematics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam. He said Massachusetts was alone among states in being first in fourth grade reading and tied for first among states in fourth grade mathematics, eighth grade reading and eighth grade mathematics. Commissioner Chester said while these results are commendable, two areas of concern in the NAEP report are the decline in eighth grade mathematics results in Massachusetts and other states, and the fact that eighth grade reading results for Hispanic students in Massachusetts lag behind other states. The commissioner also commented on the Department's organizational review, the recent ACLU report on data privacy, the Department's eighth annual Fall Summit for educators, and the upcoming district review of the Southbridge Public Schools.

PARCC Spring 2015 School and District Results

Bob Lee, Chief Assessment Analyst, reviewed PARCC results in grades 3-8 English language arts and mathematics for urban districts, Commissioner's districts, and statewide. He highlighted Leominster, Chicopee, Malden, and Newton for their notable results. Mr. Lee explained the ways in which MCAS scores translate to the PARCC performance scale.

Dr. Fryer commented on relative growth among students. In response to Ms. McKenna's question about the timeline for releasing results, Mr. Lee said Massachusetts was the first state to report PARCC results and that the standard-setting process in this first year of operation delayed the release date. Commissioner Chester said summer is the target for releasing 2016 PARCC results.

Commissioner's Recommendation on Student Assessment for FY2016 and Beyond

Chair Sagan called for a motion, which was duly made and seconded:

MOVED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. General Laws chapter 69, sections 1B and 1I, hereby endorses the approach recommended by the Commissioner to develop the next-generation Massachusetts student assessment program, and directs the Commissioner to take steps as outlined in his November 12, 2015 memorandum to the Board to achieve that objective.

Commissioner Chester said over the past two decades Massachusetts has come a long way in reducing inequities in K-12 education, through the grand bargain of education reform. He said three conclusions form the basis for his assessment recommendation: (1) MCAS has served the Commonwealth well, but has reached a point of diminishing returns; (2) PARCC is a substantial advancement over our current assessment system; and (3) Massachusetts must remain in control of its standards and assessment development.

Commissioner Chester summarized his recommendations. With respect to recommendation 6 in his memo, he clarified that *any* districts administering PARCC in 2016 would be held harmless from negative consequences of using the test scores for purposes of accountability determinations, and that for purposes of educator evaluation in PARCC districts, student growth scores that are out of line with other data would not be used. He said he has talked with Chair Sagan about appointing a Board committee to work with the Commissioner as we proceed with the assessment program.

Secretary Peyser thanked the Commissioner and Chair for a thoughtful, deliberative, inclusive process. He said the hybrid approach draws on the strengths of MCAS and PARCC, allows Massachusetts to retain control, and minimizes uncertainty and costs by using well vetted test items. He said spring 2016 would be a bridge to an integrated single test in 2017. Secretary Peyser endorsed the Commissioner's recommendation.

Ms. Stewart asked about the members of the assessment committees. The Commissioner said there are multiple panels and they include academic experts as well as K-12 teachers and administrators. Dr. Noyce asked about districts' choice of assessment for 2016. Commissioner Chester said he is recommending a Massachusetts next-generation test starting in 2017 and his

message is that districts should use PARCC this year to help students get familiar with what will be the basis for the new test.

Ms. Craven said the Commissioner's recommendation responds to what the Board heard from the public in all the hearings and it preserves our control and our investments. She said "no testing" is not an option. Ms. Craven said her big concern is communication and collaboration to build coalitions again as with MCAS; she said MCAS was controversial at first but it raised expectations and we can do that again. Ms. Craven said she supports the recommendation.

Mr. Doherty said he has heard lots of contradictory information and is not convinced that PARCC is better than MCAS. He said MCAS has served Massachusetts well and could be updated. He said tests should not be used to punish and that the real problem is poverty. Mr. Doherty said he supports a moratorium on testing.

Vice-Chair Morton said the Commissioner's proposal is consistent with the idea of improving MCAS. He said better tests prompt better teaching, and we need good tests and good data. Vice-Chair Morton said his main concerns are the timeline and equitable access to technology for low-income children.

Mr. Moriarty said he supports the recommendations and the grand bargain of education reform, which has benefited his city of Holyoke. He said assessments provide essential information, especially in poor districts. In response to Mr. Moriarty's question about recommendation 4, Commissioner Chester said as we develop next-generation assessments, it is appropriate to review the English language arts and mathematics standards to see if any modifications are needed after five years of implementation.

Ms. McKenna said she believes the pendulum on testing has swung too much towards punitive use rather than accountability and helping. She said she is not opposed to a new test but believes it cannot be done responsibly by 2017. Commissioner Chester explained the process is different than developing a brand-new test, because we have already invested a great deal in test development and have four years' worth of vetted PARCC test items. He said because we are much further along in test development, the 2017 date is aggressive but doable. The Commissioner added that each year we have been giving a new form of MCAS, and the proposal for 2017 is akin to that. Ms. McKenna said she is skeptical and suggested following the example of Maryland to give districts and students more time and money for technology.

Chair Sagan asked Commissioner Chester if there is a back-up plan for 2017. The Commissioner said the assessment technical advisory committee and the Department's assessment staff are confident we can deliver a technically sound test in 2017. Dr. Noyce said assessment is a key tool to reducing achievement gaps: tests do not eliminate gaps, but they point out gaps and move the dial toward more assistance and justice for students, as in Lawrence. She said formative assessment, done well, helps to improve teaching and learning, and we need more of it. Dr. Noyce said she supports the Commissioner's recommendation and would advocate holding districts and teachers harmless for two years. Commissioner Chester said a moratorium on accountability for too long would shortchange students.

Mr. Willyard said he is the elected representative of students and they are opposed to PARCC because of the time limits and concerns about access to technology. He said he found the PARCC math test last year too hard. Dr. Fryer said we need assessments that expand opportunities. He said poverty is not destiny and recounted his own experience. He said schools

should not be held harmless for too long. Dr. Fryer said testing is important and good schools have a transformative effect.

Commissioner Chester said he would work closely with a Board committee on assessment, and he also plans to convene advisory panels of educators. In response to a question from Mr. Doherty, Commissioner Chester said he would be interested in recommendations from professional organizations for the advisory panels of educators.

Ms. McKenna agreed with Dr. Fryer that schooling transforms lives and poverty is not destiny. She said she would make a motion to hold schools harmless based on the new test through 2017. Secretary Peyser said he is opposed to anything that would prevent identifying schools and districts that need intervention. He cautioned that hold harmless for some districts could lock others into the lower ranks.

Chair Sagan thanked Commissioner Chester for his integrity and perseverance on this issue, and thanked Board members and the teachers and other concerned citizens who have expressed their views. He said he supports the Commissioner's recommendation. Chair Sagan said he knows the Board hashed out similarly difficult issues regarding assessment two decades ago, and the Commonwealth's students have been served better as a result. He said assessment shines a light on where we are failing; we hold ourselves and other adults responsible and provide tools to address the needs. Chair Sagan said we can use PARCC now without losing control, and the PARCC hybrid would take advantage of millions of dollars already invested in development. He suggested the Department look into overuse of local testing in some schools. Chair Sagan said he will appoint a special committee of the Board to focus on assessment.

Ms. McKenna said she would like to amend the motion to say the new test would be effective in 2018 for accountability purposes and districts would be held harmless in 2016 and 2017. Chair Sagan cautioned that we need to preserve flexibility and not jeopardize the Commonwealth's standing with the U.S. Department of Education when the current ESEA waiver expires. Dr. Noyce said she would make a motion to amend the main motion, accepting the Commissioner's recommendation and adding a proviso to hold schools and districts harmless in 2016 and 2017.

Commissioner Chester said he does not support a motion that would handcuff our ability to intervene in a struggling school or district for two-plus years. Ms. McKenna said she would simply add one year to what the Commissioner already proposed. She stated that 19 new tests would have to be created. Secretary Peyser said he opposes the amendment because it is overly broad and risks losing momentum. He said the Board and Commissioner must be able to continue to exercise judgment, using the data we have, rather than putting the accountability system on hold for two years. Chair Sagan concurred, noting that these decisions affect the most underserved students. He suggested the Board could return to this question in the future if it proves necessary. Mr. Willyard said he supports the amendment.

In response to a question from Dr. Fryer, Commissioner Chester described the five levels in the accountability system. He said of the current Level 3 schools, 15-20 are of concern, and several of the Level 4 schools are of concern. Vice-Chair Morton asked if factors other than test scores enter into the determination of a school's accountability level. The Commissioner said the list of the lowest 20% is based solely on test scores, but other factors are considered in determining placement in Level 4 or 5. Dr. Noyce asked if the amendment then affects movement into Level 3, but schools could still move to Level 4 or 5. Secretary Peyser said Level 3 status gives the school access to greater resources and technical assistance. Mr. Moriarty said he opposes putting

accountability and resources on hold for two years, noting that this year's kindergarteners will be in grade 3 by 2018. Commissioner Chester said the accountability system has been effective and the amendment would take an effective tool off the table. Ms. McKenna said the amendment just extends the Commissioner's recommendation on hold harmless by another year, and it relates only to the use of test scores. General Counsel Rhoda Schneider suggested the Board could defer action on the hold harmless question until the next meeting, to allow further consideration.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education amend the main motion as presented by adding, after the word "objective," the following language:

“, provided that schools and districts administering PARCC in spring 2016 and administering the new test in spring 2017, in grades 3-8, will be held harmless for any negative changes in their school and district accountability level based on those test scores.”

The motion passed by a vote of 7-4. Ms. Craven, Mr. Moriarty, Secretary Peyser, and Chair Sagan voted in opposition.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. General Laws chapter 69, sections 1B and 1I, hereby endorses the approach recommended by the Commissioner to develop the next-generation Massachusetts student assessment program, and directs the Commissioner to take steps as outlined in his November 12, 2015 memorandum to the Board to achieve that objective, provided that schools and districts administering PARCC in spring 2016 and administering the new test in spring 2017, in grades 3-8, will be held harmless for any negative changes in their school and district accountability level based on those test scores.

The motion, as amended, passed by a vote of 8-3. Mr. Doherty, Ms. Stewart, and Mr. Willyard voted in opposition.

Chair Sagan appointed members to a temporary Board committee on assessment; Dr. Fryer (chair), Dr. Noyce (vice-chair), Secretary Peyser, Mr. Willyard, and Chair Sagan. He noted that per the bylaws, all Board members are welcome to attend committee meetings.

Dr. Fryer left the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

Commissioner Chester thanked the Board for its thoughtful deliberations and said he is very pleased with the outcome.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY2017 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board's Budget Committee

Committee chair Katherine Craven presented the committee's recommendations as to general priority areas for the FY2017 state education budget. She noted there are several unknowns at this stage of state budget planning, including the recommendation from the Foundation Budget Review Commission for potentially \$1 billion more in state aid for education, and the possibility of 9C cuts this year. Ms. McKenna asked that the bullet point on educational time be amended to include summer learning. The Board agreed by consensus to that change. In response to a question from Dr. Noyce, Ms. Craven said the list is not in priority order. Secretary Peyser said he would abstain from the vote, since by statute he receives the Board's budget proposal.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. Gen. Laws chapter 69, § 1A, approve the budget priorities for the FY2017 education budget as recommended by the Board's budget committee and the Commissioner, and direct the Commissioner to convey these recommendations and priorities to the Secretary of Education, the Governor, and the Legislature.

The vote was 9-0-1. Secretary Peyser abstained.

Update on Holyoke Public Schools

Ventura Rodriguez updated the Board on implementation of the Holyoke district turnaround plan. He said the district has hired Erin Linville as Chief Officer for Strategy and Turnaround and Nancy Athas as the acting principal for the Peck Middle School. Mr. Rodriguez said the district is exploring extending learning time and community engagement practices, and is providing multiple pathways to re-engage dropouts including a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, online credit recovery, accelerated courses, and social/emotional supports.

Additional Updates

Ms. Stewart provided Board members with a recap of the National Association of State Boards of Education annual conference in Baltimore. She said the conference focused on changing demographics, student data privacy, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, among other topics. Ms. Stewart reported she was elected as the Northeast Representative to the NASBE board. She said the NASBE legislative conference will be held April 4-5, 2016.

Dr. Noyce reported that the Commissioner's performance evaluation committee is in the process of updating the performance criteria, which all members will receive after she has reviewed the document with the Commissioner.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:55 p.m., 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