

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Monday, May 23, 2016
5:05 p.m. –7:05 p.m.
DESE, 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge
James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston
Ed Doherty, Boston
Margaret McKenna, Boston
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
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

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Katherine Craven, Brookline
Roland Fryer, Cambridge
Pendred Noyce, Boston

Chair Sagan welcomed Board members and the public. He said members will hear an update on the state's educator evaluation system. He said the Massachusetts Teachers Association and American Federation of Teachers- Massachusetts were invited to participate in tonight's meeting; they may attend a follow-up meeting in June.

Commissioner Chester said the Board adopted regulations in 2011 for the evaluation of educators, informed by recommendations from a 40-member task force comprised of practitioners, association and union leaders, and policy experts; the task force included Board member Mary Ann Stewart, representing the Massachusetts PTA. He said the Massachusetts educator evaluation framework focuses on five key priorities: promote growth and development; place student learning at the center; recognize excellence; set a high bar for tenure; and shorten timelines for improvement. He said prior to 2012, evaluations in Massachusetts rarely included student outcomes or singled out excellence among educators, and failed to ensure educator input or continuous improvement and differentiate meaningfully between levels of effectiveness. The commissioner provided an example of a district, in which a sample of 58 teacher evaluations, looking at over 1,000 indicators of performance, resulted in only one indicator for one teacher rated less than satisfactory. He said before the framework, most evaluation systems were binary and educators were rated satisfactory or unsatisfactory; they rarely received feedback. Commissioner Chester said the current system was designed with multiple measures that in turn provide feedback, and include artifacts of learning and impacts on student learning. He introduced Senior Associate Commissioner Heather Peske and Ron Noble.

Ron Noble reviewed the implementation timeline. He said the work on developing and implementing the evaluation system has been underway since 2010 and all districts are now implementing systems aligned to the state framework. He noted that due to an intentional phased rollout, districts are still developing some components of the framework, such as measures of impact on student learning and student surveys. Mr. Noble said every educator will receive two

ratings: a summative performance rating and a student impact rating. He said unlike other states, Massachusetts avoided using algorithms and formulas to determine an educator's evaluation; in the case of both ratings, professional judgment is the determining factor allowing evaluators and educators to consider the broader context as they review and analyze evidence together.

Mr. Noble said the summative performance rating is grounded in a five-step evaluation cycle that begins with a self-assessment to inform professional practice and student learning goals, followed by a formative check at the midpoint of the educator's plan, and then a summative evaluation at the end. He said districts have a great deal of flexibility in customizing this process to meet their needs, and the Department has created tools and resources to support each step of the process and shares best practices from districts. Mr. Noble explained that like the performance rating, the student impact rating involves collecting evidence and using professional judgment to determine a rating. He said common measures such as statewide growth measures and local measures (sometimes called district-determined measures or DDMs), are looked at over time to identify trends and patterns related to an educator's impact on student learning. He said districts have significant latitude to customize the process to meet their needs and align the work to district priorities, including deciding which and how many measures will be used to inform the impact rating. Mr. Noble noted that last spring the Department offered additional flexibility for districts to propose their own plan to measure an educator's impact on student learning.

Senior Associate Commissioner Heather Peske said the rollout of the framework was phased in as follows: districts with Level 4 schools and a group of volunteer early adopter districts began in 2011-2012; districts that participated in Race to the Top started in 2012-2013; and all remaining districts began in 2013-2014 with at least half of their educators. She said components of the framework were also staggered based on stakeholder input, such as the incorporation of student and staff feedback slated to begin in 2013-14 and delayed to 2014-15 and the introduction of measures of student learning delayed until this school year. She said the Board would hear from two panels at this evening's meeting, one offering national, statewide, and research perspectives and the other offering perspectives from district and school practitioners. She introduced Kati Haycock, President of the Education Trust, and Ross Wiener, Director of the Education and Society Program at the Aspen Institute.

Kati Haycock reflected on the Education Trust's evaluation system. She said the organization is beginning their evaluation season, which is the time, each year, when, in addition to the informal feedback that employees get during the year, they get formal feedback. She said their system, like the Massachusetts system, begins with self-assessment, self-reflection, and quality feedback, accompanied with honest reflection: a critical part of helping anybody to get better. Ms. Haycock said the evaluation work is hard and time-consuming, and she is not surprised when there is pushback. She said she would like to encourage Massachusetts to stay the course, both with the thoughtful and comprehensive nature of the system, and especially on the demand that the impact on student learning be considered as part of all educators' evaluations. She said state leaders and the many other educators around the state who participated in the design process took the steps to avoid issues that other states have experienced, such as: a one-size-fits-all model, with no district discretion; a formulaic approach to measuring learning; a state-imposed algorithm with state-imposed weights; the absence of room for professional judgment; and the punitive nature of many state systems which are not focused on growth and development. She said Massachusetts took care to avoid the misuses of evaluation, and that to go backward, especially around student learning, would betray the responsibilities of the Board to advance student learning. Ms. Haycock said to evaluate educators, whose fundamental responsibility is to grow the knowledge and skills of their students, on everything but how well they grow the

knowledge and skills of their students is irresponsible. She said a good evaluation system does not improve employees by itself but it is a strong signal about what is important and has the effect of changing conversations and re-focusing.

Ms. Haycock said across the country, districts and partners are focused on improving the achievement levels of low-income students and students of color. She said there are a variety of reasons why those students are lagging behind, but among the most important of those reasons within our control is our propensity to assign these children disproportionately to our least experienced, least well-educated, and least effective teachers. She said the Board and the state must own some responsibility for acting on this pattern. She said looking constantly both at the adults and what children are learning is the fundamental connection that makes your educator evaluation system so powerful in Massachusetts's improvement efforts.

Mr. Ross Wiener said his role allows him to work with education leaders and policy makers to develop and refine strategies for improving outcomes in public education, and in particular around educator evaluation as it has been such a priority across so many states. He said evaluations provide an essential infrastructure for improvement. He said this is especially true in Massachusetts with its ambitious aspirations for student learning that are embedded in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, requiring everybody to learn new ways of teaching and incorporating feedback to get better.

Mr. Wiener said evaluation policies that distinguish Massachusetts from other states include valuing professional judgment, emphasizing local control, and prioritizing growth and development. Mr. Wiener added that a professional learning network was put into place to convene district leaders to address vexing problems of practice with regard to the evaluation system and another network was established to focus on ensuring that students of color and low-income students have equitable access to the most effective teachers. He said the treatment of complex issues has been both strategic and balanced, such as student learning, which does not rely on a formula or an algorithm for calculating teachers' impact. In many states, the debate over formulas overtook the conversations and turned them from one about a strategy to help support teachers to get better with students to a debate that undermines professional judgment. Mr. Wiener said Massachusetts's policy resolved that the system must be a reflective, growth-oriented process that takes into account student learning, but that professional judgment plays the decisive role.

Mr. Wiener said leaders here recognized the considerations of including student learning data within a new system and have tried to manage this shift thoughtfully by changing timelines and additional flexibilities. Mr. Wiener said district-determined measures are an essential part of the system. He said there may be frustration with the slow pace of change in some quarters and there might be pushback to the new responsibilities from others, but Massachusetts is on the right track establishing the need for teachers and evaluators to set goals for student learning, deciding on the measures used to determine whether they have met those goals, and using information to discuss how they are going to improve practice.

In response to Mr. Willyard's question, Ms. Peske said student feedback is still part of the evaluation system, but districts decide how it is used. She said the Department encourages its use at the formative stage for professional growth and has developed optional survey instruments. In response to Ms. McKenna's question, Ms. Peske said the Massachusetts student growth percentile is a strong indicator of student growth, but it is only available for approximately 14 percent of educators, which is why the district-determined measures are a component of the system. Mr. Doherty said he is not in favor of using student growth, and the two statewide

teachers unions do not support its use either. He said the American Educational Research Association's report states that student performance should not be used for teacher evaluation, and other factors cannot be disentangled. Mr. Wiener said that the report was critiquing formulaic systems, which Massachusetts does not employ.

Secretary Peyser said Massachusetts is trying to get to the real work of meaningful engagement among instructional leaders, principals, and teachers around instruction and student outcomes to improve practice. He asked panelists to share promising practices of other states, particularly those that have garnered buy-in and engagement at the local level. Mr. Weiner said Tennessee was quick to implement an evaluation system, but over the years it has been in place, educators have grown steadily more comfortable with it and have trust in the system. He said educators and education leaders do not get the grounding in assessment that they need to be clear about measuring student improvement and growth. He said in other countries teacher preparation programs are focused on creating assessments of student learning, which leads into a natural conversation on measures of student learning in the evaluation. In response to Ms. Stewart's question, Ms. Haycock said the evaluation is not the only feature of a successful system and the focus at the school level should be on how people think about and do their work across the board.

Commissioner Chester said this is about growth and development for the whole school, not just individual teachers. He noted that even high-income districts have significant achievement gaps. Mr. Doherty said when we are trying to encourage teachers to teach in tough situations, tying their evaluation to student performance may be a disincentive. Chair Sagan noted this might indicate a messaging problem.

The Board took a short break.

Heather Peske introduced the panel of practitioners:

- Kate Fenton, Chief Instructional Officer, Springfield Public Schools
- Shakera Walker, Senior Manager of Teacher Leadership and Professional Development, Boston Public Schools, member of the Educator Evaluation Task Force as a teacher
- Gene Reiber, Teacher, Hanover Public Schools
- Mike Sabin, Principal, McDevitt Middle School, Waltham
- Michelle Ryan, Teacher, Randolph Public Schools
- Kim Smith, Superintendent, Wakefield Public Schools

Ms. Fenton said Springfield has 2400 teachers in 55 schools, and the district prepared evaluators by sending them to a two-day course. She said there is an expectation that each educator will be observed three times and will receive feedback. She said the district distilled the 30+ indicators to four essential elements to clarify the focus. Ms. Walker said in Boston there is a five-step process that values teacher voice, quality feedback, and high expectations. She said principals are getting into classrooms more now. She noted that the Peer Assistance and Review system with the BTU has been helpful. Ms. Walker said the evaluation system should be about "supporting and inspiring" and not "sorting and firing." She cautioned that observable activities should not be privileged and noted that unconscious bias can be a challenge.

Mr. Reiber said the evaluation process shows that climate and culture matter, and the development process must include educators. Mr. Sabin said he spent ten years under the district's prior evaluation system, and five years under the current evaluation system. He believes the new system has been a positive change and now includes teacher voice that is expected, not

optional. He said evidence of student learning is important; results should be part of evaluation so it does not focus solely on input measures. He cautioned that year-three of an evaluation of a new teacher has an impact on teacher tenure, which puts additional pressure on evaluators. He said more resources are needed to work with teachers on the rubric and the system entails hundreds of hours of work for principals, who need additional time to complete observations and feedback.

Ms. Ryan said a positive aspect of the statewide system is a common language and common expectations for educators. She said she appreciates support for growth, reflection, and risk-taking. She said challenges include not enough time for administrators to complete the evaluations and provide support to educators.

Supt. Smith said Wakefield took advantage of the alternative pathways option from the Department. She said she experienced three obstacles to district-determined measures: a disconnect with the five-step cycle; the potential high-moderate-low ratings caused fear; and teachers wanted a broader picture of their work depicted. She said Wakefield created a fifth standard and five indicators that include both qualitative and quantitative measures. Supt. Smith said the district's alternative home-grown pathway helps teachers view their work through the lens of student performance.

Vice-Chair Morton thanked panel members for their expertise and commended Wakefield for the creation of an alternative pathway and inclusion of educators in the process. In response to Mr. Moriarty's question, Ms. Smith said approximately fourteen to sixteen direct reports to evaluate is a responsible and manageable number. In response to Ms. McKenna's question, Ms. Walker said the "needs improvement" rating must be de-stigmatized. She said educators must feel safe and free to explore new strategies and programs in their classrooms, and they need training and support. Mr. Sabin suggested first-year teachers might need a developmental rubric.

Chair Sagan and Commissioner Chester thanked all panelists for the excellent discussion.

On a motion duly made and seconded:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 7:05 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