

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

**September 21, 2010
8:33 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.**

**Massachusetts 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
Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, Milton
Harneen Chernow, Vice Chair, Jamaica Plain
Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge
Michael D'Ortenzio Jr., Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley
Beverly Holmes, Springfield
Jeff Howard, Reading
Ruth Kaplan, Brookline
James McDermott, Eastham
Paul Reville, Secretary of Education, Worcester

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

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Comments from the Chair

Chair Banta introduced two new members, Vanessa Calderón-Rosado of Milton and James McDermott of Eastham. Chair Banta said she participated in a planning retreat with Secretary Reville and the commissioners and board chairs of Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Higher Education. The chair along with Board member Beverly Holmes attended a session with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in Springfield to congratulate the state on receiving a Race to the Top grant. Chair Banta said she was pleased to visit three Springfield schools that day. She said several school officials expressed appreciation for the help they have received from the Department's Office of Accountability and Assistance. Chair Banta said she was also recently in Washington, DC to meet with Achieve on next steps in the Common Core State Standards initiative.

Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Chester welcomed the two new Board members, Dr. Calderón-Rosado and Dr. McDermott, and noted that he attended events with each member in the last week. The commissioner said the Springfield visit with Chair Banta and Ms. Holmes was very positive. The commissioner said he met with the State Student Advisory Council during the summer and commended the council on receiving a \$15,000 grant through the America's Promise Alliance to empower high-school-aged youth to examine the high school dropout crisis and take action to help more youth graduate on time.

Commissioner Chester said he sent a letter to Gloucester Community Arts Charter School on Friday stating that he no longer believed the school was viable in light of recent circumstances including two delayed openings and a decision from the state Attorney General that the school violated state laws on procurement and construction. The commissioner said he hoped parents would enroll students in their home districts. He said if the school does open, parents are risking enrolling their children in a non-publicly funded school. Commissioner Chester said he will assess the situation and determine if further action is necessary, which might include convening a special meeting of the Board later this week.

Board member Ruth Kaplan arrived at 9:45 a.m.

Comments from the Secretary

Secretary Reville extended the Governor's thanks to the two new Board members. The secretary commended the Board for its discussion of the Proficiency Gap Task Force report during last night's special meeting. He acknowledged the leadership of Task Force chair Jeff Howard, and said the Board made real progress on the topic and identified topics for future discussions. Secretary Reville said the Administration is still trying to reach agreement with the Legislature on the FMAP funds. He thanked Department staff, Executive Office staff, and the Board for the collective work around the state's successful Race to the Top application, and noted that Massachusetts received the top score. The secretary said thanks to the federal Education Jobs Fund, the state was able to preserve 2,400 to 2,700 teaching jobs. Secretary Reville provided an update on the state's participation in the PARCC assessment consortium with 26 other states and the federal grant the consortium recently received. The secretary said he is proud of MCAS, which has served us well, and MCAS will remain, as state law calls for it. Secretary Reville also updated the Board on the opening of two innovation schools this fall and on the continuing work among the three education departments on key subjects such as early literacy and college and career readiness.

Public Comment

- State Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.

- Jennifer Shulman, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.
- Rebecca Olson, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.
- Pamela Cilluffo, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.
- State Senator Bruce Tarr addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School
- Shelley Bos, a parent, addressed the Board on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.
- Robert Kosta, president-elect of the Massachusetts Council for Social Studies, addressed the Board on social studies instruction.
- Arthur Lipkin, chair of the Massachusetts Commission on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Youth, addressed the Board on the anti-bullying regulations.
- Tyrone Mowatt addressed the Board on the Proficiency Gap Task Force report.
- Amy O'Leary from Strategies for Children addressed the Board on early literacy and the work of her organization.

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 July 21, 2010 special regular meeting.

The vote was unanimous.

Annual Meeting: Election of Vice-Chair

Chair Banta announced that September is the annual meeting of the Board and invited members to nominate candidates for Vice-Chair. Board member Gerald Chertavian nominated Harneen Chernow. No other nominations were made.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education elect Harneen Chernow to serve as Vice-Chair of the Board, in accordance with Article I of the By-Laws.

The vote was unanimous. Chair Banta congratulated Vice-Chair Chernow.

2010 MCAS Results

Commissioner Chester said MCAS results are the most important indicator of how we are doing on improving student learning. The commissioner presented an overview of the 2010 MCAS results, noting gains made in grade 3 and in middle grades, and said this is the first year that more than 50 percent of all 7th and 8th graders statewide scored *Proficient* or higher in Mathematics. The commissioner said 62 schools exited their accountability status, and described the new designation – Commendation schools – to recognize schools that are narrowing proficiency gaps, demonstrating high growth, and exiting their No Child Left Behind (NCLB) status. The commissioner said this year, 187 schools were recognized as Commendation schools.

Chair Banta said she is pleased with the recognition for schools that have made good progress. Board member Jim McDermott asked about the Eliot Elementary School in Boston, site of the press conference to release the 2010 MCAS school and district results. Commissioner Chester said the current principal is entering her fourth year and there has been a fair amount of staff turnover; the school has focused on curriculum, trained teachers, redesigned its schedule, provided extra academic intervention, and reached out to families. Board member Vanessa Calderón-Rosado said these numbers are encouraging and thanked the commissioner and his staff for their work. Dr. Calderón-Rosado said she would like to see what strategies the other Commendation schools are using. She said the results for English language learners are cause for concern.

Secretary Reville noted a dip in proficiency rates between the 3rd and 4th grades in ELA and Math. Associate Commissioner Robert Bickerton said in math, the grade 3 to grade 4 changes seem to reflect standard-setting and expectations for grade level performance.

Vice Chair Chernow asked about schools exiting and then coming back into AYP status. Commissioner Chester said in most cases those schools are improving but the metric is more challenging each year. The commissioner said federal AYP status has lost impact, and the state has tried to integrate it into the new accountability levels for schools and districts.

Board member Ruth Kaplan said she wondered whether the Board should make a statement to Congress about NCLB reauthorization because the metrics have no meaning anymore. Ms. Kaplan said students with disabilities still seem to be on the margins and she is concerned about the number not receiving a high school diploma. She said there is a fine line between improving teaching and learning and teaching to a test. Commissioner Chester said it's not about test results, it's about students learning to read well, do math well, and think. Commissioner Chester said the state is taking a leadership role in the consortium to build the next generation of assessments.

Dr. Howard commended the observations and research discussed by Mr. Mowatt during public comment, and asked if there was any plan to look at the performance of currently high performing students and watch their progress from year to year. The commissioner said the Department will review the request.

Report of the Proficiency Gap Task Force: Commissioner's Recommendations

Chair Banta provided a recap of the Board's special meeting last evening. The chair said the Board agreed that the commissioner is the driver of measurable results, and the Board expects to get a progress report from the commissioner in a few months.

Dr. Howard said the Board had a good discussion about setting a clear target but did not reach a conclusion. Dr. Howard said he heard a clear message that the commissioner is the driver of this work and has designated an office to monitor and report on results. Dr. Howard said effective action to close proficiency gaps should be a part of the commissioner's evaluation. Chair Banta said the evaluation committee has taken this into account. Ms. Kaplan asked that future discussions on this topic include a focus on students with disabilities.

Regulations to Implement Anti-Bullying Statute, 603 CMR 49.00

Commissioner Chester said the proposed regulations to implement the Anti-Bullying Statute, 603 CMR 49.00, were sent out for public comment in June. The commissioner said the regulations are one part of a broader initiative to create supportive school cultures that encourage students and adults to be respectful and sensitive to differences. The commissioner said a broader approach is necessary so students learn appropriate behavior and know what won't be tolerated. Associate Commissioner John Bynoe said the model plan is broad and based on the Behavioral Health Task Force report, while the regulations address one specific component about reporting on incidents of bullying.

Vice Chair Chernow asked why the regulations did not include prevention and education. Department counsel Dianne Curran said the law directs the Board to promulgate regulations only in the area of parental notification and law enforcement notification. She noted that the model plan and other Department initiatives under the anti-bullying statute are much broader.

Vice Chair Chernow moved to amend the proposed motion on the regulations, to direct the commissioner to work with interested parties to provide technical guidance to schools. She said comments from various groups like Mass Equality, the Commission on GLBT, and GLAAD argued that the regulations could provide a disincentive for students coming forward to prevent them from being outed to their parents. The motion to add a second paragraph to the proposed motion was seconded and approved.

Board member Beverly Holmes said she agrees with the emphasis on creating a school culture where bullying is unacceptable and would not happen. Associate Commissioner Bynoe said this is part of the larger school climate initiative that is continuing. Secretary Reville said the model plan is very helpful in providing guidance. Board member Michael D'Ortenzio Jr. said the Board would benefit from getting more information in January, per the amendment to the motion.

On an amended motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 69, § 1B, and c. 71, §37O, as added by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, and having solicited and reviewed public comment in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. chapter 30A, § 3, hereby adopt the Regulations on the Anti-Bullying Law, 603 CMR 49.00, as presented by the Commissioner. The proposed regulations concern the school's notification to parents/guardians and, under certain circumstances, to the local law enforcement agency, as required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O (d) (viii).

Provided, further, that the Board direct the Commissioner to work with interested organizations to develop and provide additional guidance and technical assistance to schools on implementation of these notification requirements, in light of the public comments received concerning vulnerable populations of students; and that the Commissioner report back to the Board on these activities in January 2011.

The vote was unanimous.

School and District Accountability and Assistance System

Commissioner Chester said he is proud of the work on the state's accountability and assistance system, and credit goes to Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr, Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy, and Eva Mitchell. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the 2008 law required two separate centers, one on Accountability, headed by Eva Mitchell, and one on Assistance, headed by Lynda Foisy. As Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Baehr oversees the work of both units. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the purpose of today's discussion is to provide members with background information that will be helpful when reading about Level 3, 4, and 5 schools in the media, when the commissioner comes back to the Board in late winter with recommendations about future designations for five school districts, and as useful information as the Department moves forward with the full implementation of the accountability redesign.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr presented a PowerPoint to the Board. She said the redesign is crafted around three key ideas – (1) the system is built with the field to enhance credibility and ensure it is more effectively implemented; (2) the district is the entry point; and (3) the district is only as strong as its weakest school. Other core ideas include: (1) accountability is essential, but not sufficient; (2) assistance and intervention are proportional to need; (3) the number of districts and schools identified for the strongest intervention needs to be proportional to the Department's capacity to assist and intervene; and (4) the federal and state accountability requirements need to be integrated. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department developed a tiered assistance and assistance. Deputy Commissioner Baehr outlined the school and district level designations:

- Level 1 – Districts with no schools in corrective action or restructuring
- Level 2 – Districts with schools in corrective action or in restructuring
- Level 3 – Districts with one or more schools among the lowest-performing 20% based on quantitative indicators
- Level 4 – Districts identified by quantitative and qualitative indicators through a district review; districts with one or more schools among the lowest-performing and least improving 2% based on quantitative indicators
- Level 5 – Districts or schools declared by the Board as requiring "Joint District-ESE Governance"

Ms. Holmes asked how the state will leverage the Readiness Centers. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) are the Department's primary vehicle for intervening and assisting in Level 3 and 4 districts. She said the Department is developing a strategic plan and looking at how to access resources in a strategic way to drive improvement in districts. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Readiness Centers were designed to provide professional development and networking across districts and sectors. The DSACs are housed at the Readiness Centers.

Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. asked why charter schools are not included. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said charter schools have a separate accountability system; a charter school that fails to improve may have its charter revoked. She noted that the federal accountability system designations (corrective action, restructuring) apply to charter schools. Commissioner Chester said unlike other public schools, charter schools exist under charters granted by the Board, and the Board decides whether or not to renew charters.

Mr. Chertavian congratulated the commissioner and staff on a huge body of work. He asked about the people and resources available to the Department around assistance, and how the Department would measure the effectiveness of that assistance. Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy said the state line item for targeted assistance is the primary resource. Ms. Foisy said the Department hires consultants, who are very experienced superintendents, to lead teams that work with districts. Ms. Foisy said the Department has used various methodologies over the last 8 to 10 years: in Holyoke, the district hired a partner to work alongside the district; in Fall River, a team was deployed with a set of specific skills and experience. Ms. Foisy said the DSAC model provides support regionally to Level 3 districts. The Urban District Assistance Unit is comprised of the 10 largest districts, with ESE staff acting as liaisons. Ms. Foisy said the Donahue Institute is conducting a study of the Urban District Unit and there is a preliminary study of the DSAC model. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the budget for the Center for Targeted Assistance is \$6.5 million per year, and the Department has brought in other resources, including Title I dollars, special education dollars, and stimulus funds for technology to support data specialists.

Dr. McDermott asked about Randolph's plan was around the teaching of mathematics and getting the community involved. Dr. McDermott said he would like to see the whole plan. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the district reviews are posted online and available to the public. Ms. Mitchell said the Department will present summative reports to the Board in the fall, including two reports that identify promising practices.

Commissioner Chester said there is an active and purposeful networking of Level 4 districts and schools. The commissioner introduced Esta Montano, who is the Department's new director of the Office of Language Acquisition. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said Ms. Montano has already participated in a district review and is customizing a classroom walk-through protocol to support best practices for English language learners. Secretary Reville said the Department's accountability and assistance work exemplifies doing work with the field, not at it. The secretary said the field appreciates being included in the planning, and this represents a very positive change.

Vice Chair Chernow said the focus on Level 4 schools and staffing can lead to resentment from other schools where top teachers are recruited to go to Level 4 schools. The vice chair commented that moving so many resources and attention to these Level 4 schools may have unintended consequences. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said there was urgency with the passage of the reform law in January 2010, and Boston's expedited process was challenging. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said on the positive side, the bringing together of union leadership and management early and often has reaped many dividends.

Ms. Kaplan asked whether there was a mechanism to share best practices from charter schools. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department's charter school office and office of school redesign will be merging, forging a much stronger connection. Ms. Calderón-Rosado asked whether community engagement is one of the conditions for school effectiveness. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the full text of the Essential Conditions speaks to that.

Process and Timelines for FY2012 Budget and Possible Legislative Proposals

Chair Banta said she has appointed members of the Board's Budget Committee, which includes the chair, Ms. Calderón-Rosado, Ms. Kaplan, and Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. Commissioner Chester introduced Rachel Trant, the Department's budget director.

Secretary Reville had to leave the meeting at 12:02 p.m.

Commissioner Chester reviewed the budget timeline. The commissioner said there have been three down budget years in a row, and this will be the fourth. Commissioner Chester said the Department had to eliminate over 30 positions this year due to fiscal constraints.

State Student Advisory Council End-of-Year Report

Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr., who chairs the State Student Advisory Council, described the council's major highlights from the past year, which included: (1) a review of the by-laws; (2) work on partnering with the Governor's Youth Council; (3) writing a letter of support for the state's Round 2 Race to the Top application; (4) welcoming Secretary Reville and Commissioner Chester to a meeting of the council; (5) submitting letters in support of adding a student voice to the Task Force for Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators; and (6) writing letters of support for a student voice on local stakeholder groups. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said in the past year he tried to visit each of the five regional councils that sit below the statewide council. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. also described a grant funded by AT&T and America's Promise that the council received to support student-to-student conversations about the importance of staying in school.

Chair Banta suggested that as the council engages in its conversations on dropout prevention, it should talk with Neil Sullivan of the Private Industry Council in Boston. The chair asked whether schools give students time to participate in the council. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said that was dependent on the district, and some schools send students to regional and statewide council meetings each year. He said it comes down to the choice of the student in terms of involvement. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said when students describe their experience to their schools, most are supportive.

Ms. Kaplan thanked Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. for his service and report. She asked whether there were student members on every school committee in Massachusetts. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said every school committee is supposed to have a student advisory committee, which elects one student to be an ex officio non-voting member of the school committee. He said this practice is not followed in every district. Ms. Kaplan said one of the council's issues could be to ensure a student serves on every school committee. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said there is a helpful guide on the council's website. Ms. Kaplan asked whether more council members might attend Board meetings to gain broader experience. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said the Student Advisory Council executive committee receives a copy of the Board agenda each month.

Update on Race to the Top

Commissioner Chester said Massachusetts submitted a very strong application and in winning a Race to the Top grant, will receive \$250 million over four years. He said 275 school districts have signed on, representing over 75% of the state's low-income students. The districts have made a commitment to the work outlined in the application. Commissioner Chester also described the \$170 million grant that a consortium of states, including Massachusetts, won to develop the next generation of assessments. The commissioner will chair that effort in year one.

Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. asked why some districts are not getting any Race to the Top dollars. Commissioner Chester said these schools and districts made a commitment to the reforms even though they knew they would not get any funding. The commissioner said they did this knowing they would be at the table while these reforms are developed. Deputy Commissioner Baehr explained that to qualify for Title I funding, a district has to reach a

threshold number of students and percent of population. Commissioner Chester said every district will eventually benefit through the development of new teacher evaluation systems and by aligning their curriculum, but non-participating districts won't be at the table in designing those systems.

Ms. Kaplan asked about districts with a small amount allocated over the four years. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department is encouraging districts to collaborate and pool resources. Dr. McDermott said the best assessments are embedded with instruction and that marrying assessment and instruction creates powerful learning. Commissioner Chester said the plan is very ambitious and will allow us to create the next generation of assessments.

Advisory Council Appointments and Annual Reports

Commissioner Chester said there are three categories of members – those continuing on, those recommended for reappointment, and new members being recommended. The commissioner said Board members may wish to make additional nominations. Commissioner Chester said the Board will vote on the appointments in October.

Chair Banta said many of these councils work directly with the Department and there is a plan to bring the councils in on some rotational basis. Commissioner Chester said the annual reports of the councils are included in the Board books. Ms. Kaplan said she was glad to hear of a plan to bring the councils in, and suggested setting aside an evening meeting and inviting all of the councils to make a short presentation. Ms. Kaplan recognized the Parent and Community Involvement Council for its report. Commissioner Chester said parent and community involvement is critical, and the Department's Adult Basic Education unit as well as our new ELL director will be working on this.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled for Tuesday, October 19, 2010.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 1:00 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

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

**September 20, 2010
5:08 p.m. – 6:57 p.m.**

**Massachusetts 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
Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, Milton
Harneen Chernow, Vice Chair, Jamaica Plain
Gerald Chertavian, Cambridge
Michael D'Ortenzio Jr., Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley
Beverly Holmes, Springfield
Jeff Howard, Reading
James McDermott, Eastham
Paul Reville, Secretary of Education, Worcester

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

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Ruth Kaplan, Brookline
Dana Mohler-Faria, Bridgewater

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m.

Chair Banta said that Commissioner Chester was not with us this evening due to a death in his family. The chair said Deputy Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus would fill in for the commissioner. The chair introduced the two new Board members, Vanessa Calderón-Rosado and James McDermott, and said the Board was delighted to have them.

Chair Banta said the purpose of this special meeting was to discuss the Proficiency Gap Task Force report. The chair said the Task Force provided great insight, and the Board is grateful for their time. She said the work is clear and central to the Readiness agenda, and the work is evident through Race to the Top. The chair thanked the Task Force for this important contribution.

Board member and Task Force chair Jeff Howard acknowledged three Board members who served on the Task Force – Harneen Chernow, Gerald Chertavian, and Beverly

Holmes – for their work. Dr. Howard said the group examined how to go about focusing an organization on making a particular kind of change happen. Dr. Howard said the Department’s strategy in the fall of 2008 appeared to focus on strategies to close gaps. Dr. Howard said his answer is that is not how to make change happen. Dr. Howard said if everyone is responsible, no one is, and no one is held accountable. He said the Task Force’s approach was a deliberately focused, organized approach to close gaps.

Dr. Howard said there is a need for two additional components. First, a concrete objective that is psychologically motivating. Dr. Howard said the group came up with an 85 percent target for all population groups to score *Proficient* or higher on MCAS. He said that seemed to meet the criteria, and would allow us to see how much progress we were making at any one time. Second, Dr. Howard said there is a need for a structure within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to bring together this work and focus on accountability.

Dr. Howard said Commissioner’s response to the Task Force report was disappointing. He said the commissioner rejected the 85 percent target. Dr. Howard said he did not believe that 4 or 5 targets that bear on an issue will have a psychologically motivating effect. He said the commissioner did agree to rename the Office of Strategic Planning, Research and Evaluation (OSPRE), and that is gratifying. Dr. Howard said, though, that he isn’t sure what its primary objective is.

Dr. Howard said he predicts only incremental progress if there is no psychologically mobilizing target, whether formal or informal, and if the office does what it did before but adds on the work on proficiency gaps. He said Massachusetts needs a much stronger response in order to distinguish itself, and he would like to see the Board take a position on that.

Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Task Force did a tremendous job. The deputy commissioner said within each area, there are some recommendations the Department agrees with and some it does not agree with. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department wants to observe the Comstat-like process in Boston to see how it works before rolling it out more broadly. The deputy commissioner also said the Department agreed to designate OSPRE to monitor and report on the efforts to close proficiency gaps.

Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr said the outcomes that every Race to the Top district committed to included closing achievement gaps for each low performing subgroup by 25 percent, which is a quantitative goal. The deputy commissioner said those districts also committed to reducing gaps in graduation rates by 15 percent and gaps in college enrollment by 15 percent. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department has prepared baseline data for every district which includes four year targets. Districts’ RTTT plans need to drive toward those objectives. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the commissioner assumes responsibility for making significant progress in closing proficiency gaps.

Dr. Howard said a 25 percent closing of proficiency gaps over four years for districts that represent 70 percent of all districts, 80 percent of all students, and 90 percent of LEP students is the kind of formulation he is looking for. He asked if that was enough. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said to derive that figure of 25 percent, the Department looked at data on what does improvement look like in the highest performing schools. The deputy commissioner said the Department also looked at what the data tells us in terms of what is attainable in the highest improving schools. Vice Chair Chernow asked what a 25 percent reduction equates to. Department staff member Carrie Conaway said the Composite Performance Index (CPI) was used to focus on lower performing students. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said we are asking all districts to do better.

Board member James McDermott said compelling people to meet a particular testing grade could lower expectations. He said it is important to foster strong pedagogy. Board member Michael D'Ortenzio Jr. said there are a lot of great initiatives going on, but he did not have a clear vision for how the report fits. Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. asked about the overlap between the Commissioner's Network and Level 4 schools. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said that the Urban Superintendents Network is comprised of 22 school districts, while Level 4 schools are currently located in nine districts that have the 35 lowest performing schools.

Secretary of Education Paul Reville arrived at 5:50 p.m.

Board member Gerald Chertavian applauded Dr. Howard for the focus and passion he brought to this work. Mr. Chertavian said it is clear that we agree on the direction, and there is less divergence than might appear. He said the main divergence was around targets. Mr. Chertavian said he read not an outright rejection of the proposed target, but a view that it is not endorsed at this time. Mr. Chertavian asked how the 25 percent goal projects out, and if that is the direction we want to go. Mr. Chertavian said if Commissioner Chester says he is accountable, there is a way to think about how to hold him accountable over time.

Dr. Howard said he would like to think that is correct, with some tweaks. Dr. Howard said the current performance evaluation of the commissioner does not include a component tied to closing gaps, but the Board could decide it would be there going forward.

Board member Beverly Holmes said there is a committee looking at the commissioner's evaluation differently than in the past. Ms. Holmes said the report includes operations and planning, but the action piece is missing. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the role of the office within the Department will be monitoring the many activities by all the units within the agency to see the impact and whether they are on target. She said the commissioner is charged with achieving the results. She said this office is critical to monitoring progress against benchmarks, but much of the action will be carried out by other units.

Vice Chair Chernow said this raises some challenging organizational questions. She said it is hard for those outside of the Department to see how the work will be driven. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the commissioner will drive the work, and he will rely heavily on this office as well as others. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus described assistance the Department will receive from the U.S. Delivery Institute and the Donahue Institute.

Secretary Reville said we need to draw the distinction between the what and the how, and leave to the agency how to accomplish that, holding the commissioner accountable. Secretary Reville said we have a powerful role to play as a Board to ask does what we talk about today as a strategy contribute to closing proficiency gaps, how does it contribute, and sharing our ideas on how we might approach it. Dr. Howard said he agreed that we don't want to micromanage, but it is appropriate for the Board to be directive on the information we want to see. Secretary Reville said he did not think we had to accept a singular framework for this conversation.

Board member Vanessa Calderón-Rosado said it is clearly important to have a target to measure and be held accountable to. She said closing proficiency gaps is a key issue, and we have to set the right goals. Dr. Calderón-Rosado said we need to ensure that we see how all the strategies fit together and make sure all these actions jointly lead us to closing proficiency gaps.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr said coordinating the role of the office is key, as is sharing information so we work in a coordinated way. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said that Commissioner Chester is actively engaged in regular meetings with senior staff to monitor whether implementation benchmarks are on track. Dr. Calderón-Rosado asked if the Department has looked at combining what is in this report and what is in Race to the Top. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the work is underway now, and that priority goes to activities in Race to the Top that match the goals outlined in the Proficiency Gap report. She said the Department used ideas in the Proficiency Gap report for the Race to the Top application.

Mr. D'Ortenzio Jr. said it would be helpful if the commissioner could come back in a few months and detail what the Department is already doing, what this report has spurred us to do, and present goals for the future. Dr. McDermott said there is a teaching and learning gap in our schools. Dr. Howard said proficiency is a standard.

Dr. Howard said this has been another outstanding conversation. He asked how to translate it into a general directive to the Department about what we expect and to help guide this activity. Dr. Howard offered three recommendations: (1) that the Board charge the commissioner as responsible for driving this work; (2) that making effective action to close achievement gaps is an important part of the commissioner's evaluation; and (3) that a subcommittee develop a reporting protocol for Department reports and updates to the Board on closing proficiency gaps.

Chair Banta said the commissioner knows he is the driver of this work, and that the first recommendation strikes her as unnecessary. The chair said she agreed with the second

recommendation about evaluation criteria, and the evaluation committee had had its first meeting today. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the work with the U.S. Delivery Institute will be to set targets, and the Department should come back to the Board with that protocol. Secretary Reville said the commissioner's priorities are the priorities of this Board, and it is up to the Department to come up with a protocol for reporting. The secretary said that at the Board's retreat in November, members could offer their opinion on what they would like to receive.

Dr. Howard said the idea of a target was an unresolved issue, and asked if we need one and what it should be. He said the work should be done in collaboration with the Department. Secretary Reville said the discussion is about aspirational versus realistic goals. The secretary said if the goal is to close gaps, that implies a focus on progress and reasonable increments of progress. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department would be prepared to come back with information in the next two months or so. Vice Chair Chernow said further information from the Department would help in thinking about a numerical goal.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 6:57 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