

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
Tuesday, January 23, 2024, 9:02 a.m. – 1:35 p.m.**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Katherine Craven, Chair, Brookline
Matthew Hills, Vice-Chair, Newton
Ericka Fisher, Worcester
Ela Gardiner, Wellesley, Student Member
Farzana Mohamed, Newton (participated remotely)
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education, Andover
Dálida Rocha, Worcester
Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington
Martin West, Newton

Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Paymon Rouhanifard, Brookline

Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m., and members introduced themselves. She noted that Member Mohamed is participating remotely. Chair Craven announced that today’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board/BESE) meeting, like all regular meetings of the Board, is being [livestreamed and recorded](#). She noted this is the first meeting of the Board in the new office of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department/DESE) in Everett, and she commended all who helped the move go smoothly.

Statements from the Public

- **Yana Shechterman**, Parent, Brookline Public Schools, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Jacob Donnelly**, Activism Manager, Israeli American Council of New England, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Gil Edelist**, Student, Newton South High School, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Esther Faust**, Parent, Newton Public Schools, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Nirit Friedlander**, Parent, Newton Public Schools, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Ronit Inbar**, Newton resident, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Miri Bor-Halpern**, Parent, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.

- **Beth Tripathi**, Massachusetts Teachers Association, addressed the Board on Item 3: Chronic Absenteeism and Accountability Reporting System.
- **John Mudd**, Education Advocate, Boston, addressed the Board on the Boston Public Schools inclusive education plan for English Learners and long-term facilities plan.
- **Kahris McLaughlin**, former chair of the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council, addressed the Board on the topic of educational equity.

During the Chair's Report, Chair Craven said she had invited five additional people to speak to the Board.

- **Andrea Silbert**, Eos Foundation, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Robert Leikind**, American Jewish Committee, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Peggy Shukur**, Anti-Defamation League, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Dan Osborn**, JCRC, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.
- **Ruth Kaplan**, former Board member, addressed the Board on the topic of antisemitism.

Chair Craven called for a brief recess at 10:15 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:35 a.m. and Chair Craven said the Board would move to the first item on the agenda.

Massachusetts Teacher of the Year and Milken Awards

Commissioner Riley welcomed the 2024 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, De'Shawn C. Washington (Lexington Public Schools), and Milken Award winners Michelle (Shelley) Terry (Plymouth North High School) and Andrew Rebello (Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School, Fall River). Grace Kingsbery of the Department's Educator Effectiveness team introduced the honorees and said they would each make a brief presentation.

Michelle (Shelly) Terry, Milken Award winner and English teacher at Plymouth North High School, spoke about her teaching and that she had created an elective class in broadcast journalism. She said she appreciates having autonomy to create engaging units and lessons that address state curriculum standards and meet students' needs. She expressed concern about how much time students spend on screens and said she wants to encourage students to read by getting more books in their hands.

Andrew Rebello, Assistant Superintendent and Principal of Diman Regional Vocational Technical in Fall River, credited teachers and administrators at his school for boosting students' academic performance, reducing chronic absenteeism, and preparing student to be life ready. He said the school has invested in high-dosage tutoring, mental health services, giving students choice opportunities, and providing supports tailored to individual students' needs because "one size fits none."

De'Shawn Washington, a fourth-grade teacher at Maria Hastings Elementary School in Lexington, said he is honored to be the first African-American male Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. He said he feels called to service. He spoke about ongoing work to support and retain

new teachers, and about developing curriculum in Lexington that is culturally responsive, evidence-based, and student centered. Mr. Washington said after listening to the Milken awardees, he feels even more inspired. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve as the 2024 teacher of the year.

Member Gardner expressed her gratitude to the awardees and to all educators who support students and help them succeed.

Commissioner Riley and Board members gathered with the awardees for photographs. Chair Craven said she would now wrap up the Comments from the Chair and any comments from Board members and then welcome new member Dálida Rocha and give her an opportunity to speak.

Member Moriarty commented that the Board has a policy of not responding to statements from the public but having listened particularly to the voices of students and others in November and at today's meeting, he wants them to know they have been heard. He noted the Commissioner sent Board members a memorandum late yesterday on Addressing Antisemitism and Islamophobia, describing resources that DESE is providing in collaboration with other state and federal leaders to support schools in fostering a safe, inclusive learning environment for all students. He thanked the Commissioner and offered some additional suggestions. Member Stewart said she appreciated hearing from the speakers. Chair Craven said the Board could come back to this topic at a future meeting.

Chair Craven welcomed new Board member Dálida Rocha and invited her to introduce herself. Member Rocha said she is an immigrant from Cape Verde, off the west coast of Africa, and a proud graduate of Madison Park Vocational Technical High School in Boston. She said she is grateful for all that her teachers had done to give her the skills she needed. She said she is now a resident of Worcester and has three children in the Worcester Public Schools. Member Rocha said she hopes to bring to the Board her experience as an immigrant, as a Madison Park graduate, as a labor movement organizer, and as a parent. She thanked everyone for the warm welcome.

Comments from the Secretary

Secretary Tutwiler wished everyone a peaceful, healthy, and joyous new year. He joined in the welcome to new member Rocha and complimented the Department on the successful move to the new location in Everett. Secretary Tutwiler recounted the principles for education policy development and resource allocation last year: stabilizing, healing, and transformation. He said Governor Healey's new education budget will articulate a commitment to universal access to pre-K for four-year-olds beginning with our Gateway communities, as well as a 5-year investment in early literacy across the Commonwealth, Literacy Launch: Reading Success from Age 3 through Grade 3. He thanked the Commissioner and his team for their support of the literacy launch initiative.

Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Riley thanked everyone involved in the successful move from Malden to Everett. He welcomed new member Rocha and expressed gratitude to the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Secretary for launching the new literacy initiative. The Commissioner voiced concern that 12,000 students in Newton are not in school and said he hopes everyone can find a reasonable and peaceful solution to get them back to school soon. Commissioner Riley noted the agenda item on school safety will focus on school building safety in light of recent violence and gun issues across the country. He said more broadly, we want all students to be safe and feel safe in school, noting Secretary Cardona's statement that all students have the right to a learning environment free from discrimination. The Commissioner said DESE will continue working with the Governor's office and the Attorney General's office to provide guidance on these issues. He said due to scheduling issues, Boston Public Schools (BPS) will not be on the agenda today but will be on the agenda at a future meeting. In response to a question from Chair Craven, Commissioner Riley said DESE is reviewing reports that BPS submits under the systemic improvement plan; several items are in process and he will update the Board as things proceed.

School Safety

Commissioner Riley introduced Anne Gilligan, DESE's Safe and Healthy Schools Coordinator. Noting her upcoming retirement, the Commissioner commended Ms. Gilligan for her many years of exemplary service. Ms. Gilligan provided an overview of DESE's initiatives to support schools and districts in improving and sustaining school safety. She explained that school and district leaders collaborate with local partners in public safety and behavioral health services to carry out their responsibilities under two key state laws: Section 363 of the Acts of 2000, which requires schools and districts to develop and implement multi-hazard evacuation plans or emergency operations plans, and Section 77 of the Acts of 2012, which requires schools and districts to develop medical emergency response plans and was updated in 2022 to include behavioral health emergencies. Ms. Gilligan said Section 363 requires local law enforcement, fire, emergency response, and school leadership to work together and similarly, DESE works with the U.S. Department of Education's emergency planning and readiness center to provide free trainings for schools on developing high quality K-12 emergency management plans and threat assessment teams. She added that DESE also collaborates with other state and federal agencies to support schools with trainings and guidance, including FEMA, HHS, Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Education, EOPSS/Fusion Center (for training and support on cyber security), the Boston office of the FBI (bomb threats and hoaxes), and the MA Department of Fire Services. She said DESE posts numerous resources on our website as well as providing technical assistance to schools and districts on a regular basis.

Chair Craven thanked Ms. Gilligan for her presentation and her years of service and leadership. Chair Craven then called for a motion and vote to approve meeting minutes.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the November 1, 2023 Special Meeting and the November 21, 2023 Regular Meeting.

The vote, by roll call, was 9-0. Member Rocha abstained.

Chronic Absenteeism and Accountability Reporting

Commissioner Riley began with a presentation on chronic absenteeism (students missing 10 percent or more of the school year). He noted chronic absenteeism has been part of the accountability system since 2018. He said chronic absenteeism increased significantly in Massachusetts and other states during the pandemic. The Commissioner said while Massachusetts rates have improved more than other states, 75 percent of our schools still have an issue with chronic absenteeism and 1 in 4 students miss more than 18 days of school per year. Commissioner Riley said DESE has a comprehensive program to address it including grants, technical assistance, and communications, and this proposal on 2024 accountability reporting would add to it. He turned over the presentation to Rob Curtin, Chief Officer of Data, Assessment and Accountability, and Associate Commissioner Erica Gonzalez.

Mr. Curtin outlined two proposed changes for accountability reporting following the 2023-24 school year:

1. Adding a third year of data to the accountability system and the weighting of the three years. Mr. Curtin explained that historically, DESE's accountability calculations have included multiple years of data, to give a better sense of performance trends over time and less volatility than with year-to-year results. In 2018, the plan was to add up to 4 years of data as we rolled out the new accountability system and the Next-Generation MCAS assessments. Due to the pandemic, there are currently two years of available data (2022 and 2023) weighted at 40% / 60% with greater weight given to the most recent year. Mr. Curtin went through the proposed weighting of years for 2024 calculations, using 3 years of data.

2. Increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator in the criterion-referenced portion of the accountability system. Mr. Curtin explained that DESE is interested in increasing the weighting of the chronic absenteeism indicator in the accountability system for 2024 to highlight the importance of the emerging post-pandemic problem. This is coupled with DESE's initiative to offer seed funding to districts and a public service campaign to illustrate the need for all parties to address the issue. He said the proposal would increase the weighting of chronic absenteeism in the criterion-referenced (target percentage) only, so it would be an indicator for individual schools to monitor how they are doing relative to their own targets. Mr. Curtin noted the proposed change would have no impact on school percentile and charter cap calculations.

Mr. Curtin described the current and proposed weighting, noting that the focus is on improvement and no school has a target of zero. He added that the state as a whole is making progress; as of January 8, chronic absenteeism is at 19.5%, continuing the improvement from last year. In response to questions from members, Mr. Curtin confirmed that DESE is proposing this

change for 2024 accountability reporting only, and would return at a later date to discuss 2025 weighting of indicators with the Board.

Board members discussed the proposal. Member Fisher said she would like to see more assessment and research on chronic absenteeism before making a change to the accountability system. Chair Craven commented that the accountability system is one lever but not the only lever. Member Gardiner advocated listening to students as the key to solving chronic absenteeism; she noted student advisory council surveys have identified factors that keep students connected with school. Commissioner Riley agreed that students need to be engaged and said he wants to celebrate the schools and districts that are making progress.

Member Mohamed asked about alternatives. The Commissioner noted chronic absenteeism is already in the accountability system and the proposal would increase its weight. Member West said the norms around school attendance really matter and he understands the rationale for the proposal and is inclined to support it. Vice-Chair Hills said he appreciates the presentation and would like to understand more about the overall policy before moving forward with this change. Chair Craven asked about adding other factors into the accountability system. Mr. Curtin responded that DESE has an accountability task force that is looking at broader issues and those policy questions will come back to the Board.

Member Moriarty recommended keeping a stable accountability system for now, and continuing the conversation. Member West suggested the Board should act on the first element: adding a third year of data to the accountability system. Mr. Curtin said it is important to decide whether to add the additional year and the Board can determine when to take that vote. Vice-Chair Hills asked if the Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC) had expressed any concerns about adding a third year of data. Mr. Curtin said the AAAC did not have concerns about that proposal. The Board discussed possible motions.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

MOVED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with 603 CMR 2.03(10), hereby adopts the framework for district and school accountability recommended by the Commissioner, as described in the December 2023 Summary of the District and School Accountability System document (i.e., adding a third year of data and increasing the weight of the chronic absenteeism indicator), for the purposes of calculating 2024 district and school accountability results.

The motion failed, 2-7-1. The vote, by roll call, was 2 in favor (Stewart, West), 7 opposed (Craven, Hills, Fisher, Gardiner, Mohamed, Moriarty, Tutwiler), and 1 abstention (Rocha).

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with 603 CMR 2.03(10), hereby adopts the recommendation of the Commissioner to

include three years of data for the purpose of calculating district and school accountability results, as described in the December 2023 Summary of the District and School Accountability System document.

The vote, by roll call, was 9 in favor (Craven, Fisher, Gardiner, Mohamed, Moriarty, Rocha, Stewart, Tutwiler, West) and 1 opposed (Hills).

Chair Craven said in view of the late hour, the Board would defer the update on the FY25 budget process and Department relocation.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 1:35 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board