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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Board Documents - Tuesday, March 25, 2008

Regular Meeting Agenda
 Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
 75 Pleasant Street
 Malden, MA 02148
 Tuesday, March 25, 2008
 9:00 a.m.

Comments from the Chairman
Comments from the Commissioner
Statements from the Public

Routine Business:

Approval of the Minutes of the February 26, 2008 Regular Meeting - **Vote**

Items for Discussion and Action:

1. [Dropout Report for 2006-2007 and Initiatives to Reduce High School Dropouts](#) - **Discussion**
2. [Winchendon Public Schools: Update and Next Steps](#) - **Initial Discussion**
3. [Gill-Montague Regional School District: Update and Next Steps](#) - **Initial Discussion**
4. [Charter Schools: Extended Loan Term for Holyoke Community Charter School and Innovation Academy Charter School](#) - **Discussion and Vote**
5. Approval of Grants - **Vote**

Other Items for Information:

6. Education-Related News Clippings
7. [Update on Perkins Five-Year State Plan for Vocational-Technical Education](#)
8. [Directions to the Meeting](#)

Briefing

last updated: March 21, 2008

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The Massachusetts Board of Education

School Year 2006-2007 Dropout Report and Initiatives to Reduce the Dropout Rate

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner

Date: March 21, 2008

This week the Department will be releasing its annual report on high school dropouts for the most recent school year. A copy of the statewide summary is enclosed. This year's report shows that in 2006-2007, more than 11,000 students-3.8 percent of the students in grades 9 through 12-dropped out of school. At this month's meeting, we will inform the Board about the results of the 2006-2007 high school dropout report and engage in a discussion about how to address this critical issue at the state level. While we have made progress in many aspects of education reform, we are increasingly concerned about the consequences of the persistent dropout and graduation gap in the Commonwealth at a time when the socioeconomic consequences of dropping out have dramatically increased.

As part of this agenda item, Board member Harneen Chernow will lead a discussion with representatives from two urban communities about steps they have taken to reduce high school dropouts. Janet Powell, senior director of student support services in the Quincy Public Schools, will discuss three strategies employed by her district to work with high-risk, high-need students. Neil Sullivan and Emmanuel Allen, executive director and dropout recovery specialist, respectively, for the Boston Private Industry Council, will discuss their recent research and programs related to dropouts in the city of Boston. I will also outline a number of upcoming actions that the Department will undertake, both on our own and in collaboration with other state agencies and organizations, to more effectively address the Commonwealth's dropout crisis.

Massachusetts High School Dropouts, 2006-2007

This year's high school dropout report, covering the 2006-2007 school year, includes a number of important findings.

- In total, 11,436 students in grades 9 to 12-3.8 percent of total enrollment in those grades-dropped out of

school during the 2006-2007 school year.

- This year's report showed an increase in the overall dropout rate, from 3.3 percent in 2005-2006 to 3.8 percent in 2006-2007. This increase is largely due to improvements in our data collection systems. (See below for further details.)
- Among dropouts, 2,781 (24 percent) were already in grade 12, and 1,988 of those grade 12 students (72 percent) had already earned the Competency Determination: that is, they had performed at the *Needs Improvement* or higher level on the grade 10 MCAS tests or retests in both English language arts and mathematics.
- Across racial and ethnic groups, the largest share of dropouts (51 percent) were white, but dropout rates were substantially higher for Hispanic and African-American students than for white and Asian students. The dropout rate for students enrolled in grades 9 to 12 in the 2006-2007 school year was 9.1 percent for Hispanic students, 6.4 percent for African-American students, 2.7 percent for white students, and 2.6 percent for Asian students.
- Nearly 40 percent of all dropouts were low-income students. Students with disabilities comprised 22 percent of dropouts; 10 percent were English language learners. The dropout rate for both low-income students and students with disabilities was 5.8 percent, whereas for English language learners it was 10.4 percent.

Two changes to our data collection policies have affected recent trends in the graduation rate. First, in the 2005-2006 school year, the Department improved its collection of information on students who dropped out of school but obtained a GED before the beginning of the next school year. Rather than solely relying on reports from districts on these students, we now cross-reference our student records with a database of GED earners. The 1,000-plus students who fall into this category each year are no longer counted as dropouts. This change is a primary reason why the dropout rate decreased between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years.

In 2006-2007, the Department added further refinements to the dropout and transfer data collections in the Student Information Management System (SIMS). Rather than simply coding students as a dropout or a transfer, districts were asked to report where students were transferring (e.g., to an in-state public school or a private school) or why they were dropping out of school (e.g., to work or due to incarceration). Students who were coded as a transfer to an in-state public school but had no record of re-enrollment in another school district before October 1, 2007, are now counted as dropouts. This change has had a large effect on the annual reported dropout rate. The 0.5 percentage point increase in the dropout rate from last year can be attributed to our improved ability to distinguish between transfers and dropouts. Our analysis suggests that, had we not made these refinements, the dropout rate for 2006-2007 would have been lower than the prior year's 3.3 percent rate.

While the changes in our data collection systems make it difficult to compare the dropout rates across years, greater accuracy in our student enrollment data is critical to measuring our progress on reducing the dropout rate. We remain committed to collecting and reporting the most accurate data possible on student enrollment, transfers, and dropouts.

Department Initiatives to Reduce Dropouts

Even if the dropout rate had held steady or significantly declined, we would still be concerned about this issue. The implications of these data are clear: Too many students are dropping out of high school.

We cannot achieve our goal of college and career readiness for all students if over 11,000 of them each year leave

school before graduating.

We view all of our policies and programs, from full-day kindergarten to academic support to school redesign to educational proficiency plans, as working together to help reduce the dropout rate. That being said, in the coming months, the Department will take a number of important steps aimed specifically at addressing the dropout crisis.

- **Department workgroup.** This spring, we will convene a Department workgroup to examine how our units can work together to improve our policies and practices and better allocate resources so that we can help to reduce the number of students dropping out of school. We will review current programs that address dropout prevention and look at ways to strengthen them. We will examine other forms of technical assistance and professional development that can be provided to assist local school staff to engage and retain students throughout their high school careers. This workgroup will report its recommendations to the Commissioner, with the expectation that the recommendations may inform the Board's fiscal year 2010 budget request.
- **Pathways to Success by 21.** An existing interagency committee, Pathways to Success by 21, focuses on a broad range of issues related to youth in the Commonwealth. The committee is co-chaired by the secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the secretary of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We will work with this group to develop a framework for how state agencies can address the state's dropout rate.
- **Identifying promising practices.** We have already begun two related research projects to help inform our activities on improving the dropout rate. First, we are reviewing the actions of states with low dropout rates as a basis for possible recommendations for changes in Massachusetts laws, regulations, or state policies. Second, we are identifying districts in Massachusetts with relatively low dropout rates given the students they serve. We will work with these districts to understand what factors may have contributed to their success and determine which of their practices could be implemented on a broader scale.
- **Public events.** The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, Jobs for the Future, the Boston Private Industry Council, and the Department are partnering to offer several events for policymakers this spring focusing on dropout prevention. The first event, *Signs that Matter: Using Early Indicators to Lower the Dropout Rate*, is scheduled for April 2. Researchers will share data from large-scale dropout studies conducted in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. This will be followed by another conference later this spring: *Cross-Sector Support for At-Risk Students*. This second event will focus on developing a comprehensive, inter-governmental, child-focused approach to provide the social and emotional supports necessary to enable students to stay in school and strive for proficiency. In the fall, we will hold a "promising practices" conference on early interventions for at-risk students and programs that enable students to get back on track to high school graduation.

In addition, I am pleased to report that the America's Promise Alliance has committed to providing each state with a \$25,000 convening grant to address the issue of dropouts. The America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest multi-sector collaborative dedicated to the well-being of children and youth. We will provide the Board with more information on plans for these grant funds at an upcoming meeting.

We have challenging work ahead of us if we are to be successful in reducing the number of students who leave school before graduation. Achieving our education goals for all of the Commonwealth's students requires us to take swift action-to provide a meaningful and engaging educational experience and the support services students need in order to retain those most at risk of dropping out. I look forward to discussing this important issue with the Board.

Further information

Included are the 2006-2007 summary (*High School Dropouts 2006-07*  ) and three reports to help frame our discussion:

 *Too Big to Be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America*, by the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force

 *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter Hart Research

  *Youth Voices - How High Schools Can Respond to the Needs of Students and Help Prevent Dropouts: Findings from Youth Focus Groups*, by Department staff

Each report was based on a significant number student interviews and each contains recommendations from the students to improve outcomes for youth.

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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Progress Reports on Winchendon Public Schools

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner

Date: March 20, 2008

The Winchendon Public Schools are currently in *underperforming district* status. The district was so designated by the Board in November 2003 as a result of inadequate leadership for needed improvements in curriculum and instruction in the district's schools, and lack of community support to improve the quality of the district's educational programs and services.

The Turn-Around Plan for the district accepted by the Board in 2004 identified three priorities to be addressed by local educators and the district's state-supported Turn-Around Partner: curriculum alignment, implementation of data-driven instructional practices, and the building of community cohesion in support of high quality teaching, learning, and student support services in the district's three schools. Over the past four years, progress has been achieved on all three of these fronts.

Before the Board, for discussion this month and a potential vote at the April meeting, is the question of whether the Winchendon Public Schools should remain in, or be removed from, *underperforming district* status. Although there remains much work to be done to improve educational outcomes for Winchendon students, the same can be said of many of the Commonwealth's school districts. In recognition of the progress that has been achieved in aligning Winchendon's curricula to state standards, putting in place leadership for curriculum and instruction in the district's schools, and beginning to use data systematically to inform instructional decision-making, and in light of the need to allocate available resources to districts with a high priority for targeted state assistance, I plan to recommend in April that the Board vote to remove Winchendon from underperforming district status.

Since November 2003 when the Board voted to designate Winchendon as an underperforming school district, the Department has provided the Winchendon Public Schools with a variety of state-supported assistance, including:

- provision of interim superintendent coverage

- Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) training and consultant assistance to district and school teams working to define the root causes of performance gaps and formulate plans to achieve needed improvements
- engagement of a Turn-Around Partner to support implementation of the Turn-Around Plan developed by the district and approved by the Board in April 2005
- participation of Winchendon school and district leaders in the two-year National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training program.

This month's Board packet includes two reports describing improvement initiatives undertaken by and in support of the Winchendon Public Schools in the period from 2004 - 2007. The first is a district progress report prepared by Dr. Peter Azar, who has served as Winchendon's superintendent of schools since 2004. Superintendent Azar will be leaving the district at the end of the current school year. He was asked to submit a report on the district's progress to date and a plan to ensure that improvements implemented to date are sustained.

The second report was prepared by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) of Newton, Massachusetts. EDC has served as the state-appointed Turn-Around Partner for the Winchendon Public Schools. The EDC report provides an overview of the improvement initiatives that have been undertaken during the three-year duration of the EDC/Winchendon/state partnership. The average annual cost of this partnership has been \$130,000. Partnership work has focused primarily on building leadership capacity to improve instructional systems.

Also included in the Board materials are a student performance and enrollment data summary for Winchendon, and copies of the Winchendon Public Schools' 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress ("AYP") reports. As indicated on the attached Performance and Enrollment report, the Winchendon Public Schools, as a district, currently has no NCLB accountability status. However, as the 2007 AYP reports demonstrate, student performance in the district is below state standards at certain grade levels and for various categories of students.

Superintendent Peter Azar and Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy will join us at the Board meeting to respond to Board members' questions about the efforts that have been made to date to improve educational outcomes for Winchendon students.

Attachments:

-   District Progress Report, submitted by Superintendent Peter Azar
-   Turn-Around Partner Report, submitted by EDC, Inc.
-   Winchendon Student Performance and Enrollment Data Summary
-  Winchendon Public Schools 2007 Adequate Yearly Progress Reports

last updated: March 21, 2008



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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Gill-Montague Regional School District Turn-Around Plan

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Date: March 20, 2008

Background

In January 2007, the Board determined that the Gill-Montague Regional School District was underperforming and in need of formal state intervention. As a result of this determination, the Department assigned a three-member team of independent evaluators to examine the district's leadership capacity and governance practices. The Team visited the district in October 2007 and engaged district and community leaders, parents and teachers in interviews and focus group discussions. The resulting *District Leadership Evaluation* report was reviewed by Board members at the November 2007 Board meeting. The Board directed Gill-Montague district leaders to use the findings contained in the report to guide the development of a district Turn-Around Plan.

The Turn-Around Plan submitted by an underperforming district is subject to Board review and approval. Gill-Montague district officials were given until January 30, 2008 to submit a proposed Turn-Around Plan for Board consideration. The applicable Board regulations, at 603 CMR 2.04 (4) (b) (1), provide that "the Board, upon the recommendation of the Commissioner, may accept, reject or require modification of the district's plan."

A copy of the district's proposed *Turn Around Plan for the Gill Montague Regional School District* is included in this month's Board book. The proposed Plan sets out a number of areas in which district and town leaders have begun to advance: developing a process and a plan for consolidating elementary schools, joining the GIC health insurance plan, exploring the possibilities of collaborative regional fiscal planning, and developing initiatives to address some of the educational deficiencies noted in the EQA report.

At the March meeting Board members will have an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the proposed *Turn-Around Plan for the Gill-Montague Regional School District*. At the April 2008 Board meeting I will ask the Board to vote to accept the Plan, with any modifications that we may direct District officials to make after discussion

of the Plan at this month's meeting.

Gill-Montague's Interim Superintendent, Kenneth Roche, will attend the March Board meeting and provide an overview of the district's proposed Turn-Around Plan. He will share his views on the priority needs facing the district and its schools and will respond to any questions Board members may have. Associate Commissioners Lynda Foisy and Juliane Dow will join us at the table to respond to any questions Board members may have regarding the Department's capacity to provide the assistance and support requested by the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

Attachment:   Proposed District Turn-Around Plan

last updated: March 3, 2008

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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Approval of Loan Beyond Charter Term for Holyoke Community Charter School and Innovation Academy Charter School

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner

Date: March 18, 2008

Under the charter school statute, G.L. c. 71, § 89(j)(6), a charter school may incur temporary debt in anticipation of receipt of funds but requires approval of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education if it wishes to agree to repayment terms that exceed the duration of the school's charter. Two charter schools are requesting this approval this month.

Holyoke Community Charter School

The Holyoke Community Charter School (HCCS) is a Commonwealth charter school in its third year of operation. The HCCS Board of Trustees requests the Board's approval to enter into a loan agreement with TD BankNorth in order to secure \$8.4 million of tax-exempt bond financing at an estimated rate of 5.13% for a period of 15 years, estimated to mature May 2023. Entering into this loan agreement will allow HCCS to refinance several high-interest loans and to significantly reduce interest and finance charges.

Innovation Academy Charter School

The Innovation Academy Charter School (IACS), currently located in Chelmsford, is a Commonwealth charter school in its twelfth year of operation. Last month, the Board approved the IACS Board of Trustees' request to become a regional charter school and relocate to Tyngsborough. This month, IACS requests the Board's approval to enter into a loan agreement for up to \$7.5 million over a period of up to 30 years. The school is currently in conversation with multiple banks and has an offer from Century Bank.

The purpose of this financing is to purchase a state-of-the-art facility located at 72 Tyng Road in Tyngsborough from

Boston University. The facility (80,000 sq. ft.) and surrounding land (200+ acres) will provide a permanent home for the school's entire grade span.

All parties to these loans have acknowledged in writing their understanding that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, including but not limited to the Board and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, provides no representations or guarantees with respect to these loans and has no liability for any portion of the loans. They have also acknowledged in writing that specifically and without limitation, the Board's approval of the loan has no impact on any action that the Board may choose to take in the future with respect to probation, revocation, or renewal of the school's charter. The proposed motion approving this loan agreement request is explicitly conditioned upon the inclusion of this language in the loan agreements themselves. These written acknowledgements will be required of any new lenders should there be changes.

The Department has reviewed these requests, and they appear reasonable and consistent with the charter school statute and regulations. With the safeguards explained above and agreed to by the schools, I recommend that the Board approve these requests as presented.

If you have any questions regarding this amendment or wish to see the school's full request, please contact Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, at 781-338-3200; Jeff Wulfson, Associate Commissioner, at 781-338-6500; or me.

last updated: March 21, 2008

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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Perkins IV State Plan for Career and Technical Education

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Date: March 25, 2008

Background

The federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, known as Perkins IV, became law in August 2006, replacing the previous Perkins Act (Perkins III). The Perkins Act provides funding to states to strengthen secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs. By providing students with a strong academic program coupled with applied learning experiences in their selected field, the goal is for students to graduate career and college ready.

Under Perkins IV, Massachusetts will receive a total of \$20,231,840 for fiscal year 2009, which is similar to annual amounts received under Perkins III. In order to receive Perkins IV funding, we must submit a Five-Year State Plan by April 1, 2008. This plan will build on the One-Year Transition State Plan that we submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in May 2007 and which we are implementing this school year. At the October 2007 Board meeting, I provided information regarding the development of the Five-Year State Plan. We released the draft plan for public comment from October 15 - December 31, 2007 and received 29 written comments. We also held two public hearings on the plan in December 2007. About 50 people attended the hearings and 11 gave oral testimony. Department staff incorporated the comments into the plan, where appropriate. It should be noted that while the plan covers five years, it can be amended on an annual basis.

Perkins IV Funding

The \$20.2 million is for Perkins IV Titles I and II. Of the \$20.2 million, \$18,583,628 is for Title I. The focus of Title I is strengthening programs so that the outcomes for students are enhanced. Of the \$18,583,628, a minimum of 85% must be used for formula grants to school districts and public two-year colleges. The Department anticipates that there will be approximately 80 school districts, serving more than 61,800 students, and 17 public two-year colleges,

with approximately 46,500 students (full and part time) enrolled in public two-year college career and technical education programs, that will receive formula grants in 2008-2009. A maximum of 5% may be used by the Department for state administration. A maximum of 10% may be used for state leadership activities such as technical assistance, statewide professional development initiatives, data collection and analysis, support for career and technical student organizations, and support for activities to increase the participation of students in programs that would prepare them for careers nontraditional for their gender.

Of the \$20.2 million, \$1,648,212 is for Title II, also known as Tech-Prep Education. The focus of Title II is on linking secondary and postsecondary career and technical education through articulation agreements, joint programs of study, professional development, and other activities and services. Of the \$1,648,212, 95% is used for formula grants to consortia comprised of school districts and colleges. Five percent may be used for state administration. The Department anticipates that there will be 13 consortia in 2008-2009.

Perkins IV Five-Year State Plan for Career and Technical Education

Our State Plan addresses the major changes that Congress included in Perkins IV: alignment of federally funded career and technical education with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, and the establishment of 21 Performance Indicators for secondary, postsecondary, and tech-prep education (see Attachment A). Noteworthy is the fact Perkins IV, like NCLB, highlights students enrolled in high school career and technical education achieving proficiency on MCAS in English language arts and mathematics by 2014. Perkins IV emphasizes closing the achievement gap for students who are members of special populations. Perkins IV expects that the graduation rates for high school students enrolled in career and technical education meet or exceed the graduation rates for high school students not enrolled in such programs.

Perkins IV requires that school districts and public two-year colleges provide rigorous and challenging academic and technical courses that integrate academic and technical education. To support high quality instruction, Perkins IV requires that professional development be of high quality, sustainable, intensive, and focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on teaching and learning.

Our plan addresses these changes in Perkins IV, aligns the use of Perkins funds with NCLB, special education, and state programs, and incorporates recent Board policies and regulations such as MassCore, Educational Proficiency Plans, and graduation rates. Further, the plan stresses that the Department will collaborate with key stakeholders such as organizations representing business, labor, and industry.

On behalf of the agency, I will submit our plan by the April 1, 2008 due date. Once the plan has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education, it will be posted on our Web site. I look forward to an in-depth discussion with the Board on career and technical education at an upcoming Board meeting.

Enclosure: [Attachment A: Federal Performance Indicators for Career and Technical Education](#)



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75 Pleasant Street
 Malden, MA 02148-4906

Voice: (781)338-3000
 TTY: (800) 439 2370

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From the T:

- Take the Orange Line in the direction of Oak Grove, get off at the Malden Center stop.
- When you leave the station, cross Commercial Street and walk down Exchange Street.
- Turn left onto Washington Street and walk up one block to Pleasant Street.
- Turn right onto Pleasant Street and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on your left.
- The reception desk is on the first floor.

From Boston:

- Take Route 93 North to Exit 32 (Route 60).
- Take a right off the exit and follow Route 60 East approximately two miles.
- Parking is available at the CBD Garage at the corner of Middlesex and Centre Street (Route 60), which is one block east of the intersection of Main Street and Rte. 60.
- Please exit the CBD garage onto Middlesex St (east side of the garage).
- As you exit the garage, turn left onto Middlesex Street, cross over Exchange Street, and walk straight up one block to Pleasant Street.
- Turn left onto Pleasant Street, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on your right.

- The reception desk is on the first floor.

From Route 128:

- Take Route 93 South (Exit 37 Boston) to Exit 32 (Route 60).
- At rotary, bear left and follow Route 60 East approximately two miles.
- Parking is available at the CBD Garage at the corner of Middlesex and Centre Street (Route 60), which is one block east of the intersection of Main Street and Rte. 60.
- Please exit the CBD garage onto Middlesex St (east side of the garage).
- As you exit the garage, turn left onto Middlesex Street, cross over Exchange Street, and walk straight up one block to Pleasant Street.
- Turn left onto Pleasant Street, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on your right.
- The reception desk is on the first floor.

From Route 1:

- Take Route 99 (Broadway) to Route 60.
- Turn right onto Route 60 and follow for approximately 1 3/4 miles.
- Parking is available at the CBD Garage at the corner of Middlesex and Centre Street (Route 60), which is one block east of the intersection of Main Street and Rte. 60.
- Please exit the CBD garage onto Middlesex St (east side of the garage).
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- Turn left onto Pleasant Street, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on your right.
- The reception desk is on the first floor.

From the Mass Pike:

- Take I-90 EAST towards Boston.
- Take the I-93 North exit towards Expressway North/Callahan Tunnel/Logan Airport
- Follow Route 93 North to Exit 32 (Route 60).
- Take a right off the exit and follow Route 60 East approximately two miles.
- Parking is available at the CBD Garage at the corner of Middlesex and Centre Street (Route 60), which is one block east of the intersection of Main Street and Rte. 60.
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The Massachusetts Board of Education

Briefing for the March 25, 2008 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner

Date: March 20, 2008

The next regular meeting of the newly-renamed Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Malden, starting at 9:00 a.m. Coffee will be available at 8:30 a.m. The meeting will adjourn by 1:00 p.m. If you need overnight accommodations or any additional information about the schedule, please call Belinda Wilson at (781) 338-3118.

Overview

This month we welcome three new members to the Board and congratulate Paul Reville on being appointed as Secretary of Education, effective July 1st, to oversee the recently created Executive Office of Education. The agenda for our March 25th meeting includes discussion of the 2006-2007 dropout report and initiatives to reduce high school dropouts and an update and discussion of next steps concerning two districts that the Board has designated as underperforming, Winchendon and Gill-Montague. Other items on the agenda are two charter school requests concerning loan terms and approval of grants.

Regular Meeting

Comments from the Chairman

Chairman Reville will introduce the three members who were appointed by Governor Patrick earlier this month: Gerald Chertavian, Jeffrey Howard, and Dana Mohler-Faria.

Gerald Chertavian is the founder and CEO of Year Up, a nationally recognized one-year training and education

program that serves low-income youth ages 18 to 24 in five states by providing them with the skills needed to make successful transitions to careers and higher education. Before founding Year Up, he co-founded and ran Conduit Communications, an Internet strategy consulting firm.

Dr. Jeffrey Howard, a social psychologist, is the founder of The Efficacy Institute, a national not-for-profit education reform agency that provides training and application methods to adults in school systems and community organizations throughout the U.S., focusing on addressing the root causes of the poor academic performance of many American children, especially children in urban settings.

Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria has served as Governor Patrick's Special Advisor on Education, helping the Governor form the Readiness Project and guiding him on education policy. He is President of Bridgewater State College, where he has been a leader for over a decade, and he has been an administrator at three other public colleges in Massachusetts.

We are delighted to welcome our new members and look forward to working with them. At our meeting, Chairman Reville may also brief the Board on other issues and activities.

Comments from the Commissioner

- 1. Update on curriculum framework revision process.** The English Language Arts Panel that I appointed in November has held five meetings to review the 2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework and its 2004 Supplement. This panel consists of 34 members, selected from 135 applicants. The panel has reviewed frameworks from other states and other resources in the field of English language arts. The panel conducted an online survey, seeking comments on the separate sections of the framework, and held four focus group meetings with educators and high school students. We received 28 responses to the survey and about 175 people attended focus groups. The panel will present its general recommendations to the Board in April for a possible vote in May. These may include, for example, suggestions for areas that could be simplified or strengthened, structural and organizational changes for clarity and ease of use, and incorporation of different types of writing standards. With direction from the Board on the areas for change, the panel will begin drafting proposed revisions, which should be ready for the Board to review and send out for public comment sometime in the 2008-2009 school year.

Our recruitment for a Mathematics Curriculum Framework Review Panel began in February and will end on March 19th. Panelists will be notified of selection in early April and the first meeting will be held on April 16th. We have posted an online survey for this framework, and we will convene focus group meetings to gather ideas from educators, students, and other interested parties. The panel will review the 2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework and its 2004 Supplement prior to presenting general recommendations to the Board in the fall of 2008.

We also are convening a focus group meeting with elementary teachers in May 2008 to discuss the breadth and presentation of the elementary standards in all seven curriculum frameworks. The purpose is to get advice from elementary teachers about whether the format of the curriculum frameworks, currently seven separate documents, serves their needs, or if they would prefer an elementary framework that presents all of the disciplines together and suggests ways to integrate them. In addition, we will invite the teachers to comment on the reasonableness of the amount of content across the frameworks, based on their classroom

experience.

2. **Technology Literacy Standards.** At our February meeting the Board deferred action on the proposed updated version of the Technology Literacy Standards, pending further review. I plan to send the comparison documents (the 2001 standards and the proposed update) to Board members early in April so that you will have the opportunity to review the changes in more detail. I will put the standards on the agenda for discussion at the Board's April 29th meeting and recommend a vote in April or May.
3. **Reports to the Legislature.** The Department has filed the following reports with the Legislature, in response to directives included in the FY08 budget:
 - *Report to the Legislature on School Redesign: Expanding Learning Time to Support Student Success* reports on the schools that are planning and implementing this new initiative. The Year One Report by Abt Associates is included in the appendix.
 - *Addendum on MCAS Academic Support Program, FY06* supplements the January 2006 report and details the programs that eligible students participated in and their success in achieving the competency determination.
 - *Academic Support Programs* identifies the FY08 programs serving students who have not yet achieved the competency determination. We will submit an addendum after the participating students have taken the MCAS tests.
 - *Implementation of the Special Education Reimbursement ("Circuit Breaker") Program* identifies the audit procedure and findings of the fourth year of implementation of this additional state support for the education of students with disabilities.
 - *Mathematics and Science Teacher Content-Based Professional Development* outlines the work the Department is doing to develop a professional development delivery system to meet the demand for qualified educators, provide educators with tools to identify their professional growth needs, and offer regionally-based opportunities.
 - *After-School and Out-of-School Time Quality Grants* reports on the Department's coordination with other agencies as well as public schools, non-public schools, and community-based organizations to provide high quality experiences for students outside of the school day in academic tutoring; programs to improve health; art, theater, and music programs; enrichment activities; gifted and talented programs; and community service.
 - *School Leadership Academies Training Initiative* focuses on the implementation of the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) Executive Development Program and implementation of School Leadership Academies for principals and superintendents to increase their capacity to provide effective instructional and educational leadership.
 - *English Language Acquisition Professional Development* reports on the status of training educators to deliver sheltered English immersion to nearly 56,000 English language learners in Massachusetts's public schools.
 - *Intervention and Targeted Assistance Efforts* details the state system for identifying underperforming schools and districts and the targeted assistance and intervention in Commonwealth Priority Schools.

These reports to the Legislature are all posted on the Department's Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/legislative.html>. If you have questions about any of the reports, please contact me.

Items for Discussion and Action

1. **Dropout Report for 2006-2007 and Initiatives to Reduce High School Dropouts - Discussion**

At this month's meeting, we will present the results of the 2006-2007 Massachusetts high school dropout report and consider some ways to address this critical issue. The persistence of the dropout problem is of great concern. Board member Harneen Chernow will lead a discussion with representatives from two urban communities about steps they have taken to reduce high school dropouts. Janet Powell, senior director of student support services in the Quincy Public Schools, will discuss three strategies employed by her district to work with high-risk, high-need students. Neil Sullivan and Emmanuel Allen, executive director and dropout recovery specialist, respectively, for the Boston Private Industry Council, will discuss their recent research and programs related to dropouts in the city of Boston. The memo in your materials under Tab 1 outlines several actions the Department is undertaking, both on our own and in collaboration with other state agencies and organizations.

2. **Winchendon Public Schools: Update and Next Steps - Initial Discussion**

In 2003, the Board voted to designate the Winchendon Public Schools as an underperforming district, as a result of inadequate leadership and lack of community support to improve the quality of the district's educational programs and services. The Board accepted a turn-around plan from the district in 2004. Since that time, the Department has been working with the school district and its state-supported turn-around partner to address the problems that were identified. This month we will discuss the district's progress with outgoing Superintendent Peter Azar and Associate Commissioners Juliane Dow and Lynda Foisy of the Department. I plan to recommend in April that the Board vote to remove Winchendon from underperforming district status.

3. **Gill-Montague Regional School District: Update and Next Steps - Initial Discussion**

In January 2007, the Board determined that the Gill-Montague Regional School District was underperforming and in need of formal state intervention. As a result, the Department commissioned a district leadership evaluation report to examine the district's leadership capacity and governance practices. The Board reviewed the report in November 2007 and directed Gill-Montague district leaders to use the findings in the report to prepare a district turn-around plan. Gill-Montague's Interim Superintendent, Kenneth Rocke, has submitted the plan, which is included in your materials under Tab 3. He will be at our meeting this month to provide an overview and respond to questions from Board members. At our April meeting, I will ask the Board to vote to accept the plan, with any modifications that we may direct the district to make after our discussion on March 25th.

4. **Charter Schools: Extended Loan Term for Holyoke Community Charter School and Innovation Academy Charter School - Discussion and Vote**

Under the charter school statute, G.L. c. 71, § 89(j)(6), a charter school may incur temporary debt in anticipation of receipt of funds but requires approval of the Board if it wishes to agree to repayment terms that exceed the duration of the school's charter. The Holyoke Community Charter School has requested the Board's approval to enter into a proposed loan agreement for up to 15 years in order to secure \$8.4 million of tax-exempt bond financing that will enable the school to reduce the interest and finance charges it is paying.

The Innovation Academy Charter School has requested the Board's approval to enter into a loan agreement for up to 30 years to secure \$7.5 million to purchase a new school facility. In each case, all parties to the loans have acknowledged in writing that the Commonwealth, Board, and Department have no liability for any portion of the loans and that the Board's approval of the extended loan term has no impact on any action the Board may choose to take in the future with respect to probation, revocation, or renewal of the school's charter. With the safeguards explained in my memo and included in the motion, to which each school has agreed, I recommend that the Board approve the requests from these two charter schools.

5. Approval of Grants - Vote

Presented for your approval this month are grants totaling \$556,400 under two state-funded programs: Safe Schools for Gay and Lesbian Students (\$21,400) and Quality Full-Day Kindergarten (\$535,000 in one-time increases for 29 high-priority districts). I recommend that the Board approve the grants as presented.

Other Items for Information

6. Education-Related News Clippings

Enclosed are several recent articles about education.

7. Update on Perkins Five-Year State Plan for Vocational-Technical Education

The federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, known as Perkins IV, provides funding to states to strengthen secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs. Under Perkins IV, Massachusetts will receive about \$20 million for fiscal year 2009. In order to receive the funding, the agency must submit a Five-Year State Plan by April 1, 2008, to the U.S. Department of Education. Enclosed under Tab 7 is a memo summarizing key points in the federal Perkins IV law and our State Plan. I anticipate that we will schedule a discussion with the Board on career and technical education later this year.

8. Directions to the Meeting

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to seeing you in Malden on March 25th.

last updated: March 21, 2008

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