



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
**From:** Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner  
**Date:** May 16, 2012  
**Subject:** English Language Learners: Educator Preparation and Training/Professional Development Required for Sheltered English Immersion (RETELL Initiative)

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At our May 22 meeting I will update the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on the proposed regulations that you voted to release for public comment on February 28, 2012. The regulations are designed to improve and better support the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) by 1) aligning requirements for educator preparation programs with new knowledge and professional standards so that prospective teachers will meet the requirements for a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) endorsement upon graduation, and 2) strengthening the training/professional development that is required of veteran educators who provide SEI to ELLs. During the public comment period, the Department engaged in extensive outreach and received many thoughtful comments and recommendations that will improve the proposed regulations. Because we are continuing our discussions with the U.S. Department of Justice about the Commonwealth's duties under federal law relating to education of ELLs, I plan to present the regulations to the Board for a vote at your June 26 meeting rather than this month as originally planned. I will send the proposed final regulations to the Board as soon as possible, to give you ample time to review them before taking final action on June 26.

### Overview

Strengthening teaching and learning for ELLs is a key to closing the proficiency gap. The regulations that the Board will vote on in June will define requirements for the "SEI endorsement" – the preparation and training/professional development that core academic teachers of ELLs, and building administrators who supervise such teachers, must have. It is important to note, however, that the regulations and the required SEI endorsement are part of a larger initiative that we are calling RETELL (Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners).

The RETELL initiative is a multifaceted and comprehensive approach designed to provide ELLs access to effective instruction and close proficiency gaps. The regulations calling for the SEI endorsement are an essential component but there are others. The SEI course – the training/professional development program that will lead to the SEI endorsement – will give educators a basic foundation of knowledge, skills, and understanding critical to SEI instruction.

Beyond the coursework, instruction and professional practice in classrooms and schools will improve for ELLs through ongoing supervision and evaluation, updated standards and assessments, data review, and support for SEI teachers through coaching and other resources.

To that end, along with the regulations, the components of RETELL include:

- Model SEI Endorsement Course  
Two model SEI Endorsement courses will be delivered; one for core academic teachers of ELLs and one for building administrators who supervise such teachers. Veteran educators who fall into these groups will be required to complete the course or otherwise earn the SEI endorsement between 2012 and 2016. The model course for teachers will replace the Category Trainings; it will combine face-to-face and online sessions (“blended learning”). The course of study will establish a strong foundation of knowledge and skills for educators of ELLs. We recognize, however, that a course cannot by itself bring about the kinds of changes in practice necessary to closing the proficiency gap for ELLs. The course lays the foundation upon which a structured program of ongoing reinforcement and support can build, through these additional elements:
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Coaching  
Facilitated peer support through PLCs and coaching by SEI experts will help teachers apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the course to teaching ELLs in the classroom. These supports to strengthen practice will begin during the course and will continue after course completion as educators integrate what they have learned into the day-to-day challenges of teaching and learning.
- Ongoing Professional Development and Growth  
The proposed requirement that every educator complete at least 15 professional development points (PDPs) related to SEI and/or English as a Second Language during each upcoming license renewal cycle, combined with the professional development planning that is part of the new educator evaluation system, will help to sustain the focus on effective classroom practice.
- More Robust ELL Standards and Assessments  
Massachusetts is transitioning to the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards and the accompanying Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) in the coming school year. These moves will better prepare ELLs to meet the new English language arts and mathematics standards adopted by the Board in December 2010; both are aligned to the Common Core Standards.

- Establishing Expectations and Goals for ELL Achievement and Growth  
Closing the proficiency gap for ELLs will be a key consideration as educators and their supervisors set goals for student achievement and growth that reflect high yet achievable expectations under the new educator evaluation system.
  
- School and District Accountability for Closing Achievement Gaps  
The Massachusetts accountability system classifies schools and districts into one of five levels based in part on the performance of student groups, one of which is ELLs. For each school and district, we make an annual determination: Level 1 signifies that each student group is on track to halve the rate of non-proficient students within six years; where one or more student groups is not on track to halve the rate of non-proficient students, Level 2 is designated; Level 3 means the performance of one or more student groups is in the bottom 20 percent statewide; Level 4 schools and districts are among the bottom five percent statewide; and Level 5 are those under state receivership (currently, the Lawrence school district is in Level 5 due to the high dropout rate and low academic performance of students). Each level beyond Level 1 receives increasing amounts of intervention, support, and technical assistance. The U.S. Education Department has accepted our updated accountability system.
  
- Specific Interventions for ELLs  
The Commonwealth’s statutes and regulations on accountability for schools (including charter schools) and districts include specific requirements for attending to the academic performance of ELLs. For example, state law requires charter schools to adopt and implement plans for recruitment and retention of ELLs as well as tailoring of instructional programs to meet the needs of ELLs. The school and district accountability requirements include plans that address the specific needs of ELLs.
  
- Data to Inform Instruction and Assess Impact  
Building on our transition to “near real time” data collection, all 80,000 K-12 educators will be able to access continuously updated information about how well their students are learning new content through the P-20 longitudinal data system. Reports will provide: early identification of ELLs (and other students) who are at risk of not meeting curriculum standards, analyses of the efficacy of curricula and student support interventions, and the ability to evaluate the overall impact of RETELL and other major initiatives.
  
- Additional Resources for Teaching and Student Support  
Three major Race to the Top-supported projects will increase and enhance the delivery of effective, targeted instruction and support to ELLs. Model curriculum units aligned with the Massachusetts standards (incorporating the Common Core) are being developed for English language arts/literacy, mathematics, science, and history/social science instruction for every K-12 grade. These model curriculum units will be accompanied by new assessment, multi-media instructional resources and up-to-date on-demand data that will explicitly support targeted instruction for ELLs. In

addition, the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) will build more effective systems of student support and intervention within schools and through collaborations with other community organizations.

Senior Associate Commissioner Bob Bickerton, Associate Commissioner Julia Phelps, and Esta Montano, Director of English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement, will join me on May 22 to update the Board on the RETELL initiative. We will send you the detailed memorandum on the regulations as soon as possible, well in advance of the anticipated Board vote on June 26.