



# 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:** January 15, 2016  
**Subject:** Briefing for the January 25, 2016 Special Meeting and the January 26, 2016 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

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The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on **Tuesday, January 26, 2016, at Roxbury Community College, Reggie Lewis Center Gymnasium, 1350 Tremont Street, Boston.** We will begin our day by **meeting jointly with the Board of Higher Education, starting at 8:30 a.m.** (coffee will be available at 8:00 a.m.) and then convene our **regular meeting starting at 10:15 a.m. and adjourning by 2:00 p.m.**

The Board will also hold a **special meeting from 4:30-7:30 p.m. on Monday, January 25, 2016, at the Southbridge Public Schools Administrative Offices (Auditorium), 25 Cole Avenue, Southbridge,** to hear from school district and municipal officials and other community representatives on the proposal to declare the Southbridge Public Schools a Level 5 district. If you need overnight accommodations or any additional information about the schedule, please call Helene Bettencourt at (781) 338-3120.

## OVERVIEW

The Board's special meeting on Monday evening will be devoted to hearing from local officials and other community representatives from Southbridge. No votes will be taken. On Tuesday morning we will hold a joint meeting with the Board of Higher Education to discuss and possibly vote on the revised definition of College and Career Readiness, Incorporating Civic Learning, and to discuss early college and other cross-sector initiatives. Following the joint session, our Board will remain in the room and convene our regular monthly meeting at 10:15. We have a very full agenda, including: discussion of my recommendation on Level 5 district status for the Southbridge Public Schools (no vote will be taken this month); continuing discussion and vote on my recommendation to revoke the charter of Dorchester Collegiate Academy Charter School; state graduation and dropout results for 2014-15 (discussion); proposed standards for Digital Literacy and Computer Science (continuing discussion and vote to solicit public comment); adoption of revised Science and Technology/Engineering standards (discussion and vote); and proposed charter amendments for Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School and South Shore Charter Public School (discussion and vote on each). The Board also will discuss new charter applicants and proposed charter amendments; a progress report on civic learning and engagement, including a proposed timetable for reviewing and revising the History/Social

Science curriculum framework and related student assessment; and updates on the Holyoke Public Schools and the four Level 5 schools.

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

### **I. Southbridge Public Schools – Statements from School District and Municipal Officials and Other Community Representatives, per 603 CMR 2.06(1)(f)**

The special meeting on Monday evening, January 25, is the opportunity for the Board to hear from school district and municipal officials and other community representatives from Southbridge, as required by the Board's [Regulations on School and District Accountability and Assistance](#), 603 CMR 2.06(1)(f):

School district and municipal officials, including the school committee, as well as the local teachers' union or association president or designee, a representative of the local parent organization, and members of the public, shall have an opportunity to be heard by the Board before final action by the Board to place the district in Level 5.

Southbridge officials and members of the public have been invited. No votes will be taken at the special meeting. Please note that since the Board is devoting three hours on Monday evening to public comments on Southbridge, we will limit public comments on Tuesday to the non-Southbridge items on the agenda.

## **REGULAR MEETING**

### **I. Joint Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Higher Education (8:30-10:00)**

#### **1. Revised Definition of College and Career Readiness, Incorporating Civic Learning – Discussion and Possible Vote**

We last held a joint meeting with the Board and Commissioner of Higher Education in April 2015. These meetings are an opportunity to review and discuss some of our cross-sector initiatives to create a seamless pathway from K-12 to higher education and the workforce. The first topic for our meeting this month with the Board of Higher Education and Commissioner Carlos Santiago is to review and discuss the revised definition of College and Career Readiness, Incorporating Civic Learning. The two boards adopted the current definition of College and Career Readiness in 2013. The updated version includes a section on readiness for civic life, carrying forward a recommendation that you endorsed from the Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement. Staff from our Department and the Department of Higher Education collaborated to produce the updated definition, which you received in December 2015. I recommend that the Board adopt the revised definition, and have included a proposed motion if the Board wishes to do so at the meeting on January 26.

#### **2. Early College and Other Cross-Sector Initiatives – Discussion**

The second topic for discussion at our joint meeting is early college programming, which enables high school students to earn both secondary and college credits simultaneously. The materials in your package provide background information.

## **II. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Regular Meeting (10:15-2:00)**

### **Comments from the Chair**

Chair Sagan will brief the Board on current issues and activities. He will ask two members for a brief report: Roland Fryer, who chairs the Board's Charter School Committee and Assessment Committee, will report on the January 13 meetings of those two committees, and Vice Chair James Morton will offer his perspective on the January 21 Rennie Center event on the 2016 Condition of Education in the Commonwealth.

### **Comments from the Commissioner**

1. **Education Week's Quality Counts report.** On January 7, 2016, *Education Week* released its annual *Quality Counts* report and for the second year in a row ranked Massachusetts first overall. In addition, the Commonwealth ranked first on the publication's K-12 Achievement index, which Massachusetts has led since that index was introduced in 2008, and first for the ninth consecutive year on the publication's Chance for Success Index, which considers outcomes from early childhood through adulthood. In addition, *Quality Counts* highlighted the state's school turnaround initiatives in an article entitled, "In School Turnaround Efforts, Massachusetts Enlists Districts." The rankings and article reflect the smart, hard work that the Commonwealth's educators, students, and families do every day.
2. **Educator evaluation data release.** On January 26, the Department will release the 2014-15 educator evaluation ratings. The 2014-2015 school year marked the first year that all educators in all districts were evaluated with a system aligned to the state evaluation framework. We plan to distribute copies of the press release to the Board at the meeting.
3. **Student discipline data.** The Board adopted [new student discipline regulations](#) in April 2014 to implement revised state statutes on this subject. The new provisions took effect in July 2014. The goal is to reduce schools' reliance on long-term suspensions and ensure that students who are suspended or expelled have the opportunity to make academic progress. I am pleased to report the positive trend in the student discipline data for the 2014-15 school year, which the Department recently released online. Approximately 10,000 fewer students were suspended in 2014-15 than in 2013-14, according to the data reported by districts. The data is available on our website: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/ssdr.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ssdr.aspx). We are continuing to work with the field to provide a safe and supportive school climate for all students.
4. **Restraint regulations.** The new [physical restraint regulations](#) that the Board adopted in December 2014 took effect on January 1, 2016. The regulations are intended to ensure that students in Massachusetts public schools and approved private day and residential special education schools are free from the use of physical restraint that is inconsistent with specific requirements, and to limit the use of physical restraint to emergency situations of last resort, after other lawful and less intrusive alternatives have failed or been deemed inappropriate, and with

extreme caution. To support local implementation of the new requirements, the Department has created data tracking and reporting tools, an online learning tool, FAQs, and hosted a webinar.

### **Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Peyser will brief the Board on current issues and activities.

## **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

### **1. Southbridge Public Schools: Commissioner's Recommendation on Level 5 District Status – Discussion**

As we discussed in December, the Board declared Southbridge Public Schools to be a Level 4 (underperforming) district in September 2004, and the district has made so little progress that I am recommending the Board place it in Level 5 (chronically underperforming) status. The areas of district performance that are of grave concern include low student achievement, high suspension rates, instability in key leadership positions, and overall governance of the district. Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston and Rob Curtin will join us at the January 26 meeting for this discussion. I anticipate asking the Board to vote on this matter in February.

### **2. Dorchester Collegiate Academy Charter School: Commissioner's Recommendation to Revoke Charter – Continuing Discussion and Vote**

In December 2015, the Board discussed my recommendation to revoke the charter of Dorchester Collegiate Academy Charter School (DCACS) based on the school's lackluster academic success and its failure to meet the condition—to demonstrate significant and sustained academic improvement—that the Board imposed in 2014 when it placed the school on probation. After extensive additional deliberation, fact gathering, and discussions with DCACS stakeholders—including parents, teachers, administrators, and board members—I continue to believe that the facts support revocation of the school's charter. The memo under Tab 2 presents the details. DCACS representatives will address the Board at the January 26 meeting. Department staff will also be available to present information and answer questions. If the Board votes its intent to revoke the school's charter, the school will have 15 days to request an administrative hearing, if it chooses to do so.

### **3. State Graduation and Dropout Results for 2014-15 – Discussion**

The Department will be releasing the state graduation and dropout results for 2014-15 on January 21 and I will forward the information to the Board at that time. I will present an overview of the data at the Board meeting on January 26.

### **4. Proposed Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards – Continuing Discussion and Vote to Solicit Public Comment**

Last month the Board had an initial discussion of the proposed *Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DL&CS) Standards*, which are enclosed under Tab 4. I recommend that the Board vote on January 26 to release these voluntary standards for public comment. I anticipate asking the Board to adopt the final version of the DL&CS Standards/Curriculum Framework in the spring of 2016, and at that time I will present an implementation plan that will be supported by the Department and other partners, particularly the Massachusetts Computing Attainment Network (MassCAN). Senior Associate Commissioner Brooke Clenchy, Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang, and others who have been engaged in this work will be at the Board meeting on January 26 to answer your questions.

## **5. Revised Science and Technology/Engineering Standards – Discussion and Vote**

I recommend that the Board vote this month to adopt the *2016 Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Standards*. In October 2015, the Board voted to solicit public comment on the draft revised STE standards. We received helpful feedback from K-12 educators, higher education faculty, Board members, and others, and have made some changes to the draft standards, as summarized in the memo under Tab 5. With the Board's approval, the Department will copyedit the full *2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework* (which includes the standards and a variety of additional guidance and supporting materials), publish the completed *2016 STE Curriculum Framework* in early spring 2016, and support schools in using the updated framework to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment in science and technology/engineering starting in the 2016-17 school year. Senior Associate Commissioner Brooke Clenchy and STEM Director Jacob Foster will be at the Board meeting on January 26 to answer your questions.

## **6. Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School: Amendment to Charter – Discussion and Vote**

Pursuant to the Charter School Regulations, the Board must approve changes to the maximum enrollment and grades served of charter schools. This year, the Department received requests from 19 schools and networks of schools to change their maximum enrollment and grades served. (An overview of the 19 amendment requests and the Department's amendment process can be found under Tab 8.) I anticipate presenting most of the charter amendment requests to the Board at your February meeting. This month, I recommend that the Board approve amendments requested by two schools, Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School and South Shore Charter Public School. The materials under Tab 6 provide information on the amendment request from Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School. Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang and other Department staff members will be present to answer your questions on all items relating to charter schools.

## **7. South Shore Charter Public School: Expansion Amendment Request – Discussion and Vote**

I recommend that the Board approve the expansion amendment requested by South Shore Charter Public School (SSCPS). The materials under Tab 7 provide information on this amendment request.

#### **8. Information on New Charter Applicants and Proposed Charter Amendments – Initial Discussion**

By statute, the Board grants charters for new charter schools at its meeting in February. The Department received 10 Commonwealth charter school prospectuses in August 2015. In November 2015, the Department received final applications to establish five charter schools. Two of the seven applicant groups that were initially invited to submit final applications decided not to pursue a charter. Additionally, another applicant group decided to withdraw its final application. This leaves four applications for new schools that the Department is currently reviewing. The memo under Tab 8 provides a preview of these four charter applications and includes executive summaries from each of the applicant groups.

Also enclosed under Tab 8 is a memo describing the charter amendment requests we have received from 19 existing schools or networks of schools to change their maximum enrollment or grades served, including 11 requests from Boston schools for a total of 2,701 additional seats. Of the 19 requests, I am presenting two (not from Boston) to the Board for a vote this month. (See items 6 and 7, above.) I will present my recommendations on the remaining amendments to the Board for action at your February meeting.

#### **9. Civic Learning and Engagement: Progress Report including Proposed Timetable for Review and Revision of History/Social Science Curriculum Framework and Related Student Assessment – Discussion**

In December 2015, I updated the Board on projects currently underway to support civic learning and engagement. This month, I am presenting further information on the status of those projects, including a proposed timeline and budget estimate for revising the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework. Senior Associate Commissioner Brooke Clenchy and other members of our staff will be at the Board meeting on January 26 to answer your questions.

#### **10. Update on Holyoke Public Schools – Discussion**

Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston and Ventura Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, will present the monthly update on our work with the Holyoke Public Schools.

#### **11. Update on Level 5 Schools – Discussion**

Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston will present the second-quarter report on the four Level 5 schools: Dever Elementary School and UP Academy Holland in Boston; Morgan Full Service Community School in Holyoke; and John Avery Parker Elementary School in New Bedford. We will present the next quarterly report in April 2016.

## **OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

### **12. Commissioner's New Year's Message**

On January 8 I issued a New Year's message to the field highlighting our collective accomplishments and the work ahead. The message is enclosed under Tab 12. Massachusetts students continue to learn in the strongest public education system, and the credit for it goes to educators across the Commonwealth. Each day, classroom teachers, principals, and district administrators strive to provide a high quality education to all students. The newly reauthorized federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is an opportunity to take stock of our policy framework and continue the work that is underway. The ESSA gives us discretion to meet the requirements of the reauthorized legislation through the architecture the Board and Department have built with assistance from the field. We will continue to assess students in grades 3-8 and in high school; report annually on school and district progress; identify and intervene in the lowest performing schools; and evaluate and implement the Commonwealth's educator evaluation framework.

### **13. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Annual Report for FY2015**

The annual report for FY2015 includes key data and chronicles the major decisions and actions of the Board from July 2014-June 2015. We plan to send copies to the Governor and the Legislature and post the report on our website. We will distribute the annual report at the Board meeting on January 26.

### **14. Correspondence with U.S. Department of Education on Statewide Assessment**

Enclosed under Tab 14 is my January 5, 2016 letter asking the U.S. Department of Education to reconsider and remove its "high risk" designation relating to statewide assessment under Title I, Part A of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I continue to believe our Board made a sound and appropriate decision in November 2015 to allow school districts the choice of administering one of two assessments in spring 2016 to students enrolled in grades 3 through 8, as a transition to a single statewide assessment in 2017. The federal designation is unwarranted. I will keep the Board informed on this matter.

### **15. Report on Grants and Charter School Matters Approved by the Commissioner**

Under Tab 15 is information on grants and charter school matters that I have approved under the authority the Board has delegated to me.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to seeing you in Southbridge on January 25 and at Roxbury Community College on January 26.