



Paul Sagan
Chair

Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
From: Penny Noyce, Chair of the Committee on Commissioner's Performance Review
Date: June 17, 2016
Subject: Commissioner's Performance Review for FY2016

Each year, the chair of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education establishes a committee to evaluate the performance of the Commissioner. For reviewing Commissioner Mitchell Chester's eighth year of performance in FY2016, the committee consists of Penny Noyce (committee chair), James Morton (Board vice-chair), and Paul Sagan (Board chair).

The committee met in the fall of 2015 and, after consultation with other members of the Board, updated the performance criteria for the Commissioner's evaluation. The FY2016 evaluation is structured around four dimensions:

- Facilitate student growth and achievement (30%)
- Management and operations (25%)
- External relations and communication (25%)
- Board support/effective interactions (20%)

Attachment A includes a detailed description of the performance criteria used to evaluate these dimensions of the Commissioner's work.

The committee gathered data from various sources, including student performance results, the Commissioner's self-assessment, and input from other members of the Board, the Commissioner's leadership team, including district receivers, and selected external constituents. This memo highlights some of the accomplishments of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) under the Commissioner's leadership in FY2016. It also reviews the Commissioner's performance based on the Board-developed criteria and goals, identifies challenges and opportunities, and makes a recommendation to the Board in relation to his performance.

2015-2016 Highlights

The Commissioner, Board, and ESE continued to make excellent progress in FY2016 in many important areas. Massachusetts remains a national leader in K-12 education. The success of the ongoing work is evident in outcome measures including the most recent student data on high school graduation, MCAS scores, Advanced Placement results, and results on national (NAEP) and international (PISA and TIMSS) student assessments. Significant actions and accomplishments in FY2016 include the following (see Section A, below, for additional details):

Student assessment. On the Commissioner’s recommendation, after he shepherded a thoughtful and broad-based review of student assessment options, the Board voted in November 2015 to launch work on a next-generation MCAS.

Curriculum standards review. Under the Commissioner’s leadership, ESE is continuing to support implementation of the 2010 curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts and Mathematics while collecting feedback from the field and the public about possible adjustments.

Revised science standards. The Commissioner led ESE through a comprehensive review and revision of the Commonwealth’s Science and Technology/Engineering standards, and the Board voted to adopt the updated standards in January 2016.

Civic learning. With the Commissioner’s support, ESE is implementing the recommendations of the Board’s Civic Learning Work Group and has begun the review of the History and Social Science standards.

Lawrence and Holyoke receiverships. In addition to launching the second three-year turnaround plan for Lawrence, the Commissioner and ESE developed a turnaround plan for Holyoke, which is in its initial year of receivership.

Southbridge receivership. Building on the progress in Lawrence and Holyoke, and based on severe problems in the Southbridge Public Schools, the Commissioner recommended and the Board voted in January 2016 to designate the district as Level 5 (“chronically underperforming”).

Level 4 and 5 schools. The Commissioner and his team continue to implement, monitor, and refine the process for Level 4 and 5 schools. Four Level 5 schools are completing their second year in receivership, and an innovative state-local partnership is underway in Springfield.

Commissioner’s Performance Evaluation

Based on the criteria in Attachment A and our review of all the information, the committee evaluated the Commissioner’s performance as follows:

A. Facilitate student growth and achievement (30%)

1. On the Commissioner’s recommendation, after he shepherded a thoughtful and broad-based review of student assessment options, the Board voted in November 2015 to launch work on a next-generation MCAS. The new test will build on the best elements of PARCC and MCAS and enable Massachusetts to retain final control over test content, testing policies, and test administration procedures. Computer-based testing will be phased in over the next two years, leading to statewide computer-based testing in 2019. ESE is currently evaluating proposals that bidders submitted in response to the next-generation MCAS request for responses.

2. Under the Commissioner's leadership, ESE is continuing to support implementation of the 2010 curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts and Mathematics while collecting feedback from the field and the public about what adjustments might need to be made to the frameworks. ESE has convened panels of educators to share their experiences using the standards and make recommendations to refine the standards. ESE also is encouraging extensive public participation in the review process through use of an online survey.
3. The Commissioner led ESE through a comprehensive review and revision of the Commonwealth's Science and Technology/Engineering standards, and the Board voted to adopt the updated standards in January 2016. ESE is distributing the new Science and Technology/Engineering standards widely with the support of approximately 40 science ambassadors. ESE also developed and is disseminating standards for Digital Literacy and Computer Science, which the Commissioner will bring to the Board for final review and adoption in June 2016. This initiative involved a robust public/private partnership that included many representatives of the Commonwealth's high-tech sector.
4. With the Commissioner's support, ESE is implementing the recommendations of the Board's Civic Learning Work Group and has begun the review of the History and Social Science standards. In addition to incorporating civic learning and engagement into the state definition of college and career readiness, ESE has an ongoing work group that is advancing civic learning initiatives.
5. The Commissioner and his team continue to implement, monitor, and refine ESE's turnaround processes for Level 4 and 5 schools and districts. Lawrence has launched its second three-year district turnaround plan under Receiver Jeff Riley. As the district completes its fourth year in receivership, it continues to show improved graduation rates, decreased dropout rates, and gains in English language arts and mathematics results. Holyoke is completing its initial year of district turnaround with Receiver Stephen Zrike focusing on strategies including extended learning time, increased autonomy for schools, and secondary school redesign.

On the Commissioner's recommendation, based on severe and persistent problems in the Southbridge Public Schools, the Board voted in January 2016 to place the district in Level 5. The Commissioner appointed Jessica Huizenga as receiver, to implement the turnaround plan that is currently being developed. In each Level 5 district, ESE has tailored and adjusted strategies based on what is working, what is not, and circumstances in that particular district.

The Commissioner and ESE have assisted and closely monitored progress in the Commonwealth's four Level 5 schools, which are completing their second year in receivership: Dever and Holland in Boston, Morgan in Holyoke (now part of the Holyoke district turnaround effort), and Parker in New Bedford. ESE is also continuing its partnership with local officials in the Springfield Empowerment Zone, an innovative joint city/state governance approach to address the low performance of middle schools in Springfield.

6. Under the Commissioner's direction, ESE is implementing several programs designed to strengthen instructional programs for student groups with the greatest academic need. These programs include RETELL, through which the state is providing training to approximately 12,900 core academic teachers in FY2016 to make academic content accessible to English language learners. Since the program began in 2012, 36,439 educators have received the RETELL training. Through the LEAP initiative, ESE is working with 14 districts to reduce high rates of identifying low-income students as having disabilities and high rates of educating those students in substantially separate classes. LEAP aims to strengthen the general education program by improving teaching and other services provided to low-income students, both with and without disabilities.
7. The Commissioner leads ESE's continued implementation of the educator evaluation framework, using multiple measures to support educator growth and development. Through regional and statewide meetings, as well as workgroups of superintendents, principals, and teachers, ESE is helping educators and districts share promising practices and learn from each other.
8. The Commissioner launched a new early literacy initiative in FY2016 that builds on work that Professor Nonie Lesaux of the Harvard Graduate School of Education is leading in the Boston Public Schools around curriculum for kindergarten and grades 1 and 2. ESE is organizing statewide and regional professional development sessions to support educators who are implementing the curriculum and several hundred teachers and administrators have participated this year.

The performance evaluation committee encourages the Commissioner and ESE to continue the focus on strengthening early literacy statewide by examining options and scaling up effective initiatives.

9. In recognition of the role of social and emotional factors in student learning, the Commissioner and ESE are working with the Rennie Center, the MA Association of School Superintendents, and other statewide professional associations to explore practices and policies to promote social and emotional learning. The Commissioner shared promising practices with the Board at the April 2016 meeting.
10. Evidence of student growth and achievement in Massachusetts in FY 2016, under Commissioner Chester's leadership, includes the following:
 - a. In the National Assessment of Educational Progress, in both grades 4 and 8, and for both reading and mathematics, Massachusetts's student performance was first in the nation or statistically tied for first each of the last six times NAEP was given (2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015). According to the 2015 NAEP results, Massachusetts was alone in being first in fourth grade reading and tied for first among states in fourth grade mathematics, eighth grade reading, and eighth grade mathematics. On all four tests, Massachusetts's students scored well above the national average.

While students in the Commonwealth continue to show strong achievement as compared to their counterparts in other states, the committee shares the Commissioner's concern that as in other states, the NAEP results in Massachusetts are not showing steady gains for students overall and for subgroups. The committee urges continued attention to this issue.

- b. 88% of 10th graders last spring (class of 2017) met the state's testing requirements for a high school diploma on their first try, unchanged from last year. Between 2007 and 2015, the percentage of students scoring Proficient or higher on MCAS exams grew in most grades in English language arts, mathematics, and science. The performance gap between white and African-American or Latino students narrowed in all grades in both English language arts and mathematics. With respect to Advanced Placement courses and exams, more Massachusetts public high school students are taking and succeeding on rigorous AP exams than ever before.
- c. The state's four-year graduation rate improved for the ninth consecutive year, with 87.3 percent of students who entered as ninth graders in 2011-2012 – or who transferred into that same cohort at any time during high school – graduating within four years. In addition to the overall improvement in the graduation rate, the graduation rate among Hispanic students exceeded 70 percent for the first time, the graduation rate for urban districts crossed the 75 percent mark, and the graduation rate for black females exceeded 80 percent. The state's annual dropout rate declined to 1.9 percent in 2014-2015, dipping below 2 percent to the lowest overall rate in more than three decades.

Rating: The Commissioner exceeded expectations, receiving a rating of 4.5 out of 5.

B. Management and operations (25%)

1. In FY2016, the Commissioner initiated a strategic restructuring of ESE to ensure attention to the highest leverage initiatives while adjusting to reduced resources and staffing due to state budget constraints, an early retirement incentive program with minimal backfill allowance, and the end of federal funding under Race to the Top. He raised private foundation funding to commission an organizational review by Parthenon focused on the five core priorities: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; educator effectiveness; accountability and assistance; technology and data; and a safe and supportive learning environment. This initiative is responsive to the committee's recommendation to the Commissioner in June 2015. He is continuing to align fiscal and personnel resources with the core strategies.
2. The Commissioner has assembled and leads a staff that gets strongly positive reviews from the field for being capable and responsive. He communicates clearly and works steadfastly to advance the Board's and ESE's mission and goals. Through weekly

communications with ESE staff, meetings with senior staff, administrators, and offices, regular “stock-takes,” and twice-yearly all-staff meetings, he promotes the agency’s mission and a culture of managing for results. He has put in place an effective “delivery” system to assess progress toward goals and rethink approaches in areas where progress stalls.

3. The Commissioner receives uniformly stellar reviews from members of his leadership team. They consistently express high morale and a sense of shared mission. The Commissioner encourages dialogue, disagreement, and learning from evidence. He listens. His leadership team appreciates his strategic thinking, his courage, his work ethic, his deep understanding and use of data, his calm demeanor, and his passion for improving education for all students in the Commonwealth.
4. The Commissioner communicates high expectations for Department staff and encourages their continued growth and professional development. He expects and models collaboration across work groups in the Department. Staff look to him as a mentor.
5. The Commissioner responds effectively to unplanned scenarios, as illustrated by two high-profile situations that arose in FY2016. ESE received reports about mistreatment of students in the Therapeutic Intervention Program at the Peck School in Holyoke and physical abuse of students at the Eagleton School, a special education school in Great Barrington. In both cases, the Commissioner deployed ESE staff to first secure the safety and well-being of students and then address the institutional restructuring of Peck and the closure of Eagleton. The resolution of both incidents required inventive deployment of ESE staff and the establishment of partnerships with other state agencies as well as private organizations. In response to these incidents, the Commissioner is securing outside expertise to examine ESE protocols and identify practices to help reduce the likelihood that such situations will arise in the future.
6. The Commissioner fully and actively participates in the Commonwealth’s affirmative action and diversity efforts. Currently 18.5% of the Department’s staff are individuals who have self-identified in one of the categories as minority (i.e., race, ethnicity, disability, veteran status). Similarly, approximately 16.5% of the Department’s managers represent racial minorities, and approximately 4% have identified themselves as individuals with disabilities. The committee notes some slippage in the diversity data compared to last year (when the percentages were 25%, 17%, and 7%, respectively), likely attributable to staff reductions due to the Commonwealth’s 2015 Early Retirement Incentive Program and the conclusion of federal Race to the Top funding.
7. The committee recommends continued attention to increasing diverse representation within ESE staff and on advisory groups. The committee also recommends that the Commissioner engage in a little more “walking-around time,” being more visible to ESE staff below the leadership team level.

Rating: The Commissioner exceeded expectations, receiving a rating of 4.5 out of 5.

C. External relations and communication (25%)

1. The Commissioner maintains a visible public profile throughout the state to explain ESE's goals and initiatives and hear from the field about priorities, progress, and the challenges they are facing. He continues to engage regularly with schools, districts and the leadership of statewide professional organizations, including the MTA, AFT-MA, MASS, and MASC, among others, as well as with the MA Business Roundtable and the MA Business Alliance for Education. The Commissioner also meets regularly with the Secretary of Education and with the Commissioners and Board Chairs of the Early Education and Care and Higher Education departments. He visits schools around the Commonwealth almost every week of the school year, meeting with students, teachers, and administrators and often with parents and local elected officials as well.
2. The Commissioner makes effective use of various conduits for two-way communication with the field, including the Superintendents' Advisory Council in partnership with the Executive Committee of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Urban Superintendents Network, and ESE's Principal Advisory Cabinet and Teacher Advisory Cabinet. The committee recommends that the Commissioner continue these groups and remain open to new opportunities for building lines of communication with teachers throughout the coming year.
3. The Commissioner has dedicated time and resources to maintaining productive relationships with the Legislature through regular meetings and communication with the Education Committee co-chairs, legislative leadership, and legislative policy staff, to explain and advance Board priorities. He has played an important and helpful role in developing the state education budget. In FY2016 ESE also participated in and provided data to the Foundation Budget Review Commission, a legislatively formed committee reviewing the Chapter 70 aid program for schools and district.
4. The Commissioner or ESE leaders under his direction meet monthly with 24 urban school district superintendents through the Urban Superintendents Network to identify and share practices and policies that are advancing student learning and closing proficiency gaps. ESE also convenes professional learning networks around issues of common interest, and has begun a joint work group comprising both traditional school district and charter school leaders to identify opportunities for collaboration across the two sectors.
5. The Commissioner meets regularly with officials of Massachusetts and national foundations that have an interest in education. He responds to media requests for interviews on a wide variety of educational matters. The Commissioner also has initiated a stakeholder input process in connection with ESE planning for the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act.
6. The Commissioner does an outstanding job of representing Massachusetts on the national education scene, enhancing the Commonwealth's position as a national leader in

education reform and student achievement, and creating opportunities for the Commonwealth to learn and benefit from best practices. He continues to serve as a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, the independent, bipartisan organization that oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card.

Rating: The Commissioner's performance was outstanding, receiving a rating of 5.

D. Board support/effective interactions (20%)

1. The Commissioner provides outstanding support to the Board. Through his weekly reports, monthly calls, constant availability, and responsiveness to requests for information, he assists Board members in understanding education issues and carrying out their responsibilities.
2. The Commissioner assembles staff and resources for highly informative special meetings of the Board on Monday evenings as well as for the regular meetings. Special meetings in FY2016 have provided opportunities for in-depth discussion on topics such as student assessment, social-emotional learning, educator evaluation, and civic learning and other topics with the Board of Higher Education.
3. The Commissioner fully supports the Board's committees and task forces with staff and materials. He takes seriously the results of the Board's deliberations and decisions and follows through on his commitments.

Rating: The Commissioner's performance was outstanding, receiving a rating of 5.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Commissioner Chester's performance in FY2016 has been outstanding, receiving very high marks (**4.7 in total out of a possible 5**) based on the updated criteria that were adopted in the fall of 2015. Massachusetts continued to make steady and significant progress in K-12 education in the past year. Along with the work of teachers, administrators, and Department staff, these accomplishments reflect Commissioner Chester's dedication, contributions and leadership. Based on the evaluation of his job performance, the committee affirms its strong endorsement of the Commissioner and recommends that the Board do so as well. We would prefer to underline this endorsement with a substantial salary increase, but budget constraints limit us to recommending an increase of 2%, effective July 1, 2016.

The Committee on the Commissioner's Performance Review thanks Commissioner Chester for his commitment and dedication to the advancement of education for the students of the Commonwealth.

ATTACHMENT A

Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education 2015-2016 Performance Criteria For Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Background

The mission of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is to strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.

The Commissioner is the secretary to the Board, its chief executive officer, and the chief state school officer for elementary and secondary education. Mass. General Laws chapter 15, section 1F.

In support of the Board's mission and the goal of preparing all students for success after high school, the Commissioner and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have adopted five [core strategies](#):

1. Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment
2. Promote educator development
3. Turn around the lowest-performing districts and schools
4. Use technology and data to support teaching and learning
5. Support students' social/emotional health

The following performance criteria focus on the Commissioner's roles, accountabilities, and goals and are organized in four categories: promoting student achievement and growth, management and operations, external relations and communication, and Board support, all of which are important functions of the Commissioner. The criteria promote measurable outcomes that are realistic and attainable. The Board is recommending setting these function areas into priorities that will set the Commissioner's work plan and distribution of his time and efforts.

Performance Criteria

Facilitate Student Achievement and Growth (30%)

Make substantial progress on the five core strategies listed above to facilitate student growth and achievement, including:

- Develop, implement, monitor, and report on clear turnaround strategies for Level 4 and 5 districts and schools
- Lead the effective rollout and implementation of major initiatives around curriculum and assessment, including the next generation of the statewide student assessment program
- Promote educator development through continued implementation of RETELL, the educator evaluation system, and other initiatives.

- Ensure effective engagement of district leaders by promoting, motivating, measuring, and communicating progress of efforts to close proficiency gaps and raise student performance in underperforming districts
- Develop a plan to address gaps in reading achievement
- Develop and implement a plan to strengthen support for students' social/emotional health

Management and Operations (25%)

- Lead the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) by setting the vision, approving the strategies, and establishing a culture that promotes the Board's mission and makes substantial progress on the five core strategies listed above
- Manage within the parameters of DESE's budget to achieve goals, including:
 - Report on and implement a strategic plan for DESE based on recommendations from the Fall 2015 organizational review
 - Ensure that the DESE is structured, staffed and aligned across all centers to meet its annual operational targets and stated goals, within the limitations of DESE's budget and state hiring parameters
- Respond appropriately to changes in federal and state requirements
- Increase diversity within the DESE staff, and within the advisory groups

External Relations and Communication (25%)

- Manage relationships and communications to maximize alignment of external stakeholders (e.g., Legislature, Governor's Office/EOE, MTA, AFT-MA, MASS, MASC, principals' associations, business groups, foundations) with the Board's overall priorities and goals
- Engage and responsively communicate with the field and citizens regarding major Board and Department initiatives
- Effectively lead the discussion and communications regarding Massachusetts educational policies and initiatives
- Represent Massachusetts on the wider educational scene through participation, presentations, and leadership, enhancing the Commonwealth's position as a national leader in K-12 education and positioning Massachusetts to benefit from best practices nationally and internationally

Board Support/Effective Interactions (20%)

- Effectively interact with members of the Board
- Engage Board members in setting the strategic vision for DESE and discussing DESE priorities and local/national policy issues relevant to Massachusetts
- Keep the Board updated on subjects necessary for the Board to fulfill its role, including timely transmission of materials for meetings
- Receive feedback from Board members during annual performance review process

Rating Structure

- Outstanding = 5
- Very Good = 4
- Proficient = 3
- Needs Improvement = 2
- Unsatisfactory = 1