# Minutes of the Regular Meeting

# of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

**Tuesday, May 26, 2020**

**2:03 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.**

**By Remote Participation Per Governor Baker's Emergency Order of March 12, 2020**

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

**James Morton**, Vice-Chair, Boston

**Amanda Fernández**,Belmont

**Matthew Hills**, Newton

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke

**James Peyser**,Secretary of Education

**Paymon Rouhanifard**, Brookline

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

**Matthew Tibbitts**, Student Advisory Council, Ludlow

**Martin West**, Newton

**Jeffrey C. Riley**,Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Chair Craven convened the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) at 2:03 p.m. Board members introduced themselves. Chair Craven reminded members that because this is a remote meeting, all votes will be done by roll call.

**Comments from Chair Craven**

Chair Craven said she appreciates all the work the Department is doing with stakeholder groups, health and safety experts including the Department of Public Health, the Governor’s office, and others to plan for a return to school, possibly in the summer and hopefully in the fall. She said we need to rely on the latest scientific findings and notify districts and families about the plans as soon as possible.

Chair Craven asked Ms. Fernández to report on the work of the Educator Diversification Committee. Ms. Fernández said the committee is pleased with the progress the Department’s team has made under Ventura Rodriguez’s leadership. She noted the Department is working on a proposal for a scholarship program to remove some of the financial barriers to entry into the profession, particularly for teachers of color. Ms. Fernández said the committee hopes its involvement will help to advance the initiative.

Chair Craven asked Vice-Chair Morton to report on the Commissioner’s Performance Evaluation Committee. Vice-Chair Morton thanked the staff for their help throughout the process. He said the committee met on May 4to review and update the performance criteria for this year and also mapped out next steps, which include soliciting and receiving the Commissioner’s self-evaluation and getting input from other members of the Board, the Commissioner's leadership team, and several external stakeholders. Vice-Chair Morton said at their next meeting on May 28, the committee will review the information they have received and go over the Commissioner’s self-evaluation. Vice-Chair Morton said their goal is to make a report and recommendation to the Board at the June meeting. He thanked Chair Craven and Ms. Fernández for their participation on the committee.

**Public Comment**

* Carol Lach, Framingham, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* Joseph Shaine, Townsend, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* William Cushing-Candelario, North Reading, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* Maggie Pinney, Brockton, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* Lori Watson, Brockton, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* Gerry Mroz, Melrose, addressed the Board on Update on Covid-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families
* Irischa M. Valentin, Boston, addressed the Board on student testing
* Yordania Paulino, Boston Public Schools parent, addressed the Board on the Boston Public Schools district review and MOU
* Estephany Almanzar, Boston Public Schools parent, addressed the Board on the Boston Public Schools district review and MOU

Chair Craven thanked all speakers for their testimony and noted one positive aspect of remote meetings is that people from around the Commonwealth can more easily present their views to the Board.

**Comments from Commissioner Riley**

Commissioner Riley congratulated Easthampton High School, whose students, under the leadership of teacher Kelley Brown, won the national civics championship in the “We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution” contest. The Commissioner also congratulated Boston Latin School, whose student team won the 2020 High School Quiz Show state championship.

**Update on COVID-19 Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families**

Commissioner Riley said the Department is continuing to provide information and support to districts about remote learning and related subjects, and has created a series of webinars for teachers by content area. The Commissioner updated the Board on various items, including the survey the Department recently sent to districts about the current state of remote learning in the Commonwealth. He noted that on May 8, the Department sent a letter to families about the latest expectations around remote learning, along with information on where to find support for a variety of needs. Translated versions of the letter will be posted on the Department’s website. Commissioner Riley said the Department has posted an RFP for the federal CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund). This grant provides emergency relief funds to address the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 schools.

Commissioner Riley noted that following the Board’s vote on April 28, the Department informed the field that the competency determination requirement would be modified for current high school seniors and other actively enrolled students who were on track to graduate in spring or summer 2020. Under the change, seniors who have not passed one or more of the high school MCAS tests will be able to earn the competency determination through successful completion of a relevant high school course. Commissioner Riley said in response to questions from the field about Advanced Placement (AP) testing, the Department worked with other state officials to draw up guidelines under which a small number of students could take an AP test at a school if the students do not have access to necessary technology or a suitable testing space at home.

Commissioner Riley said Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston, who is also our state special education director, has been leading the effort to support special education services and programs for students with disabilities. Mr. Johnston continues to meet weekly with special education directors to address topics ranging from timelines to transition planning. The PowerPoint presentations from those remote meetings are available on the Department’s website.

Commissioner Riley said the Department has adjusted several deadlines for districts, students, and educators in light of the state of emergency, using the authority granted by the Legislature and the Board. He updated the Board on the Return to School Working Group, and spoke about his testimony to the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education oversight hearing on K-12 education. The Commissioner said the Department is putting out as much information as possible so people understand what is expected of them and what supports are available for schools and students.

Ms. Stewart asked if the Board could be updated on gifted and talented programs. Commissioner Riley said he would put that issue on the agenda for a future meeting, probably in the fall, and that he would include information on adaptive testing.

**2020 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Takeru Nagayoshi**

Commissioner Riley introduced Takeru Nagayoshi, 2020 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year from New Bedford High School, to discuss his experiences with remote learning. The Commissioner added that when he presented the award to Mr. Nagayoshi months ago, what struck him was how excited his students were that we were recognizing a truly gifted teacher who goes above and beyond. Mr. Nagayoshi discussed his experiences teaching remotely. He said about 65-85% of students have been engaged regularly, and while some clearly are benefiting from the flexibility of remote learning, concerns remain about fluctuating attendance and the challenges of connecting with some students.

Mr. Nagayoshi outlined recommendations to support internet access and tech literacy for students, parents, and teachers. He recommended: promote full internet access and provide support, especially for schools like his; continue and expand workshops, webinars, and professional development to help educators build their skills around teaching remotely and reaching and engaging all students; and provide support for students with disabilities and English learners. Mr. Nagayoshi said one challenge of remote learning is how to balance equity with accountability, noting that without in-person instruction and with grading relaxed, it is hard for some students to stay motivated. He commented that adults should not assume all students are digitally literate; they may know their smartphones well but not necessarily how to use laptops. Chair Craven thanked Mr. Nagayoshi for his thoughtful presentation and congratulated him on being named Teacher of the Year.

**High School MCAS Testing Plans and Proposed Modifications to Competency Determination (CD) Requirement Due to COVID-19 Emergency**

Commissioner Riley explained that at the April 2020 meeting, the Board voted to approve the implementation of modified competency determination (CD) requirements for this year’s high school seniors, the class of 2020. He said today he is presenting his recommendations for modifying the CD requirements in science and technology/engineering (STE) for students in the classes of 2021–2023 (students who will be in grade 10, 11, or 12 in the coming school year). The Commissioner said that for students in the classes of 2021–2023, the competency determination in STE would be awarded upon demonstration that the student earned credit for a course in the relevant subject matter and demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) during their high school career. The process and timeline for awarding the modified CD will be announced at a later date. Commissioner Riley noted the Department plans to administer high school MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics in the 2020-2021 school year.

Mr. West said he supports the Commissioner’s recommendation as an appropriate temporary measure in an extraordinary time due to the pandemic, adding that he wants to make clear this is not a precedent or shift. Commissioner Riley concurred. Mr. Rouhanifard said this approach makes sense in the current situation, and over the longer term we need to affirm the value of science and technology/engineering for all students.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED:** **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with**

**St. 2020, c. 56, § 6, and as recommended by the Commissioner, temporarily modifies the competency determination requirement by authorizing an emergency process through which students in the high school graduating classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023 shall earn the competency determination in science and technology/engineering through successful completion of a relevant high school course, as follows:**

* **For students in the classes of 2021–2023, the competency determination in science and technology/engineering shall be awarded upon demonstration that the student earned credit for a course in the relevant subject matter and demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) during their high school career.**

**This action is a temporary measure needed in response to the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commissioner will announce at a later date the process and timeline for awarding the modified competency determination in science and technology/engineering.**

The vote, by roll call, was 10-0.

**Update on Education Budget Matters**

Bill Bell, CFO/Senior Associate Commissioner, updated the Board on budget matters. He said the federal CARES Act grant program is the most concrete issue right now. Districts have until June 15 to apply for funds for FY20 and until July 1 to apply for funds for FY21. Mr. Bell said to help districts with their applications, the Department has posted information on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund) page of the federal grants section of our website, and the Department’s Federal Grants office is holding webinars to provide more detailed information. He added that several units within the Department are conducting other webinars for municipal and regional school districts and education collaboratives to help them plan their budgets for the coming school year despite uncertainties about the state budget for FY21. Members asked if the Board’s advocacy could help. Secretary Peyser responded that education is on everyone’s list, and the key issue is that the Legislature and Administration are still trying to figure out the revenue picture.

**Student Opportunity Act: Regulations on District Plans, 603 CMR 55.00**

Commissioner Riley recommended that the Board vote to make the emergency regulations on Student Opportunity Act plans permanent. At the February 25, 2020 meeting, the Board voted to adopt these regulations on an emergency basis and to solicit public comment. Associate Commissioner Dan Anderson provided a brief overview and noted that the Department received only one comment during the public comment period, and it expressed support for the regulations.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, § 1B, and c. 70, §§ 2 and 3, and having solicited public comment in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. c. 30A, § 3, hereby adopts the Regulations for Student Opportunity Act Plans, 603 CMR 55.00, as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote, by roll call, was 10-0.

**Proposed Schedule for Regular Board Meetings through June 2021**

Commissioner Riley asked members to review the proposed 2020-2021 meeting dates and notify staff before the June meeting if there is any issue. He said the Board would vote on the schedule at the June meeting.

**Approval of Minutes**

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the April 28, 2020 Regular Meeting**

The vote, by roll call, was 10-0.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 4:00 p.m. subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote, by roll call, was 10-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board