**Minutes of the Special Meeting\***

**of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148**

**Monday, February 22, 2021**

**5:04 p.m. – 6:33 p.m.**

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

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

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

**Jasper Coughlin**, Student Member, Billerica

**Amanda** **Fernández**,Belmont

**Matthew Hills**, Newton

**Darlene Lombos,** Boston

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke

**James Peyser**,Secretary of Education

**Paymon Rouhanifard**, Brookline

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

**Martin West**, Newton

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

\*The meeting was held remotely via Zoom, per Governor Baker’s Emergency Order of March 12, 2020.

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Chair Craven convened the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) at 5:04 p.m. Board members introduced themselves. Commissioner Riley said this is an opportunity for the Board to review and discuss Career and Vocational Technical Education, specifically, vocational school admissions. He said he plans to present a proposed amendment to the regulation on vocational admissions to the Board in March or April and invite public comment, after which the Board would consider and vote on a final regulation in June. The Commissioner introduced Liz Bennett, Associate Commissioner for College, Career, and Technical Education, and Caitlin Looby of the Department’s legal team to lead the presentation and discussion.

**Career and Vocational Technical Education (CVTE)**

Ms. Bennett introduced Ms. Looby and Jen Appleyard, CVTE data specialist. Ms. Bennett presented an overview of CVTE in Massachusetts and the various pathways students may choose. She described Chapter 74 programs that are offered in 90 districts in Massachusetts, outlined the CVTE frameworks and development of Chapter 74 programs, and gave an example of the experience of a CVTE student.

Ms. Looby presented background on the current regulation on admission to CVTE programs. She noted that CVTE programs offered under Chapter 74 of the Mass. General Laws receive state and federal funding, are subject to state and federal law, and are the focus of the admissions regulation and the waitlist analysis that will be presented. Ms. Looby reviewed Phase 1 of the CVTE regulatory changes that the Board adopted in February 2020 and the timeline for Phase 2, which entails amending the CVTE admissions regulation this spring, to take effect for students who will start high school in fall 2022.

In response to a question from member West about the supply of CVTE seats, Secretary Peyser said that since 2015, enrollment in Chapter 74 programs has grown by approximately 6000 students. He added while it is hard to know whether this growth will continue, enrollment has grown steadily over the last 6 years and some programs close while others open or expand.

Ms. Bennett said that in 2019, DESE examined overall enrollment statewide and at schools for student subgroups, and the findings illuminated statewide trends and areas to monitor or manage. She said DESE identified high demand schools using gap analyses. Ms. Appleyard provided an overview of enrollment trends, stating that while overall vocational school student populations generally reflect the communities they serve, there is room for improvement, particularly in schools serving Gateway Cities.

Ms. Bennett reviewed the waitlist data collection process and waitlist survey of schools. She presented on the awareness gap (schools received fewer applications from students who might otherwise be expected to apply, based on their representation in sending communities) and the opportunity gap (schools admitted fewer students than might otherwise be expected from populations present in their sending communities). Ms. Bennett noted that in several vocational schools and programs, there were awareness gaps for students of color, English learners, and students whose first language is not English, and opportunity gaps for students of color, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students whose first language is not English. Ms. Bennett explained that though the study is limited to just one year’s data, affected by pandemic, it shows vocational schools and programs, particularly in Gateway Cities, could do better to attract, admit, and retain students from their communities.

Ms. Appleyard reviewed the data on waitlists, awareness and opportunity gaps, and yield analysis. She noted the data indicate that economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities apply at higher rates than their counterparts, and students of color and English learner students apply at lower rates than their counterparts.

Ms. Bennett said DESE has been engaging with the field, starting with conversations with high demand districts in fall 2019, and is providing ongoing support to schools, including technical assistance webinars. She explained that next steps will be to draft regulatory language, prepare guidance, conduct simulations, and develop statewide supports. Ms. Bennett, Ms. Appleyard, and Ms. Looby responded to questions from members.

Commissioner Riley said this data review and discussion is one step toward the goal of a more fair and equitable vocational admissions process. He asked members to consider additional information they would like to have. Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang noted that some CVTE schools have had difficulty getting information out to middle school students and families, which may contribute to the awareness gap, and this also could be addressed in a regulatory change. In response to a question from Chair Craven about variations in program quality, Ms. Looby noted that the Board adopted regulatory amendments in spring 2020 to strengthen certain quality standards. Ms. Bennett added that the CVTE framework revision process, which is ongoing, involves looking at labor market demand and working with industry experts, subject matter experts, and instructors to improve the CVTE curriculum.

Vice Chair Morton commented that part of the challenge is increasing students’ awareness of CVTE options because it appears that when students, especially students of color, know the option is available, they apply and most enroll when accepted. He asked about funding for students in regional vocational schools. Mr. Chuang explained that funding depends on the particular regional district agreement as well as the formula in the state school finance law, Chapter 70. He added that each regional district agreement apportions the costs among that district’s member towns and cities.

Ms. Lombos said she appreciates the special meeting format because it allows for extended discussion. She said the leadership and engagement on this issue connects with the Board’s anti-racism training and should be centered in our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Mr. Moriarty noted some steps could increase access and successful program completion for English learners even without regulatory changes, such as providing information in languages besides English. He suggested a targeted approach to the admissions issues, given the variability in types and quality of CVTE programs. Commissioner Riley responded that the Department is working with individual schools and allocating grant funds to support program improvements. Secretary Peyser added that the state’s Sheltered English Instruction/RETELL training for vocational educators should strengthen schools’ effectiveness in working with EL students.

Mr. West thanked member Lombos for her comments. He asked the Commissioner what he takes away from the data. Commissioner Riley said this is a complex issue that calls for a multi-faceted approach, including but not limited to regulations. He said this special meeting is part of the process and there is more to come. Ms. Stewart commended the focus on equity.

Chair Craven suggested that members contact Commissioner Riley with their observations and further questions, adding it would be helpful to know more about the school finance issues. She said the goal is a fair and equitable process that will work to address the concerns that have been identified. Chair Craven thanked members for taking the time to meet and discuss this important topic and thanked the Commissioner and Department staff for their informative presentation.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 6:33 p.m. subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board