Minutes of the Regular Meeting

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

**April 28, 2009**

**9:17 a.m. – 1:08 p.m.**

**Chelmsford High School**

**200 Richardson Road**

**North Chelmsford, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

**Harneen Chernow**, Vice Chair, Jamaica Plain

**Gerald Chertavian**, Cambridge

**Andrew “AJ” Fajnzylber**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Brookline

**Thomas E. Fortmann**, Lexington

**Beverly Holmes**, Springfield

**Jeff Howard**, Reading

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Dana Mohler-Faria**, Bridgewater

**Paul Reville**, Secretary of Education, Worcester

**Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

**Sandra L. Stotsky**, Brookline

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 9:17 a.m.

Chair Banta thanked Chelmsford Superintendent Don Yeoman and Assistant Superintendent Karen Mazza for welcoming the Board to Chelmsford. The chair said that Board members enjoyed their tour of the building, including the performing arts center and science labs, and noted that the school's Learning Commons is beautiful. Chair Banta recognized Superintendent Yeoman.

**Chelmsford Presentation**

Superintendent Yeoman introduced Chelmsford School Committee members Angelo Taranto and Katherine Duffett, who were in the audience. The superintendent said he was new to the area from Chicago, and credited Assistant Superintendent Mazza as being the chief architect of school improvement in the district over the past 15 years. Assistant Superintendent Mazza thanked the Board for visiting Chelmsford, and said the district would make a presentation on 21st century skills based on the Board's white paper. She introduced Chelmsford High School's librarian Valerie Diggs and technology integrated specialist Marilyn Sweeney.

Ms. Diggs provided an overview of the Learning Commons, which can accommodate six or more classes at the same time, provides access to 38 desktop computers and 24 wireless laptops, and contains more than 22,000 volumes. Ms. Diggs said the Learning Commons also supports teachers with lesson planning, research, and the availability of books. Ms. Diggs said the Learning Commons helps to demonstrate the importance of certified staff and library specialists as a lever for 21st century skills. She showcased various methods of delivery of 21st century skills at Chelmsford High. Ms. Diggs said the school, using content as a guide, has integrated 21st century skills into the curriculum, and has embedded information literacy skills into learning and doing. Through the Learning Commons web page staff members have created "pathfinders" to provide good information to students and minimize the need for Google and other Web search engines. Ms. Diggs said students are trained how to cite sources properly and use information ethically and legally.

Ms. Sweeney used examples from the foreign language department to demonstrate the school's use of blogging, through Chelmsford Online, for student-teacher and student-student communication. Students also create podcasts in the school's television studio. Ms. Sweeney also demonstrated students' use of digital storytelling.

Commissioner Chester thanked Superintendent Yeoman, Principal Allen Thomas, Assistant Superintendent Mazza, and Ms. Diggs and Ms. Sweeney for their insight into the use of technology and 21st century skills. The commissioner said that access to original source documents in more readily available to students, and noted that the Smithsonian Museum is in the process of digitizing its entire collection. Commissioner Chester commended Chelmsford for the district's use of technology.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Banta reported on opportunities she had to represent the Board over the past month. These included a meeting with the Newburyport Chamber of Commerce to discuss their interest in 21st century skills, a meeting with the Reading Recovery board, an appearance on NECN to talk about keeping well qualified teachers in the classroom, and a meeting with Citizen Schools to discuss their interest in embedding 21st century skills into the STEM curriculum. The chair said she also attended a good meeting of the Performance Gap Committee on April 27th, and asked Board member Jeff Howard to provide an update on the group's work.

Dr. Howard said the committee is on track as it continues to review preliminary data sets, receive input from committee members, and move towards a set of concrete recommendations.

Chair Banta said that May 19th is Commissioner Chester's one-year anniversary, which means the time has come for his evaluation. The chair said she will appoint a subcommittee for this task, and that the Board would vote on his review at its June 2009 meeting.

The chair said that the Board will hold its annual retreat on August 13th, and noted that the May regular meeting will take place at Brookline High School in honor of the Board's student member, AJ Fajnzylber.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Chester said he wished to acknowledge the talented staff at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The commissioner said he has met with the leadership of the Massachusetts School Libraries Association, and he appreciates their service. The commissioner provided an update on the award of a new 5-year student assessment contract to Measured Progress, and added that among the enhancements to come will be a reduction in the amount of testing time and a shorter timeline for returning student results to districts. Commissioner Chester provided an update on the WGBH/WGBY partnership, including establishing a link between MassONE and Teachers Domain, developing a Boston-based academic game quiz show, creating a NOVA science teacher of the year award, and initiating a campaign to elevate the status of teaching.

The commissioner provided an update on the effort to revise the current structure of the Bureau of Special Education Appeals, talked about the Board's continuing charter school policy discussion, and announced that Department employee Lurline Muñoz-Bennett would be honored by the Massachusetts Arts Education Collaborative with the Irene Buck Service to Arts Education Award at a State House ceremony on May 27th.

Commissioner Chester said he recently attended the Milken Award ceremony in Los Angeles, traveled to a meeting in Chicago with Secretary Reville to hear from senior US Education Department officials on where the USED is headed with competitive fund grants, and visited the May School in Randolph. The commissioner said he has been working closely with Department of Public Health Commissioner Auerbach to monitor the swine flu situation, and that information had been provided to schools. The commissioner also distributed copies of an op-ed piece he wrote for Sunday's *Boston Globe* on districts' use of stimulus funds to invest in ways that would pay dividends after the funds stop.

Board member Beverly Holmes arrived at 10:10 a.m.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Reville said the Administration has been preoccupied with the budget and protecting education expenditures at the House 1 level. The secretary said the Governor has made a number of stimulus announcements around the state, and that work continues on the state's stabilization fund application. Secretary Reville said the Commission on Dropouts, which he chairs, would release a set of recommendations in the next few weeks. The secretary provided an update on several legislative priorities, and noted that in the next month or so the legislation to create Readiness Schools would be finalized in anticipation of a June 23rd hearing. The secretary also said that legislation on regionalization had been submitted, which would likely result in the creation of a commission. Secretary Reville said that conversations continue with respect to bringing the Harlem Children's Zone model to Massachusetts, and noted that other governors have contacted Massachusetts to talk about the USED "race to the top" funds.

**Comments from the Public**

* Kahris McLaughlin from METCO, Inc. addressed the Board on METCO.
* Emily Francisco, a junior at Chelmsford High School, addressed the Board on school libraries and 21st century skills.
* Marie Doyle, Carlisle Public Schools superintendent, addressed the Board on school libraries.
* Kathie Skinner and Beverly Miyares from the Massachusetts Teachers Association addressed the Board on accountability.
* Kathy Lowe from the Massachusetts School Library Association addressed the Board on school libraries.
* Steve Hemman, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools, addressed the Board on the budget and regional transportation reimbursement.

# Approval of the Minutes

Board member AJ Fajnzylber asked that the record reflect that his decision to abstain from the vote on setting a new graduation rate standard at the March 24, 2009 Board meeting was based on his concern that a higher standard could have a negative impact on schools, particularly through Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations. Mr. Fajnzylber said that he supports higher standards as well as encouraging higher graduation rates.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the March 23, 2009 special meeting and the March 24, 2009 regular meeting, as amended.**

The vote was unanimous.

Chair Banta recommended that in the future, if members have corrections or changes to the minutes, they should contact the commissioner’s office in advance of the meeting at which the minutes are to be approved.

**Update on State Education Budget and Federal Stimulus Funding for Education**

Commissioner Chester provided an update on the FY09 state budget, which he said may be as much as $500 million short of revenue projections, and the House budget proposal for FY2010. The commissioner said the Governor has announced several personnel moves, including a hiring freeze, reduction of 250 more positions, and furloughs for managers making $50,000 or more.

The commissioner said the House Ways & Means budget provides $4.4 billion for the Department, which represents a decrease of $93 million below current projected spending, and a $60 million decrease from House 1. The commissioner also said that the House budget does not consolidate some accounts like House 1, but does transfer all IT funds to the Secretary of Education's office. Commissioner Chester said the $60 million reduction from House 1 is reflected primarily by cuts to two accounts, regional transportation ($23 million less) and circuit breaker ($31 million less).

Board member Tom Fortmann said he was shocked to see the WPI School of Excellence zeroed out in the House Ways & Means budget. Dr. Fortmann said the 11th and 12th grade school is a gem, and the savings here are not real as those expenses will follow the students back to their home districts. Secretary Reville said the Administration shares this sentiment and will work diligently to see that this funding gets restored.

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow said that in light of the recent suicide of a young boy in Springfield, there has been a lot of interest in setting some standards or guidelines on anti-bullying. Dr. Howard agreed with Ms. Chernow's observation, and said that especially in a time of economic stress, children get stressed too.

Board member Gerald Chertavian asked why the House broke up the lines that were consolidated. Commissioner Chester said the Governor had taken 31 accounts and combined them into 11, and the speculation is that there might have been support for those individual programs among House members. Board member Ruth Kaplan commented that the charter school tuition reimbursement is a huge investment relative to the other lines and that the fiscal impact of charter schools needs to be thought through. The commissioner said those dollars are reimbursements to local school districts. Dr. Fortmann added that it was a legislative decision to set up that formula.

Board member Beverly Holmes noted the dropout prevention and alternative education line for $1 million that had been zeroed out, and said that if the funded programs work, the line item should be restored.

**School and District Accountability and Assistance**

Commissioner Chester said this work is front and center, even though it has not been necessarily visible to the Board up to this point. The commissioner said at its core the work is about student improvement and ensuring that every child in every school receives a strong education.

***Report from Advisory Council on School and District Accountability and Assistance***

Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr introduced Joe Esposito, who chairs the Board's 15-member Advisory Council on School and District Accountability and Assistance. Mr. Esposito said the council has met five times in the last six months. He acknowledged the members of the council, saying they have been engaged, the meetings have been well attended, and their comments have been very helpful to the process. Mr. Esposito said much of the review of the initial framework has been completed, and all of the framework activity is ready for the next operational steps. Mr. Esposito said he hopes there will be adequate resources to conduct the district reviews in addition to meeting other requirements.

Dr. Fortmann said the budget allots $1.4 million for this, which is half of the previous Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) budget, and the problem seems to be understated. Ms. Kaplan said that several aspects of a review are harder to quantify, including parental engagement, community, safety, and school climate, and asked whether these are included in the criteria to measure. Mr. Esposito said the EQA standards included school environment. Dr. Howard said he is pleased that this new approach seems to look more carefully than did EQA at the importance of culture and climate in schools and districts. Dr. Howard said that accountability and support are central to education reform, and that the Department, the advisory council, and the Board are like three legs of a stool. He said he hopes the Board will play an active and supportive role.

***Progress Report and Next Steps***

Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the purpose of today's update is to inform the Board of the Department's progress, to allow the Board to hear from the advisory council on its initial report, and to hear Board members weigh in with observations and questions. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the focus today would be more on accountability than assistance. She said four areas would be addressed: (1) the district review process; (2) the connection between accountability and assistance; (3) the integration of school and district accountability; and (4) interventions at levels 4 and 5.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department has looked at national standards and national work, and developed a self-assessment tool aligned with the EQA standards. This included a slight revision of the EQA standards to make them more comprehensive. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the strength of the reports is in the data that ought to be made available to every district and every school each year. The Department is well on its well to developing a prototype that uses data already available. The Department is also working with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education to replicate the Just for the Kids tool, which examines the performance of schools with similar demographics.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr cited the recent Fall River review as an example of a type of comprehensive review. The deputy commissioner described work with eight urban districts that have Commonwealth Priority Schools. Those districts have developed district plans for school intervention. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said this kind of district review has great potential. A third effort has looked at how effective districts and schools have been in addressing the needs of diverse learners by identifying six districts where student achievement and/or outcomes of Coordinated Program Reviews have demonstrated effective systems for supporting diverse learners.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr presented the Board with the latest version of the Framework for District Accountability and Assistance. The deputy commissioner said that 53 percent of districts in the Commonwealth would be in Level 1 if this framework were in place today, 10 percent would be in Level 2, and 35 percent would be in Level 3. Levels 4 and 5 would connote the most serious problems. The deputy commissioner said that Holyoke, Southbridge, and Randolph would all be Level 4 districts.

Level 5 is a real co-governance model. Interventions would come at the district level, with the Department working with a district on its need for improvement and its support of schools. Deputy Commissioner Baehr talked about the Readiness Intervention School model, and said the Department would provide funding and technical resources. At Level 5, decision-making authority would be shared by the state and the district.

Secretary Reville commended the Department, Commissioner Chester, and Deputy Commissioner Baehr for their leadership on this accountability redesign. The secretary said the Executive Office is very interested in the question of how to marry the Readiness School concept and this intervention work. Dr. Howard said this affirms the idea that districts with underperforming schools that they can't fix on their own should become Level 4 districts.

Secretary Reville and Dr. Mohler-Faria had to leave the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

Dr. Fortmann asked where the concept of receivership fits and where the Department sees a need for legislation. Commissioner Chester said we need to address the concerns with the system that we inherited. The Department looks at schools as the primary point of entry. Part of the redesign will be to examine how to enlist districts in addressing problems with a sense of urgency. The commissioner said that Level 5 would have considerable clout, and most likely would require new legislation.

Dr. Fortmann requested that the commissioner send to Board members the revised draft version of the Ten Essential Conditions as soon as possible. Dr. Fortmann also requested information about where the EQA reports are posted on the Department's website.

Vice Chair Chernow asked whether the co-pilot school model was being replaced by the Readiness School model. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said yes.

**Charter Schools: Amendment Requests from Barnstable Horace Mann Charter and Marstons Mills East Horace Mann Charter Public School (Change in Grade Span)**

Commissioner Chester said the amendment requests from Barnstable Horace Mann Charter and Martsons Mills East Horace Mann Charter Public School were pretty straightforward. The commissioner reminded Board members that they voted earlier in the year on the charter renewals knowing that the district was contemplating restructuring.

Dr. Fortmann said that Barnstable is an interesting case, in that the district not only has Horace Mann charter schools, but has given autonomy to other schools. Dr. Fortmann suggested that it would be interesting to hear more about the district at a future session. Ms. Kaplan said she was intrigued by the whole school design model, and suggested it would be useful to find out more about how this originated and how well the district is doing.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00, hereby amend the charters granted to the following schools as presented by the Commissioner:**

### Barnstable Horace Mann Charter School (grades served)

**Location: Barnstable**

**Maximum enrollment: 1,000**

**Grade levels: 4 through 5**

**Effective year: 2009-10**

### Marstons Mills East Horace Mann Charter Public School (grades served)

**Location: Barnstable**

**Maximum enrollment: 475**

**Grade levels: K through 3**

**Effective year: 2009-10**

The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Chertavian had to leave the meeting at 12:45 p.m.

**2008 Dropout Report and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Initiatives**

Commissioner Chester gave an overview of the latest dropout report. He noted that this year's 0.4 percentage point drop in the dropout rate meant nearly 1,500 fewer students dropped out in 2008, as compared to 2007. The commissioner said he hopes this will be a trend. The commissioner described the dropout report and accompanying data tables, which showed substantial disparities based on demographics, and said the dropout rate has not changed much since the introduction of MCAS. The commissioner noted that the majority of dropouts had already passed the MCAS, including more than 70 percent of dropouts in the 12th grade. The commissioner said this is evidence that the MCAS is not the reason students drop out of high school.

Stafford Peat from the Department said a number of important dropout prevention and recovery initiatives are underway. He said the Graduation and Dropout Commission report is due to the Legislature on May 15th. Mr. Peat said the report would address: a dropout reduction goal and timeline, raising the compulsory attendance age from 16 to 18, a dropout prevention grant program, and requiring school districts to develop dropout prevention plans based on the percentage of students dropping out. Mr. Peat also talked about an early warning indicator pilot program to examine 8th grade predictors tied to dropouts such as mobility, attendance, and MCAS scores. He said the Department is providing data to 24 urban districts about five levels of risk for students entering 9th grade. He said that anecdotally, various remediation programs, summer assistance, and the buddy system in Lowell have all been good models.

Jenny Caldwell Curtin from the Department talked about the work of the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Working Group and the strengthening of alternative education.

Mr. Fajnzylber said it is important to have student representation on these types of commissions.

**Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, 2009 at Brookline High School.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 1: 08 p.m., subject to the call of the chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell D. Chester

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board