**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

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

**Tuesday, October 20, 2015**

**8:35 a.m.–12:45 p.m.**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

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

**Paul Sagan**, Chair, Cambridge

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

**Ed Doherty**, Boston

**Roland Fryer**, Concord

**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke

**Pendred Noyce**, Boston

**James Peyser**, Secretary of Education

**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

**Donald Willyard**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Revere

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

**Members of the Board Absent:**

**Katherine Craven**, Brookline

**Margaret McKenna**, Boston

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. and welcomed Board members. Commissioner Chester reported that Massachusetts has received a $7 million grant to expand the state’s longitudinal data system. The commissioner said he anticipates release of 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress results in grade 4 and 8 reading and mathematics next week. He updated the Board on the organizational review of the Department that Parthenon-EY is conducting.

Secretary Peyser thanked Commissioner Chester for his comments on student assessment at the October 19 special meeting and said he agrees with the three principles the commissioner outlined: MCAS needs an upgrade, PARCC reflects good new thinking and techniques that will help improve instruction, and Massachusetts needs to control its destiny and maintain its leadership. Chair Sagan concurred.

Ms. Noyce reported on behalf of the Commissioner’s Performance Evaluation Committee. She said the committee met on October 19 to update the performance criteria, integrating several initiatives and adding a mid-year check-in with the Commissioner. Mr. Fryer reported on the Charter School Committee meeting on October 19. He said the committee reviewed and discussed the charter school approval process, hearing schedule, and various data points.

**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 September 21, 2015 Special Meeting and September 22, 2015 Regular Meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Lawrence Public Schools: Update on Receivership**

Lawrence Receiver/Superintendent Jeff Riley presented an overview of the fourth year of the Lawrence Public Schools receivership. He said the continued focus is on four pillars of high-quality teaching and learning: rigorous standards, high-quality enrichment, effort/mindset, and critical thinking and fluid reasoning. He said Lawrence continues to see an increase in the percentage of students achieving at proficient and advanced levels, as well as an improved graduation rate and decreased dropout rate. Superintendent Riley said through a federal pre-kindergarten expansion grant, Lawrence has added 130 new full-day, year-round pre-kindergarten seats for eligible four-year-olds. He said the Playball Foundation has made a generous donation to support the expansion of middle school intramural sports. Superintendent Riley provided an update on the high school redesign initiative, aimed at preparing all Lawrence High School students for success after graduation. He outlined district strategies including the 9th grade academy model, a special education taskforce to guide improvements, support for teacher leadership teams at each school as well as leadership opportunities district-wide, ongoing work on a facilities master plan, and new data systems.

Mr. Doherty arrived at 8:50 a.m.

Mr. Fryer commented that across the country, turnaround work tends to yield modest rates of growth in English language arts (ELA) achievement and somewhat better results in math achievement. He asked Mr. Riley about the experience in Lawrence. Superintendent Riley said he has seen more progress in the upper elementary grades, particularly where students have access to math tutors, and the tutoring may be expanded to ELA. He added that the February and April vacation academies accelerate student growth by providing 30 hours of ELA. In response to Ms. Stewart’s question, Superintendent Riley explained the origin of the Sontag prize, which funds professional development for teachers and their work with students in the acceleration academies. In response to Ms. Noyce’s questions, Superintendent Riley said there are 14,000 K-12 students in Lawrence Public Schools, up from 12,500 before receivership.

Commissioner Chester commended Jeff Riley’s leadership. He said the children of Lawrence are in a much better place than they were five years ago, and there is still much work to do after decades of deterioration. The commissioner thanked Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston and his staff for their work on school and district turnaround and support.

**Comments from the Public**

1. **New Bedford Public Schools Superintendent Pia Durkin addressed the Board on PARCC.**
2. **Boston Public Schools Superintendent Tommy Chang addressed the Board on PARCC.**
3. **Revere Public School Superintendent Dianne Kelly addressed the Board on PARCC.**

Commissioner Chester thanked the three superintendents for their leadership in urban education.

**Holyoke Public Schools: Turnaround Plan**

Holyoke Receiver/Superintendent Stephen Zrike outlined the district turnaround plan, which was released on October 1. He said the goals include: building on what is working and fixing what is not, staff empowerment and accountability, extending time for learning, establishing pathways to career and/or college success, investing in partners strategically, and repairing relationships with families. He reviewed the five turnaround plan priority areas. Superintendent Zrike said the turnaround plan has been discussed during community meetings, community partner information sessions, and meetings with school personnel. He said family engagement is a critical component of the turnaround effort, and includes community meetings in public housing as well as home visits by school staff. Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston said staff recruitment and contract offers will start much earlier this school year, beginning in January. Commissioner Chester expressed his appreciation to Superintendent Zrike for taking on this assignment and the excellent work he has done in Holyoke thus far, under very tight timelines.

**Student Assessment**

Commissioner Chester said he feels strongly that Massachusetts needs to move forward, and the two-year “test drive” provided valuable experience, data, and input on the development of a next-generation assessment. He said Board members are receiving a lot of contradictory input, and we should not lose sight of the forest for the trees. He reiterated his comments from Monday evening’s special meeting:

Three core understandings have emerged:

1. MCAS has been a strong assessment, and has reached a point of diminished returns in its 18th year; some schools are putting more energy into success on MCAS than into strengthening curriculum, instruction, and learning;
2. In important ways, PARCC is a substantial advancement over MCAS in terms of a) elevating expectations for student performance, b) signaling more ambitious curricular and instructional expectations of our schools, c) providing a more engaging assessment experience, and d) aligning with expectations of colleges and employers; and
3. The path we take must ensure that Massachusetts ultimately controls our own assessment program.

The commissioner said he had been thinking about two doors – MCAS or PARCC – but he is now exploring Door #3: MCAS 2.0, capitalizing on the investment that Massachusetts educators have made in PARCC by making it the foundation of MCAS 2.0. He said Massachusetts cannot stand still; we need a strong assessment to complement our strong academic standards.

Bob Lee, the Department’s MCAS Chief Analyst and PARCC Coordinator, reviewed assessment choices that districts made in Spring 2015, with 54 percent of districts choosing to administer PARCC. He explained that the representative sample of students who took PARCC or MCAS statistically matches the state student population. Mr. Lee explained that PARCC achievement levels range from 1-5, and MCAS reports performance on four levels ranging from Warning/Failing to Advanced. He reviewed statewide PARCC English language arts and mathematics results, and compared assessment results from MCAS, PARCC, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Chair Sagan reminded members that the Board has already decided to maintain MCAS as the high school graduation (competency determination) standard for students through the class of 2019.

Ken Klau, Director of Digital Learning, presented information on the technology requirements and readiness of schools to administer PARCC computer-based testing. He said 1,363 schools meet minimum specifications; 442 schools are not yet ready. He explained that upgrading all schools and classrooms for digital learning is more costly than simply upgrading for computer-based testing. Deputy Commissioner Jeff Wulfson noted that Massachusetts is lagging other states in investment in digital learning. Mr. Klau said federal e-rate funding is a large source of support, along with the state’s competitive digital connection grant program. Chair Sagan requested a statewide map of technology readiness.

**Level 5 Schools Update**

Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston gave a brief overview of the Quarter 1 reports from the four Level 5 schools. He said common themes included professional development for teachers during the summer, staffing improvements, schools using budget autonomies, and scheduling and curriculum changes. Mr. Johnston said the receivers meet quarterly and will focus on family engagement at their next meeting.

**Updated Response to Recommendations from Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement**

Commissioner Chester said he is reporting back on the Department’s response to the working group’s recommendations. He reviewed the implementation plan and noted that he would like to be more ambitious with the plan if the Department had more resources and staff to do so. Commissioner Chester said he will update the Board on this initiative as it proceeds.

**Proposed Revised Science and Technology/Engineering Standards**

Chair Sagan said the draft revised standards reflect refinements that were made in response to the Board's input at the May and September meetings. He said with the Board's approval, the Department will invite broad public input through November, make any necessary edits, and then bring the final revised STE standards to the Board for adoption in January 2016. Secretary Peyser said the standards reflect the need for students to develop a conceptual understanding as well as science and engineering practices that will help them apply learning and be analytical thinkers.

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Chapter 69, Sections 1D and 1E of the Mass. General Laws, authorize the Commissioner to solicit public comment on the draft revised *Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Standards*.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY17 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board's Budget Committee**

Commissioner Chester reported that the budget committee met to discuss the FY2017 budget process. He said the committee focused on areas of the budget that are designed to narrow proficiency gaps and strengthen the Department’s capacity for turnaround work with schools and districts. Commissioner Chester said the Foundation Budget Review Commission is recommending increases in funding for K-12 education.

Roland Fryer left at 12:00 noon.

**Student Assessment (Continued)**

Commissioner Chester said he is still considering what option number three would entail with respect to Massachusetts’s role in the consortium, test development, and other details. He said one option would be to submit a request for information from experienced assessment vendors to build a next-generation MCAS 2.0 using the best of PARCC but not limited to it. Chair Sagan said after last night’s discussion with PARCC, Inc.’s leadership team, it is clearer now that Massachusetts has more flexibility as part of the consortium. Ms. Noyce said she appreciates the additional thinking, and as part of the two-year test drive the Board decided upon she has never felt bound to a binary decision. She said PARCC provides a much better signal of each student’s college readiness and she would like to see PARCC given in the spring with the understanding that Massachusetts will have autonomy to customize the test in the future. Mr. Moriarty said his first priority is an assessment’s ability to drive improvement and close achievement gaps. Mr. Morton said technology needs are still concerning, and requested further details on the MCAS 2.0 proposal. He said he is torn about the possibility of pulling out of the PARCC consortium and appreciates that Massachusetts has been a leader in it. Commissioner Chester said the vision of the consortium was to give honest feedback to students regardless of their state.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:45 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

**Minutes of the Special Meeting**

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

**Monday, October 19, 2015**

**4:05 p.m.- 7:10 p.m.**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

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

**Paul Sagan**, Chair, Cambridge

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

**Ed Doherty**, Boston

**Roland Fryer**, Concord

**Margaret McKenna**, Boston

**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke

**Pendred Noyce**, Boston

**James Peyser**, Secretary of Education

**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

**Donald Willyard**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Revere

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

**Member of the Board Absent:**

**Katherine Craven**, Brookline

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. Commissioner Chester welcomed Board members to the meeting. He acknowledged the retirement of Associate Commissioner Elizabeth Davis and introduced acting assessment director Michol Stapel. Commissioner Chester made the following statement regarding PARCC:

Our September discussion, along with the substantial public input that we have received, has helped me to hone my thinking about the recommendation that I will be making to you for our November MCAS-PARCC decision. While we purposefully designed a decision timeline that would allow Massachusetts to have two years’ experience with PARCC before deciding the future of our assessment system, over the past several months I increasingly have been concerned that in our effort to gather both deep and broad analysis and perspective on MCAS and PARCC, it could be easy to lose the forest for the trees. There is the danger that substantial and extensive input, sometimes contradictory, can lead to decision paralysis wherein the status quo becomes the default position. It is my goal to pull us out of the trees so that we can appreciate the forest.

Three core understandings have emerged for me:

1. current MCAS has reached a point of diminished returns in terms of driving more ambitious curriculum, instruction, and learning;
2. in important ways, PARCC is a substantial advancement over MCAS in terms of a) elevating expectations for student performance, b) signaling more ambitious curricular and instructional expectations of our schools, c) providing a more engaging assessment experience, and d) aligning with expectations of colleges and employers; and
3. the path we take must ensure that Massachusetts ultimately controls our testing program.

I have been thinking about two doors: #1, MCAS or #2, PARCC. I am now exploring Door #3: MCAS 2.0.

I will spend a minute or two on each of these three understandings.

Current MCAS and the point of diminished returns

MCAS has served the Commonwealth well. I cannot imagine that the success of the last two decades – as Massachusetts’s K-12 achievement has reached the tops among states and competitive internationally – would be possible without a high quality assessment that provides feedback on student, school, district, and state achievement and progress. In 2015, MCAS was administered for the 18th year. MCAS was a terrific 20th century assessment. We have better understandings now than one or two decades ago about learning progression in mathematics, text complexity and the interplay of reading and writing, and the academic expectations of higher education and employers.

Now that we have the benefit of two decades of experience and we have upgraded our learning expectations (curriculum frameworks and content standards), it is time to upgrade our assessments to a new generation. As we look to the Commonwealth’s next-generation assessment, we have the opportunity to build on these understandings. Perhaps my greatest concern about continuing with MCAS as it exists now is that we have reached a point of diminished returns. The time I spend in schools as well as the attestations we have heard from many educators and citizens have led me to realize that, too often, the response to MCAS is instruction designed to teach students to succeed on the test rather than instruction designed to meet the learning standards.

PARCC is a substantial advancement over MCAS

We started down the MCAS 2.0 path in 2008 – looking to develop performance-based components, online testing, and other features. When the recession hit, we tabled that initiative but we were able to join other states to access US Department of Education funding to build PARCC, with Massachusetts leadership and involvement. Over $100 million went into test development and we now have the results of our two-year “test drive.”

As our discussion today and tomorrow will illustrate, in important ways PARCC sets a higher bar than MCAS for student performance. This is particularly true as students move up the grades into middle and high school. This higher bar is not simply about being harder. At least equally important is that PARCC provides more opportunity for critical thinking, application of knowledge, research, and connections between reading and writing. As I travel around the Commonwealth, I see more and more schools that are upgrading curriculum and instruction to be consistent with our 2010 frameworks, which in turn are represented in the PARCC assessments. At this point, the effort I am observing – and that you have heard testimony regarding – is not about succeeding on the test, but rather, about aligning curriculum and instruction to the expectations for critical thinking, application of knowledge, research, and connections between reading and writing.

As well, the online experience is a qualitatively different assessment experience than taking a paper-and-pencil test. The online environment is a more engaging experience (students prefer the online environment by almost a two-to-one margin); the introduction of video and audio increases accessibility for many students, including students with disabilities and English language learners; and the online setting mirrors the digital world that is ubiquitous in students’ lives and futures. Finally, the PARCC development effort we have been involved in is designed to assess our updated understanding of learning progressions in mathematics, text complexity and the interplay of reading and writing, and the academic expectations of higher education and employers.

Ensuring the Commonwealth’s control of our standards and assessments

Public comment, as well as the Board’s discussion, have helped me to understand the importance of ensuring the Commonwealth’s control over our standards and assessments as we move forward. While Massachusetts has exercised a leadership role among the consortium states, any path forward to MCAS 2.0 that includes PARCC must be a direction over which we control.

To be confident that a course that involves PARCC is one in which we exercise ultimate agency over the direction of the Commonwealth’s assessment program, I am considering a new model – Door #3 – that takes advantage of our access to PARCC development in the construction of MCAS 2.0. A model exists; Louisiana has taken a similar route. This path would involve our own contractor. Using PARCC as starting point for MCAS 2.0 would allow us to move faster and start further along towards MCAS 2.0.

Ms. Noyce asked what the new option would mean and how we could recoup our value and maintain control. Mr. Doherty asked if Massachusetts would formally end its relationship with the PARCC consortium. Commissioner Chester said Massachusetts has to figure out the best way forward. He said if remaining in the consortium means we would not have running room to customize the test, then that is not the right path. Mr. Fryer asked if PARCC is the best path to MCAS 2.0. Commissioner Chester said PARCC is a substantial advancement over the current MCAS and Massachusetts would be able to take advantage of PARCC development in which we have participated. Ms. McKenna commented that the Mathematica study took her aback and said she is glad to hear more about the third option.

Secretary Peyser introduced the presentation on the Mathematica study. He said the Executive Office of Education commissioned a study to analyze how well MCAS and PARCC predict college performance. He introduced Ira Nichols-Barrer and Brian Gill to present the findings. Mr. Gill said the researchers compared PARCC and MCAS relationships to first-year college students’ grades and the students’ assignment to remedial coursework; they then compared PARCC and MCAS test scores and success in reaching “college ready” or “proficient” levels. Mr. Nichols-Barrer said the student volunteers were randomly assigned to take MCAS or PARCC in Spring 2015. The sampling included 866 students at 11 public colleges and universities. Mr. Nichols-Barrer said MCAS and PARCC predict grade point average and remediation equally well. He said in English language arts the study found that college ready on PARCC is about the same as proficient on MCAS, and in mathematics the PARCC college ready standard is a higher standard than MCAS proficient. Mr. Nichols-Barrer said in summary, both MCAS and PARCC predict college readiness, scores on both exams provide a similarly useful way to predict college grade point average, and the exams differ in ways beyond predictive validity.

Chair Sagan asked what can be drawn from the predictive validity scale. Mr. Nichols-Barrer said .5 is considered moderate to strong. Mr. Fryer discussed assessment cut points. Ms. McKenna said SAT and student grades combined are better predictors than either one is alone.

Secretary Peyser introduced Dana Ansel, Henry Braun, and Andrew Ho to discuss the PARCC/MCAS comparative report. Ms. Ansel said the report synthesizes the academic research on MCAS and PARCC, breaking out relevant considerations without making any recommendations. Ms. Ansel and Mr. Ho highlighted the following:

* MCAS and PARCC are different assessment systems and create different incentives for classroom practices.
* Increasingly, a single test is used for multiple purposes. There is a need to balance the objectives you are seeking to achieve.
* There is no major finding that one test is superior to the other. Both meet technical standards.
* MCAS proficiency in 2013 is a different standard than it was in 2004.
* MCAS is limited by the item format.
* Consider which system sends the clearest signals to students, teachers, parents, and the public and choose a test that will prompt educators and policymakers to intervene when needed so students can become successful.

In response to Mr. Fryer’s question, Mr. Braun said there is evidence that teachers have been changing their practice since the adoption of new standards in 2010, which brought a higher level of critical thinking. He said he believes PARCC is a test worth teaching to so he is an advocate for it.

Margaret McKenna left the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Commissioner Chester welcomed Higher Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago. Commissioner Santiago said the Board of Higher Education’s academic affairs committee is also having conversations about PARCC. He said during his two years in Massachusetts he has been shocked by the high remediation rates and low success rates for students in public higher education. Commissioner Santiago said higher education campuses are looking at ways to address the issue including revising developmental requirements and piloting the use of high school grade point averages in lieu of Accuplacer testing. He said higher education has been collaborating with elementary and secondary education, beginning with the adoption of a joint definition of college and career readiness, and more recently with PARCC development including a professional judgment study, standard setting, and other activities.

In response to Ms. Noyce’s question, Commissioner Santiago said faculty who were involved in the judgment study advocated giving students clear signals at an early stage to help them meet the standards for college readiness. He said students need support structures, mentoring, and active advising. In response to Secretary Peyser’s question, Commissioner Santiago said higher education is studying whether PARCC could replace the need for Accuplacer testing, while recognizing that campuses also need to get better at addressing remediation.

Commissioner Chester introduced Laura Slover, Chief Executive Officer, and Jeff Nellhaus, Director of Assessment of PARCC, Inc. Ms. Slover said PARCC was established by chief state school officers to develop a next-generation assessment. She said Massachusetts served an outsized role and Commissioner Chester has been the intellectual leader elected by other chiefs to serve as the board chair of the consortium. Ms. Slover said 5 million students in 12 states took PARCC in spring 2015, 4 million on computer.

Mr. Nellhaus said states have led the development of the assessment. He said the English language arts (ELA) assessment incorporates extended writing prompts, reading and writing across grades, and scores for reading and writing. He said MCAS offers extended essays only in three grades and does not break out reading and writing in the ELA tests. Mr. Nellhaus said PARCC asks students to solve real world problems in mathematics and the computer-based test has interactive and engaging items.

Ms. Slover said PARCC offers quality and affordability. She said no state starting from scratch could get the same value in development and administration, since $186 million has gone into developing PARCC over five years. She said the costs are currently $24 per student for online testing and $32 for paper testing. Ms. Slover said PARCC has 30,000 test items in an item bank that could support four years of testing. She said states left the consortium due to politics, not the quality of the test. She noted that Louisiana has customized PARCC and the Bureau of Indian Affairs is joining. Ms. Slover said PARCC, Inc. is prepared to support Massachusetts with what works best for the Commonwealth.

Mary Ann Stewart left the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Chair Sagan asked what it would mean to be part of the consortium but customize the assessment. Ms. Slover said the PARCC governing board has set three tiers: Tier 1 is the governing board states, Tier 2 states use the full assessment but are not part of the governing board, and Tier 3 states use PARCC content with a different testing vendor. She said cost differs because governing board states have devoted more time and effort to development. In response to Mr. Willyard’s question, Ms. Slover said the testing contract goes through 2017-2018. Chair Sagan noted the MCAS contract has to be rebid next year. Mr. Nelhaus said that each year, a full form of the PARCC assessment at each grade would be released along with long and short responses, so that teachers can use the materials to improve instruction. He said the consortium states have a good history of working together to make adjustments, such as the reduction in testing time. In response to a question about schools’ readiness for computer-based assessments, Mr. Nellhaus said schools and states can rise to the occasion; for example, in New Mexico, 93% of the students took the PARCC tests online. He added that a paper version of the tests would be available to states as long as they need it.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 7:10 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