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# Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary

***Education Suggested Interview Questions***

***NOTE:*** *We suggest that the Board ask each candidate* a *consistent set of questions to be able to compare the candidates more easily. Of course, that should not preclude also asking candidates individualized questions. These following questions are provided as* a *guideline. They were drawn from* a *wide variety of sources and informed by the Board's discussions. Some of these questions come directly from Board members, and those are included here essentially as suggested and wherever possible assigned to the members who submitted them.*

### Opening:

Chair will provide a welcome statement for each interview.

### Questions:

1. **Chair Sagan:** The Department's mission 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." Given all that your know about Massachusetts and this position, what convinces you this is the right job for you at this point in your career?
2. **Member Craven:** We are deeply committed to diversity and inclusion as a cornerstone of excellence and equity. How would you define diversity in K-12 education and why is it important to your work? Please be sure to describe some specific strategies you have employed to foster diversity.
3. **Member Moriarty:** Turning around performance in the lowest performing schools, whether it is called the "Achievement Gap", or "Equity Gap" or the "Opportunity Gap", has been one of the most glaring disappointments of our efforts since 1993 Education Reform Act. What is your understanding of the roots of the problem, and what are the key strategies that you as Commissioner will champion to change this reality?
4. **Member Moriarty:** Still on the topic of the Achievement Gap, and turning in particular to third grade reading outcomes, specify at least three actions that you will take to close the gap there.

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1. **Vice Chair Morton:** What is your view of the role of general K-12 education in meeting both the academic and the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities and specifically how do you think that objective can be achieved?
2. **Vice Chair Morton:** As a follow-up, how will you leverage your expertise to support diverse school districts statewide to continue to improve outcomes - both academic and non-academic - for students with disabilities?
3. **Member Craven:** Please describe your experience with fiscal matters, budgeting and personnel matters, and please talk specifically about the scale you managed and size of the scope of your responsibilities.
4. **Member Stewart:** As the Commissioner, what roles would you need to fill in around you to form a complete management team to complement your skills and weaknesses?
5. **Member Stewart:** Describe your experience building, developing and retaining a professional staff, and please comment specifically on guidelines and expectations for hiring a diverse staff.
6. **Member Trimarchi:** Describe how you intend to build strategic partnerships and alliances across the spectrum of stakeholders here, including in the K-12 community, government officials, the business community and, especially, with regard to efforts to improve student engagement with the work of the department.
7. **Member Trimarchi:** What is your experience working with state legislative leaders and how do you balance the political, fiscal and programmatic interests that involves lobbying, relationship building, and policy setting in the legislative process?
8. **Member McKenna:** What is your overall philosophy and vision for how a state department of education should collaborate with and regulate the field?
9. **Member McKenna:** How do you view the balance between state oversight, local control and school-based management and, if you had the authority to do so, how would you alter that balance?
10. **Member West:** Some people in Massachusetts say that public charter schools should focus on closing the achievement gap while others say they should focus on innovation and dissemination of best practices. What role do you believe public charter schools should play in public K-12 education here?

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**<CHAIR SAGAN TO DIRECT FINALISTS TO>**

**<MOVE THEIR PREPARED PRESENTATIONS HERE>**

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**<FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS>**

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**<RESUME QUESTIONS BELOW>**

1. **Member West:** Over the past decade, many states, including Massachusetts, undertook major efforts to reform how teachers and school leaders are evaluated. What would you say are the most important lessons from this activity? And what role do you think state education agencies should play going forward in how districts evaluate educators.
2. **Member Fernandez:** As the administrative leader of a large agency with many constituency groups -- and overseeing an agency that may at any time be working on several initiatives that are important to some or all of those groups·-- how would you use your experience to help ensure that information flows to the public on a regular basis, and what is your thinking on overall

communications strategies for the work of this agency?

1. **Member Fernandez:** The LOOK Act established new policy regarding the education of English learners, the fastest growing sub-population in Massachusetts public schools. Among other things, The LOOK Act allows districts to open new bilingual and dual language programs under authorization of this department. How do you view the significance of this legislation and how would you implement it as Commissioner?
2. **Member Doherty:** Do you believe that there is a significant correlation between socioeconomic status and student learning as measured by standardized test scores? If so, what is your view on what schools and communities can do to mitigate the effects of poverty on student learning?
3. **Member Doherty:** How do you think standardized test scores should be used in school and district accountability systems, and given -- what I believe is -- the well documented link between socioeconomic status and student test scores, how do we make sure that schools and districts serving a large percent of lower income students are not unfairly labeled as failing schools?
4. **Sec. Peyser:** Some people believe that the recent focus on reading and math has crowded out other subjects in the curriculum, like science, history, civics and the arts. What have you observed and how would you approach this issue as a state education leader here?
5. **Sec. Peyser:** What is your vision of the role of vocational and career education programs, and what steps would you recommend we take to ensure that Massachusetts is in a position to educate tomorrow's workforce?
6. **Sec. Peyser:** What do you see as the core functions of a state education agency and what specific actions would you take to support superintendents, principals and other school leaders to improve overall student performance and close achievement gaps?

### Closing:

### 23) Chair Sagan: Do you have any reservations about accepting this position?

### 24) Chair Sagan: What would you like to ask us?