Minutes of the Special Meeting

of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

Monday, May 14, 2018

5:03 p.m. – 6:59 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

**Amanda Fernandez,** Belmont

**Margaret McKenna**, Boston

**James Peyser**,Secretary of Education

**Hannah Trimarchi**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Marblehead

**Martin West**, Newton

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

# Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

**Katherine Craven**, Brookline

**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke

**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

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Chair Sagan convened the meeting at 5:03 p.m. Members introduced themselves. Commissioner Riley said the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the accountability and assistance system and noted that the initiative to update the system has been in process for some time, pre-dating his appointment as Commissioner. He added that this special meeting is an opportunity for the Board to ask questions and learn more about the system before voting on it at the June meeting. He introduced Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner; Rob Curtin, Associate Commissioner; and Ventura Rodriguez, Associate Commissioner.

Mr. Johnston explained that accountability system serves two important functions: (1) to inform the public about school performance; and (2) to use that information to determine where and how the state can assist the schools and students most in need of support.

Mr. Curtin provided an overview to the Board on the timeline and process for developing the system, noting that the Board sent proposed amendments to the regulations on Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools out for public comment in March. He said before the June meeting, the Department will send to the Board a redline version of the regulations, all the public comment received by the Department, and a summary of the public comment and the Department’s response. Mr. Curtin said the Board would be voting on both the proposed amendments to the regulations and the accountability system, which is the subject of tonight’s presentation and discussion. With the Board’s approval in June, the Department would be able to publish 2018 results for schools and districts in September.

Mr. West and Secretary Peyser arrived at 5:10 p.m.

Mr. Curtin outlined the system highlights, which include additional accountability indicators, providing actionable information to districts and schools focused on continuous improvement, normative and criterion-referenced components, a focus on raising the performance of each school’s lowest performing students, the discontinuation of accountability and assistance levels 1-5, and classifying districts based on district-level data. He continued by describing the indicators and measures for non-high schools and high schools. Mr. Curtin said that based on feedback from the Board and stakeholders, the chronic absenteeism measure will now apply to grades 1-12 rather than grades K-12.

In response to a question from Secretary Peyser, Mr. Curtin explained that we are committed to looking at data over a period of years and based on that, the six-year trajectory for English Language Proficiency could be reduced in the future. Mr. Curtin explained that English learners typically are on a non-linear path, with greater growth in English proficiency at the beginning and then slower growth in later years.

In response to a question from Mr. West, Mr. Curtin said the actual metric is the percentage of students in the school meeting their individual targets towards English language proficiency. Ms. Fernandez asked how to factor in the new program options for English learners under the LOOK Act. Mr. Curtin said the Department will be looking at EL program quality separately from the accountability system. Ms. McKenna asked if a suspended student would be considered absent. Mr. Curtin said the question is whether the student is receiving educational services, noting students could be receiving services and not be present in the classroom. He said the Department would monitor attendance data submitted by school districts closely on year-to-year basis.

Mr. Curtin reviewed the indicators and measures for high schools. He explained that the high school completion indicator is measured by the four–year graduation rate, extended engagement rate, and annual dropout rate. He added that by changing the five-year graduation rate to a new metric, the extended engagement rate, the system incentivizes keeping students engaged in school whether or not they will graduate in four or five years. Mr. Curtin said one additional indicator at the high school level is the percentage of students in 11th and 12th grades who are completing advanced coursework. Ms. McKenna noted there are disparities among schools in offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Mr. Curtin said because of that, other course offerings and titles besides AP would count. Mr. Doherty asked about other indicators such as art, music, and physical education. Mr. Curtin said the indicators and measures listed are the ones to be included in the formal district and school accountability system, and the Department has committed to redesigning school report cards to include other important factors such as participation in the arts and student discipline rates.

Mr. Curtin reviewed the weighting of accountability indicators. He said the current ratio of achievement and growth is three (achievement) to one (growth). Mr. Curtin reviewed the impact of increasing the weight of growth and the considerations for weighting achievement and growth in the system. Mr. Morton asked who advocates for more weight on growth. Mr. Curtin said urban superintendents often advocate increasing the value of growth because they think it is a more fair measure. He said the Department is recommending to maintaining the current ratio.

Mr. Curtin discussed how the system would account for schools that do not have an English Learner (EL) subgroup. He explained that a school would have an EL subgroup if it tested at least 20 students in a school year per building. He added that the EL data would cover grades 1-12 rather than grades 3-8 and grade 10, so more schools will now have an EL subgroup. Mr. Curtin said that high school is a little more complicated because it has more indicators. He explained that high school completion is more of an achievement indicator than a growth indicator and therefore, the weighting of achievement plus high school completion should be taken together to form a three to one ratio with growth at the high school level.

Commissioner Riley said he views the system as a work in progress, with many good elements, and he wants to see how the data play out and then tweak the system as needed. He said he is pleased the new system addresses the transiency issue and eliminates the use of levels 1-5. He said he does not believe we can ever abdicate test scores but he would like to find a way to test students more efficiently and make the scoring more efficient so districts could get the data back in June and use it to plan for the fall. Commissioner Riley said we are putting a capstone on 25 years of education reform; it is a good time to reflect and see how this system works.

Mr. Curtin said this accountability system, overall, places less weight on MCAS scores than our previous system because of the additional indicators. He noted that the recommended approach makes any indicator grouping (achievement, growth, high school completion, progress towards English language proficiency or the additional indicators) worth at least 10 percent to ensure that is has an impact within the system.

Mr. Doherty said he does not see a big difference between the new accountability system and the previous one. He added that while achievement may have been tweaked a little bit, schools are still going to be compared with each other based on English and math achievement. Mr. Doherty expressed concern about labeling schools as underperforming or in the lowest 20 percent when those schools may be doing a good job based on how well students are growing.

Vice-Chair Morton asked if the Department has looked at the impact of the proposed system on particular schools. Mr. Curtin explained that the challenge is that we are only in year two of the new state assessment system, so we only have one year of assessment data. He said the system is focused on school improvement, not simply achievement. Ms. Fernandez asked for clarification on the extended engagement rate. Mr. Curtin explained that it is the five-year graduation rate plus the percentage of students still enrolled in that cohort.

Mr. Curtin explained the normative and criterion-referenced components of the accountability system. He added that for 2018 reporting, targets will only be set for one year based on historical improvement of like-performing schools. Long-term targets will be set once additional data is available for the new assessment system. He discussed the focus on performance of each school’s lowest 25 percent of students, controlling for transiency, and not counting ELs until their third year. In response to a question from Mr. Doherty, Mr. Curtin said the Department would notify each school of its lowest 25 percent cohort. Chair Sagan commented that the list probably would not come as a surprise to the school. Mr. Johnston said the Department provides a clearinghouse of information on effective strategies and interventions that schools can use. Ms. McKenna added that the Boston Public Schools notifies parents of students in the bottom 20 percent that the students should enroll in summer programs.

Mr. Curtin outlined the five factors on which accountability determinations for schools will be based. He went through the categories of schools, which include: schools of recognition, meeting targets, partially meeting targets, focused/targeted support, and broad/comprehensive support. Mr. Curtin added that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to place any school with a four-year graduation rate of lower than 66.7 percent in the category of needing focused and targeted support, even if the school is designed specifically for high-needs students and those who previously dropped out. He said this would not have been our choice. Those schools will be required to submit a plan to the Department on steps they plan to take to increase the graduation rate.

Mr. Curtin noted that because we are in an assessment transition, the Department plans to take a conservative approach in year one: 85 percent of schools will be classified as schools without required assistance or intervention. Within these 85 percent of schools, starting in year two, the Department will report on schools’ progress towards meeting improvement targets by using the categories meeting, partially meeting, and not meeting targets, while in year one schools, will be reported as meeting or partially meeting targets.

Mr. Doherty suggested that Board members read Senator Pat Jehlen’s report, “[Rethinking School Accountability: Opportunities for Massachusetts under the Every Student Succeeds Act](https://btu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Senator_Jehlen_ESSA_Subcommittee_Report_May2018.pdf),” before the June vote. Secretary Peyser noted that there are statutory requirements at the federal and state level; for example, ESSA requires states to identify the lowest 5 percent, and state law requires the Commissioner to choose underperforming or chronically underperforming schools from among the lowest performing 20 percent in the state. He added that the Board does not have authority to waive statutory requirements.

Mr. Curtin explained that district categorization would be similar to schools except the responsibility to determine whether a district needs broad/comprehensive support rests with the Board, whereas the Commissioner makes that determination as to schools. Mr. Curtin said most districts would be placed in the meeting targets or partially meeting targets category. Secretary Peyser asked how a district would be identified as underperforming or chronically underperforming. Mr. Curtin said the system follows the current process, which includes a district review and interaction with the Department followed by the Commissioner’s recommendation. Mr. Curtin clarified that while we are focused on the “all students” and “lowest performing” groups, the Department will be publishing data on all subgroups.

Vice-Chair Morton thanked Mr. Curtin for the presentation and said it gave him a better understanding of the system. Mr. West said it was remarkably clear. Ms. McKenna said the system has been very complicated and she appreciates that it is slightly less complicated now. She added that the emphasis on the lowest performing students is very important and it is the first time she has seen that. Ms. McKenna noted that we did commit to including the arts in our ESSA plan and there was a strong argument it should be a part of the accountability system. She said she does not want it to get lost. Mr. Curtin said the Department intends to report on arts education in the redesigned district and school report cards that will be released by the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Rodriguez gave the Board an overview of the Department’s Turnaround Assistance Redesign. He explained the current assistance model and the support that schools and districts receive. Mr. Rodriguez discussed the reasons for restructuring the Statewide System of Support (SSoS) and the design principles for the new approach. He added that the new structure for the SSoS will reconfigure regional assistance delivery; provide regional leadership and dedicated assistance leads; continue the focus on successful turnaround practices; codify, prioritize, and train staff on delivering high quality assistance offerings with a track record of success; and use data-driven reflection and improvement.

Chair Sagan asked about resource allocation. Commissioner Riley said it is clear the Department has reduced resources compared to five years ago, so we have to be strategic in how we use them. He added that schools need assistance and support, as well as accountability, to help improve outcomes for students.

Chair Sagan thanked the panel for the update. He said our goal is not to weaken or make the system more complicated but to strengthen it. Mr. Doherty said many people in the field are still having difficulty understanding what this all means and why we are making these changes. Mr. Doherty said it is equally important that parents understand it. He recommended that we be able to explain in plain language the three or four biggest changes in the accountability system and why the changes will make it better.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 6:59 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board