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Board Of Education Regular Meeting

Minutes

March 10, 1997

Chairman John Silber of Brookline called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The following were in attendance:

Members Of The Board Of Education Present

Dr. John Silber, Brookline, Chairman
Ms. Patricia Crutchfield, Southwick, Vice Chairperson
Mr. William K. Irwin, Jr., Wilmington
Dr. Stanley Z. Koplik, Boston
Mr. James Peyser, Boston
Dr. Roberta Schaefer, Worcester
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington
Ms. Alexis Vagianos, Melrose
Chair, Student Advisory Council
Commissioner Robert V. Antonucci, Secretary

Member Of The Board Of Education Absent

Dr. Edwin Delattre, Boston

Also In Attendance

Ms. Michelle McDonald, Department of Education
J. Edward Varallo, Registered Diplomate Reporter

1.Approval Of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the February 10, 1997 Regular Meeting.

Mr. Irwin made the motion and it was seconded by Vice Chairperson Crutchfield. The vote was unanimous.

2.Comments From the Chairman

Dr. Silber reported that he and Commissioner Antonucci testified at the February 21 House Ways and Means Committee hearing on the proposed education budget for FY 1998. All Board members have received a copy of that testimony, which Dr. Silber noted was scarcely covered in the news media. He said he and the Commissioner are working closely with the Legislature as the budget process continues.

3.Comments From The Commissioner

Commissioner Antonucci distributed to Board members one section of the latest draft of the History/Social Science framework (the economic strand) that was inadvertently left out of the packet previously sent to the Board. The framework draft will be reviewed later in the meeting.

The Commissioner invited Board members and the public to the four Statewide Forums on Curriculum Frameworks and Student Assessment that will be held on March 11 at Bridgewater State College; March 19 at UMass Lowell; March 20 at Westfield State College; and March 26 at Holy Cross College in Worcester. All forums will be held from 9:30 - 11:45 a.m. Commissioner Antonucci said this is an initiative by the Department to reemphasize the importance of the frameworks and assessments as curriculum is developed in school districts across the state.

Commissioner Antonucci invited Board members and the public to attend the hearings on the proposed revisions to the Transitional Bilingual Education regulations. The Commissioner said he hopes at least one Board member will attend each of the hearings. All of the hearings will be held from 4:00 - 7:00 p.m., and he or Deputy Commissioner David Driscoll as well as Department staff will attend. The hearings will be held on March 11 at B.M.C. Durfee High School, Fall River; March 13 at West Roxbury High School, Boston; March 20 at Rebecca Johnson School, Springfield; and March 26 at Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical School , Marlboro.

The Commissioner said the Department is also sponsoring testing workshops in April to work with districts to prepare for the grade 3 and grade 10 tests and the grades 4, 8 and 10 question tryouts in math and science. He stated: I am pleased to inform the Board that I have awarded the contract for the grade 3 and grade 10 tests to the Riverside Company, publisher of the Iowa Test. Three companies submitted bids for the grade 3 and grade 10 tests, and one could make the case for any of the three companies in terms of quality. When we reviewed the proposals in terms of costs, Riverside's cost was more palatable in relation to what we would like to spend. The Iowa Test is one of quality, and I am confident that the test will be a valid one that gives us some good, reliable results. We will be using the Iowa Test both in grade 3 for reading and in grade 10 for the four content areas.

Commissioner Antonucci informed the Board that it is traditional for the Board to hold one of its regular meetings in the community where the student Board member attends school. Board member Alexis Vagianos has suggested that we hold the May 12th Board meeting in the Melrose Public Schools rather than at the Department of Education in Malden, as originally planned. Board members agreed to the change.

At the April meeting, the Commissioner said, we plan to have on the agenda performance standards, a discussion of Time and Learning, and a further discussion of the History/Social Science framework based on what happens today. The Commissioner also noted that the Board has received a memo on the vocational education audit, which was discussed with the Board at a previous meeting.

In addition, Commissioner Antonucci mentioned that the Board received a communication this morning from the Lawrence School Committee, which was delivered by the assistant superintendent. A different communication was delivered to the Commissioner. Both documents will be copied for distribution to all members. The documents appear to outline steps the Lawrence School Committee and superintendent have taken.

Statements From The Public

Dr. Silber announced that the Board has not yet discussed the proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and Districts, and therefore those who wish to testify on this subject are in plenty of time. He said: Not only has no decision been reached by the Board of Education, there has not even been a discussion of these issues by the Board.

Meline Kasparian, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, addressed the Board with concerns about the proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and Districts. Ms. Kasparian stated: Both the Education Reform Act of 1993 and the *McDuffy* decision underscore the responsibility of state government to ensure that no child in Massachusetts is short-changed educationally. The MTA believes the rights of students under the law are paramount, but that we must be careful to respect the rights of every affected party. Ms. Kasparian said she believes the regulations, which could deprive a community of local control, must include a clear and precise set of criteria for determining what constitutes an "under performing" school or a "chronically under-performing" district. She also questioned whether it is fair to label an entire district as "chronically under performing" based on the alleged failings of only two schools. Lastly, the MTA questions the proposed regulatory changes in the area of revocation of certification. Ms. Kasparian said the MTA's legal staff believes the current regulations already give the Commissioner the right to do what this amendment proposes to do.

Dr. Silber asked Ms. Kasparian: If you have a school district of twenty schools and five are clearly underperforming by any criteria you would wish to select, do you think it is reasonable to say that system is underperforming? Ms. Kasparian responded: You should set certain thresholds. If those five schools fall in

the bottom 10 percent of what the thresholds are that we have set for the state, then clearly that district is underperforming.

Dr. Silber further asked: So, the fact that it was only five out of twenty would still not spare the district? Ms. Kasparian said: Yes, but I think you are better off dealing with percentages than if you deal with a hard number like two. There are some districts that only have two schools in them. Dr. Silber stated: We are dealing with 25 percent in this case. Twenty-five percent underperforming would be a sufficient threshold in your opinion to declare the whole district? Ms. Kasparian responded: I suspect that would be. I would talk in terms of percentages and where those schools fell in those percentages, I would be very clear that the number did not float from year to year. I think that we need to be very, very clear in the districts. Dr. Silber asked for clarification on what Ms. Kasparian meant by float from year to year? Ms. Kasparian clarified: I think that within the regulations those numbers are going to be set on a year-to-year basis. You can not have numbers that float from year to year and expect the districts to stay up with them. You need to talk about percentages and you need to talk about an area that people can look at all the time.

Chairman Silber stated: For instance, we are going to have to change those thresholds because we are starting at a level that is clearly unsatisfactory but if that is the operative level of most schools, you do not want to say that a hundred percent of them are underperforming now. You want to give them some time to improve, and so each year you are going to have a rising level of expectation. Are you not?

Ms. Kasparian responded: I think when we talk about a number, again I think the threshold, the triggering thresholds have to be very clear. I think what I saw through this when I read it was that we are talking about a specific number. That makes me uncomfortable. If we are talking about a percentage, if we are talking about how that percentage would reflect within the district based on the number of students in the district, people can make those kinds of connections as opposed to a single number.

Dr. Silber asked: Do you not believe that we are also going to have to have varying levels of expectations assigned to individual districts? For example, how do you put the same standard on Sherborn that you put on Chelsea, or on Lawrence? Lawrence has a large immigrant population, with a large population that is transient, with turnover at a very high rate, as opposed to Sherborn or Weston where you have great stability. Ms. Kasparian said that should be part of the triggering threshold. Dr. Silber stated: Yes, but I am not thinking so much about the triggering threshold. I think those standards have to vary from one school district to another. If the number that you will accept for, let us say the dropout rate is 4 percent in Weston, it can not be 4 percent in Lawrence. That would not be reasonable. It is a different kind of community. That would not be a reasonable threshold. Dr. Silber asked if she minded it floating from place to place?

Ms. Kasparian responded: I think that it needs to be looked at as part of what we understand to be the threshold. I think that just to float a number out there -- I do not think we are saying anything different. I think that we are just fighting semantics now. I think just a floating number out there is what I object to. If within the trigger threshold there are certain indicators that are built in, that is not something that I would have a problem with. Those thresholds and the things that trigger them need to be crystal clear to everyone.

Kathleen Kelley, President of the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers, commented on the proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and Districts. She said the standards for student performance indicators as well as the improvement standards should be clearly defined and fairly applied. Ms. Kelley stated: For example, in section 2.03(a)(1), I would make it clear that some districts are not going to meet the achievement standards but will meet the improvement standard. The improvement standard is important to detail for each of the indicators, whether it be the testing indicators, dropout rates or attendance rates. In addition, the term "adjusted school dropout rate" is unclear. In section 2.04, on under-performing school districts, I think a percentage should be used rather than a number (two schools). Finally, on the legislative proposal, I would ask you to define what "other school official" means. Ms. Kelley said she has concerns about the legislative proposal and the proposal on revocation of certification, which she said should specify which violations of law could lead to loss of a certificate. She said she will provide more specific comments on the proposals during the public comment period.

Dr. Silber asked Ms. Kelley: I take it you are not opposed to the idea that some certificates should be pulled; it is just that there should be adequate grounds established before taking such action. Ms. Kelley responded: Absolutely. I think teachers who are not doing well should be fired under the proper procedures. It does not do us any good to have people who are not doing their jobs in the school system. It hurts all of us.

Dr. Phyllis J. Dragonas, Director of Foreign Languages in the Melrose Public Schools, addressed the Board on behalf of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association. She said MaFLA is pleased that the Board is giving foreign languages due consideration, and that a tentative date for assessment is proposed on the Board's projected schedule. Dr. Dragonas stated: Dr. Silber's comments in his recent address to the Eastern Massachusetts Foreign Language Administrators and those of Dr. Delattre in his correspondence with the

president of MaFLA are thought-provoking and constructive. MaFLA agrees with Dr. Silber that this document needs to be reviewed for it to be approved by this Board, and that the term "foreign language" is more appropriate than "world language." We hope the revision committee will include individuals with a thorough knowledge of the content matter, skills in foreign language methodology, scholarship, and experience in writing. MaFLA stands ready to offer assistance and support to the Board. We trust that whatever revisions are needed on the framework will be completed in a timely manner. We also anticipate that the Foreign Language curriculum framework will be incorporated in the assessment package alongside mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts as projected.

Dr. Dragonas presented a document prepared by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages: "Standards For Foreign Language Learning: Preparing For The 21st Century," which has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Silber asked her to send additional copies for all Board members.

Dr. Silber stated: The Foreign Language Association is committed to the notion that every child should learn a foreign language and that it should be taught from K through 12. If we could even have it taught from K through 8, it would be marvelous. They are on the right track of introducing foreign language early. It would be a wonderful solution to the problem of bilingual education if a program like that were really available in all schools, because the bilingual education problem would disappear in the process of having intensive foreign language training from grade K on up, a time when children learn foreign languages with much greater ease than at any other time.

Dr. Silber continued: I had an excellent session of about two and a half hours with the association and found it very informative. I am trying to prepare a record of that meeting for distribution to members of the Board so that you will know the kinds of questions that were asked by the members and the kinds of concerns they have. I came away from the meeting with the impression that many of the items in that framework that seemed to us bizarre and counter-intuitive are actually differences in focus and in a way of speaking that could easily be removed with minor editorial correction. I found that the longer we talked the less difference seemed to remain. I think many of those differences are just editorial, so we may be able to accelerate the process of getting the document approved. I will be sending to all members the results of that meeting.

Joseph A. Keefe, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) addressed the Board and provided material outlining the activities of the 28 collaboratives that belong to MOEC. The budgets for these collaboratives total about $110 million. Mr. Keefe asked the Board to review the policy on educational collaboratives adopted by the Board in 1988. He said one important policy issue is space for collaborative programs in public school buildings, to promote inclusion of students with special needs in the least restrictive environment.

Peter Finn, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, addressed the Board regarding the proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and Districts. He said the draft regulations appear to be well-written and the MASS will take the opportunity to comment when the Board puts them out for public comment. He added the real crux of the matter is to determine the standards of performance for school districts, and how to apply them fairly to the great diversity in school districts in the Commonwealth. Mr. Finn said the MASS will work with the Department and the Board on developing the standards.

Mr. Finn went on to address the proposed regulation on revocation of certificates. He said: The proposal to revoke the certificate of a superintendent or principal if their action results in the school's loss of accreditation has had a chilling effect on school administrators, who feel it is a serious overreaction to a problem that is rarely, if ever, the fault of one person. Revocation of a certificate is the virtual end of a person's career in education, and to tie that action to something as complex as school accreditation we feel is unfair to the individuals involved. This recommendation would not give someone a chance even to seek employment as an assistant superintendent or superintendent with specific responsibilities in areas where he has demonstrated strength.

Mr. Finn continued: The revocation of a person's right to work in public education should be the result of a serious breach of moral, ethical or legal standards, as is currently the case. Revocation of certification should not be used as a tool to punish individuals whose efforts in someone's opinion have failed to achieve the rather difficult standards of school accreditation. He concluded: The Association is very disappointed that this recommendation has been made. It is our hope that in the time the Board has to review public comment on the issue, you will decide not to make this unfair and over-reactive change in the current regulations.

Dr. Silber responded: I do not think people should assume responsibility in managerial positions if they are not willing to take the responsibility that goes with it. If you do not want to be responsible for the

accreditation of a school, then you should not be the principal. If you do not want to be responsible for seeing to it that your high school, which is a major component of any school system, is competent, maybe the job of being superintendent is just not for that individual. Mr. Finn responded that in that case the individual should be dismissed from his job, but should not necessarily lose his license to practice. Dr. Silber followed up, stating: When you have the musical chairs situation of a person who fails in one job and lands on his feet in another job, and then a third job, it seems to me that something more serious with regard to protecting schoolchildren may be necessary. I am not disagreeing with you with regard to whether school accreditation is the issue. But it seems to me that removal of certification for certain cause is reasonable.

Dr. Barbara Brown read a statement on behalf of Dr. Theodore R. Sizer regarding the adoption of a reading list for English Language Arts. The statement read: My intention today is to point out that reasonable and respected individuals can properly and persuasively disagree over the nature of such standards, the texts assigned, the questions asked and the quality of the work expected. I believe that such disagreement is not only inevitable but in a democracy healthy and profoundly necessary. Furthermore, I believe it is in the state's interest to support and encourage informed diversity among its citizens and among its public schools. I am for high academic standards, not a high academic standard. The difference between the plural and the singular is fundamental. The stuff of literature, the arts and history, especially at the high school level, is continually open to criticism and debate. I believe that any frameworks and assessments in literature and kindred domains should evolve school by school with the decisions kept close to the families directly affected. In matters of philosophy, politics and taste, families should have immediate access to those authorities which decide what their children should study; authorities which, if persuaded, can modify their decisions.

Dr. Sizer's statement continued: This Board and the Legislature could insist that each school publicly and fully report on its programs and on the performance of its students against its clearly articulated local standard. It could administer statewide assessments in resourceful reading, good writing, and serious computational mathematics -- matters upon which most people would readily agree. It could require that reports on these performances be discussed at public meetings facilitated by independent moderators. It could push forward examples of all sorts of good work. It could regularly visit schools in the manner of the old-time English Inspector of Schools. It could broaden the ability of families to choose among schools, giving them power to act upon their convictions about schools which might serve their children best.

Dr. Sizer's statement concluded: I urge this Board to reconsider its approach to the matter of standards and to suggest to the Legislature such amendments to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act as may be required. As I recommend all of this, I do not underestimate the need for change. I am no apologist for the status quo and I believe that my impatience with the quality of contemporary secondary education is clearly on the public record. However, I believe that charging ahead with a flawed approach merely to charge ahead makes little sense and will further undermine public confidence in the judiciousness of state policy.

In addition to presenting Dr. Sizer's comments, Dr. Brown stated that effective and demanding exams can be created without a required reading list. She said the Advanced Placement exam in literature does not require particular texts. She read sample questions from the Advanced Placement exam.

Dr. Silber asked Dr. Brown to convey the following question to Dr. Sizer and have him reply by mail: One of the serious problems we have in Massachusetts is the issue of mobility of students; in many school districts it exceeds 20 percent per annum. Say we get rid of all the frameworks, and each school district has its own. One student starts in school system X, he transfers to school system Y; he would not be atypical if he ends up a year later in school district Z. Maybe he will stay there three or four years and end up in school district Q. In the absence of any framework and reasonable expectation of what is being studied and what is being read at these various grades, how is his or her education to be achieved? It is fine for parents who can put their children into whatever school they want and can guide their children in home education or private schools or things like that. But when we are talking about children who are mobile, how are we to guarantee some continuity in educational development in the absence of statewide frameworks?

Dr. Silber further commented: If every community had a Ted Sizer spearheading the development of education, there would be no need for a Board of Education or anything else. It's the absence of that kind of leadership that calls for some kind of institutional framework in which standards can be met.

4.Discussion Of History/Social Science Curriculum Framework

Mr. Peyser, on behalf of the Board committee that has been revising the framework, gave the Board an overview. He said the current document has been substantially improved from the December draft, stating: This document remains faithful to the intent of the December draft but it embodies many worthwhile

elements of prior drafts as well as many thoughtful criticisms and suggestions that we have received over the last several months both in writing and in testimony before this Board. It also represents the work of a number of committed and talented Department of Education staff along with an outside contractor we brought in, Richard Bennett, who did quite a bit of the final drafting and editing. The draft is not one hundred percent ready for implementation but it is certainly ready for public comment. I do not think the committee would recommend any significant structural or major content changes at this time, although there may be various small editing changes that remain to be done.

Mr. Peyser listed areas in which the new draft addresses concerns of those who commented on the December document. He stressed that the process in the last three months has been open and inclusive. He said: We have undertaken a number of meetings with prior committees and with other interested individuals. We listened to testimony and received a great deal of written comment, and we have attempted to incorporate as much of that as we could in this current draft.

One criticism of the standards in the December framework was that they lacked any integration with so-called learning standards, which would be more thematic. Critics said the December draft was more a listing of content standards rather than any over-arching thematic learning standards. There are now eighteen learning standards in the document which cut across four subject-oriented strands: history, geography, economics, and civics and government. The learning standards in the social sciences area, particularly geography, economics, civics and government, have been fully integrated with the content, meaning that the content has been organized underneath the various standards that are applicable to those areas.

Mr. Peyser continued: Another criticism had to do with the integration of the learning standards. In history there are six learning standards. We have stressed repeatedly throughout the document that these learning standards can and should be applied across the historical content that is listed in the document. The reason for doing this is that in almost any of these categories, chronology and causality, place in history, historical understanding, evidence of point of view, interdisciplinary connection, research skills, any and all content areas could fit under these rubrics. Listing everything six times did not seem to make a lot of sense. Therefore, the structure is to establish the learning standards up front and emphasize that they should be applied across the content. In addition, one of the tools we have used to help this process of integrating the learning standards across the content is to pose what we call "framing questions," which will provide useful guidance to teachers.

Mr. Peyser went on: A third criticism was the lack of integration across disciplines. Again, we have used the framing questions to try to bring in other disciplines so that teachers are given some guidance as to how certain historical material can apply to other social sciences. We have elucidated a specific principle, it is principle number 5, which talks about the importance of this cross-disciplinary integration.

A fourth criticism, Mr. Peyser said, had to do with the perception that there was excessive detail in the document. We have taken pains to try to pare away some of the lists of names or places or other details that one can safely assume will be part of any curriculum or course of study that covers a particular topic. I think there is more work to be done here -- to strive for greater evenness across the document so that we are not providing long lists of events and individuals and other information on a particular topic and very little if any on others even though they may be of equal importance.

Mr. Peyser continued: A fifth criticism dealt with the document, and again history in particular, being excessively Eurocentric. While we believe it is appropriate for the document to have European and Western civilization at its core, at the same time we have acknowledged some of these criticisms by adding additional non Western history sections.

A sixth criticism, Mr. Peyser said, had to do with the lack of pedagogical focus in the December draft. Again, this is more a function of the fact that in the December draft we were trying to establish the standards rather than complete the framework. But we have undertaken to flesh out and place those standards in context by including material on the core concepts, the guiding principles, the framing questions, sample units and other material so that the framework is not only a repository for standards but a guide for teachers to implement those standards and design courses.

Mr. Peyser continued: A seventh criticism was that there was too much material required, especially in history, up through the tenth grade and too little in grades eleven and twelve. We wrestled with this repeatedly, and with significant support and help from the prior revision committee, we determined that we should include history up to the 20th century by tenth grade, and leave the 20th century for eleventh and twelfth grade. This is relatively consistent with the current pattern of teaching history but at the same time places a great deal more emphasis on the teaching of U.S., Massachusetts and world history at earlier grades.

Mr. Peyser concluded his presentation by stating that the committee accomplished its objectives and is satisfied that this document is worthy of public comment. He said it certainly bears continued improvement, and that he expects over the next month or so it will be improved.

Commissioner Antonucci stated after this meeting the framework will be distributed for public comment, which we would like to receive within two weeks. Dr. Silber added: Please wait until you have read it so that you really are responding to this document. It is a new document. It has to be addressed on its own terms without regard to previous documents that we have been working with. Please take the time to read this document afresh, give it your best critical thought, and then submit your comments to us, but do not wait until the next meeting of the Board to do it. The sooner we get those comments, the sooner we can assess them and, when the suggestions seem to us imperative, incorporate them in a subsequent version. I would hope that we could have something close to a final version by our April meeting so that we can be in a position to take a vote on this.

Mr. Irwin made a motion that the Board hold a public hearing on the revised draft framework before the next Board meeting. There was general consensus, but no vote was taken. Dr. Silber said he would like the hearings to be held within the next two weeks to give the committee at least two weeks before our next meeting to incorporate the results. If comments are in by March 25, 1997, the committee has around fifteen days in which to incorporate them for our consideration at the April Board meeting.

The Commissioner said we have tentatively scheduled March 25 as the deadline for comments. We will get the revised draft out tomorrow, put it on the Internet and look at the dates already scheduled for the Education Reform forums, because it may be efficient to use the afternoons of those days to hear comments on the framework. The key is to give everybody the opportunity to respond either at the hearing or in writing. We know from experience that written comments are much more useful.

Commissioner Antonucci said he wants to note that last month the Board voted a process for us to follow with respect to the framework, and that process was followed to a "T". There was involvement by anyone who wanted to be involved. We received and accepted written and verbal comments. We had two meetings of the committees. The Commissioner personally participated, along with Department of Education staff and the writer, Richard Bennett. As the Chairman has said, in a framework you cannot fit in all of the historical information you would like to cover. Also, it is impossible to get full consensus on every point. Our goal is to produce a high-quality document. The next two weeks will be a critical period for us to look at the document and refine it.

Dr. Thernstrom said this has been an invaluable process. She thanked the members of the October committee who spent a great deal of time not only meeting with the subcommittee but also reviewing the documents and submitting written comments. She said she does not think public hearings will add much to the ongoing process. Mr. Irwin responded that public hearings serve to validate the process.

Dr. Silber stated: We do not have anything to lose by holding hearings, and we might as well satisfy those who want to speak rather than write. They follow the injunction of Mayor Curley, who said, "Never write if you can speak" and there may be others who say they will not speak if they can nod, those who will not nod if they can wink. I think we should hear from all of them. What worries me about the document more than anything else, is that I think it would be a great curriculum if we could achieve it at the end of the fourth year of college. It worries me how we are going to pack all of that information into the twelve years of school. We have to think about the level of exposure. Teachers will have to use their professional judgment about when to go deeper in concentration and when to survey. That is the only way this can be done. But this has been a problem for teachers since time began. It is the price we pay for being born too late in a world too old. There is more to learn today than if we lived in 400 B.C.

The Chairman continued: There are inevitable difficulties in the drafting of any framework. But this procedure has been open and thoughtful. A wide variety of people have been heard from. You can disagree with the result, but I do not see how any reasonable person can disagree with the procedure.

Mr. Peyser concluded the discussion, in response to a question from Dr. Koplik, stating: We have adopted an organizational structure that segments the disciplines, and segments U.S. and Massachusetts history from world history because it is really impossible to present the material in the framework in any other way. However, we have presented guiding principles and framing questions that encourage teachers to teach things in context, not in isolation. Teachers need to invest time in designing courses that integrate the material across disciplines, across time, and across geographical boundaries.

5.Discussion Of Reading List For English/Language Arts

Dr. Silber introduced the subject, noting that at the February Board meeting he asked Vice Chairperson Crutchfield to research and develop some recommendations to the Board on a proposal for a reading list for English/Language Arts. He said the intent is for the Board to be prepared to discuss this in the future based on some thoughtful exploration of the issue by Ms. Crutchfield.

Ms. Crutchfield stated that before the Board makes decisions about a reading list, we need information about how we will we assess knowledge of literature. Commissioner Antonucci introduced Stuart Kahl from Advanced Systems, Jeff Nellhaus and Nick Fischer from the Department of Education to answer questions from the Board.

Dr. Schaefer asked Mr. Kahl: Can you assess a student's knowledge of literature without having a required reading list; and if we were to have a required reading list, how would you accommodate the various levels of reading that exist, especially by high school? Mr. Kahl responded: We can assess the standards in the framework very well without the list. The literature strand in the framework is not about knowledge of literature; it is focused on comprehension and analytical skills. The skills can be assessed without relying on specific works of literature. If a reading list is adopted, the concerns would be such things as is the list going to be long or short, and is it going to narrow the focus of instruction. Mr. Kahl added that as he reads the framework, it does not demand knowledge of specific works of literature or awareness of specific writers.

Dr. Silber stated: It seems to me the notion that there should not be any knowledge of literature is appalling. On the other hand, the need for a customized test seems to turn on having something specific that we require that would not necessarily be required otherwise. If there is nothing unique that Massachusetts students are to be tested on, then again, I go back to the question of why we cannot use a standardized test. The majority here felt there ought to be a customized test. If it is going to be a customized test, there ought to be something customized for them to test.

Mr. Peyser asked: How practical is it to use the AP model in a statewide test where the students who are tested are not just a small percentage but all of the students in a particular grade? Dr. Silber further asked: How can you grade an essay exam like the A.P. within a reasonable budget for the state? Somebody has to read every one of those papers and has to be vastly knowledgeable. That is expensive. Say in the tenth grade we have 70,000 essays that have to be read. Can the state afford that? Mr. Kahl responded that this would be difficult, especially if students have the option to choose literary works that are unfamiliar to the readers. That is one of the problems with leaving it totally open.

Student Board member Alexis Vagianos expressed concern about requiring all students to read certain books, when not all students can read at the same level. She also wondered if the AP model could be adapted for use in the Massachusetts test by not offering students the option of choosing a title other than those on the list. Mr. Kahl said these are issues that should be explored further.

Dr. Koplik said that the Board may subject itself to criticism if it mandates a minimum expected set of readings for purposes of the assessment, but to do otherwise is to permit a gross unevenness in terms of measurement. He said the Board has a responsibility with regard to assessment, and should go on record with its view, recognizing that the list will be criticized by some.

Dr. Silber stressed that the Board is not voting on this issue today. This is simply a discussion of the issue, with no prior commitment even to have a required list, much less what the list would be. He said the Board should discuss the issue only after a lot of background work has been done on it so that the discussion is focused on some specific alternatives. Then the Board can ask whether it can come up with a list, if it is a good idea to have a list, and other substantive questions. Dr. Silber added that the Board is not going to rush to judgment on this issue.

Vice Chairperson Crutchfield asked if Advanced Systems could come back with some recommendations on how we might assess students' knowledge of literature, along with a broad outline of what the assessment might look like if it were or were not based on a reading list. Commissioner Antonucci responded that we can do that, but it has to be broad-based, as the Chairman said. We have to look at it in terms of the curriculum framework and in terms of graduation requirements. Second, we have to look at it in terms of a required list for schools from which they make selections, or a required list for students where, for example, students would be required to read four books in a particular grade. That is an option.

The Commissioner continued that all we are doing now is to look at all of those possibilities. Working with the Board, we will review these questions and keep the discussion going. We will come back to the Board with options, the pluses and the minuses of each option, and information relating to assessment. We will provide information about the costs of each option. Dr. Silber added the essential question is whether we can grade the exam within the limits of economic resources.

Dr. Schaefer asked if we need to go back and amend the English/Language Arts framework as it is currently written because it does not include the standard for assessing knowledge of literature. Dr. Silber replied it depends on the eye of the beholder; he did not read the framework that way, but does not argue with that interpretation of it. He said he will re-read it and see whether that interpretation is justified. If it is, we may need some amendment of it. Ms. Crutchfield added that the framework must be congruent with our emphasis on reading and on high stakes testing. Dr. Schaefer added that it also must be consistent with the Board's emphasis on the issue of reading literature.

6.Certificate Of Mastery - Vote

Commissioner Antonucci opened the discussion, stating that based on suggestions Board members made at February's meeting, we have revised the proposal on standards for the Certificate of Mastery called for in the Education Reform Law. He outlined the three options in the memo: (1) achieving a score of four or better on two or more Advanced Placement examinations; (2) successfully passing the International Baccalaureate program; and (3) achieving scores to be established by the Board on three Scholastic Achievement Test II examinations. The Commissioner continued: Along with those recommendations, I propose that the Board establish a minimum GPA of 3.5 or some other score to be determined by the Board, for a student to receive a Certificate of Mastery. I also recommend that we not determine the Certificate of Mastery until at least the first or second semester of the senior year, and actually award it at graduation. Finally, I suggest the Board consider a pilot program, as suggested by one Board member: If a district presents to the Board a creative program based on serious academic study and proposes that students who complete that program be awarded a certificate, we could offer it as an option.

Dr. Silber commented that the Board may not be ready to vote on this today, but we should certainly give it a thorough discussion.

After discussion with the Student Advisory Council, student Board member Alexis Vagianos voiced their concerns about implementing the Certificate of Mastery this year. She said: Many students will take their AP exams in May, and receive their scores later. Most schools do not offer large AP programs in the junior year. Another issue is that the AP test is supposed to be equivalent to a college freshman year program, and the SAT II is to assess what you have learned in high school, so we do not see how the Board can use those two together. Also, students tend to score better on the SAT II's than they do on the AP tests. Most importantly, we think the tests speak for themselves. If you do well on your SAT II's or on your AP test, they speak for themselves. Having a Certificate of Mastery seems needless. It would not be an incentive for students or even be important for students.

Ms. Vagianos concluded: Maybe the Board needs to think about what we want to achieve with this program; what our purpose is; and what our goal is. What if any incentive is going to be available for students and how many students will this affect?

Commissioner Antonucci responded: The law calls for some way to recognize high achieving students, students who work hard in rigorous academic courses and achieve at a high level. If the Board approves the concept of a Certificate of Mastery, the second step for us is then to work with the institutions of higher education in terms of how they will view this certificate. Third, we need to look at scholarship programs. Is the state willing, for example, to create a scholarship program for students who have achieved at that high level, to recognize what they have done by way of a scholarship? These are steps we will take if the Board accepts the concept of the Certificate of Mastery.

The Commissioner added that Ms. Vagianos's point about the SAT II and Advanced Placement is a continuing debate in the field. The reason we considered it was that at the last meeting, there was concern about students who do not have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses. Again, that is open for discussion.

Dr. Silber stated: The law not only gives us the right but the obligation to recognize intellectual achievement. There has never been any protest about recognizing artistic achievement in music, in entertainment, and certainly no objection to having elitism on the athletic field or on the basketball court. That has been widely acceptable. I think if we can accept elitism in those areas, we certainly can accept a little elitism with regard to the kind of natural elite that do well in school. This is not based on who their parents are, it is not based on how rich they are, it is not based on socioeconomic factors. It is based on a lot of hard work by serious students and there is no reason on earth why we should be deterred from recognizing these students.

Dr. Silber continued: I have trouble with the way this would be administered, because if you take a minimum GPA, it has to be an unweighted score. Many school districts inflate the grades for advanced level

courses. You cannot have that and be judging it objectively. The GPA needs to be applicable for the academic core courses such as English, math, science, history/social science and foreign language. Those are the areas that are covered for our competency determination for high school graduation. I think the GPA has to be cumulative through the whole senior year or at least through the first semester of the senior year, because we are not trying to judge this student on what he or she did in one semester. This is an endurance contest. We want to see what he has done throughout high school.

Dr. Silber stated: A 3.5 average in this age of grade inflation is not even an A minus. I do not know what it means to give a mastery recognition for somebody who cannot produce at least an A minus average. So, I would think 3.7 is minimum, and because teachers and school districts will have the tendency to inflate those grades, I would want it checked out by how well they did on a SAT. So, we can have something like a general Certificate of Mastery to be granted to students with a minimum 3.7 GPA and SATs of at least 1400. If you push your SAT high enough, you take care of the problem of the difference between the Advanced Placement exam and the SAT because a student who gets a 1400 can probably handle college work with relative ease. I think if we are not going to have a combination of standards that goes beyond just accepting the school district's assessment of the student to offer some objective validation of it, we are going to have something that means very little. It is just another piece of paper.

Mr. Peyser asked the Commissioner to review whether students could claim the state should pay their testing fees, if they must take the AP or SAT II exams in order to qualify for the certificate. Mr. Irwin suggested that Commissioner Antonucci talk with higher education representatives as a next step, to get their recommendations on criteria. After further discussion, the Commissioner concluded by saying the Department will answer the questions that were brought up, refine the proposal further, and bring it back at a future meeting. He said he would like the Board to take their time with this, rather than vote today. The initiative is moving forward, and at each meeting we will refine it to a higher level.

7.Matters relating To Under-Performing Schools And Districts

Commissioner Antonucci stated the proposals he is presenting today are only for public comment. Several speakers this morning addressed the Board about their concerns with the proposals, and this is what the public comment period is about. The Commissioner continued: When we develop regulations like these or proposals to amend the statute, we do so understanding that if we were ever to exercise those options, we would do so in a very serious manner. This is not something we would use arbitrarily, or without a lot of research, fact-finding and thought. The bottom line is we would use them when we determine that students were not getting the quality of education they should get in a school or in a district. The statute requires us to follow due process. In fact, people who are aggrieved by any regulation can go to Superior Court to challenge the decisions we have made.

The Commissioner said he strongly supports the recommendations he is presenting to the Board today. They are driven not by the situation in Lawrence, but by the 351 cities and towns across the Commonwealth. Education reform mandates that we move ahead with high quality teaching and learning. These are options available to the Commissioner and to the Board to use when necessary. The recommendations today would allow the Board to receive public comment about the proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and Districts, a legislative proposal to be considered, and a proposed standard for revocation of certificates.

Dr. Silber stated: We as a Board are not endorsing any of these recommendations; we are simply presenting a platform for public discussion and refinement of the proposals. After we have had the public comment, presumably we will rework these recommendations and try to come up with regulations that will be generally acceptable and clearly in the public interest. We are not voting on the substance of this; we are voting a procedural motion that it goes out for public comment.

Mr. Irwin distributed a memorandum to Board members regarding how auditing is going to be done and the consolidation of auditing teams. He said no school district wants to have one, two or maybe three auditing teams coming in yearly. Mr. Irwin said he supports the proposal to set standards for under-performing schools and school districts and to revoke certain administrative certifications, but he feels strongly the process for auditing and reviewing school districts should be streamlined.

Mr. Irwin said his memorandum recommends: (1) selecting school districts for priority audits based on the criteria for determining under-performance; (2) auditing all districts every three to five years; (3) using an outside firm for preliminary findings but then integrating this into the Department's staff functions; (4) that audits should cover federal and state programmatic and fiscal requirements; (5) combining the Governor's audit team initiative with Dr. Silber's school audit proposal; and (6) providing technical assistance to school districts to help them implement the laws.

Dr. Silber stated: The Governor's audit team has not yet been funded by the Legislature. The law requires the Board and the Commissioner to oversee the quality and competence and performance of school districts. We have that obligation under statute. If the Legislature and Governor want to take away that responsibility and put it into another body, that is their decision. But until they do that, nothing relieves us of that responsibility.

Dr. Silber continued: Already the audits that we are doing combine financial auditing with the program requirements, because it is not enough to know merely how much a district received under the Education Reform Act. You have to find out how much they got from the municipal government, from the federal government and from the state. Also, one thing we pointed out to the House Ways and Means Committee when the Commissioner and I appeared there was that we have to have a history of what the community has provided. Unless the community has suffered a decline in property values, there is no excuse for their reduction in the level of community support. We have to be clear about that. Also, we are trying to develop an instrument so that local officials submit answers to us under oath, so we can rely on the data under penalty of perjury in case there is any falsification of the records. Finally, I think it is wrong to assume these audits won't cost something extra, because everything costs something. But it can certainly be substantially reduced. I think that is the main point.

Board members commented on the proposed regulations. Mr. Peyser suggested adding to the criteria on under-performing schools the presence or absence of an aggressive plan for corrective action, and evidence of its implementation. He also suggested further review of the proposal on revocation of certificates, to consider aligning the standards for dismissal and loss of certification, and to tie the educator's loss of certification to a violation of law that bears directly on the school or on the students. Dr. Koplik suggested thinking more about the role of the school committee in the case of an under-performing school or district.

Dr. Silber stated: The proposal is that these go out for public comment. If there is no objection, I recommend that we separate out the legislative proposal, and postpone review of that to another day.

a.Proposed Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts - Initial Consideration to Seek Public Comment - VOTE

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, sections 1B, 1J and 1K, hereby authorize the Commissioner to proceed in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. c. 30A, section 3, to solicit public comment on the Proposed Regulations on Under-performing Schools and School Districts, 603 CMR 2.00.

The motion was made by Dr. Silber and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

b.Legislative Proposals - VOTE

No vote was taken on the proposal to file legislation that would permit the Commissioner to remove from office a school official who is found, after an administrative hearing, to have wilfully violated or neglected his or her duty under state law. On recommendation of Dr. Silber and Commissioner Antonucci, discussion and action on the matter was postponed to a future meeting.

c.Regulations on Revocation of Certificates - Initial Consideration to Seek Public Comment on Proposed Changes - VOTE

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, section 1B and c. 71, section 38G, hereby authorize the Commissioner to proceed in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. c. 30A, section 3, to solicit public comment on the proposal to amend the Certification Regulation, 603 CMR 7.02 (17) (a) (5), by adding the following sentence:

Such good cause may include, but is not limited to, action or inaction that results in the loss of accreditation of a public school, or failure to comply with laws applicable to the certificate holder.

The motion was made by Dr. Silber and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

8.Regulatory Reform

a.School Finance and Accountability - Adoption of Amended Regulations - VOTE

The Commissioner outlined the major issues in the amended regulations, which would take effect July 1, 1997.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education, pursuant to its authority under G.L. c. 69, section 1B; c. 70, sections 3 and 11; c. 72, section 6; and c. 76, sections 12A and 12B, and having complied with the notice and public comment requirements of G.L. c. 30A, adopt the proposed Regulations on School Finance and Accountability (603 CMR 10.00), as revised after public comment, and repeal the regulations on School Choice Transportation (603 CMR 43.00) and Metco Special Education Reimbursement (603 CMR 22.00) superseded thereby.

The motion was made by Dr. Koplik and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

b.Tuition Assistance - Repeal of Obsolete Regulations - VOTE

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. Chapter 69, section 1B, and having solicited public comment in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. Chapter 30A, section 3, hereby repeal the Regulations on Standards for the Award of Tuition Assistance to Students at Private Business, Trade and Correspondence Schools, 603 CMR 39.00.

The motion was made by Dr. Koplik and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

9.Approval Of Grants - Vote

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education approve the following grant:

Fund Code	Name Of Grant Program	Number of Grants Recommended	Amount
493 (7038-0160)	MA Family Literacy Consortium Training Activities	5	$64,000

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Vice Chairperson Crutchfield. The vote was unanimous.

There being no further business, the Board voted to adjourn the meeting. The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 14, 1997 at 9:00 a.m. at the Gerena Community School, 200 Birnie Avenue, Springfield, MA.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED:that the Board of Education adjourn the meeting at 11:55 a.m. subject to the call of the Chairman.

The motion was made by Dr. Silber and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert V. Antonucci
Secretary