

## **Q&A about State Receivership of Holyoke Public Schools, May 2015**

### **What does it mean that Holyoke Public Schools are in receivership and how will it affect students?**

After careful consideration, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted on April 28, 2015, to place the Holyoke Public Schools into state receivership, known as “Level 5” status. Holyoke schools are now being run by a new leader called a receiver. In the short term, the receiver is Massachusetts Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester. In the coming weeks, the commissioner will appoint a new leader to manage the school district. The receiver has the powers of the school committee and superintendent.

The district will have a three-year turnaround plan, and at the end of the turnaround plan, the commissioner will determine whether the district has made sufficient academic progress and has the capacity to continue that progress or whether more time is needed.

During the remaining months of the 2014-15 school year, students should not expect any dramatic changes to their normal school day, or to end-of-year events like prom or graduation. Starting in the fall, the receivership will provide more support for Holyoke students to achieve their full potential.

Holyoke High School and Dean Technical High School diplomas will continue to be recognized by colleges, and students will continue to be accepted to college.

### **Why did the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education put Holyoke Public Schools into receivership?**

The Board looked at a range of data, including that student achievement and growth in Holyoke Public Schools are among the lowest in the state overall and for subgroups of students, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. The state has given significant assistance and resources to Holyoke Public Schools over the past 12 years, but the district-led efforts did not improve student performance significantly. Therefore, the Board voted in favor of receivership and the tools associated with it to dramatically strengthen the school system.

### **What happens next in the Holyoke Public School System?**

The state will convene a local stakeholder group that will provide recommendations to the commissioner and the receiver for the district turnaround plan. That group will include representatives of teachers, parents, the community, healthcare, workforce, early education, and higher education. The commissioner and receiver will work on the turnaround plan over the summer. The turnaround plan will be finalized and begin to be implemented early in the 2015-16 school year. The turnaround plan will include priorities and strategies to accelerate student achievement.

### **Will there be changes in teaching and administrative staff?**

The commissioner has said that there will not be mass firings of Holyoke staff. Holyoke's Level 5 district turnaround plan will outline the district's new priorities and path forward. Evaluating current district staff will be part of that process. Teachers and staff will have the opportunity to reflect on the new approach and determine if it is the right fit for them. In Lawrence, currently the only other Massachusetts school district in receivership, most of the teachers stayed, and both the receiver and commissioner encouraged teachers to stay if they wanted to work with the receiver to improve the district. State law allows the receiver to ask all staff to reapply for their positions, but it is up to the receiver to decide how and whether to use that power.

**How has Lawrence Public Schools, the only other district in state receivership, been impacted over the past three years?**

Lawrence Public Schools has made notable progress since its designation as a Level 5 district in 2011. The number of schools meeting performance targets (Level 1 schools) has tripled, student growth on state assessments has increased, and graduation and dropout rates are improving significantly.

**Where can I find more information, and how can parents, teachers, and the community get involved?**

The Holyoke Public Schools website (<http://www.hps.holyoke.ma.us/>) will continue to be the central location for all communications about the district. The commissioner has already posted memos to parents and Holyoke staff there. Please continue to check that website for updated information. The commissioner will work with Holyoke Public Schools leadership to ensure that parents, teachers, and community members are well-informed of the process and are able to offer input and ask questions. Important communications will be available in both English and Spanish.

The commissioner has staff on the ground in Holyoke. This team can be reached by email at [receiver@hps.holyoke.ma.us](mailto:receiver@hps.holyoke.ma.us) or by phone at (413) 534-2000, ext. 277. The receivership team welcomes the involvement of all community members, especially students and families, in improving Holyoke schools. Please feel free to contact us with information about programs you believe are working well and those that need improvement.

For more information about receivership and Level 5 districts, please visit ESE's website at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level5/districts/>.

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