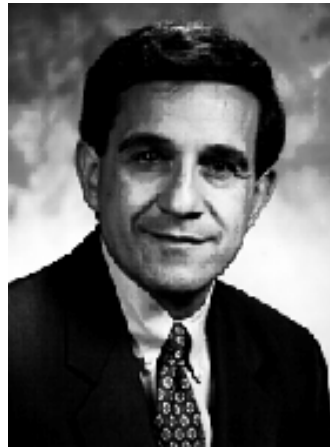


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## Commissioner's Update

June 16, 1995

### End of Year Information

**To:** School Superintendents  
**From:** Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner  
**Date:** June 16, 1995

The end of another school year is fast approaching. It has been a busy time for all of us. This mailing contains information which will be crucial to you as you plan for the next fiscal year.

The FY 96 budget has been passed by the Senate and the House and now awaits final action by the Governor. Also, we now have a clearer idea of the federal allocations as a result of the President's veto, so we are able to provide more accurate estimates of funding for next year. This will be helpful as you determine staffing and other needs for the next academic year.

Of particular interest to you will be the FY 96 Foundation Program data for your district. We are providing information on state aid, minimum contribution and net school spending based on the budget approved by the House and the Senate. These numbers will hold if the Governor does not veto any of the line items or outside sections of the budget.

The state budget provides that \$25.00 of the \$75.00 per pupil minimum aid for all communities shall be spent on professional development, in accordance with standards set by the Board of Education. We will have these standards in place as soon as possible.

I need your assistance with an issue that is particularly critical as we move ahead to implement education reform and secure additional funding in future years. We are all accountable to see to it that funds are allocated and expended for the intended purposes of the laws and regulations. It is important for you to be involved personally to ensure

that all state and federal funds in your district are used properly. The integrity of all school programs depends on how effectively funds are used. I encourage flexibility, as long as our legal obligations are being met. As Commissioner, I also have legal obligations that I must meet in order to satisfy audit requirements.

The FY 96 state budget places more responsibility at the local level. Most of the new monies will go directly to school districts. We will move as quickly as possible to develop procedures for any new programs or expansion of existing programs. Note that some grant funds are intended for very specific purposes, and are not to be used for general staffing and program support. For example, the health protection funds, which could decrease significantly as money from the cigarette tax decreases, are intended to provide students with programs and instruction that promote better health. School districts need to be able to demonstrate that the funds were used appropriately, and that as a result of the funding, students achieved the positive benefits intended by the legislation.

During the next fiscal year we will be undertaking a major project to track school district expenditures of all state and federal funds. We need this information to support requests for additional funding in future years. It will help us with the Legislature and Governor, as well as with Congress and the Administration in Washington. The Board of Education and I intend to continue to advocate vigorously in support of Education Reform for the students and schools of Massachusetts. With your help, by demonstrating the positive impact of Education Reform funding, we will succeed.

Related to the issue of accountability for funding and programs is the issue of certification. School districts are required to employ administrators, teachers and other educational personnel who are appropriately certified for the position to which they are appointed. The certification regulations as amended in October 1994 provide flexibility for educators, and the certification law permits school districts to seek a waiver of certification from the Department when they show a hardship in securing certified applicants for the position. However, for every professional educator employed in the school district you, as superintendent, must assure compliance with the certification law.

**The following information is included in this mailing:**

1. Preliminary Allocation and Entitlement Grant Amounts  

2. A Statement of Assurances / Master Agreement for State and Federal Funds  
**[No Longer Available]**
3. New Reporting Requirements Under the Welfare Reform Law  

4. A Summary of Current Law Regarding Religion in the Public Schools  
**[No Longer Available]**
5. End-of-Year Report Schedule of Workshops  
**[No Longer Available]**
6. 1994-95 End of Year Pupil and Financial Report Workshops  
**[No Longer Available]**
7. World War II Commemoration Schedule of Summer Events  
**[No Longer Available]**
8. Chapter 70 Foundation Aid: House and Senate Budget Allocations  
**[No Longer Available]**

We have had a successful year, and together we are meeting the challenges before us. I recognize that managing the many duties of the superintendency, in the midst of Education Reform, is no easy task. Your continued cooperation and support are truly

appreciated. Have a good summer - and take some time to relax!

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End:



Thursday, June 15, 1995

## Preliminary Allocation and Entitlement Grant Amounts

**To:** Superintendents of Schools**From:** Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education**Re:** Preliminary Allocation and Entitlement Grant Amounts

Enclosed you will find your school system's preliminary grant amounts for those allocation and entitlement programs you administer. While we have yet to receive formal written notice from the United States Department of Education (USED), we have been notified verbally regarding these amounts. We have been conservative in our calculations so that while we know that further adjustments may need to be made, we are confident that the enclosed figures are minimums. In addition, the President's recent veto has allowed us to include a dollar amount for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program.

In the case of special education and early childhood special education, I am pleased that we are able to increase the per student allocation over that stated in April. We had projected \$300/student for special education and \$440-450 for early childhood special education. Based on Massachusetts' allocation from USED, we are able to increase the amount for these two programs to **\$335/student** and **\$515/student**, respectively. While this is still less than the per student amount available in FY95, it is a smaller reduction than had been anticipated.

In the case of the Health Protection Funds, the recent language coming from the conference committee discussions has provided level funding for this program and the Department will retain the same minimum level of funding and maximum level of funding as during FY95. However, with increased enrollments in K-12 programs, the per child allocation, which forms the basis for the majority of district allocations, will be reduced from \$28.50 to slightly over **\$27.27/student**.

This year has been unusual due to the rescission discussions occurring at the national level. I know that it has been difficult for you to complete your planning and staffing decisions for the upcoming school year without the grant funding information. It has been frustrating for us to be unable to provide you with funding information in a more timely manner. We are here to assist you in whatever way we can to facilitate the submission and processing of your grant applications so that funds can flow as soon as possible. We will not be setting a grant submission deadline but will respond to applications as they are submitted. The sooner the application is submitted, the sooner it can be reviewed and funds released. If allocation adjustments are necessary, we will inform you regarding the process to be followed in order to amend the grant amount.

Applications should be mailed to:  
**Massachusetts Department of Education**  
**Grants Management**

**350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148-5023**

If you have any programmatic questions, please contact the appropriate Department liaison for your community. I thank you for your patience and continued support.

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## Welfare Reform Law

### Memorandum

**To:** School Superintendents & School Principals  
**From:** Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education  
Joseph Gallant, Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance  
**Date:** June 15, 1995  
**Re:** Welfare Reform Law

This memorandum is intended to inform you about the new welfare reform law-- Chapter 5 of the Acts of 1995--and how it will affect local school districts. First, the new law changes the name of the Department of Public Welfare to the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Second, it makes many changes to the current welfare program--Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Assuming federal approval, some time after July 1, 1995, DTA will implement the new welfare reform program which is entitled the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) Program. Under Chapter 5, in order to receive TAFDC benefits: 1) children under the age of 14 must meet specific school attendance requirements; and 2) teen parents must graduate from high school, or attend a program which will lead to a high school diploma or a GED.

On May 17, 1995, staff from the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) met with representatives from several school districts to develop a system that would best meet the requirements of welfare reform while imposing as few burdens as possible on schools. This memo outlines the system which was agreed upon. DTA will appoint one person in each of its local offices to act as a liaison to assist the school in resolving any school attendance reporting problems.

### Attendance of Children Under the Age of 14 (LEARNFARE)

#### Children Subject to the Requirement

This requirement pertains only to children between the ages of six (or in the first grade, whichever occurs later) and thirteen. (In other words, it does not pertain to children under six, children in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten programs, or children 14 and older. It also does not pertain to a child whose parent(s) is disabled; however, DTA will make this determination.)

#### Parent/School Notification of Attendance Requirement

DTA will notify each recipient subject to Learnfare of the requirement to provide her children's attendance records. The recipient will be asked to sign a form authorizing the Department of Education to release school attendance information to DTA. Included on

this form will be identifying information provided by the DTA worker and/or the recipient, including the following: the child's name; the child's date of birth; the parent's name, address, telephone number, and social security number; the name and address of the school; the child's grade in school; the DTA worker's name and identification number; and the name and address of the DTA office responsible.

The school may choose to make copies of this form to use to report the child's attendance to DTA, as outlined below. In this way, all of the identifying information will be present on each attendance report, and no one will have to complete this information again unless there are changes, such as an address. If the school prefers to use another system, including an automated report, it may do so, as long as all of the identifying information is included for each child on each attendance report.

### **Quarterly Attendance Reports**

Under the welfare reform law, a parent is placed in a probationary status if her child has more than eight unexcused absences during a school quarter. To simplify reporting requirements DOE and DTA have agreed that schools will only report to DTA those children who have had more than eight unexcused absences during a quarter. Schools may use the simple, one-page form designed by DTA (described above) to provide attendance information on children with more than eight unexcused absences. (Or, as noted above, the school may use an alternative method which provides the same information.) If DTA's form is used, it will contain a section for the school to identify the number of unexcused absences for that child, and the dates those absences occurred.

The form will also contain a section to check off if the child is no longer enrolled at that school. If a child transferred to another school during a school quarter, the school will provide the number of unexcused absences for that child for the portion of the quarter that the child attended that school--even if it is less than eight. This will enable DTA to calculate the total number of unexcused absences for the quarter, when attendance information is obtained from the school to which the child transferred.

If a school has no students who have more than eight unexcused absences in a particular quarter, the school will provide this information to DTA in writing, in whatever format the school chooses, so that it is clear to DTA that school attendance information has been received for the quarter in question.

All attendance reports should be sent to the attention of the DTA liaison.

### **Due Dates for Quarterly School Attendance Reports**

DOE and DTA agreed that a quarter shall mean every 45 days that the school is in session. Schools will provide attendance information to DTA within two weeks of the end of each quarter.

### **Definition of Absences**

The following types of absences shall be considered to be excused, and schools will not report a child as absent for these reasons:

- illness certified by a physician;
- hospitalization;
- disability of the child such that it precludes the child from attending school;

(Please note: A child is not presumed to be disabled solely because he or she is entitled to special education services.)

- death of a family member;
- religious holidays; and
- crisis situations, including the need to appear in court.

Schools must count as unexcused any and all absences which do not fall into one of the above categories, including, but not limited to; suspensions, expulsions, and illnesses not certified by a physician. It will be the responsibility of DTA to contact the parent and offer her an opportunity to provide documentation that any or all of the absences were, in fact, excused absences.

### **Monthly Reporting for Those in Probationary Status**

DTA will make the final determination as to whether such absences are excused or unexcused, and will inform the school when it has been determined that a child's parent has been placed on probation. Once a parent is placed on probation, her cash assistance may be reduced if the child has more than three unexcused absences within a calendar month. While in a probationary status, the child's attendance must be provided on a monthly basis. Schools will provide such attendance information to DTA within two weeks of the end of each calendar month.

DOE and DTA have agreed that schools only need to report to DTA when a child has more than three unexcused absences in a month. Schools may use the same process described in the section above entitled **Quarterly Attendance Reports** to report each child's attendance to DTA on a monthly basis. Again, however, the school should notify DTA if the child is no longer enrolled at that school. The DTA form will contain a section to check off in such cases. If a child transferred to another school during the month, the school should provide the number of unexcused absences for that child for the portion of the month that the child attended that school--even if it is less than four. This will enable DTA to calculate the total number of unexcused absences for the month, when attendance information is obtained from the school to which the child transferred.

If a school has no students who have more than three unexcused absences in a particular month, the school will provide this information to DTA in writing, in whatever format the school chooses, so that it is clear to DTA that school attendance information has been received for the month in question.

All attendance reports should be sent to the attention of the DTA liaison.

DTA will inform the school when/if it is determined that the parent is no longer on probation, so that the school will know that attendance information no longer needs to be provided on a monthly basis. (For your information, a parent may be taken off probation when the child has less than ten days of unexcused absences in the six preceding school months. This determination will be made by DTA.)

### **When a School May Cease Attendance Reporting on a Child**

Children 14 years of age and older are not subject to the Learnfare requirement. Therefore, a school may cease to report attendance information on a child as soon as that child reaches the age of 14.

If a child is no longer enrolled in the school which received the initial authorization to provide attendance information to DTA, that school will inform DTA as outlined in the

sections above entitled **Quarterly Attendance Reports** and **Monthly Reporting for Those in Probationary Status**, and will cease to provide attendance information to DTA on that child. As noted in these sections, however, in such cases the school will provide the number of unexcused absences for that child for the portion of the reporting period that the child attended that school, regardless of the number--even if it is less than eight. This will enable DTA to calculate the total number of unexcused absences, when attendance information is obtained from the school to which the child transferred.

The school will also cease to report attendance information whenever DTA informs the school in writing that such information is no longer necessary. (This will occur, for example, if the family ceases to receive TAFDC benefits.)

### **For Your Information**

DTA will provide DOE with a list of all of its local offices, their addresses, phone numbers, and the geographic area they serve. Schools will also be provided with the names and phone numbers of the Learnfare liaison in each DTA office.

DOE will provide DTA with the names, addresses and phone numbers of all of the schools in the Commonwealth.

This protocol assumes that the Board of Education will vote at the June meeting to amend its Student Records Regulations to add "dates of attendance" to the list of information that may be released, unless the parent or eligible student notifies the school that such information shall not be released. [See 603 CMR 27.07(4)(a)] DOE will inform you of any changes to the Student Records Regulations.

### **Teen Parents' School Attendance**

Under welfare reform, TAFDC benefits will not be provided to a family headed by a parent under the age of 20 unless such parent has graduated from, or is attending a program for a high school diploma or a GED.

DTA may choose to require teen parents to provide their report cards or some other acceptable written documentation signed by a school authority to verify their school attendance. DOE and DTA have agreed that schools will assist teen parents in providing such documentation if the teen parent or the teen parent's guardian/parent requests such assistance.

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