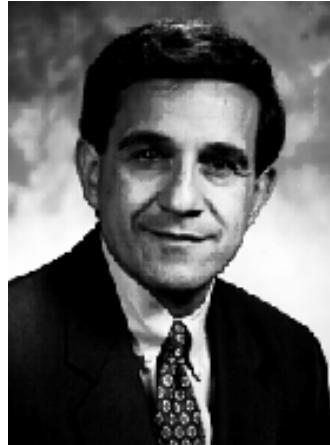




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## Commissioner's Update

April 18, 1996

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

There have been a number of questions I have received recently from districts about implementing the state initiative on the principles of effective teaching and effective administrative leadership. To answer these questions, I have prepared a very simple [one page summary and a one page form](#) for you to use. This is the first item in the coordinated mailing.

In addition to this item, you will find four other documents on current matters. I hope you will also help me in distributing these locally to staff who would be interested and in your wider school community as well.

1. [Questions and Answers on school-related welfare reform issues](#)
2. [Information on school choice](#)
3. "Excellence in Mentoring" regional seminar invitation (May and June dates available)  
[ No longer available ]
4. ["High Expectations Institute" regional seminar invitation](#) (May dates available)

I hope you find these materials useful. As always, please refer to our Internet site (<http://www.doe.mass.edu>) for these and other documents, notices, press releases and other matters of interest.

All the best, and

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education



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## Welfare Reform

**To:** School Superintendents, School Principals

**From:** Robert Antonucci, Commissioner of Education Joseph Gallant,  
Commissioner of Department of Transitional Assistance

**Date:** April 18, 1996

**Re:** Welfare Reform

On June 15, 1995 and November 1, 1995, we jointly distributed information about the new welfare reform law -- Chapter 5 of the Acts of 1995 -- and how it affects local school districts. The [June 15th memorandum](#) provided pre liminary information about the new welfare reform law, and the attendance reporting requirements of the law. The November 1st memorandum provided more detailed procedures, including the Learnfare implementation date, and the specific attendance reporting periods. Copies of these memos are available for your convenience on the Internet at <http://www.doe.mass.edu>. At this time, we would like to provide you with additional information which will answer questions commonly asked about the ongoing implementation of the Learnfare program.

Thank you for your assistance in making the implementation of this new law a smooth process for all concerned.

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### Learnfare Questions and Answers

#### Timetable Issues

Q. When are reports due? What time period is covered by each report?

A. There are two types of reports required by the Learnfare provisions of the welfare reform law:

**Quarterly Reports:** Because the definition of a school quarter varies from one community to the other, it was agreed by Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) that a quarter will be defined as every 45 days that a school is in session. Quarterly attendance information must be provided by each school to DTA within two weeks of the end of each 45-day period.

For ease of administration, since the first reports that DTA prepared for the schools were not ready until December 1995, it was agreed that in 1996 schools would consider the first 45-day quarter to begin the first day the school was in session after January 1, 1996. The first attendance reports were then due to DTA within two weeks after the end of that 45-day quarter. The second reporting period began the 46th school day after

January 2 and ends on the last day of the school year. The last attendance report will be due within two weeks of the end of the school year, regardless of the number of days that has elapsed since the prior quarterly report was submitted to DTA.

Beginning with the 1996-1997 school year, the first reporting period will begin on the first school day of the year, and subsequent reporting periods will begin every 45 school days.

During the reporting period, schools will receive a list of all of the students for whom they must provide attendance information for that 45 school day period. The report will also include a separate list identifying all changes from the previous report.

**Monthly Reports for Those in Probationary Status:** Under the welfare reform law, a student is placed in a probationary status if he or she has more than eight unexcused absences during a school quarter. Schools are responsible for providing DTA with the number of unexcused absences in accordance with the guidelines that follow. However, if the parent challenges the number of unexcused absences, DTA will consider any information provided by the parent and make the final determination as to whether absences are excused or unexcused. DTA will provide each school with a monthly report which identifies those students who are in a probationary status. Once a student is placed on probation, the family's cash assistance may be reduced if the student has more than three unexcused absences within a calendar month. While in a probationary status, the student's attendance must be provided by the school to DTA on a monthly basis. Schools must provide such attendance information to DTA within two weeks of the end of each calendar month.

### **Reporting Issues**

**Q. What types of absences must be reported?**

**A. Only unexcused absences need to be reported to DTA. An absence is considered to be excused if it is due to one or more of the following reasons:**

1. illness;
2. hospitalization;
3. disability of the child such that the disability precludes the child from attending school;
4. death of a family member;
5. religious holidays; and
6. crisis situations, including the need to appear in court. (Please note, a child is not presumed to be disabled solely because he or she is entitled to special education services. Any child with a special education curriculum should be expected to attend school regularly unless there are health issues, such as illness, which prevent attendance.)

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 and expulsions. It will be the responsibility of DTA to contact the parent and offer him or her an opportunity to provide documentation that will verify that some or all of the absences reported as unexcused should be allowed as excused absences.

**Q. In what format does school attendance information need to be reported? Can I use my school's current attendance records?**

**A. DTA has provided each school with a report which identifies students at that school**

who are subject to the school attendance reporting requirement. This report includes identifying information such as: 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 DTA worker's identification number; the name and address of the DTA office responsible; and the name of the office's Learnfare Coordinator.

The school may choose to make copies of these reports, and simply annotate them to report the child's attendance to DTA. In this way, all of the identifying information will be present on each attendance report. If the school prefers to use another system, including an automated report, it may do so as long as it attaches copies of the monthly reports provided by DTA, so that identifying information such as the mother's name and SSN, and the worker's identifying number are included for each child whose attendance is being reported. DTA wants to make this process as simple as possible for schools; therefore, the school may use any reporting method it chooses, as long as all of the information needed for accurate reporting, as noted above, is present and can be easily understood by DTA staff.

### **Further Questions**

Q. Whom do I call if I have a question?

A. Each DTA local office has designated a staff person to serve as the Learnfare Liaison. If you have any questions, feel free to call him or her. A copy of the name and phone number of each office's Learnfare Liaison is attached for your convenience.

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## School Choice Participation Vote School Year 96/97

### Memorandum

**To:** Superintendent of Schools

**From:** Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education

**Date:** April 18, 1996

Changes in the School Choice Law contained in the [Education Reform Act of 1993](#) presume that each school committee will admit non-resident students under the choice program unless there is a vote to the contrary by June 1 of each year, following a public hearing on the issue of whether or not to participate.

The Department of Education needs to receive a written statement if your district withdraws from school choice or it has to be presumed that your district is participating in the School Choice Program for the 96/97 school year.

Please notify the Department of Education of your district's school committee vote and the reasons for such a vote by June 28, 1996 so that we may publish a list of participating districts. You can mail, FAX or E-Mail the notification to:

Massachusetts Department of Education  
School Finance Services  
School Choice Program  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148  
or  
FAX: (781) 338-6530  
or  
E-Mail: [sfinance@doe.mass.edu](mailto:sfinance@doe.mass.edu)

Thank you for your assistance.

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## High Expectations Institute

Dear Friends,

The Massachusetts Department of Education invites you to join us for a one day regional institute at which Massachusetts educators will discuss successful practices they are using to create schools that work for entire school communities.

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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### Dates, Sites, and Featured Speakers

**Institute I:**

May 8, 1996  
Northampton Hotel, 36 King Street

**Presenters:**

A.M. - Ron Berger, Teacher, Shutesbury Public Schools  
P.M. - Bob Swartz, National Center for Teaching Thinking

**Institute II:**

May 13, 1996  
Randolph Lantana, 43 Scanlon Drive

**Presenters:**

A.M. - John D'Auria, Principal, Wellesley Middle School  
Margaret Pickett, Teacher  
Yolanda Rodriguez, Teacher  
P.M. - Sandy Gilmore, Efficacy Institute

**Institute III:**

May 22, 1996  
Worcester Holiday Inn, 500 Lincoln Street

**Presenters:**

A.M. - Teachers Greg Ciardi  
21 with Sullivan Middle School  
Worcester, MA  
P.M. - Ann Wheelock, Author of Crossing the Tracks:

## **Agenda**

**8:30 - 9:00 a.m.** Registration and Coffee

**9 a.m. - 12 p.m.** Morning Session: Interactive Presentation

**12:00 - 1:00 p.m.** Light Lunch

**1 - 3 p.m.** Afternoon Session: Interactive Presentation

Institutes will engage participants in the following areas:

- How schools, classrooms, and communities could look when all are held to high expectations
- How to set high expectations for everyone in the school community; communicated through mechanisms such as:
  - Individual, school, district, and state goals and standards
  - Core values
  - Assessment Practices
- How to engage school communities in getting started and continuing to help create a climate of high expectations for all students, teachers, support staff, parents, business partners, etc.
- How curriculum frameworks can be used to achieve high expectations
- What instructional strategies build on children's strengths and are inclusive
- How to get children ready to learn

## **School Team**

Districts may send multiple teams. Choose from the following...

- Superintendent
- Principal
- School Council Member
- Teacher
- Specialist
- Health Coordinator
- Guidance Counselor
- Parent
- Central Office Staff (Title I, Special Education, Vocational, Bilingual, Equity, Metco, etc.)
- School Committee Member
- Community Member

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## **Registration**

**Deadline:**

One week prior to the institute. Space is limited, so please register early. You will hear from us only if space is not available in your first choice of institute. No confirmation will be sent.

The Institutes are provided free of charge.

Resources will be available in areas such as Nutrition, Early Learning, and Curriculum Frameworks

- All participants will receive certificates verifying their attendance at the Institute.

**For more information:**

Please call 781-338-3000 to contact Carole Forbes or Dot Earle.

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**Directions to Institute Sites:**

**Northampton Hotel**

From The Mass Pike (I-90) East or West:

Take Exit 4. Take I-91 North to Exit 18. Turn left onto Route 5 North. The hotel is located on the left in approximately .5 mile in downtown Northampton.

**Lantana (Reception Hall)**

From Route 93 North or South:

Take Exit 5A "Randolph - Rt. 28." At first set of lights, take right onto Scanlon Drive. Lantana is at 43 Scanlon Drive.

**Worcester Holiday Inn**

From The East (Boston/Framingham):

Take the Mass Pike (I-90) West to 495 North. Take 495 North to 290 West. Take Exit 20 (Burncoat/Lincoln Street) off of 290 West. Bear right off of the ramp onto Lincoln Street. The Holiday Inn is .5 mile on left.

**From The West**

Take Mass Pike (I-90) East to Exit 10 "290 East." Take Exit 20 (Burncoat/Lincoln Street) off of 290 East. Go straight through first set of lights onto a one way street. At the next set of lights take left onto Lincoln Street. Holiday Inn is .5 mile on the left.

**From The Leominster/Fitchburg Area**

Take 190 South to Worcester. Take the left hand exit for Burncoat/Lincoln Street. Stay towards the right off the ramp to a set of lights. Go straight through the light onto a one way street. At the next set of lights take a left onto Lincoln Street. The Holiday Inn is .5 mile on the left.

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