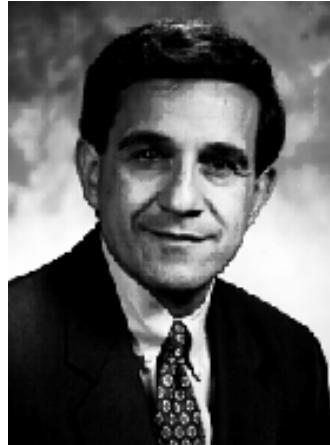


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Commissioner's Update

December 16, 1996

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

As we close out this calendar year, I have taken some time to reflect on the twelve months past. Looking over the 17 coordinated mailings, you will recall reviewing drafts of [curriculum frameworks](#), receiving advisories on comprehensive health education, performance standards, welfare reform and regulatory reform, being notified about grant opportunities and conferences, and hearing updates on major issues before the [Board of Education](#). We all have had a full plate.

In this final mailing of 1996, I have enclosed the following items for you to review and distribute to the staff you designate:

1. New draft of history and social science curriculum framework--comments requested by January 6
[No longer available]
2. Technology conferences scheduled for January dates
[No longer available]
3. Packet of information updating status of [state technology bond funds, other technology initiatives](#)
4. [Memorandum on new state testing requirement for teacher certification](#)
5. [Board-in-brief summary](#) of Board of Education meeting December 11 in Worcester. Please note especially the section on curriculum frameworks, and the Board vote on time and learning. I will have a further elaboration on time and learning issues in my first mailing in January.
6. [Math/science national teacher award application](#) available

I have enjoyed our many opportunities to see each other and talk about our common concerns during the past year, and look forward to more opportunities in 1997. Have a great holiday season and a healthy, relaxing and enjoyable New Year.

All the best, and

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci
Commissioner of Education

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Educational Technology

Memorandum

To: Superintendents
From: Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner
Date: December 15, 1996

Last month I sent you an update on the myriad of educational technology initiatives currently underway. In it, I included information about the release of the first round of Educational Technology Bond Matching Grants to 25 districts. Attached to this memo is a copy of the [1st Round Grant Application](#). This application is enclosed as an example only to indicate to you the funding priorities of the Information Technology Division of the Secretary of Administration and Finance, who oversees all state bonds, including this bond for technology.

As you can see in the application, ITD intends to set a high expectation for the quality of each districts networking and professional development plans. To assist you in ensuring that these two components of your educational technology plan are as strong as possible I have also attached three other related documents:

- An invitation for schools to put together teams to attend the Department's January educational technology professional development conferences. These sessions will highlight successful educational technology practices from several Lighthouse districts and will provide information on several exciting new grant programs the Department will be administering under the new Federal Technology Literacy Challenge Grant.
- An application to participate in the April 5 [Mass NetDay](#) as a partner district. In addition to receiving discounts on goods and services and support on organizing community volunteers, partner districts will receive a guidebook on school networking design and installation.
- A copy of the [Benton Foundation's recent report](#) on how the Universal Service Fund will discount telecommunications and networking services for schools and libraries. My staff has begun meeting with ITD, the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, and the Massachusetts Attorney General's office to develop a plan for implementing universal access in Massachusetts.

I encourage you to make full use of all three of these important resources.

In next month's mailing, I will include an update on the Department's Information Management System with worksheets for you to prepare for the interviews and site visits which Digital and Communica will begin in January.

If you have any questions about any educational technology initiatives, you can access additional information at the Department's Web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu>, send

an e-mail to bozols@doe.mass.edu, call the Department's new educational technology hotline at 781-338-3000 or attend one of the monthly ET Advisory Committee meetings.

I look forward to working closely with you as we move aggressively forward to strengthen technology for the benefit of the students in our schools.

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Testing Requirements for Teacher Certification

Memorandum

To: Education Deans, College Contact Persons, Certification Candidates, and Other Interested Parties

From: Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education

Date: November 22, 1996

Massachusetts statute requires that certification candidates demonstrate that they have "passed a test established by the board which shall consist of two parts: (A) a writing section which shall demonstrate the communication and literacy skills necessary for effective instruction and improved communication between school and parents; and (B) the subject matter knowledge for the certificate." [M.G.L. c.71, s.38G]

At its meeting on November 18, 1996, the Board of Education authorized me to announce that as of January 1, 1998, all candidates for teacher certification shall be required to pass such a two part certification examination. The Department soon will issue a Request for Responses in accordance with state procurement requirements to select a test vendor for this purpose.

These tests are an integral part of the Department's implementation of Education Reform to improve student learning. They also are entirely within the spirit of the Report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, released in September 1996. The report's first recommendation is:

Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers. The Commission recommends that we renew the national promise to bring every American child up to world class standards in core academic areas and to develop and enforce rigorous standards for teacher preparation, initial licensing, and continuing development.

As the time for meeting the test requirement draws near, we will ensure that teacher education programs and certification candidates have access to study guides and other materials to help in preparing for the examinations. We rely on the leaders of teacher preparation programs to ensure that students are advised of the testing requirement and encouraged to take the tests as early as possible in their programs to allow for remediation and a second administration if necessary. We also expect preparation programs to play a role in assisting their students to prepare for the tests and to provide appropriate services to low-scoring students who may merit remediation and retention in a program.

I am confident that these tests will play a positive role in assuring a world class corps of teachers for Massachusetts in the future, and I look forward to working with all who are

involved in teacher preparation to achieve that goal.

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Board in Brief

Friday, December 13, 1996

This is [Board in Brief](#), issued at the request of Commissioner Bob Antonucci, to bring you up to date on [Board of Education](#) developments of interest to the Department staff. The following is a report on the Board meeting held on Wednesday, December 11, 1996 at the City View School in Worcester. After the meeting, Board and Department staff toured the Seven Hills Charter School across the street.

[Minutes from the December 11 Board Meeting](#)

GED/Assessment

The Board voted 5 to 3 to reaffirm its November 18 decision to administer the General Educational Development (GED) test next spring to all high school seniors. The Board specified the GED would only be administered to high school students in 1997, and that the results would not be a condition of graduation or reported on a student's record. Board member Abigail Thernstrom praised Chairman John Silber and Governor Weld for using the GED issue to focus attention on the need for accelerating development of statewide assessments to improve accountability in public education.

Chairman Silber said the results on next spring's GED test might serve as a "wake-up" call to parents and schools if students do poorly on the exam. While saying it was never his intention to make the GED a permanent part of high school student assessment, Silber said the GED would provide parents with more information than the MEAP assessment because it measures individual student performance. He also said the GED would give the state a "head start" on a high school exit examination, and would not interfere with development of the statewide assessment to test students on the specific [curriculum frameworks](#).

Board members William Irwin, Jr., Patricia Crutchfield and Alexis Vagianos voted against administering the GED. Student member Vagianos decided against the GED after taking the test and questioning its relevance to her high school coursework. She also doubted whether many high school seniors, many of whom have already been accepted to college, would take the test seriously.

In a related matter, Rep. Harold Lane (D-Holden) told the Board he has filed legislation to block the spring GED exam. Calling the GED a "distraction at best," Lane said he opposed the GED because it does not measure actual coursework and is not tied to higher standards. Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Executive Director Peter Finn, MFT President Kathy Kelley, and MTA President Meline Kasparian also testified against the GED.

In addition to supporting a one-time administration of the GED, the Board adopted a proposal from Board member Roberta Schaefer to administer an "off-the-shelf" standardized assessment to all 10th graders next spring, provided funds are available in the Board budget this year. Commissioner Robert Antonucci said the Board would probably need a supplemental appropriation for this new test because funds are not available. The Board also voted to accelerate the schedule for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Under the new timetable, the full battery of exams in all core academic areas will now be given in the spring of 1998. Additionally, the Board voted to begin developing standards, based on the Advanced Placement exam, for the Certificate of Advanced Mastery, specified in the [Education Reform Act](#).

Budget

The Board unanimously approved its \$2.941 billion budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 1998. The Board also agreed to submit to the Governor's Office an alternative budget format incorporating Board member James Peyser's block grant recommendations. The total funding level for both budgets is the same. Board member Peyser said his proposal would consolidate 13 existing grant programs into a single block grant to permit districts greater flexibility in programming. This approach, Peyser said, allows schools to devote time and staff to achieving outcomes, rather than complying with specific grant requirements.

A motion by Chairman Silber to increase further the Board's request for early childhood education was defeated on a 4 to 4 tie. Last month, the Board agreed to increase its request for early childhood programs to \$100 million. Chairman Silber's motion would have raised that amount to \$134 million. The Chairman said the unmet need for early childhood programs is \$34 million in Boston alone. "There is no question that over a period of time we could use an additional \$500 million," said Chairman Silber. He added that every dollar spent on preparing young children for school saves \$6 that might otherwise be spent for remedial education and social services.

Time and Learning

Acting on a recommendation by Commissioner Antonucci, the Board voted 7 to 1 to maintain without change the [Student Learning Time regulations](#) adopted in 1994, which take full effect in September 1997. The Board agreed to postpone consideration of any changes in the regulations. Included in the vote was a Board resolution encouraging districts to explore alternative scheduling and creative ways to extend the school day within existing budget constraints, during future collective bargaining opportunities.

At the November meeting, Board member Edwin Delattre questioned the current regulations because they reference the more general Common Core of Learning [[HTML](#) | [PDF](#)] rather than the specific core academic subjects enumerated in the [Education Reform Act](#). Board members Roberta Schaefer and Abigail Thernstrom argued, however, that high stakes statewide assessments will provide a powerful incentive for districts to devote adequate structured learning time to those core subjects. Board members concluded that while the term "core subject" should be used according to the meaning in the statute, it would be disruptive to change the Student Learning Time regulations now.

Curriculum Frameworks

The Board gave a strong endorsement to the revised draft curriculum framework for

English Language Arts. Several members suggested a number of possible improvements, but said they expected to approve the framework at the January meeting. "This is not only a great improvement; it is a significant document in its own right," said Board member James Peyser. Members made several suggestions for changes, including specifying the skills and works of literature that should be taught at each grade, rather than in broader grade levels. The revised draft has been distributed widely for public comment, and the suggestions from readers will be reviewed and considered for inclusion in the final document.

A Board subcommittee of James Peyser, Roberta Schaefer and Abigail Thernstrom has revised the draft curriculum framework in History/Social Science. Mr. Peyser explained that the subcommittee based its draft on the nationally-acclaimed Virginia learning standards, as well as on the most recent Massachusetts draft. The revised History/Social Science draft is now being distributed for public comment. The Board will discuss it at the January meeting.

By-law Change/New Business

By unanimous vote, the Board adopted a new by-law requiring that except in an emergency, or upon a two-thirds vote, the Board will act on a matter of policy only when the matter has been discussed at the previous meeting.

Mary-Beth Fafard

The Board honored Senior Associate Commissioner Mary-Beth Fafard, who has left the Department of Education for new duties as Director of Programs and Services at the New England Regional LAB at Brown University.

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Outstanding Math And Science Teachers Sought For Presidential Awards Program

Commissioner Robert V. Antonucci announced today that the Massachusetts Department of Education is inviting outstanding math and science teachers to apply for the 1997 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching (PAESMT).

The program, sponsored federally by the [National Science Foundation](#), identifies outstanding science and mathematics teachers, kindergarten through 12th grade, in each state and the four U.S. jurisdictions.

"I encourage parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members to call us with the names of outstanding math and science teachers so we can send them an application," said Commissioner of Education Robert V. Antonucci. "Math and science teachers wishing to receive an application can also contact us."

Massachusetts is entitled to select three finalists in each of the four award groups: elementary mathematics, elementary science, secondary mathematics, and secondary science. The secondary groups include middle, junior, and senior high school teachers.

Each finalist will receive \$750 from the National Science Foundation, and be eligible for the Presidential Award (one for each award group). The Presidential Award includes a \$7,500 National Science Foundation grant to the award winner's school, and an expense-paid trip for the award winner and a guest to Washington D.C.

All K-12 teachers may apply. Teachers from all locations (urban, suburban, small town and rural) and all under represented minority groups are encouraged to participate.

To meet the National Science Foundation's guidelines, completed application need to be postmarked by February 28, 1997. You may request to have an application sent to you or to someone else by sending the name and address to Rick Atkins at ratkins@doe.mass.edu. If you have questions about the PAESMT program, please contact Gisele Zangari at 781-338-3000.

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