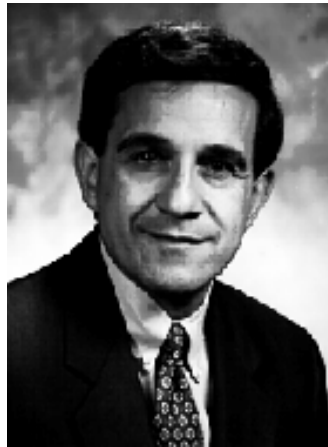


**> Commissioner's Update Archive****Commissioner's Update**

September 17, 1997

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

I am pleased to provide a relatively slim package of materials in this coordinated mailing, knowing well that this is a very busy month for all of you. In this mailing you will find:

1. The 1997-1998 Massachusetts Department of Education Professional Development Program, with the comprehensive calendar of opportunities for professional development sponsored by the DOE for the year;
[No longer available]
2. [An invitation to prospective charter school leaders to attend a conference for applicants on Saturday, October 4 in Worcester;](#)
3. Several items concerning the Massachusetts Summit: The Promise of Our Youth, set for Sunday October 26 at Northeastern University in Boston. This day-long event will set the action plan for Massachusetts for achieving educational, service, mentorship, health and safety goals which the state has committed to achieve by January 1, 2000. It is the Massachusetts follow-up to the President's summit with Colin Powell held in Philadelphia in April. I am encouraging Superintendents, charter school leaders and others to contact their municipal officials to join the local delegations which will be attending this important occasion.
[No longer available]
4. A [memorandum about "Learnfare," the program in which specific school attendance requirements are set for certain school age children as a condition of eligibility for state benefits, with instructions for a streamlined school reporting process;](#)
5. [Materials for the spring 1998 dual enrollment program for qualified high school juniors and seniors; and](#)
6. [An invitation for participation in a grade 4-6 student art contest.](#)

As always, I would appreciate it if you would copy and distribute the materials to your staff. All of the documents are also on our website at www.doe.mass.edu for easy viewing.

With all best wishes, and

Sincerely,

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

Charter School Leadership Applicants Conference

Saturday, October 4, 1997
8:30 AM to 2:00 PM
Seven Hills Charter School, Worcester

This conference is for anyone considering applying for a public school charter. It will address questions about Commonwealth and Horace Mann charter schools. We expect it to be helpful to prospective applicants for charter school leadership, and attendance is voluntary.

The conference will begin at 8:30 AM and conclude no later than 2:00 PM. Lunch will be provided.

Topics to be covered include:

- An overview of the application procedure, relevant deadlines, review process, and criteria for approval.
- School accountability, standards, and student testing.
- School leadership and governance.
- Public school laws and regulations.
- Budgets and finance.
- Resources available for applicants and charter schools.

Space is limited, so please register soon. We may need to limit attendance to three representatives per applicant group. You can register by phone by calling Lee Ferrante at (617) 727-0075; by faxing the registration form to (617) 727-0049; or by mailing the form to the Department of Education, Boston Office, One Ashburton Place, Room 1403, Boston, MA 02108.

Directions to Seven Hills Charter School

From Boston. Take 90W (Auburn/Worcester) to 290E, then continue on 290E. Get off at exit 16 (E. Central St.). Stay to your right through traffic light up the hill which is Eastern Ave. Make your first right on top of the hill onto Gage St. The school is on your left.

From MA Pike. Take 495N to 290W. Continue on 290W. Get off at exit 16 (E. Central St.). At the bottom of the ramp make a left at the traffic light. Make another left at the next traffic light onto Eastern Ave. Stay to your right. Make a right on the top of the hill onto Gage St. The school is on your left.

Please print [registration form](#) and mail/fax or call today.

[E-mail this page](#) | [Print View](#)

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

Learnfare

To: School Superintendents
School Principals

From: Claire McIntire, Commissioner
Department of Transitional Assistance

Robert Antonucci, Commissioner
Department of Education

Date: September 15, 1997

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with information about a change to be made in the way schools report attendance information to the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) under the Learnfare program. **Effective with the first Learnfare reports issued in September 1997, schools will mail their quarterly and monthly attendance reports to a Centralized Learnfare Unit (CLU) in Boston, rather than to DTA local offices across the state.** This change is being implemented in an effort to simplify the reporting process for schools.

The first reports to be affected by this change are the quarterly and monthly reports which must be completed by schools by October 15, 1997. When you receive quarterly and monthly reports from DTA in the future, they will contain the return address of the Centralized Learnfare Unit (CLU) for your convenience. You may also call 1-888-236-8096 if you have any questions or concerns.

For the benefit of Superintendents who have been newly hired for the 1998 academic year, this memo also contains an overview of the Learnfare program intended to answer those questions most commonly asked about Learnfare.

Please note that reporting attendance information for students subject to Learnfare is required under state law. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

LEARNFARE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Overview of the Learnfare Program

Q. What is Learnfare?

A. State law (Chapter 5 of the Acts of 1995) establishes specific school attendance requirements for certain school age children as a condition of eligibility for benefits under the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program. These requirements are known as **Learnfare**. The law also requires schools to provide attendance information on children subject to Learnfare.

On a quarterly basis, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) provides each school with a list of the children enrolled in that school who are subject to Learnfare. At the end of each calendar quarter, the school must report to DTA any student on the list who has more than eight unexcused absences. Under the law, such students must be placed on probation by DTA. Each month DTA provides schools with lists of the students who are on probation, and the schools must provide attendance information on a monthly basis for these students for as long as they are on probation. Students are removed from their parents' TAFDC grants in any month for which they have more than three unexcused absences while on probation.

Q. Who is Subject to Learnfare?

A. Learnfare 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.)

Q. Do I need a release from a parent to provide attendance information to DTA?

A. Under Student Records Regulations promulgated by the Board of Education "dates of attendance" are included on 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)] Therefore, attendance information must be provided to DTA for any child for whom it is requested, unless the child's parent notifies the school that such information cannot be released. In the unlikely event that this happens, make a notation to this effect on the quarterly and/or monthly report, and DTA staff will pursue this matter with the recipient.

Reporting Deadlines

Q. When are reports due?

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

Quarterly Reports: Quarterly attendance information must be provided by each school to DTA within two weeks of the end of each calendar quarter. Calendar quarters end on the last days of September, December, March and June.

Monthly Reports for Those in Probationary Status: For students in a probationary status, schools must provide monthly 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 student's name; the student'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; and the address and phone number of the Centralized Learnfare Unit.

The school may choose to make copies of these reports, and simply annotate them to report the student'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 all the data fields appearing on the DTA report are included on the school's report, and copies of the DTA reports are attached. DTA wants to make this process as simple as possible for schools; therefore, the school may use any reporting method it chooses, however, it is necessary that all of the information needed for accurate reporting, as noted above, is present and can be easily understood by DTA staff.

Questions/Problems

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

A. Call the Centralized Learnfare Unit at 1-888-236-8096 if you have a question or concern.

[E-mail this page](#) | [Print View](#)

Massachusetts Department of Education

[Search](#) · [Site Map](#) · [Privacy](#) · [Site Info](#) · [Contact DOE](#)

[Dual Enrollment Home](#)[Family & Community](#) > [Alternative Education](#) >

A New Dual Enrollment Program

To: Superintendents and Charter School Leaders
High School Principals

From: Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education

Date: September 16, 1997

Subject: Dual Enrollment Program

I am pleased to provide you with this update on the Dual Enrollment Program, established by the Education Reform Act of 1993, through which qualified high school students can enroll in courses at public colleges and universities at state expense. Approximately 850 students participated in the program in the Fall 1996 semester, over 1,100 students participated in the Spring 1997 semester, and nearly 900 students participated in the Fall 1997 semester.

At about the same time you receive this, high school guidance counselors will receive a mailing for the Dual Enrollment Program for the Spring 1998 semester. That mailing will include an application form and a document describing the program. I have enclosed copies of these for your information.

Through the Dual Enrollment Program, qualified high school students can earn both high school and college credit simultaneously. The Department of Education will reimburse Massachusetts public institutions of higher education an amount per credit for tuition and fees for participating students. I encourage you to promote this opportunity to qualified students who would benefit from college-level course work.

[Dual Enrollment Brochure](#)

[Dual Enrollment Home](#)

[E-mail this page](#) | [Print View](#)

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

Massachusetts Governor's Committee on Physical Fitness and Sports (MGCPFS) Art Contest

September 23, 1997

Dear Principal:

The Department of Education and the Massachusetts Governor's Committee on Physical Fitness and Sports (MGCPFS) Youth Subcommittee are pleased to invite your school to participate in an art contest.

The purpose of the contest is to promote physical fitness and sports participation among youth. The contest is open to fourth through sixth grade students in the Commonwealth's public schools. The artwork will be used to illustrate educational materials and will be exhibited at various sites around the state.

Winners of the contest along with their schools will be recognized at the Great Massachusetts Workout on the Boston Common in May 1998. This event is sponsored by the MGCPFS to educate the citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts about the importance of physical activity and to motivate people of all ages to begin exercising on a regular basis. Last year, a host of celebrities participated in the event which featured health and fitness demonstrations, exhibit tables and a fitness walk around the Boston Common.

It is our hope that by having children think about and artistically express their views and experiences on physical activities, they will become more motivated to participate on their own.

Enclosed is an instruction sheet on the contest. ([Download instruction sheet](#)). Please return the bottom half to us no later than October 15, if your school is planning to participate. Thank you for your interest, and best wishes for a creative, enjoyable and successful program.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci
Commissioner of Education

[E-mail this page](#) | [Print View](#)