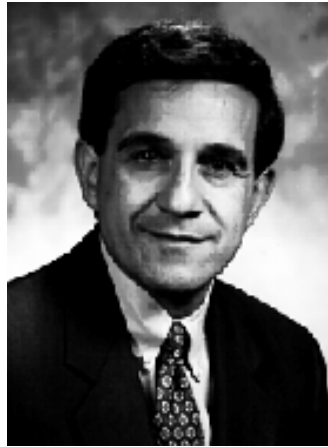


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## Commissioner's Update

December 2, 1997

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

I hope your Thanksgiving holiday was terrific, and that you will enjoy other festive occasions later this month.

In the past few weeks, we have received a few inquiries about the 180 day school year and weather-related closings and other emergency situations. As you know, for the past three years I have taken the position that 180 days is 180 days, and that school districts need to schedule a longer school year to anticipate weather-related closings or other emergencies, and that schedules need to be adapted if necessary in February, March, April, May and/or June to ensure the 180 days of school for students. I am continuing to take that position this year, and am committed to work with you to be sure that the 180 day year for all districts is preserved.

In this bimonthly mailing, I have enclosed six items for your use and for you to distribute to staff. These are:

- [Reminder--Reimbursements available for transporting low income students under school choice or to charter schools](#)
- Request for Services for Spring, 1998 Massachusetts Department of Education evening/weekend/school vacation content institutes in English Language Arts and History/Social Science  
[ No longer available ]
- [Flyer regarding uninsured children health insurance awareness campaign](#)
- [Announcement of 1998-1999 Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program opportunity for one K-12 teacher](#)
- [Memorandum regarding school bus driver shortage](#)
- Handy rolodex card for Massachusetts Department of Education with new area code  
[ No longer available ]

I will make every effort to make this the final coordinated mailing of 1997. If it is, let me take this opportunity to wish you, your staff, family and friends a safe, healthy and happy holiday season, and a great new year for 1998.

All the best, and

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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## Reimbursements Available for Transporting Low Income Students Under School Choice or Charter Schools

December 1, 1997

Dear Superintendent or Charter School Leader:

I am writing to remind you that reimbursements are available for the transportation of low income students who travel under school choice or attend a charter school. Do you know, this state reimbursement program has been in effect for three years. Recently, it was expanded to include transportation costs incurred on behalf of charter school students.

We are encouraging school districts and charter schools to make this option available to school choice or charter school students, to determine whether a student is eligible under the income guidelines, and if so, to arrange for transportation under one of the available options. Any school or district that provides transportation may apply for reimbursement under this program. We are asking the receiving school choice district or the charter school to apply for reimbursement for parent arranged transportation. Reimbursement requests will be processed on a quarterly basis.

Attached again for your information and use are Application Forms to be sent to households, Reimbursement Claim Forms and Roster of Transported Students to be completed and submitted to the Department of Education as well as other sample forms and letters for use in notifying parents of the status of their application and documenting claims for reimbursement. [\[DOWNLOAD all forms.\]](#) If you have any questions, please contact Christine Lynch at: Massachusetts Department of Education, c/o School Finance Services, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5023 or by phone at (781) 338-3000 or by FAX at (781) 338-6530.

I urge you to take full advantage of this reimbursement opportunity, and thank you for your work to support this program.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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## Health Care Awareness Campaign for Uninsured Children

December 2, 1997

Dear Superintendent and Charter School Leader:

The Governor's Office, the Division of Medical Assistance and the Department of Public Health have combined resources to develop an awareness campaign aimed at increasing access to health care for uninsured children in your district.

The campaign's goal is to reach all Massachusetts parents with flyers that contain this message: There is no reason a child or teen in Massachusetts has to go without health insurance. Within coming weeks, Governor Cellucci will ask all Massachusetts school principals to distribute these flyers in their schools directly to their students. Students should be encouraged to bring the flyer home to their parents. I have enclosed a flyer for your reference.

I would greatly appreciate your help in doing all you can to ensure the campaign's success. If you need any additional information, please feel free to contact Alan Safran, my Executive Director, at 781-338-3000. Thank you for helping to spread this important message.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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**There is no reason why a child or a teen in  
Massachusetts should go without health  
care.**

Every uninsured child and teen in Massachusetts can get health care coverage at little or no cost. Children aged 18 and younger can enroll in a program with either full coverage or primary and preventive care. The kind of coverage you get depends on your family income. You can get services no matter what your immigration status is. The information you give us when you apply is confidential and is not shared with other agencies.

**MassHealth** is a health insurance program with a full range of benefits. It pays for doctors' office visits, prescription drugs, dental services, counseling, hospital services, and other health-care services. In many cases parents can get MassHealth as well as children.

Children in families not eligible for MassHealth can get more limited coverage for primary and preventive care through the **Children's Medical Security Plan**. CMSP does not pay for hospital services. Some families may have to pay a small monthly fee, depending on their income.

**Call for more information:**

**MassHealth  
1-800-841-2900**

**CMSP  
1-800-909-CMSP (2677)**

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## Announcement of the 1998-1999 Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program

**TO:** Superintendents of Schools, Principals of Schools, Headmasters/Directors of Charter and Private Schools

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

**DATE:** December 2, 1997

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I am pleased to announce the application process for the 1998 Christa McAuliffe Fellow. The Fellow will be chosen based on the quality of the proposal and the relationship to Massachusetts education reform initiatives, specifically the curriculum frameworks. The 1998 Fellow will complete his or her project during the 1998-1999 school year.

The Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program is a federally-funded program to provide fellowships nationally to outstanding teachers to enable and encourage them to continue their education, develop innovative programs, consult with or assist local educational agencies, charter schools, private schools or private school systems, and to engage in other educational activities that will improve the knowledge and skills of teachers and the education of students. The Fellowship honors the late Sharon Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who served as an astronaut on the Challenger Space Shuttle in January 1986. The Fellowship award will be \$36,400. In addition to the Fellowship award, the Fellow may receive all or a portion of his or her regular salary depending upon the extent to which the Fellow continues his or her current teaching duties.

The requirements and [application](#) for the fellowship program are attached. Please feel free to make multiple copies of the application and related materials, distribute them throughout your system, and use any other methods that will help to make this award accessible to the teachers in your district.

In order for all reviews of applications to be finished in time, completed applications need to be postmarked by February 9, 1998. A seven member statewide panel will be assisting me in the review process. I urge you to encourage the teachers in your school system to apply for this unique opportunity. As we continue to work together to implement education reform, we are excited to present this opportunity for educators to take a lead in the implementation of Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

If you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact Melanie Winklosky or Deborah Walker at (781) 338-3000. Thank you for considering this opportunity.

### **Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program Requirements and Application**

#### Purpose

The Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program is a unique, annual state-based recognition program for experienced teachers which results in the development and completion of a product useful to the improvement of classroom instruction. Funding is provided by the Council of Chief State School Officers. The goal in Massachusetts is to have the Fellow develop "tools" or provide additional capacity that will assist in the implementation of state curriculum frameworks, work closely with the Department of Education, and present the project at the Department's 1999 Summer Institutes.

#### Priorities

Fellowship projects must focus on one or more of the following priority areas related to education reform:

- Classroom practices that model teaching, learning, and assessment that support the implementation of curriculum frameworks and improve student performance;
- Models of exemplary professional development plans/programs that focus on the curriculum frameworks and/or assessment;
- The expanding use of technologies for educational improvement, as they relate to the frameworks; or
- Models and tools to assist districts to review, select, and implement local standards-based curricula aligned with the curriculum frameworks.

*\*NOTE:* Special attention will be given to projects that relate to the implementation of the curriculum frameworks, particularly proposals related to the English/Language Arts and History/Social Science frameworks.

#### Eligibility

Full-time public, private, and charter school teachers (K-12) who have been employed as teachers for 8 or more years are eligible to apply to the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program. The fellowship award period is 12 months or less. A teacher may not receive a Christa McAuliffe Fellowship for two consecutive years.

#### Requirements for Fellows

Each Christa McAuliffe Fellow is required to return to or remain in a full-time teaching position (in his or her place of employment prior to receiving the fellowship award) for at least 2 years following the completion of the fellowship. Repayment of the award shall be made to the State in the case of fraud or gross noncompliance by any recipient.

#### Project Duration

August 1, 1998 - July 31, 1999

#### Use of Fellowships

There will be one Fellow chosen. The Grant award will be \$36,400. Funds will be sent directly to the Fellow's district. The Fellow will complete the project during the 1998-1999 school year (between 8/1/98 and 7/31/99). With the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks as the focus, the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship may be used for study, research or academic improvement; consultation with or assistance to other school districts or private school systems; development of innovative programs; projects or partnerships that involve the business community and the schools; programs that incorporate the use and the sharing of technologies to help students learn; and expanding or replicating model programs of staff development. Fellows will work closely with the Department of Education and our education reform initiatives. Fellows may choose a full time sabbatical, part-time sabbatical, or pursue Fellowship activities along with full time teaching responsibilities (depending on the agreement reached between the recipient and the school district). In addition to the Fellowship award, the Fellow may receive all or a portion of his/her regular salary depending upon the extent to which the Fellow continues his/her current teaching duties.

#### Selection of Fellows

The Fellowship applications will be reviewed by a seven member statewide panel. Applicants who are chosen as finalists must be available for an interview at the Department of Education in Malden on a date(s) designated by the Department. The final decision on the recipient will be made by the Commissioner of Education, and the announcement of the Fellowship award will be made in the spring at a public ceremony by Commissioner Antonucci and the statewide panel.

#### Annual Conference for McAuliffe Fellows

The Council of Chief State School Officers will sponsor an annual conference for the McAuliffe Fellows. The conference for the 1998 McAuliffe Fellow will be held in August 1999. Specific dates are to be determined.

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## School Bus Driver Shortage

**TO:** Superintendents

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

**DATE:** December 2, 1997

The School Transportation Association of Massachusetts (STAM) has reported to me that the critical shortage of school bus drivers which has been cited in various national media this fall is especially pronounced in Massachusetts.

According to STAM the reasons are varied, but foremost among them is the lack of public appreciation for the school bus driver's job. The association believes that because of the perception of low prestige associated with the job, there is a limited applicant pool. The association notes that with an increased number of recognition programs such as the school bus driver appreciation day sponsored by the Governor's office and Registry of Motor Vehicles on October 20 which was heavily reported by the media, the public will place a greater value on the role of the school bus driver and the number of applicants will increase.

After investigating the job, applicants often lose interest upon learning of the licensing process. The new school bus driver applicant faces up to 40 hours of classroom and behind the wheel instruction under the supervision of a state-certified school bus driver training instructor; a preliminary written examination and a final written exam on school bus laws, regulations, and procedures at the federal, state, and local level: drug and alcohol screening; a Criminal Offender Record Information Act criminal history review; a driving history review; and a strict U.S. Department of Transportation physical examination.

Complicating this process, and contributing to the driver shortage at the all-important start of the school year, are the timeframes for each of these steps. While the school bus company can control the training schedule, it has no control over the delays in obtaining the CORI information or the scheduling of the final behind-the-wheel skills examination and road test. School bus drivers are licensed by the Department of Public Utilities, an agency with only seven examiners to cover the entire state. Each skills, or road, test takes to hours. Although the DPU Transportation Division is extremely cooperative in trying to license drivers, even the extent of working weekends at the start of the school year, staff limitations and federal and state testing requirements contribute to the difficulties providers face in employing sufficient number of drivers.

As a result of these factors, the industry association reports that it takes up to eight weeks to get a new school bus driver licensed. The situation was especially difficult this fall because of revisions made to the Commercial Driver Licensing training manual and to the skills testing program itself. It was typical for company owners themselves to be driving a school bus during the first four to six weeks of the current school year.

The final contributing item is that the school bus industry trains a high percentage of individuals who, after obtaining their Commercial Driving License, never accept employment with the bus company which did the training, but use the license in order to obtain better paying jobs in other transportation fields requiring the CD license. This situation results from the Massachusetts statute forbidding school bus firms from charging fees for their training. To obtain the equivalent license at a commercial driver training school costs more than \$1,000.

In light of our awareness of the school bus driver shortage, I respectfully urge school administrators to communicate with their transportation providers, to investigate the driver situation in their districts and to cooperate with their contractors wherever possible to address this problem.

The Department's concern is based on the obvious relationship between well-trained professional school bus drivers and safety and continuity in the Commonwealth's school transportation system.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

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