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## Commissioner's Update

July 8, 1999

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

I have two updates for you regarding assessment-related matters. First, the Department will once again be seeking educators with strong content expertise to contribute to the development of the next MCAS tests. In August, you will receive application information for candidates to participate on Assessment Development Committees. Second, the third and final statewide Grade Three Iowa Reading Test results will be released on July 16. I have enclosed a pre-publication copy of district results for your preview.

I have enclosed five documents for your information, and appreciate your continued assistance in getting the word out about these materials:

**1. Proposed School and District Accountability System and Proposed Amendments to the Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts**

- [Proposed School and District Accountability System](#)
- [School and District Accountability System and Amendments to Regulation 603 CMR 2.00 for Under-Performing Schools](#)

The Board approved these in June to be released for public comment. These are critical matters that will have a strong and lasting impact on school and district operations. I urge you to give them a careful and thorough review, and to submit your comments to me.

**2. Proposed Amendments to the Recertification Regulations**

The Board approved these in June to be released for public comment. Of special interest are five issues related to the proposed changes: the definitions of "advanced academic studies" and "topic;" criteria related to the term "advanced academic studies;" an optional test of subject mastery or performance assessment in lieu of earning some PDP's; a test upon completion of individual courses as a condition for receiving some PDP's; and PDP's earned for submitting recertification applications online.

[ No longer available ]

**3. The 1999 Iowa Grade Three Reading Test District Results**

This is a pre-publication copy of the district results of the Iowa Grade 3 Reading Test. The individual school results will be included with district results on our website as of July 16.

**4. Policies on the Re-Use and Renovation of Existing School Buildings Memorandum**

We have been asked to explain the policies of the Department's school building assistance program, regarding the re-use and renovation of existing school buildings. This memo addresses those issues.

[No longer available]

**5. "Board in Brief" - Summary of the June 29th meeting of the Board of Education.**

The 1999 school year is finally behind us. I recognize that the past year was a particularly challenging one. I want to acknowledge your hard work this year, and thank you for your continuing support. I urge you to set aside some time for yourselves and your families, to relax and enjoy the summer, and I look

forward to seeing many of you later this month at the summer professional institutes.

With all best wishes, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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# School and District Accountability System

## June 29, 1999

### Contents

- I. [Introduction](#)
- II. [Evaluating School Performance](#)
  - a. [School Performance Rating Process](#)
  - b. [Under-performing Schools](#)
  - c. [Exemplary Schools](#)
- III. [Evaluating District Performance](#)
- IV. [Proposed Amendments to 603 CMR 2.00 Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and School Districts](#)
- V. [District Performance Evaluation and School Inspection Processes](#)

## I. Introduction

### Education Reform and Accountability

In 1993, with backing from the business and education communities, the Massachusetts Legislature passed the Education Reform Act, responding to the need for significant improvement to our public education system to meet the challenge of the next century. The law's "paramount goal" is to,

*provide a public education system of sufficient quality to extend to all children the opportunity to reach their full potential and to lead lives as participants in the political and social life of the Commonwealth and as contributors to its economy (M.G.L. c. 69, section 1).*

With this law, Massachusetts joined many other states undertaking similarly sweeping reform of public education in the 1990s. This movement is marked by a shift in focus to student performance results as the key indicator of school quality, and to the adoption of systematic processes to hold schools and districts accountable for achieving those results. The law directs the Board of Education, the Commissioner, and the Department of Education to manage the unprecedented investment in public education that the law represents, by:

- setting student performance standards, including a graduation requirement;
- providing guidance and resources to assist schools and districts in delivering programs and services to enable students to meet those targets;
- assessing the effectiveness and monitoring the improvement of all public schools; and
- intervening, as needed, to ensure results

Education Reform raised the stakes for all Massachusetts public schools by setting new, higher expectations for student performance and making high school graduation contingent on meeting those expectations. Massachusetts has always done well, relative to the rest of the country, on standardized tests of basic skills. Under Education Reform, however, schools are expected to prepare students to demonstrate a higher degree of content knowledge, cognitive skills, and problem solving abilities than those required to perform at acceptable levels on most norm-referenced, standardized tests.

Under the Education Reform Act, the State has adopted a funding formula designed to bring all schools to a level of spending that provides an adequate foundation for the delivery of effective education. By the year 2000, all schools and districts will have reached their foundation budget funding level. Important governance changes have also been made under Education Reform. These changes have expanded the responsibilities and authority of school principals and district superintendents, and placed in the hands of local school committees the responsibility to set goals for improved student performance, allocate resources to accomplish those objectives, and hold local administrators accountable for their achievement.

At the core of the academic changes brought about by Education Reform are the Curriculum Frameworks for the core subjects specified in the Act (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History and Social Science, Foreign Languages, Health, and the Arts). The frameworks establish the standards for what students should know and be able to do at particular stages of their education. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), a criterion referenced test aligned with those standards, is designed to test whether students have learned the content and skills set out in the frameworks

## **Measuring Student Progress and Holding Schools and Districts Accountable**

Having laid the groundwork for improvements in our public school system with financial and governance changes, the adoption of curriculum frameworks and implementation of the MCAS testing program, we are entering the accountability phase of Education Reform. The Department and Board of Education must assess the progress of schools and districts towards meeting State objectives and intervene, where necessary, to ensure that all schools are providing a high quality education to the students they serve. To this end, we have designed and are beginning to implement an accountability system that is educationally beneficial, inclusive, and administratively sound.

Massachusetts schools demonstrated a wide range of performance on the first MCAS tests given in 1998, from critically low to very high. Wherever on the performance spectrum they are starting, and regardless of school size, geographic location, or community demographics, the same high expectations apply to all Massachusetts public schools. Every school is expected to prepare its students in core academic subject areas so that, at the completion of tenth grade, they can meet rigorous State standards for high school graduation.

School districts must provide the organizational leadership and infrastructure necessary for their schools to provide a high quality education to every student. That is the ultimate goal of Education Reform. The proposed School and District Accountability System focuses on student results, expressed as both performance and improvement, and tracks the progress of every school in every district in improving the performance of its students toward State standards.

The State's role will be to monitor those results and support districts' efforts to improve student performance at each of their schools. The Department will analyze student performance data and conduct periodic evaluations of the quality of services and management provided by districts. This analysis will guide decisions about how and where to deploy State resources in the form of grants, technical assistance, self-assessment and planning, and targeted assistance.

## **II. Evaluating School Performance**

The Department will use the School Performance Rating Process to assess the extent to which all Massachusetts public schools are successfully preparing their students to demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to perform at an acceptable level on the MCAS tests in core academic subjects. While schools perform other important functions, such as supporting the healthy growth and development of our children, preparing students to meet State performance standards is at the core of every school's mission

The School Performance Rating Process will provide policy makers and the public with important information on the impact our State's education reform efforts are having on student results. It will, at the same time, provide the Department with a valuable tool to identify: 1) schools with low performance that are not meeting improvement expectations; and 2) schools whose students have demonstrated impressive improvements or attained high levels of performance on MCAS tests. The Commissioner may refer low performing schools for review to determine whether the school should be declared under-performing, and what special support, assistance and oversight from local and state education authorities will be required to ensure that all students are provided a high quality education. Schools with positive ratings may be selected to serve as exemplars of effective teaching and/or school administration practices.

The performance categories used in the School Performance Rating Process describe the wide range of present performance by MA public schools. These categories provide a series of benchmarks to track the improvement achieved by our schools in decreasing the number of students failing, and increasing the number demonstrating proficient or advanced performance on MCAS tests. By setting specific improvement expectations, the School Performance Rating Process will promote improved performance by all schools.

### **A. The School Performance Rating Process**

The School Performance Rating Process will measure schools' performance and improvement on the MCAS tests. At the end of each two-year cycle, a school will be assigned an overall performance rating and an overall improvement rating based on the school's performance over the cycle. Consequences for

schools are based upon both ratings. The two-year cycle affords schools needed time, between rating points, to formulate and implement specific improvement strategies and provides a statistically reliable measure of a school's progress over time toward meeting State targets.

### MCAS Performance Categories & Improvement Expectations

A school's baseline performance categories determine the amount of improvement the school is expected to make over that cycle. The performance categories are based on the percentages of students at each of the performance levels. Improvement will be measured using the average scaled score for each content area to capture movement within performance levels and provide a more statistically reliable measure of change.

Category	Percentage of Students Scoring in Proficient or Advanced		Percentage of Students Scoring Failing Level	Increase average scaled score by:
Very High	80% or more	and	5% or less	1-3 points
High	60% or more	and	10% or less	1-3 points
Moderate	40% or more	and	20% or less	2-4 points
Low	20% or more	and	40% or less	3-5 points
Very Low	less than 20%	or	60% or less	4-6 points
Critically Low			More than 60%	5-7 points

For the first rating cycle, data from the 1998 MCAS test will be compared with the average of the 1999 and 2000 results. In subsequent cycles, the two-year average of a school's performance in the prior cycle will serve as the baseline for the next cycle.

### Improvement and Performance Ratings

At the end of each cycle, a school's overall improvement rating will be determined by comparing its average improvement across all MCAS content areas to its overall improvement expectation. The school will receive one of the following improvement ratings: Failed to Meet, Approached, Met, or Exceeded. An overall performance rating for the school will be calculated by averaging across the content areas the percentage of students scoring in the Failing category and the percentage of the students scoring in the Proficient or Advanced categories.

### Baseline Performance and Improvement Expectations

MCAS Content Area	Prof/Adv	Failing	Ave. Score	Performance Category	Improvement Expectation Increase score by:
ELA	44%	22%	233	Low	4 points
Mathematics	11%	61%	216	Critically Low	6 points
Sci. & Tech.	15%	53%	220	Very Low	5 points
Overall Improvement Expectation = 5.0					

### Measuring and Rating Improvement at the end of Cycle 1

MCAS Content Area	Baseline	Average of 1999 and 2000	Difference	Met Improvement Expectations?
ELA	233	235	2	Approached
Mathematics	216	223	7	Met
Sci. & Tech.	220	220	0	Failed to Meet
Average	223.0	226.0	3.0	Approached
Overall Improvement Rating				

### Measuring and Rating Performance at the end of Cycle 1

MCAS Content Area	Average of 1999 and 2000 Data		Performance Category
	Prof/Adv	Failing	
ELA	49%	16%	Moderate
Mathematics	23%	46%	Very Low
Sci. & Tech.	16%	52%	Very Low
Average	29%	38%	Low
Overall Performance Rating			

### Overall Ratings

<b>PERFORMANCE</b>	Very High				
	High				
	Moderate				
	Low		Warning		
	Very Low				
	Critically Low				
		Failed to Meet	Approached	Met	Exceeded
<b>IMPROVEMENT</b>					

#### Interpreting Results

A school's improvement and performance rating together will guide state action. State actions will include recognition for performance and/or improvement, warnings, and the identification of schools whose low performance and failure to meet improvement expectations warrant further review to determine appropriate state action. The matrix on the following page shows the actions that will result from each combination of performance and improvement ratings for Cycle 1 of the School Performance Rating Process.

### Interpretation of Accountability Ratings - State Action Guide

## Overall Results

Very High		<b>RECOGNITION</b> for very high performance	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for very high performance and for meeting improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for very high performance and for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
High			<b>RECOGNITION</b> for high performance and for meeting improvement expectations	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for high performance and for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Moderate	<b>WARNING</b> that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts		<b>RECOGNITION</b> for meeting improvement expectations	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Low	<b>WARNING</b> that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts	<b>WARNING</b> that the school and district must strengthen improvement efforts	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for meeting improvement expectations	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Very Low	<b>REFERRED FOR REVIEW</b> to determine whether school should be declared under-performing High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>REFERRED FOR REVIEW</b> to determine whether school should be declared under-performing High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for meeting improvement expectations High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program High priority for district support and targeted state assistance
Critically Low	<b>REFERRED FOR REVIEW</b> to determine whether school should be declared under-performing Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>REFERRED FOR REVIEW</b> to determine whether school should be declared under-performing Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for meeting improvement expectations High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	<b>RECOGNITION</b> for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program High priority for district support and targeted state assistance
	Failed to Meet	Approached	Met	Exceeded
<b>OVERALL IMPROVEMENT</b>				

### B. Under-Performing Schools

Schools with low MCAS performance that do not meet improvement expectations may be referred to a Review Panel for more extensive evaluation. Schools' attendance and dropout rates and improvement trends may be considered in determining which schools will be referred for review. Schools that are referred for review will be required to submit a report to the Review Panel that will include:

- Additional student performance data, including results disaggregated by subgroups, and other standardized assessment data,
- An analysis of the factors that might have had an impact on a school's failure to make progress (e.g., focusing improvement efforts in one area, significant demographic changes in the district, faculty or leadership turnover),
- Evidence of the school's improvement initiatives implemented within the past 24 months, and improvement plans for the coming year (e.g., new instructional programs, professional development, reorganization, curriculum alignment).

In addition to reviewing the information in the report, the Review Panel will also meet with a team representing the school. The team will include the school's principal, a representative of the faculty, a parent representative, the district superintendent, and a representative of the district school committee. At the meeting the school team will have the opportunity to answer the Review Panel's questions and address their concerns. Using the information from the report and the meeting with the school team, the Review Panel will assess the likelihood for improved performance by the school if state intervention is not provided. The Review Panel will then provide the Commissioner with a report summarizing their findings.

Based on Review Panel's assessment, the Commissioner will either:

1. **determine that if the school stays on the current course of action, it is likely to meet its improvement expectations in the next cycle.** Schools determined to be on course to improved results will be put on academic watch.. The Department will actively monitor and support implementation of school and district plans to improve student performance results
2. **declare the school to be under-performing.** In accordance with Massachusetts G. L. c. 69, s. 1J, when a school is declared to be under-performing, the Commissioner will appoint an independent fact-finding team to assess the reasons for under-performance and prospects for improvement. The fact-finding team will conduct a comprehensive on-site school inspection, including classroom observations, to evaluate the quality of the education provided by the school and to identify key shortcomings

The fact-finding team will report its findings, in writing, to the Commissioner and to the district in which the school is located. Following the fact-finding process, the school must then submit an improvement plan to the Board of Education for its approval.

- The plan must include a statement detailing the support and oversight district officials will provide to ensure successful implementation of the school's improvement efforts
- Before the plan is submitted to the Board, it must first be reviewed and approved, in writing, by the district superintendent and school committee.
- If the Commissioner, upon review of the plan, judges it to be adequate and appropriate in response to the conclusions of the fact-finding team, the plan will be forwarded to the Board.
- The Board may then accept, reject, or direct modification of the plan, or any parts of the plan.

During the period of implementation of the plan, the Department will provide the school with technical assistance for the improvement of the educational program provided to the students.

If the school fails to demonstrate significant improvement as dictated by its plan within twenty-four months after the approval of the plan, the Board may declare the school to be chronically under-performing. The school would then be subject to the provisions outlined in G. L. c 69, s. 1J.

### C. **Exemplary Schools Program**

The focus of the School and District Accountability System is on the improvement of all schools. In supporting this focus, the Department recognizes the importance of locating and learning from those schools that are making exceptional progress. The Exemplary Schools Program will provide a means for schools with successful educational practices and programs to share their expertise with other schools in the state. At the end of each rating cycle, two groups of schools will be eligible to apply to the Exemplary Schools Program:

- all schools that received an overall improvement rating as having exceeded expectations; and
- any school that received an overall improvement rating as having met expectations and that significantly outperformed demographically similar schools in the state in absolute performance.

Eligible schools that wish to participate in the Exemplary Schools Program will submit an application that will include additional performance data evident of school improvement and an analysis by the

school of their reasons for success. Distinguished educators, appointed by the Commissioner, will review the application and other school performance data compiled by the Department, select a group of schools as finalists, and participate in comprehensive on-site inspections, including classroom observations, to evaluate the quality of the education provided by the school and elaborate factors contributing to the school's success. Based on the panel's findings and recommendations, the Commissioner will select schools to serve as exemplars.

The selected schools will not only have impressive improvement results, but also have the capacity and willingness to serve as a model for other schools. In addition to receiving special recognition, Exemplary Schools will be provided with resources to enable them to document and share innovative and effective school practices, programs and approaches with other schools in the state. For example, Exemplary Schools may serve as mentors for specific schools, may host visits at their school for teachers and administrators, or may present at conferences or workshops.

### **III. Evaluating District Performance**

The District Performance Evaluation Process will consist of comprehensive on-site evaluations every five years, with mid-cycle reviews between, for each of the 357 districts in the Commonwealth. Central to the evaluation process is the expectation that every district develop and implement long-term and annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning processes led by the district school committee and superintendent, with active participation by teachers, parents, students, business and community leaders. The Department will provide guidance, and make training and assistance available for districts not already using a district improvement planning process.

Regular Department evaluations of district performance will be on a five year cycle, in two stages. The Department will conduct a comprehensive on-site district performance evaluation in approximately 70 districts each year, visiting each district in the state at least once every five years. A mid-cycle review of key data and documentation will be conducted for another 70 districts each year. Districts found to have performance deficiencies will be evaluated on a more frequent basis.

In evaluating the performance of a district, the Department will consider:

- the educational results for all students served by the district,
- the quality of curriculum, instruction, programs and services provided by the schools in the district, and
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the district's operational management and resource utilization.

When, as the result of this evaluation, the Department determines that inadequacies in the district's performance in one or more areas are not being effectively addressed, the district will have an opportunity to prepare a plan, submitted for Board approval, to remedy the shortcomings. The Department will provide technical assistance as needed in the preparation of that plan.

Districts cited for serious or widespread deficiencies that fail to submit an acceptable plan in the time specified by the Commissioner may be declared under-performing.

#### **Key Questions**

1. Are the district's students performing at levels that put them on course toward meeting state standards for high school graduation?
2. What are the performance results for identifiable subgroups of students in the district (gender, racial, language and low income status)?
3. Have the district's schools met their improvement expectations during the last two school performance rating cycles?
4. Is there evidence that the district has analyzed its student performance and improvement data-for all students, all student groups, and each school in the district-and used this data as a basis for formulating its improvement plans?
5. Are the district's improvement plans clear, adequate and appropriate, addressing needed improvements in critical areas, including quality of instruction, curriculum, programs, student support services, and instructional equipment and materials.
6. Is the district actively using well-designed and meaningful evaluation practices/procedures to assess:
  - Student performance (standardized, locally developed, diagnostic or classroom-based assessments), the performance of teachers and administrators,
  - Effectiveness of the various education programs and services, including those it operates for students in its regular education program and those in federally regulated program areas (e.g., special education and bilingual education),
  - Effectiveness and efficiency of district organizational and resource management?
7. Is there evidence that the district has made appropriate changes in staffing, programs, policies,

- services, and resource reallocation based on evaluation results?
8. Is the district in compliance with State requirements under Education Reform and with Federal requirements in regulated programs?
  9. Is there evidence of effective governance and organizational management structures and processes at the School Committee, district central office, and school site levels?
  10. Is the district using available resources creatively and efficiently to accomplish the district's improvement objectives?
  11. Is the district actively developing community and business support, and accessing available state and federal grants, and private foundation support to enhance the quality and range of educational opportunities available to its students?
  12. Is the district utilizing effective strategies to actively involve parents in initiatives designed to improve student performance in key areas?

### **Procedures**

An evaluation protocol and performance rating rubric will be developed to ensure consistency in the application of district performance evaluation criteria. District performance will be assessed and rated based on performance standards and evaluation criteria approved by the Commissioner and Board of Education.

The Department will submit an annual report to the Board on the results of the regular mid-cycle and five year district evaluations completed each year. The Board will use this information to identify districts that are *chronically under-performing*.

Over the next 6 months, in cooperation with the Department of Revenue, Local Services Division, we will be developing and piloting protocols and training for staff who will be participating in district performance evaluations.

## **IV. Proposed Amendments to 603 CMR 2.00 Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and School Districts**

For Board approval to release for public comment; June 1999.

### **603 CMR 2.02: Definitions**

Amend by adding the following definitions:

**District Performance Evaluation** shall mean an evaluation conducted by the Department on a regularly scheduled basis to determine whether a district is making adequate provision for the delivery of a high quality education to all students served by the district, and whether the district is making effective and efficient use of available resources to improve the educational outcomes attained by students attending the district's schools. District Performance Evaluations shall be based on performance standards approved by the Commissioner and the Board. The Department shall publish and provide district officials with written guidelines for the District Performance Evaluation process.

**Independent Fact-Finding Team** shall mean a group of individuals appointed by the Commissioner pursuant to G. L. c. 69, s.1J or 1K to assess and report to the Commissioner and the Board on the reasons for a school or district's under-performance and prospects for its improvement. The Department shall recruit from among elementary and secondary educators and administrators, college and university faculty and administrators, educational program administrators and evaluators, other education professionals, business and legal professionals, parents, and members of the general public to serve as team members. The size and composition of a fact-finding team shall be determined by the Commissioner after consultation with the Board or its designee, and shall vary depending on the size and type of school or district to be assessed and the findings upon which the declaration of under-performance is based.

**Review Panel** shall mean a group of no fewer than three individuals appointed by the Commissioner to review additional information on student performance and evaluate the improvement efforts and plans of a school that, as a consequence of the School Performance Rating Process, has been referred for review to determine whether it is under-performing. Review Panels shall be composed of members of the Department's professional staff, education and business professionals serving as consultants to the Department, and teachers and school administrators on part or full time leave from their districts to participate in State school and district evaluations. When feasible, review panels shall also include one or more participants from higher education, the business community, human services organizations, professional associations, or the general public

**School Performance Rating Cycle** shall mean a two-year period at the conclusion of which the Department shall assign school improvement and performance ratings in accordance with the School Performance Rating Process approved by the Board.

**School Performance Rating Process** shall mean a process developed by the Department and approved by

the Board which is used to evaluate the absolute performance and improvements made by a school toward meeting the State's goal of providing all students with meaningful opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge they are expected to demonstrate on State assessments in core academic subjects

**603 CMR 2.03: Under-Performing Schools**

Amend by deleting the text that currently appears at 603 CMR 2.03(1) through (6) and inserting in their place the following new sections

**603 CMR 2.03**

1. Every district shall develop and implement an annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning process, led by the district superintendent and school committee with active participation by teachers, parents, business and community leaders.
  - a. The district's evaluation and planning process shall result, at least once in every 5 years, in the development of a written long-range plan to improve the educational programs and services and ensure the adequacy of educational facilities and equipment for students attending the district's schools.
  - b. Annually, the district shall develop and implement a written plan stating specific goals for improved student performance and detailing the actions to be taken by the district to meet those goals.
  - c. A district's long-range and annual improvement plans shall be premised on an analysis of data on performance by the district's students and an assessment of actions the district and its schools must take to improve that performance toward meeting State targets.
  - d. Annual district improvement plans shall be in a form and conform to content requirements set forth in guidelines published by the Department.
2. district's plan(s) to support the improvement of any school(s) within the district that has been declared to be under-performing and each school within the district that failed to meet its improvement expectations during the previous school performance rating cycle shall be incorporated into, and given high priority, in the district's annual improvement plan.
3. The Department shall evaluate all school districts on a regularly scheduled basis, and shall perform a comprehensive on-site evaluation of each district's performance at least once in every five years.
  - a. District performance evaluations shall assess the level of academic proficiency being attained by students served by the district, the trends with respect to drop-out and attendance rates, the quality and adequacy of curriculum, instruction, programs, services, and facilities for students attending the district's schools, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the district's organizational management and resource utilization.
  - b. District performance shall be evaluated according to standards adopted by the Board, and shall be performed in accordance with guidelines published by the Department.
4. The Commissioner shall provide the Board with an annual report of the results of district performance evaluations performed by the Department.
5. The Commissioner shall advise the Board of any case in which a District Performance Evaluation conducted by the Department uncovered serious or widespread deficiencies in the quality of curriculum or instruction or in the adequacy of programs, services, operational management or facilities that, in the Commissioner's opinion, are likely to have a substantial negative effect on the educational achievement of students attending the district's schools. The Commissioner shall provide Board members with copies of the written District Performance Evaluation report for each district in which such deficiencies are identified.
  - a. The Board, after receipt and review of such a report, shall provide an opportunity for district officials to appear before the Board or a subcommittee thereof to explain the reasons for the district's performance deficiencies and offer a plan for their remediation.
  - b. The Board, upon the recommendation of the Commissioner, may accept, reject, or require modification of the district's plan.
6. A determination by the Board, on recommendation of the Commissioner, that one or more of the following conditions or occurrences set forth at 603 CMR 2.04(6)(a) through (e) exists with a particular school district shall constitute evidence of under-performance by the district, and shall trigger the Commissioner's appointment of an Independent Fact-Finding Team in accordance with G. L. c. 69, s. 1K.
  - a. Failure by the district's superintendent and school committee to agree to, or failure by the district to faithfully and diligently implement, a plan approved by the Commissioner and Board pursuant to 603 CMR 2.04(5)(b).
  - b. Failure by a district to submit an acceptable plan, or to faithfully and diligently implement the plan approved by the Commissioner and Board, for the improvement of one or more schools declared, pursuant to G.L c. 69, s. 1J and 603 CMR 2.03, to be under-performing.
  - c. Failure by a district to remedy, within the time period specified by the Department or permitted by statute or agency rule, a serious violation of state or federal law regarding the provision or operation of required public education programs or services
  - d. Failure by a district to correct, within the time period specified by the Department, any school facility deficiency that seriously impedes the delivery of education services or poses a serious health or safety risk to district students.
  - e. Failure by a school district or its governing city or town(s) to comply substantially with the appropriation and spending requirements set forth at G. L. c. 70, 603 CMR 10.00, and any

- special legislative enactment related to the financing of public education.
- f. Failure by a school district to properly manage, lawfully expend, or truthfully report the district's use of funds appropriated or awarded for the support of public education.

**NOTE:** Substantive changes from the version of this document that was provided to Board members in the May 1999 Board packet appear in strikethrough and bold type.

## **V. District Performance Evaluation and School Inspection Processes**

### **Administrative Plan**

The Commissioner will establish a new unit within the Department to conduct district performance evaluations and coordinate school panel reviews and inspections. Juliane Dow, Director of Accountability and Targeted Assistance will lead the development and provide senior management to the new unit. Sandra Stotsky, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Planning will oversee and assist with the development of evaluation protocols and selection of staff to serve in the District and School Evaluation unit

The unit will be staffed with a mix of 1) full time DOE staff (some recruited from other DOE units; others newly hired), 2) part-time consultants who are experienced educators or educational administrators, and 3) practicing educators/ teacher leaders/school administrators on full or part-time leave from their home districts. Managers will be appointed to direct and oversee the day to day operations of the District and School Evaluation unit.

The District and School Evaluation unit will coordinate with, but have separate and distinct responsibilities from those performed by, the Department's state and federal program compliance unit (PQA). The new District and School Evaluation unit will collaborate with the Department of Revenue/Division of Local Services with respect to financial management aspects of district performance reviews.

Staff employed in the new District and School Performance Evaluation group will be engaged, full time, in conducting district performance reviews and coordinating school review panels and inspection teams. When fully staffed, the unit will have eight six-member teams. Teams will be comprised of three full time staff, and three part-time consultants or on-leave educators/administrators. Each team will complete 9 comprehensive district evaluations (total of 70), and 9 mid-cycle district reviews (total of 70) each year. Unit staff will also coordinate up to 32 school review panels and 16 school inspections per year.

Provision of targeted assistance to low performing schools and districts will be the responsibility of a separate work group. No member of the District and School Evaluation unit will serve as a technical assistance provider or coordinator for a district or school in which he or she has been or may serve as a performance evaluator.

The Commissioner will appoint an independent advisory board on district and school evaluation. The Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Planning will convene and serve on the Commissioner's representative to this Board. The Advisory Board on District and School Evaluation will meet on a regularly scheduled basis to review the protocols and procedures used and evaluation results obtained by District Evaluation and School Inspection teams.

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## Accountability System and Amendments to Regulation 603 CMR 2.00 for Under-Performing Schools

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders and Other Interested Parties  
From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner  
Date: June 30, 1999  
Re: School and District Accountability System and Amendments to Regulation 603 CMR 2.00 for Under-Performing Schools

At the June 29, 1999 meeting, the Board of Education voted to release for public comment the enclosed School and District Accountability System proposal and Proposed Amendments to 603 CMR 2.00, the Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and School Districts. The public comment period will extend until August 16, 1999. I anticipate bringing these documents, with any revisions prompted by public comments, back to the Board for final action at our August 31, 1999 meeting

The proposal and regulations call for the implementation of a three step process for evaluating school performance. Step 1, the School Performance Rating Process will be used to rate all schools' progress toward improving students' MCAS results. MCAS performance and improvement will determine the ratings a school receives at the end of each two-year cycle. Performance will be rated based on the percentage of students failing and the percentage of students scoring in the proficient and advanced levels. Improvement will be rated based on the extent to which a school meets specific improvement expectations set by the Board. Improvement expectations are graduated to ensure that schools make significant progress, cycle by cycle, toward closing the gap between current MCAS performance and the top school performance category (80% or more proficient and advanced; fewer than 5% failing).

At the end of each rating cycle, schools with low MCAS performance and improvement may be referred for a detailed review of student performance and of the school's improvement efforts. This review process will result either in the school being declared under-performing, or being placed on academic watch. Schools that are declared under-performing will have a comprehensive school inspection by a fact-finding team. The regulations provide for an interim process for fiscal year 1999, authorizing the Commissioner to refer those schools that demonstrated the lowest levels of performance on the 1998 MCAS tests, and that fail to demonstrate significantly improved performance on 1999 MCAS tests, for immediate panel review to determine under-performance.

Schools that receive positive ratings through the School Performance Rating Process may apply to serve as Exemplary Schools.

The proposal and regulations call for a district performance evaluation process consisting of comprehensive on-site evaluations every five years, with mid-cycle reviews for each Massachusetts district. The proposed regulations require that every district develop and implement long-term (5 year) and annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning processes

District performance will be evaluated based on:

- The educational results for all students served by the district
- The quality of curriculum, instruction, programs and services provided by the schools in the district, and
- The efficiency and effectiveness of the district's operational management and resource utilization.

Specific district performance standards will be adopted by the Board and published by the Department of Education. Districts cited for serious or widespread deficiencies that fail to submit an acceptable plan in the time specified by the Commissioner may be declared under-performing. The proposed regulations specify other conditions and occurrences that may lead to a declaration of district under-performance.

The accountability system described in the enclosed proposal and regulations has my full support. I believe it will assist us in our efforts to ensure that students in all Massachusetts public schools have the benefit of high expectations and quality education programs. We look forward to receiving your comments on the proposed system. Please submit your written comments by mail to the Office of Accountability and Targeted Assistance, by email to [ddelorey@doe.mass.edu](mailto:ddelorey@doe.mass.edu); or by FAX to 781-338-3392, no later than August 16, 1999.

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- > [MCAS Home](#)
- > [School Notices](#)
- > [About The MCAS](#)
- [Test Schedule](#)
- [Test Items](#)
- [Scoring Guides/Student Work](#)
- [MCAS Results](#)
- > [MCAS Alternate Assessment](#)
- > [Publications](#)
- > [Links to Related Resources](#)
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[Assessment/Accountability](#) > [MCAS](#) >

## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

### July 1999 Iowa Tests of Basic Skills

#### Welcome Letter

July 1999

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to report the [state's results of the 1999 Iowa Tests of Basic Skills® Grade 3 Reading Test](#), a standardized achievement test which allows Massachusetts third grade students to be compared to their peers nationwide.

This 75-minute test was administered statewide in 1999 for the third consecutive year. While the results from the first two years were nearly identical, the percentage of students who performed at the *Advanced Reader* level increased from 21 percent in 1998 to 31 percent this year. This compares to 19 percent of students in the national norm group. Notably, this improved performance cannot be accounted for by lower participation, as 95 percent of third graders participated in the testing in both years. This good news should not be cause for celebration, however, as over one-quarter of our students continue to perform at the lowest two levels. We need urgent attention by school leaders to improve the reading ability of these children. To assist in this effort, we will be implementing new literacy initiatives at the state level, and through our school and district accountability system will support reading programs at the local level.

Scores for individual students have been provided to each school. I recommend that parents consult with their child's teacher and principal to discuss these results. Also, I encourage each community to review their local results carefully, with a focus on using the information provided as a tool to improve the teaching and learning of reading for all children. Although we now have three years of data from this testing program, I urge caution in interpreting trends, particularly in small schools, since the groups of students tested may be very different from year to year.

This is the last year that the *ITBS* will be administered statewide in Massachusetts. This testing program will be replaced with a new *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Reading Test*, which will be piloted in spring 2000 and implemented the following year. This test will be based upon the *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework*.

Reading is the gateway to all future learning. It is essential that by the third grade, all of our students are able to read effectively.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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[To Table of Contents](#)

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- > [BOE Home](#)
- > [Board Meeting Schedule](#)
- > [Board in Brief](#)
- > [Board Meeting Minutes](#)
- > [BOE Members](#)
- > [BOE Advisory Councils](#)
- > [Chairman's Statements](#)

[District/School Administration](#) > [Administration](#) >

## Board in Brief - Revised Edition

### Thursday afternoon - July 1, 1999

This is [Board in Brief](#), issued at the request of Commissioner David Driscoll to bring you up to date on Board of Education matters. This is a report on a special meeting on Monday, June 28, 1999 and the regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, June 29, 1999 at the Department of Education in Malden.

#### Special Meeting - Recertification Discussion

The Board of Education held a special meeting on June 28, to discuss issues related to recertification. Commissioner of education David P. Driscoll summarized his recommendations for changes in the recertification regulations. They reflect recommendations made by the Joint Board of Education/Board of Higher Education Commission on Educator Preparation, whose members include Chairman James Peyser, Edwin Delattre and Roberta Schaefer.

The recommendations include: emphasis on knowledge of subject; linking professional development with school and district improvement as well as individual educator improvement; supervisory approval of professional development plans; online publication of a registry of professional development providers; and additional options for meeting recertification requirements through passing challenging tests or performance assessments. The new requirements would be phased in according to the date of issue of an educator's standard certificate. Board members commended the Commissioner for proposing improvements in the regulations, but raised questions about the definition of "advanced academic studies" and whether advanced studies should be required; the use of optional tests and performance assessments in lieu of continuing education; and whether the Department should approve rather than register providers. Board Chairman James Peyser said he thinks the test option is an intriguing experiment, while members Abigail Thernstrom and Edwin Delattre expressed concern about it. Dr. Delattre also suggested that recertification should be based on graduate-level academic study. Commissioner Driscoll recommended that the Board move the process forward and seek public comment on the proposed regulations. Member Charles Baker agreed, stating that the public comment period will give the Board time to revise and improve the regulations before they are adopted in the fall. The Board held the proposed regulations for further discussion at the Regular Meeting.

#### Regular Meeting

Board Chairman James Peyser opened the meeting by introducing the new student member of the Board, Marcel LaFlamme, a senior at Monson Junior-Senior High School. He was elected by fellow students from across the Commonwealth to chair the Statewide Student Advisory Council for 1999- 2000, which by law makes him a voting member of the Board of Education for one year starting in July 1999.

Commissioner Driscoll reported that the state budget will be approved later in July, and that the Governor has taken steps to implement a temporary budget. Over the next several weeks, the conference committee will be working to reconcile differences between the House and Senate versions of the FY 2000 budget, which will then be submitted to the Governor. Commissioner Driscoll also reported on the statewide results of the 1999 Iowa Test of Basic Skills Grade 3 Reading Test. They show a gain in the top category of students whose performance is rated "Advanced," but he noted his concern that one quarter of third-graders are performing in the bottom two levels. The district-by-district results will be released in July.

#### Proposed School and District Accountability System and Proposed Amendments to Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts

Chairman Peyser and Commissioner Driscoll presented a revised version of the proposed School and District Accountability System. The proposed school performance rating process is based on the percentage of students failing MCAS, and the percentage demonstrating proficient or advanced performance. Improvement will be rated based on the extent to which a school meets improvement expectations, designed to ensure that every school makes significant progress on MCAS performance. Attendance and dropout rate trends will be considered by the Department in determining which schools that fail to meet MCAS improvement expectations will be referred for review.

Chairman Peyser stated, "This proposal is fair, action-oriented, and focuses on school and district improvement, not on subjective judgment. I am confident that it is ready to go out for public comment." Commissioner Driscoll added, "The revised system is strong and makes sense. It will play a major role in improving educational outcomes for students, and I view it as a national model." The Board voted 8 -1 to seek public comment on the proposed system and on corresponding amendments to the Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts. The Board thanked Juliane Dow, Director of Accountability and Targeted Assistance, and her staff, for outstanding work in developing the system.

### **Proposed Amendments to Special Education Regulations**

In March, the Board voted to seek public comment on proposed revisions to the regulations on special education. At several public hearings and in writing, the Board received a great deal of comment on the proposed regulations, which have been improved as a result. At this meeting, Commissioner Driscoll recommended, and the Board unanimously voted, that it will act on the proposed amendments in March 2000, taking into account any amendments to the state special education law that have been enacted by that date. Additionally, upon Commissioner Driscoll's recommendation, the Board unanimously voted to repeal immediately four of the current regulations that conflict with recently-released federal regulations.

### **Curriculum Frameworks**

The Board voted unanimously to adopt the revised Arts Curriculum Framework, which was presented by Dr. Sandra Stotsky, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs, Susan Wheltle, Coordinator for the Humanities Frameworks, and panel member Carol Guidice, Education Program Director for the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The revised framework is the product of a distinguished panel of educators and artists, and reflects the comments of many others. The two strands in the framework are: the Arts Disciplines (Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts) and Connections (History, Criticism and Links to Other Disciplines). The framework will be distributed to schools and other interested parties this summer, for use in the upcoming school year.

Commissioner Driscoll introduced members of the Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework revision panel who reported on revisions to the current framework. Joining State Science and Mathematics Director Tom Noonan were Dr. Penny Noyce of the Noyce Foundation, chair of the revision panel, Joyce Newhouse, CEO of the Mass. Pre-Engineering Program, and Michael Silevitch, Director of the Center for the Enhancement of Science and Mathematics at Northeastern University. Commissioner Driscoll commended the panel for their work, and noted that additional work is being done on the standards for grades 9 -12.

Dr. Noyce reported that the revised draft framework provides more definition and depth. It offers clearer guidance for curriculum and instruction, and shifts from "technology" to "technology/engineering." Regarding revisions at the high school level, she noted that the current draft uses an integrated approach that may not align with traditional, one-domain science courses taught in high school. Board members discussed the possibility of developing subject-specific MCAS tests at the 10th grade, as a means of providing local options for high school curriculum and course sequence. The Commissioner said that in July he will present the Board with options on high school science curriculum and assessment, for further consideration.

### **Charter Schools: Renewal of Charters**

The Board voted unanimously to renew charters for three charter schools, Francis W. Parker in Devens, Neighborhood House in Boston and Sabis International in Springfield. The charters are valid for five years. Acting Associate Commissioner for Charter Schools, Ed Kirby presented the recommendations. Chairman Peyser noted that these three charter schools are very different from each other, but each has achieved academic excellence and is worthy of renewal.

### **Amendments to School Building Assistance and School Finance Regulations**

The Board voted unanimously to adopt amendments to the School Building Assistance regulations, presented by Chief Financial Officer Jeffrey Wulfson and SBA Director James Anderson. Member Charles Baker stated that the SBA program is in need of a major overhaul. Commissioner Driscoll and Chairman Peyser stated that a comprehensive review of the SBA program will be considered as the Board develops its policy and budget initiatives for the new fiscal year.

### **Proposed Amendments to Regulations for Recertification - Vote to Release for Public Comment**

The Board voted 8 -1 to release for public comment the proposed amendments to the Recertification Regulations. Board members raised several questions about the proposed amendments, but agreed that the public comment period will be useful in revising the draft. Chairman Peyser reported that during the public comment period he will hold a forum on professional development and recertification and invite national experts; schedule meetings for Board members and interested groups to discuss the draft; hold a special Board meeting to discuss the public comment; and map out a plan for revising the Board's regulations on certification and evaluation of educators, and the Principles of Effective Teaching and Effective Educational Administration. He said the Board will be very interested in public comment on several issues in the proposed regulations, including whether the regulations should encourage or require educators to engage in advanced academic studies, and whether educators should have to pass an end-of-course assessment or produce a product in order to receive "points" for professional development. The public comment period will take place during the summer. The Board is expected to act on the regulations in September or October. The Board also voted to adopt as a permanent regulation a section of the Recertification Regulations that provides for a waiver or modification of recertification requirements in hardship situations.

### **Lawrence Public Schools - Update**

Roberta Schaefer, who chairs the Board's Lawrence Oversight Committee, reported that Superintendent Mae Gaskins has submitted her end-of-year report, which outlines the district's progress regarding: MCAS results; professional development; English language acquisition; school restructuring; improved data collection of dropout rates and attendance; financial management; and plans for new school building. Dr. Schaefer said the report indicates real progress, but the district has a long way to go. The Oversight Committee plans to meet with the Lawrence School Committee and the Superintendent.

### **Approval of Grants and Annual Approval of Non-Operating School Districts**

The Board unanimously approved grants under two state programs: the Early Literacy Intervention Program, providing \$1.5 million to 75 school districts and charter schools to train teachers to provide individual tutorial assistance to children at risk of failing to learn to read in the first grade; and the Advanced Placement Program, providing \$365,704 to 60 school districts and charter schools to assist them in developing and implementing Advanced Placement courses. The Board also approved the semi-annual list of School Building assistance grants and reimbursements. In other action, the Board unanimously approved requests from 20 small towns that by statute require Board approval to tuition their students to public schools in other towns rather than operating their own public schools.

The next meeting of the Board will be held at the Department of Education on Tuesday, July 20th.

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