

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

October 1, 1999

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

I have several updates for you and just a few documents.

First, I want to reiterate some news that I announced at the Board of Education meeting on September 28th. The 1998 NAEP results released last Tuesday show that Massachusetts eighth-graders' writing performance ranked second in the nation. I am pleased that 31% of students performed at or above the Proficient Level compared to 24% across the nation, but I remain concerned that 13% of students performed at the Below Basic and 56% performed at the Basic Levels. While we do well compared to other states, we have a long way to go to get more students out of the lowest two levels.

We have had considerable difficulty with our telephone system. Within the next few days, a new phone system will be installed. Beginning October 12th the main number at the Massachusetts Department of Education will be changed from 781-388-3300 to 781- 338-3000. Also, all extensions will change from three digits to four. Until we send to you a new list of extension, you can call the new number and ask for staff by name.

The Board of Education took action on three important initiatives this month. First, they adopted the plan for the School and District Accountability System and corresponding regulations. Also the new health curriculum framework was approved, and the Board voted to send out for public comment the draft of the revised mathematics curriculum framework. Within the next few days, all of these updated documents will be posted on our website. The draft mathematics framework includes a comment form that I hope you and others will complete and return to us. Additionally, we will be sponsoring a series of regional and statewide focus groups to discuss and receive specific feedback on the revisions to the math framework. The public comment period on this framework period deadline is December 20th.

The Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications (MCET) plans to air a one-hour, edited version of the fall MCAS reporting workshops that are being held in each of six regions in October and November. For your information, the broadcasts will be aired on November 9, 15 and 23, from 8-9 p.m.

In our continuing effort to utilize our technology resources and decrease paper copy, we are posting the 1999-2000 Department of Education Professional Development Calendar ([www.doe.mass.edu/tpd](http://www.doe.mass.edu/tpd)). Educators can search the site for professional development opportunities and obtain registration information. The site will be updated frequently.

Also, I have posted on our website two special notices for students:

- United States Department of Energy Secretary Bill Richardson is announcing a nationwide contest for students in grades four to eight. The "Power Art" Young Artists Competition, sponsored by the White House Council on the Millennium, is designed to raise student awareness of how the science of energy impacts our lives. For details, visit their website at <http://home.doe.gov/powerart/power.htm>, or phone 202-586-1908.

- Announcement regarding the annual Jewish War Veterans Brotherhood Program, "Classmates Today - Neighbors Tomorrow, " recognizing high school students statewide

It has been brought to my attention that some superintendents are concerned about teachers not honoring their contractual obligation to give adequate notice before leaving their positions to taking jobs in other school districts. I have little evidence that this is a widespread problem, but if it is, I may want to address the issue. Therefore, I am asking for your input as to whether you have experienced this problem, and if so, I would appreciate your suggestions on possible solutions.

In this mailing, I have enclosed five items that are located on our website:

1. [A memo on the projected schedule of release of MCAS data](#)
2. [A brochure announcing a conference on character education](#)
3. [A memo regarding certification for school nurses](#)
4. "[Board in Brief](#)", a summary of the September 28th Board of Education meeting
5. [An update on the Shigella outbreak in Hampden County](#)

Finally, beyond the smooth opening of school across the Commonwealth, I commend all of you for the serious effort that is underway in all of our schools.

All the best, and  
Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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**1-866-MCAS220**



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## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

**To:** Superintendents of Schools

**Copy:** Principals, Charter School Leaders, Directors of Collaboratives and Chapter 766 Private Schools

**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner

**Date:** October 1, 1999

**Re:** Projected schedule for release of the 1999 MCAS results and related publications

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Included in this memorandum is the projected schedule for the release of the 1999 MCAS test results, as well as for future mailings of supporting materials related to MCAS. Please share with your staff this memorandum, the projected schedule, and all materials in the upcoming mailings.

### Reporting MCAS Results

Your 1999 MCAS reports will be shipped directly to you for receipt no sooner than November 29, 1999. I expect to publicly release these results during the first week of December. It will be the responsibility of the superintendent to see that the distribution of the School Reports and the Student Reports to Parents/Guardians takes place in a timely manner.

In preparing to receive MCAS reports, I ask you to keep in mind that this year there will be multiple Student Reports for Parents/Guardians for each student. Each student will have a separate report for each content area tested at his or her grade level. As a result, this will require the additional clerical task of collating each student's reports. We appreciate that this task will take some time. I am notifying you now so as to give you time to plan. For those schools that have a particularly large population (250 or more students) at a tested grade level, we have created a School Assistance Program that is designed to help offset this clerical burden. Those schools with eligible enrollments will receive additional information shortly. In the future, the implementation of the state student identification system will eliminate this burden.

As was the case in 1998, reports will be mailed to each district's central office and will be bundled by school. Like last year, the reports will be grouped based on the school where the student was enrolled in spring 1999. Accordingly, I recommend that for cases where students have changed schools since last May, you identify in advance the school where each student is currently enrolled. This advance preparation will allow you to promptly forward reports to the parents/guardians of tested students in accordance with the timeline for distribution provided on the other side of this page.

### 1999 SCHEDULE FOR THE RELEASE OF MCAS RESULTS AND RELATED PUBLICATIONS

**September 30**

The following documents are available on our website: [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/)

- Scoring guides for each of the open response questions included in the *Release of Spring 1999 Test Items*
- For each scoring guide, sample student work for each score point

## Early November

This mailing includes:

- *State Report, Tests of Spring 1999*  
This report will include a summary of statewide test results and participation rates by grade, content area and student status (Limited English Proficient, Students with Disabilities, Regular Education).

## November 15

Superintendents will be shipped:

- CD-ROM version of Individual Student Compositions, Tests of Spring 1999

## November 24 (shipped on or about)

Superintendents will receive:

- *Student Reports for Parents/Guardians, Tests of Spring 1999*
- *Understanding the 1999 Student Reports for Parents/Guardians* (available in English, Cambodian, Cape Verdian, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese)  
A copy of this guide should be included in each envelope that is used to mail the *Student Reports*.
- Student Labels  
Each label contains individual student results for attaching to student folders.
- *School Reports, Tests of Spring 1999*
- *District Report, Tests of Spring 1999*
- *Final Test Item Analysis Reports, Tests of Spring 1999*
- *Guide to Interpreting the Spring 1999 Reports for Schools and Districts*

This guide will assist schools and districts in using the School Report, District Report, and Test Item Analysis Reports.

## November 29 (shipped on or about)

- *Summary of District Performance Report, Tests of Spring 1999*

## 3rd Week in December

Superintendents will be shipped:

- CD-ROM version of *School, District and State Results*
- CD-ROM version of *Individual Student Reports*

Return to the [October Mailing](#)

## REGISTRATION

All public and private schools are invited to participate. Teams of three to five are encouraged to register. Teams should include a superintendent or principal, a curriculum coordinator, or teachers. Teams of four or five may include parents/school council members, high school student leaders, or a school or public librarian. Registration is limited to 500 people.

**Please mail or FAX registrations by November 15, 1999**

to Cathy Depradine

Massachusetts Department of Education  
350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148  
FAX 781-388-3396

Questions: 781-388-3300 ext. 622

### District or charter school

#### Contact Person

1. Name/Title

School

Address/Phone/e-mail

2. Name/Title

School

Address/Phone/e-mail

3. Name/Title

School

Address/Phone/e-mail

4. Name/Title

School

Address/Phone/e-mail

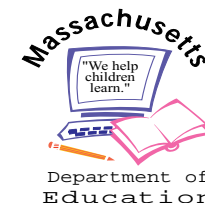
5. Name/Title

School

Address/Phone/e-mail

# Cultivating Character *and* Civility *through the* Curriculum Frameworks

A Conference on Character Education  
FEATURING  
Kevin Ryan, co-author of  
*Building Character in American Schools*



**December 1, 1999**

8:00-1:00

**Worcester Centrum  
Conference Center**

**50 Foster Street, Worcester, MA  
(508) 755-6800**

**Concurrent Sessions  
will focus on topics such as**

***An invitation from  
Governor Paul Cellucci,  
Chairman of  
the Board of Education  
James Peyser  
and  
Commissioner of Education  
David Driscoll***

*to educators in Massachusetts schools  
who want to enhance student learning  
through character education.*

- What character education is in the schools
- How to integrate character education into the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
- Strategies for getting started and involving school councils and the community
- Connections to student council activities and community service learning
- Schoolwide policies on school climate and civility
- How to address character education and civility through school improvement plans

**Our keynote speaker is Kevin Ryan, Founder  
and former Director of the Center for the  
Advancement of Ethics and Character  
at Boston University.**

Dr. Ryan will speak on:

**“Character Education:  
The Schools’ Latest Fad  
or  
Their Oldest Mission?”**



Monday, September 20, 1999

**NEWS SEARCH**

**Keyword:**

**Target:**

**Dates:**

Past 30 days

Past 90 days

Date Range

Start:

End:



## School Nurses' Certification News

This is a reminder, in accordance with Chapter 220 of the Acts of 1997, that any school nurse employed by a school district on or before September 1, 1993, who has five years of experience as a registered nurse, may obtain a Standard Certificate without having to meet the bachelor's degree and master's degree requirements, if they apply before October 1, 1999. Please note that these nurses are not required to pass the communication and literacy skill test.

It should also be noted that the FY 2000 budget, which is currently in conference committee, contains several provisions which may, among other things, extend the above deadline.

If you have any questions, you may contact the Certification Office at (781)338-6600

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## BOARD IN BRIEF

### Friday, October 1, 1999

*This is a report on the special meeting held on Monday, September 27, 1999 and the regular monthly meeting held on Tuesday, September 28, 1999, at the Department of Education, in Malden.*

Special Meeting - Initial Discussion of Competency Determination (MCAS Grade 10 Passing Standard)

The Board conducted its initial discussion on setting the 10th-grade MCAS passing standard. Commissioner Driscoll and Board Chairman James Peyser outlined policy issues for the Board to consider, including: which subject areas will count toward the competency determination for the class of 2003; whether different standards should apply to various categories of students; whether students should have to pass each applicable subject; the possibility of local overrides in individual cases; setting a schedule for raising the initial competency threshold; and an appeals process.

Chairman Peyser said, "Our purpose today is to begin a public discussion that will ultimately lead to a decision on where to establish the threshold for the state's competency determination, which is to be a graduation requirement for the class of 2003." He added that over the next several months, after further discussion and review of the most recent MCAS tests and test results, the Board will decide what level of performance on the MCAS will be required for high school graduation.

Massachusetts law requires a state test of the core academic subjects: English language arts; math; science; history and social science; and foreign languages. The Board reached a consensus that the passing standard for the class of 2003 should include two of these subjects - English language arts and math - because these two curriculum frameworks have been in use in schools for a considerable period of time. The remaining subjects would be phased in as part of the competency determination in future years.

Commissioner Driscoll said the Board might need legislation to use only two subjects initially for the 10th-grade competency determination. He said he has raised the issue with legislative leaders, and they seem receptive to the idea. Board member Roberta Schaefer recommended setting a schedule for phasing in the remaining subjects.

Board members agreed that all students, including those in vocational-technical education, special education and bilingual education programs, should be held to the same passing standard on the English language arts and math exams. Board members Bill Irwin and Abigail Thernstrom noted that the alternative would run the risk of creating a dual-class system, in which some students might be denied educational opportunities. The Board also agreed that students should be required to meet the passing score on each of the two tests rather than using an average combined score.

On other issues, the Board agreed that the law does not permit local school districts to override a student's inadequate performance on the 10th-grade MCAS, and that the competency threshold used initially for the class of 2003 will be raised in subsequent years. The Board also asked the Commissioner to propose a narrowly crafted appeals process that may be used by individual students. In concluding, Chairman Peyser stated that the starting point for the escalating competency threshold should be somewhere below the "proficient" level.

Commissioner Driscoll recommended that the Board make a preliminary decision on the initial competency determination at the November 23 meeting, solicit public comment on the proposed standard, and then vote on it in late January 2000.

### Regular Meeting

Chairman Peyser opened the September 28th meeting by summarizing the Board's discussion on the 10th-grade competency determination. Commissioner Driscoll then reported that schools opened very smoothly and efficiently around the Commonwealth this year, and that he was impressed by faculty and students' purposeful focus on academic standards.

## **Curriculum Frameworks in Mathematics and Health**

The Board voted to send out for public comment the draft of the revised Mathematics Curriculum Framework. A panel comprised of teachers and administrators of mathematics programs in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, university faculty, and mathematicians revised the framework. It is now clearer and contains more specific learning standards, so that teachers at all levels will know what they are expected to teach. The grade spans have been narrowed, and the standards are grouped by pairs of grades. The framework also includes a section showing which standards might be included in algebra I, geometry, and advanced algebra/pre-calculus courses.

Chairman Peyser commented that the revised framework makes explicit what was implicit in the previous version, and "enriches it by lining it up with good classroom practice." The mathematics framework will be out for public comment until December 20. The Board is tentatively scheduled to vote on the framework in February 2000.

The Board also approved the revised Health Curriculum Framework. The revisions to the 1996 framework include a greater emphasis on health education content. The core concept was strengthened and the guiding principles were clarified in order to reflect realistic and effective health instruction and learning in schools. The framework will now be distributed to schools for use in improving curriculum and instruction in health.

## **Charter School Renewals**

The Board approved renewals for two charter schools to operate for five more years: the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School and the Marblehead Community Charter School.

## **Adoption of the School and District Accountability System and Amendments to Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts**

Chairman Peyser opened the discussion, stating, "I believe this School and District Accountability System is sound and fair, and I hope the Board will give it final approval." Responding to concerns about using MCAS data, the Chairman said, "No judgment whatsoever will be made about school quality on the basis of MCAS performance, especially during this first year. The rating system is used simply to identify those schools, particularly at both ends of the performance spectrum, which deserve closer evaluation. Evaluation and judgment will be based on a wealth of available data plus, if necessary, a detailed on-site inspection by experienced, qualified educators."

The Chairman added that the Board needs to move ahead with the accountability system. "The only way we will ever perfect this system is to apply it. I am inclined to err on the side of early evaluation to ensure that students trapped in demonstrably failing schools are not allowed to languish without some kind of timely remedial intervention," he said.

Juliane Dow, who leads the Department's Accountability and Targeted Assistance initiative, summarized the changes that have been made to the system and to the proposed regulations as a result of public comment. She described the multi-stage process that will be used in the rating process. Student Board member Marcel LaFlamme recommended that students should be recruited for the accountability system's fact-finding teams. Board member Stanley Koplik added that parental or guardian involvement should be listed as a factor that is important for school improvement. The Board voted, with one dissent in each case, to accept these two amendments.

Board member Edwin Delattre expressed his opposition to the proposed accountability system because of its reliance on MCAS. He also asked for more information about the plan and personnel for school inspections. The Commissioner explained that those details will be presented to the Board at a later date. The Board voted 7-1 to adopt the School and District Accountability System and the amendments to the Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and Districts, as revised.

## **Adoption of Emergency Regulations for Essex**

# Agricultural and Technical Institute

The Board voted to adopt emergency regulations affecting governance and financing of the Essex Agricultural and Technical Institute. When the Legislature abolished Essex County government effective June 30, 1999, it made the Institute a freestanding agricultural high school under the general supervision of the Department of Education. The Department will seek public comment on the regulations, which will go back to the Board for final adoption in December.

## Chapter 70: School Finance

Board member Charles Baker presented the report of the Board's finance committee summarizing suggested changes to the Chapter 70 statute. These proposals keep the essence of the current school finance formula, particularly the commitment to provide an adequate level of funding to every school district, while making the formula more equitable and easier to understand.

Simplifications to the foundation formula include a baseline per-pupil dollar amount for each grade level for elementary, middle, and high schools, and adjusting the baseline for individual school districts based on their enrollment of limited English proficient (LEP), vocational, and low-income students. The Board will pursue these ideas as the Legislature and the Governor consider changes to Chapter 70 over the next year.

## Proposed Budget for FY 2001

The Board received a preliminary FY 2001 budget proposal from the Commissioner, which represents a \$267 million increase over Administration and Finance's FY 2000 spending targets. Almost \$208 million of the proposed increase comes from various state aid programs that are formula-driven. Commissioner Driscoll and Chairman Peyser said the budget proposal is intended to meet statutory obligations, provide the additional resources needed for assessment and accountability, and take into account the Governor's directive to all state agencies to reduce the growth in state spending. The Board will vote on the budget proposal in October and then submit it to the Governor and the Legislature.

## Proposed Equity Plan from Waltham Public Schools

Waltham Superintendent Susan Parrella, Mayor William Stanley, and other local officials presented to the Board an Equity Plan to address racial imbalance and isolation of minority students, through a parent choice program that does not use race or national origin as a factor in making student assignments. The Board will review the plan, and expects to address it at a future meeting.

## Other Business

The Board unanimously re-elected Roberta Schaefer of Worcester as Vice-Chairperson. The Board also approved \$15,183,047 in grants which include Advanced Placement Programs; Community Service Learning School-Based Program (federal and state); Gay/Straight Alliance Mentoring Program; Gifted and Talented Education; Middle School Climate Improvement; Safe Schools for Gay and Lesbian Students; and Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Intervention Program.

## Next Meeting

The next Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 26, 1999, at the Department of Education in Malden.

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## UPDATE: Shigella Outbreak in Hampden County

To: School Administrators, School Nurses and Teachers  
From: Allison Hackbarth, MPH, Epidemiologist  
Date: September 15, 1999

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Public Health  
State Laboratory Institute  
305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
BUREAU OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL  
Division of Epidemiology and Immunization  
(617) 983-6800

The shigella outbreak that is currently occurring in Hampden County and surrounding towns is restricted to that area of Massachusetts. Please note that the [Department of Public Health Letter](#) that was sent to school administrators, school nurses and teachers, and dated August 18, 1999, only applies to schools in Hampden County and some surrounding towns. If you are a school that is not in Hampden County, please think of the letter as more of an FYI. You do not have to implement a strict handwashing policy, hold parent meetings, etc., at this point (unless you actually have shigella cases). If your town does have shigella cases that are outbreak related, the Division of Epidemiology and Immunization will notify the local board of health who will in turn work with schools and daycares to control and prevent further spread of shigella. (The towns outside of Hampden County that have shigella cases and are outbreak related have already been notified.) You may use this outbreak notification as an opportunity to review handwashing policies/curriculums within your school, as shigella is only one of many communicable diseases that can be prevented by handwashing. If you have any questions, please contact our office at (617) 983-6800.

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