



## Commissioner's Update Archive



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March 21, 2000

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

In this letter, I have just a few matters to address.

### **New Grant Information Webpage**

I am pleased to let you know that we have redesigned our Grants Information page. It now provides more comprehensive and complete information in one place. The new webpage can be directly found at <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/grants/default.html>.

### **MCAS Update**

I have been asked to provide schools and districts with a list of helpful hints for administering the MCAS tests this spring. If you have suggestions on how to coordinate and administer the tests at the district, the school building or classroom levels, please forward your advice to Jan O'Keefe at [jokeefe@doe.mass.edu](mailto:jokeefe@doe.mass.edu), or call her at 781-338-3117. I will summarize the list, and include it in next month's updates.

### **Class-Size Reduction Grants Released Soon**

In the summer of 1999, 266 Massachusetts school districts received federal "Class-Size Reduction" funds - a total of more than \$22 million - that have enabled them to recruit, hire, and train more than 500 new teachers for the 1999-2000 school year. School districts use the funds for these purposes: to recruit and hire highly qualified teachers to reduce class sizes in targeted grades and areas; to provide extra pay for veteran teachers who serve as mentors to newly hired teachers; and to provide teachers with professional development based on the identified learning needs of students. The federal appropriation for Massachusetts for FY 2001 is more than \$24 million. Funds are awarded to each school district based on the community's total K-12 enrollment and the number of students from families with low incomes. Funds are targeted to high-poverty communities, but most districts will receive awards. The amount of funds that are available to each district will be available on our website in late April, and applications will be available later this spring in the FY 01 Entitlement Grant Package application.

### **New Teacher Signing Bonus Update**

Nearly 950 individuals have applied to the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program for New Teachers, and 380 applicants have participated in sample teaching sessions and interviews held at the Department of Education. We have identified a large group of outstanding candidates with expertise in the areas of greatest need: math, science, and foreign language. We will select up to 125 signing bonus recipients who will participate in our intensive summer training, and up to 125 recipients to receive scholarships for the training. Up to 250 additional positions will be available for candidates who are admitted to the training. Please contact Kimberly Beck at 781-338-3230 or

[kbeck@doe.mass.edu](mailto:kbeck@doe.mass.edu) if you would like to obtain candidate information.

## **Recertification**

On March 20, we are beginning to ship copies of the Recertification Guidelines and Recertification Questions and Answers to all Massachusetts school districts. Each shipment will contain enough copies for all certified staff in your district. Shipments will be completed by April 1.

## **PDPs for Attendance at a Professional Conference**

Educators and professional development providers have asked for clarification regarding our current guidelines for professional development points (PDPs) for attendance at professional conferences. The January 2000 Recertification Guidelines for Massachusetts Educators state, "PDPs will not be awarded for attendance at a professional conference." However, as with other professional development initiatives, educators may receive PDPs after the successful completion of a professional conference of 10 hours or more with an observable demonstration of learning that could include a written product or other product that can be documented. Educators are also eligible to receive 30 PDPs the first time they make a presentation at a professional conference in a five-year renewal cycle. In addition, an educator who attends a professional conference may extend his learning by developing an activity or curriculum for use at school, or by publishing written material as described in the Guidelines.

## **Census 2000**

The U.S. Census Bureau has launched a national campaign to ensure that everyone is counted, especially children. I encourage the participation of every school district to reinforce this national priority. For more information and materials call 1-800-296-5923, or visit the census website at <http://www.census.gov/>.

## **Education Technology: VES**

We are working with several school districts, including Boston, Worcester, and Springfield, to create a "Virtual Education Space" for every teacher, student, and parent. An extensive Request for Proposals was issued earlier this month. In the fall of 2000, every teacher will be able to log on to a personal workspace through any computer connected to the Internet to develop and share lessons that are aligned to state and district standards. In the fall of 2001, students and parents will be able to download school assignments. By providing continuous feedback on work toward all the standards, this opportunity will help families and schools work more closely together. I anticipate that this initiative will provide great opportunities for teaching and learning.

## **Education Technology: SASIDs**

School districts have responded very well in meeting the deadline for establishing the state student registration system. We are working with a few remaining districts to ensure that every student has an identification number in time for this spring's MCAS. The individual student identification codes will assist you in several important areas including: analyzing MCAS performance data from year to year through the Department of Education DataMart that will be introduced this spring; and providing for VES capability. I will have more information soon.

Your hard work is appreciated.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education