



David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Commissioner's Updates

October 4, 2001

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

In this letter I have four matters to address and three items for your review:

Field Trips During this Period of Uncertainty

Given this time of uncertain public safety, a number of superintendents have asked me for an official announcement regarding school field trips. Generally, excursions to games, competitions and educational field trips have resumed. My advice is that you proceed in as normal a manner as possible, but with caution. As ever, I have faith that local school leaders will make the wisest and safest decisions for students and parents, and for teachers.

MCAS Appeals Process

At the September 25th meeting of the Board of Education, the Board had an initial discussion about an MCAS appeals process for students unable to pass English and mathematics after numerous tries but can demonstrate through evidence that they meet the 220 standard. While there will be a public comment period of at least four months for educators and the general public to weigh in on the proposed policy, there are important criteria that will affect current juniors today, if approved. As a condition for appeals, the Board may include eligibility requirements such as good attendance and a minimum number of hours in MCAS remediation. Therefore, I am asking you to notify students and their families of the need to maintain a good attendance record and to take advantage of MCAS remediation classes now so they are prepared for all eventualities.

Please note: recent media reports about the MCAS appeal process have suggested that we are lowering the standard. This is totally incorrect. To prevail on appeal, students will need to have taken the test multiple times and present evidence that they can perform at the 220 level in mathematics and English. In response to the media inaccuracies, I submitted to The Boston Herald this op-ed that was published on Saturday, September 29 at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.asp?id=1300>.

Student Pledge Against Gun Violence

On October 17, North Carolina State Superintendent of Education, Michael E. Ward, is leading a Day of National Concern about Young People and Gun Violence. Youth across the country will have the opportunity to participate in the sixth annual Student Pledge Against Gun Violence by signing voluntary contracts agreeing to gun-free schools. Given the violence of September 11, we all need to take proactive, protective measures, and I urge you and your middle and high school students and their parents to participate. For more information on this special program, please visit www.pledge.org or www.ncpublicschools.org, or call 507-645-5378.

Listed on our website at www.doe.mass.edu are three items:

1. MCAS Update



2. Informational Sessions on the New Educator Licensure Regulations



3. "Board in Brief," a summary of the September meeting of the Board of Education



All the best, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS Update

Memorandum

To: School Superintendents, Principals, Directors of Charter Schools, Chapter 766 Approved Private Schools, Institutional Schools, and Educational Collaboratives

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: October 5, 2001

Scoring Guides and Sample Student Work

Scoring guides and sample student work for all tested grades and subjects are posted on the Department website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/>. This site gives examples of actual student work and shows how student work is scored at each score point. This is an excellent resource for students, parents and teachers.

Schedule for Release of 2001 Results

Results for 2001 tests are still scheduled to be released in mid-October. As in the past, state results will be released first to the public and posted on the Department website followed by the release of school, district, and student results. Thank you for taking the time to review your Test Item Analysis results and reporting any irregularities.

Reminder to Attend Grade 10 Administration Workshops in November

If you think you will have students taking the grade 10 retest and have not done so already, please register for one of the MCAS Grade 10 Retest Administration Workshops scheduled for the second week in November. A registration form is located on the Department website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2001/news/retest_frm.doc.

Reminder to Attend MCAS Alternate Assessment Workshops in October and Early November

A number of workshops on the MCAS Alternate Assessment are being offered to educators and administrators during October and early November at a variety of locations. Please encourage pertinent staff to take advantage of this professional development opportunity. Registration forms are available on the Department website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt>.



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Informational Sessions on the New Educator Licensure Regulations

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Directors of Collaboratives and Chapter 766 Private Schools

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: September 24, 2001

The new Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval will become effective October 1, 2001. As you learned from my letter of August 17, the new regulations provide for significant involvement of school districts in the teacher licensure process. For example, all school districts will be required to provide induction programs to support teachers in their first year of practice. Also, under the new regulations, school districts can establish programs to prepare teachers to meet the requirements for initial licensure.

We are inviting you and representatives from your staff to join us at one of our New Educator Licensure Regulations Informational Sessions. More detailed information on the new regulations will be provided, and you will have the opportunity to ask questions. We hope to be able to address all your concerns.

The New Educator Licensure Regulations Informational Sessions will be held at the following times and locations:

October 11, 2001 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Worcester (Holiday Inn)

October 16, 2001 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Mansfield (Holiday Inn)

October 18, 2001 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Northampton (Inn at Northampton)

November 1, 2001 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Waltham (Bentley College)

To register please fill out the following information and mail to the Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, Attn: Maria Silva or fax to her at (781) 338-3391 or email msilva@doe.mass.edu by October 3. A confirmation letter will be sent by October 9 along with directions. For more information, you can call (781) 338-6610. A continental Breakfast will be provided.

Name: _____

Title: _____

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Board in Brief

Tuesday, September 25, 2001

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 the regular meeting on Tuesday, September 25, 2001 at the Department of Education in Malden.

Board Chairman James Peyser opened the meeting by commenting on his recent school visits. He said, "I want to personally recognize the wonderful, sometimes even heroic performance of teachers, principals, counselors, and other educators throughout the Commonwealth in response to the tragic events of September 11." Commissioner Driscoll also acknowledged Massachusetts teachers and administrators, saying, "Across this Commonwealth, our schools have responded in a remarkable and immediate way to the needs of their students. I couldn't be prouder of the way that our schools dealt with these tragic events."

Commissioner Driscoll reported on the state effort to provide extra help to the Class of 2003, to supplement the work being done in high schools across the Commonwealth. The Department of Education issued two Requests for Responses last week for vendors to provide online tutorial services to students in the Class of 2003 who failed either or both English language arts and mathematics grade 10 MCAS tests. The Department will also be providing several dozen staff members, for one hour a week beginning October 15, to tutor students in the Class of 2003 at Malden High School.

Board member Rick Crowley reported on his participation in this summer's MCAS standard-setting process. He said he was very impressed with the quality of the educators who participated and the integrity of the process of setting the standards.

Annual Meeting: Election of Vice-Chairperson

The Board voted unanimously to elect Henry Thomas III as its Vice-Chairperson. Mr. Thomas will hold office until the next annual meeting of the Board in September of 2002. Chairman Peyser and the members of the Board thanked Roberta Schaefer for her service as Vice-Chairperson since 1998.

Competency Determination: Recommendations on MCAS Appeals Process

Commissioner Driscoll presented initial recommendations on the MCAS performance appeals process to the Board. Chairman Peyser, Commissioner Driscoll, Board member Henry Thomas III, and Associate Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus have been working with the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee, appointed by the Commissioner last spring, to prepare a recommendation to the Board on policies and procedures for performance appeals. The Blue Ribbon Committee, an advisory board comprised of school principals, superintendents, teachers, business and community leaders, helped to shape the recommendation the Commissioner brought to the Board for discussion.

The performance appeal applies to a student who asserts that his or her performance on the grade 10 MCAS in English language arts, mathematics, or both subjects, does not accurately reflect the student's knowledge and skill in relation to the relevant standards in the Massachusetts curriculum framework in that subject area. The appeal does not exempt students from meeting the grade 10 standards in English language arts and mathematics, nor does it change the 220 minimum standard for the competency determination. What it does mean is that if, for some reason, a student repeatedly has not demonstrated a 220 level on the grade 10 MCAS, but the student and the school can show through other specific measures that the student has reached a level of performance equivalent to 220, then the student should

receive the competency determination.

Chairman Peyser noted that the purpose of the performance appeals process is to ensure fairness. Commissioner Driscoll stressed that the proposal does not mean that the standards have been lowered. "We can't turn a blind eye to students who have otherwise shown they can meet this standard, but for whatever reason cannot do it on MCAS," he said. "This is the most important appeals process we have ever dealt with." The Commissioner will meet with the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee to further develop the recommendation, which he will bring back to the Board in October for a vote to solicit public comment.

FY 2003 Budget Proposal

Chairman Peyser appointed Board member Rick Crowley to the Board's Budget Committee. Chairman Peyser and Commissioner Driscoll noted that fiscal constraints will likely affect the state budget for the current year, FY 2002, as well as the budget for FY 2003, and they urged Board members to focus on clear budgetary priorities. The Board will continue the budget discussion at the October meeting, and will vote on its FY 2003 education budget proposal at the November meeting.

Establishment of Advisory Council on Educational Technology

The Board voted to establish an Advisory Council on Educational Technology, which will advise the Board and the Department on key issues in this field. It will also interact with the work of the other advisory councils to the Board, each of which is affected by educational technology. Chairman Peyser charged the new Council "to be a vocal skeptic of technology for technology's sake" and to focus on technology that supports teaching and learning. The Commissioner will present nominations for advisory council membership to the Board for appointment at a future meeting.

Charter School Amendments

Under the Board's Charter School Regulations, certain changes in a school's mission statement or organization require an amendment to the school's charter and approval by the Board. The Board approved an amendment to the mission statement of the Neighborhood House Charter School in Boston, and an amendment to mission statement and change in region (adding Holden and West Boylston) for the Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School in Worcester.

Schedule of Regular Board Meeting Dates through June 2002

The Board agreed on the following schedule of regular meeting dates for 2002: January 22, February 26, March 26, April 30, May 28, and June 25. The regular meeting dates for the remainder of 2001 are: October 23, November 27 and December 18.

NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, October 23, 2001, at a location to be announced.

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