



**David P. Driscoll**  
Commissioner of Education

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## Commissioner's Updates

December 6, 2001

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

In this letter, I have 3 announcements and 2 items recently posted on our website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu). Beginning with this Update, I will discontinue mailing my bimonthly update letter to you, and will post it on our website only.

### Final Chapter 70 Spending Requirements

We have posted the Final FY02 Chapter 70 Aid and Spending Requirements information on the school finance server at [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/chapter\\_02f.html](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/chapter_02f.html).

### Notice of Public Comment on Proposed Amendments to School Finance and Accountability Regulations

The deadline to submit public comments on the proposed amendments to school finance and accountability regulations is Friday, January 25, 2002. The proposed amendments are needed to implement the new special education "circuit breaker" reimbursement program, enacted in 2000 and scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2002, to provide financial relief for school districts that incur unusually high costs in educating students with disabilities. Copies of the proposed amendments are available at [www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/), or by calling 781-338-6533.

### Project FOCUS Federal Fund Opportunity

Project FOCUS: Empowering Special Educators as Leaders, is a federally funded initiative designed to support the development of innovative classroom practices that will enhance services for students with disabilities. For more information, you can go to [www.doe.mass.edu/sped/#new](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/#new), or call Linda Tarmy at 781-338-3384 or email [ltarmy@doe.mass.edu](mailto:ltarmy@doe.mass.edu).

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Here are two items recently posted at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu):

1. Recruitment of School Panel Evaluators



2. "Board in Brief," a summary of the November meeting of the Board of Education



All the best, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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## School Panel Reviews

As part of the School and District Accountability System, the Department will continue to conduct on-site reviews through the 2001-2002 school year, both to identify schools that are under-performing and schools that are exemplars of improvement. The Department seeks qualified school-based practitioners, including principals, teachers, and curriculum directors, to participate in these reviews. Educators with experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are encouraged to apply.

## Frequently Asked Questions on the Panel Review Process

### How are schools selected for review?

Schools are chosen for a review based on a performance rating of *Very Low* or *Critically Low* and no improvement in English Language Arts and mathematics in the first School Performance Rating Cycle (1998-2000) and the 2001 MCAS test results. Student performance results, together with the findings from a panel review, are the information the Commissioner of Education uses to decide whether or not a school will be declared under-performing.

Schools that exceeded their improvement expectations in Cycle I, and maintained that improvement in 2001, are invited to participate in the Department's new Exemplary Schools Program by submitting a School Leader Questionnaire, which provides information on the changes and improvement initiatives they think have had the most significant effect on their student performance results. Finalists from that group receive a panel review for possible selection as a 2002 Compass School.

### When are the reviews conducted?

Reviews are scheduled during the school year, in late fall and in early spring.

### Who is eligible to serve as panelist?

Any school-based practitioner including teachers, principals, and curriculum directors, who meets the minimum qualifications. See [Panelists Qualifications](#) sheet.

### What kind of commitment is required of panelists?

Panelists will serve on five member teams composed of Department staff, educational consultants, and active practitioners. Panelists must commit to four hours of training, some preparatory reading and analysis of information submitted to the Department by the school, and a two-day on-site visit.

Under the guidance of an experienced chairperson, panelists will review and analyze performance data, staffing data, school improvement plans, and other information on the school. On-site visits are guided by a detailed protocol for interviewing and observation, and culminate in a meeting by

the panel to come to consensus on the answers to two key questions that frame each evaluation process.

The key questions to identify **under-performing schools** are:

1. Does the school have an effective planning process which has produced, or is likely to produce, a sound written plan for improving student performance?
2. Are the conditions in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

The key questions to identify **Compass Schools** are:

1. Is this school using effective improvement initiatives that could be replicated in other similarly profiled schools?
2. Are the conditions in place for this school to serve as a model of effective practices and successful improvement initiatives?

A report on the team's findings is submitted to the Commissioner, who considers it in the determination of declaring a school under-performing or in the final selection of schools to serve as Compass Schools.

## **What are the benefits of serving on a panel?**

In addition to contributing to the effort to improve student performance in all the schools in the Commonwealth, panelists on school panel reviews have the opportunity to work with peers from outside their own schools and community.

Participation in the panel review process enables panelists to observe the organizational structure, planning processes, and instructional and assessment practice in a variety of schools. Panelists will work as a group to analyze information on: the process of developing and implementing school improvement plans; how schools use various kinds of student performance data to drive the planning process; what school level assessments are being used to track student progress and measure the success of improvement efforts; and what kind of professional development teachers are focusing on.

Panelists cite the experience of evaluating other schools in an objective, systematic way as a valuable form of professional development, which they can bring to bear in the operation of their own schools and districts. As Patricia A. Poska of the Lynn Public Schools puts it, "My experience as a panelist was so helpful to me in my professional capacity as Staff Development/Instructional Support Facilitator. It helped clarify for me the kind of assistance I could be providing to my own district's schools as support for their efforts to improve student achievement."

In addition, panelists will develop a clearer understanding of the state's Accountability System, as well as how to use their own school's MCAS test results to help drive the improvement planning process.

## **Are panelists remunerated for their service?**

Participants will also receive a \$100 honorarium for each completed panel review and 30 professional development points for their service.

## **How do I apply?**

By submitting an application, current resume, and a written recommendation and authorization for release from your superintendent to the office of School Performance Evaluation.

Please submit your application by electronic or regular mail to Kristen Mazzuchelli.

### **Panel Review Application**

[ [PDF](#) | [MSWORD](#) ]

### **Superintendent Recommendation Form**

[ [PDF](#) | [MSWORD](#) ]

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## Board in Brief

**Tuesday, November 27, 2001**

This is "Board in Brief," issued at the request of Commissioner David P. Driscoll to bring you up to date on Board of Education matters. This is a report on the regular meeting held on Tuesday, November 27, 2001 at the Floral Street Elementary School in Shrewsbury.

Commissioner Driscoll opened the meeting by reporting on a number of positive news articles that have been published in the past week regarding MCAS results, including an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, a front page story in *Education Week*, and recent articles in the *Boston Globe* and *Boston Herald*. "Now we have seen what happens when the test counts," Commissioner Driscoll said. "MCAS shows us that education reform is working, and we are beginning to see the fruits of our labors."

Commissioner Driscoll announced that Massachusetts is one of five states chosen to participate in the American Diploma Project. Achieve, Inc., the Education Trust, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the National Alliance of Business were funded by a two-year grant from the Hewlett Foundation to help states implement higher standards and accountability systems through this project. The five states selected to participate are Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Texas. Among other things, the project will review high school standards and assessments in relation to college admissions and employment. Board Chairman James Peyser, Higher Education Chancellor Judy Gill, and Commissioner Driscoll will be collaborating on this project.

## FY 03 Budget Proposal

The Board voted to approve the FY 03 budget proposal. The total budget request is 2.9% above the FY 02 provisional budget, reflecting spending targets provided by the Governor's office in light of projected revenues. The FY 03 budget proposal includes an increase of \$84 million in Chapter 70 state aid, full funding of the new special education "circuit breaker" reimbursement program at \$135 million, and increased funding for Academic Support Services grants. Proposed reductions include School Building Assistance (in line with reductions in the FY 02 legislatively mandated authorization level), regional school transportation, and charter school reimbursements.

Chairman Peyser reviewed the FY 02 conference committee budget, which was released by the Legislature on November 21st. He commented that it makes major cuts that are "inappropriate and indefensible" at this point five months into the fiscal year, including a \$13 million (44%) reduction in adult basic education and a \$700,000 (6%) reduction in the Department's administrative account. The Governor will announce her vetoes by December 1st and the Legislature will reconvene on December 5th to consider them. The Commissioner will report to the Board at the December meeting on how the Department will respond to the budget cuts.

## Proposed Revisions to the Curriculum Framework in History and Social Science

The Board had an initial discussion on proposed revisions to the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework. A review panel of 18 history and social science educators has worked with the Department for the past year to revise the 1997 framework. In response to recommendations from classroom teachers, the new proposed standards are organized by grade level and provide more specificity to guide instruction. After further consultation with the framework review panel, the Commissioner will bring the proposed framework back to the Board in December for further discussion and a vote to solicit public comment.

## **Proposed Regulations on Special Education Reimbursement Program**

The Board voted unanimously to solicit public comment on proposed regulations on the new special education reimbursement program (the so-called "circuit-breaker" program) that was enacted in the summer of 2000 and is scheduled to begin on July 1, 2002. The proposed regulations govern the administration of this new state aid program, which will provide financial support for high-cost special education placements. After the public comment period and any necessary revisions, the Commissioner will bring back the proposed regulations to the Board in February 2002 for a vote.

## **Charter Schools Matters**

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 charter of the Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter School in Springfield, allowing the school to revise its educational philosophy as presented in its charter application.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, December 18, 2001 at the Department of Education in Malden.

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