



David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Commissioner's Update

October 21, 2005

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

In this update I have 8 announcements and 3 items recently posted at www.doe.mass.edu.

2003-2004 School Year Dropout Report

The annual dropout report we are releasing today shows that the number of teens leaving high school prior to graduation has reached an all-time high. This may be in part because of our improved data collection system, but it is likely that other factors are involved as well. I am especially concerned about the number of juniors and seniors who are dropping out, many after earning their competency determination.

I call on each of you to study this problem in your communities, and do an in-depth analysis of the reasons why students are not completing high school. Once you have reviewed the issue locally, please submit your findings back to us. We intend to compile a report of the major reasons and begin to develop a set of statewide strategies to address them. Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter.

Deadline for Education Personnel Data Collection Survey-- October 28th

All districts are encouraged to complete the Education Personnel Data Collection Survey before the October 28 deadline. This new data collection initiative will eventually replace the current District and School Staffing Report (DSSR). The DOE is using the survey to gather information on how school districts and public charter schools maintain education personnel information and to invite districts to become part of a pilot group that will help develop the collection process. For more information, and to complete the survey, go to: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/edb/>. After October 28th, the survey will be closed.

MCAS Appeals Workshops

All high school faculty members responsible for completing MCAS appeals applications are encouraged to attend one of two Performance Appeals workshops being held in November. The dates are: Thursday, November 10, from 9:30 a.m. to noon, in Daly Auditorium at Monson Development Center in Palmer; and Monday, November 21, from 9:30 a.m. to noon, at the Massachusetts Department of Education in Malden. Please register at mcasappeals@doe.mass.edu. Directions to the [Monson Development Center in Palmer](#). Directions to the Department of Education located at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/contact/doedirections.asp>.

Pothole Awards

Earlier this month we posted the list of Round 1 Pothole awards and applications for Round 2 at http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/found06_award1.html. Please keep in mind that the deadline for Round 2 applications is November 4.

School Nurse Certification Requirement

I recently had the honor of attending a gala celebrating the 100th anniversary of school nursing, and was reminded of the critical role our school nurses play in the lives of our school children.

With that in mind I wanted to remind you to ensure that your school nurses meet the Department's certification requirements. These were designed to reflect the standards necessary to provide high quality nursing care in our schools. Nurses today are caring for a rapidly increasing number of children with complex health needs, mental health issues and life threatening allergies, and it is more important than ever before that they are highly educated in health and emergency training.

Telecast of the White House Conference on Helping America's Youth

The Department of Education and the University of Massachusetts are co-sponsoring the first-ever teleconference of the White House Conference on Helping America's Youth on October 27. Hosted by First Lady Laura Bush, the conference will promote public awareness of the various problems facing at-risk youth in the United States, and will bring together policy makers, research experts, educators and parents to share examples of what is working and what is not.

The conference will be simulcast at the U-Mass Center in Shrewsbury, beginning at 9 a.m. To participate, RSVP by October 26 to sjablonski@donahue.umassp.edu. For more information about the White House's Helping America's Youth Initiative, look online at www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/helping-youth.html.

Lead in School Drinking Water Workshops

The Department of Environmental Protection is hosting four FREE workshops on the Massachusetts Lead in School Drinking Water Program. Topics include regulations, health effects, sources of lead, school sampling, and communicating results. Those who complete the seminar will be awarded 0.3CEUs, (equivalent to 3 TCHs).

These workshops are designed to help schools, day care facilities, small public water suppliers, local officials, and day care facilities with lead or copper in their drinking water. The workshops will be held on October 27 at the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission; November 9 at the Littleton Water Department; November 15 at the Carver Public Library; and Dec. 6 at the Greenfield Community College. For more information, go to the Department of Environmental Protection's website at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/>.

Classroom Wishlist

I have recently learned of a non-profit organization dedicated to helping public school classrooms get the supplies and technology they so desperately need. Classroom Wishlist runs a website that lets teachers publish their classroom supply needs so that community members and parents can make specific donations directly to your class to meet your exact need. Donors can make a tax deductible donation directly to Classroom Wishlist, which then buys the items and ships them directly to your school. This is a unique organization that, with very little effort on your part, could help you fill your classrooms with needs ranging from notebooks to pencils to computers. For more information, check online at www.classroomwishlist.org.

Here are 3 items recently posted at www.doe.mass.edu:

1. 2003-2004 Massachusetts High School Dropout Report



2. November is Family Literacy Month



3. E-Learning in Massachusetts



Thank you for the great work that you do every day for the children of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Statistical Reports

For Immediate Release

Friday, October 21, 2005

Contact: Heidi B. Perlman 781-338-3106

Dropout Rate Increase Prompts Call For More Student Engagement

MALDEN - The dropout rate for high schoolers hit a high during the 2003-2004 school year, prompting Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll to renew his call for educators to do more to keep students engaged in their learning.

In his bi-monthly email message to Superintendents, Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll on Friday asked district leaders to do a careful analysis of why students dropped out in their communities, and to report their findings back to the Department of Education. These findings will be used to develop a set of statewide strategies to address the problem.

"We owe it to our young people to build a system that will ensure every single one of our students feels connected to and engaged in their learning and gets the support they need to reach full success in high school and graduate," he said. "This is, quite simply, our responsibility as educators."

According to the Department of Education report released Friday, the 2003-2004 dropout rate rose to 3.7 percent, a slight increase from 2002-2003, when the rate was 3.3 percent.

In all, 10,633 students in grades 9-12 dropped out during the 2003-2004 school year. When broken down by class, this translates into 2.6 percent of freshmen, 3.7 percent of sophomores, 4 percent of juniors and 4.8 percent of high school seniors.

Of the 2,736 juniors who dropped out that year, 55 percent had not yet earned their competency determination. Of the 2,976 seniors who dropped out, 35 percent had not yet earned their competency determination.

Driscoll said he was concerned by the increase in dropouts, particularly at the junior and senior level.

"What these numbers show is that MCAS is not primarily what is prompting our students to drop out," he said. "We need to study the numbers carefully over the next few years and find out the exact reasons why they are quitting. Some may have family circumstances or job issues, or perhaps this increase is a result of more accurate data collection. Regardless, it is clear that too many teenagers do not feel a positive connection to their schooling, and this must not continue."

In the 2002-2003 school year, the dropout rate was 3.3 percent, or 9,389 students. This translated into 2.6 percent of freshmen, 3.6 percent of sophomores, 3.7 percent of juniors and 3.5 percent of seniors.



The 2000-2001 national dropout rate, according to the latest report by the National Center for Education Statistics, was 5 percent.

The 2003-2004 dropout rate was calculated based on enrollment figures reported through the Student Information Management System (SIMS) by each district on Oct. 1, 2003 and Oct. 1, 2004. A dropout is defined as a student in grade 9-12 who leaves school prior to graduation for reasons other than to transfer to another school, and does not re-enroll before the following Oct. 1.

This is the third year that SIMS data has been used to calculate the dropout rate. Data collected using SIMS is considered more accurate than the data the state was able to collect before the system was developed. SIMS requires districts to submit individual student data, while the prior system required districts to submit only data in the aggregate.

Other statewide findings include:

- Black and Hispanic students dropped out at a higherrate than White and Asian students in grades 9-12. Overall, Hispanic students dropped out at the highest rate in every grade: 6.6 percent in grade 9, 9.3 percent in grade 10, 8.1 percent in grade 11 and 10.1 percent in grade 12.
- 18.2 percent of the students who were retained inthe 2003-2004 school year dropped out.
- As has been the trend in previous years, more malesthan females dropped out: 4.3 percent (6,291) of male students dropped out, as compared to 3.1 percent (4,342) of female high schoolers.
- 5.7 percent (3,692) of low income students droppedout, as compared to 3.1 percent (6,941) of students who are not classified as low income.
- 5.4 percent (2,223)of special education studentsdropped out, as compared to 3.4 percent (8,410) of general education students.

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Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium

Our vision is successful families. Our mission is successful partnerships.

November is Family Literacy Month

October 20, 2005

Dear Friends:

In recognition of the critical role parents play in achieving the goals of Education Reform and the federal No Child Left Behind law, I am pleased to announce that Governor Mitt Romney has declared November as Massachusetts Family Literacy Month. This annual celebration, sponsored by the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium and the Massachusetts Reading Leadership Team, underscores the importance of strong literacy skills that help each family member be successful in school and in life.

We know that students do better in school when they are reading, writing, and participating in literacy activities with their families. Family Literacy Month is a great way to engage parents in supporting their children's education, and to help children toward lifelong learning. I applaud your efforts to involve parents and families in their children's education and encourage you to make this a vibrant tradition in the Commonwealth. Our website (www.doe.mass.edu/familylit) has resources that can help:

 [Governor Romney's 2005 Proclamation of Massachusetts Family Literacy Month](#)

 [A Guide to Celebrating Massachusetts Family Literacy Month](#)

 [The National Center for Family Literacy Activity Calendar](#)

 [Every Grownup is a Famous Storyteller](#)

 [Office of Reading Resources and Technical Assistance](#)

 [The Especially for Parents page of the U.S. Department of Education website](#)

 [The Massachusetts Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages Directory](#)

 [Public Service Announcements featuring the Adult and Family Literacy Hotline](#)

The Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium is a statewide partnership of 14 state agencies, statewide and community organizations, parents, and other interested parties working to integrate and coordinate family literacy and family support. The Massachusetts Reading Leadership Team was convened by the Department to oversee and evaluate the successful implementation of our Reading First initiative. It includes membership from a broad range of stakeholders including Reading First districts, teacher organizations, higher education, and representatives of state and federally funded literacy programming.

Together, I am confident we can build the successful partnerships that will help us achieve success for all Massachusetts families. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Educational Technology

October, 2005

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to share with you this report, E-Learning in Massachusetts,   which provides a snapshot of the online learning activities currently underway in our schools. E-learning offers exciting opportunities to engage today's students and ultimately improve their learning. In addition, the Internet makes it possible to provide students with courses and resources that might not otherwise be available. For educators, online technologies offer increased opportunities for professional development, enabling them to become highly qualified, as required by No Child Left Behind.

Also included in this report is a section highlighting the issues that educators and students should be aware of when using online technologies. Students need to know how to keep themselves safe when using the Internet, and schools need to know how to keep their networks secure. In addition, students and educators need to learn how to deal with the ethical issues that arise when using online technologies.

The publication of this report coincides with the launch of the Massachusetts Online Network for Education (MassONE). This secure online portal enables communication, collaboration, and sharing among educators, students, and DOE staff-creating ONE statewide community.

I am proud that Massachusetts offers a statewide e-learning platform that is available to all of our educators and students. I hope that this report will inspire you to consider how you might take advantage of MassONE to enhance teaching and learning in your school. I look forward to supporting you in your efforts.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
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