Dear Colleagues,

A few months ago, I had the privilege to meet with teacher leaders at Malden High School and learn how they are using common district-determined measures (DDMs) to promote discussion about student performance expectations and instructional strategies. At Malden High, DDMs are informing weekly department meetings at which teachers discuss how to teach in a way that requires students to show their work and to explain how evidence supports their claims and conclusions. It was clear that for these educators, DDMs have become a key tool for measuring student growth and grounding educator conversations about teaching and learning.

My department has also been paying close attention to Norwell. The leadership team there embraced DDMs early and has positioned the district as one of the Commonwealth’s leaders in this work. Jamie LaBillois, the Executive Director of Instruction, acknowledges that developing common measures is challenging, especially in traditionally untested grades and subjects, but he credits his educators with rising to meet these challenges head-on. He reports that DDMs have raised the quality of conversations about student achievement. Over time, he has seen the leadership team’s skill in planning, executing, and reflecting on these conversations grow exponentially.

Malden and Norwell are two among many districts that have embraced the rollout of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework and specifically DDMs as an opportunity to transform conversations among educators and between evaluators and educators. As I have said many times, implementing a comprehensive system of educator growth and development is difficult and time consuming, but it is the right work to be doing; study after study shows that educator quality has a major impact on student achievement and on students’ life trajectories.

(letter continued on page 2)
Evaluator feedback is divided into two main areas: (1) feedback about the educator’s instructional practice, namely what the educator is doing and how he or she might improve, and (2) feedback about the educator’s impact on student learning, how much students are growing and whether it matches expectations. District-determined measures are a primary tool for understanding educators’ impact.

While Malden, Norwell, and many others have developed processes for educators and evaluators to discuss student outcomes on common DDMs, it has become clear over the last several months that not all districts are finding success. Still, an evaluation system that cannot provide educators with objective feedback about their impact on students is incomplete at best, and at worst, irresponsible.

In order to provide all districts a meaningful and feasible way to advance this component of the evaluation framework, ESE has introduced the Alternative Pathways Proposal (click here for the Quick Reference Guide). This proposal was informed by conversations with a range of stakeholders, including leadership from the superintendents’ and teachers’ associations. It permits districts to submit a request to ESE to implement an alternative, but equally rigorous, pathway for incorporating evidence of educator impact into a Student Impact Rating. In other words, if analyzing trends and patterns based on DDMs and statewide growth measures is not going to work for your district, propose a different architecture to arrive at the same end. All approaches must adhere to the five core principles outlined in the Quick Reference Guide.

I want to thank Malden, Norwell, and the many other districts that are meeting the challenge of creating meaningful common measures. I am impressed and encouraged by your efforts. To all other districts, I trust that the Alternative Pathways Proposal will be a catalyst for you to complete your evaluation systems so that all educators receive the feedback they need to improve student outcomes.

Sincerely,
Mitchell D. Chester
Commissioner

25 Districts Administering the ESE Model Feedback Surveys

Twenty-five districts are partnering with ESE this spring to administer the ESE Model Feedback Surveys. Students and staff are being given the opportunity to comment on important aspects of instructional or leadership practice, such as “My teacher helps me to develop many ways to think about an activity or a problem,” (Student Survey, Grades 6-12) and “There is time allocated for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other” (Staff Survey). With individualized, timely reports that organize results by Standard and Indicator, educators can quickly apply feedback to practice and see immediate effects in the classroom or school. Results can also be used to inform educators’ self-assessments and goals for next year.

Teacher of the Year Update!
The 2016 Teacher of the Year will be announced on May 5th, National Teacher Appreciation Day.

In February, ESE received 50 applications for the 2016 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. A group of staff members from the Educator Effectiveness Team and members of ESE’s Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets participated in reading applications and visited the finalists’ classrooms.

Educator Evaluation Data Collection

The 2014-15 school year marks the first year that all educators in all districts are participating in an evaluation process aligned to the state framework. As an early reminder, educator evaluation data is reported to ESE through the end-of-year Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS) data collection.

For each educator, districts will report:
(1) whether the educator has professional teacher status,
(2) the educator’s overall Summative Performance Rating,
(3) the educator’s ratings on Standards I-IV, and
(4) the type of Educator Plan the educators was on when they received the ratings being reported.

Districts that are able to determine and report Student Impact Ratings based on trends and patterns will have an opportunity to do so. For more on data collection, read the Quick Reference Guide.
Giving All Students a Voice

“Students often feel that they’re unable to make choices or take action in the classroom, and I think it’s very important for us to empower them. ...By asking them for feedback we are empowering them to know that their understandings of things—that their feelings about things—are important.” - Ruth Freeman, 4th Grade Teacher, Westford, MA and member of ESE’s Teacher Advisory Cabinet

Giving all students a voice is critical to effective teaching and learning, and ESE is working to ensure that the model surveys are accessible to everyone. Students at the Massachusetts Hospital School, who have multiple disabilities and complex needs, are taking part in the model student surveys this year. “It’s important for this student population to be included in this work, to have a voice,” emphasized Mary Lou Chapman, Director of Special Education in Institutional Settings. “Our teachers are excited to be supporting this project and to contribute to the work of the department, other school districts, and ultimately other students with disabilities across the state.” The adaptations that MHS teachers employ will be made available on ESE’s website to assist all districts in collecting meaningful feedback from students with disabilities.

Ongoing Analysis of Model Surveys

Following the rigorous pilot study and validity analyses conducted in 2013-14 (download the full technical report), an independent research firm is conducting an external and consequential validity study of the model surveys to examine the relationship between survey results and other metrics of educator effectiveness.

Results will be available in Summer 2015 and will inform any changes or improvements to the instruments. Learn more about ESE’s Model Surveys by attending the afternoon session at the Spring Convening. Read the session description and see the full agenda here.

Just Released – 2015 Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring Programs

ESE is excited to announce the publication of updated guidance to support districts’ induction and mentoring programs. Based on input from a variety of stakeholders—teachers, administrators, mentors, education preparation program, unions, and ESE advisory councils—the updated Guidelines are more reader-friendly, aligned with current district work to support educators’ ongoing learning, and include local examples.

Comprehensive induction and mentoring programs offer critical supports to the growth and development of educators. Additionally, these programs offer an opportunity for districts to recognize effective educators and provide them with leadership roles in their schools and districts. Induction and mentoring programs also support a school culture built on collegiality, continuous professional development, and shared responsibility for the outcomes of all students.

Key updates to the 2015 Induction and Mentoring Guidelines include:

- **Annual district report to ESE now available electronically.** Under the regulations, districts are required to submit an annual report to ESE on induction and mentoring activities. In recent years, districts were to keep these reports on file and submit them to ESE upon request. As of the 2015-16 school year, districts will electronically submit annual induction and mentoring program information to ESE. More information about reporting, including a copy of the 2015-16 report is available here.

- **Improved alignment to educator effectiveness initiatives.** Updates to the guidelines have been made to explicitly draw connections across educator effectiveness initiatives and highlight their links to induction and mentoring programs.

- **Increased attention to local needs.** The guidelines highlight opportunities for districts to develop programs which truly meet local needs while ensuring that the spirit of the regulations is maintained.

- **New district examples and ESE resources.** A new section is included at the end of the guidelines to share district examples and ESE resources that can support local induction and mentoring programs.

ESE continues to seek out opportunities to highlight the work happening across the Commonwealth. To support this, we encourage educators and other stakeholders to send additional examples and resources to EducatorDevelopment@doe.mass.edu. Questions, comments, and/or suggestions are also welcome. For more information, visit the updated Induction and Mentoring webpage.
ESEA Flexibility Waiver Renewal

On March 31, ESE submitted its request for a three-year renewal of the state’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver.

Beginning in January, ESE worked with a wide range of stakeholders to review implementation of Massachusetts’ school and district accountability and assistance system and other aspects of the agency’s work that are authorized by the waiver. Through this process, participants identified several aspects of the system that could be improved. The waiver modifications ESE proposed relate to the assessment results of English language learners and the minimum group size used for accountability determinations. General information about Massachusetts’ flexibility waiver is available online.

For additional information, please email esa@doe.mass.edu or call (781) 338-3550.

Office of Educator Licensure Service Updates

Extended Call Center Hours. In order to further accommodate busy educator schedules, our Customer Service Call Center at (781) 338-6600 doubled its operating hours in early January to Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. In addition, every Wednesday through June 24th, the Call Center is open until 7:00 p.m. Currently, over 91% of the calls are answered with an average wait time of under four minutes.

New Website. You may have noticed that the webpages related to Licensure have received a new look and revised content, which is part of a larger ESE website redesign aimed at helping users quickly find the information and tools they are seeking. Please visit www.mass.gov/ese/licensure to check out the new pages.

Online Transactions in ELAR. The Educator Licensing and Recruitment (ELAR) System allows current and prospective MA educators to complete most licensure related transactions online and school districts, educators/applicants, and preparation programs have the ability to submit documents directly into an applicant’s ELAR profile. This provides the option for direct upload rather than having to submit documents through the mail, fax or Drop Box Central’s Document Drop Box. Following a successful upload, the documents will appear instantly in the applicant’s profile and the applicant will receive an email confirming receipt by the Office of Educator Licensure.

Update on ESE’s State Equity Plan

In July 2014, Secretary Duncan announced the Excellent Educators for All Initiative, which is designed to "move America toward the day when every student in every public school is taught by excellent educators." As part of this initiative, states are required to develop a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (also known as an equity plan) to the U.S. Department of Education. Over the last several months, Massachusetts has been gathering ideas and stakeholder feedback on the content to be included in this plan.

The Equity Plan, due June 1st, will assess Massachusetts students' access to strong educators as determined by multiple measures and will include steps ESE will take over the next several years to eliminate equity gaps. To contribute to the plan or to ask questions, email EducatorDevelopment@doe.mass.edu.

ESE’s Spring Convening - Registration closes May 8th!

Registration for ESE’s 2015 Spring Convening: Building Momentum, Sharing Success is still! The statewide convening will take place on Wednesday, May 27th and will be repeated on Thursday, May 28th at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel and Conference Center in Marlborough, MA.

Educators and districts across the state have laid the groundwork for meaningful evaluation systems and supports for educators to ensure all students have access to effective teachers and administrators. Join us for a full day of interactive workshops featuring promising practices from MA educators. Session topics include supporting evaluator capacity, teacher leadership, common assessments, alternate pathways for implementing the Student Impact Rating, curriculum and instruction, and more!

See the full agenda and session descriptions here. (See next page for more information.)
ESE’s Spring Convening (cont.)

Who should attend?
• Each district is invited to bring a team of four, including a union representative, school leader, district leader, and another member of the superintendent’s choosing.
• Educator preparation programs are invited to bring two representatives to attend.
• State-level organizations (unions, associations, etc.) are invited to bring a leadership team of five representatives to attend.

How do I register?
Contact your district office to see if there are spaces available on your district’s team. Registration information was emailed directly to superintendents, educator preparation programs, and union and association leaders at the beginning of April from EdEvalEvents@doe.mass.edu.

Teams are encouraged to register early to secure session preferences. Session preferences will be assigned in the order they are received. Registration closes on Friday, May 8th.

*Please note: Each person must register individually.

Visit the website for more information. Email any questions to EdEvalEvents@doe.mass.edu.

Questions or Comments are Always Welcome at EducatorEvaluation@doe.mass.edu

Contact the Educator Evaluation Team

Claire Abbott, Evaluation Training Program, Implementation Support, Student and Staff Feedback
Susan Berglund, Evaluation Liaison to Level 3 and Level 4 Districts
Matt Holloway, Evaluation Training Program, Evaluator Capacity, Student and Staff Feedback
Kat Johnston, Teacher Leadership, Communications, Implementation Support
Simone Lynch, Assistant Director, Center for Educator Effectiveness
Ron Noble, Educator Evaluation Manager
Craig Waterman, District-Determined Measures, Evaluator Capacity

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to preparing all students for success in the world that awaits them after high school. Whether you are a student, parent, educator, community leader, taxpayer, or other stakeholder interested in education, we invite you to join us in this endeavor.

We are guided by this mission...
“To strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.”

And by these goals...
• Strengthen curriculum, instruction, and assessment
• Improve educator effectiveness
• Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools
• Use data and technology to support student performance