

2020 Annual Report to BESE

Katherine Craven

Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education



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Dear Fellow Board Members,

During these times of historic uncertainty, I am further reminded that our time together is finite and limited in order to achieve our collective goal of positively impacting the education and future of Massachusetts' most precious resource—our children. Our work continued this past year, despite our and our children's lives being turned upside down starting when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close in March. I know that Vice-Chair James Morton and I are very grateful for how you brought all of your talents to bear in helping DESE manage during the pandemic.

I am proud that we were able to accomplish many things during this tumultuous time, including but not limited to:

- Although my effort to hold our Board meetings at schools across the Commonwealth was stymied by the pandemic, we continued to hold monthly meetings and advance the work of our Board committees and task forces, such as Educator Diversification, led by Member Amanda Fernandez; Evidence-Based Policy Making, led by Member Dr. Martin West; and the work of Member Matt Hills and others on the Early College Initiative, which is a joint effort with Chairman Chris Gabrieli and the Board of Higher Education.
 - We are seeing positive results in all of these efforts, with programs to increase teacher diversity underway statewide; a current real-time effort to increase college enrollments because data showed us a reduction in FAFSA filings by high school seniors; and the success in college persistence amongst our Early College students.
- Approved a path for high school students to earn their Competency Determination despite the cancellation of spring 2020 MCAS testing.
- Engaged with infectious disease and pediatric mental health experts to best inform the risks and rewards of school reopening.
- Heard from citizens all over the Commonwealth through their passionate and robust public testimony representing many opinions and areas of expertise on the matters before the Board.

The Board also welcomed new members Paymon Rouhanifard and Darlene Lombos this year, and we are already benefiting from their addition to our membership. Member Ed Doherty resigned from the Board after five years of service, and I would like to thank Ed, not only for

his many years of friendship but also his lifetime of passionate service to the schoolchildren of the City of Boston.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the many disparities that students face in accessing instruction and tools, including broadband, in order to continue their educational progress. I am grateful to the many community organizations that have stepped up in the face of these challenges, including those that provided technology at sites where students could learn remotely. I hope that we as a Board can continue learning from our community organizations in the future. In times of historic uncertainty, our collective commitment and passion for eradicating educational disparities has unprecedented urgency. Our time is short, and I look forward to continuing our work and making a positive impact for our children in the next year as well. Thanks to Commissioner Jeff Riley and the fine staff at DESE for their hard work in tumultuous times.

Sincerely,

Katherine Craven
Board Chair