

2020 Annual Report to BESE

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education



January 2021

Dear Board Members,

As someone who has spent his career in education, I have come to expect the unexpected, but I don't think any of us were prepared for the coronavirus pandemic that arrived at the end of last winter. Looking back on the 2019-2020 school year, there's a clear dividing line between the work we planned for during the first half of the school year and the shift in our work at the onset of the pandemic in March and beyond.

In fall 2019, we welcomed the arrival of the Student Opportunity Act, long-awaited legislation that promised to bring more aid to the Commonwealth's poorest districts and ensure that the additional funding was invested in proven practices. At the same time, we prepared to launch the first pilot cohort of the Kaleidoscope Collective for Learning, our initiative to spread deeper learning throughout Massachusetts schools.

That work and much else was disrupted when COVID-19 closed Massachusetts schools in March. The Department supported districts as they pivoted quickly to address students' basic needs, such as meals, and then, as the pandemic wore on, remote learning and technology. Our focus on the pandemic did not mean we abandoned our other work; we adapted it to the new conditions. As just one example, Kaleidoscope continues to work with districts remotely, assisting them with instructional practices that can work in a variety of learning models.

I want to thank Board members for their help and adaptability during this very challenging time. You passed emergency regulations that allowed for more flexibility in assessments, licensure, and learning time requirements, and you have remained committed to equity and students' well-being. Your work continued even as the Board itself changed. We said goodbye to former educator Ed Doherty after he served five years on the Board, and we welcomed Paymon Rouhanifard and Darlene Lombos. I am grateful to each of you for your time and expertise, and I look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner