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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Board Documents - Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Regular Meeting Agenda  
 Massachusetts Board of Education  
 75 Pleasant Street  
 Malden, MA 02148  
 Tuesday, January 22, 2008  
 9:00 a.m.

#### **Morning Business Meeting (9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.)**

**Comments from the Chairman**  
**Comments from the Commissioner**  
**Statements from the Public**

#### **Routine Business:**

Approval of the Minutes of the December 18, 2007 Regular Meeting and the December 13, 2007, December 18, 2007, and January 7, 2008 Special Meetings - Vote

#### **Items for Discussion and Action:**

1. [Support for Students](#) - **Continuing Discussion**
2. [Proposed Changes to 2008 Accountability Reporting: Graduation Rate, Growth Measures, and Technical Revisions](#) - **Discussion and Vote**
3. [Preliminary Report on Current Fiscal Conditions in Massachusetts School Districts](#) - **Discussion**
4. Charter Schools
  1. [Charter Renewals for Seven Schools: Boston Collegiate, Boston Day and Evening Academy, Excel Academy, Four Rivers, Health Careers Academy, Rising Tide, and Smith Leadership Academy](#) - **Discussion and Possible Vote**
  2. [Information on New Charter Applicants](#) - **Initial Discussion**

5. [Amendments to Regional School District Regulations \(603 CMR 41.00\): Commissioner's Operation of Regional Districts in Emergency Circumstances](#) - **Discussion and Vote to Adopt Final Regulations**
6. [Approval of Grants and Appointments to State Review Panel](#) - **Vote**

**Other Items for Information:**

7. Education-Related News Clippings

**Afternoon Discussion on School and District Accountability System (1:00 - 4:00 p. m.)**

1. Overview of State and Federal Accountability Standards
2. Strategies and Options for Low Performing Schools

**Briefing**

last updated: January 18, 2008

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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Support for Students - Presentation by Dr. Mary Walsh

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 15, 2008

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In September 2007 the Board heard a presentation by Dr. Rick Weissbourd of the Harvard Graduate School of Education on ways to assist schools and districts in providing the various kinds of emotional, social, physical and mental health support that students need in order to be successful in school. This month we have invited Dr. Mary Walsh, the Daniel E. Kearns Professor of Education and Innovative Leadership at Boston College, to talk with the Board about "Boston Connects." This school-community-university partnership links 10 of Boston's public elementary schools, the YMCA of Greater Boston, Boston College and other community partners to provide children and their families with the after-school and social assistance they need. To date more than 3,300 children and their families have been served through this collaborative effort.

The mission of Boston Connects is well aligned with the goals of the Board. The initiative aims to:

- Significantly increase student academic achievement
- Reduce barriers to learning through provision of student support and family support services, including mental health and social services.
- Expand academic and cultural enrichment opportunities through positive youth development activities

Dr. Walsh will present an overview of the work of Boston Connects, discuss her view of the state's current efforts to provide support for students, and suggest some possible areas for improvement. We look forward to an interesting discussion.

last updated: January 18, 2008



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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Proposed Changes to 2008 Accountability System: Graduation Rate and Technical Revisions

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 15, 2008

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At the Board of Education meeting on January 22, 2008, I will present proposed changes to our accountability system for 2008 relating to the graduation rate standard and some technical revisions described below. In addition, I will brief the Board on our preliminary plan to include a measure of growth in individual student performance in our 2008 school and district accountability reporting. After approval by the Board, we will submit our annual "State Consolidated Accountability Workbook" to the U.S. Department of Education, which must review and approve state accountability system modifications associated with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requirement that every state determine "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) for each of its public schools.

#### Graduation Rates for AYP Purposes

At its February 2007 meeting, the Board voted to establish a minimum four-year graduation rate standard of 55 percent as the "must meet" AYP target for 2007 for all student groups in the Commonwealth's public high schools. The Board also voted to establish a taskforce to work with Department staff to review additional data related to the high school graduation rate - including five-year graduation data when available - and to consider issues such as recommendations for AYP graduation rate targets and addressing capacity and resources needed to increase the percentage of students graduating from high school. At the December 18, 2007 Board meeting, I provided the Board a report from the Graduation Rate Taskforce (attached).

On January 22 I will present state-level four-year graduation rate data for the 2007 graduation cohort, as well as five-year graduation rate data for the 2006 graduation cohort. These data will provide a context for my recommendation of a revised minimum graduation rate standard that all student groups in public secondary schools in the Commonwealth must meet in order for the school to make AYP. My recommendation will be detailed in a separate memorandum that I will send to Board members on Friday, January 18.

## **Additional Technical Changes**

The Department plans to propose to the U.S. Department of Education two additional technical changes to the State Consolidated Accountability Workbook for Massachusetts.

1. We will seek additional flexibility regarding the way certain Limited English Proficient students are included in AYP determinations. Specifically, for LEP students who are in their second year of U.S. schooling, we propose to assign English language arts/reading index points according to the students' progress toward achieving English language proficiency as measured by the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). These index points would be incorporated into the Composite Performance Index (CPI), which is the basis for school and district AYP performance and improvement calculations. We sought approval for this change last year, but the U.S. Department of Education did not approve it. We will renew and reargue our case for this change in 2008.
2. We will seek to extend for an additional year currently granted flexibility regarding the way certain Special Education students are included in AYP determinations. The current flexibility allows the Department to assign 100 CPI points to up to two percent of all students with disabilities who, based on established criteria, are likely to benefit from being assessed in relation to "modified" performance and achievement standards. As a condition for approval of this extension of our current flexibility, Massachusetts must show evidence of progress toward developing an assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. We plan to do so by increasing the specificity of certain components of the MCAS Alternate Assessment to better allow the identification of students whose performance should be assessed in relation to modified achievement standards. We will implement these changes by spring 2009.

## **Use of Growth Measures in Accountability Reporting**

We plan to include a measure of growth in individual student performance in the 2008 accountability reporting for each of the Commonwealth's public schools and districts. By doing so, the Department will for the first time provide districts, schools, and other interested parties data that describe the change in individual student performance on MCAS from one year to the next.

At the December 2007 Board meeting I informed the Board that the U.S. Department of Education recently announced it is expanding its growth model pilot project under NCLB, and that the Department was preparing to submit a proposal. We have analyzed longitudinal MCAS data and reviewed the current restrictions in measuring student growth that are associated with participation in this federal pilot project. Based on this review, we have concluded that for 2008, maintaining our current measures of school and district adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a more suitable approach. By developing an indicator of growth in student performance that is free of the limitations inherent in pilot project participation, the Department will be able to provide more robust information to schools and districts regarding the performance of students across grade levels and performance categories.

We plan to engage in discussions with district and school leaders about the use of various growth measures. After our work with the field, and after we learn what accountability system changes may be occasioned by the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we will consider whether to propose including a growth measure for determining school and district AYP for 2009 and subsequent years.

Enclosure:



Final Graduation Rate Memorandum (January 18, 2008)



Chart of Number of High Schools Not Meeting Different Graduation Standards



Graduation Rate Taskforce Report

last updated: March 12, 2008

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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Current Fiscal Conditions of Massachusetts School Districts

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 14, 2008

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During the past several months, the Board of Education has begun a discussion on the fiscal conditions facing Massachusetts public school districts. The Board has heard considerable anecdotal evidence that a number of districts are facing financial difficulties that may be compromising their ability to provide quality educational services. At the Board's direction, the Department has conducted an initial investigation into district fiscal conditions in order to further this discussion and identify areas for possible Board action.

Our preliminary report from this investigation, "Current Fiscal Conditions of Massachusetts School Districts," was prepared by the Department's Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Office of School Finance. Our initial investigation found that:

- **Academic expectations and challenges have risen, but spending on instructional services has not kept pace.** From fiscal years 2002 to 2007, total spending by districts and spending per pupil have remained flat relative to inflation. At the same time, academic expectations for districts, schools, educators, and students have appropriately increased, and the demographic characteristics of the state's students have changed. Spending on instructional services is being crowded out by increases in other budget areas such as health insurance and out-of-district student placements. As a result, instructional services are declining as a share of total spending.
- **On average, districts spend 18 percent more than their foundation budget,** and nearly every district in the state is spending over foundation. This suggests that the current foundation budget formula may not reflect the cost of providing an adequate education to all students. Health insurance, payments to other districts, and teacher salaries were areas of particular concern; actual expenditures in these areas substantially outpaced the assumptions behind the foundation budget.
- **Chapter 70 aid increases did not keep up with inflation between 2003 and 2006.** From fiscal year 2003 to fiscal year 2006, most districts saw little or no increase in their aid, and many districts

experienced cuts in fiscal year 2004. With the adoption of changes to the Chapter 70 formula in fiscal year 2007, aid has increased by more than 6 percent in each of the last two years. But after adjusting for inflation, state aid has only recovered to fiscal year 1999 levels, well below the high-water mark of fiscal year 2002.

- **Despite the Chapter 70 aid cutbacks, many districts were able to maintain their overall spending levels, but only by increasing local funding,** and, to a much lesser degree, imposing user fees for transportation and extracurricular activities. Although these actions helped protect school budgets, they created added pressure on municipal budgets and on parents and community members.
- **A number of districts have experienced enrollment declines, which can have both a positive and negative fiscal impact.** Declining enrollment should make it easier to maintain services when budgets are tight, but in extreme cases it may also require school consolidations and teacher layoffs. Declines have been especially common in districts that serve large percentages of low-income students.
- **Districts have employed a variety of strategies to maintain services for students despite constraints in their instructional budgets.** In some cases, staff reductions have compensated for higher-than-average salary increases. In other cases, lower-than-average salary increases have helped maintain staffing levels but leave the district at risk of not being able to attract qualified new teachers. Statewide, average salaries have grown more slowly than inflation but more quickly than assumed by the foundation budget, and student-teacher ratios have edged up slightly during the period.

In summary, at a time when districts need to be moving forward quickly to address their students' growing educational needs, they are hard-pressed to maintain their expenditure levels, let alone increase them to meet higher expectations. And unlike the situation in the late 1980s, when school budget cuts were disproportionately affecting the poorer urban districts, today's fiscal pressures appear to affect a much broader range of districts, including many middle-class communities that have traditionally taken great pride in the quality of their school systems.

The current statewide foundation budget is \$8.4 billion. Some short-run increase in this funding level is likely necessary to address the rising cost of education in the Commonwealth. Beyond that, the Board of Education may wish to recommend a detailed study to update the foundation budget formula to ensure that it provides an adequate level of fiscal resources for both current and future needs. While the state continues to work toward a sustainable long-range funding plan, it will need to continue other initiatives to ensure that it is making the best use of its existing resources. Examples include:

- Creating incentives for local participation in the state health insurance and pension fund programs, to help bring the cost of these programs under control.
- Expanding the use of educational collaboratives and other regional entities to more efficiently provide services such as special education transportation, professional development, and specialized education programs.
- Helping districts to identify and adopt instructional practices and models that have been proven effective at improving student outcomes at a reasonable cost.
- Addressing the inefficiencies and lack of capacity created by the large number of small school districts in the state. Currently, 284 of the state's 328 operating districts serve fewer than 5,000 students.

Bringing all these resources to bear will allow districts to provide an adequate education to every child and allow the state to reach the vision and promise of education reform.



A copy of the report, as well as district-by-district data for the fiscal indicators mentioned in the report, will be available on our website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/research.html>.

last updated: January 18, 2008

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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Charter Renewals for Seven Charter Schools

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 15, 2008

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I am recommending that the Board of Education renew the charters for the following seven charter schools:

- [Boston Collegiate Charter School](#)
- [Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School](#)
- [Excel Academy Charter School](#)
- [Four Rivers Charter Public School](#)
- [Health Careers Academy Charter School](#)
- [Rising Tide Charter Public School](#)
- [Smith Leadership Academy Charter Public School](#)

For each school, we have provided you with a memo outlining the Department's findings based on our evaluation of the school's academic success, organizational viability, faithfulness to its charter, and dissemination of successful educational practices. Your materials also include a more detailed Summary of Review on each school. The Board received the materials on three of these schools (Boston Collegiate, Excel Academy, and Smith Leadership Academy) at the December meeting also, but did not reach this agenda item.

At the Board's January 22nd meeting, Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, will explain how the Department reviews charter schools for renewal and respond to any questions you may have about the review process. Along with representatives from the schools, they will also respond to any questions you may have about these seven schools. Following the discussion, the Board has the option to waive its bylaw that calls for discussion at one meeting and a vote at a subsequent meeting, in order for the Board to vote on these recommended charter renewals at this month's meeting. We have enclosed a motion for a vote on renewal of each of the seven charters, for use if the Board wishes to vote on any or all of them on January 22nd.



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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Charter School Applications

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 15, 2008

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At the February meeting of the Board of Education, I may recommend that the Board grant charters for new charter schools. In the current application cycle, 18 Commonwealth charters and 41 Horace Mann charters are available. The Department received prospectuses, twenty pages long, from ten applicant groups in August 2007. One prospectus proposed a Horace Mann charter school, and the remainder proposed Commonwealth charter schools. Five applicant groups were invited to submit final applications, including the group seeking the Horace Mann charter. On November 13, 2007, all five groups submitted final applications, eighty-five pages long.

An executive summary, prepared by each applicant group, is included for your review. The names of the proposed charter schools, their enrollment capacity, and the district(s) they seek to serve are as follows:

- **Dorchester Collegiate Academy Charter School**, serving students in grades 4-12 from Boston. Enrollment capacity: 240.
- **Gateway Collegiate Academy Charter School**, serving students in grades 9-12 from Boston. Enrollment capacity: 240.
- **Hampden Charter School of Science**, serving students in grades 6-12 from Chicopee, Ludlow, Springfield, and West Springfield. Enrollment capacity: 350.
- **International Charter School of Southeastern Massachusetts**, serving students in grades K-12 from Abington, Avon, Bridgewater-Raynham, Brockton, East Bridgewater, Easton, Holbrook, Middleborough, Randolph, Stoughton, West Bridgewater, Weymouth, and Whitman-Hanson. Enrollment capacity: 1,300.
- **Silver Hill Horace Mann Charter School**, serving students from Haverhill. Enrollment capacity: 580.

The application review process for public school charters is rigorous and extensive.

- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Charter School Office conducted review panels

during which internal and external reviewers discussed each final application at length, comparing the applications submitted to the application criteria.

- Public hearings were held in Boston, Brockton, Haverhill, and Springfield, respectively.
- Written comment was solicited from superintendents, school committees, and the public.
- Applicant groups will be interviewed in the third and fourth week of January.

We consider all of this information in the application review process in formulating recommendations. A detailed description of the charter application review process is attached.

Based upon the merits of the applications, the feedback received from the review panels, public comment, and information from the final interviews, I will determine those applicants that meet the criteria for a Massachusetts charter school. At the February meeting, I will ask that the Board vote to grant charters to the applicant groups I decide to recommend.

If you have any questions on the applications or review process, please contact Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, at 781-338-3200; Ruth Hersh, New Schools Development Specialist, at 781-338-3217; or me.

Enclosure:



Description of the Charter Application Review Process



Executive Summaries

last updated: January 18, 2008

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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Proposed Amendments to 603 CMR 41, Regional School District Regulations

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 14, 2008

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State law (M.G.L. c.71, s.16B) provides that the Commissioner shall "assume operation" of a regional school district if the member towns have not adopted a budget by December 1 of any fiscal year. This year, one regional district, Southern Berkshire, did not have an adopted budget as of December 1, 2007. This is the first time in many years that we have had to invoke this statutory provision.

At its October 30, 2007, meeting, the Board voted to promulgate emergency regulations to establish the procedures to be followed by districts and the Department under these circumstances. Emergency regulations are limited in duration to three months. In order to make the regulations permanent, the Administrative Procedures Act (M.G.L. c.30A), requires that we solicit public comment, and we have done so. Comments were received from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, in support of the amendments; from the Department of Revenue; and from several representatives of the Southern Berkshire Regional School District, including Superintendent Valerie Spriggs, business administrator Christine Regan, and the finance subcommittee of the Regional School Committee. The DOR and school district comments, which were submitted at the very beginning of this process, identified some potential technical issues that we might need to address. In the first month and a half of state oversight, however, the process has gone very smoothly and no real problems have cropped up. Accordingly, it is my recommendation that the Board vote to make these regulations permanent without any further changes at this time. At the end of the fiscal year, we will review our experience with district staff and DOR and decide then whether any fine-tuning is needed for future years.

Attached are the text of the proposed amendments to the regulations and a motion for their approval. Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Deputy General Counsel Kristin McIntosh will be available at the meeting to answer any questions.



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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Nominations to the State Review Panel

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 14, 2008

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The Board of Education's Regulations on Underperforming Schools and Districts, as amended in 2006, call for districts with Commonwealth Priority Schools to develop and submit a District Plan for School Intervention for consideration by a State Review Panel. The State Review Panel provides advice and assistance to the Commissioner and Board in making judgments regarding the adequacy and viability of each District Plan for School Intervention. Specifically the regulations state, at 603 CMR 2.03 (2):

- (2) The Commissioner shall recruit highly qualified individuals to serve as members of a State Review Panel.
- (a) The Commissioner shall select Review Panel members on the basis of their demonstrated expertise in one or more of the following fields:
- 1) district or school leadership
  - 2) standards-based elementary or secondary curriculum, instruction, and assessment
  - 3) instructional data management and analysis
  - 4) district, school, or program evaluation
  - 5) educational program management
  - 6) teacher leadership
  - 7) organizational management
  - 8) district or school budget and finance
  - 9) any other fields that the Commissioner deems to be relevant to the review and evaluation of school or district performance or school improvement planning.
- (b) The Commissioner shall deploy Review Panel members, individually or as a group, to conduct or participate in the review of school improvement plans and the evaluation of district improvement activities. Review Panel members may be asked to provide advice and assistance to the Commissioner and Board regarding the appropriateness and sufficiency of actions being taken by district and school leaders and by the Department to improve student performance in Commonwealth Priority Schools and Chronically Underperforming Schools.

- (c) Candidates for appointment to the State Review Panel shall be approved by the Board.
- (d) State Review Panel members may be compensated by the Department for their service.

We conducted outreach for State Review Panel nominees through a mailing to qualified individuals, partner organizations, professional associations and schools of education. I am pleased to present this initial list of distinguished candidates to the Board for your approval. The list provides the names and affiliations; qualifications and resumes of these individuals are on file with the Department's Office of School Performance Evaluation. Panel members will be appointed to a three-year term of service. If Board members would like to recommend any additional individuals for appointment to the State Review Panel, please let me know.

Attachment: [List of Nominees](#)

last updated: January 18, 2008

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## The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

### Briefing for the January 22, 2008 Regular Meeting of the Board of Education

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education

Date: January 15, 2008

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The next regular meeting of the Board of Education will be on Tuesday, January 22, 2008, at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Malden, starting at 9:00 a.m. Coffee will be available at 8:30 a.m. The regular business meeting will adjourn by 12:00 noon. After a lunch recess, the Board will reconvene from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. for review and discussion of the school and district accountability system. If you need overnight accommodations or any additional information about the schedule, please call Belinda Wilson at (781) 338-3118.

#### Overview

The first item on our business agenda is a presentation by Prof. Mary Walsh of Boston College about an innovative school-community-university partnership providing support for students in Boston. We will also discuss the Department's preliminary report on "Current Fiscal Conditions in Massachusetts School Districts." Action items on the agenda include a vote on proposed changes to the school and district accountability system relating to the minimum graduation rate standard; charter school renewals; final amendments to the regional school district regulations; grants; and appointments. In the afternoon, from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., we will have an extended seminar-type discussion on the school and district accountability system.

#### Regular Meeting

##### Comments from the Chairman

The Chairman will present an update on current issues.

##### Comments from the Commissioner



1. **Reports to the Legislature.** The Department has filed two reports with the Legislature this month, in response to directives included in budget language. *Professional Development Expenditures* details school district spending activity in the areas of professional development leadership, teacher/instructional staff professional days, substitute salaries and professional development stipends, providers, and expenses. *Kindergarten Development Grants* reports on Transition Planning for Full-Day Kindergarten Grants and Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grants and progress toward universal full-day kindergarten opportunities throughout the Commonwealth. The reports will be posted on the Department's Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/legislative.html>
2. **Governor's Education Reorganization Proposal.** Board members have received information on the Article 87 reorganization plan that Governor Patrick submitted to the Legislature on January 10th. It maintains the three existing education boards, including the Board of Education (to be renamed the Board [and Department] of Elementary and Secondary Education), expands the size of our Board and staggers the terms, and creates an executive office of education, headed by a cabinet secretary, to coordinate statewide education policy. We will keep you posted as the plan moves through the Legislature. The Governors' press release outlining the plan is posted at: [http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=pressreleases&agId=Agov3&prModName=gov3pressrelease&prFile=080110\\_Secretary\\_Education.xml](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=pressreleases&agId=Agov3&prModName=gov3pressrelease&prFile=080110_Secretary_Education.xml)
3. **Carline Gele.** Carline Gele, who as Assistant to the Commissioner has worked closely with Board members as well as with the Commissioner and Department staff for 14 years, is leaving at the end of January to move to Florida and pursue new endeavors. We have all appreciated and benefited from Carline's professionalism, grace, and humor. We thank Carline for all of her contributions to our work and wish her happiness and success in the future.

## Items for Discussion and Action

### 1. Support for Students - Continuing Discussion

In September 2007 the Board heard a presentation by Dr. Rick Weissbourd of the Harvard Graduate School of Education on ways to assist schools and districts in providing the various kinds of emotional, social, physical and mental health support that students need in order to be successful in school. As part of our continuing consideration of this important topic, we have invited Dr. Mary Walsh, the Daniel E. Kearns Professor of Education and Innovative Leadership at Boston College, to talk with the Board this month about "Boston Connects," an innovative school-community-university partnership that serves children and families in Boston.

### 2. Proposed Changes to 2008 Accountability Reporting: Graduation Rate, Growth Measures, and Technical Revisions - Discussion and Vote

This month I will present proposed changes to our accountability system for 2008 relating to the graduation rate standard and some technical revisions. I will also brief the Board on our preliminary plan to include a measure of growth in individual student performance in our 2008 school and district assessment reporting. After approval by the Board, we will submit our annual "State Consolidated Accountability Workbook" to the U. S. Department of Education.

In February 2007, the Board voted to set a graduation rate standard for purposes of calculating Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for high schools under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The Board also established a task force, chaired by Board member Harneen Chernow, to review additional data related to the graduation rate and consider strategies to increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school. The task force report, which is included in your materials along with a memo outlining our approach, has helped to define our next steps. The Department is continuing to review data relating to the graduation rate.

I will send relevant data along with my recommendation on the updated graduation rate standard to Board members on January 18th.

### **3. Preliminary Report on Current Fiscal Conditions in Massachusetts School Districts - Discussion**

**Over the past several months the Board and Department have grown increasingly concerned about financial difficulties that may be compromising the ability of some school districts to provide quality educational services. At the Board's direction, the Department, through our Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation and Office of School Finance, has conducted an initial investigation. At this month's meeting we will present our preliminary report, "Current Fiscal Conditions of Massachusetts School Districts." The report, along with a memo summarizing key findings, is in your materials under Tab 3. I will present the report along with Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Carrie Conaway, our Director of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation.**

### **4. Charter Schools:**

- **Charter Renewals for Seven Schools: Boston Collegiate, Boston Day & Evening Academy, Excel Academy, Four Rivers, Health Careers Academy, Rising Tide, and Smith Leadership Academy - Discussion and Possible Vote**

**I recommend that the Board renew the charters for the seven charter schools listed above. For each school, we have provided a memo outlining the Department's findings based on our evaluation of the school, as well as a more detailed Summary of Review. Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, will explain how the Department reviews charter schools for renewal and respond to questions you may have about the review process. Along with representatives from the schools, they will also respond to questions about these seven schools. Following the discussion, the Board may choose to waive its bylaw that calls for discussion at one meeting and a vote at a subsequent meeting, in order to vote on these recommended renewals this month. We have enclosed a motion for each school, should the Board wish to vote on any or all of them.**

- **Information on New Charter Applicants - Initial Discussion**

**Under the charter school statute, the Board votes each February on new charter applicants. This year five groups have applied for new charters. Enclosed you will find summaries of the five charter applications.**

**5. Amendments to Regional School District Regulations (603 CMR 41.00): Commissioner's Operation of Regional Districts in Emergency Circumstances - Discussion and Vote to Adopt Final Regulations**

State law directs the Commissioner to "assume operation" of a regional school district if the member towns have not adopted a budget by December 1st. For the first time in many years, we have had to invoke this statute; Southern Berkshire Regional School District did not have a budget adopted as of December 1, 2007. In October 2007, the Board voted to amend the regulations on regional school districts on an emergency basis to establish procedures to be followed in these cases. As required by the Administrative Procedures Act, we have solicited public comment on the regulations. I recommend that the Board vote this month to make the amendments permanent. Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Deputy General Counsel Kristin McIntosh will be present to answer questions you may have about the regulations.

**6. Approval of Grants and Appointments to State Review Panel - Vote**

Presented for your approval this month are grants totaling \$2,914,147 under the following programs:

- **System for Adult Basic Education: Program and Staff Development (\$75,000 increase - federal funds)**
- **Community Adult Learning Centers (\$14,147 increase - state funds)**
- **Perkins IV Leadership Academy (\$20,000 - federal funds)**
- **Transition to Full-Day Kindergarten (\$2,805,000 - state funds)**

**I recommend that the Board approve the grants as presented. If you have questions about any of the grants, we will be pleased to respond.**

**Also included under Tab 6 for your approval is a list of nominees for appointment to the State Review Panel. Our regulations on underperforming schools and school districts call for the Board to appoint members to the State Review Panel to conduct or participate in the review of school improvement plans and the evaluation of district improvement activities, and to provide advice and assistance to the Commissioner and Board. I am pleased to present this initial list of 18 distinguished nominees to the Board for approval. We would welcome additional nominations from Board members at any time.**

**Other Items for Information**

**7. Education-Related News Clippings**

Enclosed for your information are several recent newspaper articles about education.

**8. Directions to the Meeting**

**Afternoon Discussion: School and District Accountability System**

- 1. Overview of State and Federal Accountability Standards**
- 2. Strategies and Options for Low Performing Schools**

Chairman Reville will lead this seminar-type discussion on school and district accountability; Associate Commissioner Juliane Dow and other Department staff members will participate. At the chairman's initiative, we have set aside three hours so that Board members can have an in-depth discussion about the accountability standards and our strategies and options for assisting low performing schools, ask questions, address concerns, and plan next steps. These are very challenging issues for Massachusetts and for every state that takes seriously its responsibility to provide a high quality education for all students.

Materials for the Tuesday afternoon discussion will be distributed at the meeting.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to seeing you in Malden on January 22nd.

last updated: January 24, 2008

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