



# Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Maura Banta  
Chair

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
**From:** Penny Noyce, Chair of the Committee on Commissioner's Performance Review  
**Date:** June 23, 2014  
**Subject:** Commissioner's Performance Review for FY2014

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Each year, Board Chair Maura Banta establishes a Board committee to evaluate the performance of the Commissioner. For reviewing Commissioner Mitchell Chester's sixth year of performance in FY 2014, the committee includes Penny Noyce (Chair), Maura Banta, Harneen Chernow, Daniel Brogan, and James Morton.

In continuity with last year, the committee evaluated the Commissioner on the following five dimensions: (1) his work as Chief State School Officer; (2) his leadership of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; (3) his management of external relations; (4) his interactions with the Board; and (5) his national leadership. A detailed description of the criteria used to evaluate these dimensions is included as Attachment A.

The committee gathered data from various sources, including the Department's actual performance results, the Commissioner's self-assessment, input from the Commissioner's leadership team, and input from leaders of selected education associations. This memo outlines some highlights of accomplishments for the Department under the Commissioner's leadership in FY2014. It also reviews the Commissioner's performance based on the Board-developed criteria and goals, and makes a recommendation to the Board in relation to his performance.

### **2013-2014 Highlights**

The Commissioner, Board, and Department made great progress in FY2014 in many important areas. Massachusetts continues to be a national leader in K-12 education. The success of our work is evident in outcome measures including our most recent student data on high school graduation, MCAS scores, Advanced Placement results, and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. Significant FY2014 highlights include:

**Educator evaluation** – The new educator evaluation system that the Board adopted in 2011 is now being implemented in school districts throughout the Commonwealth, with the Department providing technical assistance and resources to help educators connect evaluation with curriculum and instruction as well as professional development.

**Curriculum** – The Department is continuing to work with the field to implement the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English language arts and mathematics, incorporating the Common Core State Standards. Among other accomplishments this year, the Department produced and published on its website 86 model curriculum units in English language arts/literacy, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering, and video/print guides for creating standards-based curriculum units.

**RETELL** – The Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative has continued to expand, building the capacity of educators to address the learning needs of English language learners. The Department has revised and improved the SEI endorsement course and is midway to reaching 26,000 core instructional personnel who teach ELL students. The Department also produced the SEI MTEL test as an alternate route to the SEI endorsement, and reviewed syllabi of teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers beginning their careers will be able to earn the SEI endorsement in their pre-service programs starting in July 2014.

**PARCC** – The Commissioner presented and the Board adopted a plan for a two-year “test-drive” of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), to provide a solid base of information leading up to the decision the Board will make in 2015 about whether to adopt PARCC as the Commonwealth’s student assessment system. In the spring of 2014, the Department successfully completed a field test of PARCC assessments for 81,000 students in 345 districts and 1050 schools.

**Lawrence receivership** – The 2012-13 school year (the first full year of receivership) resulted in improved graduation rates, decreased dropout rates, and improved ELA and mathematics results. In 2013-14, all elementary and middle schools implemented new schedules and staffing assignments to increase instructional hours for all students (at least 1,330 hours of instruction per year), as well as providing academic support and enrichment for students furthest behind, and implemented a new approach to compensation tied to professional growth, effectiveness, and opportunities for advancement. In early spring 2014, the Lawrence Teachers Union ratified a new collective bargaining agreement that codifies these approaches.

**Level 4 and 5 schools** – The Department continued implementing comprehensive school turnaround, per the 2010 Achievement Gap Act and the Board’s regulations. From the first cohort of Level 4 (underperforming) schools identified in 2010, 14 made sufficient progress to exit Level 4, while the results in four other schools – Dever and Holland in Boston, Morgan in Holyoke, and Parker in New Bedford – were so concerning that the Commissioner designated them as Level 5 (chronically underperforming). With input from local stakeholders, he developed a turnaround plan for each Level 5 school and he appointed three outside receivers and one superintendent to put the plans into action for the start of the new school year in September 2014.

#### **Commissioner’s Performance Evaluation**

Based on the criteria in Attachment A and our review of all the information, the committee

evaluated the Commissioner's performance as follows:

#### **A. Chief State School Officer**

1. The Commissioner maintained a visible public profile throughout the state with a busy schedule that constantly takes him into the field—schools, school districts, superintendents' meetings, and statewide and regional association meetings, among others – to explain the DESE's goals and initiatives and hear from the field about progress and the challenges they are facing.
2. In response to concerns from the field about the pace of various initiatives, the Commissioner made adjustments. For example, with the Board's revision of educator evaluation regulations to provide the Commissioner with timeline flexibility, he made the 2013-14 school year a pilot year rather than the first year of full implementation, and the Department is providing districts with up to three years (through the 2016-17 school year) to complete the initial two-year cycle of full evaluations.
3. The Commissioner aligns the Department's work with Executive Office of Education initiatives as appropriate, and provides input and support to the Commonwealth's goal of integrating early education, K-12, and higher education. For example, the Department is coordinating with the Department of Higher Education on the development of PARCC assessments and standards, aligning expectations about high school curriculum and students' readiness to engage in credit-bearing coursework in college; and worked with the Department of Early Education and Care on aligning preschool and kindergarten guidelines for learning with the *2011 Curriculum Frameworks in Mathematics and English Language Arts/Literacy*.
4. The Commissioner developed and implemented a clear strategy for Level 4 and 5 schools. Fourteen of 34 schools identified in 2010 exited Level 4. The Commissioner created turnaround plans for four Level 5 schools, following all statutory procedures. He communicated clearly to the Board and field.
5. The Department continued its focus on educator effectiveness, rolling out educator evaluation in all districts, with early results showing a correlation between educator effectiveness ratings and subsequent student growth. The Department is assisting districts to integrate educator evaluation and Curriculum Framework implementation supports. Expanded implementation of the RETELL initiative has made more opportunities available to educators to strengthen their skills in working with English language learners.
6. The Department led a successful field test of the PARCC formative and summative assessments, involving 80,000 students.

7. The Department introduced new tools and oversight systems to support access and equity in charter schools.
8. The Department presented and the Board approved regulations to implement the new Massachusetts student discipline law, including access to educational services for students excluded from school.
9. The Commissioner led the work on several other very significant initiatives this year, which are highlighted earlier in this memo.
10. The dropout rate fell to 2.2 percent, the lowest level in two decades, and four-year graduation rate reached 85%, its highest level to date. Most schools statewide held steady or improved MCAS performance rates in ELA, mathematics, and science. 88% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders in the class of 2015 met the state's testing requirements for a high school diploma on their first try, up from 86% two years ago. Achievement gaps between white students and African-American or Latino students in the percentage of students scoring Proficient or higher narrowed in mathematics at all tested grades and in ELA at all but grade 3. Advanced Placement participation reached its highest point yet, with more Massachusetts students scoring 3 or higher on Advanced Placement exams (17,616) than even attempted an AP exam a decade ago (13,501).

**Rating: The Commissioner fully met the Board's expectations, receiving a rating of 4.75.**

## **B. Lead the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

1. The Commissioner communicates clearly and steadfastly works to advance the Department's mission and goals. Through weekly communications with Department staff, meetings with senior staff, administrators, and offices, bi-monthly "stock-takes," and twice-yearly all-staff meetings, he promotes the agency's mission and a culture of managing for results.
2. The Commissioner has assembled and leads a DESE staff that gets strongly positive reviews from the field for being capable and responsive. He has recruited and hired several strong additions to the team, including a new Senior Associate Commissioner for Accountability and Assistance who will start on August 1, 2014.
3. The Commissioner receives uniformly stellar reviews from members of his leadership team. There is high morale and a sense of shared mission among the members of his leadership team. The Commissioner encourages dialogue, disagreement, and learning from evidence. He listens. His leadership team appreciates his strategic thinking, his work ethic, his calm demeanor, and his passion for improving education for all students in the Commonwealth.

4. The Commissioner communicates high expectations for DESE staff and encourages their continued growth and professional development. He expects and models collaboration across work groups in the Department.
5. The DESE fully and actively participates in the Commonwealth's affirmative action and diversity efforts. More than 20% of the current DESE staff are individuals who have self-identified in one of the categories as minority (i.e., race, ethnicity, veteran status). Similarly, approximately 20% of DESE's managers are minorities, and approximately 8% have identified themselves as individuals with disabilities. In the past four years, 19% of internal promotions were awarded to minorities.
6. The committee recommends continued attention to increasing diverse representation on advisory committees as well as within DESE staff. The committee also recommends that the Commissioner engage in a little more "walking-around time," being more visible to DESE staff below the leadership team level.

**Rating: The Commissioner exceeded the Board's expectations, receiving a rating of 5.**

### **C. Manage External Relations**

1. The Commissioner continues to engage regularly with schools, districts and the leadership of statewide professional organizations, including the MTA, AFT-MA, MASS, and MASC, among others. The Commissioner also meets regularly with the Secretary of Education, and with the Commissioners and Board Chairs of the Early Education and Care and Higher Education Departments. The Commissioner visits schools across the Commonwealth almost every week of the school year, meeting with students, teachers, and administrators and often with parents and local elected officials as well.
2. In response to complaints from the field that the Department's mandates were top-down, too fast-paced, and unresponsive to conditions in the field, the Commissioner established structures to improve communication – including a Superintendents' Advisory Council in partnership with the Executive Committee of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, a Teacher Leadership Cabinet, and two Principal Advisory Groups. These working groups already are serving as vehicles for timely, two-way communication and engagement between the Department and the field. The Commissioner also started emailing a concise Weekly Update directly to superintendents, principals, heads of the state educational organizations, and other interested parties, to inform them about the work of the Department, key reform initiatives, resources, and related activities. This ensures that they receive the updates, and has helped to reduce and streamline the volume of communications they were receiving from the Department.
3. The Commissioner constantly seeks to find the appropriate balance between the pace demanded by legislation or the Board and requests from the field for flexibility with

timelines. We recommend continued attention to communication, with special attention to matching timelines to local realities and the Department's capacity to provide timely support. For example, consider involving unions and superintendents early in consideration of yearly budget requests; union membership could help advocate with the legislature for shared priorities. Some discontent in the field that the Department is top-down and doesn't listen may be inevitable, considering the nature and pace of reforms demanded by legislation and the Board, but further attention to building consultative forums that can communicate back to the field should remain a priority, as should a Department-wide priority on communicating respect for and appreciation of the field.

4. The Commissioner works to maintain good relations and support for the state's education agenda with the business community (e.g., the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education and the Business Roundtable), the mayors of the Commonwealth's major cities, the Legislature, and representatives of state and national foundations that have an interest in education.

**Rating: The Commissioner fully met the Board's expectations, receiving a rating of 4.5.**

**D. Board Support/Effective Interactions**

1. The Commissioner provides outstanding support to the Board. Through his weekly reports, monthly calls, constant availability, and responsiveness to requests for information, he assists Board members in understanding education issues and carrying out their responsibilities.
2. The Commissioner assembles staff and resources for highly informative special meetings of the Board on Monday evenings as well as for the regular meetings. Special meetings in FY2014 have provided opportunities for in-depth discussion on topics such as digital learning, civic education and engagement, Level 5 schools, and integrating college and career readiness.
3. The Commissioner fully supports Board committees (e.g., Proficiency Gap, Charter School, and Budget Committees, among others) and Board task forces with staff and materials. He takes seriously the result of the Board's deliberations and decisions.
4. The Board encourages the Commissioner to bring significant policy discussions to the Board as early in the decision cycle as possible.
5. Board members encourage the Commissioner and Board Chair to return if possible to the tradition of annual Board retreats to further help orient new members and to allow room for larger strategic discussions of priorities, goals, and strategy.

**Rating: The Commissioner exceeded the Board's expectations, receiving a rating of 5.**

## **E. National Leadership**

1. The Commissioner does an outstanding job of representing Massachusetts on the national education scene, enhancing the Commonwealth's position as a national leader in education reform and student achievement, and creating opportunities for the Commonwealth to learn and benefit from best practices.
2. The Commissioner is past president of the Council of Chief State School Officers and is well respected by his peers. Massachusetts is constantly looked to as a model by other states in curriculum and instruction, educator evaluation, charter schools, school and district turnaround, and other initiatives.

**Rating: The Commissioner exceeded the Board's expectations, receiving a rating of 5.**

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The Commissioner's performance in FY2014 has been outstanding, receiving very high marks (4.85 in total) based on the criteria developed by the Board. Massachusetts continued to make steady and significant progress in its accomplishments in K-12 education in the past year. These accomplishments are in part due to Commissioner Chester's dedication, contributions and leadership. Based on the evaluation of his job performance, the Committee is recommending a 3% salary increase for Commissioner Chester effective July 1, 2014, and a mid-cycle review in early 2015.

The Committee on the Commissioner's Performance Review thanks the Commissioner for his commitment and dedication to the advancement of education for the students of the Commonwealth.

## ATTACHMENT A

### Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education 2013-2014 Performance Criteria For Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

The following performance criteria are designed to focus on: Roles, Accountabilities and Goals while promoting measureable outcomes that are realistic and attainable. These criteria are important functions of the Commissioner. The Board is recommending setting these function areas into priorities that will set the Commissioner's work plan and distribution of his time and efforts.

#### **Chief State School Officer (25%)**

- Develop and implement clear strategy for Level 4 and 5 districts and schools
- Lead the effective rollout and implementation of major initiatives including RETELL, the educator evaluation system, the PARCC field test, etc.
- Ensure effective engagement of district leaders by incenting, motivating, measuring and communicating progress of efforts to close proficiency gaps and raise student performance in underperforming districts

#### **Lead the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) (25%)**

- Set the vision, approve the strategies, and establish a culture that promotes the Board's mission statement
- Manage within the parameters of DESE's budget to achieve goals, including:
  - Ensure that the DESE is structured, staffed and aligned across all affected centers to meet its annual operational targets and stated goals, within the limitations of DESE's budget and state hiring parameters
- Complete or make substantial progress on strategic initiatives for the Board's five focus areas:
  - Educator Effectiveness;
  - Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment;
  - Accountability and Assistance;
  - Wrap-Around Supports and Engagement for Students and Families; and
  - School and Classroom Culture
- Oversee implementation of College & Career Readiness recommendations and strategy
- Increase diversity within the DESE staff, and within the Advisory Groups



### **Managing External Relations (20%)**

- Manage relationships and communications to maximize alignment of external stakeholders (e.g., Legislature, Governor’s Office/EOE, MTA, AFT-MA, MASS, MASC, principals’ associations, business groups, foundations) with Board’s overall priorities and goals
- Engage and responsively communicate with the field and citizens regarding major Board and Department initiatives.
- Effectively lead the discussion/communications regarding Massachusetts adoption of Common Core State Standards and Assessments

### **Board Support/Effective Interactions (20%)**

- Effectively interact with members of the Board
- Engage Board members in setting the strategic vision for DESE and discussing DESE priorities and local/national policy issues relevant to Massachusetts
- Keep the Board updated on subjects necessary for the Board to fulfill its role
- Receive positive feedback from Board members during annual performance review process

### **National Leadership (10%)**

- Chair the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career Readiness Governing Board – articulate multi-state goals and work to accomplish them
- Represent Massachusetts in the Council of Chief State School Officers
- Position Massachusetts to benefit from best practices nationally and internationally

### **Rating Structure**

- Outstanding = 5
- Very Good = 4
- Satisfactory = 3
- Needs Improvement = 2