*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | March 14, 2022  |
| **Subject:** | Briefing for the March 22, 2022 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  |

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will be on **Tuesday, March 22, 2022**, at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Malden. The meeting will start at **9:00 a.m.** and should adjourn by **1:00 p.m.** The Board will meet in person, following the Commonwealth’s current health and safety guidelines, and the meeting will be live-streamed and recorded. Helene Bettencourt and Courtney Sullivan will assist with all arrangements; please email or call them if you have any questions.

**OVERVIEW**

We will open the business portion of the meeting by recognizing the National Guard and other partners for their assistance to the K-12 school community throughout the pandemic. Next, the Board will hear a report on the ongoing work of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership. I will update the Board on actions the Department has taken and is taking to support schools, students, and families. The Department will present two items for discussion and vote: a proposed amendment to the regulations on school and district accountability and assistance for initial discussion and a vote to solicit public comment, and proposed renewal of the certificates for the two current Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools. The final item on the agenda is an update on the education budget.

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven will report on current issues and activities.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

***Investigating History* Curriculum for Grades 5, 6, and 7.** In response to feedback from educators, schools, and districts about a lack of high-quality curricular offerings for middle school history, the Department is currently developing [Investigating History](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/investigating.html), a suite of comprehensive, open-source fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade curricular materials that are fully aligned to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework. The units developed will ultimately cover all the fifth-grade American history content standards as well as six of the nine topics in the sixth/seventh-grade world geography and ancient civilizations content standards.

Investigating History is grounded in research-backed design specifications for curricular materials that focus on four key principles: historical inquiry and investigation, historical empathy and human connections, civic engagement and current world relevance, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Schools and districts have expressed great interest in using these materials when they are available.

The Department drafted the materials in close collaboration with teacher advisors and scholar experts. During this 2021-2022 academic year, teachers in 18 schools and approximately 50 classrooms across the state are piloting the Investigating History units and participating in a third-party, independent evaluation of the materials. The Department will soon begin recruiting to expand this pilot in the 2022-2023 academic year. Following the pilot, we anticipate releasing the Investigating History curricular materials for general use starting in spring 2023.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Peyser will report on current issues and activities.

**Statements from the Public**

**Routine Business: Approval of the Minutes of the February 15, 2022 Regular Meeting**

The Board will vote on approval of the minutes.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

1. **Recognition of** **National Guard, MEMA, and Other Partners – Discussion**

During the pandemic, schools and students throughout the Commonwealth, as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, have benefited from the service of many partners, including the National Guard, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, the Massachusetts State Police, and the Malden Police Department. This month’s meeting gives us an opportunity to thank them publicly.

1. **Springfield Empowerment Zone Update – Presentation and Discussion**

The Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership (SEZP) was created in 2014 as an innovative, voluntary partnership between Springfield Public Schools and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with the Springfield Education Association. The goal of the partnership was to rapidly improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for students in a subset of Springfield’s middle and high schools that had been designated as underperforming. At our meeting on March 22, Lauren Woo, DESE’s director of strategic transformation, will introduce Colleen Curran and Matthew Brunell, co-executive directors of SEZP, Inc., to provide an update on SEZP’s governance structure, the overall academic progress to date, and the successes and challenges of the model. The co-executive directors will be joined via zoom by the Mayor of Springfield, Dominic Sarno and Springfield Superintendent, Daniel Warwick.

1. **Update on Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families – Discussion**

I will update the Board on the Department’s recent and ongoing actions to provide support for schools, students, and families.

1. **Proposed Amendment to Regulations on Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools, 603 CMR 2.00 (Modification due to COVID-19 Pandemic) –** **Initial Discussion and Vote to Solicit Public Comment**

At the Board’s February meeting, we presented the Department’s plan for potential changes to the state’s district and school accountability system, which would be implemented for 2022 accountability reporting this fall. Consistent with the plan, the Department has asked the U.S. Department of Education to approve temporary changes to certain federal accountability reporting requirements for the 2021-2022 school year. This month, I am presenting a proposed regulatory amendment that would allow the Department to suspend the reporting of certain accountability information this fall; see the memorandum for details. I recommend that the Board vote this month to solicit public comment on the proposed amendment. After reviewing comments and determining whether further changes are needed, I plan to bring the amendment back to the Board in June 2022 for final adoption. Rob Curtin, our chief officer for data, assessment, and accountability, will be at the meeting on March 22 to answer your questions.

1. **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools: Certificate Renewals – Discussion and Vote**

Massachusetts has two publicly funded Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS), each of which operates under a renewable certificate granted by the Board pursuant to the virtual school statute and the Board’s CMVS regulations. The schools are Greater Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS) and TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School (TECCA). Each of these schools is up for renewal this year. I am recommending that the Board renew the certificates for GCVS and TECCA for an additional four years and also place conditions on the schools’ certificates to address concerns related to academic performance and governance issues. The memorandum and other documents in your materials provide details. Alison Bagg, director of our Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, and Senior Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang will be available to answer your questions.

1. **Education Budget Update –** **Discussion**

Senior Associate Commissioner/CFO Bill Bell will update the Board on education budget matters.

**OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

1. **Report on Grants and Charter School Matters Approved by the Commissioner**

Enclosed is information on grants and charter school matters that I have approved since our last meeting, under the authority the Board has delegated to the Commissioner.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to meeting with you on March 22.