*****Massachusetts Board of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

### 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906 Telephone: (781) 338-3000

##  TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

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| Katherine Craven *Chair* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| To: | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| From:  | James Morton, Chair of the Committee on Commissioner’s Performance Review |
| Date:  | June 24, 2022  |
| Subject: | Performance Review of Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley for SY 2021-2022 |

Each year, the Chair of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) establishes a committee to evaluate the performance of the Commissioner and present its report and recommendation to the full Board. For reviewing Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley’s fourth year of performance in SY 2021-22, the Commissioner’s Performance Review Committee (Committee) consists of James Morton, Committee Chair and Board Vice-Chair; Katherine Craven, Board Chair; and Board members Amanda Fernández and Matt Hills.

The Committee held four meetings, on April 12, May 10, May 18, and June 15, 2022. Members participated remotely per Governor Baker’s Emergency Order of March 12, 2020 and the meetings were live-streamed.

The Committee discussed data it had gathered from various sources, including the Commissioner’s Goals and Objectives for 2021-2022, dated October 15, 2021; the Commissioner’s 2020-2021 Self-Evaluation, dated May 16, 2022 (see Attachment 1 for both documents); and input from a variety of internal and external stakeholders and constituents, including the Secretary of Education, other members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Commissioner’s leadership team, receivers in Lawrence, Holyoke, and Southbridge, the leadership of education associations, councils and networks, and others.

In previous years, the Committee organized its evaluation (and calculated its ratings on a 1-through-5 scale ranging from Unsatisfactory to Outstanding) around four criteria and metrics:

* Facilitate student growth and achievement (25%)
* Management and operations (25%)
* External relations and communication (30%)
* Board support and effective interactions (20%)

Because of the continued extraordinary circumstances and leadership challenges presented in SY2021-22 by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee decided to adopt, for a second consecutive year, a *holistic* approach to the Commissioner’s SY 2021-22 performance evaluation, rather than using the criteria and metrics above. Using the holistic approach, the Committee’s overall evaluation report and recommendation to the Board is as follows:

1. **Recovery and Reimagination:** During SY 2021-22, Commissioner Riley was guided by two priorities: recovery and reimagination. **Recovery** called upon him to continue to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, such as health and safety guidance and academic and social emotional supports for children. **Reimagination** required a continued focus on the implementation of pre-existing initiatives designed to transform and improve education in the Commonwealth.

1. **Effective and Accessible:** Commissioner Riley provided strong, effective, and accessible leadership to the field throughout the second academic year of COVID-19. He regularly sought the input of others and continued to be extraordinarily accessible to students, families, educators, and other stakeholders. With the omnipresence of COVID-19, Commissioner Riley communicated frequently with district and school leaders, the medical community, and numerous executive branch entities, including the Governor’s COVID-19 Command Center, Executive Office of Education, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and Department of Public Health. The Commissioner was praised by stakeholders for his active listening skills and accessibility.
2. **COVID-19 Leadership:** The Commissioner was an ardent advocate for balancing student learning and social emotional recovery. He concluded that students were suffering psychological harm by being deprived of in-person access to classmates and teachers. It appears that the Commissioner was correct; children needed to return to school, sooner rather than later, to mitigate the harm caused by the social isolation and uncertainty caused by COVID-19. The Commissioner and his team sought to facilitate a safe and informed reopening of schools, in part, by:
	1. Maintaining the Rapid Response Help Center to provide districts and schools with health and safety information and guidance to support in-person learning;
	2. Providing parents, families, and school leaders with direct email access to DESE staff and timely and informed responses to inquiries;
	3. Assuring districts and schools with access to COVID-19 testing, including *Test and Stay*, diagnostic, and pooled testing;
	4. Implementing a mask requirement for all students and staff;
	5. Engaging the Massachusetts Army National Guard to distribute masks and transport students to and from school; and
	6. Aggregating and disseminating data weekly, from multiple sources including public health agencies and medical advisors, regarding COVID-19 and how to best manage it.
3. **Progress on Initiatives:** Along with attending to the needs of students and schools during SY2021-22, Commissioner Riley and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department or DESE) continued to make progress on several initiatives that are central to advancing educational equity and eradicating opportunity gaps. The Commissioner and DESE made progress, as follows, on several initiatives (greater details are provided in the Commissioner’s Self-Evaluation, attached hereto as Attachment 1):
	1. The **Acceleration Roadmap** was released statewide and DESE provided tiered support at more than 200 districts and schools, including monthly content-specific workshops, along with associated resources. 15 districts and schools were provided with more intensive and targeted coaching and supports. Planning is underway for the delivery of acceleration training opportunities for SY 2022-23.
	2. **Accelerated Learning Academies** in math, literacy, and ELA were conducted during SY 2021-22, including Kaleidoscope Acceleration Academies, Biggest Winner Math Challenge, and the Acceleration to College program.
	3. **ESSER Funding:** Commissioner Riley and DESE have approved all *ESSER I, II and III* applications and has made allocated funding accessible to all districts. *ESSER III* represents a federal infusion of $1.65 billion in educational funding. Many districts will use the funding to improve air quality in buildings and DESE hired HVAC experts to assist districts in meeting the federal procurement guidelines for construction and remodeling projects.
	4. **Individualized Education Program:** Commissioner Riley and DESE continued to make progress toward improving and updating the *Individualized Education Program* (IEP) process. For example, in the fall of 2021, the Department released an updated “Referral, Evaluation, and Eligibility Guide” and posted it on DESE’s Special Education IEP Improvement Project website. Next steps include creating a printable version of the Guide, in multiple languages, for SY 2022-23. On April 28, 2022, DESE disseminated, for stakeholder feedback, a new IEP form. The goal is to incorporate feedback and finalize the new IEP form by winter 2023, with statewide trainings on the new form to be provided before the end of SY 2022-23.
	5. **Blueprint for English Learners:** DESE completed the *Interactive Blueprint for English Learners* pilot in Lawrence, Southridge and Holyoke and is currently implementing a second phase pilot in Brockton. DESE’s Office of Language Acquisition (OLA) is collaborating with other DESE offices to align available tools and resources, create cohesiveness across strategies, and prioritize the needs of English Learners.
	6. **Early Literacy Supports:** Commissioner Riley and DESE continued to advance high quality, evidence-based, early literacy supports in the Commonwealth. DESE provided early literacy training for approximately 750 educators in collaborative learning networks; prepared for the launch of its early literacy curriculum, *Appleseed*, during the summer of 2022; and planned for the implementation and expansion, based upon high demand, of professional development in early literacy knowledge and instructional practices for educators, as part of its *Open Access Professional Learning* program. The Commissioner invested in early literacy as follows:
		1. GLEAM (Growing Literacy Across Massachusetts), funding 17 districts seeking to strengthen literacy across an array of strategies;
		2. Early Grades Literacy grants to 16 schools, for year-long professional development in literacy; $9 million is state and federal funding for updated, high-quality, instructional materials for more than 60 school districts and charter schools;
		3. Provided school districts with tutorial services for approximately 4,000 students; and
		4. Initiated a multi-year initiative to assure that all teacher candidates will be well informed, trained and prepared to serve the literacy and language acquisition needs of students.
	7. **Targeted Support of Schools:** Commissioner Riley and DESE continue to provide targeted supports, funding, and resources to districts with schools performing in the lowest 10 percent statewide. These schools are receiving concrete support to:
		1. Implement evidence-based strategies to mitigate learning loss;
		2. Address the social-emotional learning and mental health needs of students;
		3. Build capacity of instructional leadership teams; and
		4. Plan strategically at the school and district level.

A 2021 district review in Brockton has resulted in a DESE funded strategic planning partner and led to the adoption of a five-year strategic plan by its School Committee. The Plan prioritizes curriculum development, inclusion of students with disabilities, and redesigned instruction for multilingual learners.

Commissioner Riley continued to work with the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in connection with a 2020 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Commissioner and his team conducted a Follow-up District Review of BPS in the spring of 2022 and they are continuing to work with BPS regarding ongoing concerns.

* 1. **Kaleidoscope and the Boston Public Schools**: The DESE Kaleidoscope Team has worked with 15 BPS schools to:
		1. Provideongoing professional development for educators and school leaders;
		2. Support Acceleration Academies and Early College programs;
		3. Deepen teacher engagement with Kaleidoscope;
		4. Facilitate monthly professional development for school principals regarding deeper learning and strategic planning;
		5. Met with BPS regional leadership to align Kaleidoscope protocols with BPS academic visioning and strategic planning for SY 2022-23;
		6. Provide technical assistance and grant funding for Acceleration Academies in 15 schools; and
		7. Support Early College program at the two high schools within the 15-school cohort; support included grant funding, technical assistance, and coaching.
	2. **Kaleidoscope and the Statewide Network:** The Kaleidoscope Team is working with schools across a statewide network to establish a clear instructional vision for each school; improve classroom instruction; and create lesson plans and units that foster deeper learning.
	3. **Expand the Number of Schools Participating in the Innovative Science Assessment Pilot:** Based upon the results of the pilot conducted in SY 2020-2, Commissioner Riley and his team expanded the Innovative Science Assessment Pilot in Year Two from 20 to nearly 100 schools, with 5,000 students in Grades 5 and 8, taking the innovative, interactive science assessment at the end of the current school year. Year Two Cohort teachers participated in four days of professional development focused on effective science instructional practices aligned to the assessment.
	4. **Early College:** The Early College programs continued to grow under Commissioner Riley’s leadership. In the spring of 2021, 3,893 students from 35 high schools participated in 23 designated Early College programs. In the spring of 2022, 4,332 students from 40 high schools participated in 31 designated Early College programs. The growth was supported by three competitive grant programs: Expansion Grants (support existing programs seeking to expand the number of underrepresented students accessing post-secondary education), Full School Impact Grants (support “full school” early college partnerships between high schools and college partners, with a minimum of 400 participating students who have the opportunity to earn a minimum of 30 college credits before graduating from high school), and Incubator Planning Grants (support new schools seeking to participate and increase the number of underrepresented students attending college).
	5. **Promote Early College Educator Pathways:** Commissioner Riley and DESE continued to partner with the Department of Higher Education to create pathways for Early College students to explore and pursue careers in education. By the spring of 2022, 12 programs had created educational pathways for students, especially underrepresented students, to explore careers as teachers and administrators.
	6. **Innovation Through Fifth Year Early College Promise Program:** The Early College Promise program is a pilot supported by Commissioner Riley whereby high school students remain in high school for an additional year and receive an additional year of Early College programming, enabling them to graduate with an associate’s degree. Currently, there are five school districts and six colleges participating in this pilot, serving approximately 100 students. By SY 2022-23, it is anticipated that the program will grow to seven high schools and seven colleges, serving approximately 200 students.
	7. **Diversify the Educator Workforce:** Under the Commissioner’s leadership, the Department has taken a multi-faceted approach to educator diversity including the following:
		1. As of December 2021, DESE has awarded $9 million to districts and school in support of **teacher diversification**. Thus far, in SY 2021-22, 163 individuals received tuition assistance for enrollment in educator preparation programs. Additionally, 300 MTEL vouchers were provided to school districts and 372 MTEL vouchers were purchased by school districts.
		2. DESE has been allocated $10 million in **ARPA funding** **for educator diversity**. DESE plans to use the funds in SY 2022-23 to build licensure pathways to transition Emergency licensed educators to Provisional or Initial Licensure. DESE also intends to use these funds to invite non-profits, state universities, and other providers to apply for funding to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce.
		3. In SY 2021-22, DESE established a teacher **diversity professional learning community**, comprised of 100 school districts, charter schools, vocational schools, private special education schools and education collaboratives. This learning community focuses on the components of a comprehensive teacher diversification strategy centered on cultural proficiency. Approximately 400 individuals participate in the monthly learning series.
		4. As of April 2022, DESE has approved 12 **alternative assessments** for educator licensure – five alternatives to the Communication and Literacy MTEL and seven alternatives to the Subject Matter Knowledge MTELs. DESE also established *MTEL-Flex* in February 2022, which enables test takers who were very close to achieving a passing score to take an *MTEL-Flex* assessment rather than retaking the full MTEL test.
		5. During the summer of 2021, DESE adopted a policy for the identification of **home mortgage assistance** programs to support a diverse educator workforce by providing access to home ownership opportunities.
		6. The **Influence 100 fellowship program** entered its third year as a strategy to diversify the administrator workforce. The program has 60 aspiring superintendents, Influence 100 fellows, from 26 districts in the two-year leadership development program. The Department partners with The Leadership Academy on curriculum design and implementation and with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute as a third-party evaluator.
	8. **Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) Admissions:** Under the Commissioner’s leadership, the Department provided technical assistance and support to districts for the completion of waitlist/admissions data collection. The Department will analyze the data to determine whether new CVTE admissions policies promote equity and access.
	9. **Career/Vocational Technical Equitable Access Grant:** The Department is providing grants to enable districts to build capacity in three primary areas: analyzing data, enhancing English learner recruitment and success, and building equitable structures. 25 districts have received these grants and have accessed monthly technical assistance sessions and office hours. The Department also launched the **Secondary Options Family Engagement** project to increase awareness among families whose preferred language is not English. This project provides information resources and a hotline to assist families as they navigate through the decision-making process.
	10. **Action-oriented Research for Educational Equity:** Commissioner Riley and his team have led a collaborative effort with EOE, DHE, EEC and the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to create a Preschool-to-Workforce (P20W) Research and Data Hub. The objective of the P20W Data Hub is to use data and research to identify those investments and initiatives that best promote equity and student learning and well-being. During SY 2021-22, the P20W team has developed Early College data systems to provide accurate data regarding the number of credits earned by Early College students. The P20W team is also creating a dashboard to monitor students’ college and career success, and plans to launch a Data Hub website to provide the public and agency staff with a one-stop destination for data.
	11. **Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool:** Under the Commissioner’s leadership, DESE has rolled out an agency-wide Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool to assure that equity is at the center of staff decision-making regarding programs, initiatives, policies, practices, and budgetary allocations. The tool incorporates a set of guiding questions to be considered when making decisions. The Department has provided training sessions, conducted by BlackPrint, Inc., to assure that the tool is used with fidelity and provide support to enhance and build upon the Department’s internal capacity to sustain this work.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

The foregoing is evidence of Commissioner Riley’s focus on recovery and reimagination. The Committee believes Commissioner Riley was correct in focusing on these priorities, and that he (and his team) made significant progress in carrying out core functions and initiatives by being: extremely accessible; an active listener who was open to the input of others; thoughtful and comprehensive in his deliberations; universally student-centric; deeply committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, and exceedingly diligent and focused in his efforts. The Committee and the stakeholders we interviewed are proud of what has been accomplished during a very challenging time for students, teachers, and administrators.

Commissioner Riley would be the first to admit that he did not act alone. He partnered with many to accomplish much. He has also recruited and retained a talented, impactful, and cohesive leadership team and has empowered the team to support deeper learning and equity for all students.

The Committee encourages Commissioner Riley to continue to support the academic and social-emotional needs of students and to remain steadfast in his commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by assuring a diverse and inclusive educator workforce. Commissioner Riley is also encouraged to more fully engage the talents of his innovative leadership team to ensure the sustainability and expansion of core functions.

The Commissioner is expected to engage the Board, as appropriate, regarding important educational initiatives, policies, and challenges. Further, the Committee expects Commissioner Riley to develop and articulate an educational vision for the Commonwealth and the Department that outlines how the initiatives set forth herein and any that are added will be aligned to accomplish said vision. The Board and public are eager to understand how all initiatives are aligned to accomplish the Department’s overall goals and objectives. A clearly articulated vision will enable the Board to support intended outcomes more effectively.

Along with addressing the challenges of the pandemic, the Commissioner has kept the Department moving vigorously on an array of vital educational initiatives. In our judgment, Commissioner Riley has earned an overall rating of4.75 on a 5-point scalefor his accomplishments in SY 2021-22.

Based on the evaluation of Commissioner Riley’s job performance, the Committee affirms its strong endorsement of the Commissioner and recommends that the Board do so as well. The Committee thanks Commissioner Riley, the DESE staff, and the stakeholders who contributed to this evaluation. We are grateful to Commissioner Riley for his leadership, his dedicated service to the students of the Commonwealth, and his commitment to helping all students to succeed in school and in life.

Attachment: Commissioner’s self-evaluation, May 16, 2022 (includes Commissioner’s

goals and objectives for 2020-2021, October 15, 2021)