**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

**of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)**

**75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148**

**May 23, 2023, 9:05 a.m.–1:10 p.m.**

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

**Matthew Hills**, Vice-Chair, Newton

**Tricia Canavan,** South Hadley

**Darlene Lombos,** Boston

**Farzana Mohamed,** Newton

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke

**Eric Plankey,** Westford, Student Member

**Paymon Rouhanifard,** Brookline

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

**Patrick Tutwiler**, Secretary of Education, Andover

**Martin West,** Newton

**Jeffrey C. Riley,** Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m., and members introduced themselves. She announced that today’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) meeting, like all open meetings of the Board, is being [livestreamed and recorded](https://livestream.com/accounts/22459134).

**Public Comment**

1. **Gerry Mroz** addressed the Board on Item 7: Educational Vision
2. **Patrick Lattuca, Ph.D., Superintendent, TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School (TECCA),** addressed the Board on the use of remote proctoring for the MCAS assessment for Commonwealth Virtual Schools

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven asked committee chairs to provide a brief report. Vice-Chair Hills said the Commissioner's Performance Evaluation Committee met on May 2 and will meet again before presenting its recommendation to the Board at the June meeting. Mr. Rouhanifard reported on the Educator Diversification Committee and its recent meeting with DESE staff.

**Approval of the Minutes of the** **April 25, 2023 Regular Meeting**

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of** **the April 25, 2023 Regular Meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler noted the Senate Ways and Means budget proposal for FY24 includes additional funding for student mental health and social-emotional learning and said he looks forward to supporting that expansion. The Secretary added he and the Commissioner recently attended a convening of districts on this topic.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Riley discussed his school visits around the Commonwealth and the 2023 Teacher of the Year celebration at Devens on May 9 that he, Secretary Tutwiler, and Ms. Stewart attended. The Commissioner gave a brief update on the Boston Public Schools systemic improvement plan, noting BPS has submitted reports on key areas including special education, student safety, English learner services, and transportation and is now merging them into a more detailed unified plan. In response to a question from Chair Craven, the Commissioner said while the plans are promising, the key is execution and DESE will be looking at targets and performance indicators heading into the fall to assess whether BPS has done what is needed. Chair Craven asked about the data group that was called for in the BPS systemic improvement plan. Commissioner Riley said the group is in place and he would provide more information at a future meeting.

**Early College Update – Discussion**

Commissioner Riley introduced Phylitia Jamerson, Executive Director of DESE’s Office of Early College, Kristin Hunt, Director of Planning and Policy, and Rebekah Barr, Early College Program Specialist. The panel presented highlights of recent work to expand and strengthen the Early College initiative. The update included the Early College Joint Committee’s approval of nine new programs for Designation to be launched in fall 2023, Early College federal grants, the Early College statewide convening on April 12, and ongoing work by DESE and the Department of Higher Education as part of a Data Summit relating to Early College programs and outcomes. Panel members responded to questions from Board members. Secretary Tutwiler said he is a big proponent of the program as part of high school redesign and the Governor has proposed a $14 million increase in her FY24 budget. Commissioner Riley said he saw great progress in Lawrence when Early College was introduced and expanded and he is pleased that the Administration is committed to this initiative. Chair Craven commended the work and thanked the panel for the update.

**Early Literacy Update – Discussion**

Chair Craven and Commissioner Riley introduced Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy and Humanities, Russell Johnston, Deputy Commissioner, Erin Hashimoto-Martell, Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support, and Laura R. Garcia, Curriculum, Data & Assessment Manager–ELA from the New Bedford Public Schools, to update the Board on the Department’s early literacy initiatives. The Commissioner said DESE is actively promoting evidence-based early literacy. The panel presented an overview of the Mass Literacy initiative and strategic plan, highlighting guidance, resources, and information DESE has produced, including the Mass Literacy Guide, the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines, the list of approved early literacy screening assessments to support districts, GLEAM and other grant programs, and the Board’s adoption in September 2022 of a regulation that requires all elementary schools to assess each student's reading abilities and early literacy skills at least twice per year from kindergarten through at least third grade. The presenters highlighted DESE’s ongoing work around high-quality instructional materials, professional learning, funding, and educator preparation.

Ms. Garcia discussed New Bedford’s investment in early literacy and spoke about the district’s progress in boosting literacy. She said the literacy initiatives at the early grades are expanding to upper grades as well. Ms. Garcia expressed appreciation for the ongoing technical and financial support DESE has made available for evidence-based literacy work. Panel members responded to questions from the Board about stakeholder engagement, funding, and gathering data on results. Chair Craven commended the work and thanked the panel for their presentation.

**Use of Electronic Devices in Schools – Discussion**

Commissioner Riley said technology, including artificial intelligence, plays an increasing role in education at every level and will be a continuing topic for discussion. He said today’s topic is cell phones and their effect on students. The Commissioner noted that the Surgeon General has warned that electronic communication devices and social media contribute negatively to young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Commissioner Riley said districts and schools in Massachusetts have taken a variety of approaches to cell phone use and today the Board will hear from administrators, teachers, and students about their experiences. He said the Department may put out a matching grant of up to a million dollars to help districts address this issue.

The panel included: Traci Griffith Walker, Principal, Eliot K-8 Innovation School, Boston, Gwyneth Zeeck, 8th grade student at the Eliot; Johanna Glazer, Teacher, Concord-Carlisle High School, Alexander Sproule, student, Concord-Carlisle High School, Alessandra Nugent, student, Concord-Carlisle High School; Gerry Padilla, Teacher, Marlborough High School; Josh Otlin, Principal, Milford High School, and Tessa Scrimgeour, student, Milford High School.

Panel members explained the different approaches they have taken on this issue and provided reflections on their experience implementing these practices, the results in their classrooms and school communities, and the effects on student engagement and wellbeing. Students said the restrictions on cell phone access and use in school have had a positive impact, citing more attention and engagement in classes, stronger connections with their teachers and classmates, being actively present in class and discussions, and fewer distractions. The presenters responded to questions from Board members. Chair Craven thanked the presenters.

Chair Craven called for a break at 11:35 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 11:50 a.m.

**Holyoke Public Schools Update – Discussion**

Holyoke Receiver Anthony Soto, along with Deputy Commissioner Russell Johnston, updated the Board on the Holyoke Public Schools (HPS). Receiver Soto explained that during his first full year as Receiver in 2021-22, he collaborated with the Holyoke community to establish a shared vision for the next phase of the district’s transformation. He said the district received input from more than 1,000 community stakeholders, released its multi-year strategic plan in August 2022, and that formed the basis of the district’s renewed turnaround plan in December 2022.

Receiver Soto reviewed the district’s vision, mission, and priorities, noting HPS has continued to set aggressive goals for improvement, particularly around increasing student achievement as measured by statewide assessments, improving outcomes for multilingual learners, and reducing chronic absenteeism. He highlighted accomplishments including increased graduation rates, enrollment in advanced courses, and educator diversity, a decrease in the dropout rate, growth in early childhood programs, and plans for a new middle school. Receiver Soto listed some continuing challenges including staffing, students’ mental health, increasing numbers of students who need out-of-district placements, and further development of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Receiver Soto responded to questions from the Board. Mr. Moriarty said as a resident of Holyoke he can confirm Receiver Soto is well respected in the community. Chair Craven thanked Receiver Soto and his team.

**Amendment to Regulations on Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools, 603 CMR 52.00 – Discussion and Vote**

Prior to the presentation, Commissioner Riley acknowledged Senior Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang, whose last day at DESE will be June 1, 2023. The Commissioner said Mr. Chuang has been an instrumental leader at DESE and will be starting a new position as Superintendent of the Bedford School District.

Mr. Chuang, Alison Bagg, Director of Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, Alyssa Hopkins, Assistant Director, and Ruth Hersh, Manager of Education Collaboratives and Virtual Schools, were introduced. Ms. Bagg explained that the memo outlined the changes to the regulations for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools. She said DESE received two comments during the public comment period, which led to an additional change to remove some outdated language. She said the Commissioner is recommending that the Board approve the amendments to the regulations as presented.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED**: **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 69, § 1B, and chapter 71, § 94, and having solicited and reviewed public comment in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. chapter 30A, § 3, hereby adopts the amendments to the regulations for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools, 603 CMR 52.00, as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Delegation of Authority to Commissioner to Approve Contracts Proposed by Three Charter Schools –** **Discussion and Vote**

Joining Ms. Bagg and Mr. Chuang, Alyssa Hopkins, Assistant Director, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, also acknowledged Mr. Chuang and his contributions to the Department’s work on behalf of students, families, and educators.

Ms. Hopkins explained that the recommendation before the Board is to delegate to the Commissioner approval of the management contracts of three charter schools: UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester, which is a Horace Mann Charter School in Boston, and two Commonwealth Charter Schools , Excel Academy Charter School and the new Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School. She explained that the charter school statute permits a charter school board of trustees to enter into a contract for substantially all educational services and these contracts are subject to approval by the Board. Ms. Hopkins said in similar situations involving other charter schools, the Board has delegated these approvals to the Commissioner. To open the discussion, Chair Craven asked for a motion to delegate the approvals. The motion was made and seconded.

Ms. Lombos said there are still many concerns about the new Worcester charter school and it is her understanding that the State Auditor will be looking at the financial arrangements. She proposed amending the motion by deleting the Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School. She said if it is separated, she would vote yes on delegating the contract approval on the two other charter schools. Chair Craven asked for a motion to amend by deleting the Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School from the main motion. Ms. Lombos made the motion to amend and Ms. Stewart seconded the motion. Chair Craven called for discussion on the motion to amend.

Mr. West asked for clarification on the motion and whether the intent is for the Board to convene a special meeting over the summer to weigh in directly. He added the reason for delegating the authority to the Commissioner is to allow these schools to move forward with their planning on a timely basis. Ms. Lombos said with a financial review by the State Auditor, the Board would have a chance to consider that before any contracts were signed. She added that she does not know the details or timeline of a state audit but she believes it is a review of the finances of the organization that is proposed for management of the charter school’s education program. Mr. West said this was the subject of discussion by the Board when they considered the charter proposal, including the process and criteria by which the management contract would be reviewed, and the Board voted to authorize the creation of the charter school. Mr. West said he does not see grounds for treating this charter school differently from the other two and so he is inclined to keep the original motion as it was presented.

Vice-Chair Hills said as to process, an amendment has been moved and seconded and the Board should vote on the amendment; if it prevails, the motion is amended, and if it does not prevail, we would go back to the original motion, vote on it, and then move on to the next item.

Commissioner Riley said in reviewing the proposed management contract the Department will follow the process and criteria as outlined, and the delegation of authority is a standard procedure. The Commissioner added that he has not heard about any pending audit. Chair Craven commented that there is no contract to audit yet. She called for a vote on the motion to amend the main motion.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED:To amend the original motion to remove the Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School from the original motion.

The vote was 2-9, with Ms. Lombos and Ms. Stewart voting in favor. The motion failed.

Chair Craven called for a vote on the main motion.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education authorizes the Commissioner, in accordance with General Laws c. 15, § 1F, paragraph 3,**

**to act on behalf of the Board in approving the management contracts for Excel Academy Charter School, UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester, and Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School as required by General Laws c. 71, § 89(k)(5), and 603 CMR 1.00. Such approval will follow a legal and technical review of each proposed contract and a vote by the charter school’s board of trustees to approve such contract and to submit a request to amend its charter accordingly. Any such approval by the Commissioner shall also operate to amend the charters granted to Excel Academy Charter School, UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester, and Worcester Cultural Academy Charter Public School to include the approved management contract.**

The vote was 10-1. Ms. Lombos voted in opposition. (Note: Later in the meeting, Ms. Stewart clarified that she voted no on the main motion and asked that the record be corrected. See p. 7.)

As corrected: The vote was 9-2. Ms. Lombos and Ms. Stewart voted in opposition.

Mr. Rouhanifard and Mr. West left the meeting at 12:40 p.m.

**Educational Vision –** **Discussion**

Commissioner Riley introduced Deputy Commissioner Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner Russell Johnston, and Chief of Schools Komal Bhasin, who presented an overview of the Department’s Educational Vision and Strategic Objective Framework. Ms. Robinson provided historical context and noted key themes the Commissioner outlined in his June 2019 Our Way Forward document that carry through to the new Educational Vision. Ms. Bhasin discussed how DESE has used the Racial Equity Decision-making Tool to analyze data and context, engage stakeholders, and identify racial equity strategies and impact. She said the draft Educational Vision was finalized in December 2022 and DESE began identifying key strategic objectives and focus areas that will guide the agency’s work in supporting districts to advance the vision. Mr. Johnston discussed next steps for the Educational Vision and Catalog of Aligned Supports and said through this ongoing work, DESE will continue to improve alignment of programs and services, which will help districts and schools strategically select and leverage DESE resources, to promote more equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. Chair Craven thanked the Commissioner and team.

Chair Craven deferred the budget update item to June. She recognized Ms. Stewart, who asked to clarify that she voted no on the motion regarding Delegation of Authority to Commissioner to Approve Contracts Proposed by Three Charter Schools. The record was corrected to show that the motion passed 9-2, with Ms. Lombos and Ms. Stewart voting in opposition. (See p. 6, above.) Chair Craven referred to the list of proposed meeting dates for 2023-24 that the Board will vote on in June, and asked that the proposed February 2024 dates be changed to February 12 and 13, not February 26 and 27 as proposed.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 1:10 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board