

**To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**  
**From: Matt Hills, Chair of the Committee for the Commissioner's Performance Assessment**  
**Date: June 25, 2023**  
**Re: 2022-2023 Commissioner's Performance Assessment**

### Process

Early last Fall, Chair Craven appointed a committee of Board Members to assess the Commissioner's performance and present its report to the full Board. The appointees included Katherine Craven (Board Chair), Matt Hills (Committee Chair and Board Vice-Chair), Tricia Canavan, Mike Moriarty and Marty West. We met several times beginning in November 2022 and most recently on June 21, with meetings live-streamed and recorded.

The Committee reviewed documents for 2022-2023 including (documents attached):

- The Commissioner's Goals and Objectives, presented in October and updated in November
- The Board Addition to the Commissioner's Goals and Objectives, reviewed in December
- The Commissioner's Self-Evaluation, distributed earlier this month

Tricia and Matt reached out to all Board members and, based on those calls, gathered feedback for this assessment. The Committee met and agreed on key themes to emphasize in the written assessment, with Matt writing this draft to be distributed to the Board. The next step is for the Board to discuss and approve an annual assessment of the Commissioner at our June 27 meeting.

### Summary

This year has seen significant accomplishments for many of the goals summarized in the Commissioner's Goals and Objectives and in the Board Addition. The Commissioner led the department in addressing the key priorities identified in his goals including:

- Providing supports to accelerate student learning
- Building a diverse and culturally responsive workforce
- Cultivating safe and healthy learning environments
- Aligning DESE supports to a vision of deeper learning

In addition, the Commissioner continued to make progress in achieving goals from the Board Addition including with the community, management and Board. We all recognize that the Commissioner has the support and respect of our Superintendents, and those relationships are critical to much of his ability to be successful.

In the conversations that Tricia and Matt had with Board members for this assessment, members consistently expressed the need for a more comprehensive set of goals tied to key outcomes as our districts and schools continue to struggle coming out of the pandemic while also needing to progress further from where we were pre-pandemic. These issues impact almost every community in the country, and by no means are unique to Massachusetts. We believe that the Commissioner's leadership and respect throughout the state can be even further directed to working cooperatively with districts and schools to accelerate progress (both academic and non-academic) in a variety of areas. In this regard, it

will be valuable to identify specific goals which will be developed collaboratively by the Commissioner and Board. Examples of areas to consider for our goals include: a) student learning--with an emphasis on literacy, especially early literacy, b) mental and emotional health, c) teacher diversity, d) staff openings, and e) other student-centered issues.

DESE's successful work and significant achievements will tie directly into these goals; that work is crucial to our success going forward. At the same time, our Commonwealth needs one-year and multi-year goals—all tied to key outcomes--to focus resources and efforts, assess progress and understand needed adjustments.

Last year's Commissioner Assessment highlighted the following key priority for the 2022-2023 year:

*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.*

The Board looks forward to working collaboratively with the Commissioner in continuing to see progress. We believe he is the right leader to take the Commonwealth forward and lead us through the aftermath of the pandemic and beyond.

### Selected Progress and Achievements

This year has seen significant successes and accomplishments. This is a testament to the leadership team and the entire staff, and as leader the Commissioner has set priorities and empowered his team. A subset of this year's highlights (i.e. not meant to be a complete list) includes:

- **Student Learning**
  - The work on HQIM (high quality instructional materials) has been extensive and impressive. A range of subject areas has been developed and distributed to schools and districts, and the buy-in has reinforced the value and impact of the efforts. Examples—not exhaustive—include expansion of Curate, Appleseeds, Accelerated Math and Literacy, and the Grant Program
  - Early Literacy supports including GLEAM, grants for a range of districts, and support and training for our educator preparation programs
  - Deeper Learning initiatives including the work summarized in the Our Way Forward presentation at our May meeting, the Deeper Learning Educator Network, and continuation of the Innovative Science Assessment pilot
  - Early College and Career Pathways, with both scaled-up significantly with operating infrastructure (i.e. key staff) added
  - A range of programs for multi-lingual learners

- The IEP Improvement Project which provided a much-needed overhaul to a complex and sometimes-difficult form and process. This was an excellent example of DESE collaboratively working through a series of issues with a range of stakeholders
- Targeted assistance to certain identified districts, including the receivership districts and Boston Public Schools. The three receivers were clear about their appreciation of the work and support from DESE in this governance structure
- **Educator and Workforce Initiative**
  - Teacher diversity including the 70 districts and 300 educators with whom you worked to improve educator diversity
  - MTEL support and piloting of MTEL alternatives
  - Emergency and temporary licensure measures that impacted more than 600 educators
  - Working with our educator preparation programs to improve practices to increase teacher diversity
  - Supporting districts with staff shortages
- **Safe and Healthy Learning Environments**
  - Working with districts on grants and support programs
  - COVID-related supports where needed
  - Working with districts on emergency plans
- **Supporting Deeper Learning Initiatives** including support for districts that is not necessarily driven by regulations and requirements, working with districts on their planning processes, expanding the AP subsidy program, and actively working to improve family-district interactions and collaboration
- **The REDT tool** was regularly used to provide an equity-lens in decision-making
- **Progress was made in the goals and objectives identified in the Board Addition in the three areas (Student Learning goals have separately been addressed in this memo) including:**
  - **Community**
    - Continued improvement on already strong and collaborative relationships with Superintendents and other state education leaders. The Commissioner has positioned DESE as a partner and supporter for districts and their leaders
    - The Commissioner has invested time with families and parent leaders (including the Family Engagement event) in ways that are noticed and appreciated in the community
    - Continued nurturing of relationships with a range of community organizations
    - Weekly contact list shows the range of relationships formed in the community
  - **Management**
    - The relationship with the entire team is very positive and collaborative
    - The addition of high-performing new team members and continued reliance upon a strong existing team

- The reorganization has continued to be beneficial for the Commissioner and the organization
  - Board
    - Board members see the Commissioner as responsive and accessible
    - While this is still a work in process, progress has been made in updating and engaging the Board on certain issues including
      - Updates on the Boston Public Schools Systemic Improvement Plan, with identification of
        - Progress being made
        - Collaboration with DESE
        - Key next steps and areas of concerns
      - Having all three receivers to Board meeting for presentations and discussion. While more information would be helpful going forward, Board access to the three receivers shows meaningful progress
      - Progress has been made in addressing DESE programs and initiatives that have not typically been on the agenda
    - More communication with Chair Craven on the length of specific agenda items would eliminate problematic timing issues

#### Process for Developing the Goals

The specific process should be determined by the Commissioner and Chair Craven. The following is an example of one possible path. *The important aspects of this example are not the exact monthly schedule but rather: a) the regular points of interaction and collaboration between the Commissioner and Board, and b) finalizing the goals with a Board vote in September/October.*

- July. Board discussion with the Commissioner in order to agree on
  - Key goals (academic and non-academic, with a focus on outcomes) to address
  - How progress will be assessed

This meeting can be on Zoom or as part of a retreat

- August/September. Draft goals presented to Board including
  - State and District Goals
  - Realistic timeframes
    - One-year
    - Multi-Year
  - DESE's role working collaboratively with districts
  - Critical issues to be addressed and overcome

The Commissioner and Board will discuss the draft and identify areas for further consideration

- September/October. Review of revised goals with Board vote