**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**

**October 24, 2023, 9:10 a.m.–12:40 p.m.**

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

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

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

**Ericka Fisher,** Worcester

**Farzana Mohamed,** Newton (participated via Zoom)

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke (participated via Zoom)

**Ela Gardiner,** Wellesley, Student Member

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

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

**Martin West,** Newton

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

**Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:**

**Paymon Rouhanifard,** Brookline

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Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:10 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). She noted two members will be participating remotely via Zoom.

**Public Comment**

1. **Gerry Mroz** addressed the Board on Item 3: Commissioner Riley’s Goals for 2023/24
2. **Maria Daveiga and Elijah Daveiga** addressed the Board on Item 3: Commissioner Riley’s Goals for 2023/24
3. **Magalie A. Pinney,** MAGE Advocacy Team,addressed the Board on Item 3: Commissioner Riley’s Goals for 2023/24
4. **Ed O’Connell** addressed the Board on Item 2: Civics Education Update
5. **Matt Wilson** addressed the Board on Item 2: Civics Education Update
6. **Kahris White-McLaughlin** addressed the Board on MCAS and racial equity in the Commonwealth's public schools
7. **Priya Tahiliani**, Superintendent, Everett Public Schools, addressed the Board on the accountability system, school designations, and support for schools requiring assistance
8. **Theresa Lynn,** Senior Vice President, and **Echo Lahey,** Program Manager, United Way of Central MA, addressed the Board on support that DESE has provided for after-school programs in central Massachusetts

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven announced that Board member Darlene Lombos has stepped down from her position on the Board after three years of service and the Governor will appoint a replacement. She expressed her appreciation for Ms. Lombos’s service on the Board. Chair Craven noted the passing of Charles H. Lyons, who was the longtime superintendent of the Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School in Billerica and a leader in the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators and other organizations. She said what Mr. Lyons created at Shawsheen was a model for learners and communities everywhere. Chair Craven extended deepest condolences to his family.

Chair Craven asked Board Budget Committee Chair Farzana Mohamed to brief the Board on the committee’s October 16 meeting. Ms**.** Mohamed said the committee discussed the budget process and focused on boosting support for early literacy, teacher diversification, and students’ social and emotional health as priority initiatives. Ms**.** Mohamed said the committee will meet once more in November, and at the November 21 Board meeting, she will present the committee’s recommendations.

Chair Craven thanked Ms. Gardiner for being a panelist at the statewide Access and Admissions event that took place at UMass Boston on October 23.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler thanked all who participated in STEM Week and at the Statewide Access and Admissions convening at UMass Boston.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Riley paid tribute to the late Charlie Lyons and offered condolences to his family. The Commissioner expressed his appreciation to Darlene Lombos for her service on the Board for the last three years and said she has been a great advocate for labor and for the children of Massachusetts. Commissioner Riley said he looks forward to discussing early literacy and other topics with the Board at its November 1 retreat. He said he will be inviting Boston Public Schools Superintendent Skipper, Boston Mayor Wu, and Boston School Committee Chair Robinson to present at the Board’s December 19 meeting. The Commissioner noted that DESE will host its second annual Family Summit on October 26. He said today’s meeting will be the last Board meeting in Malden, as DESE prepares to move to Everett, and the plan is to hold the next two meetings at One Ashburton Place in Boston. Chair Craven asked if meetings could be held at schools. The Commissioner said he would check with staff about this.

**Approval of the Minutes**

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of** **the September 19, 2023 Regular Meeting.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

**Update on Chronic Absenteeism**

Commissioner Riley said chronic absenteeism is a national problem and multiple media outlets have reported on it, underscoring the urgency and importance of getting students back in school. He said DESE recently posted districts’ and schools’ chronic absenteeism rates for the 2022-23 school year and it is clear Massachusetts is not immune to this national problem; almost 1 in 4 Massachusetts students missed more than 18 days of school. Commissioner Riley said while schools have worked hard to reduce the rates that spiked during COVID, the rates are still too high and research shows the negative impact on students’ mental health and academic outcomes when they miss school. Commissioner Riley said today he is launching an awareness campaign and issuing a call to action. He said he looks forward to partnering with districts, schools, families, and students to address chronic absenteeism, adding that partnerships with families are critical to this effort.

Commissioner Riley said he has decided not to name any underperforming or chronically underperforming schools this year. He added that while these designations have served well in the past, it is time to focus on attendance priority schools, which number about three-quarters of all schools in the Commonwealth. The Commissioner said school attendance is vital to recovery and DESE will provide all districts in the state with access to new supports and funding for this purpose. He said while students get sick from time to time, and some have chronic medical conditions and cannot attend school regularly, he believes the break in the routine of school-going culture during the pandemic is the root cause of the problem, and all parties need to work together to get students back into the routine of regular attendance.

Commissioner Riley introduced three physicians joining the meeting via Zoom: Dr. Genevieve Daftary, Practice Medical Director, Codman Square Community Health Center, Dr. Beverly Nazarian, General Pediatrician, Mass Memorial Health and School Physician Consultant, Worcester Public Schools, and Dr. Mary Beth Miotto, Pediatrician, Mattapan Community Health Center and President, Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The physicians discussed the impact of chronic absenteeism on students’ learning and wellbeing. They agreed that this problem calls for a community-wide campaign.

Chair Craven thanked the Commissioner and presenters. Commissioner Riley invited Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability, to join the discussion. The Commissioner and Mr. Curtin responded to questions from Board members about school-parent communication, family outreach, early warning and intervention, the accountability system, and strategies to support schools, families, and students to address chronic absenteeism. The Commissioner said this topic would continue at future meetings.

**Civics Update**

Commissioner Riley introduced the civics update, noting the Board has been involved in promoting civics education since 2014. DESE staff including Erin Hashimoto-Martell, Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support, Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy and Humanities, and Reuben Henriques, History and Social Science Content Support Lead, joined by Dave Buchanan representing the [Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition](http://www.macivicsforall.org), presented an update on civics education in Massachusetts. They discussed recent progress, highlighted the [Massachusetts Civics Project Showcase](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0sFk4DvUBg&t=2s), noted additional activities that are in process, and responded to questions. Board members commended the work being done.

Chair Craven called for a break at 11:35 a.m. The meeting resumed at 11:45 a.m.

**Commissioner Riley's Goals for 2023-2024**

Commissioner Riley presented an outline of key goals that will guide his work and the work of the Department in the 2023-2024 school year. He noted the priorities align with DESE’s educational vision across three strategic objectives: supporting the whole student, expanding deeper learning, and creating a diverse and effective workforce. Additional goals focus on DESE’s core functions that are foundational to supporting districts and schools.

Commissioner Riley explained that the goals are not a comprehensive list of everything DESE does; rather they highlight significant new and ongoing initiatives in the current school year. He presented a summary of goals under the strategic objectives and core functions, and noted that addressing chronic absenteeism, early literacy, and educator diversity are important objectives.

Board members offered comments. Vice-Chair Hills said the document is excellent as to strategies and he favors identifying a few power goals. Dr. West suggested building on that idea to identify outcomes we would look for to measure progress in a few key areas. Commissioner Riley said he looks forward to continuing the discussion at the Board’s upcoming retreat.

Noting that Ms. Mohamed gave an update from the Budget Committee earlier in the meeting, Chair Craven said the Board would move on to the final item on the business agenda.

**Educator Licensure: Progress Report on MTEL Pilot**

Commissioner Riley introduced the third annual progress update on the Pilot of Alternative Assessments for Educator Licensure, which was authorized by the Board in 2020. Claire Abbott, Director of Educator Effectiveness and Aubree Webb, Research and Policy Analyst joined researchers from DESE’s evaluation partner, National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education (CALDER), James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, and Roddy Theobold, for the presentation. Ms. Abbott explained the purpose of the pilot is to strengthen equitable access to education and allow prospective teachers to demonstrate knowledge in other ways while maintaining high standards for literacy skills and content knowledge. The panel reviewed the types of alternatives, timelines for the pilot, and some highlights from the Year 2 interim report and answered questions from the Board. Chair Craven thanked the presenters.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:40 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