**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

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

**Wellesley High School, 50 Rice Street**

**Wellesley, Massachusetts 02481**     
**Tuesday, April 30, 2024, 9:40 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.**

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

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

**Matthew Hills**, Vice-Chair, Newton *(participated remotely)*

**Ericka Fisher,** Worcester

**Ela Gardiner,** Wellesley, Student Member

**Farzana Mohamed,** Newton *(participated remotely)*

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke

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

**Dálida Rocha,** Worcester

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

**Martin West,** Newton

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

**Paymon Rouhanifard**, Brookline

**Russell D. Johnston,** Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m., and members introduced themselves. She noted two members are participating remotely and votes would be taken by roll call, and that today’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board/BESE) meeting, like all regular meetings of the Board, is being [livestreamed and recorded](https://vimeo.com/user217853291). Chair Craven thanked Wellesley Superintendent Dr. David Lussier and Wellesley High School principal Jamie Chisum for welcoming the Board to hold its meeting here in honor of student member Ela Gardiner.

**Statements from the Public**

* **Beth Kontos,** President, American Federation of Teachers-Massachusetts, addressed the Board on the Lawrence Public Schools receivership and superintendent search process.
* **Kim Barry,** Lawrence Teachers Union, addressed the Board on the Lawrence Public Schools receivership and superintendent search process.
* **Kahris McLaughlin** addressed the Board on school and district accountability and reporting of student data.
* **Gerry Mroz** addressed the Board onDESE’s Educational Vision and serving academically advanced students.
* **Mary Tamer,** Executive Director, Democrats for Education Reform, addressed the Board on Literacy Launch.
* **Elizabeth Tripathi,** Massachusetts Teachers Association, addressed the Board on Literacy Launch.
* **Heather Peske,** President, National Council on Teacher Quality, addressed the Board on Literacy Launch.
* **Tyrone Mowatt** addressed the Board on serving academically advanced Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven said the BESE is planning to hold a joint meeting with the Board of Higher Education in June. She also asked BESE members to note the conferences and other professional development opportunities available from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler thanked Superintendent Lussier and Principal Chisum for hosting this meeting at Wellesley High School. The Secretary expressed his appreciation for Ela Gardiner and her contributions as the student voice on the Board. He noted FAFSA has been a challenge across the nation and added that in Massachusetts, many financial opportunities and supports are available for students and families, including grants that schools, districts, and partner organizations are using to assist students and families with FAFSA completion. Secretary Tutwiler closed with thanks for the support the House has shown for Literacy Launch, early college, universal free school meals, and other education initiatives in the FY 25 budget.

**Comments from the Acting Commissioner**

Acting Commissioner Russell Johnston expressed his appreciation to Superintendent Lussier, Principal Chisum, and all who are assisting with the Board meeting today. He provided updates on five matters.

Receivership districts (Lawrence, Southbridge, Holyoke)

Acting Commissioner Johnston updated the Board on the superintendent selection process in Lawrence and said the Receiver, the Lawrence Alliance for Education, continues to involve the community in the process. In Southbridge, he met on April 29 with local officials to discuss ways to build local capacity and said it was a very positive conversation with a commitment to continue. With respect to Holyoke, the Acting Commissioner said he is meeting regularly with the local control subcommittee of the school committee and is encouraged by the school committee’s commitment to this process.

Felix Commonwealth Virtual School

Acting Commissioner Johnston said members of the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School board of trustees have begun working with DESE on initial opening procedures and addressing the conditions placed on the certificate. DESE staff meet weekly with Felix board members about next steps to establish the virtual school and will be reviewing submissions from the board as spelled out in the conditions. Acting Commissioner Johnston said he is encouraged by the ongoing collaboration.

Brockton

The Acting Commissioner reported DESE continues to provide support aligned with our general targeted assistance effort and the Memorandum of Understanding with Brockton Public Schools around quality instruction, school finance, and services for English language learners and students with disabilities. He noted the safety audit at the high school and a monitoring site visit focused on academics.

FAFSA

Building on Secretary Tutwiler’s comments, Acting Commissioner Johnston said while there is a federal delay with the new FAFSA portal, there is still time for college bound students to complete the application for college this fall. He noted that the Department of Higher Education has extended some deadlines and is providing various other supports for students.

Perkins state plan

Acting Commissioner Johnston said Massachusetts submits a Perkins state plan to the U.S. Department of Education every four years, outlining how the Commonwealth will use federal funds for career technical education programs. The Board received the draft state plan in March. DESE has reviewed public comments that were submitted, updated the draft, and it is now with the Governor’s Office for final review, on track for submission to the U.S. Department of Education by the May 10 deadline.

Chair Craven thanked Acting Commissioner Johnston. She called for a motion and vote to approve the minutes of the March 26 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 March 26, 2024 Regular Meeting.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

**Welcome from Wellesley Public Schools and Tribute to Member Ela Gardner**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced Wellesley Superintendent Lussier and Wellesley High School principal Chisum. Principal Chisum welcomed the Board and commended the longstanding tradition of having a student member. He praised Ela Gardiner and spoke of her leadership and active engagement in Wellesley High School. He said she is a great student and wholeheartedly seeks out opportunities for service.

Superintendent Lussier welcomed everyone and said he is proud that DESE named Wellesley High School as a school of recognition. The superintendent said student voice and student agency are vital in education. He commended Ela Gardiner for her service and said she is an excellent representative for the students of Massachusetts.

Chair Craven said Ela Gardiner has been a source of wisdom during her service on the Board this year and has been a trailblazer for young voices in Massachusetts, working with the State Student Advisory Council, Massachusetts Association of Student Representatives, National Student Board Member Association, and Young Democrats of Massachusetts. Chair Craven said Member Gardiner will be attending Hobart and William Smith Colleges in the fall, studying politics and Spanish. Chair Craven thanked Member Gardiner for her contributions to the Board and to the students of Massachusetts and invited her and her mother, Vickie Gardiner, to the stage to accept a certificate of appreciation.

Member Gardiner thanked the Board and said she has great respect and appreciation for the work of the Board, DESE, and government. She thanked her family, her teachers and school administrators, and her friends for their support. Board members applauded Member Gardiner.

Member Rocha left the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

**Update on Commissioner Search Process**

Chair Craven said the first step is to select a search firm and the procurement has been extended to May 3. She said she will report again next month.

**Update on the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students**

Acting Commissioner Johnston led off with a remembrance of former Associate Commissioner John Bynoe, a respected and beloved colleague who passed away on April 22. Mr. Bynoe retired after 38 years of service to the students of the Commonwealth. His portfolio at DESE included the Safe Schools Program, the State Student Advisory Council, and School Nutrition among others. The Acting Commissioner said we will remember John Bynoe as we discuss the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students.

Acting Commissioner Johnston explained this program is an antibullying initiative that is a collaborative effort between DESE and the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth. The program assists schools to create a safe and supportive learning environment where all students can have a sense of belonging and thrive. He introduced the panel: Associate Commissioner of Student and Family Support Rachelle Engler Bennett, Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support Erin Hashimoto-Martell, Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students Director Jason Wheeler, Randolph Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Thea Stovell Herndon, and Boston Public Schools high school student, Rowyn. The panelists presented an overview of the program and its impact, discussed guiding principles for LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, offered perspectives as a district leader in Randolph and as a high school student in Boston, and responded to questions. Chair Craven thanked the panelists for their work and for the update.

Member West left the meeting at 11:40 a.m.

**Update on DESE’s Educational Vision**

Acting Commissioner Johnston presented a brief update on DESE’s Educational Vision and Strategic Objectives. He said DESE is cultivating systems to support the whole student, promote deeper learning, and expand and sustain a diverse and effective workforce. He said today’s focus is on two key initiatives that promote the Educational Vision: Literacy Launch and Early College.

1. **Literacy Launch**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced Associate Commissioner Erin Hashimoto-Martell and Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy & Humanities. They presented the goal and purpose of Literacy Launch, external stakeholder engagement and internal collaboration, and proposed Literacy Launch programs and responded to questions. Member Moriarty commented that Massachusetts is unique among states in that DESE has built out this work since 2019 without it being driven by legislation; he said he is hopeful about the plan to move it forward. Chair Craven thanked Member Moriarty for his leadership on early literacy and thanked the presenters.

1. **Early College**

Acting Commissioner Johnston said Early College is a key lever in advancing DESE’s Educational Vision. He introduced Early College Executive Director Phylitia Jamerson, Senior Director of Policy and Planning Dr. Kristin Hunt, and Director of Programs Danielle Wheeler. They presented an overview of the Early College program, some program highlights and new program designations, an update on grants and the new data dashboard, and noted the recent student summit and spring convening. Chair Craven thanked the presenters and said she is pleased that three members of BESE serve on the Early College Joint Committee: Secretary Tutwiler, Vice-Chair Hills, and Chair Craven. Vice-Chair Hills said he is glad to be part of this DESE-DHE collaboration and the data dashboard is an excellent model.

**Education Budget Update: House Ways and Means FY25 State Education Budget Recommendations**

DESE Budget Director Julia Jou reviewed the House Ways and Means FY25 state education budget recommendations, gave a brief update on ESSER funding, and responded to questions from members. Chair Craven thanked Ms. Jou for the update.

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

**VOTED:**  **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns the meeting at 12:35 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board