# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:** | January 21, 2025 |
| **Subject:** | Briefing for the January 28, 2025 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) will have a **regular meeting** this month on **Tuesday, January 28, 2025**, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.(held in person at the office of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), 135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149). The meeting will be live-streamed and recorded. Helene Bettencourt will assist with all arrangements; please email or call her if you have any questions.

**REGULAR MEETING, January 28, 2025**

Our business agenda will lead off with an update on the Commissioner search process and the recent CTE Committee meeting. I will provide members with an update on the use of time-out practices in Massachusetts education settings, including public schools, education collaboratives, and approved private special education schools. I expect to propose amended regulations for the Board’s consideration at the February 2025 Board meeting. At the Board meeting, I will provide an update on the Department’s Educational Vision, including its ongoing work to advance student learning. I will provide updates on the early literacy initiatives, including Literacy Launch and actions the Department has taken to integrate recommendations from the Board’s Special Committee on Pandemic Recovery and Literacy into our ongoing early literacy initiatives. In response to the questions raised during our meeting on December 17, 2024 on the new statutory provisions relating to the competency determination, I will present additional information. I look forward to continuing this discussion. I will also provide an update on the FY27 budget process.

**Statements from the Public**

**Comments from the Chair**

**Comments from the Secretary**

* New Year’s Greetings
* Governor’s FY26 Budget and Supplemental Fair Share Budget
* Governor Healey’s Executive Order Creating the K-12 Statewide Graduation Council

**Comments from the Acting Commissioner**

* Cell Phones and Social Media in Schools Toolkit for School Leaders and Communities from the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General
* Guidance for Schools and Districts Relating to Immigrant Students and Families
* House 1 Budget Highlights

**Routine Business:** Approval of the Minutes of the December 17, 2024 Regular Meeting**.**

The Board will vote on approval of the minutes.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

1. **Update on Commissioner Search Process**

Chair Craven will update the Board on the search process.

1. **CTE Committee update**

Committee Chair Martin West will provide an update on the Career Technical Education committee meeting that is planned for Monday, January 27, 2025.

1. **Competency Determination Update – Discussion**

At the regular meeting of the Board we will continue the discussion of the new statutory provisions relating to the competency determination. In response to the questions raised by the Board during our meeting on December 17, 2024, I will present on the following matters.

1. Amendments to the current regulations: necessary deletions

1. Possible amendments to the current regulations: “additional areas determined by the Board” and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) oversight

1. Information on MassCore and MyCAP

Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability; Elizabeth Bennett, Associate Commissioner for College, Career, and Technical Education; and Nicole Smith, Director of College, Career and Technical Education, will join us for the discussion on January 28.

1. **Use of time-out practices under current regulations at 603 CMR 46.00 and 603 CMR 18.00 - Initial Discussion**

At the Board meeting, I will provide an update to the Board on the use of time-out practices in Massachusetts education settings, including public schools, education collaboratives, and approved private special education schools.

Time-out is a behavioral support strategy in which a student temporarily separates from the learning environment. It is referenced in current regulations, 603 CMR 46.00, and also in 603 CMR 18.00, as it relates to approved public and private special education programs.

Because the overuse or inappropriate use of time-out and time-out rooms may cause academic loss and trauma to students, it is in the best interest of our students and school communities to reduce or eliminate these practices. After analyzing the feedback obtained from the Department’s summer-fall 2024 working group as well as multiple discussions with key stakeholders, I expect to propose amended regulations for the Board’s consideration at the February 2025 Board meeting. The proposals would further the work we launched in September 2021 to reduce or eliminate the use of time-out practices in Massachusetts educational settings.

At the January 28 meeting, Iraida J. Álvarez, Acting Executive Director of Special Education, Jamie Camacho, Acting State Director of Special Education, Janelle Roberts, Director of the Office of Approved Special Education Schools, and Arabela Thomas, Deputy General Counsel, will present to the Board, invite discussion, and respond to your questions.

1. **Educational Vision Update and Advancing Student Learning**

At the Board meeting, I will provide an update on the Department’s Educational Vision, including its ongoing work to advance student learning.

1. **Early Literacy Update – Discussion**
   * 1. **Early Literacy and Literacy Launch Update: – Discussion**

At the Board meeting, I will provide updates on the early literacy initiatives, including Literacy Launch and actions the Department (DESE) has taken to integrate recommendations from the Board’s Special Committee on Pandemic Recovery and Literacy into our ongoing early literacy initiatives. At the Board meeting on January 28, 2025, DESE staff will present an overview of this information along with a report on early literacy tutoring.

Erin Hashimoto-Martell, Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support, Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy & Humanities, and Linda Sewnarine, Assistant Director of Literacy, will present an overview of this information to the Board and invite discussion, questions, and feedback.

* + 1. **Early Literacy Tutoring – Discussion**

At the Board meeting I will provide an overview of early literacy tutoring coordinated by the Department.

The Department has coordinated delivery of early literacy tutoring to students across the state since 2020. Initially funded by Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds under the federal CARES Act in the first year of the pandemic, DESE selected a small group of vetted tutoring vendors through an open procurement. DESE then matched tutoring providers with school districts and other local education agencies (LEAs) interested in receiving tutoring services and paid the tutoring providers directly. DESE has continued to use this model, utilizing federal ESSER funds more recently, and applying ongoing operational and programmatic improvements including a yearly program evaluation.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University will describe their [recent study on high-dosage tutoring in Massachusetts](https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/items/051a05b4-2637-45f5-93fd-1806da538eac) and invite questions from the Board. The research team studied a One8 Foundation-sponsored initiative that provided one-to-one virtual literacy tutoring for first-grade students in 13 districts. Along with the researchers, Ed Lambert, Executive Director of the MA Business Alliance for Education, and Joanna Jacobson, President of the One8 Foundation, DESE staff members Erin Hashimoto-Martell, Associate Commissioner of Instructional Support, Katherine Tarca, Director of Literacy & Humanities, and Linda Sewnarine, Assistant Director of Literacy, will be available to answer questions.

1. **Education Budget Update – Discussion**

On January 22nd, Governor Healey filed House 1, containing the Administration’s FY26 state spending recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year. The Governor recommends a $61.5 billion budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2026, including $1.95 billion in surtax spending. Non-surtax spending totals $59.577 billion, a 2.6 percent increase over the current Fiscal Year 2025 spending estimate.

A discussion of the Governor’s education budget proposal for FY26 will be on the agenda at the Board meeting on January 28, 2025.

**OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

1. **Reports on Grants Approved by the Commissioner**

Enclosed is information on grants I have approved since the last meeting, under the authority the Board has delegated to the Commissioner.

1. **Chronically Underperforming Schools - Quarter 2 Report**

This month, for your information I am providing the second of four SY2024-2025 quarterly progress updates to the Board on the two chronically underperforming schools’ (Paul A. Dever Elementary School, Boston, UP Academy Holland, Boston) implementation of their school turnaround plans, focusing on activities from October to December 2024. The narratives for this progress update have been provided by the School Empowerment Network, based on classroom observations led by that group during that timeframe. The third quarterly update will be presented in March and a final annual review will be provided in June.

1. **Board 2023 – 2024 Annual Report**

The Board’s annual report highlights key activities and initiatives of the Board and Department for Fiscal Year 2024. The report will be posted on our website at [https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/annual/2024](https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/annual/2024/). s we do each year, we will inform the Governor, the Legislature, and education stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth about the annual report.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to meeting with you on January 28.