# Minutes of the Regular Meeting

**of the Massachusetts Board of Education**

# August 28, 2007

**9:05 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.**

**Massachusetts Department of Education**

**350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Education Present:

**S. Paul Reville**,Chairman, Worcester

**Ann J. Reale**, Vice-Chair, Commissioner of Early Education and Care

**Christopher R. Anderson**,Westford

**Harneen Chernow**, Jamaica Plain

**Thomas E. Fortmann**,Lexington

**Ruth Kaplan**,Brookline

## Clantha McCurdy (for Patricia Plummer, Chancellor of Higher Education)

## Zachary Tsetsos, Chair, State Student Advisory Council, Oxford

**David P. Driscoll**,Commissioner of Education, Secretary to the Board

Member of the Board of Education Absent:

 **Sandra L. Stotsky**,Brookline

Chairman S. Paul Reville called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

#### Comments from the Chairman

Chairman Reville opened the meeting by thanking Governor Patrick for giving him the opportunity to serve as chairman of the Board of Education. He thanked Christopher Anderson for his leadership and the positive tone he set and his collaborative, inclusive approach during his chairmanship of the Board for the past nine months. Mr. Reville also thanked Dana Mohler-Faria, the Governor’s special advisor on education, Commissioner David Driscoll, Deputy Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus, and General Counsel Rhoda Schneider. He noted that this was Commissioner Driscoll’s final meeting before his retirement on August 31, 2007. He expressed appreciation to the Commissioner for his leadership at the classroom, district and state levels over his 43-year career, and commended his advocacy on behalf of students and education reform.

Chairman Reville read the following statement:

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Governor Deval Patrick recently honored me by asking me to chair the Massachusetts State Board of Education.  Because of my deep respect for the institution of the Board and my belief in the Board’s power to promote improved learning for all Massachusetts’ children, I readily, and with humility, accepted this new responsibility.

I am eager to work with the Governor, the Legislature, fellow Board members, the Department of Education, educators, community leaders and members, parents and a host of interested parties in leading the next phase of education reform and improvement in the Commonwealth.  Our achievements in school reform in Massachusetts have been impressive over the last decade and a half, and we should celebrate these.  However, it is obvious that all children are not yet learning at high levels in Massachusetts.  Despite the best efforts of policy makers, educators and advocates, there are persistent gaps in student achievement and too often, these gaps correlate with socio-economic status.  All students have not achieved proficiency nor are all students, irrespective of their achievements, being challenged.  We need to do better.

Schools and educators need support in order to build the necessary expertise to achieve our unprecedented goal of educating all students to high levels.  Standards and accountability are critical cornerstones that provide the foundation for education reform, but a foundation alone is insufficient.  The Commonwealth needs to provide the resources, expertise, direction and opportunities for our educators to do what is essentially a new job, educating all students to at least a level of proficiency.  In addition, the work of educating all students goes beyond the boundaries of traditional K-12 schools.  Early childhood education, human and social services, expanded school time and after school and summer programming are all needed in addition to a robust Department of Education capable of providing high quality technical assistance and support to all school districts.

Education reform has arguably lost momentum.  Even though tens of thousands of people have worked tirelessly to achieve our educational ideals, the gaps persist and we must redouble our efforts and move forward boldly to do whatever needs to be done to improve educational performance at all levels.  Our educational challenges are complex and will not lend themselves to simplistic solutions.  We will need to be thoughtful, persistent and courageous in order to move ahead.  Now is the time.

I pledge to lead a civil, deliberate process to finding strategies to meet our biggest educational challenges.  We want to have a collaborative, thorough process, which in the end, leads to decisions that will be lasting and make a constructive difference for children.  I will challenge all parties to the conversation to present not only their criticisms of current policy but also their constructive, prescriptions for future policy.  There’s much to be done, and I welcome the participation of all of those in the Commonwealth who see high quality education as a fundamental obligation to our children and a vital key to our future as a society.

I recognize that one of our biggest challenges may be to have an expansive, inclusive, civil discourse on education, while still, after a reasonable interval of listening to one another, having the courage to call the question so that we might take timely action on behalf of children. We must be ready to act on behalf of children.

Our first step as a Board will be to commence the work of selecting a Commissioner of Education, the state’s chief state school officer.  The process of selecting the Commissioner will move forward immediately and embody the opportunities for participation that I hope will be a hallmark of the Board’s work.  I will be seeking your input as part of this process.

I have played many roles in the world of education from teacher, to principal, to activist, to professor, to researcher, to policy maker, but perhaps my most important role is that of parent.  I will be guided in this work by wanting for all children in the Commonwealth what I want for my own children.  I invite you to join the Board and me in this important mission.  Please feel free to be in touch, to share your views.  Know that you will be heard.

I find that most of us agree on the goals that we want to achieve for children in our schools, our desire to educate each one of them fully so that they might both flourish in our society and contribute to it.  This agreement on both excellence and equity is heartening and cause for optimism. Our disagreements tend to revolve around strategy: how to achieve our goals.  We sometimes disagree strenuously on the ways and means of achieving goals especially when our own adult interests are at stake.  A certain amount of disagreement is healthy and essential for forging new solutions to the challenges we face.

I know that, going forward, we won’t always agree on strategies either, but we will listen to one another respectfully, and we will be persistent in our conviction that the quality of our schools depends on our commitment to the continuing struggle to find the right strategies to make good on the promise of a high quality public education for all of our children.

I look forward to working with you on this vitally important mission.

Sincerely,
 **S. Paul Reville**

S. Paul Reville
Chairman
Massachusetts Board of Education

Chairman Reville observed that today was the first day of school for many students, including one of his own children. He wished a successful school year to all educators and students across the Commonwealth. He stated that the Board is moving ahead on the search for a new commissioner. The Chairman plans to reschedule the September Board meeting and to include a special meeting on the evening before the regular meeting to discuss the search with the consultant from NASBE.

Board members introduced themselves.

The Governor’s special advisor on education, Dana Mohler-Faria, addressed the Board, congratulating Mr. Reville on his appointment and commending Mr. Anderson for his leadership during his tenure as Chairman. Dr. Mohler-Faria presented a Governor’s Citation to Commissioner Driscoll in recognition of his 43 years of dedicated service to public education and to the children of the Commonwealth. He said he appreciates the continued leadership that Jeff Nellhaus will bring as Acting Commissioner.

Chairman Reville read the following letter to the Commissioner from Representative Patricia Haddad, Chair of the Education Committee:

August 23, 2007

Dr. David Driscoll, Commissioner

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Education

350 Main Street

Malden, Massachusetts

Dear Dr. Driscoll,

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank you for your service to the school children of the Commonwealth during your tenure as Commissioner of the Department of Education. On this, the occasion of your last meeting of the Board of Education while Commissioner, please know that we are all appreciative of your many years of guidance and counsel.

On a personal note, please know that I have enjoyed working with you both as a former Chair of the Somerset School Committee and as House Chairperson of the legislature’s Joint Committee on Education. Your efforts have helped to bring public education to new frontiers here in the Commonwealth and has brought Massachusetts great respect, nationally. Your presence will be missed but your legacy will continue forward.

Please accept my very best wishes in your new endeavors. May your retirement be filled with happiness and good health.

With warm personal regards,

**PATRICIA A. HADDAD,**

Chair, Committee on Education

Commissioner Driscoll thanked Chairman Reville, Mr. Anderson and the Board for their support and commitment.

#### Approval of the Minutes

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the June 26, 2007 regular meeting, as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

# State Education Budget for FY08 and Implications for FY09

Commissioner Driscoll discussed the FY08 state education budget, noting that the overall budget increased by $260 million, of which $220 million is allocated for Chapter 70 aid and another $20 million for various grant programs. He said the past few years have been difficult for school budgets, and much of the increased Chapter 70 funding will be absorbed by health care increases, special education costs, and collective bargaining increases.

The Commissioner highlighted other increases in the FY08 budget, including $1 million in foundation reserve (“pothole”) and $12 million in circuit breaker increases. He commented that funding for targeted assistance to districts and schools has increased but is not adequate to meet the needs in the nine “Commissioner’s Districts” that include 98 of 121 schools in corrective action, as well as smaller districts that lack the capacity to address their performance problems.

Commissioner Driscoll called attention to the $1 million allocated for a district leadership development program, which will be jointly managed by the Department of Education and the Massachusetts associations of school committees (MASC), school superintendents (MASS), secondary school principal (MSSAA), and elementary school principals (MESPA). He advocated for the expansion of the Extended Learning Time (ELT) initiative, given the positive results that are apparent in participating schools.

With regard to the Department’s administration, the Commissioner noted that the actual budget did not increase by $2.5 million; rather, that amount represents consolidation of staffing expenditures from other line items. Finally, the Commissioner noted increases in the technology budget aimed at building capacity and infrastructure for districts and schools.

Looking ahead to FY 09, Commissioner Driscoll encouraged the Board to identify and advocate for specific priorities, such as mentoring and induction for new teachers, targeted assistance to schools and districts, and state-local partnerships to foster the conditions necessary for stronger teaching and learning. Chairman Reville said the Board will have an initial discussion of its budget priorities for FY 09 in October.

# 2. Review and Update of Curriculum Frameworks

Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus presented an overview of the proposed schedule for reviewing and updating the state’s Curriculum Frameworks in all seven content areas. While the frameworks are nationally recognized as being sound and strong, he said, both state law and good practice dictate that they should be reviewed periodically and updated as needed. The Deputy Commissioner proposed a five-year cycle to review the frameworks, beginning with a review of the English Language Arts framework this fall and the Mathematics framework this winter. The Department plans to convene an advisory committee of preK-grade 12 educators and scholars from higher education with expertise in the content area to review the existing framework and identify needed changes, then recommend changes to the Commissioner, who would present any proposed revisions in the frameworks to the Board for approval. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department will initiate an open nomination process for advisory committee candidates.

Chairman Reville commented that some further consideration of the schedule for framework review would be useful; he noted a recent letter from the Board’s Interdisciplinary Health Education Advisory Council recommending that the Health Education framework should be reviewed and updated in the near future. The Chairman conveyed the sense of the Board that the process and schedule could be modified as needed, and in the meantime the Department should move forward with the plan to review and revise the English Language Arts framework.

# 3. Approval of Grants

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the grants as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

The Board voted to approve state and federal grants totaling $6,212,284 and accepted the Commissioner’s report on grants he had approved since the June 2007 meeting, totaling $4,502,001. The grants include funding for technology enhancement, education of homeless students, academic support services, after-school academic enrichment and youth development, alternative education, tech-prep transition, and early literacy intervention.

# 4. Board of Education Annual Report for FY 2007

Commissioner Driscoll presented the Board’s FY07 Annual Report. As he reviewed the accomplishments of the Board and the Department relating to strengthening teaching and learning in mathematics, the Commissioner acknowledged Board member Thomas Fortmann for his work on the Department’s new guidelines on the mathematical preparation of elementary teachers.

The Commissioner went through some of the highlights of the annual report. He distributed two corrected pages and noted that a few final edits will be made to the report before it is posted on the Department’s website.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

**VOTED:** **that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, §§ 1A and 1B, approve the annual report for FY 2007 as presented, and authorize its publication.**

The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Reville commended the annual report as eloquent testimony to the work of Commissioner Driscoll, the Board, the Department, former Chairman Anderson, and the field. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus acknowledged the work of his staff in the new Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation in compiling the report.

Commissioner Driscoll also commended student Board member Zachary Tsetsos, chair of the State Student Advisory Council, for the excellent 2007 summer leadership conference that the SSAC organized for student representatives from high schools across the Commonwealth. Board member Ruth Kaplan asked the members of the Student Advisory Council who were in attendance at the Board meeting to stand and be recognized.

Chairman Reville concluded the meeting by thanking Commissioner Driscoll again for his leadership, his courage, his willingness to speak out on hard issues that need to be addressed, his advocacy and special focus on children, his care and commitment, and his sense of humor. Other Board members echoed the sentiments.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

**VOTED: that the meeting adjourn at 10:45 a.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

David P. Driscoll

Commissioner of Education

and Secretary of the Board