**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

**of the Massachusetts Board of Education**

**September 27, 2007**

**9:05 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.**

**John J. Duggan Middle School**

**1015 Wilbraham Road**

**Springfield, Massachusetts**

**Members of the Board of Education Present:**

**Paul Reville**, Chairman, Worcester

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

**Christopher R. Anderson**, Westford

**Harneen Chernow**, Jamaica Plain

**Thomas E. Fortmann**, Lexington

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Patricia F. Plummer**, Chancellor, Board of Higher Education, Boston

**Sandra L. Stotsky**, Brookline

**Zachary Tsetsos**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Oxford

**Jeffrey Nellhaus**, Acting Commissioner of Education, Secretary to the Board

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

##### Comments from the Chairman

Chairman Reville stated that the Board was pleased to be at the Duggan Middle School, which is one of four schools that the Board designated as Commonwealth Pilot Schools earlier this year. The chairman recognized former Board member Henry Thomas, and congratulated him on his recent appointment as a trustee of the University of Massachusetts.

The chairman said he spent much time during his first month in the field listening to a broad range of views on K-12 education and encouraging people to work collaboratively on solutions to the challenges we face. He said the reception was uniformly positive, and he found people willing to engage and eager to move forward.

Chairman Reville provided an update on the search process for a new commissioner and noted that the Board had a special meeting on September 26th with its search consultant, Brenda Welburn of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). *(****Note****: Minutes from the September 26, 2007 special meeting of the Board are attached.)* The Board is scheduling public forums and focus groups to hear from constituents on the qualities to seek in a new commissioner. Forums will be held on September 27th at Central High School in Springfield, and on October 5th at Gardner Auditorium at the State House in Boston. Following this process, NASBE will develop an announcement and advertisement, which will be posted for 30 days. Once that deadline has passed, a screening process will commence, the field of applicants will be narrowed to semi-finalists for interviews, and then finalists will be selected sometime in December. The chairman said the Board will act in a thoughtful, deliberate manner, but also expeditiously, to complete its search. The Board hopes to appoint a new commissioner early in 2008.

Chairman Reville said the state's performance on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows the success of our education reform efforts. Massachusetts 4th graders outscored their counterparts in all 49 states in reading and mathematics, and 8th graders were tops in mathematics and tied for first in reading with three other states. Fifty-eight (58) percent of Massachusetts 4th graders scored Proficient or higher in mathematics, making Massachusetts one of only five states to move more than half its students above the 50 percent proficiency mark. In grade 8 mathematics, 51 percent of Massachusetts 8th graders scored Proficient or higher, making it the only state to exceed the 50 percent mark. Massachusetts 4th graders made significant gains in reading and mathematics since 2005, when the NAEP was last administered, and 8th graders made significant gains in mathematics. Massachusetts also recorded the highest scores in the percent of students achieving at the Advanced level, including 16 percent in grade 4 reading and 15 percent in grade 8 mathematics. While this news was reason to celebrate, the chairman also noted that achievement gaps persist and the state has a lot more work to do to close those gaps.

The chairman referred to the Department’s research brief on school finance trends included in the Board packet. He commented that despite overall increases in funding, many districts are dealing with varying degrees of financial distress. The Governor's Readiness Project will examine this issue, and Chairman Reville has also asked Acting Commissioner Nellhaus to conduct a study on school spending and report to the Board in November or December.

Chairman Reville added that voluntary school integration programs and other issues are also of great importance to the Commonwealth and the Board.

Chairman Reville said he has asked Board member Ruth Kaplan to chair a small, *ad hoc* committee to examine the Board’s procedures for receiving public comment and engaging with the field. Board member Thomas Fortmann will also serve on this committee, which will make recommendations on improving the participatory process.

##### Comments from the Commissioner

Acting Commissioner Jeffrey Nellhaus noted that this was his first Board meeting in his new role. He said the transition has gone very smoothly, and thanked Chairman Reville, the Board, and the entire Department staff for their support. The Acting Commissioner said he looks forward to working with the Board on strategic objectives and priorities for the FY09 budget.

**Approval of the Minutes**

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the August 28, 2007 regular meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

##### Commonwealth Pilot Schools

Chairman Reville welcomed Springfield Superintendent Joe Burke, Duggan Principal Jonathan Swan, Springfield Education Association President Timothy Collins, Associate Commissioner Juliane Dow, and Dan French, Executive Director of the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE). Board member Chris Anderson commented that there is great interest in the Commonwealth Pilot Schools initiative and the Board is looking forward to positive results. He said that when he visited the English High School in Boston recently, he saw a remarkable transformation. Mr. Anderson added that the other Commonwealth Pilot Schools – Putnam Vocational Technical High School and Duggan Middle School in Springfield, and Academy Middle School in Fitchburg – are also experiencing a culture change, empowering staff to come up with their own solutions.

Superintendent Burke said the two Springfield schools, Duggan and Putnam, have undertaken the planning and early implementation with energy and enthusiasm. Principal Swan acknowledged the efforts of Duggan's design team, and noted that the vision at Duggan is to create professional learning communities focused on closing the achievement gap. He said the changes this year include a smaller school size and average class size, a teaching staff that is committed to the project (64 percent of the teachers are newly recruited to the school), establishment of common planning time and 10-12 hours of professional development each month focused on teaching and learning, and shared decision-making with teachers. Mr. Collins said the Commonwealth Pilot Schools are a work in progress. He cautioned that they would need continued support, and that the creation of pilot schools should not drain resources from other public schools.

CCE Executive Director Dan French commended the Board for taking the bold step to extend to the four Commonwealth Pilot Schools (these two in Springfield plus one each in Boston and Fitchburg) greater control over resources coupled with greater accountability. He noted that in three of four pilot schools, there has been more than 50 percent turnover of staff. These schools are building the foundations for a professional collaborative culture where teachers talk with other teachers and engage administrators and the community. The four schools are setting up governing boards. He said he is cautiously optimistic that they can transform the historical cultures of their schools, and this will take time, resources, and sustained support.

Associate Commissioner Dow said the Department is expanding the Commonwealth Pilot School initiative this year to bring in up to 12 additional schools in up to 6 additional districts.

Chairman Reville noted that it is the Board's responsibility to monitor the progress of each of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools. The Board engaged the panel in a discussion on interim benchmarks and other issues.

In response to questions from the Board, Superintendent Burke said that the Springfield School Committee voted a year and a half ago to require Algebra in grade 8 in all schools. He recognized Step-Up Springfield, a citywide effort to engage the community in helping all students to achieve proficiency. Superintendent Burke said the School Committee has a five-year plan to increase art and music programs in the schools.

Mr. French offered suggestions based on the Boston pilot schools experiment. First, there is the need to track student-level longitudinal data over time, including attendance rates, suspensions, transfers, graduation rates, MCAS scores, and college data. Data should be disaggregated, and an emphasis should be placed on value added. Second, each school should assess the change in its practices. Pilot schools could also undergo school quality review regarding effective practices, similar to charter school reviews.

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department’s Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation is looking into a number of growth models. Superintendent Burke said that Springfield plans to implement a growth model, which is in a pilot phase this year. Chairman Reville asked the Department to assess and report periodically to the Board on the progress of the four Commonwealth Pilot Schools.

**Charter Schools**

Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson and Director of Charter Schools Mary Street presented the Board with a calendar for anticipated Board action on charter school matters between September 2007 and February 2008.

The Board discussed a request for a waiver of the deadline for submission of its renewal application from the New Leadership Charter School (NLCS). Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the deadline in the regulations generally is not a problem, and an exception in this case is warranted.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 71, section 89 and 603 CMR 1.03(2), hereby grant a waiver of the requirements in 603 CMR § 1.12(2) to New Leadership Charter School. This waiver allows New Leadership Charter School to proceed with the renewal process as if its Application for Renewal of a Public Charter School had been complete when submitted on August 1st.**

The vote was unanimous.

Associate Commissioner Wulfson said twelve charter schools are scheduled for renewal this year. The first four renewal applications presented today for initial discussion are: Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School, Foxborough Regional Charter School, Mystic Valley Regional Charter School, and Sturgis Charter Public School. Ms. Street said the Summary of Review compiles the five-year performance record of each school. These charter renewals will be on the agenda for a vote in October.

In response to questions from Board members, Associate Commissioner Wulfson and Ms. Street provided additional information. The waiting list for charter schools statewide is about 20,000 students, but the list contains some duplication. Student demographics at the four schools do not necessarily mirror the demographics of the sending districts, particularly around students with disabilities and English language learners, but charter schools are schools of choice, and it is not surprising if the demographics do not match the sending district. The Department does go to great lengths to ensure that each charter school is open and welcoming to all students and prepared to serve all students. In response to a question about the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School’s failure to comply with the state’s open meeting law, Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the Attorney General enforces that law, but the Department holds charter schools accountable and would point out such a problem.

Chairman Reville observed that charter schools serve fewer than 2 percent of Massachusetts public school students, and the Board should rely on the Department to assess and analyze the charter schools, and then make expeditious decisions.

Associate Commissioner Wulfson presented proposed charter amendments submitted by three charter schools for the purpose of expanding their enrollments. Hill View Montessori Charter Public School is seeking to add 53 students in order to expand from a K–7 to a K–8 school; MATCH Charter Public High School is seeking to add grades 6, 7, and 8 to its current 9–12 levels, with an enrollment increase of 240 students; and Rising Tide Charter School is seeking to increase its enrollment by 20 students.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 71, §89 and 603 CMR 1.00, hereby amend the charters granted to the following schools: Hill View Montessori Charter Public School (enrollment increase from 243 to 296 students and grade span increase from K-7 to K-8); MATCH Charter Public High School (enrollment increase from 220 to 460 students and grade span increase from 9-12 to 6-12); and Rising Tide Charter School (enrollment increase from 300 to 320 students), as presented by the Acting Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

##### Student Performance and College Readiness in Massachusetts

The Department's Director of Student Assessment, Kit Viator, made a presentation on state-level 2007 MCAS results, showing the progress that students are making towards achieving proficiency. Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Carrie Conaway presented data on college readiness from the new School-to-College database, which the Department and the Board of Higher Education are implementing in partnership, with funding from the National Governors Association. The school-to-college data report highlights how students' performance on the grade 10 MCAS tests relates to their success in public institutions of higher education.

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus noted that this presentation sets the stage for the Board's consideration of high school reform initiatives, including the MassCore recommended program of studies next month. Board members observed that the database reports only on students who enter the Massachusetts public higher education system. Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said this tool is the first step, and additional information could be obtained from the national higher education clearinghouse. Chairman Reville commended the two agencies for their collaboration on the database, which is a powerful informational tool for policymakers.

**Grants**

The Board reviewed state and federal grants totaling $3,608,021. The grants included funding for technology data-driven decisions, community service-learning partnership grants, Perkins IV Tech-Prep transition, and after-school and out-of-school time quality programs. In response to a question about evaluation of the outcomes of after-school and out-of-school grant programs, Acting Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department is reviewing the grant-making process generally, including how grant outcomes are evaluated.

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

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

The vote was unanimous.

**Review and Update of Curriculum Frameworks**

Chairman Reville said this agenda item does not require the Board’s vote, but given its importance, he requested that the Board indicate its support for the revision process.

Acting Commissioner Nellhaus explained that the review is a two-step process and the Board plays a role at each stage. First, the Commissioner appoints the review panel, which will review the framework and present its recommendations to the Commissioner and the Board. Second, the Department will work with the review panel to draft revisions to the framework, and any revisions would be presented to the Board for approval. In response to questions and suggestions from Board members, the Acting Commissioner agreed that the Department will seek out the views of teachers and others in the field on the framework documents; include experts and practitioners on the review panels; and add to the timetable for framework review a target date for the next five-year review. Chairman Reville encouraged student Board member Zachary Tsetsos to consider ways that the State Student Advisory Council might offer the students’ perspective on the curriculum frameworks as part of the review process.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Education endorse the process to review and update the Curriculum Frameworks, and to have the Department move forward with the plan as presented by the Acting Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

##### Supports for Students

Chairman Reville noted that the Acting Commissioner has presented an initial list of some of the state- and federally-funded initiatives that provide support to students to help them be successful in school. The chairman said that next month the Board will have the first in a series of discussions on supports for student learning, and how to strengthen and coordinate the current array of programs into a more coherent system of support.

Chairman Reville concluded the meeting by noting that given the Board’s diversity and thoughtfulness, and the need to engage in discussion, time management could become a challenge. He said he welcomes input from Board members on how best to manage the Board’s time.

Chairman Reville announced that the next regular meeting of the Board will be held on Tuesday, October 30, 2007 at a location to be determined.

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

**VOTED: that the meeting adjourn at 12:20 p.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Nellhaus

Acting Commissioner of Education

and Secretary to the Board

**Minutes of the Special Meeting**

**of the Massachusetts Board of Education**

**September 26, 2007**

**7:20 p.m. – 9:10 p.m.**

**Sheraton Monarch Place Hotel**

**Springfield, Massachusetts**

**Members of the Board of Education Present:**

**Paul Reville**, Chairman, Worcester

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

**Christopher R. Anderson**, Westford

**Harneen Chernow**, Jamaica Plain

**Thomas E. Fortmann**, Lexington

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Patricia F. Plummer**, Chancellor, Board of Higher Education, Boston

**Sandra L. Stotsky**, Brookline

**Zachary Tsetsos**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Oxford

Also Present:

**Rhoda E. Schneider**, General Counsel

**Brenda Welburn**, Executive Director, National Association of State Boards of Education, and search consultant to the Massachusetts Board of Education

Chairman Reville called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m. He introduced Brenda Welburn, Executive Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and search consultant to the Board of Education.

Chairman Reville said the full Board is serving as the commissioner search committee. He outlined the general process. The Board is scheduling public forums and focus groups to hear from constituents on the qualities to seek in a new commissioner. Forums will be held on September 27th at Central High School in Springfield, and on October 5th at Gardner Auditorium at the State House in Boston. Following this process, NASBE will develop an announcement and advertisement, which will be posted for 30 days. Once that deadline has passed, a screening process will commence, the field of applicants will be narrowed to semi-finalists for interviews, and then finalists will be selected sometime in December. The chairman said the Board will act in a thoughtful, deliberate manner, but also expeditiously, to complete its search and appoint a new commissioner early in 2008.

Ms. Welburn discussed the search process, including public outreach, recruitment of candidates, screening, and reference checks. She said that in the four most recent commissioner searches that NASBE has facilitated, 18-27 candidates applied. She noted that what counts the most is the quality of the applicants. Ms. Welburn then led the Board through an exercise to articulate:

* What are the most important tasks for the new commissioner in the first six months?
* What characteristics and qualities should the new commissioner have?
* What management experience and skills should the new commissioner have?
* What educational or other credentials should the new commissioner have?

All Board members engaged in the discussion. Ms. Welburn said the views of the Board will be reflected in the job description for the commissioner position, and will shape the questions that are asked in the screening and interview process. She will draft, for review by the Board, the job description and three questions for applicants to address. She will also give the Board a synopsis of the information she gathers from the public forums and focus groups.

General Counsel Rhoda Schneider added that she will advise the Board on open meeting law and public records requirements in connection with the commissioner search. The Board will conduct the search and selection process in accordance with the law and in a way that will maximize the pool of high quality candidates.

Chairman Reville concluded the meeting by affirming that while Ms. Welburn and NASBE will play a very helpful consultant role, this is the Board’s search. He encouraged Board members to be active recruiters for excellent candidates.

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

**VOTED: that the meeting adjourn at 9:10 p.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Rhoda E. Schneider

General Counsel