Minutes of the Regular Meeting

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

**October 21, 2008**

**9:10 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.**

**Holyoke High School**

**500 Beech Street**

**Holyoke, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

**Harneen Chernow**, Vice Chair, Jamaica Plain

**Gerald Chertavian**, Cambridge

**Andrew “AJ” Fajnzylber**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Brookline

**Thomas E. Fortmann**, Lexington

**Beverly Holmes**, Springfield

**Jeff Howard**, Reading

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Dana Mohler-Faria**, Bridgewater

**Paul Reville**, Secretary of Education, Worcester

**Sandra L. Stotsky**, Brookline

**Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Maura Banta thanked Holyoke Superintendent Eduardo Carballo and Holyoke High School Principal David Dupont, who welcomed Board members to the city. The chair said the Board had a very productive special meeting the previous evening as part of a continuing review of the state system of accountability and assistance.

Chair Banta thanked Board members Jeff Howard, Gerald Chertavian, and Tom Fortmann for their participation on the Board’s budget committee. The chair said she was honored to represent the Board over the last month in a variety of forums, including as a panelist at the release of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education’s new report, [*Educating a 21st Century Workforce*](http://www.mbae.org/uploads/06102008230519EducatingA21stCenturyWorkforce.pdf), at meetings with Citizens for Public Schools and Stand for Children, at an Aspen Institute meeting on teacher quality in Washington, D.C., and along with Commissioner Chester at the National Association of State Boards of Education conference in Washington, D.C. Chair Banta said that every group she has met with has been impressed with our Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and they all have high expectations for the Board and Commissioner Chester.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Chester thanked the Holyoke officials for hosting the Board, and acknowledged Department staff who work hard to put together the Board’s monthly meetings. The Commissioner said he visited a number of schools over the past month.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Reville said that his work in the past month has been dominated by the state’s acute fiscal situation. He said Governor Patrick was largely able to spare education from some of the biggest cuts, demonstrating his deep commitment to public education. The secretary said that several task forces have begun to look at cost savings, some of which would require changes in statute. Secretary Reville said we need to identify savings before asking for new resources, in order to have a more effective, more efficient 21st century educational system that delivers on our aspirations to provide the highest quality education for all of our students.

**Comments from the Public**

* Arthur Stellar, Taunton Public Schools Superintendent, addressed the Board on the Horace Mann League.
* Linda Nathan, Raul Garcia, and Mark Lonergan from the Boston Arts Academy addressed the Board on MCAS.
* Kathleen Wang, Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion School Principal, addressed the Board on a federal grant awarded to the charter school.

**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 10, 2008 regular meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

**2008 MCAS Results and AYP Determinations**

Commissioner Chester provided an overview of the 2008 MCAS and AYP results, which were released in September. The commissioner presented graphs to demonstrate the great progress made by students on the MCAS tests between 2002 and 2008. The commissioner noted that while serious achievement gaps remain, more students are doing well, and this is a real tribute to the state’s educators and students.

In terms of AYP, Commissioner Chester said that school results on MCAS have improved at the same time that federal targets have been increasing at a higher rate. The commissioner said a school could be making good progress even if it misses the federal targets. Commissioner Chester said the federal law requires the state and districts to be deliberate and attentive to student populations that are identified for improvement, and the state has a role in providing technical assistance and disseminating best practices.

Board member Howard congratulated all who worked to enact the 1993 Education Reform Act for putting the state in a position to be able to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity and to know the realities of student performance and gaps in performance. Dr. Howard noted that while too many black and Latino students are not achieving proficiency and performance gaps are large, white students also are not performing at the levels they should be. Dr. Howard proposed three questions that relate to the data: (1) What is the role of the state versus individual schools and districts to close gaps? (2) What is the target? (3) What levers does the state have to bring about the necessary change? Commissioner Chester said the state has a proactive role and needs to provide technical assistance and share best practices. The commissioner also referenced the discussion the previous evening at the Board’s special meeting about the levers for change at the district level.

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow asked what we realistically think will happen in 2014. Ms. Chernow said that MCAS is just one measure of what goes on in schools. Commissioner Chester said the federal statute needs to be reauthorized, and there is a strong awareness that the 2014 proficiency target is unrealistic.

Board member AJ Fajnzylber expressed concern about the performance gaps for students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. The commissioner said we need to be deliberate about our attention to these populations and find ways to disseminate successful practices.

Board member Chertavian asked what accounts for the declining English language arts results in the early grades and why more middle schools are missing the AYP targets. Commissioner Chester said the concern over early reading is not unique to Massachusetts. The commissioner said schools have done a good job on the building blocks of reading (decoding, phonics), but not as good a job teaching comprehension. He said students must also be exposed to a wide variety of texts. The commissioner said that schools at the elementary level most often miss their targets for ELA, while schools at the middle level are more likely to miss because of mathematics.

Board member Ruth Kaplan said she hoped the Department could convene groups of experts around the issues of students with disabilities and limited English proficient students.

Board member Sandra Stotsky said it would be helpful if the data included breakdowns by gender and showed performance by Asian students. The commissioner said the Department would produce additional charts.

**Educational Proficiency Plans**

Commissioner Chester engaged the Board in a discussion about the Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) to clarify the policies set forth in the regulation adopted in 2006. Commissioner Chester said the EPP was established to ensure that students who score below the *Proficiency* standard on the grade 10 MCAS tests receive the additional rigorous coursework and academic help they need in grades 11 and 12 that will prepare them for college and a career. The Department has been working with principals, guidance counselors, and teachers to assist them in implementing the EPP. Deputy Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus said the school-to-college database indicates that many students who have graduated from high school but have not reached proficiency in English language arts and math need remedial work in college. The Department has heard from principals that the EPP is helpful in sending a message to students who score *Needs Improvement* that their high school work is not yet complete.

Vice Chair Chernow asked whether “successfully complete” means that a student has passed the course. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said that students will need to earn credit in those courses. Commissioner Chester noted that districts set their own curriculum requirements for graduation.

Dr. Howard asked whether it was more accurate to say that 60 percent of 10th graders had already passed the Proficiency requirement, and another 20 percent are required to do the EPP. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus concurred and said that 40 percent of students need to complete the EPP (which includes students who scored in the *Needs Improvement* and *Failing* categories).

Board member Kaplan expressed concern that students might not know until the end of senior year if they have satisfied the EPP requirement. Commissioner Chester responded that this is true for every student who has to pass senior year courses in order to graduate from high school.

Commissioner Chester said the EPP puts the focus on *Proficient* as a goal and not simply *Needs Improvement*. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said that every student who does not get to *Proficient* will have an EPP. Secretary Reville said the EPP is a strong policy that provides incentives to move students toward proficiency by encouraging them to take courses in grades 11 and 12 that will develop their knowledge and skills. Board member Fortmann noted that the EPP is a state-local partnership: the state sets the testing requirement, and the EPP delegates to schools and districts the decisions about coursework and credit.

Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said one indicator of the EPP’s success would be if we see a reduction in the number of students who have to take remedial English and math courses in college. Commissioner Chester made an observation that Massachusetts is very hands-off in terms of required high school curriculum compared to other states. He noted that most states set minimum course requirements.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Proposal for FY 2010**

Chair Banta asked General Counsel Rhoda Schneider to review the statutory changes to the budget process as a result of Governor Patrick’s reorganization plan. Under the new process, the Board’s budget recommendation funnels into the process through the secretary of education. The chair thanked Board members Gerald Chertavian, Jeff Howard, and Tom Fortmann for their work on the Board’s budget committee. The chair said the Board will develop two budgets, a maintenance budget and an expansion budget.

Commissioner Chester said that among the recent budget cuts of close to $1 billion, the Department’s budget was cut by approximately $30 million. The commissioner said the Governor’s cuts attempted to minimize the impact to school districts. Secretary Reville said that the starting point for the maintenance budget should be right now after the 9C cuts, and the expansion budget should address how additional revenues should be spent if they were to become available. Commissioner Chester presented a budget spreadsheet divided into four sections: (1) Grants to School Districts and Other Entities; (2) Direct Educational Services in Institutional Settings; (3) Department Programs; and (4) Local Aid and Chapter 70. After further review and refinement of the budget proposal, the Board will vote on it at the November meeting.

Dr. Fortmann said he thought the priorities were good ones, and that consolidating line items gave more flexibility and made sense. Mr. Chertavian said the process went well and the budget reflects the deliberations of the budget committee. Dr. Howard noted that because the Efficacy Institute, of which he is president, has an earmark in the budget for training of approximately $300,000, he will recuse himself from any discussion or vote on earmarks.

Dr. Stotsky asked about the teacher recruitment initiatives that used to exist. Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson said the 12-to-62 initiative was funded from a trust fund and that funding was ended during the last downturn. Dr. Stotsky suggested that the Board consider a placeholder for teacher recruitment initiatives. Ms. Kaplan said the line item for professional development for English language acquisition seems low and asked about professional development for special education. Commissioner Chester said each of the professional development line items includes attention to special populations. Vice Chair Chernow noted that the role of libraries in schools has been raised in public comment to the Board over the past several months. Board member Beverly Holmes asked about the MCAS line item and support for closing achievement gaps. Commissioner Chester said the assessment line item is the cost of running the program, and the expansion budget would look at going beyond the current MCAS. Dr. Stotsky requested that the Board be notified of the dates of future budget committee meetings so members can share their comments.

**State System of Accountability and Assistance**

Chair Banta thanked Commissioner Chester, Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr, Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy, and Holyoke Superintendent Eduardo Carballo for their efforts in planning the Board’s special meeting the previous evening. The Board will continue its discussion of various aspects of the state system of accountability and assistance at its future meetings.

**Advisory Councils to the Board**

The Board took up the authorization of the membership of the 16 existing advisory councils and also made appointments to the newly established advisory council on school and district accountability and existence. The councils are made up of volunteers who provide advice and comment in specific program areas: Adult Basic Education, Arts Education, Community Service Learning, Educational Personnel, Educational Technology, English Language Learners/Bilingual Education, Gifted and Talented Education, Global Education, Interdisciplinary Health Education and Human Services, Life Skills Management, Mathematics-Science Education, Parent and Community Education and Involvement, Racial Imbalance, School and District Accountability and Assistance, Special Education, Technology-Engineering Education, and Vocational Technical Education. Board member Fajnzylber thanked the commissioner for adding student members to several councils.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws Chapter 15, § 1G, hereby appoint the Advisory Council members as recommended by the Commissioner. Unless otherwise specified, appointed members shall serve for a three-year term, concluding November 1, 2011.**

The vote was unanimous.

On the matter of the new advisory council on school and district accountability and assistance, Dr. Stotsky asked whether it was possible to add heads of parent-teacher organizations in a number of communities. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the composition of the council was set forth in the legislation, which calls for 15 members, seven of whom are representatives of specific groups. Dr. Baehr said that parents were not identified in the legislation as a group, although several of the nominees are in fact parents. Commissioner Chester added that the legislation does not give the Department the discretion to expand the membership, and that the at-large members must have a demonstrated record of achievement in this area. Ms. Kaplan asked about the tenure of members, which Dr. Baehr said was three years. Ms. Kaplan said she supported Dr. Stotsky’s comments about adding PTO representatives to the council.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws Chapter 15, § 1G, as amended by section 2 of Chapter 311 of the Acts of 2008, hereby appoint members to the Advisory Council on School and District Accountability and Assistance as recommended by the Commissioner. Unless otherwise specified, appointed members shall serve for a three-year term, concluding November 1, 2011.**

The vote was 10-1. Dr. Stotsky voted in opposition.

The Department will convene the advisory councils on Monday, November 3, 2008 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester.

**Update on Initiatives to Strengthen Educational Leadership**

The commissioner and Department staff provided an update on statewide initiatives to strengthen school and district leadership, including the state’s ongoing work to clarify the professional standards for administrators. The commissioner reminded Board members about the Wallace Foundation forum in Boston on strengthening school and district leadership, to be held on November 6 and 7, 2008.

Associate Commissioner Robert Bickerton said the Department is preparing draft amendments to the professional standards for administrators, to bring to the Board for discussion early in 2009. School Performance and Evaluation Leadership Director Bobbie D’Alessandro described some of the work the Department has been doing with the Urban Superintendents Network and school principals. She said the Department has sponsored training through the National Institute for School Leadership in 25 districts for 975 principals. Massachusetts was one of six states to receive a grant ($2 million for 6 years) from the Wallace Foundation.

Dr. Stotsky encouraged the Department to refer to the research base for changes that might be proposed to the professional standards. Ms. Holmes said this leadership initiative is exciting, and she is interested to learn more about Springfield’s involvement in the program. Mr. Chertavian suggested that the Department review how organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools are recruiting and preparing principals for urban schools.

**Charter Schools**

The Board voted to approve charter amendment requests to increase maximum enrollment for Four Rivers Charter Public School, Global Learning Charter Public School, and Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School.

Vice Chair Chernow said it appears the Global Learning Charter Public School did not make AYP, but the predecessor Horace Mann school did make AYP. Charter Schools Director Mary Street said this was a transition year from Horace Mann school status to Commonwealth charter school status, and the proposed expansion will allow the high school program to grow.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00, hereby amend the charters granted to the following schools as presented by the Commissioner:**

### Four Rivers Charter Public School (maximum enrollment increase from 192 to 212 students)

**Location: Greenfield**

**Maximum enrollment: 212**

**Grade levels: 7 through 12**

**Effective year: 2009-10**

#### Global Learning Charter Public School (maximum enrollment increase from 450 to 500 students)

**Location: New Bedford**

**Maximum enrollment: 500**

**Grade levels: 5 through 12**

**Effective year: 2009-10**

### Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School (maximum enrollment increase from 154 to 180 students)

**Location: Haydenville**

**Maximum enrollment: 180**

**Grade levels: K through 8**

**Effective year: 2009-10**

The vote was 9-1-1. Mr. Fajnzylber voted in opposition. Vice Chair Chernow abstained.

The Board also voted to approve an extended loan term request by Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 89(j)(6), approve the request of the board of trustees of Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School of Excellence to enter into proposed loan agreements that extend beyond the term of the school’s current charter and are not to exceed thirty years. The Board’s approval is explicitly conditioned upon the inclusion of the language that follows in all of the loan agreements, as executed by the schools and their lenders.**

**The [parties] explicitly acknowledge and agree that the Commonwealth, including but not limited to the Board and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, has no liability for any portion of the loans and provides no representations or guarantees with respect to these loans. Furthermore, the [parties] explicitly acknowledge and agree that the Board’s approval has no impact on any action the Board may choose to take in the future with respect to probation, revocation, or renewal of the school’s charter.**

The vote was unanimous.

The Board considered authorizing the commissioner to act on behalf of the Board henceforth in approving loan terms exceeding the duration of a school’s charter. Under the statute, a charter school may incur temporary debt in anticipation of receipt of funds, but it requires approval from the Board if it wishes to agree to repayment terms that exceed the duration of the school's charter. The Commonwealth has no liability for any portion of these loans.

Ms. Kaplan asked whether there was any statutory obstacle to the Board approving this motion. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the statute requires the Board to approve any terms, but the education reorganization statute permits the Board to delegate routine matters to the commissioner. Ms. Kaplan asked whether the Board ever did not approve a loan extension, to which Associate Commissioner Wulfson said no.

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

**VOTED: that in order to allow decisions to be made and conveyed on a timely basis, and in light of the thorough and documented process that the Commissioner and the Department administer, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education authorize the Commissioner, in accordance with General Laws c. 15, § 1F, paragraph 3, to act on behalf of the Board in approving loans to charter schools with repayment terms that exceed the duration of the charter as required by General Laws chapter 71, section 89(j)(6); provided that the Commissioner shall report to the Board on any loans that have been so approved.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Ballot Question 1**

General Counsel Rhoda Schneider summarized a memorandum to the Board that included advice from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) relative to the extent to which a public official can take a position on a ballot initiative. Public officials may not use public resources to influence the outcome of a ballot initiative.

Board member Ruth Kaplan moved that the Board take a position in opposition to state ballot initiative #1, an initiative to repeal the state income tax. Vice Chair Chernow spoke in favor of the Board taking a position on the ballot question. Secretary Reville said he was strongly in support of the motion, noting that while not the normal course of the Board’s action, the extent of the cuts that would result from the initiative’s passage would be devastating. Dr. Howard expressed his support for the motion, and asked whether the Board’s vote on this motion would be publicized. General Counsel Schneider said that the vote would be publicized as part of the Board’s normal course of business, and that the OCPF sets boundaries on how the Board could publicize this action. General Counsel Schneider said that Department could provide copies of the text of the motion in response to inquiries from the public or the media.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education expresses its grave concern about the potential impact of Question 1 on the 2008 ballot, an initiative to repeal the state’s income tax. The recent report from the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, “The Enormous Consequences of Question 1,”** [**http://www.masstaxpayers.org/files/MTF\_Question1\_Analysis.pdf**](http://www.masstaxpayers.org/files/MTF_Question1_Analysis.pdf)**, states that passage of the ballot question would result in a loss of $12.5 billion in state income tax revenue. This loss would cause drastic reductions in support for students in our schools. As the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation states on page 9 of its report:**

**The large cuts in education and non-education aid would have a devastating impact on cities and towns that are already facing serious fiscal problems. The result would be major cuts in services in almost all communities and ever higher property taxes that would fall more heavily on low and moderate income taxpayers.**

**Consistent with its mission to strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system for the benefit of the students we serve, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education states its opposition to Question 1.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Report on Grants Approved by the Commissioner; Continuing Authorization to Commissioner to Approve Grants**

Commissioner Chester presented the Board with a memorandum that summarized actions related to grants taken between the September and October meetings. As requested by the Board, he recommended that the Board delegate to the commissioner indefinitely the authority to approve state and federal grants on its behalf, to allow decisions to be made on a timely basis so that programs can begin more quickly. He noted that the Board's approval of grants comes at the end of a thorough and documented review process. Delegating the final approval to the commissioner also helps the Board to clear its agenda of routine votes in order to focus on matters of educational policy, and is consistent with state law.

Dr. Fortmann said he was in favor of delegating authority to the commissioner, and asked about the magnitude of individual grants. Commissioner Chester said the largest grant last year was for $541,000, the next largest was for $408,000, and the third largest was for $343,000. The commissioner said the largest grants are awarded to regional entities and most grants are much smaller. Board member Dana Mohler-Faria said giving the commissioner this authority would keep the Board focused on larger policy issues. Secretary Reville asked that the commissioner keep the Board informed on the balances in these accounts.

The commissioner said he would report to the Board on all grants that he approves.

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

**VOTED: that in order to allow decisions to be made and conveyed to grant applicants on a timely basis, and in light of the thorough and documented grant review process that the Commissioner and the Department administer, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education authorize the Commissioner, in accordance with General Laws c. 15, § 1F, paragraph 3, to act on behalf of the Board in approving state and federal competitive grants; provided that the Commissioner shall report to the Board on any grants that have been so approved.**

The vote was unanimous.

As part of the update on the Mathematical Preparation of Elementary Teachers, Dr. Fortmann described a recent forum he attended related to the National Mathematics Panel report that was released last spring. Dr. Fortmann noted that Massachusetts is a leader in terms of new requirements for elementary and special education teachers understanding mathematics.

Secretary Reville acknowledged the publication of the Board’s Annual Report, and said that if anything was understated in the report, it was the Board’s selection of a new commissioner. The secretary said the results of that search and what Commissioner Chester has already accomplished far exceeds the expectations of the Board, and the selection was a very important step for the Commonwealth.

**Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled for November 18, 2008 in Somerville at a site to be determined.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m., subject to the call of the chairman.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell D. Chester

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board

Minutes of the Special Meeting

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

**October 20, 2008**

**5:20 p.m. – 9:25 p.m.**

**Delaney House**

**3 Country Club Drive**

**Holyoke, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

**Harneen Chernow**, Vice Chair, Jamaica Plain

**Gerald Chertavian**, Cambridge

**Andrew “AJ” Fajnzylber**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Brookline

**Thomas E. Fortmann**, Lexington

**Beverly Holmes**, Springfield

**Jeff Howard**, Reading

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Dana Mohler-Faria**, Bridgewater

**Paul Reville**, Secretary of Education, Worcester

**Sandra L. Stotsky**, Brookline

**Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 5:20 p.m.

Commissioner Chester thanked Holyoke Superintendent Eduardo Carballo for hosting the Board. The commissioner said the special meeting was an opportunity for the Department to present its latest thinking about how to move forward with the design of a stronger and more effective system of accountability and assistance under the Massachusetts Education Reform Act and the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The commissioner recognized Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr and Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy. The commissioner said the focus of the special meeting would be on a conceptual framework for the state’s accountability and assistance system, with a brief review of the experience in Holyoke. He said the key question is how the state could engage most productively with districts to improve school performance.

Dr. Baehr reviewed the contents of the briefing packets prepared for Board members, while Ms. Foisy introduced the speakers from Holyoke, America’s Choice, and the Meristem Group.

***Holyoke Public Schools***

Superintendent Carballo made a presentation on the Holyoke turnaround initiative. The superintendent has served in that position since January 2002. In November 2003, Holyoke became the first district in the state to be declared underperforming by the Board. The district has had a close working relationship with the Department since that time, and has partnered with America’s Choice since 2005. Superintendent Carballo described the progress the district has made and the challenges it faces.

The superintendent noted that about 30% of the students in Holyoke enter school with little or no English. He said he will be leaving the superintendent position in 2010. Among the key challenges facing the district are funding, contract negotiations, attracting and retaining highly qualified staff, student transiency, and special education. He said he supports the idea of a statewide teacher contract for the commissioner’s districts. Superintendent Carballo said there also should be clear exit criteria for underperforming districts.

Board member Sandra Stotsky asked how much has been spent on the partnership since it began. Dr. Stotsky also asked about teacher turnover and the use of coaches by Holyoke. Commissioner Chester and Superintendent Carballo said the district could follow up on these questions. The superintendent said there is a coach for ELA and math in each of the 11 schools, Reading First schools have a Reading First coach, and there are 2 coaches for English language learners, for a total of 27 coaches. Board member Tom Fortmann noted that the materials provided to the Board indicated that the cost of the multi-year partnership was $4.5 million.

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow asked about Peck Middle School’s designation as a chronically underperforming school in an underperforming district. The superintendent said it has been a confusing arrangement, and priorities should be made clear.

Commissioner Chester thanked Superintendent Carballo for his service to the community, the children of Holyoke, and the state. The commissioner also recognized the new superintendent of schools in Springfield, Alan Ingram, who was in the audience.

***America’s Choice***

Associate Commissioner Foisy described the nationwide search for a turnaround partner for Holyoke and the selection of America’s Choice. Ms. Foisy introduced Peter Haney and Jaime Aquino from America’s Choice, who discussed lessons learned from the partnership, including: (1) the effective use of data, (2) the creation of a turnaround collaborative, (3) the need to build district capacity, (4) the acknowledgement of district assets as well as needs, (5) recognition that the parties should have focused earlier on the needs of English language learners , and (6) the need to incorporate the voices of parents and teachers.

Board member Jeff Howard said he was impressed with the framework from America’s Choice and the leadership from the superintendent. Dr. Howard said he appreciated the use of data, but was concerned about the flat MCAS results in Holyoke between 2002 and 2008. He said that given the state’s investment, we need to progress in 2009 and 2010.

***Meristem Group***

Associate Commissioner Foisy said the Meristem Group has spent the last year in Holyoke looking at data and talking with various stakeholders. Ms. Foisy introduced Noe Medina and Samantha Tan, who described the evaluation of Holyoke’s partnership. Among the lessons learned were: (1) the focus has to be at the district level, as well as on individual schools, (2) everyone has to understand and share explicit goals and objectives, with a common framework and benchmarks, (3) there is a need for a turnaround collaborative linking local and state organizations in a well coordinated effort, (4) it is important to assess the assets and needs of the district and to get the right level of detail, (5) there is a need to ensure the continuity of effective programs, and (6) the voices of staff and teachers should be incorporated into the process.

Secretary Reville asked about goals. Mr. Medina said students who were there for the entire period might benefit from broad intervention, while transient students need targeted assistance.

Commissioner Chester said a lesson for him was the need to start with a diagnosis of the problems and issues. He said America’s Choice knew about school intervention but needed to address district issues as well.

***Vision for ESE Framework for District Accountability and Assistance***

Following the Holyoke presentation, Dr. Baehr and Ms. Foisy engaged the Board in a discussion of the key principles that guide the Department’s thinking about accountability and targeted assistance/intervention. The Department’s focus is on building the capacity of districts to support and guide improvement efforts in individual schools. Dr. Baehr and Ms. Foisy then presented a proposed Framework for District Accountability and Targeted Assistance. The new framework aims to coordinate and integrate various agency review processes, reducing the burden on districts while enhancing the effectiveness of the Department’s work with districts to improve outcomes for students.

Following the presentation, Commissioner Chester, Dr. Baehr and Ms. Foisy engaged Board members in a conversation about the new framework. The commissioner said this represents the Department’s current thinking, and he will bring to the Board more detailed criteria and other indicators at a later date. He said he expects the Board’s new advisory council on school and district accountability and assistance will provide helpful input as well. The commissioner said at the apex of the framework, where a large number of students are not hitting their targets and the Department sees no evidence that the district is able to get traction, co-governance would involve a strong hand for the state, but local districts should also maintain some stake and decision-making. The commissioner said that Readiness schools could be one way to help schools that are not making progress. The state would determine the leadership, staffing assignments, and use of time, and this could also be a leg up on the notion of a statewide teachers’ contract. Dr. Fortmann suggested the Turnaround Challenge report might provide some good models. Vice Chair Chernow asked how charter schools would fit in the accountability framework. The commissioner said he would present further information at the next meeting.

Chair Banta thanked the commissioner and staff and members of the Board for the presentation and thoughtful discussion.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 9:25 p.m., subject to the call of the chairman.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell D. Chester

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board