Minutes of the Regular Meeting

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

**October 19, 2010**

**8:40 a.m. – 12:40 p.m.**

**Urban Science Academy**

**West Roxbury Education Complex**

**1205 VFW Parkway**

**West Roxbury, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

**Vanessa Calderón-Rosado**, Milton

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

**Gerald Chertavian**, Cambridge

**Michael D'Ortenzio Jr.**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley

**Beverly Holmes**, Springfield

**Jeff Howard**, Reading

**James McDermott**, Eastham

**Dana Mohler-Faria**, Bridgewater

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

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

Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The chair introduced Supt. Carol Johnson, who welcomed the Board to the Urban Science Academy and introduced former headmaster Rasheed Meadows and current headmaster Nicole Gittens. They presented a brief overview of the school. Commissioner Mitchell Chester commented that the Urban Science Academy is one of 187 Commendation Schools – one of eight in the Boston Public Schools – recognized for its success in closing proficiency gaps.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Banta noted the handout listing major competitive grants for education that Massachusetts has been awarded recently in addition to Race to the Top, including grants for School Improvement, Teacher Incentives, Dropout Prevention, and Longitudinal Data Systems. The chair said she participated with the commissioner and the secretary in the recent STEM summit. She said the Board will hold a luncheon for former members Tom Fortmann and Sandra Stotsky on October 25th and the Board retreat is scheduled for November 12th. The chair said she anticipates the Board will partner with the Boards of Early Education & Care and Higher Education on some projects in the coming months.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Chester said he is proud that Massachusetts has been awarded $364 million in competitive federal grants for K-12 education, in addition to the funding for the PARCC consortium, grants to individual districts such as the Promise Neighborhoods grants, plus EdJobs and other entitlement grants. He reported on recent visits to the Readiness Center at Bridgewater State University with Dana Mohler-Faria and Anna Bradfield, the new Boston Renaissance Charter School facility in Hyde Park, and the Peabody Alternative High School at North Shore Mall. He distributed the October 19th report on the progress to date of the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School in meeting the conditions that the Board imposed on October 1st.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Reville congratulated the Urban Science Academy on its commendation status and congratulated the Commissioner and Department on the significant federal grants that have been awarded to Massachusetts. He said he is gratified to see Boston Renaissance Charter School and Prospect Hill Charter School opening in new facilities and going strong. Secretary Reville reported that Governor Patrick signed a supplemental budget with record levels of Chapter 70 funding. He commended Dana Mohler-Faria for launching the Readiness Center at Bridgewater State University and said he looks forward to more collaboration among the three education boards.

**Public Comment**

* Norm Shacochis of the Massachusetts Council for Social Studies addressed the Board on funding for history/social science MCAS testing.
* Ed Moscovitch of the Bay State Reading Institute addressed the Board on funding for the Bay State Reading Institute.

# 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 20, 2010 special meeting, the September 21, 2010 regular meeting, and the October 1, 2010 special meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

**“Common Core Plus”: Proposed Massachusetts Additions to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics**

Commissioner Chester said the Board voted in July to adopt the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (ELA) and the *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics* and directed the commissioner to reconvene the ELA and Mathematics Curriculum Framework Review Panels as well as early childhood educators and financial literacy specialists to recommend augmentations for Massachusetts within the 15 percent allowance. The commissioner presented the recommendations for augmenting the Common Core Standards and recommended that the Board solicit public comment on the documents. He asked Deputy Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus and other staff members to review the proposed additions.

Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department worked on the pre-K standards with EEC and other early childhood experts, and the Board of Early Education and Care voted last week to send them out for comment. Susan Wheltle described proposed additions to the English language arts standards at pre-K and K-12. Barbara Libby and Sharyn Sweeney reviewed proposed additions to the mathematics standards.

Chair Banta and Commissioner Chester thanked the team for their work and their involvement of educators. Commissioner Chester noted the outstanding content experts on our staff. He said the Board made the right decision in adopting the Common Core Standards and customizing them for Massachusetts. The commissioner added that the real issue is whether every student is experiencing a full program of study according to these high standards.

Board member Jim McDermott said he is pleased with the pre-K standards, and that the course standards for high school mathematics made sense to mathematics teachers he consulted. He said the guiding principles are excellent and he hopes the frameworks will lead to a rich curriculum for all students. He said he is particularly pleased with the Committee’s decision to retain the term “frameworks” because it suggests that the standards are guides to creating rich and rigorous curricula, and allow for teachers to create an innovative and imaginative learning environment for each child. He also strongly urged the committee to explicitly explain the meaning of the term in the introduction of the final document.

Board member Michael D’Ortenzio Jr. said he supports the model pathways and the proposed changes generally. He suggested that more real-world context for mathematics would be helpful.

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow asked if this is a static document or will it change in the future. The commissioner replied that curriculum should not be static; the frameworks are on a five-year revision cycle. He added that standards alone do not bring a curriculum to life; teachers need instructional supports as well.

Secretary Reville praised the Department staff for their nationally recognized work, and asked about the writing standards. Ms. Wheltle responded that the proposed additions open up opportunities for various kinds of writing. She said the Department will be interested to get public comment on the proposed addition of teaching cursive writing, which is traditionally part of the framework. She said the panel suggested adding a glossary so that teachers can operate with the same definitions of terms. In response to a question from the secretary, Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Advanced level on MCAS means deep knowledge of the grade-level standards, not necessarily college- and career- readiness, unlike Advanced Placement exams.

Board member Beverly Holmes asked about the proposed addition of financial literacy standards to the mathematics standards. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the financial literacy standards would highlight skills that are needed. Board member Dana Mohler-Faria applauded the financial literacy inclusion. Sharyn Sweeney of the Department commended the State Student Advisory Council for its work on this.

Board member Gerald Chertavian noted that young people are not career-ready if they lack financial literacy and are carrying substantial debt. He asked if career readiness is addressed adequately in the standards. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the standards address English language arts and mathematics concepts and skills, including writing, but do not lay out everything students need to be ready for college and careers.

Dr. McDermott asked about the schedule for revising the other curriculum frameworks. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department is currently reviewing the science and technology/engineering framework and will set a schedule for reviewing and updating the other frameworks.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Chapter 69, Section 1E of the General Laws, authorize the Commissioner to solicit public comment on the proposed Massachusetts additions to the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subject*s and the *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.***

The vote was unanimous.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY 12 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board’s Budget Committee**

Commissioner Chester presented the initial report from the Board’s budget committee: Chair Banta, Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, Michael D’Ortenzio Jr., and Ruth Kaplan. The committee met on October 7th and will meet again before the Board votes on the budget at its November 16th meeting. The commissioner said we are in a period of extraordinary fiscal downturn and he is concerned about the ability of the Commonwealth to fund schools at the current level. He reviewed the recommended priorities in the budget memo.

Secretary Reville said he does not vote on the Board’s budget proposal because the recommendations come to him and he has to make recommendations to the governor. He asked the commissioner to comment on the merits of a consolidated literacy line item rather than an earmark. The commissioner responded that when the Legislature appropriates funds directly to a provider, the provider has no incentive to work with the state education agency. He said he does not question the efficacy of programs such as the Bay State Reading Institute, but said that schools most in need of similar services are not being served by it. He commented that Reading Recovery is a high-cost intervention with small groups of students that does not necessarily improve reading instruction on a wider scale. Commissioner Chester said that with a consolidated literacy line item, the Department could give priority to Bay State Reading Institute and Reading Recovery but only if they are built into a district plan and not necessarily at the same funding level as before.

Vice Chair Chernow asked about evaluations of these reading programs and suggested hearing from people involved with Reading Recovery. Commissioner Chester said his concern is not the efficacy of the programs with individual students, but rather if they are focused on the schools most in need, and if they provide a broad enough fix for weak reading instruction.

Board member Jeff Howard commended the references in the budget memo to closing proficiency gaps but said that, other than the English language learners reference, he found it hard to identify other items that specifically address closing the gaps. Commissioner Chester responded that the accountability and assistance initiative is core to closing proficiency gaps. Dr. Howard said he would like to have more explicit discussion and specific recommendations about closing proficiency gaps.

**Update on Educator Evaluation Task Force**

Commissioner Chester presented an overview of the work of the 41-member Task Force on Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators that he appointed per the Board’s vote in May 2010 to help overhaul the state's current regulations and guidelines governing the evaluation of the state's 80,000 licensed teachers and administrators. He said the task force and its associated working groups are meeting regularly to discuss and prepare recommendations for revised regulations and principles of evaluation by January 31, 2011.

Associate Commissioner David Haselkorn, who is managing the work of the task force, introduced three members: Seth Moeller of Fidelity Investments, Tom Scott of the Mass. Association of School Superintendents, and Paul Toner of the Mass. Teachers Association. Associate Commissioner Haselkorn went through a PowerPoint presentation on the approach the task force is taking to strengthening professional practice for all educators. Mr. Moeller said the task force is making meaningful progress. Mr. Scott said the current system of evaluation is broken, and the task force has embarked on very important work. Mr. Toner said the task force faces many challenges but he is encouraged that Massachusetts is focused on continuous improvement and ensuring adequate supports and resources to implement a new evaluation system. Chair Banta thanked the task force members for their commitment to this work.

Vice Chair Chernow asked about the connection between the state role and local collective bargaining. Commissioner Chester responded that the task force is working within the current statute, and the regulations that emerge from this process will be the touchstone for local performance standards. Secretary Reville commended the Department for organizing the task force and focusing on teacher development, with evaluation as one important tool. He said defining the role of the state and local collective bargaining will be crucial, and the state must exercise quality control.

Secretary Reville asked the task force members about peer evaluation. Mr. Toner said he supports it, although the MTA has not taken a formal position. He said he would want the details to be defined in local collective bargaining agreements, particularly around hire-fire decisions. Mr. Scott suggested that peer supervision might be a better model than peer evaluation, which connotes decision-making. Associate Commissioner Haselkorn said the AFT-Massachusetts has also expressed openness to peer review.

Dr. Mohler-Faria commended the task force and said he supports peer review and a focus on teacher development. He asked whether the evaluation process would provide feedback to the teacher preparation institutions. Associate Commissioner Haselkorn said that issue has not yet been addressed. Mr. Scott said a three-year induction program for new teachers is critical. Dr. Mohler-Faria agreed and said higher education should play a more active role with school districts. Dr. McDermott asked about the instructional rounds model. Mr. Toner said he had some experience with it in Cambridge and Mr. Scott said the MASS had a presentation on it.

Mr. Chertavian suggested using as a starting premise that teachers want feedback and want to improve. He commented that the terms “development process” or “learning process” might be preferable to “improvement plan.” He encouraged the task force to strive for simplicity and to get the essentials right. Secretary Reville agreed and said the task force should ensure the recommendations can be implemented. Dr. Howard added that the approach seems sophisticated and balanced rather than punitive, and good communication will be very important.

Commissioner Chester thanked Associate Commissioner Haselkorn and the task force, and said this has the potential to be very high leverage work. The commissioner added that he expects to present the proposed evaluation regulations to the Board in February 2011 for initial discussion and review, with final action in June 2011 after a period of public comment.

**Appointments and Reappointments to Advisory Councils to the Board**

The commissioner noted a few changes and updates to the list of proposed appointments that the Board received in September.

**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, 2013.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled for Tuesday, November 16, 2010. The Board also will hold a special meeting, its annual planning retreat, on Friday, November 12, 2010.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:40 p.m., subject to the call of the chair.**

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 18, 2010**

**5:05 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.**

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**75 Pleasant Street**

**Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

**Vanessa Calderón-Rosado**, Milton

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

**Gerald Chertavian**, Cambridge

**Michael D'Ortenzio Jr.**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Wellesley

**Beverly Holmes**, Springfield

**Jeff Howard**, Reading

**James McDermott**, Eastham

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

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

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**Dana Mohler-Faria**, Bridgewater

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

**Charter Schools: Policy Issues under 2010 Amendments to Charter School Statute**

Chair Banta said the purpose of this special meeting was to discuss policy issues raised by the new charter school law enacted in January 2010. These include “proven provider” criteria as well as possible approaches for awarding new charters within the charter cap lift. She thanked the Commissioner for his thorough memo.

Commissioner Chester said the new law made substantial changes, including lifting the cap in high-need districts and requiring charter schools to have retention/recruitment plans. The commissioner noted that the Board is the sole authorizer for charter schools in Massachusetts; other states vary in how they authorize charters. He said the potential of 25 applications for new charters this year places added demands on the Department’s excellent charter school office, and he is recommending seeking dedicated funding for the office in the FY2012 budget. The commissioner reported that Mary Street has retired as director of the office and the Department is recruiting a new director.

Board member Vanessa Calderón-Rosado arrived at 5:15 p.m.

Commissioner Chester highlighted key policy issues presented in the memo: proven provider status, how many potential seats to award this year, network size/school size, and recruitment plans in relation to non-discrimination requirements. He said he expects the Board will revisit these topics at future meetings too. The commissioner asked Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson to present the issues for discussion.

*Proven providers:* Associate Commissioner Wulfson said about 30 districts (the bottom 10 percent) are affected by the smart-cap lift; the largest is Boston. The Department has deferred decisions on proven provider status until the final application stage. Questions about proven provider status include similarity of programs and similarity of student body. The Department is not entertaining charter applications this year from any applicants who lack experience in running schools; the issue is how high to set the bar.

Secretary Reville asked what guidance the Department had provided to applicants about proven provider status. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said it was fairly general; they were asked to describe prior programs and student groups they had served. The secretary said the intent of proven provider status is to focus on the neediest school districts and look for providers who have served a similar population and have a track record of success. Secretary Reville noted the paradox: these are underserved populations so there may not be a lot of experience with successful educational models that close proficiency gaps. He said if enough elements match up, the populations and programs do not have to be identical. The secretary encouraged a flexible approach, noting that charter schools are intended to foster innovation to address persistent problems. Associate Commissioner Wulfson commented there is also some inherent tension between proven provider status and the requirement to recruit underserved populations, including student groups that a provider may not have served in large numbers previously.

Board member Gerald Chertavian agreed with the secretary’s notion of providing more flexibility in making these judgments. He said quality implementation is hard to do and it is fundamentally about people; if a team of quality educators has a strong track record and a sound plan, those factors should outweigh questions about the similarity of programs. Board member Jeff Howard noted two competing interests: seeking the best proven providers vs. allowing a variety of approaches and assessing what works. Secretary Reville said while innovation is important, the express purpose of the proven provider requirement is to not take chances with students who have been underserved.

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow suggested reviewing the data on proven providers including attrition rates, MCAS success, attendance, and dropouts. The secretary agreed and added that the review should take into account that attrition rates and suspension rates at some charter schools with high expectations for student performance may exceed those at some district schools. He said the requirement for recruitment and retention plans responds to the concern that some charter schools may be creaming motivated students or pushing out those who are not.

*Award of potential seats.*  Associate Commissioner Wulfson described the phased-in smart-cap lift in districts that are in the bottom 10 percent of performance. He noted that if a district moves out of the bottom 10 percent, the cap lift ends. He said most applications this year will come from Boston, requesting more seats in total than can be filled. Applicants are requesting the award of provisional seats for future years. In the regulations that the Board adopted in the spring, it authorized the commissioner to allow a charter school to defer its opening beyond 19 months from the award date. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the question is whether the Board is inclined to allocate all seats this year if we have enough high quality proposals.

Chair Banta asked if the charter school office has a view on this. Associate Commissioner Wulfson responded that he expects the overall quality of applications this year will be high, and we could raise it even higher. He said the question is whether to make a deliberate effort to hold back seats for future expansion.

Mr. Chertavian said if we have very high quality applications then he is inclined to award the charters; decisions should be made on the quality of applications. He said proven providers have to look to multi-year plans. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the question is whether to go beyond the 12 percent cap now, i.e., add in the provisional seats. He added that we are asking applicants what they would do if they could not get the additional seats in future years.

Secretary Reville noted that committing all seats this year would preclude other good applications in the future. He associated himself with Mr. Chertavian’s remarks, suggesting that high quality should be the guide, while we monitor future progress. The secretary added that while acknowledging the charter school office is overloaded, we should not constrain the number of charters based on the capacity of the charter school office.

Dr. Howard asked if the idea of charter school networks could encourage a monopoly. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the statute gives preference to any applicant proposing a network of schools in more than one municipality, and the Department seeks to strike the right balance. Secretary Reville said a monopoly seems unlikely, given the variety of applications. He noted that public schools also aggregate into organizations called school districts, and networks are functionally equivalent to districts. He said quality should be the primary consideration. Associate Commissioner Wulfson noted that one network could operate schools serving 5,000-10,000 students. Secretary Reville said if a charter school in a network fails, that school’s charter would be revoked, not the whole network. In response to a question from Dr. Howard, Associate Commissioner Wulfson said for-profit entities cannot apply for a charter.

Mr. Chertavian cautioned against using the word monopoly when only 3 percent of the student population is enrolled in charter schools. He said even a strong network of charter schools is a small organization compared to the whole system. Dr. Howard and Board member Michael D’Ortenzio Jr. said they still have some concerns about networks. Associate Commissioner Wulfson clarified that a separate charter would be issued for each school, even within a network.

Vice Chair Chernow said with the cap lift, charter schools could educate close to 20 percent of the students in some districts. She noted how difficult it has been for the Board to close a charter school or reduce the enrollment at a charter school. Board member Jim McDermott said he shares the concerns about charter networks. Dr. Calderón-Rosado said if the network has a positive impact on the schools and students, then it is doing the work we would want it to do.

Commissioner Chester said the statute allows for networks of charter schools and he does not envision a scenario of huge networks. He said the network could provide effective mutual support and structure to several schools. The commissioner noted that several networks have demonstrated their effectiveness already. He said the key issue is governance; every charter school that the Board has closed or put on probation had problems with governance.

Board member Beverly Holmes said the bottom line is closing the achievement gap, and we should look for proven providers or networks that have been successful at this over time. She said performance should also be the key to awarding provisional seats.

*Recruitment and retention.* Associate Commissioner Wulfson said the new statute requires plans for recruitment and retention; charter schools can be judged only on their efforts because they are not permitted to set quotas for enrollment. He asked if the Board has any suggestions or direction on this.

Secretary Reville said the intent is that charter schools should reflect the demographics of their neighborhoods and should have aggressive recruiting plans to build a strong pool and attract populations that have not historically been served in charters. Dr. Calderón-Rosado asked if the Board could recommend a target percentage. Deputy General Counsel Kristin McIntosh responded that the statute’s non-discrimination clause would prohibit an advantage or outreach to only one group.

Chair Banta thanked the commissioner, Associate Commissioner Wulfson, and Board members for a very thoughtful discussion. She reminded members of the eight public hearings on proposed charter schools that are scheduled for late November and early December. She asked members to contact the commissioner’s office to sign up to attend and chair the hearings.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 7:00, subject to the call of the chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell D. Chester

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board