Minutes of the Regular Meeting

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

**November 16, 2010**

**8:35 a.m. – 12:55 p.m.**

**Brockton High School**

**470 Forest Avenue**

**Brockton, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

**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

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**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:

**Maura Banta**, Chair, Melrose

Vice Chair Harneen Chernow, who was presiding, called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

**Comments from the Chair**

Vice Chair Chernow said she was presiding for Chair Maura Banta, who was unable to attend the meeting. Vice Chair Chernow thanked Brockton Public Schools Superintendent Matthew Malone and Brockton High School Principal Susan Szachowicz for hosting the Board at Brockton High School and for leading members on an impressive tour of the school. Vice Chair Chernow recognized Superintendent Malone.

**Presentation by Brockton School Officials**

Superintendent Malone thanked the Board for selecting Brockton High School as the site of its November regular meeting. The superintendent provided an overview of the Brockton Public School system. Superintendent Malone said there is a tremendous professional culture in Brockton, and the system has strong values and is mission driven. The superintendent said the district focuses on results.

Board member Jeff Howard arrived at 8:45 a.m. Board member Beverly Holmes and Nick Martinelli, designee for Secretary Reville, arrived at 8:50 a.m.

Principal Szachowicz presented an overview of Brockton High School and talked about the school’s focus on literacy across the curriculum. The principal showed a recent video clip on Brockton High from the CBS Evening News. Commissioner Chester said this was his fourth visit to Brockton High, and that leadership is a huge part of the school’s success. The commissioner said the culture is remarkable at Brockton High, and praised Principal Szachowicz for her commitment to continuous improvement.

**Comments from the Chair**

Vice Chair Chernow said she recently participated in Boston’s Principal for a Day program, which she described as an excellent opportunity. The vice chair also attended a Boston Foundation event on teacher quality and improvement, calling it an interesting discussion. Vice Chair Chernow thanked Board members for signing up to attend one or more of the eight public hearings for proposed charter schools between November 22nd and December 8th.

Vice Chair Chernow thanked Board member Beverly Holmes for her service on a National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) study group on the use of time and technology in the 21st century. Ms. Holmes said she participated in the NASBE study group on the structure of schools, which came about after NASBE members visited the High School of the Future in west Philadelphia. She said the school, which has a relationship with Microsoft, has a focus on technology and the whole child perspective. Ms. Holmes said the study group looked at models for learning and instruction and the policy supports and barriers to creating true 21st century learning communities.

The NASBE report, [*No Time to Wait: Creating Contemporary School Structures for Students Today and Tomorrow (Executive Summary)*](http://nasbe.org/index.php/downloads/study-groups/structure-of-schools-study-group-2010/527-key-findings-from-structure-report/download), is available online.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Chester provided an update on Race to the Top, noting that since the award of the grant the state has had 90 days to submit a game plan to the federal government. The commissioner said the Department is on track with 260 of the 275 districts, and expects that 15 districts will drop out.

The commissioner said that recipients of the Adams Scholarship were recently announced, and more than 18,000 had earned the scholarship this year, an increase of more than 500 students since last year. Commissioner Chester said the state recently was awarded a High School Graduation Initiative grant in the amount of $15 million over the next 5 years. The commissioner also provided on update on the probationary conditions placed on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School.

**Public Comment**

* Bob Kostka, president-elect of the Massachusetts Council for Social Studies, addressed the Board on the postponement of the MCAS History and Social Science test.
* Ann O’Halloran, a retired teacher, read a statement to the Board on the postponement of the MCAS History and Social Science study on behalf of Bill Schechter, who was unable to attend the meeting.
* Marilyn Segal, Citizens for Public Schools, addressed the Board on the postponement of the MCAS History and Social Science test.

Secretary Reville arrived at 9:30 a.m.

* Nancy Costa, Coordinator of Library/Media Programs for the Brockton Public Schools, addressed the Board on school libraries.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Reville said it was a thrill and honor to be back at Brockton High School, and noted that Governor Patrick is particularly fond of this high school. Secretary Reville said the Administration has a mandate to keep pushing forward with education reform, and highlighted three upcoming initiatives: (1) interagency collaboration with an immediate focus on early literacy and college readiness; (2) meeting with the three communities that received Promise Neighborhood planning grants (Boston, Lawrence, Worcester); and (3) putting together the FY12 budget in what will be a very challenging budget year.

# 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 October 18, 2010 special meeting and the October 19, 2010 regular meeting.**

The vote was 8-0. Ms. Kaplan abstained. Ms. Holmes did not vote.

**Follow-Up to Board Planning Retreat**

Vice Chair Chernow said the Board had a deep discussion at its November 12, 2010 retreat that included a review of Board accomplishments from the past year and an examination of key issues moving forward. The vice chair said the Board expanded its key policy areas from four to five to include: Educator Effectiveness; Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Accountability and Assistance; Wraparound Supports, Parent and Community Engagement; and School Culture. Vice Chair Chernow also said the Board agreed to add language around closing proficiency gaps to its existing mission statement.

Secretary Reville said the intent of adding language to the Board’s mission statement was to make prominent that every child is entitled to an excellent education and that closing gaps is embedded in our work. Board member Jeff Howard said for him the change in the mission statement is important because it makes it explicit and is a way of focusing our attention and policymaking strategy on proficiency gaps. Ms. Kaplan asked whether the Board would also vote on its policy areas. Vice Chair Chernow said no, that the Department will come back with a report on priorities within each of the focus areas. The vice chair said at that time the Board will have a discussion and see if there is a need for more action.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education affirm its mission statement as adopted in 2008 and amend it by adding at the end, “and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps,” so that the mission statement reads as follows:**

**The mission of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is to strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Proposal for FY 2012**

Vice Chair Chernow said the Budget Committee met twice, and she thanked members Michael D’Ortenzio Jr., Ruth Kaplan, Vanessa Calderón-Rosado, and Chair Banta for serving on the committee. Commissioner Chester said next year’s budget will be a challenging one, and some predict a shortfall of $2 billion to fund the budget at current levels. The commissioner said his budget recommendation is focused on bringing forward a small number of key areas, which include: (1) securing funding for local school districts by supporting foundation level funding and restoring circuit breaker to pre-ARRA levels; (2) reinstating the MCAS History / Social Science test requirement; (3) increasing funding for English language learner programs; (4) advocating for the Consolidated Literacy line; (5) ensuring that the Department has the capacity to close proficiency gaps and manage programs; (6) increasing funding for school and district accountability and assistance; and (7) increasing the Department’s main administrative account.

The commissioner said the Board voted in 2006 to add History/Social Science to the Competency Determination requirement for high school graduation, starting with the class of 2012. The Board voted in 2009 to postpone that requirement due to the state’s fiscal challenge. The commissioner said to restart the program by administering MCAS tests in 2012 would cost about $2.5 million. The commissioner said it would be essential to tie that to funding for the academic intervention line.

Commissioner Chester said two additional considerations are to increase funding for Special Education in Institutional Settings (SEIS) and for Teacher Certification.

Mr. D’Ortenzio Jr. noted that the Board took a similar approach last year, rather than make line-by-line budget recommendations, adding that the Board’s goal should be to increase or leverage the ability of the Department to improve student achievement. Dr. Calderón-Rosado said the intent is to look at how best to leverage the limited funds available to ensure the Board is able to achieve its mission.

Dr. Howard asked who pays licensure fees. Commissioner Chester said candidates pay their own fee for licensing and the funds go into the state’s General Fund. The commissioner said the state budget includes a line item that funds educator certification functions, but the fees generated far outstrip the allocation. Dr. Howard asked what role a positive vote of the Board would have on making these priorities happen. Commissioner Chester said a positive vote lets the Secretary know the Board’s priorities, informs the Governor and Legislature of the Board’s priorities, and will generate conversations with legislators and the Administration. Secretary Reville said that the Board’s budget gives the Administration a clear sense of the Board’s priorities.

Ms. Kaplan said that due to an illness in her family, she was unable to attend the Budget Committee meetings. Ms. Kaplan said she was surprised and shocked to see the proposal to reinstate the MCAS History / Social Science test, particularly in light of the fiscal situation. She said given the testimony today, and a desire to reevaluate methods to assess certain areas, this is not the right road to take. Ms. Kaplan said she is concerned that a focus on American history will push out global history and minimize the focus on local history and field trips.

Mr. Chertavian said he appreciated Ms. Kaplan’s candor, and asked how the history test is juxtaposed with new forms of assessment that the state is working on. He said this is the place where there should be work on a newer, better assessment. Commissioner Chester said the challenge with history is that this is an area where the state hoped to be innovative, but there is no money to do that. The commissioner said the Department needs substantial lead time before it can add a component to the Competency Determination requirement, and if the Board restarted the history assessment now, the earliest any class would be held to the requirement would be the class of 2015 or 2016. Commissioner Chester said the 26-state PARCC consortium is working on innovative approaches to assessment.

Deputy Commissioner Jeff Nellhaus said the $2.5 million includes money for both high school assessments and assessments at grades 5 and 7. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the state wants to train teachers at the local level to get more involved in the scoring of tests. Secretary Reville said a delay in the history assessment was the result of financial crises, but also allowed the chance for doing some innovative things. The secretary asked to what extent the state had moved forward. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Department would implement what it has already developed in history. Secretary Reville asked whether it was true that during this break there had been no further development of this history instrument. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said that was correct, adding that there was no money to do so.

Vice Chair Chernow said she was concerned about going down this road, and worried that schools only take seriously subjects that are part of the assessment. Ms. Holmes asked how the test is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said the Common Core Standards are in English language arts, math, and literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. He said the history tests in Massachusetts are based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework in History/Social Science. Commissioner Chester said it would be helpful to share at a future meeting the development work that has been done. The commissioner said the current assessment contract includes the development of some innovative components, but the Department is unable to support it at the moment due to the budget.

Dr. Howard said hearing today about Brockton High School’s success is very reassuring about the role of standardized testing. Dr. Howard said the literacy drive at Brockton High was shared by good educators who put together a process to figure out what good literacy teaching is. Dr. Howard said these MCAS tests are tests of proficiency, though they are sometimes derided as bubble tests. He asked about the analytical capability of open-ended response items. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said that 30 to 50 percent of questions on MCAS require the application of factual knowledge. Deputy Commissioner Nellhaus said there is a reliance on primary source documents in the history test, and students must read and derive meaning from them.

Dr. Calderón-Rosado said we have to come to terms with the reality that standardized testing is a way to establish a baseline so students can get the instruction and knowledge they need to be successful. Dr. Mohler-Faria said he agreed with Dr. Howard’s comment about the need for standardized testing as a way to assess proficiency. Dr. Mohler-Faria said that even many students who do well on MCAS do not have writing and analytical skills at a college level. Dr. Mohler-Faria said this goes beyond simply proficiency, and we need to look at what we are measuring and what other skills go with proficiency that equal knowledge. Dr. Mohler-Faria said many students are not college ready from that perspective.

Dr. McDermott said that the best assessment is married to instruction, and teaching has improved since the beginning of MCAS. Dr. McDermott said there needs to be a new type of assessment tied to Common Core, adding that he doesn’t want a child to be taught history, but rather for a child to become a young historian. Dr. McDermott said it is important to figure out how the new Common Core connects to the history framework, and teachers could improve instruction by looking at student work.

Ms. Kaplan said she would like to offer an amendment to the motion to remove the recommendation to reactivate the MCAS History and Social Science testing requirement. Ms. Kaplan said this is a big decision, and in the past, there has been notice given to the public. She said the pressures will be greater in urban schools. Mr. D’Ortenzio Jr. said that the Board motion in 2009 delayed the history/social science testing requirement for two years, and then directed the Board to take the matter up again. He noted that this vote was only to include implementation in the budget recommendation and not whether or not to implement the exam. He stated that the Legislature allocating money to the exam would allow us to appropriately take that vote later. Mr. D’Ortenzio Jr. said the tests need to be used as a catalyst to galvanize the type of work seen at Brockton High School and to improve student achievement.

Mr. Chertavian said the justification for the delay two years ago was fiscal, and now we are in a worse budgetary situation. Mr. Chertavian said he is pro-assessment as long as it’s the proper assessment, and there is an opportunity here to choose the right path. Vice Chair Chernow said she favored Ms. Kaplan’s amendment to the motion and said she didn’t think the Board has come to a consensus about the History /Social Science MCAS test.

Secretary Reville said he abstains from the Board’s votes on the budget because the recommended budget comes to him. On the issue of the MCAS test and Competency Determination, he said he is sympathetic to eventually making the history requirement consequential. The secretary also said he was sympathetic to having innovation in history testing, but the Department has no budget for this. The secretary said there should be a separate discussion on the History MCAS test. Commissioner Chester said he is not certain that any items among his budget recommendations would come to pass. The commissioner said assuming his recommendation is successful, and there is money in the FY12 budget, he would come back to the Board with recommendations. The commissioner said in any event the Board will need to revise the Competency Determination regulations that have the history requirement for the CD beginning with the class of 2014. Commissioner Chester said the Department is committed to doing further development and revising this assessment going forward.

**On a motion to amend the original motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

MOVED: to add the following language at the end of the original motion:

“with the exception of the commissioner’s recommendation to reactivate the MCAS History and Social Science testing requirement. Deferral of the History and Social Science testing will be the subject of Board deliberations in the winter of 2011.”

The motion was defeated 4-5-1. Board members Kaplan, Chertavian, Chernow and McDermott voted in the affirmative. Secretary Reville abstained.

Ms. Holmes asked whether the responsibilities of the Charter School Office include any matters beyond charter schools. Associate Commissioner Wulfson said that currently the Charter School Office only handles charter school matters, but the commissioner intends to combine the Charter School Office with the School Redesign unit that includes Expanded Learning Time and Innovation Schools. Commissioner Chester said there are no specific sources of funding for staffing for the Charter School Office, Innovation or ELT schools, and that the Department cobbles together funding from appropriate sources.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. Gen. Laws chapter 69, § 1A, approve the budget priorities for the FY 2012 education budget as recommended by the Board’s budget committee and the Commissioner, and authorize the Commissioner to transmit these recommendations to the Secretary of Education.**

The vote was 6-3-1. Board members Calderón-Rosado, Mohler-Faria, McDermott,

Holmes, Howard, and D’Ortenzio Jr. voted in the affirmative. Secretary Reville abstained.

Board member Mohler-Faria had to leave the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

**Charter Schools: Proposed Amendments for Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School and Foxborough Regional Charter School**

Commissioner Chester said the Department received seven amendment requests to increase maximum enrollment or grades served. He said the Department is still reviewing these requests as some involve networks of schools, and are relevant to proven provider status under the new charter school law. The commissioner said the two renewals today involve Cape Cod Lighthouse’s request to relocate its facility, and Foxboro Regional’s request to add a town to its district. The commissioner said no comments were received on either amendment request.

Associate Commissioner Wulfson said that Cape Cod Lighthouse is one of the state’s oldest charter schools at 15 years and has been looking for a new facility for some time. The proposed new location would be in Harwich, a slightly more central location that would add no additional transportation cost burden for Harwich. Mr. Wulfson said that in the case of Foxboro Regional, the amendment request would correct an apparent administrative error when the school began. He said the school had always intended to serve the town of Easton in its region, but it was somehow left off the charter.

Ms. Kaplan said there was talk at the recent retreat about streamlining the work of the Board in relation to charter schools. She said the Board might want to consider delegating approval of charter school items that represent major changes but generate no comment by school committees or superintendents.

**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:**

**Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School (location of school facilities)**

 **Location: East Harwich**

**Effective: In or about January 2012,**

**when renovation is complete and the school’s board has determined the school is ready to move.**

**Foxborough Regional Charter School (districts specified in region)**

 **Districts in region: Attleboro, Avon, Brockton,**

**Canton, Easton, Foxborough, Mansfield, Medway, Millis, Norfolk, North Attleboro, Norton, Norwood, Plainville, Raynham, Sharon, Stoughton, Walpole, West Bridgewater, and Wrentham**

**Effective: Upon approval by the Board**

The vote was unanimous.

Dr. Calderón-Rosado said she had some questions about the commissioner’s progress report on the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School. She said while the commissioner appears to be satisfied with the school’s progress so far, there seems to be significant back and forth on things the school is still struggling with, such as leadership of its board. Commissioner Chester said this is the second update he has provided. He said the Board’s probation vote has been taken seriously by the school. Commissioner Chester said in some cases the school is making good progress and in other cases it is not yet clear. The commissioner said the school is trying to be responsive, and he will provide the Board with a full update and report at the December meeting.

**Report on District and School Assistance Centers**

In 2009, the Department opened six regionally-based District and School Assistance Centers (DSACs) to help identified districts and their schools strategically access and use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for all students. Vice Chair Chernow said the DSACs are a key part of the Department’s new accountability and assessment system. Commissioner Chester introduced Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr, Lynda Foisy, and Lise Zeig. The commissioner said the Department is now more comprehensive and deliberate in its support of schools and districts, with a focus on Level 3 and 4 schools and districts. Commissioner Chester said the Department is systematically connecting the work of assistance with the work of accountability.

Deputy Commissioner Baehr and Associate Commissioner Foisy presented a PowerPoint presentation on the DSACs. Ms. Foisy distinguished between the Urban District Assistance unit, which focuses on the 10 Commissioner’s Districts, and the DSACs, which include 49 Level 3 districts and three Level 4 districts (Randolph, Gill-Montague, and Southbridge). Ms. Foisy said the DSACs are virtual and borrow space from the Readiness Centers. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said this initiative is changing the way the Department operates by fostering cross-unit collaboration. Deputy Commissioner Baehr added that Race to the Top has provided some additional resources for the DSACs.

Secretary Reville said this is important work and it is great to see it come to light. The secretary said he appreciated the Department’s collaboration in relating the DSACs to the Readiness Centers. He said he would like to see wraparound services and supports to students reflected in this work. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said as we move forward with Race to the Top resources, we will focus in some projects on student support services. This will include: (1) guidance and counseling services and the adoption of a Massachusetts model on preventive use of counseling, where guidance counselors become much more connected to the community; (2) opportunities in the school readiness area to link Early Education and Care and community-based organizations to schools, which requires close coordination; and (3) professional development courses around instructional practices. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said DSACs can play a role in regional networking.

Vice Chair Chernow asked about staffing for the centers. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said there was some contracting with third parties to recruit and vet candidates, and in other cases the Department recruited the staff members. Ms. Kaplan asked if any Race to the Top money could be used to add a position to the Department to act as a guidance or support person. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the Department will add two positions to lead the wraparound zone effort in the Commissioner’s districts statewide. Ms. Kaplan asked if Readiness Centers were virtual. Secretary Reville said there is a unique relationship in each area, but that the centers have space in most locations.

Commissioner Chester said the Department tried not to create a lot of capital infrastructure, noting that part of the DSACs’ genesis is the coordinating of a number of obligations we have as a state. Secretary Reville said the DSACs try to co-locate where possible. The secretary said the Readiness Centers have no budget and no funds for staff, but where they do have staff it has been loaned from state universities. Dr. Howard asked what the rationale was for the Readiness Centers. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said there is a coordinated effort to bring together early education, K-12, higher education, and social service agencies that serve a region and can provide strong professional development and networking across those entities. Deputy Commissioner Baehr said the DSACs give us the first way to have strong two-way communication between the field and the Department.

**Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled for Tuesday, December 21, 2010 at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Malden.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:55 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**

**Bridgewater State College, Maxwell Library, Heritage Room**

**November 12, 2010**

**9:40 a.m. – 3:40 p.m.**

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

**Ruth Kaplan**, Brookline

**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

Chair Maura Banta called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. She thanked Dana Mohler-Faria for hosting this special meeting/planning retreat of the Board at Bridgewater State College, and thanked the Board members who served with her on the retreat planning committee: Harneen Chernow, Gerald Chertavian, and Beverly Holmes.

Chair Banta reviewed the agenda for the retreat, starting with the objectives:

1. Members reflect on the Board’s major accomplishments and challenges in FY10
2. Members are aware of some critical issues the Board will address in FY11
3. Members have a common understanding of effective Board membership and process and develop a strong working relationship
4. Members have a sense of how to measure the success of our efforts as a Board
5. Members feel motivated, energized, and prepared for the work ahead

Chair Banta noted that the Board has a budget committee and a committee on the commissioner’s performance evaluation, and she anticipates appointing a committee on cross-sector (Early Education & Care/Elementary & Secondary/Higher Education) projects and another on charter school work.

1. **The Board’s major accomplishments and challenges in FY10**

Chair Banta led a review and discussion of the Board’s accomplishments in FY10. She highlighted the Board’s thoughtful work on the comprehensive School and District Accountability and Assistance System and on review and adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Commissioner Mitchell Chester said the Legislature handed the Board a substantial assignment in January 2010 in the Achievement Gap legislation, encompassing a new approach to school and district accountability and assistance and school turnarounds, the charter cap lift, and innovation/virtual schools. He commended the Board for its deliberate and thoughtful process in setting policy in each of these areas. Secretary Paul Reville added that the innovation schools, Readiness Centers, and cross-sector work all have great potential.

Chair Banta went through the list of major federal education grant awards to Massachusetts, including the Race to the Top grant, and said they would not have happened without the Board’s leadership. She quoted from U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s letter that said the state had shown courage and commitment to produce the highest rated RTTT application in the nation.

Board member Jeff Howard arrived at 10:20 a.m.

1. **Some critical issues the Board will address in FY11**

Vice Chair Chernow led a review and discussion of topics that the Board anticipates addressing in FY11, in relation to the list of priorities. Board members went over the list of priorities established in 2008 (educator effectiveness, curriculum and instruction, accountability and assistance, and supports for students and families). There was consensus that the list should be called areas of focus rather than priorities. Board member Ruth Kaplan suggested that the Board have a special meeting on parent, family, and community engagement. Secretary Reville recommended expanding the focus area to include wraparound services and the need to address issues that impede students from attending to learning. Vice Chair Chernow suggested that school culture is another important area of focus, particularly with increasing attention to preventing and addressing bullying.

Secretary Reville said he expects the three education boards and departments will be collaborating on cross-agency initiatives concerning early literacy and college and career readiness.

Board member Gerald Chertavian suggested that the Board consider ways to streamline its charter school business, to allocate more time to policy issues that affect every student in the Commonwealth. Chair Banta said she expects to appoint a committee to consider this question.

Board members suggested other topics that could be discussed at future meetings, including innovation schools, Readiness Centers, vocational-technical education, early college high school and dual enrollment, and STEM initiatives.

Dr. Howard asked how the Board could make clear that closing proficiency gaps is a high priority for the Board. Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria responded that the mission is the key; the priorities each year should flow from the mission. Board member Jim McDermott noted that the mission statement does refer to “every student.” Members discussed how to reflect in the mission the Board’s intent to close proficiency gaps. Secretary Reville suggested, and Board members agreed, to revise the mission statement by adding nine words at the end, so that it reads as follows:

The mission of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is to strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.

Mr. Chertavian said that he believes the mission should lead to the areas of focus, the Commissioner should set priorities and goals within each area, and that the Board should provide feedback to him. Mr. Chertavian advocated for high standards for school performance, noting that we are not measuring the proficiency gap for the large numbers of students who drop out in some urban districts. Commissioner Chester commented that our work is effective only if it improves practice in districts, schools, and classrooms and leads to better results for students.

The continuing discussion led to consensus to revise the areas of focus to read as follows:

* + Educator effectiveness
	+ Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
	+ Accountability and assistance
	+ Wrap-around supports and engagement for students and families
	+ School and classroom culture

Dr. Howard suggested that the Board discuss 3-5 priorities for the Board and the Department, and the Board should expect measureable improvement in closing proficiency gaps and turning around underperforming schools. Mr. Chertavian responded that the Commissioner needs to set the initial direction on priorities. Secretary Reville said that the Department has already launched a great deal of work in each area of focus and the Commissioner, not the Board, should articulate the priorities and strategic initiatives under each one. Chair Banta said the Commissioner has to start with the work that is already launched and mandated by law and other commitments such as Race to the Top. Commissioner Chester said one factor to add to the list of expectations for FY11 would be tightening fiscal constraints.

Vice Chair Chernow concluded the session by inviting the Commissioner to report to the Board on the priorities or strategic objectives that he has identified for FY11. The Commissioner agreed. Chair Banta added that she would ask the Board to revisit and reaffirm the revised mission statement at the next meeting.

1. **Effective membership and Board process; strong working relationships**

Board member Dana Mohler-Faria led a discussion of effective membership and Board process. He said the work of the Board is tied to its mission. He listed some keys to being an effective member, including supporting the mission, coming to meetings prepared to discuss items on the agenda and cast an informed vote, and maintaining a statewide perspective on all issues at all times.

Dr. Mohler-Faria asked General Counsel Rhoda Schneider to present on the new Open Meeting Law. Ms. Schneider reviewed the key provisions outlined in the materials and responded to questions. She said she would notify the Board when further guidance is available on records retention and remote participation in meetings.

Dr. Mohler-Faria said the Board needs to make judicious use of time, ensure everyone’s voice is heard, and ensure that critical topics take precedence. He said it would be helpful to clarify the role of the Board vis-à-vis the role of the commissioner. Mr. Chertavian suggested adding to the list mentoring and orienting new members and developing norms and processes for feedback. Members discussed the role of the Board in relation to the role of the Legislature. Secretary Reville said the Board makes education policy within the framework that the Legislature sets. Commissioner Chester added that the Board also influences the Legislature, noting that the Board’s work to redesign the School and District Accountability and Assistance system led to enactment of certain approaches in the Achievement Gap legislation.

Vice Chair Chernow asked if the Board needs more time or needs to use its time at meetings differently. Dr. Mohler-Faria said the board of Bridgewater State University meets five times a year for two-hour meetings, plus two retreats; the university board concentrates on setting the correct areas of focus and holds the president accountable for the rest. Dr. Howard said he believes the Board spends more time on operational and charter school issues than on issues of policy. Ms. Kaplan suggested perhaps cutting the updates from the Board chair, commissioner and secretary. Secretary Reville responded that the updates serve a purpose of public information. Ms. Kaplan suggested that Chair Banta keep the public comment portion of the meetings to the posted limit of 3 minutes per speaker and 30 minutes total. Chair Banta agreed.

Chair Banta noted that the commissioner had included in the packet for the retreat a draft list of charges to each of the Board’s advisory councils for FY11.

1. **Measuring the success of our efforts as a Board**

Board member Beverly Holmes led a discussion on how the Board could measure the success of its efforts, using as an example the upcoming adoption of new educator evaluation principles and regulations. Vice Chair Chernow said she finds it helpful when the commissioner gives the Board contextual information on major policy issues, including a sequence of anticipated action steps. Commissioner Chester outlined the expected process for the Educator Evaluation Task Force, which he said is a good case study because it will raise issues about the state role, the respective roles of the Board and the Department, time pressure, and other factors.

Board members discussed the role of a task force in relation to the Board’s role. Dr. Mohler-Faria said it is the chair’s prerogative to appoint a task force. Dr. Howard said he hopes the chair will appoint a committee to follow up on the Proficiency Gap Task Force report.

Board members suggested additions to the lists of anticipated obstacles and factors that will determine success as individual members and as a Board. They discussed ways in which they as individuals and the Board as a whole might help school officials, teachers, families, community members, and other constituents, understand and implement the Board’s policy decisions. Secretary Reville reminded members that only the chair speaks for the Board, and that individual members do not.

1. **Commitment and preparation for the work ahead**

Board member Gerald Chertavian suggested that the commissioner keep the Board informed about task forces and outreach to the field that he anticipates will be needed in the future. Mr. Chertavian then reminded the Board that while many challenges remain, the one million students in our purview are doing better than students in every other state. He asked members to comment individually on how well they thought the objectives of today’s retreat had been achieved. Board members rated the meeting between 6.5 and 9 on a 10-point scale, and commented that they felt encouraged, energized, engaged, and enlightened.

Mr. Chertavian then asked members to comment individually on what they would want to see in a year. Members said they would like to see progress in closing proficiency gaps, good collaboration and communication with each other and the commissioner and the field, a sense of knowing the priorities, and that Massachusetts will still be # 1 in K-12 education. Commissioner Chester said he appreciates the Board’s interest in feeling connected to the work that he and the Department staff do every day with a great sense of urgency. He noted it is a challenge for a volunteer board that meets monthly to stay connected to the ongoing work. Mr. Chertavian observed there was congruence about the importance of clarifying roles and priorities, and it would be good to be able to say in a year that the Board and commissioner have done that.

Chair Banta concluded the meeting by noting the Board has refined its mission statement and agreed to five areas of focus for its work. She said the Board will look to the commissioner to set priorities for the significant body of work, and she will look to members to participate in the committees that will be established. She thanked Dr. Mohler-Faria for his hospitality and the support that Bridgewater State College provided today, and to all members of the Board for their participation.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 3:40 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