**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

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

**October 22, 2013**

**8:35 am- 12:20 pm**

**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

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

**Daniel Brogan**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Dennis

**Vanessa Calderón-Rosado**, Milton

**Karen Daniels,** Milton

**Matthew Malone,** Secretary of Education

**Pendred Noyce**,Weston

**David Roach**, Sutton

**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 Banta called the meeting to order at 8:35 am.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Banta welcomed members of the Board and the public to the meeting. The chair said she recently attended the Education Nation Summit, where the key topics were curriculum standards and equitable education. Chair Banta noted her recent visit to the Lawrence schools with Commissioner Chester and the co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Education. She said they visited classrooms with Receiver/Superintendent Jeff Riley and saw a number of impressive initiatives that are underway.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Chester said the College Board recently released the 2013 SAT results and Massachusetts students are among the top students in the nation in terms of performance and participation. Commissioner Chester noted the CCSSO grant awarded to the Department to work with the Department of Higher Education and six other states to strengthen educator preparation. The commissioner gave a brief update on educator evaluation; he said 270 districts so far have sent in their initial plans on using district-determined measures as a component of educator evaluation, and over 100 are going beyond the minimum of five key academic areas. He said the Department is continuing to work with districts to align curriculum, assessment, and evaluation in a coherent way to strengthen teaching and learning. Commissioner Chester noted two informational memos in the Board packet: an overview of charter authorizing and the anticipated schedule for the coming year, and a report on scheduling of comprehensive audits and reviews. He distributed two recent columns on the Common Core State Standards.

Chair Banta asked for reports from the Board’s committees. Ms. Calderón-Rosado said the charter school committee met to discuss proposed changes to the charter school regulations, access and equity issues, and the pilot of a charter school data tool. She said the meeting was very informative. Ms. Chernow said the work of the Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness is moving forward through an advisory committee that is working with the Department to build partnerships with workforce boards around the state. She said the advisory committee would like to see restoration of the connecting activities line item in the state budget at $7 million, to support public-private partnerships connecting students and schools with workplace learning.

**Public Comment**

1. Superintendent Pia Durkin of the New Bedford Public Schools addressed the Board on reform efforts in New Bedford.
2. Neil Sullivan of the Boston Private Industry Council addressed the Board on connecting activities.
3. Paul Toner, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, addressed the Board on Common Core implementation.
4. Mary Jo Rossetti and Adam Sweeting of the Somerville School Committee addressed the Board on PARCC.
5. Ann O'Halloran of Citizens for Public Schools addressed the Board on PARCC.
6. Catherine Tighe and Chris Wright, teachers affiliated with Teach Plus, addressed the Board on Common Core and PARCC.
7. Steve Hemman of the MA Association of Regional Schools addressed the Board on the fiscal year 2015 budget and regional schools.
8. Barbara Donnelly, a Boston parent, addressed the Board on the Dever Elementary School Level 5 designation.
9. Donna Lashus, a Boston parent, addressed the Board on the John Holland Elementary School Level 5 designation.
10. Maria Walzer addressed the Board on the Ukranian genocide and the report of the Global Education Advisory Council.

**Approval of 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 23, 2013 special meeting and the September 24, 2013 regular meeting**

The vote was unanimous.

**Plan for Administering MCAS and PARCC Assessments**

Commissioner Chester said this is a continuation of the review and discussion of PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) that the Board began in September, in anticipation of the Board’s vote in November on a proposed transition plan for moving from MCAS to PARCC. The commissioner clarified that the vote is not on whether to adopt PARCC as the Commonwealth’s student assessment program, but rather on the transition plan leading up to that decision. He said the Board would hear about what makes PARCC a rigorous and high quality assessment and how it is aligned to the curriculum frameworks, and hear from three of the educators who are serving as PARCC fellows. Commissioner Chester introduced Senior Associate Commissioner Bob Bickerton, who presented an overview of the process for developing test items and introduced the three PARCC fellows to talk about their engagement with the PARCC initiative and walk the Board through a comparison of sample test questions in mathematics and writing.

Mary Beth Banios, assistant superintendent of Shrewsbury Public Schools and a Massachusetts PARCC educator leader fellow, said in her experience teachers are pleased with the rigor of the new standards for curriculum and assessment. Ms. Banios showed the Board a grade 7 writing prompt, which requires students to develop an argument and support it with textual evidence. She said she met with representatives from Worcester State University, who agree that this type of thinking is what students need to know for success in college.

Darren Burris, mathematics teacher at Boston Collegiate Charter School and a Massachusetts PARCC educator leader fellow, said in his experience teachers would like to have more PARCC sample items. He said mathematics teachers favor the more challenging and interesting assessment questions. Mr. Burris said teachers know MCAS is a quality assessment, and also that it is not necessarily an indicator that students are ready for college. Mr. Burris walked the Board through a PARCC grade 5 mathematics test item. He said a major difference is that the PARCC assessment includes visual aids and tools built directly into the question, and students have to show their work as well as the answer.

Commissioner Chester said a major shift in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks is a more deliberate progression of skills through the grades, such as students’ conceptual understanding of proportional reasoning. Mr. Burris said having fewer standards allows educators to go more in depth to focus on the development of skills.

Christine Shaw, executive director of Northeast Regional Readiness Center at Salem State University and a Massachusetts PARCC educator leader fellow, said Massachusetts is one of a few states that included a higher education fellow in PARCC development. She said engagement teams have been used at campuses statewide to discuss our curriculum frameworks and PARCC. Ms. Shaw said the rigor of test questions and the analysis needed to answer the questions is exactly what colleges expect from their students. Ms. Shaw said the new curriculum standards and assessment should help to open up access for all students.

Mr. Bickerton said PARCC’s commitments to assessment rigor and quality include: ensure that students engage with texts and focus on core math standards at each grade; use authentic texts that are worthy of study; include multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and rigorous real world applications; ensure multiple reviews of every item by educators, content, and assessment experts; and adhere to the standards so expectations remain the same in both instructional and assessment settings. The Board reviewed PARCC items for grade 5 English language arts, grade 6 mathematics, and algebra I. Mr. Bickerton said the item review process includes K-12 educators, higher education, and other interested parties from the PARCC states. He also outlined PARCC supports for teaching and learning, such as diagnostic and speaking and listening assessments.

Commissioner Chester outlined the proposed PARCC timeline for Massachusetts. In response to a question from Mr. Roach, the commissioner said he expects that by the spring of 2015, a number of the states participating in PARCC will cease using their legacy student assessment tests in favor of the PARCC assessment. Under the timeline the commissioner is proposing, the Board would vote in the fall of 2015 on whether to adopt PARCC for Massachusetts.

Chair Banta thanked the presenters and said the Board will devote part or all of its special meeting on November 18 to a continuing discussion of PARCC.

Secretary Malone joined the meeting at 10:25 a.m.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Malone said he was just at a Boston Chamber of Commerce event at which Governor Patrick spoke about the need to invest in education. He said the Commonwealth has had ten consecutive years of growth. Secretary Malone said we have more work to do aound closing achievement gaps, third and fourth grade literacy, and access to high quality early education. Secretary Malone said he has been visiting schools around the state including rural and vocational-technical schools. He said the continued discussion about PARCC is valuable. Secretary Malone thanked the Department for its outreach to the professional associations and the education field generally.

**Update on Science Curriculum Framework**

Commissioner Chester gave the Board an outline of the revision process and anticipated next steps for the Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Curriculum Framework*.* He said the Department convened a review panel in 2009 and it has worked closely with the multi-state Next Generation Science Standards Advisory Group, which was convened in 2011. The commissioner said the Department plans to make the draft standards available to the field and the public for review and consultation during this school year and through the 2014-15 school year.

Jake Foster, of the Department’s curriculum and instruction office, said the standards incorporate real world content, science and engineering practices, and national research. He explained that the STE standards overlap with English language arts and mathematics skills, feature coherent progressions of learning grade by grade, and integrate practices and content. Chair Banta said the Board appreciates that the Department is taking a measured approach to engaging the field with the draft standards over an extended period of time, in recognition of various other initiatives that are being implemented.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY15 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board’s Budget Committee**

Chair Banta said the Board’s budget committee met and reviewed the budget calendar and education line item funding from 2005 to 2014. Commissioner Chester said the Board will vote on the budget proposal at the November meeting, in order to provide timely input to the Secretary and Governor for the FY15 budget. Deputy Commissioner Jeff Wulfson said the amount of funding for discretionary programs is only about 1 percent of the $4 billion state education budget, to cover many initiatives that are priorities for the Board and the Legislature. He said the Department works with the Executive Office of Administration and Finance and the Committees on Ways and Means throughout the process. Mr. Wulfson said over half of the Department’s staff positions are federally funded, which is a real concern in light of sequestration, the expiration of Race to the Top funding in 18 months, and other anticipated federal budget cuts. The budget committee will meet again next month and will present its recommendation to the Board at the November 19 meeting.

**High School Equivalency Credential: Overview and Current Activities**

Commissioner Chester said the Department’s Office of Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) oversees the administration of a high school equivalency assessment through a network of 28 local testing centers, located in adult learning centers, community colleges, and public schools. He said the GED test will no longer be in operation as of January 2014, as it is being replaced by three possible tests. He said the Department is reviewing the three responses to our request for proposals for a high school equivalency test. The commissioner introduced Deputy Commissioner Wulfson and Anne Serino, the Department’s director of ACLS. Mr. Wulfson said there is understandable uncertainty in the field about which test will be chosen and the technology needed to administer the test.

Ms. Noyce asked for data on students who pass the high school equivalency test and their success in higher education. Anne Serino said we will have the data in the near future, based on the national student clearinghouse and the Edwin system; though we know that many GED recipients who enroll in high education end up in developmental courses. She said in 2012 about 11,000 people in the Commonwealth took the equivalency test in English and 800 in Spanish. She said about one-third of the test takers are under age 20. Ms. Calderón-Rosado asked if the new criteria would integrate college and career readiness. Mr. Wulfson said all three proposals align to the new state standards and also address technology, accommodations, and the overall ability to administer a testing program.

Secretary Malone said this is a topic that many struggle with because adult education is very different than the need for a high school diploma, particularly for the 16-19 age group. Secretary Malone suggested that the Department and the Executive Office of Education consider ways to ensure pathways for older teens, including alternative high schools and gateway high schools, so they do not assume the GED is the best or only pathway.

**Update on Level 5 Schools**

Commissioner Chester said he has identified four underperforming (Level 4) schools from the 2010 cohort for consideration for a Level 5 designation: Dever Elementary School and Holland Elementary School in Boston; Morgan Full Service Community School in Holyoke, and John Avery Parker Elementary School in New Bedford. Commissioner Chester said he convened public meetings at each school, which included extensive discussions with union presidents, mayors, superintendents, teachers, and parents. He said he has substantial concerns about the students of these schools, which still show very low academic performance even after three years of turnaround efforts. The Commissioner outlined the process that occurs after schools are identified as Level 5.

Ms. Daniels said she attended one of the meetings in Boston, which was very emotional for the school community. She said the children must be the top concern, and the performance of the schools is disturbing. Ms. Chernow said she attended one of the Boston meetings and heard that while many changes have occurred, the current initiatives seem to be working. She said it was unclear to the school how an outside operator or management company would change the school. Ms. Calderón-Rosado said she understands the anxiety of the community, but the data show that something must be done now. She asked about the resources available to a Level 5 school. Commissioner Chester said he has been listening to what is working in the schools, and the turnaround plan would build upon those assets.

Secretary Malone Senior Associate Commissioner Lynda Foisy and her team for their work with underperforming schools. He said this work is difficult but the commissioner has been listening carefully and asking community members to come forward with comments on what should be done better at the school. Ms. Noyce asked about low-income data for the schools. Commissioner Chester said all types of data have been considered, and low income status is not determinative of a child’s success. He said while there is an overall correlation between poverty and academic results, other schools in the first cohort of Level 4 schools with similar demographics made significant progress. Commissioner Chester said he enters this work with humility and with the conviction that we do not have to settle for poor outcomes for low-income students. He said he feels an obligation to improve the conditions for the students, because their lack of skills will have lasting consequences.

Mr. Roach had to leave the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

**Proposed Delegation of Authority to Commissioner to Approve Management Contracts for Two Horace Mann Charter Schools**

Commissioner Chester gave a brief overview. He said in February 2011, the Board granted a charter to UP Academy Charter School of Boston (UP Boston) and in February 2013, the Board granted a second charter to the board of trustees of UP Boston to establish a second Horace Mann charter school in Boston, UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester (UP Dorchester). For both schools, the board of trustees contracts with Unlocking Potential, an educational management organization, to procure substantially all educational services. The commissioner asked the Board to vote this month to delegate authority to him to approve the management contract for both schools, anticipating that the contracts are days away from approval and otherwise the schools would have to wait an additional month for Board approval. Ms. Chernow asked to receive the contracts and the commissioner said he would send them to Board members. Ms. Daniels stated that she had abstained from the discussion and would abstain from the vote because she used to be on the board of Unlocking Potential.

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

**VOTED: that 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 the management contract between the board of trustees of UP Academy Charter School of Boston and UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester and Unlocking Potential, a non-profit education management organization located in Boston, as required by General Laws chapter 71, section 89(k)(5), and 603 CMR 1.00. Such approval shall also operate to amend the charter granted to UP Academy Charter School of Boston and UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester.**

The vote was 6-0-1. Karen Daniels abstained.

**Update on Spirit of Knowledge Charter School Probation**

Commissioner Chester said the Board voted in May 2013 to place the Spirit of Knowledge Charter School on probation and he continues to have very serious concerns about the school. He said the Department is monitoring the situation closely as the school’s ability to stay solvent is unclear. Associate Commissioner Cliff Chuang said the school projected and budgeted for a higher enrollment then it received, and academic performance was very weak on the latest MCAS test. Mr. Wulfson said governance and financial issues have emerged, and the school has to cut the budget so significantly that program quality would be affected. Ms. Calderón-Rosado asked if any academic progress has been seen. Mr. Chuang said last year a site visit showed significant problems that resulted in the Board placing the school on probation. He said the school’s progress and performance index (PPI) is a four out of one hundred for 2013. The commissioner said he will keep the Board informed about the school.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 12:20 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