**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

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

**Tuesday, March 22, 2016**

**8:35 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

**Paul Sagan**, Chair, Cambridge

**Katherine Craven**, Brookline

**Ed Doherty**, Boston

**Roland Fryer**, Cambridge

**Margaret McKenna**, Boston

**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke

**Pendred Noyce**, Boston

**James Peyser**, Secretary of Education

**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

**Donald Willyard**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Revere

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

**Member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:**

**James Morton**, Vice-Chair, Boston

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

Commissioner Chester announced the appointment of Jessica Huizenga as the receiver of Southbridge Public Schools. Dr. Huizenga, who is currently Cambridge Public Schools' assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment, will assume her duties on May 2. Dr. Huizenga thanked the Commissioner and the Board for their support. She spoke briefly about her background and told the Board that the children are her first priority and she looks forward to making the Southbridge Public Schools a shining light for students and their families.

Commissioner Chester updated the Board on the New Heights Charter School pre-enrollment, which is currently 315 students with 200 on the waitlist. He said the Department has launched the review of the English language arts and mathematics frameworks, and many educators have offered comment through the web survey. He invited Board members to submit nominations for the history/social science framework review panel. The commissioner said the College Board recently released data showing that Massachusetts has increased the number of students taking Advanced Placement courses and earning a three or higher on the exam. He updated the Board on the Department’s work with the Executive Office of Education and other state agencies to monitor the Eagleton School and ensure a smooth transition for the students. He informed the Board that the Massachusetts School Building Authority is exploring the possibility of no-interest loans for schools to upgrade their technology infrastructure.

Commissioner Chester said the Department is continuing its work with districts to implement the new student discipline law; next steps include bringing together schools with a high incidence of suspensions and expulsions. Referring to a recent news report, Commissioner Chester said he is committed to working with the Level 5 schools around student discipline and he is confident in the work of UP Academy Holland’s executive director Scott Given, who has already taken action and is moving in the right direction. In response to Chair Sagan’s questions, Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston said the Department is in the school frequently, has a reporting process in place, and has established meetings to review issues and give feedback to the receivers. He said he will be reviewing all restraint data with the Level 5 schools.

Mr. Moriarty said schools need more help in implementing alternatives to suspension. Commissioner Chester noted the alternatives include preventive measures and staff training on de-escalation techniques. Ms. McKenna asked about the discipline data for the other UP Network schools. She said teachers would benefit from more development on social-emotional learning and classroom management. Secretary Peyser said schools have to attend to the safety of all the students and their ability to learn, while addressing concerns about suspension data. He said the working group that the Department is initiating should produce useful information.

Commissioner Chester presented a brief report on the Department’s organizational review. He said the Board encouraged him to take stock of the Department’s needs and structure with the end of Race to the Top funding and staff reductions due to the early retirement incentive. He said philanthropic organizations supported the cost of the review. He introduced Tammy Battaglino and Chris Librizzi of Parthenon-EY, the organization leading the review. Mr. Librizzi said they worked with staff to gather feedback through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and a survey tool. He said key areas of opportunity include: support for the Commissioner to increase integration and alignment of strategic priorities across the agency; clarify the role of the state related to instructional support to the field and ensure integration of core instruction-related elements of the agency; streamline communications, both internal and external, with differentiation for distinct stakeholder groups; bolster the Department’s student support function; and consider alignment of functions related to the broad range of educational options.

Commissioner Chester thanked Parthenon-EY for their work and said he is in the process of finalizing the organizational chart and making shifts that better align the Department’s priorities. He noted the Department has about 50 fewer positions than in FY2015 and he wrestles with the need to address social-emotional supports and other priorities without additional resources. Chair Sagan also thanked Parthenon-EY and said he appreciates how the Commissioner arranged for the review and embraced the opportunity to re-think the organization.

**Comments from the Public**

1. Laurel Dicky and Kelly McDermott addressed the Board on Reading Recovery.
2. Gerry Mroz addressed the Board on the Every Student Succeeds Act and assessment.

**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 February 22, 2016 Special Meeting, and February 23, 2016 Regular Meeting**

The vote was unanimous.

**Update on Southbridge Public Schools**

Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston said the middle school and high school have been split into separate programs but will continue to share the same building. Ventura Rodriguez, special assistant to the Commissioner, said the community conversation sessions are continuing with parents and others to hear their concerns and needs. He said the local stakeholder group will be presenting their recommendations to the Commissioner soon. Commissioner Chester thanked Paul Dakin, the former superintendent of the Revere Public Schools, who is assisting the Department during Southbridge’s current budget cycle.

**Update on Holyoke Public Schools**

Commissioner Chester said the Department continues to monitor the safety and quality of the therapeutic intervention program at the Peck School. He said the district has established a program for teachers in honor of Ann Cullin, a Holyoke teacher who passed away this year, and would identify 24 teachers who will work with students in an acceleration academy during April vacation. The commissioner said Dean Vocational Technical High School recently received a $393,156 workforce skills grant to transform its existing machine technology shop into an advanced manufacturing shop, and the College Board has recognized Holyoke’s efforts to increase the number of low-income students who participate in AP classes, take the SAT, and apply to college. Mr. Johnston informed the Board about Holyoke’s initiatives to recruit strong teachers, including the Teach Western Mass. Initiative that the Davis Foundation and the Department are supporting. He noted that Holyoke hired a new CFO and a new chief talent officer and that work is continuing on family engagement and secondary school redesign.

Katherine Craven left the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

**Update on the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA)**

Commissioner Chester provided an overview of the history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, initially enacted in 1965 and most recently reauthorized through the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA). Matt Pakos of the Department said ESSA includes nine “Title” programs, most of which provide funding to states and school districts. They include Title I, improving the academic achievement of disadvantaged students; Title II, preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality teachers; and Title III, language instruction for English learners and immigrant students. Mr. Pakos said initial estimates for SY2017-18 (the first year of ESSA implementation) compared to SY2015-16 indicate flat funding across all ESSA programs combined.

Mr. Johnston provided an overview of the key changes from the No Child Left Behind Act to ESSA. He said the Department is planning the transition now through the next school year, for full implementation of the new law during the 2017-2018 school year. He said the Department is developing a stakeholder engagement plan to gather input, opinions, and advice from a broad range of stakeholders this spring and summer.

In response to Ms. Stewart’s question, Mr. Pakos said the federal rulemaking process is targeted to assessments, supplement-not-supplant language, and Title I funds. In response to Secretary Peyser’s question, Mr. Pakos said previously states had to apply for turnaround funds through a grant program and now a greater portion of Title I funds can be used for turnaround. Secretary Peyser noted that the change could mean a reduction in the amount of federal funds available for school turnaround.

Margaret McKenna left the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Mr. Doherty said ESSA no longer requires each state to have a plan to include student performance as an element in teacher evaluations. He requested that the Board discuss educator evaluation and district-determined measures at an upcoming meeting in May or June and invite superintendents, teachers, and researchers to attend. Commissioner Chester said he would welcome the discussion. He noted that while ESSA says the federal government cannot demand teacher evaluation systems, it does require states to identify which students lack access to effective teachers, which suggests the need to look at student learning in order to determine teacher effectiveness.

**Update on FY2017 Budget**

Commissioner Chester said the state spends a total of $16 billion annually on K-12 public education, which works out to about $16,000 per pupil on average. Chief Financial Officer Bill Bell presented an overview of the state education budget. He noted the Commissioner and Secretary testified at the Ways & Means Committee hearing a few weeks ago and debate on the FY2017 budget will start on April 25. Mr. Bell added that the Department relies heavily on federal funding for basic staff support; staffing is now about 60% federal and 40% state-funded.

Chair Sagan commented that $16 billion is an enormous sum and asked what we can do to ensure it is well spent. Commissioner Chester responded that one goal of setting up the Department’s new strategy office is to focus more clearly on return on investment. He added that federal funds make up only about 5% of K-12 spending but can be high-leverage.

Mr. Doherty said public education needs more funding and suggested the Board might want to take a position on the proposed constitutional amendment known as the millionaire’s tax. Ms. Stewart agreed and also suggested the Board revisit the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission and consider endorsing them at a future meeting.

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

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 11:30 a.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