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Board Of Education Special Meeting

Minutes

September 14, 1998

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. The following were in attendance:

Members Of The Board Of Education Present:
Dr. John Silber, Chairman, Brookline
Ms. Patricia Crutchfield, Vice Chairperson, Southwick
Dr. Edwin J. Delattre, Boston
Mr. William K. Irwin, Wilmington
Dr. Stanley Z. Koplik, Boston
Mr. James A. Peyser, Dorchester
Dr. Roberta R. Schaefer, Worcester
Ms. Rebecca Urbach, Chairperson, Student Advisory Council, Falmouth
Dr. David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education, ad interim

Board Members Absent:
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington

Also In Attendance:
Mr. Jeff Nellhaus, Department of Education
Mr. Neal Kingston, Advanced Systems
Gayle Ohman, Certified Shorthand Reporter

The only agenda item for the meeting was a discussion on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

The Board discussed the proposed "threshold scores (or cut scores)" for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). These are the numeric scores that differentiate the four performance levels set by the Board: advanced, proficient, needs improvement and failing. (The "pass level" -- the performance required on the grade 10 MCAS in order for a student to be eligible to graduate from high school, starting with the class of 2003 -- will be determined by the Board at a later date.) Over the past several months over 200 educators, business and community leaders, including Board member James Peyser, worked with the Department and Advanced Systems, the testing contractor, to determine the MCAS cut scores.

State Testing Director Jeff Nellhaus and Neal Kingston of Advanced Systems provided an overview of the scoring and standard-setting process. Nearly 210,000 students took the first MCAS test last spring. Six million open-response questions needed to be scored. 1400 people, including 700 Massachusetts teachers, were involved in the scoring. Board member Roberta Schaefer attended one of the scoring sessions this summer and said, "I was very impressed with the level of hard work and collaboration by the teachers."

The Board discussed the process by which the panels reviewed and assigned student work to one of the four performance levels previously established by the Board. Chairman John Silber expressed the view that when panel members disagreed as to where to draw the line between two

performance categories, the lower category should be chosen (e.g., "failing" rather than "needs improvement,") to put students, teachers and families on notice of deficient performance. Board member Ed Delattre added that he thought the Board did not yet have enough information to make a decision about the cut scores. No action was taken at the special meeting.

No votes were taken at the special meeting except to adjourn.

At 5:50 p.m., on a motion duly made and seconded, it was
VOTED: that the Board of Education adjourn the special meeting, subject to the call of the Chairman.

Respectfully submitted,

David P. Driscoll
Secretary to the Board