COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
*****REGULAR MEETING*****
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

350 MAIN STREET
MALDEN, MASSACHUSETTS

TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2001
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESENT:

Mr. James A. Peyser, Chairman
Dr. Roberta R. Schaefer, Vice-Chairperson
Mr. Charles D. Baker, Swampscott
Mr. Richard Crowley, Andover
Dr. Judith I. Gill, Chancellor,
Board of Higher Education, Boston
Mr. William K. Irwin, Wilmington
Ms. James Madden, Chair,
Student Advisory Council, Randolph
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington

Dr. David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of
Secretary to the Board

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ABSENT:

Mr. Henry M. Thomas, Springfield

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Good morning everyone. I want to preface our meeting today by making reference to a report which is going to be released by the Department. Actually, there are two reports. There is the Report of 2000 Massachusetts and Local School District MCAS Results by Race, Ethnicity and by Gender. This is an annual report that the Department releases which cuts the MCAS data from the prior year by various demographic categories across race, ethnicity and gender. One of the objectives of standards-based reform is to ensure that all students, regardless of what group they happen to fall in, reach at least minimum performance levels. With that in mind, we're tracking MCAS performance and especially failure rates by these various demographic categories.

This year's report shows little change in the failure gap between the various groups of students from last year or the year before. The average failure gap between black and white students in English and math across the three grade levels of four, eight and ten is about thirty-one percentage points. The average failure gap between Hispanic and white students in English and math across the three grade levels is about thirty-seven percentage points. One other interesting finding in the

report is that while girls and boys do essentially the same in terms of failure rates on math, girls outperform boys on English language arts across the grade levels and across the various demographic groups.

One finding in this report that is both hopeful and telling, is that homework matters. Passing rates on math for tenth grade black students who have three to five hours of math homework per week were three times higher than those for black tenth graders who had less than one hour of math homework per week. The same pattern is in evident across all the demographic groups, although not necessarily in as dramatic a fashion. These results confirm what we already know. We need to redouble our efforts to ensure that all students receive the opportunities they need and deserve.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. A couple of things on the reports that we've issued. First of all, as you will note, the reports are based on the 2000 results. We're just a couple of months away from the 2001 results. There is a year lag. That will end with this year. Beginning this year, with the 2001 results, we're going to be able to report this data right away. So that will be a major, a major plus. I'd just like to reinforce what the Chairman has said. A little quirk in the homework by the way--it almost doesn't help if you spend more than five hours on homework--so maybe too much homework suggests that it becomes drill or something.

The data are very important. We spend a lot of time talking to schools and districts about the use of data. We need to pay attention to this as well, particularly at the state level. It does tell us that we have a lot of work still to do. This is something we need to attend to here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As you may know, other states, and they even talked about it at the federal level, measure progress according to your lowest performing ethnic group. That's not something we've done here in Massachusetts, but it does drive home the point of having to address probably the number one issue in public education in America and here in Massachusetts, which is narrowing the achievement gap. It's very important data for us to have, to analyze, and more importantly, to attend to and to address.

I have a couple of comments, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to report on the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee that I appointed, which is a very, very excellent group representing superintendents, principals, teachers, higher education, bilingual students, and vocational students. We have been discussing the issues around appeals and accommodations for MCAS. The Committee will continue to meet this summer. We're hoping to have a set of preliminary recommendations to the Board for the September meeting.

I also want to introduce a couple of new people who have joined us. First of all, in our charter school office, taking on the issue of charter school development, is Julie Lane. Julie, welcome to your first week and your first meeting. And also here for her second day, and I'm thrilled that she came back, is our new Chief Information Officer, who comes to us with tremendous background having worked in a couple of state agencies, Maureen Chew. Maureen, welcome.

Just a couple of other items. This is the time of the year where a lot of organizations run their summer institutes. And in particular, this past week, the superintendents association met and this week the secondary principals associations will meet. These meetings give us a great opportunity to interact with them and so forth. While, as we all know, there are tremendous challenges, I am impressed by the purposefulness of superintendents and principals, and the teachers unions will

have meetings as well. The way people are attending to their work is impressive. Off course, every year it seems that summer is shorter and there's more work. There's hardly a gap now between the work that educators have to do--we see a tremendous amount of professional development occurring, not only driven by districts, but by us and other providers. And it's a tremendous time for renewal. So with that Mr. Chairman, let me turn it back to you for the meeting.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Thank you Commissioner. We are going to start the meeting today with a presentation from Massachusetts Foreign Language Association, and specifically from Yulan Lynn, president of MAFLA.

MS. DIFABBIO: Yulan Lynn has asked me to make the presentation this morning. My name is Elvira DiFabbio. I want to thank you Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Commissioner, and the Board for allowing us to address you today. I'm here with my colleagues, Yulan Lynn, Phyllis Dragonas, Mary Alice Sammy and Catherine Lopez Natale on behalf of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association, MAFLA, and its constituencies, the teachers of the Commonwealth, to express our initiative by the Board regarding foreign language education. I'll be reading an abridged version of the statement that I gave you and that is included in your meeting docier. I do ask that you read the unabridged version at your earliest convenience.

These progressive initiatives began with the support and encouragement of the then Chairman of the Board of Education, Dr. John Silber, who organized a committee to develop a framework for the goals and standards of foreign language education. A sophisticated working committee, came together to prepare an exemplary document that won the approval of the Department of Education. In the past two years, this framework has been used by cities and towns across the state as a guide in aligning curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels of instruction. We have seen a substantial position change in foreign language education coupled with a positive attitude in the schools. After so much time, effort, and intelligence invested in this outstanding project, it is our duty to continue this momentum.

On November 13, 2000, Commissioner Driscoll issued a memorandum to superintendents, principals, and other educational leaders calling for classroom teachers to serve on the assessment development committees in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and history. The core discipline of foreign languages was conspicuously missing from the list. As a result of this neglect, school systems, taking a cue from the actions of the Department of Education, have begun to dismantle the programs that they very recently had put into place.

Therefore, we respectfully urge the Board to rectify this oversight and to form immediately, an assessment development committee for foreign languages. More precisely, we ask that the Board reinstate the committee that had evolved from the frameworks committee three years ago. We ask that you charge this committee to review existing standardized examinations and to recommend either the adoption of customization of extant exams or the development of a new one. Furthermore, the committee should be directed to study the costs, timing and effectiveness of such testing. By reinstating the assessment development committee with these or similar directives, you will reassure us, the teachers and proponents of foreign language education in the

Commonwealth, of your commitment to recommend measures that should be taken to establish the kind of assessment that is appropriate for the furtherance of the quality of instruction and the accountability for measurable success.

Secondly, we ask that this Board urge the Department of Education to renew the position of foreign language content specialist. For the past two years, public schools in the Commonwealth have benefited by the accomplishments of this specialist, particularly, in the professional development of our teachers. The intelligent implementation of the frameworks at all levels of instruction and the demonstration of practical methods for developing effective foreign language assessment tools. Statewide, she has given over one hundred workshops, especially on assessment. She has worked with superintendents, principals and teachers in shaping foreign language education in the middle and high schools and helped to increase the number of foreign language programs at the elementary school level. She has been an effective advocate of foreign languages at a number of important state, regional and national conferences and has worked with various collaboratives nationwide. It is obvious that this position is key to the continued success of foreign language education in this state. Most recently, she has completed a survey of the state of foreign languages in Massachusetts and we look forward to her report to this Board hoping that we might share the results with MAFLAs 3000 plus membership through our newsletter.

Lastly, we recognize that there is a shortage of qualified personnel to execute the successful implementation of the frameworks. This is a crisis nationwide. And the urgency to identify qualified foreign language teachers must be addressed. We ask your cooperation in reviewing the portion of the regulations regarding foreign language certification to see if it truly works well. The Board need only check with the DOE to verify that the number of waivers for certification has increased significantly in just the past couple of years. There are college-trained citizens and legal residents living in the Commonwealth who have the requisite language skills. Why not seek them out and train them for the position?

Furthermore, we urge you to encourage and support those teacher training initiatives that are available in higher education. We ask that you seek out, develop, and maintain more such opportunities, especially within the state university system. Now is the time to examine the importance of quality foreign language instruction in our state universities. Now is the time to revive those foreign language departments that have been or are being dissolved for one reason or another, and to offer our college students, our teacher colleagues and our administrators the gateway to a pool of qualified foreign language educators and administrators that is so urgently needed.

In sum, we ask no more and no less for foreign languages than have been afforded the other core disciplines. Indeed the foreign language framework is the linchpin of all the frameworks, with it's heavy emphasis on connections, comparisons and community, it, in effect, links the other disciplines. Without foreign languages in the curriculum, the other disciplines tend to work independently of each other.

Many studies indicated improved academic performance through foreign language learning. Research commissioned by the DOE, through the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy at Boston College, has found that foreign language is the third predictor behind Algebra I and Geometry for math MCAS success in grade ten. Furthermore, the public

and the job market recognize the consequence of another language, especially in our highly urban state with hundreds of national and multinational firms seeking qualified personnel with a foreign language competency. Foreign language study might be likened to a multi-faceted vault ceiling over general education. Without the fundamental supporting pillars that are offered by an exemplary framework, an intelligent assessment tool, an effective content specialist and an enlightened system for the training and certification of qualified personnel, we cannot expect that ceiling to stand. The importance of foreign language education is self-evident. We hope that you accept your responsibility in the multifaceted construction of foreign language education. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Thank you very much. Thank all of you for coming in this morning. I want to say a couple of things and then ask a question or two. First, I want to assure you that the commitment of this Board and the Department to the expansion and improvement of foreign language education has not diminished. I think the only thing that you're seeing is the reality of a very extensive reform movement that cuts across all subject areas that has forced us to make some choices about how to establish priorities and rule out the assessments and the other components of reform. It's not for any lack of commitment or lack of understanding of the importance of foreign language education for the success of our students. So that has not changed.

I have a couple of questions. One, on the certification issues, have you looked at the alternative certification parts of the regulations to determine whether or not they offer promise for bringing people into the profession who may not have followed the prescribed course taking and the prescribed preparation in their college years?

MS. LYNN: This information is all available to teachers coming into different systems if they are newly recruited. We let them know that there is standard certification and also traditional and also alternative. So I believe that in all districts, this information definitely is available to the teachers.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: But does the process itself, based on what you've seen at least on paper of how the process is supposed to work, would that, if it were implemented fully and were made accessible to a large number of people coming out of college or coming out of mid-career jobs with foreign language proficiency, but lacking some of the basic teacher preparation that might be traditionally found by students who come up through college and perhaps graduate school, but specifically following the path, would the alternative path be sufficient if well done to expand the pool of available teachers?

MS. DIFABBIO: I believe so, and I feel that we in the public schools are taking initiatives along those lines to provide professional development mentoring, working with people individually and showing them and giving them direction according to their needs and we have a few native speakers as a matter of fact. We have seen growth and development over the last two years. They have, for example, provisional certification working toward regular certification and we see that this is do-able. I think that this is an alternative route that we can take provided that we go about it in a methodical way in order to provide this experience for them that would be beneficial to us and to our children.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I think that, in theory at least, one of the main beneficiaries of alternative path certification are specialties like foreign language instruction where there are quite a few people who are competent in the specific area, in this case the mastery of the foreign language itself, but who lack some of the credentials that historically have been required to get into the classroom.

The second question I have goes back to your first point, which is the recreation of the assessment development committee and the evaluation of existing assessment instruments. The only question I'd ask is based on your understanding of what those assessments are in terms of what the standard assessments are already--whether you think it's likely that we're going to find some existing assessments that fit our frameworks and their the requisite quality to be worthy of recommendation for use by districts.

MS. LYNN: I served on the assessment development committee a couple of years ago. At that time, our committee looked very carefully at the variety of assessments available in the market. We said that with those instruments, definitely we can look at which one is more in line with assessment and we can work on that. I think that's why it makes it very important that assessment committees reconvened. Then we can seriously look at the available assessment or we can modify and develop within the committee and that's all do-able. We believe we started that way and we can continue our work.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Thank you. Do any other Board members have questions for the panel? If not, I want to thank you very much and the Commissioner and I and the Board, if necessary, will take under advisement the recommendations that you've made and we'll try to make some decisions about them over the next few months. So thank you very much. I appreciate it.

MS. LYNN: Thank you.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Moving on to the business portion of the agenda, we have the minutes from the last meeting. Anybody have any questions, comments, edits, corrections?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: In the discussion about the school improvement plan for Kuss School in Fall River, on page 21, and I'm just going over this because the minutes will be done from the tape, it starts on the first full paragraph about, it should say "Turning Points," and that should be "Connected Mathematics." So we'll make those corrections.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the June 20, 2001 as amended.**

HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY/SOCIAL SICENCE ASSESSMENT – Discussion and Vote

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: The next item on the agenda is the issue which we discussed at the last meeting and which we're taking up again, this time with a motion that will be on the table for

consideration and approval to change some of the elements around high school history assessment. In particular, what the motion proposes to do is to discontinue the tenth grade world history exam and to replace it over time with an end of course U.S. history exam, which would be administered either in the tenth or the eleventh grade at the option of the local district.

There are more details to the motion which we'll get into, but I wanted to say a couple of things up front. One is that the purpose of this change is to ensure that all students graduating from high school have a solid grounding in American history and civics. It is not to diminish the importance of world history. Indeed, I think it's been the position of this Board all along that history education, including world history, needs to be expanded throughout the K-12 experience. So in no way are we trying to send a signal to schools and districts that world history no longer matters or that they can now end their world history courses and do nothing but U.S. history. That is certainly not the case.

I think it underscores another general point, which is we need to get away from the notion that the only subjects that matter are subjects that we test through MCAS. MCAS is not designed to define the entire spectrum of course offerings in the K-12 system. Rather, they're designed to ensure that all students receive what is necessary, albeit not sufficient, in their K-12 experience. So again, I want to underline the point that we are not recommending or suggesting or otherwise indicating that schools and districts should diminish the importance of world history. We're only saying that all students must come out of high school with a solid grounding in U.S. history and civics in order to be prepared to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens of this country and this Commonwealth. With that, Commissioner, is there anything you'd like to add?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think those are the two most important points. I think we need to remember that we're in the "eye of the storm" right now with this focus on MCAS, and the focus on the graduation requirement as it kicks in. But I think your point is so well taken that we're looking at the necessary but not sufficient conditions for graduation. That's part of the responsibility of education reform -- to see to it that when kids graduate from high school, they have at least basic skills in English and mathematics and so forth. I look forward to the day when we get beyond the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions, recognize that that's a given, and then we look at the whole system which talks about getting kids into advanced and proficient. After all, that's what we're hoping to do. We want to compete with other countries as well as do well here in this country. We also want to have a balance between what it is that the state is assessing and it has to be limited with what's going on at the local level.

The foreign language people made a very good point. Music people make a very good point. If kids do well in music, they'll do well in mathematics and if they do well in foreign language, they'll do well in mathematics and English. This is a comprehensive approach and it's getting kind of divided up by this current atmosphere around the testing program. This should be a partnership going forward. For example, the idea of having the world history assessment be something that we help develop but is administered and perhaps even scored at the local level. We talked about having science experiments statewide, where we provide the assessment tool, but it's done again at the local level. I think that's where we need to move so that we really do develop a comprehensive approach.

I think, unfortunately, that this is being viewed as the negative somehow, when in fact, clearly this Board, as I think the general public and many educators understand, when you're looking at what a student should know and be able to do, the statute requires United States history and the knowledge of basic American history and civics. There seems to be a clear mandate from the public and from educators to see to it that our students not only have basic skills in English and mathematics, but also know something about this great country in which we live. So, I'm just glad, Mr. Chairman, that you added that balance. It's not about being anti-world history or something like that. We still want to make sure that world history is taught. There's plenty of opportunity. This is a way of making an adjustment. The flexibility of allowing the test either in tenth or eleventh grade, is specifically to allow districts that have strong world history programs in grades nine and ten the opportunity to continue with that sequence if they so choose.

I think we do need to get the balance back in here. That this isn't about promoting United States history only, or diminishing world history. Realistically looking at the fact that we want to make sure that this is a basic graduation requirement, with all of the other things that kids should be addressing in high school, including foreign languages, as we heard today, will continue. So, that's what I have to add.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I'd like to make two other more technical points. One, to underscore what Commissioner said, is that the first part of this motion directs the Department, in particular, the folks working on the frameworks and the assessment, to help develop some alternatives that we would consider that would allow more flexibility at the local level in actually administering MCAS-like assessments in world history. The purpose here is not to stop all development of test items and assessment in general around world history, but rather to move in a different, more flexible direction that's more driven by the local requirements than by state requirements. Again, it's not to eliminate our assessment program in world history; it's to change it, to make it more flexible and more localized.

The second thing is, one of the things we need to be careful of, and one of the things the Department is aware of, and the committees are aware of in developing the assessment in U.S. history in tenth and eleventh grade, is to make sure that we aren't simply recreating an eighth grade U.S. history course, and putting it in the tenth or eleventh grade, so that students who have already gone through a U.S. history survey course are essentially asked to repeat that course two or three years later. We need to ensure that the kind of assessment we create and the kind of frameworks we create are designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of the major themes and issues that cut through U.S. history and not simply walk through the sort of chronology of events.

In that context, we're also looking for the Department and the committees to provide us with guidance about the scope of this U.S. history course, or the scope of the assessment in particular. We certainly, I think, are in agreement, and we can revisit that today, but we're certainly were in agreement last time that the Revolutionary and Founding Periods needed to be included, and that we should go up at least through Reconstruction. There was discussion as to whether we should go beyond that. Certainly we're looking for advice from the committees as to whether we ought to go beyond Reconstruction and the design of this framework and the assessment. But the main point here is that in addition to continuing our assessment program around world history, we're also trying to make sure that we're designing a U.S. history

framework and assessment that is asking students to develop deeper knowledge and skills then they may have demonstrated while they were in middle school. Are there any more specific comments that Susan or Sandra might have before we open up to Board members?

MR. IRWIN: I just have a technical question. You have a student that goes to school system A, which has world history in the nine and tenth grade. Then, going into the summer of their junior year, the student transfers to school system B that has a ninth grade world history and a tenth grade U.S. history. What happens to that student in the eleventh grade, because now they haven't had U.S. history and it's not available in the school system that they're transferred into? How does this work? These are some of the pitfalls that we're going to run into, and I think they need to be thought out thoroughly before we go down this road completely.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I think it's a good question. This happens today, of course, when students transfer, because we don't have a lock step curriculum across the state. I'm sure that in some cases, what happens is that a junior might be in a class with sophomores, but I'm not sure if you all have any insights into what actually may be going on.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: I think from a practical point of view, particularly as it gets to be part of the competency determination, that the second school would have to make the adjustment to allow the U.S. history course in grade eleven. First of all, ironically, it's still on the books. All schools have to offer United States history. I think that's the practical effect in that particular case, that the student would take U.S. history, even though it's a tenth grade course, as an eleventh grader. I can't think of a high school that wouldn't be able to accommodate that.

MR. MADDEN: I have a question regarding what you suggested to cover here, because that is generally the eighth grade course, the Revolution through Reconstruction. Most eleventh grade courses, high school courses, with the exception of advanced placement and higher level courses, only cover Reconstruction through the present. So that initiating this would require a huge change in the courses in most high schools. They would have to develop a new high school history course that would cover these years, and then possibly another new course to cover the years that this is leaving out, from Reconstruction onward. I assume, too, that having to do maybe two years of that would require a change in where they are placing the world history courses and development of those. So I was wondering what thoughts you had on that?

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Sandra, Susan, if you could comment on that. The only comment I'd make is that this will require some adjustment in the existing curriculum -- there's no question about it -- in the existing sequence of courses. There are many high school courses that do cover these periods that actually tend to be more in the senior year through AP courses and others. But in addition to that, one of the open questions is what the scope of this course, or this assessment in particular, should be, and to the extent it should go beyond Reconstruction. For instance, I know some have suggested it should go up to at least the First World War, to the beginning of the twentieth century or something like that.

DR. STOTSKY: I'll comment, and then Susan can add some comments too. To begin with, the junior year, which has been the U.S. history year for most school systems, has not been tested. So it's not clear from any data we've been able to gather, exactly what periods have been covered right now in that junior year. Traditionally, everything from soup to nuts used to be covered in

the junior year, the U.S. history year. As, after the 1997 framework, it was suggested that only from Reconstruction on, but there are school systems that still continue to do whatever they were doing. It wasn't tested, so there was no reason for them necessarily to change. So we really don't have any clear data on what periods are being covered in that junior year course and how much of a change it will be.

Many school systems, perhaps most, have gone to the Reconstruction and onward. But there are school systems that, until just a few years ago, were doing everything. So that part of it isn't quite clear as to how much of a change it necessarily makes of their staff. Perhaps you'd like to add something more to that piece.

MS. WHELTLE: I think as we get into this further, the exciting thing will be that school districts will find their own ways of doing this that will be well designed for individual school districts. And as we've been talking on our panel, one of the things that has come up, is the idea that a lot of the history of the modern world is both U.S. and world history together -- that there isn't a complete logic in separating them. I think also what the Chairman said about a thematic approach would be a very good approach for us to take to differentiate the eighth grade and the high school curriculum.

DR. THERNSTROM: You know, of course the complaint by people dedicated to raising student performance -- that there are not enough AP and AP-like courses, and that they're really only for the best students. It seems to me that as you just said, the students who choose to take AP in American history do get a very sophisticated American history course in the high school years. It would be nice if this indeed encourages school districts to offer what is much closer to an AP-like course for all students, opening the door to a more rigorous education. So it seems to me that we're building in an incentive for better education here.

Just one remark on the world history question. I would hope that districts can have their own requirements. I would hope that districts would say, "You're not graduating from high school without having taking some world history." Because as Susan just said, you really can't separate out or compartmentalize American and European history and say one has had nothing to do with the other and you can just learn one and not the other. So that the districts still have the power to set their own graduation standards. I would hope that they would use the work that the Department is going to do on world history. The alternative approach is that the Department is going to develop and build them into part of the high school curriculum.

DR. SCHAEFER: Just to follow up on that, it seems to me that what we were thinking about here was that the MCAS exams in history will now be fifth, eighth, and tenth or eleventh grade, and that they will all be successively more difficult versions of U.S. history, U.S. government, and civics. And that the one at the high school level would incorporate, as does the AP course picking up on what Abby and Jim had said already, is that it would incorporate some primary documents. In addition to being, perhaps, thematic, that we would be using primary documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, The Federalist Papers, that students would actually be reading those, which in a strict chronological course, is probably not necessarily the case. So, in that respect, we would try to model it more after the AP course, although not necessarily in the depth or the difficulties that of an AP course, but something close to it. So I

think that that was the notion, to make sure that by the end of high school, students do have a good understanding of U.S. history and government and civics.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: I don't want to go too far afield, but to me, as you look at the implementation of education reform in Massachusetts, one of the clear, major plots is this issue of state guidance and state control, versus local option or local control. We've seen that played out in a number of ways. When we first started the mathematics assessment, we had districts say to us that the framework was to broad and that we ought to make it more definitive, which is why we put out the bridge document and why our latest math framework is in two year grade levels rather than in four. So, it's kind of interesting, what did Education Reform Review Commission report call it -- a tight-loose approach.

We had the issue of Lawrence, and all of a sudden, we're tripping over each other to have SWAT teams go into districts, when before it was about letting districts do what they have to do. So, in my judgement, there's an interesting backdrop of this whole issue of how do we all get there together? It seems to me that too much prescription on the part of the state is not a good thing. And yet, there has to be some agreed to clear minimums, at least, and some areas of importance. I think the Lawrence agreement, for example, is a perfect place where we engineered, in Massachusetts, kind of a balance between the state and local districts.

Look at science, which I think is very interesting, as we saw a change. Certain districts were teaching physics and chemistry before they were teaching biology, when, in fact, we know historically it was biology, chemistry and physics because of the alphabet, an unfortunate historical fact as to how the sequence of science was first developed. It reminds us of the school year of 180 days and the logic that went into that still remains.

So, I think what I'm looking at in a larger context is what we did in science, which I think made great sense. Of course, people can have physics, chemistry, earth science, and biology in whatever sequence they want. I think the same thing is true in history. I can certainly see courses that will combine United States history. Looking at contemporary United States history along with world history, why wouldn't you? I assume there will still be electives in Asian studies and other courses. But I think it provides the flexibility.

Our issue is that kids, as they graduate from high school, and unfortunately we know this not to be the case across this country, ought to know something about Thomas Jefferson. Ought to know, that the Civil War came before World War I, or whatever the issues might be. We see an unfortunate lack of knowledge of basic American history. And for us, the period of the Founding Fathers up through the Reconstruction is most important. So, I think there are these issues, as you point out, that I think have to be developed at the local level. We've only said that there has to be this one test for the graduation requirement and around that I see districts doing a number of creative things including world history. And to me, as they get to their junior and senior year, I think Abby is quite correct. Why should the advanced placement program be so exclusive? Why can't that be opened up? If that's so good for certain students, then it should be good for all students? That's what we need to approach in mathematics with algebra, etc. So I want to reach for the highest level which I think they can do at the local level. This gives plenty of flexibility to address world history, to address United States history as a minimum requirement up through Reconstruction, and I would hope any high school would then go clearly from Reconstruction up

to the present date in light of the world, not just as a history course. So I think the flexibility is there. It should be at the local level. We should be requiring some things but at a minimum. That's what this does, and I think it's a step in the right direction.

MR. MADDEN: I don't want to harp on this point too much, but I am very concerned about the way that this is proposed only up to Reconstruction. And I see your point as to the possibility, the flexibility, and the creativity with this, but I'm just thinking as far as my own school, and students I've talked to from other schools, that I don't know if it would necessarily play out that way. I'm trying to envision an AP-like course being developed with this test. I can see that. I'm not sure if that would work because the test is in April. What's going to happen in the spring? Hopefully, if there was a course that covered the entire American history from Revolution to the present, they'd be far beyond Reconstruction by the spring. At that point they're going to need to go back and review. It's not going to be avoided. It's going to happen. They're going to be reviewing this and that will take time away from teaching further on into American history.

I'm thinking, from a civics aspect of it, that I almost believe the twentieth century is more important from a civics aspect, if you want to emphasize that. Because the twentieth century is the point where a lot more democracy actually comes into the system. I believe that would be de-emphasized with this test.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Just one quick thing. The basic design is for it to be an end of course assessment, which I believe we would then put on a different calendar than the other assessments, so the scheduling would be that this would be offered literally at the end of the course rather than at the middle or two-thirds of the way through the course, the way the other assessments are offered.

Again, I accept the basic point. The question is, at some level, how much do we think is reasonable to be put into a single course, in particular a course that may last only one year? Whether it is reasonable to cover in any kind of meaningful depth the entire span of American history from its founding until the present day. I can conceive of how you might do that, but I think it would be a sprint. I think the Revolution to Reconstruction period we're talking about would result in essentially recapitulation of the eighth grade course rather than a study in more depth of the key themes and issues that play out during that period.

The other thing is just to reiterate the point that what we're looking for is some advice from the frameworks and assessment committees and others as to exactly what the scope of this ought to be. It may be that there is a way to create an assessment and a curriculum framework or a course design that covers a broader span than just the Revolution to Reconstruction. I think we were only putting that in as a minimum requirement, not essentially the limits to what the course could cover

DR. SCHAEFER: We can't understand the working out of the principles in the twentieth century without understanding the intention in the first place. So, that's the goal really, to try to weave these different themes through, perhaps, and hopefully into the twentieth century.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Again, I'm looking forward to the day when the tail doesn't wag the dog so much. When you talk about, we've got this test coming up, so therefore it doesn't drop

everything and review quickly the Founding Fathers up to Reconstruction to get ready for this test. We hope that day ends, that it's just the natural course of things, it's just a check along the way. Kids are doing well, and the MCAS is not going to be a major problem.

But to follow that logic, just think what we're asking now. If we continue to give a tenth grade test for two years of world history, just think of the cramming that has to go on in the last couple of months over that, enormous. We have the survey of what teachers think is important. I'm glad I'm not in the tenth grade taking that kind of thing. We'll now know that students can pass the mathematics and English, which is key to the basic skills, and then the test, hopefully, will be more geared to what is it that kids should know and be able to do regarding their country's history, from the Founding Fathers up to Reconstruction. So, I think it can be worked out.

There are certainly some practical issues. But even more, we can define exactly what we need and then give the flexibility to the locals. After all, they know what they want their kids to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from the twelfth grade, which I think is more important.

DR. STOTSKY: Just to add to the James' concern, which I think is a very reasonable one, we shouldn't forget that there is the first semester of the senior year available for an elective that easily could address what you're saying is very important and that is modern history.

MR. MADDEN: I agree, and I think that would be the direction it would take with this test. We would see just a one-year course covering Revolution to Reconstruction. Without a three semester, very intensive course like an AP course, I think it's almost impossible to cover well U.S. history in total. But I think the key word you used is "elective," and I don't think necessarily that a large number of students would get the history that they need if it were just to be elective. And I don't know whether a large number of schools or students would be willing to take four years of history to implement that when there are already so many requirements for them filling up their schedules.

MR. BAKER: How many bites of this apple do you think we are going to get over the next four years? You're talking about 2006, a testing cycle, and 2008? It seems to me that at this point in time, what we're really talking about is 30,000 feet and 20,000 feet, 10,000 and 5,000 and are going to come forward.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Yes, I think the short answer is, what we're doing here is essentially providing the basic framework within which the Department is going to go out and come back to us with some specific recommendations about exactly what the framework is going to look like and exactly what the assessment is going to cover. So at a minimum, we will have -- I'm not sure exactly what you're timetable is on getting this work back to the Board -- but at a minimum, we will have an opportunity to review all of this in gory detail when the time comes to vote on final adoption of the frameworks.

In addition to that, obviously the test is going to roll out over time, questions will be piloted, we'll get feedback from the field as to whether the scope of test and the test items that we're using are fitting the kinds of courses that are being developed in the field. Whether there's some mismatch, and so they'll be obviously some feedback and some improvement in the process over that time. By the same token, we don't want to leave this to be an open-ended question for an extended

period of time, because I think what the schools need from us is some clarity about exactly where we're going so that they can actually start to implement rather than wait for the next shoe to drop. So, I think there's some time between now and when we finally adopt the frameworks. There will be some more tweaking that will occur as we actually start piloting test questions and making the test ready to roll out in its formal phase. But I'm hopeful that we're sending a pretty clear signal about the direction we want to head and that within a matter of months we'll have some very specific clarity about exactly what it is that we hope to test and when.

DR. THERNSTROM: James, I do know that students very much like electives, but I for one would love to see districts -- and it would be up to districts of course -- to say all students will take four years of history or civics and a combination. That seems to be essential to a liberal arts education in high school. If we nudged districts in that direction, that's great.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education discontinue administration of the current 10th grade world history MCAS test and direct the Department of Education to develop alternative approaches to assessing world history knowledge at the high school level, to be considered by the Board at its September meeting; and, further,**

That the Board of Education direct the Department of Education to develop a high school level end-of-course assessment in United States history, to be administered statewide in either the 10th or 11th grades at the option of each school district. Such assessment shall include questions covering key events, issues and themes in American history beginning with the Revolutionary period and continuing at least through Reconstruction, and will eventually become part of the competency determination.

The motion passed unanimously.

STATE PLAN FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Discussion and Vote

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: My only comment on this issue, besides thanking everyone for the work that they have done -- Ann Duffy and her group, and for the feedback Peg Wood and others who have been so helpful. We received a tremendous amount of feedback, which is great. I'm pleased to present this to you and I urge its adoption. The one thing I will say that we're struggling with -- I think we've got the plan right. It's succinct, it's well written, it focuses on the issues that need to be focused on. It talks about the responsibilities of the various players, which I think is good. I think it's a good plan. One of the things that I worry about, is that, like so many plans, it tends to be somewhat dry in its presentation. But the good news is I think we've got the goals right, the language right, and the plan right. What we need to think about is how we come up with various vehicles or aspects or different ways of sort of marketing it, if you will, different strategies to make various parts of it become important, whether we start to use video screening, and some other things. I'm not talking about just glitzy stuff. What I'm talking about it making parts of it real, making it come alive.

I'm very proud of the plan. I think it says the right things. I mean obviously, knowledge of subject matter, the link to the standards of the frameworks and also looking at common pedagogical practices that make sense for individual schools and individual teachers is the clear, main goal. So I think, from a state perspective, our responsibility is to set this umbrella for district plans, individual school improvement plans, and all of the other professional development planning requirements from our providers, etc. I think it's well laid out. It's a question of how do we get people's attention to use their assessments. I recommend it to you.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER : First, I underscore your comment that this is pretty high level framework here, within which local districts and schools are supposed to try to align the work that their doing to make sure that we're all moving in the same general direction. It isn't particularly prescriptive. It doesn't really require much of anything on the part of the local schools or districts. It's intended to be a guide. It's intended to be helpful. It's intended, again, to try to put some context around all the various professional activities that are going on in the state. As such, it's a relatively weak read. I mean, it doesn't have a mandate associated with it. It doesn't have financial incentives and other sorts of things that are designed to get districts to comply or to fulfill the expectations of the plan directly.

However, there are some things that the Department can do and is doing, but can do more of to essentially model the kind of professional development that we want the local communities to be pursuing on their own. And in particular, I just note two bullets within page 3, under Responsibilities of the Department of Education. This is about number five and six. It talks about continuing to sponsor professional development activities of high quality, and preparing the annual calendar of all DOE sponsored professional development opportunities. The professional development that this Department does sponsor and does develop on its own needs to be of the highest quality, needs to be a model for what districts and schools ought to be doing themselves and needs to be addressing the areas of greatest need and greatest weakness in the system as a whole. I think that's the way the Department is going to have the greatest impact on professional development at the local level. As useful and helpful that this is, that's where the rubber meets the road.

So with that, I want to thank everyone in the Department who has worked on this document but obviously want to encourage you all to redouble your efforts around ensuring that the kinds of professional development programs that we are sponsoring and developing ourselves are of the highest quality. It will make all of us proud and will also contribute towards the overall progress of education reform.

DR. GILL: I'd like to thank Ann Duffy for the work that she has done with the staff and Board of Higher Education and the revisions that were made to this document. It has been an excellent example of the Department of Education working with the Board of Higher Education in terms of a joint effort to improve our work in a particular area of great importance. With respect to your concern on implementation and also to the Commissioner's concern, I think that as we move down the road, here is something that the Board of Higher Education and the institutions need to be held accountable for also. This hopefully will help with the concerns that you do have. The institutions were very serious as they worked with Ann in the development and revisions to this. I will make my commitment to you that we will continue to work with our institutions in our involvement in the professional development world.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: That's a great point. I'm glad to hear your comments about the cooperation between the Department and the Board of Higher Education. Also, I'm particularly glad to hear you underline the importance of the public higher education system, because no matter how much we do directly as a Department or as a Board of Education in providing professional development opportunities, it's going to be a sliver of what the higher education system is already providing, not only through it's teacher preparation programs, but also through professional development for teachers already in the field. That's where the biggest asset is that the state has and that's where the greatest leverage is. So I appreciate those remarks.

MR. CROWLEY: Jim, the document says that there is $125 per pupil that is required to be spent. Do we track it? And if the districts don't spend it, are there consequences?

MS. DUFFY: I will leave the second half of the question to the Commissioner. But I can address the first half of the question which is, each year in the foundation formula, there is a place holder for professional development spending. It has risen from in 1996, when it started at $25 per student to last year at $125. That's budgeted again this year to be at $125. What we do track is from the financial office. We know that the actual professional development expenditures exceed that per student. It averages about $127 a student across the state. But the detail is something we are beginning to track this year for the first time so that we can get a handle not just on the state funding sources that districts are spending, but also on federal and other grant monies. We know from last year that the foundation budget provides about $119 million to districts, which is $125 a student. But another $28.5 million was spent as well as $18 million from federal and $7.8 million from state grants. So there's more money than just the $125 going into professional development. I'll leave the second half to David.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: A little bit of history -- it gets back to my other point about this evolution. First of all, the dollars per pupil was a way of seeing to it that the suburban districts got some money for their reform. The real complaint the first few years was that all the money was going to four districts. So the minimum, increasing the amount of money per pupil, allowed districts to get that much more money, and it's gotten to be some fairly serious money, at $125 per pupil as opposed to $25. Again, it shows the evolution, because at one time it was just, get the money out and let the locals decide. That was the theory.

Then, every year in my judgment, the pressure has grown, particularly in the legislature, asking if districts are spending this money where it's supposed to be spent. So we have shifted away from 'let them decide' to 'so, what are they doing?' Then the question became 'are they ever going to have some penalty if they don't?' Anecdotally and actually from a lot of statistics from about three or four years ago, clearly the money was not being spent for professional development in most districts. They would be very quick to tell you that between special education tuitions in particular and other shortages, they were looking at this as just local aid and it was going to other places. Most recently, the legislature directed us to do a careful study about exactly how much is being spent on professional development. I think the idea is that they're going to start to look towards ways of putting teeth into this in order to see to it that the money is being spent for professional development. So that's the legislative trend.

Other than to report every year how much is being spent, there is no penalty or other requirement, but I think that's coming. So again, it's one of those evolutions of the local control versus state

control. I think you're going to see increasing pressure to have districts spend this money for professional development. You know, it's all well and good, but by the time districts finish paying salaries, pay collective bargaining increases, pay for special education tuitions and transportation and then pay for the new cost of fuel oil, people are being laid off. So it's going to be that kind of conundrum, but I sense the legislature's getting very serious about seeing to it that this money is spent for professional development.

MS. GILL: The report that is provided from the districts to you, does it identify how they have spent the money, or just that they have spent the money?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Just really that they have. We do have some information on how they spend it, but not to any excruciating detail.

MS. DUFFY: The biggest detail factor is whether or not it is spent on salaries or programs. And salaries, in this case, would be salaries for teacher days beyond the regular school year. We know that about half of the money spent last year from their professional development line item was spent for that purpose.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: So that means you're paying essentially, the whatever the number might be, sixty, seventy dollars out of $125, to pay for the time of the teacher whose taking the professional development course and not working in the classrooms?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: That's correct

MS. STOTSKY: Could I also just add that your question is very much on target with what we are trying to develop, which is more of an effort to find out exactly what the money is being spent on, figure out the quality of that and then see if there are links to student learning which is ultimately what you want professional development for. That's all part of a coordinated plan that we've been trying to work out with a research component that will finally get at some of these more basic questions that will inform us about what all of this money really amounts to.

DR. THERNSTROM: So in other words, we don't really currently know much about the programs that qualify as professional development. And suppose we did know something about those programs and suppose we decided that unacceptable percentage of them didn't look very good to us. What do we do then? What are our options down the road here to ensure quality?

MS. DUFFY: Well, the strongest point of leverage is frankly in the recertification regulations which create and expectation for what professional development counts towards your next recertification cycle. When the Board adopted the recertification regulations in 1999, you set a very clear expectation that it would be strong content-based with a clear learning objective end product, which has, I think dramatically changed what's happened in individual teachers' professional development. There's also the sign-off of the individual professional development plan which requires the individual professional development plan to directly connect the school and district improvement plan. That has gone a long way to be doing what the Commissioner described, which is creating this integrated system of professional development where individuals are connecting to school and district improvement plans.

DR. SCHAEFER: You don't have aggregate information on the programs, but you have individual information on what each teacher is doing, and there's a sign-off on that?

MS. DUFFY: Correct. At the Department level, we actually don't have details on the individual teachers either at the local level. So what we actually have available at the Department level is very minimal information, and that's one of the gaps we're trying to address.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: I probably should have made this comment at the beginning. We're focusing on the $125 per pupil, because it's part of the Chapter 70 formula, etc. But that's only a small part of the overall picture. Not only have we heard of the changes with respect to the recertification regulations, perhaps even the new certification regulations and recommendations of the Joint Commission, the sign-off, the planning, but also all of the offerings that are otherwise made and paid for. Our content institutes, for example, the sum of all of our workshops, etc. So there is a whole series of offerings that are not necessarily tied to the $125 that paints a larger picture. It's interesting, the question of how much we're going to find out about that. This gets back to the issue that we've come a long way from just 'get the money out there and let them decide', to, 'so now we want to know why they're spending it and where they're spending it.' So, it's a balance and it's very complicated to figure it all out. I think we are making progress as a state in alignment.

DR. SCHAEFER: The summer content institutes are not captured in that $125 at all. So that's an additional piece. In many of the institutes, the teachers do not get any money which is apparently a problem for some teachers -- they won't sign up for those that are not paying them something.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: But they do get PDPs from them. PDPs and cash are not the equivalent.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: But also not counted in there would be those courses that teachers are taking on their own as they work towards degrees, or as their accumulated PDPs that they are taking at colleges and other places all along.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: There's still the obligation that those might show up in the $125 for districts to provide a cost-free option for teachers to become recertified, and that takes various forms. It could even take the form of doing curriculum guides at the local level and professional development opportunities for fellow teachers for which they can get PDPs. So, it's a complicated picture and I think we've got a little bit more of a semblance of order than we used to have by making sure that all the pieces fit together under this plan.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. Chapter 71, section 38Q, hereby approve the State Plan for Professional Development and authorize the Commissioner to submit a copy to the Joint Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities of the General Court.**

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR KUSS SCHOOL, FALL RIVER – Discussion and Vote

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: There is a motion in your books to approve the school improvement plan this time around.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: If I could make a couple of comments. I think there's nothing wrong with admitting that we're all in this learning curve together. I think this whole process of trying to get the school improvement plan to be written in such a way that it's going to make the kind of difference that we want it to make in these very difficult, challenging arenas of these schools that we've designated as under-performing. I would like to layout to the Board that I see this is as somewhat of a continuum. Each time I think we get a little better at it.

With respect to the Kuss School, they have had perhaps more challenges beyond the usual by the fact that there have been a number of changing administrators in the school. When the principal was here last month, she described the fact that she arrived at 10:00 and our visiting team came at 11:00 o'clock, on that very first day that she was there. From my perspective, this is clearly a work in progress, even though I'm asking the Board to approve it. I think I made that clear at the last meeting, and I made it clear to the principal and the superintendent when I talked to them privately. And I think they're getting there. Each time it's better. But I would ask the Board to be a little bit patient because I think we're learning and I think the schools are learning as we go through this process. The elements are there, but I'm not sure that they've been completely internalized. I think it reads a little bit like they're still nibbling around the edges as I've said at the last meeting. We're going to need the work on the ground in the year and again we're going to be partners in this. This isn't the case of just sending them off to do their bit.

I get concerned, for example, on this almost over-focus to me about having common planning time. Don't get me wrong, I think common planning time is wonderful. I just don't know that it's practical, necessarily, given the conditions that they have at the Kuss School and so forth. So I hate to see that as a focus, such that if they aren't able to schedule common planning time, that somehow things go away. I think there are many, many other ways. If a school is committed to providing the kind of communication that they need between teachers, between the principal and the teachers, between the district and the school, that can be accommodated. We see it in a lot of different ways. People are willing to come in early in the morning. If you get people turned on, they'll find ways to communicate. That's one of my concerns here, that it's almost, we need common planning time. We have all these issues of communication, and if somehow we don't find the common planning time, everybody will go away.

But I do think the elements are there. They talk about using the MCAS data, the Terrinova data, and other assessments. They have adopted Turning Points. Clearly, there's a great willingness. There's a recognition that they have problems and issues, so I think that's important. But quite frankly, I think this is a plan that needs more refinement as time goes on. But I see the only way of doing it is on the ground as the school year begins and on a day to day basis in the school. I think they've made a tremendous attempt to try and develop a plan. I think it just has a ways to go. I recommend it and along with the other schools that we're dealing with, we need to give you periodic reports as we go along.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Commissioner, I agree with what you said. In particular, what we've discovered with this case reinforces that we are frequently dealing with schools that are in early stages of transition, especially leadership transition. It has become evident that it's difficult to get the kind of clarity and closure around a school improvement plan under those conditions because of people coming in. In this case, the principal coming in hasn't had enough time to understand at a level of detail exactly what the problems are that need addressing first, and exactly what kind of expectations to set for improvement in those areas where the greatest challenges are. So this is a real difficult problem, and we're wrestling with it and trying to do the best we can.

But given the nature of the process, in particular, the two-year improvement cycle that we're trying to move towards, delaying the approval of school improvement plans until we get that kind of clarity and until the leadership team has had enough time to get its hands around the situation really sets us back in terms of the accountability system generally. So, I'm not sure there's much we can do other than muddle through and try to improve. I would say, just on the improvement side, that the plan really does lack much in the way of quantification of the outcomes that they expect to achieve or of their objectives. There are some statements that are made about things that they want to achieve and directions they want to move in, but there aren't numbers behind them. I think as we all know, it's hard to know whether you're making progress unless there's a way to measure improvement. And so that seems to be absent and that's an area that needs some work here.

There is some language that's a little bit vague and unclear as to how it connects directly to the improvement of the school or to the specific weaknesses that are identified. Just an example, under climate, I think I know what they're talking about under the improvement objective, but on its face its a little vague to be able to recognize how an event or series of events can be responsible for the creation of various outcomes. I'm not sure what that means. I'm not sure who is supposed to recognize it. I'm not sure what outcomes in particular we're concerned about. That's an example of a sentence and an objective that needs more than a little fine tuning, I think.

One thing that I am very pleased to see in this report, and really has been in every improvement plan that we've approved, is a commitment on the part of the principal or a vice principal or leadership team, to act as instructional leaders for the school and to visit classrooms every day. This is a critical part of being a principal and being an educational leader in the school. It is typically the thing that gets pushed to the bottom of the priority list, as all the other urgent tasks of being a principal intrude on the daily work. I'm pleased to see it in this report and again I'm pleased to see it generally in improvement plans that we've approved so far.

One little nitpicky thing, on page 8 under "District Support," the top bullet, and I'll just quote from it, says, "In the past, permits were issued to parents to send their children to non-neighborhood schools. The staff feels that there has been a diversion from Kuss. Children who might be expected to be high performers". I understand the concern, but I would just express my concern that the school not embark on this process, considering itself a victim of its students or parents. That has been said many times here, parents send their best kids to school. They don't hold their worst kids at home. And furthermore, parents have an obligation to send their children to the best schools they possible can. Therefore, its the obligations of schools to provide excellent learning opportunities for children of parents who want to send their children to those schools, not that they're forced to send their children to those schools. So, just that one plug, not only for parental

choice, but also for the importance of schools not to consider themselves victims, in particular, victims of poor students. I think it is at least one message I'd like to communicate to the folks at the Kuss School.

Again, given the fact that leadership team is still new and there is a transition under way, I think this is probably as good as we're going to get, although I hope the Department will go back and attempt to strengthen the plan before it is set in concrete.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: I feel your central point is correct. But, as we're looking at the Kuss School, and they're not making excuses, we also need to make sure that the district establishes consistent policies. Let's put it that way.

MS. GILL: Mr. Chairman, I support the comments that you and the Commissioner have both made. I believe that whether we're talking about a school or a college, and we're talking in terms of an improvement plan, we're talking about a work in progress. The accountability is very important. But to make sure that it works both for the students and for the teachers, it's going to take us some time. I feel very comfortable voting for this motion because of the language in the motion which states that the Department of Education will continue to work with the school to ensure that the goals and the direction of the plan and of the Board of Education are followed.

DR. THERNSTROM: Well, this is my singing my old song. I have no idea whether student performance is going to improve under this sort of plan and it just seems to me that its just never going to tell us very much. At the end of the day, a good educator is walking into classrooms, observing what's going on, is the only way to evaluate whether the school is on to the right track. You can spiff up the words a bit and add a few elements, but its always going to be too abstract and there are going to be too many unknowns.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: It is important to keep in mind that this is a school that has been declared under-performing. This begins a now two-year process, at the end of which we need to do exactly that -- to go in and evaluate whether in fact there has been any change and improvement of the quality of education offered to students of this school. And that's where one hopes, not to overuse this cliche here, but the rubber is meeting the road now. But it certainly will two years from now if this doesn't yield the kind of progress that we all expect. Ultimately, that is what this is all about -- whether we're actually changing practice in the classroom and improving student outcomes. The way we're going to have to evaluate that is the way we evaluated this school at the outset, which is to go in and actually see what's going on and spend time in classrooms and look at the data that's available about student performance.

MS. GILL: In the motion it says that there will be progress report required by the school at the end of this first year. I think that's important. If, as we review the progress report, the kinds of concerns that have been raised today by the three of you are not addressed, then I think that the Board of Education needs to reconsider the action. My feeling is, by the way that this is written, that if on the reports submitted in June of 2002 does not meet the concerns, then we do have the opportunity to vote for another motion.

DR. THERNSTROM: Going down the road as state is one thing, but what school improvement really depends on is a principal who is constantly in classrooms and who is looking at what he or she is seeing. All the words in the world don't substitute for a quality principal who is really an instructional leader.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I couldn't agree with you more.

MR. BAKER: I'm bummed that I missed these two meetings and missed this discussion, as I have a tremendous amount of empathy for the people who are involved in trying to do this. As I've said before, and I'll say every time we have one of these, bravo to anybody whose willing to take this stuff on. They all deserve our support and thanks. That said, just in my knowledge of this only being this report, I wonder if it's possible that these two broad goals that they start with be mutually inclusive. I take from this that they have a big-time issue with discipline in the school. One of the main things I'm saying here is to improve learning and achievement for all students. I'm wondering if this may be radical, if part of the game plan here ought to be, for all students who want to learn. Then part of the objective here may be that they need to figure out how to separate the kids that want to play from the kids that don't. Because I think that's going to make it hard to build and sustain a productive healthy school culture, which is number two.

Again, I wasn't here so I don't know what the discussion was, but reading between the lines, I took out of this that they've got a core of kids who are big-time problems for them, both in terms of structure, discipline and order, and all that sort of thing and that they have a bad process for managing and dealing with those kids. On top of that, they've got a lot of kids coming long distances to get there in the first place, which creates a certain raggedness to the way every day starts. I wonder if they don't get on those two, if they're ever going to be able to get to productive and healthy school culture.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: First of all, the discussion wasn't that much different in a sense from the discussion we had with the people who were here from Holyoke. The issues are very similar in some ways. I think there's a recognition. There's a reality that hits when you're declared under-performing. As we've talked about the leadership issue, they've been reactionary. And so, they have reacted to the policy of the district that took away their best kids in the neighborhood, so to speak, that kind of defensive reaction challenge. And now, this is a good attempt for people to come together and identify what it is that they need to address. So, I'm not so sure that even though they have a lot of discipline problems to be sure, that it's so much about cutting your losses as it is about why do they have such discipline problems beyond some obvious demographics. The issue is that they do not have a cohesive instructional program, etc. They talk about the differentiated instruction. I think that there's an acknowledgement that there's an awful lot of boredom going on, etc., which leads to other issues and so on and so forth. I think it's the school, all of the aspects, a new good leader, teachers recognizing that they need to all pull together and that's what the issue is about common planning time, although it's really about communication. This is a school and a faculty that's going through a catharsis, in my opinion, and that's a good thing, even though Abigail is right about the words on the page until they come alive. At least they come together and made this attempt and they've identified a plan. It needs to be fleshed out, discipline being a major part. So just the fact that their addressing the number of discipline cases and they're going to track that and they're going to examine it and so forth. I think it's a step in the right direction.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I would say though, that I think Charlie's point is a very strong one, especially around the requirement that before you can really address the student learning issues, you've got to have an environment for learning that creates order out of the chaos. Looking at the data here, there are 6,000 office referrals.

MR. BAKER: The number really blew me away. That's a mind boggling number.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: That's a large number.

MR. BAKER: You've got one hundred and eighty days of school, think about that.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Right. Essentially there are seven hundred and fifty, or something like that, suspensions that will happen during the course of the year. It's a very big number and obviously a very big problem.

MS. DOW: That's why I just want to say, from the principal's perspective though and as she presented it, the climate issue is not just the climate among the students. It's very much a climate in the school and she's helping to change that, the hearts and mind and conduct and patterns of behavior of the adults in the building. Part of that culture is just sending people out of the classroom and simply, rather than dealing with things in the classroom, which is what they're working towards. So, they may certainly need to make some decisions about some students, that there are a smaller number that are chronically a behavior management problem. But they've got very widespread phenomenon going on that requires really changing the whole culture of adults and students together.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: But it may be just in thinking about, not just the document per se, but in the strategy for going forward -- the climate category, which is the last, might really be first. Before you can have success in addressing some of the other areas, you have to get control of the climate. And it might be worth asking to revisit whether they think they've really done enough or suggested enough here around the climate area which involves some professional development, expanding the student service center, expanding and formalizing outreach, and whether those sorts of measures are really sufficient to address this what appears to be epidemic, of disorder. So anyway, that's worth exploring. Obviously we don't know the specifics of what the school culture is like.

MR. BAKER: I'm going to vote for this. The other two things I would say is number one, you know if they really do have a chronic tardiness problem, maybe they need to rearrange the day. Start to structure class for time, so, again, I don't know anything about what's going on, but, I think keeping the regular day in place. If you're always going to have a chronic tardiness problem associated with transportation issues, it means that the raggedness is always going to be there. You're never going to be able to get out from under there, until you fix something like that first.

The other thing I would say is, we have to figure out a way to make these things so that the diagnostic -- whatever that word is -- I constantly find myself not being able to go from when somebody says the issues that they have to deal with are to what it is that they say their going to do to fix them. That's as much true here as it has been anywhere, right? That just makes it very hard for me to understand. People really understand what the three and four, and it can't be

more than that, cause no one can carry more than three or more thoughts simultaneously around their head for a long period of time, what the three or four things are. We have to figure out some way, it's a sifting process here. You get to the point where, you know, we know and they know, you know, we can say, "These are the three or four things they're worrying about." And when they're down there in Fall River trying to fix that, they know what the three or four things they're worrying about are.

DR. THERNSTROM: Picking up on this conversation, I notice at the end where they say here's how we measure improvement, students empowered, teachers in team take ownership of all their students. I mean, is there anyplace where it says, "Look these teachers have to be skilled in classroom management" so that these classes are not chaotic and you don't have all these students who are behavioral problems every day? Maybe I'm missing it, but it seems to me that's the first thing to say about a school in chaos, that you've got a student body with a lot of problems. You've also got teachers who are underskilled in terms of their knowledge of how to manage a difficult classroom.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Obviously you can go through any of these words. I think there is a real attempt here for a faculty that has been fractured to come together. We've said it's a work in progress. Judy has made a point that we're going to give you on-going progress reports. I think they have an attempt at a plan here that does have some specific goals in mind. For example, they talk about the daily visitations and just trying to get a handle on this stand and so that people understand exactly what's being taught every day and so forth. It's their attempt. I think they've got a ways to go. And I agree with Charlie, the connection is not clear. There are too many issues, superfluous issues, and we need to focus it down. But they do, in here, talk about the issue of instruction. The daily visit of the principal, and vice principal, the daily focus on standards and so on and so forth.

So, I ask you to support it, recognizing that they recognize there are some issues here. I'd rather have this discussion on an imperfect plan than come in here and tell you we've got the answers for everybody's issues. These are very challenging schools. I like the sort of overall approach that Charlie gave in the past. We're trying to work towards identifying the three or four things and then what are you going to do about it? And then how do you know you're addressing them and how do you know you're making progress? I just urge you to approve the plan and hopefully, I see already the good news is, this is a school that's coming together. And that's what this process seems to be doing, whether it's in Lawrence or whether it's in New Bedford. It does have a unifying effect. They may not have the plan perfect, but we've got their attention, and they're working on it.

MS. GILL: I'd like to support the comment that the Commissioner made earlier and that was what do we have if we don't approve this? This is a plan that sets them in a direction. They have worked hard. If we don't support this plan, that makes a statement to them that I don't think will help them at all. The other comment I'd like to make is that I do agree with all of the concerns that have been raised by Board members on this, and I think it's important, Commissioner, that a transcript of this discussion be sent by you with a letter to the principal so that she'll understand the kinds of issues that the Board is concerned about. And hopefully, that will influence the ways in which she follows through on this plan during this year and the report that she presents to us next year.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: I just want to make one last comment, which is not specific to this. Most of the plans that we've approved have addressed the math issue through a curriculum which is connected math or the Connected Math Program. I think it would be useful for us now that we've got several schools who were in this turn-around mode were using the same curriculum, to take a look at the extent to which it's having a positive impact on their performance on math MCAS in particular, but mathematics generally. Given the sort of consistency that we're seeing here, I think it behooves us to take a close look at the effectiveness of the curriculum to make sure that in approving plans that include CMP, that we're doing schools a favor rather than making it more difficult. And I'm agnostic on whether it works or doesn't work, or whether it's effective or not. But I do think it's worth a look as we get into these turnarounds.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, s. 1J and 603 CMR 2.03 (6)(b), and upon recommendation by the Commissioner, hereby accept the improvement plan submitted by the Kuss School in Fall River; provided that said acceptance is subject to the following conditions:**

1. **The Department shall provided oversight and technical assistance as needed to ensure that Kuss School and district leaders develop detailed work plans and timelines to guide and track the progress of implementation of agreed-upon improvement initiatives; and**

2. **By June 1, 2002 the Kuss School shall submit to the Board a written progress report and School Improvement Plan update, reflecting refinements and changes planned for the 2002-2003 school year.**

The vote was unanimous.

APPROVAL OF GRANTS

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Does anyone have any comments on the grants?

MR. CROWLEY: Yes. Jeff, do you work off of a budget for these? In other words, we have three totals that we're approving. Are these sub-amounts within an overall budget that you're working towards during the year?

MR. WULFSON: [IN AUDIENCE]: [INAUDIBLE].

MR. CROWLEY: So, during the course of the year, you have to manage to that total? And the rejection, in some categories you reject, what are the reasons you might reject a request?

MR. WULFSON: [INAUDIBLE].

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: On the competitive side, in addition to the priorities, there are qualitative judgments that may be made as well about the extent to which the proposal is not merely is responsive to the requirements, but seems to be of higher quality based on the criteria.

MR. CROWLEY: So, for example, for each of these three, there are categories to which there have already been funds approved and we're not just allocating…

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Correct. In the first two, there were more requests than we were able to accommodate and we rate them. So, in one case there were five proposals not recommended, in the other case, seven. In the case of the mentoring program, that's specific to a program that is doing well and is going to help other districts. So there are three such programs that we identify. But in all cases they have to have an appropriated amount associated with them. And that money has to be there or else we cannot accommodate them.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: And similarly we are under an obligation, essentially, to spend the money as well.

MR. CROWLEY: So the process here really is rubber-stamping from a standpoint of relying on you to decide that these programs have met the requirements in terms of the request?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: Correct. And we offer back-up materials to Board members if you request them. And we're glad to do that.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education approve the grants as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

MR. BAKER: Didn't this come about as a result of people just wanting to know what all these grant programs were? I wouldn't quite put it in a rubber-stamp category, but that's certainly one way to think about it.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: When did we last reject a grant?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: I don't know that there's ever been a grant rejected. I'm told historically you've had some boards that have spent an inordinate amount of time on it.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: The next motion is to empower the Commissioner to make some decisions regarding grants, it says "In any other matter that have been so approved." That sounds like a fairly large loophole. But this has been a traditional grant of authority we've given the Commissioner during off months to allow him to move the process forward, especially around grants that have certain schedules attached to them and for which money needs to get out on the field in order for programs to continue as planned.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: The practical fact is that I will inform you before I do…

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Are there any big items that you know are on the horizon?

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: We've got this huge issue of the state budget being held up once again and we've got SBA, which we can talk about in a minute. So, who knows what will happen between now and September 24th. Perhaps everything and perhaps nothing. I mean, it's, ten years ago it would have been like shutting the government down. But now no one pays attention, it's so "Let us know when you finish it." It's unbelievable.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education authorize the Commissioner, in consultation with the Chairman, to act on behalf of the Board in approving grants and any other matters that require action between regularly scheduled meetings through September 24, 2001; provided that the Commissioner shall report to the Board at the next meeting on grants and any other matters that have been so approved.**

The vote was unanimous.

MR. WULFSON: One thing that struck me in a lot of the literature I read relative to the SBA, is you need more staff. And the, how quickly can you do that? Is it a function of waiting for the next budget, or are there monies within currently that we can do that? Given the dollar amount that's involved there, that's an open question at this point. We are waiting to see what the Department's appropriation will be for our administrative budget, which funds -- not only the SBA program, but everything from the Commissioner's office to the public information to the legal office to the rent here. One of the things that we're doing that the Commissioner may have mentioned in his briefing memo is as part of an overall review of everything that state government is doing. Secretary Crosby has initiated what we're calling the Management for Results and Initiative, MRI, and we, along with every other department, are visiting our needs not only in the SBA program, but across the agency, across all the programs. As part of that, this summer, we will be putting together a complete proposal for what the agency needs in terms of resources and staffing to present to administrative finance and fiscal affairs, that they will take into account in putting together the spending plans for this year and the budget proposal for next year. But it's more than just needing more staff, it's let's look from the bottom up of what we're doing, why we're doing it, what needs to be done.

COMMISSIONER DRISCOLL: If I could just quickly comment. We, even if the state government wasn't doing Managing for Results Initiative, the MRI, which I welcome, I think it's tremendous and I think it's going to be very positive for the Commonwealth. But, even if they weren't, we were undertaking here in the Department that kind of an overall approach, and I have a team of senior staff members that Jeff is on as well looking at the entire issue. We have three questions. One is the capacity of the Department. The Education Reform Review Commission recently came out with a report suggesting we don't have the capacity. That doesn't necessarily mean we're going to hire staff. There are other ways to provide capacity to get the job done. In particular, other, we have wonderful resources here in Massachusetts, so that's one issue.

Secondly, the question of the legislation, the way certain line items -- school building assistance appropriation is a perfect example. Last year in House 1, there was a proposal to establish a new office for school building assistance with $750,000 to fund that. The legislature rejected it, gave it back to us, but without the $750,000. So this whole question of when legislation is written, when

things are approved in the budget, is there automatically an amount of money to administer the program or not? More often than not, sometimes there isn't. So we get an additional responsibility without the staff. So the whole issue needs to be looked at. And we're in contact with Administration and Finance and I think they're asking the right questions. I think people recognize we have to do something in school building assistance. It's just clear, with all of these applications and the whole area is so different. We need the staff there.

Now the question is, if we look across our agency, really look at everything that we're doing and why we're doing it, do we have to add staff or are there ways within the organization to accommodate that staff? But clearly school building assistance is a place we're going to be adding staff. We either going to do it by finding other places in the Department to make economies or by getting some legislative changes as we go forward or dealing with the whole capacity issue with Administration and Finance. So, it's a very important time for us as we look excruciatingly at each detail of our Department. The state is doing the same thing. And, as you know, we're brought in a Chief Information Officer, and we're bringing in a new Chief Operating Officer, so it's a time of real introspection here at the Department. We're going to give the Board very clear recommendations within a few months.

CHAIRMAN PEYSER: Any other business or comments before we adjourn? We are not scheduled to meet in August. We are scheduled to meet on Tuesday, September 25. With that, we are adjourned.