

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Education**

**September 23, 2003
9:10 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.**

**Massachusetts Department of Education
350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts**

Members of the Board of Education Present:

James A. Peyser, Chairman, Dorchester
Henry M. Thomas, III, Vice-Chairman, Springfield
Charles D. Baker, Swampscott
J. Richard Crowley, Andover
Jeff DeFlavio, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Belmont
Judith Gill, Chancellor, Board of Higher Education
Roberta Schaefer, Worcester
Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington

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

Chairman Peyser called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

Comments from the Chairman

Chairman Peyser opened the meeting by reporting on the Board's budget committee discussions. The committee met in September, and hopes to meet once more before the October Board meeting, at which the Board will discuss its FY 2005 budget request. The Chairman noted that the committee discussed possible additional investment in assessment, school and district intervention, professional development in the areas of math and English language acquisition, and Department administration.

Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Driscoll reported that the school and district MCAS results will be released on September 24th at the Edison Middle School in Boston, and once again, there is good news to report.

The Commonwealth's students and schools continue to make progress towards the dual goals of increasing the number of students scoring in the *Proficient* and *Advanced* performance levels on MCAS, and decreasing the number of students scoring in *Warning/Failing*.

Commissioner Driscoll also updated the Board on the smooth beginning of the school year across the state. He reported that a new challenge for about sixteen school districts this year was mold in school buildings, which delayed some school openings while the problems were addressed. Despite these challenges and some budget difficulties, he said that schools have opened with a great sense of purpose and energy.

The Commissioner announced that the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework received a grade of an "A" in a recent report by the Fordham Foundation. The framework is the focus of a statewide history conference the Department is sponsoring on September 26th. He also welcomed Peter Finn as the Interim Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents.

Approval of the Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the August 26, 2003 regular meeting as presented by the Commissioner.

The vote was unanimous.

1. Annual Meeting: Election of the Vice Chairman

Under the Board's by-laws, the September meeting is the Annual Meeting of the Board, at which the Vice Chairman is elected. The Vice Chairman holds office until the next annual meeting of the Board, and until a successor is elected and qualified.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Education re-elect Henry M. Thomas, III, of Springfield as its Vice Chairman.

The vote was unanimous. Chairman Peyser thanked Vice Chairman Thomas for his work on behalf of students. He noted that this will be the third year Mr. Thomas has served as Vice Chairman.

2. Two Year Follow-Up Report on Under-Performing Schools

Commissioner Driscoll and Associate Commissioner Julianne Dow updated the Board on the status of four schools that the Department designated as under-performing in the winter of 2000: the Arlington School in Lawrence, the Roosevelt Middle School in New Bedford, the John J. Lynch Middle School

in Holyoke and the Matthew J. Kuss Middle School in Fall River. The schools adopted improvement plans that were accepted by the Board in 2001, and they have been implementing the improvement plans for the past two years. The Department conducted follow-up reviews in May 2003, and the Board received copies of the reports in July. The Commissioner is currently reviewing the schools' 2003 MCAS data and the most recently reported statistics on attendance, suspension, exclusion and retention, in order to make a recommendation on each school relative to the issue of chronic under-performance. The Commissioner will make a recommendation on each school for the Board's consideration at a future meeting. Chairman Peyser noted that the Department is sponsoring a conference on October 29th that will focus on effective strategies for improving school performance, with implications for district strategies as well.

3. Response from North Adams Public Schools to July 2003 Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) Report

The Board heard a presentation from North Adams Mayor John Barrett and Acting School Superintendent James Montepare on their response to the Tier II report on the North Adams Public Schools prepared by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) and transmitted to the Board by the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC). Acting Superintendent Montepare said that North Adams has taken the findings of the Tier II report very seriously.

Commissioner Driscoll said that he will review the information presented by the North Adams officials and will make a recommendation to the Board about next steps, in accordance with the Board's Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and School Districts.

4. Report on Keefe Vocational Technical School District from EMAC

The Board discussed a Tier II report on the Joseph P. Keefe/South Middlesex Regional Vocational Technical School prepared by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) and transmitted to the Board by the Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC). Under the Regulations on Under-Performing Schools and School Districts, the Board is responsible for reviewing any reports from EQA that "uncover serious or widespread deficiencies" which "are likely to have a substantial negative effect on the educational achievement of the students attending the district's schools."

Joe Rappa, the director of EQA, presented an overview of the report's findings. Chairman Peyser clarified that the Tier II reports are intentionally designed to focus on academics, not the vocational-technical programs in a school district. The Superintendent of Keefe Vocational Technical School District will be invited to respond to the report at the Board's October meeting. After he reviews additional information from district officials and from the Department, the Commissioner will prepare a recommendation for the Board's consideration.

5. Proposed Reading and Mathematics Standards (Grades 3-8) for Assessments Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*

The Board discussed proposed reading and mathematics standards for grades 3, 5 and 7. The proposed standards are based on the curriculum frameworks, and will give schools more detailed guidance about the expectations at each grade level and the content of future grade-level assessments, as required by federal law. The Massachusetts curriculum frameworks for English language arts (2001) and mathematics (2000) contain standards written for two-year grade spans, such as 3-4 and 5-6. The MCAS currently assesses students in English language arts at grades 3, 4, 7, and 10 and in mathematics at grades 4, 6, 8, and 10 based on these standards. The federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, however, requires annual testing at each grade from grades 3 through 8 in both reading and mathematics beginning in 2005-2006. Working with committees of teachers, Department staff have drafted standards for grades 3, 5 and 7 in these subjects. Chairman Peyser noted that the curriculum frameworks are not being changed, since the standards included in the frameworks and approved by the Board will remain the same.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education hereby authorize the Commissioner to solicit public comment on the proposed Reading and Mathematics Standards (Grades 3-8) for assessments under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous. The Department will invite comment on the proposed grade-level standards over the next two months. After review of the comments, the Commissioner will bring the proposed standards back to the Board for a vote in early 2004. This timetable will allow the Department to begin developing grade-level MCAS tests for grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics in 2004 so that question tryouts can take place in the spring of 2005.

6. Proposed Amendments to “Circuit-Breaker” School Finance Regulations

The Board discussed proposed amendments to the School Finance Regulations (603 CMR 10.07). Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson explained that the amendments conform to changes in the statutory reimbursement rates recently enacted to the special education “circuit breaker” reimbursement program as part of the FY 2004 budget.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: **that the Board of Education, in accordance with G.L. chapter 69, section 1B, and G. L. chapter 71B, section 5A, hereby authorize the Commissioner to proceed in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. chapter 30A, section 3, to solicit public comment on the proposed amendments to regulations for special education payments and reimbursements, 603 CMR 10.07, as presented by the Commissioner.**

The vote was unanimous.

7. Proposed Model Policy on School-Sponsored Student Travel (St. 2002, c. 346)

The Board discussed the proposed model policy for late night and overnight school-sponsored student travel, which the Department drafted in response to a state law that was enacted last year (St. 2002, c. 346). Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson explained that the model policy is intended to assist school districts in establishing their own local policies, as the new law requires.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Education, in accordance with St. 2002, c. 346, hereby authorize the Commissioner to solicit public comment on the proposed model policy on student travel, as presented by the Commissioner.

The vote was unanimous.

8. Approval of Grants

The Board approved \$901,607 in grants under the Technology Enhancement competitive grant program (federally-funded) and \$2.5 million in grants for academic support services, transition services for students from the Class of 2003, and one-stop career centers (state-funded).

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.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the meeting adjourn at 11:05 a.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.

Respectfully submitted,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education
and Secretary of the Board