**Minutes of the Regular Meeting**

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

**Holyoke High School**

**500 Beech Street, Holyoke, MA, 01040**  
**Tuesday, November 19, 2024, 9:35 a.m. – 12:58 p.m.**

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

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

**Matthew Hills**, Vice-Chair, Newton

**Ioannis Asikis,** Brookline, Student Member

**Farzana Mohamed,** Newton *(participated remotely)*

**Michael Moriarty,** Holyoke

**Dálida Rocha,** Worcester

**Mary Ann Stewart,** Lexington

**Patrick Tutwiler**, Secretary of Education, Andover

**Martin West,** Newton

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

**Ericka Fisher,** Worcester

**Russell D. Johnston,** Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m., and members introduced themselves. She announced that today’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) meeting, like all open meetings of the Board, is being [livestreamed and recorded](https://vimeo.com/user217853291).

**Statements from the Public**

* **Tim Norris**, Attorney, Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators, addressed the Board on Career Technical Education (CTE) admissions
* **Heidi Driscoll**, Superintendent, Minuteman Regional High School in Lexington, addressed the Board on CTE admissions
* **Dr. Heidi Riccio**, Superintendent, Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School, addressed the board on CTE admissions
* **Charlie Ellis**, Vocational Division Chair, Massachusetts Association of School Committees, addressed the board on CTE admissions
* **Will Austin**, Boston Schools Fund, addressed the Board on high school graduation standards
* **Patrick Lattuca**, Superintendent, TECCA, addressed the Board on tuition rates for Commonwealth virtual schools
* **Salah E. Khelfaoui**, Ph.D., Superintendent, Greater Commonwealth Virtual School, addressed the Board on tuition rates for Commonwealth virtual schools
* **Dr. Evonne Alvarez**, Superintendent, Lynn Public Schools, addressed the Board on KIPP Academy Lynn’s charter
* **Jared Nicholson**, Mayor, City of Lynn, addressed the Board on KIPP Academy Lynn’s charter
* **Sheila O’Neill**, President, Lynn Teachers Union, addressed the Board on KIPP Academy Lynn’s charter
* **Kahris McLaughlin** addressed the Board on educational equity

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven thanked members for their attendance at recent special meetings on CTE admissions and said she is establishing a subcommittee of the Board to continue the work. Chair Craven said the subcommittee will be led by Member West and will include Member Fisher, Vice-Chair Hills, and Member Rocha. Chair Craven also briefly commented on the passage of Question 2.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler commended Acting Commissioner Johnston and DESE for quickly issuing guidance regarding the passage of Question 2. Secretary Tutwiler said he believes educational equity requires a uniform standard for high school graduation.

**Comments from Acting Commissioner**

Acting Commissioner Johnston opened his comments by thanking Mayor Garcia, Superintendent/Receiver Soto, members of the Holyoke School Committee, and members of the Holyoke High School team for hosting today’s meeting. Acting Commissioner Johnston then commented on the special Board meetings on CTE admissions. On the passage of Question 2, Acting Commissioner Johnston said DESE continues to develop additional guidance in response to questions from school and district leaders. Acting Commissioner Johnston asked the Chair to solicit any clarifying questions from members on this topic. Chair Craven and members offered comments and questions to consider in relation to the passage of the ballot question and the future of high school graduation standards. Acting Commissioner Johnston thanked the Chair and Board members for their comments.

Chair Craven then called for a motion and vote to approve meeting minutes.

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

**VOTED:**  **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the October 28, 2024, special meeting and October 29, 2024, regular meeting.**

The vote, by roll call, was 8-0-1. Member Stewart abstained.

**Welcome from Holyoke Public Schools and Holyoke Transition Plan Update**

Acting Commissioner Johnston welcomed Holyoke’s Mayor Joshua Garcia, School Committee Member Devin Sheehan, Superintendent/Receiver Anthony Soto, and Lauren Woo, DESE’s acting chief of staff to present on the progress the Holyoke School Committee has made in implementing the plan to return to local control. Superintendent/Receiver Soto introduced a student performance from the Holyoke High School theater company. Theater company director Bruno introduced the scene from the play “Miss Nelson is Missing.”

Superintendent/Receiver Soto discussed the strategic plan including many accomplishments. Mr. Soto described the inclusive engagement process that led to the development of the strategic plan including a mission, vision, equity commitment, priorities, and core beliefs. Mr. Soto also shared key efforts for the school year 2024-25 and accomplishments. Mr. Soto then turned it over to Mayor Garcia. Mayor Garcia discussed the capacity building plan. Mayor Garcia introduced school committee member Devin Sheehan, who thanked the Healey-Driscoll administration and Acting Commissioner Johnston for their support during this process. Mr. Sheehan described the capacity building plan that the school committee will undertake in more detail including the superintendent evaluation and hiring, training on finance and budget, and policy development. The presenters then responded to questions from Board members.

Acting Commissioner Johnston commended all who have helped Holyoke reach this point. Chair Craven commended the Acting Commissioner and acting chief of staff Woo for their ongoing work and Superintendent/Receiver Soto for his leadership. Chair Craven expressed thanks to Member Moriarty for being a consistent advocate for the students of Holyoke. Member Moriarty noted that while many challenges remain, this is a momentous day.

Chair Craven called for a short break at 12:00 noon. The meeting resumed at 12:12 p.m. Chair Craven announced that in the interest of time, she would move to item 2 (commissioner search), then to item 4 (budget), hold off on item 6 (Felix), and then end with item 3 (Educational Vision).

**Update on Commissioner Search Process**

Chair Craven described the progress made on the search for the next commissioner, with assistance from search firm Isaacson Miller. She stated they have held three public sessions to gather feedback from stakeholders, received over 100 responses to the survey, and have been meeting with DESE staff to gather input. Chair Craven said Isaacson Miller drafted a position profile for the commissioner search that will go live with an application this week; Board members have the draft for review and feedback. She announced that the preliminary screening committee will meet in December and the four Board members on the committee will be Secretary Tutwiler, Chair Craven, Member West, and Member Fisher.

**Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY2026 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board's Budget Committee**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced Member Mohamed, chair of the Board’s Budget Committee, which includes members Asikis, Fisher, and Moriarty. Member Mohamed presented the committee’s FY2026 budget proposal and report. Board members engaged in discussion. Acting Commissioner Johnston noted that the committee’s recommendations are connected to priorities including literacy, workforce diversification and readiness, and support for high-dosage tutoring.

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

**VOTED:** **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. Gen. Laws chapter 69, § 1A, approve the budget priorities for the FY2026 education budget as recommended by the Board’s Budget Committee and the Commissioner, and direct the Commissioner to convey these recommendations and priorities to the Secretary of Education, the Governor, and the Legislature**.

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools: Funding**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced Alison Bagg, Director of DESE’s Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, Robert O’Donnell, Director of School Finance, and Ruth Hersh School Redesign and Education Collaborative Manager of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign. Acting Commissioner Johnston stated that the two operating Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS), Greater Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS) and TEC Connections Academy Virtual School (TECCA), requested an increase in their per pupil tuition rates. He said the presentation and discussion today will inform his decision in response to the requests from the virtual schools.

Ms. Bagg provided context about the two operating virtual schools including historical and current tuition rates. She described the current request and how tuition is calculated, as well as two possible timelines for the Commissioner's recommendation. The panel then responded to questions from Board members as members discussed the two possible timelines presented. Acting Commissioner Johnston thanked Board members for their feedback and stated he would bring a recommendation to the Board in December.

**Educational Vision Update and Advancing Student Learning**

Acting Commissioner Johnston provided an update on the Educational Vision including a summary of the quarterly stocktake meetings DESE held in late October. Acting Commissioner Johnston also updated the Board on the academic support and intervention, including a description of the conditions necessary for success with high dosage tutoring programming. Board members offered comments. Chair Craven thanked Acting Commissioner Johnston and thanked all DESE staff who helped arrange this meeting in Holyoke. She noted the Board’s next regular meeting will be at DESE’s office in Everett on Tuesday, December 17, 2024.

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

**VOTED:**  **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns the meeting at 12:58 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote, by roll call, was unanimous.

 Respectfully submitted,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board