# MEMORANDUM

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:** | November 15, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Briefing for the November 15, 2024 Special Meeting, November 18, 2024 Special Meeting, and November 19, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) will have three meetings this month: a **special meeting** on **Friday, November 15, 2024**, 1:00 –3:00 p.m. (held virtually); a **special meeting** on **Monday, November 18, 2024,** 5:00–7:00 p.m.(held virtually); and the **regular meeting** on **Tuesday, November 19, 2024**, 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.(held in person at Holyoke High School, 500 Beech Street, Holyoke, MA 01040). The meetings will be live-streamed and recorded. Helene Bettencourt will assist with all arrangements; please email or call her if you have any questions.

**SPECIAL MEETINGS, November 15 and 18, 2024**

The special meetings on Friday, November 15, 2024 and Monday, November 18, 2024, will be the second and third of three study sessions on Career Technical Education (CTE) admissions.

We held a study session with the Board on October 28, 2024 to address a key question: *What impact has the most recent regulation change had on addressing equitable access to CTE admissions?* During this first study session, we focused on admission and enrollment data since the implementation of the updated regulation, including a presentation from an external researcher with expertise in Massachusetts CTE admissions data.

On November 15, 2024, we will hold a second study session with the Board to continue the conversation and follow up on requests that members made for additional data and analysis, following the first study session. The Board will hear from Department staff including Elizabeth Bennett, Associate Commissioner for College, Career, and Technical Education, and Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability. In the third study session on November 18, 2024, we will hear from stakeholders regarding their experience in implementing the 2021 regulations. Following the study sessions, I will make a recommendation to the Board about any further changes to the regulations.

These special meetings are an opportunity for the Board to hear about CTE admissions and engage in discussion. No votes will be taken.

**REGULAR MEETING, November 19, 2024**

Our business agenda will lead off with a welcome from Holyoke’s Mayor Joshua Garcia, School Committee Member Dr. Yadilette Rivera Colón, and Holyoke Public Schools Receiver Anthony Soto and a presentation of the Holyoke transition plan. Chair Craven will provide an update on the Commissioner search process. I will update the Board on implementation of DESE’s Educational Vision and Advancing Student Learning. BESE Budget Committee Chair Farzana Mohamed will present the committee’s report and recommendations for the FY2026 education budget, for a discussion and vote. We will have an initial discussion on tuition funding for the two Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools. The Board will discuss and vote on the return of the certificate from the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School.

**Statements from the Public**

**Comments from the Chair**

**Comments from the Secretary**

* Question 2 – Elimination of MCAS as High School Graduation Requirement
* Reflections on the Work Ahead

**Comments from the Acting Commissioner**

* Review of the Board’s Special Meeting on Nov. 15, 2024 (Career Technical Education Admissions Study Session: Session 2)
* Review of the Board’s Special Meeting on Nov. 18, 2024 (Career Technical Education Admissions Study Session: Session 3)
* Question 2 – Elimination of MCAS as High School Graduation Requirement

**Routine Business:** Approval of the Minutes of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Special Meeting, 10/28/2024, and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Regular Meeting 10/29/2024.

The Board will vote on approval of the minutes.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

1. **Welcome from Holyoke Public Schools and Holyoke Transition Plan Update – Discussion**

At our meeting on October 29, I announced that the Holyoke School Committee is building its capacity to resume local control of the Holyoke Public Schools at the end of the 2024-25 school year. At the Board meeting on November 19 in Holyoke, Holyoke’s Mayor Joshua Garcia, School Committee Member Dr. Yadilette Rivera Colón, Receiver Anthony Soto, and Lauren Woo, DESE’s acting chief of staff, will present on the progress the Holyoke School Committee has made in implementing the plan and answer your questions.

1. **Update on Commissioner Search Process – Discussion**

Chair Craven will update the Board on the search process.

1. **Educational Vision Update and Advancing Student Learning**

At the Board meeting I will provide members with an update on the Department’s ongoing work to align to the Educational Vision and advance student learning. This will include a follow up on proposals that were presented during the October Board meeting.

1. **Board of Elementary and Secondary Education FY2026 Budget Proposal and Report from the Board’s Budget Committee – Discussion and Vote**

Committee Chair Farzana Mohamed will present the FY2026 budget proposal and report from the Board’s Budget Committee. Committee members include Mr. Ioannis Asikis, Student Member, Dr. Ericka Fisher, Worcester, and Mr. Michael Moriarty, Holyoke. Senior Associate Commissioner/CFO Bill Bell will provide context about the budget process. Based on the committee’s recommended priorities, the Board will discuss and vote on its FY2026 education budget proposal. Consistent with Mass. General Laws c. 69, § 1A, I will transmit the Board’s recommendations to the Secretary of Education, who “shall then prepare and submit a budget request on behalf of the department to the house and senate committees on ways and means, the joint committee on education, and the secretary of administration and finance.”

1. **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools: Funding – Initial Discussion**

On July 25, 2024, 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. While the schools submitted a joint request, the per pupil tuition rate is a material term of each CMVS’s certificate. Each CMVS is a public entity and the tuition for each student is paid by the student’s district of residence. As of October 2023, GCVS and TECCA enrolled a total of 4,068 students from across the Commonwealth in grades K-12.

The enclosed memorandum provides detailed information. At our meeting on November 19, DESE staff including Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, and Robert O’Donnell, Director of School Finance, will present an overview and respond to your questions. Informed by the Board’s discussion and additional stakeholder input, I expect to bring a recommendation to the Board for a vote at the December 17 Board meeting.

1. **Felix Commonwealth Virtual School Return of Certificate – Discussion and Vote**

On October 15, 2024, the Felix Commonwealth Virtual School (Felix) Board of Trustees voted to voluntarily return its certificate. As the basis for its decision, the school’s board of trustees stated that conditions imposed with the granting of the certificate “delayed the team’s ability to advance the model and appropriately execute key partnerships.” I recommend that the Board vote on November 19, 2024, to accept the voluntary return of the certificate granted to Felix.

We thank Felix’s founding members for their efforts to establish a new virtual school in Massachusetts. Regina Robinson, Deputy Commissioner, Alison Bagg, Director of Charter Schools and School Redesign, and Ruth Hersh, School Redesign and Education Collaborative Manager will be at the Board meeting to answer your questions.

**OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

1. **Report on Scheduling of Comprehensive District Reviews**

The Department conducts numerous district and school reviews for a wide variety of purposes throughout the year. It is the Department's goal to minimize the burden these reviews placed upon districts and schools as much as possible, while also ensuring that we fulfill our legal and public obligations by conducting thorough, high-quality reviews.

The enclosed memorandum explains how the Department has addressed the provisions of M.G.L. c. 15, s. 55A, regarding the scheduling of major reviews to reduce administrative burdens on schools and districts. The Board voted in December 2010 to delegate this scheduling task to the Commissioner, and I am submitting this report for FY2025 in accordance with that vote.

If you have questions about any agenda items, please call me. I look forward to meeting with you on November 15, 18, and 19.