# Minutes of the Regular Meeting

# of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

# 135 Santilli Highway

# Everett, Massachusetts 02149 Tuesday, December 17, 2024, 9:10 a.m. – 12:22 p.m.

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

**Katherine Craven**,Chair,Brookline

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

**Ericka Fisher,** Worcester

**Farzana Mohamed,** Newton

**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:**

**Ioannis Asikis,** Brookline, Student Member

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

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Chair Craven called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m., and members introduced themselves. Chair Craven announced that today’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) meeting, like all open meetings of the Board, is being livestreamed and recorded.

**Statements from the Public**

* **Senator Brendan Crighton** **and Representative-elect Sean Reid** addressed the Board on KIPP Academy Lynn’s charter
* **Max Page, President, Massachusetts Teachers Association, and Deb McCarthy, Vice-President, Massachusetts Teachers Association,** addressed the Board on the Competency Determination Update
* **Gayle Carvalho, President, Quincy Education Association,** addressed the Board on the Competency Determination Update
* **Justin Brown, President, Brookline Educators Union,** addressed the Board on the Competency Determination Update
* **Patrick Lattuca, Superintendent, TECCA,** addressed the Board on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools: Tuition Rate
* **Dan French, Citizens for Public Schools Board President and Member, Vocational Education Justice Coalition**, addressed the Board on Career Technical Education (CTE) admissions
* **Mirian Albert, Senior Attorney, Lawyers for Civil Rights**, addressed the Board on CTE admissions
* **Denise Pigeon, Superintendent, Nashoba Valley Technical High School and President, Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA); Michael Watson, Superintendent, Greater New Bedford Vocational Technical High School; and Tim Norris, Attorney for MAVA,** addressed the Board on CTE admissions
* **Glenn Koocher, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Committees,** addressed the Board on CTE admissions

**Comments from the Chair**

Chair Craven thanked the members for their work on the Board, noting members serving on the Commissioner search committee and members serving on the Board’s CTE admissions committee. Chair Craven highlighted the Teacher of the Year, Luisa Sparrow, and acknowledged with appreciation that Wellpoint donated a $10,000 grant to Ms. Sparrow’s school to purchase school supplies and materials. Chair Craven said she was pleased to meet Kareem Weaver during a panel last week and noted his mission to improve the teaching of reading as a civil rights issue. Lastly, Chair Craven commented that the Supreme Judicial Court in 1993 set forth the state’s constitutional duty regarding education, even as the updated competency determination law gives responsibilities to local education agencies.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler congratulated the Teacher of the Year, Luisa Sparrow. Secretary Tutwiler recalled the celebratory announcement at Ms. Sparrow’s school during which he had the opportunity to visit Ms. Sparrow’s classroom. Secretary Tutwiler also commented that FY26 budget planning is well underway, and he looks forward to continuing the momentum from the past two years with the FY26 education budget proposal.

**Comments from Acting Commissioner**

Acting Commissioner Johnston commented on each receivership district. First, he highlighted his ongoing meetings with the Holyoke School Committee’s local control subcommittee and said they are well on their way to meeting their milestones to exit receivership. Second, Acting Commissioner Johnston said he met recently with local leaders in Lawrence regarding the development of a multi-year strategic plan that will live alongside the turnaround plan. The Acting Commissioner described ongoing support that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is providing to Southbridge in order to strengthen leadership relations across town government and school committee and ultimately a basis for the transition to local control. Lastly, Acting Commissioner Johnston announced the John Avery Parker School in New Bedford will exit chronically underperforming status on January 1, 2025, with exit assurances remaining in place until June 30, 2025, at which time the school will transition into an early childhood center.

Acting Commissioner Johnston also informed the Board that regulatory updates will be on the agenda for upcoming Board meetings, including updates to educator licensure regulations aligned to the Massachusetts Leads Act.

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

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

**VOTED:**  **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the November 15, 2024, special meeting, November 18, 2024, special meeting and November 19, 2024, regular meeting.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Update on Commissioner Search Process**

Chair Craven introduced Arianna Williams from Isaacson Miller, who provided an update on the Commissioner search process. Ms. Williams thanked the Board members who are participating on the search committee. Ms. Williams said the job description has been finalized and posted to the DESE website, the preliminary screening committee of internal and external stakeholders had its first meeting, and applications, nominations, and inquiries have been coming in over the past month. She said the preliminary screening committee will be meeting to confidentially screen applicants and then the public interviews of finalists will be conducted. Ms. Williams responded to questions from Board members.

Acting Commissioner Johnston then announced that he will not be applying for the position. Chair Craven thanked Acting Commissioner Johnston for his many years of outstanding service to the students of the Commonwealth and said while she is sad about his decision, she respects that it is a personal decision. Board members then commented on Acting Commissioner Johnston’s announcement.

**Teacher of the Year**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced the 2025 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Luisa Sparrow, a special education teacher for fifth- and sixth-grade students at the Oliver Hazard Perry School in South Boston.

Ms. Sparrow stated that nearly 8 out of every 10 adults with intellectual disabilities are not employed, due to a lack of access and not due to a lack of ability. She said she believes in the importance of inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities and, in fact, research shows academic and social benefits for all students who participate in inclusive environments. Ms. Sparrow stated her vision for reframing inclusion in schools so that all students feel a sense of connection, contribution, and belonging. Ms. Sparrow thanked Board members, her colleagues, and all educators across the Commonwealth. Ms. Sparrow then responded to comments and questions from the Board.

Acting Commissioner Johnston and Board members gathered with Ms. Sparrow for photographs. Chair Craven called for a short break at 10:30 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:45 a.m.

**Educational Vision and Advancing Student Learning Update**

Chair Craven asked Acting Commissioner Johnston to provide the Educational Vision update. Acting Commissioner Johnston updated the Board on the DESE as Partner Planning Process that is entering its third year. He reviewed how DESE is providing coherent and aligned resources, guidance, and tools to support schools and districts in improving student learning and outcomes. Acting Commissioner Johnston then responded to questions from Board members regarding the Advancing Student Learning working group, high-dosage tutoring, and the use of the Racial Equity Decision-making Tool (REDT) in the strategic planning process.

**Career Technical Education Admissions Committee Update**

Chair Craven introduced Member West to provide an update on the CTE admissions committee, which he chairs. Member West thanked Chair Craven for creating the committee and said the purpose is to answer the question: *Are changes needed to promote more equitable access to career and technical education schools in the Commonwealth and if so, what are possible approaches?* Member West said the committee will come back to the Board with recommendations. Member West summarized the two meetings the committee has held thus far, including the information that DESE provided for the committee’s review. He noted DESE is currently working on a further data request from the committee. Other Board members commented on their participation on the committee and posed questions to which Member West, Chair Craven, and Acting Commissioner Johnston responded. Chair Craven thanked Member West for taking on this assignment. Acting Commissioner Johnston said he expects to bring recommendations to the Board after the committee completes its work.

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools: Tuition Rate**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced the topic of the tuition rate for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools (CMVS) as a follow-up to the discussion that occurred at the November 19, 2024 Board meeting. Acting Commissioner Johnston recommended that the Board vote to amend the certificates for GCVS and TECCA to specify a per pupil tuition rate of $13,114 with $75 per pupil retained by the Department for program administration. Each school will receive the net amount of $13,039 per pupil, effective FY26. He further recommended that the Board delegate to the Commissioner authority to revise this rate for FY26 to reflect the annual Chapter 70 inflationary adjustment and amend their certificates accordingly. Chair Craven thanked Acting Commissioner Johnston for the process that led to the recommendation. With no questions from members, she called for a motion.

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

**VOTED:** **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 94, and 603 CMR 52.07, hereby amends the certificates of the Greater Commonwealth Virtual School and the TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School to specify an annual per pupil tuition amount of $13,114, with $75 per pupil retained by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for administration of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual schools program. The cost of special education services shall be calculated in accordance with 603 CMR 10.07(3) and shall be added to the per pupil tuition amount unless such services are provided in kind by the sending district. These amendments shall be effective July 1, 2025.**

**The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education further delegates authority to the Commissioner, in accordance with General Laws c. 15, § 1F, paragraph 3, to act on behalf of the Board in amending the current certificates for the Greater Commonwealth Virtual School and the TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School to increase the annual per pupil tuition amount by no more than the annual rate of inflation for fiscal year 2026.  Any such increase shall only occur in compliance with G.L. c. 71, § 94(k) and shall occur by December 31 of the fiscal year preceding the effective date of any increase in the per pupil tuition rate.**

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual Schools shall be operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 94; 603 CMR 52.00; and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations and such conditions as the Commissioner or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may from time to time establish, all of which shall be deemed conditions of the certificate.**

The vote was unanimous.

**Competency Determination Update**

Acting Commissioner Johnston introduced Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability to discuss the new statutory provisions and guidance relating to the competency determination. Mr. Curtin presented on the new language of the statute and the Department’s three stages of work ahead as it relates to the competency determination. These three stages include responsibilities for both DESE and the Board related to the short-term (class of 2025), medium-term (current high school students), and long-term (students not yet in grade 9). Mr. Curtin said if there is further legislation, DESE and the Board would need to take it into account. Mr. Curtin outlined examples of topics covered in the updated guidance document that DESE issued in December. Mr. Curtin and Acting Commissioner Johnston then responded to questions from Board members. Chair Craven said the Board will continue to discuss the competency determination at its upcoming meetings.

With today’s agenda concluded, Chair Craven asked to adjourn the meeting in memory of Francis X. Bellotti, former Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General of the Commonwealth, who passed away this morning at age 101.

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

**VOTED:**  **that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns the meeting at 12:22 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

 Respectfully submitted,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

and Secretary to the Board