



*News from Commissioner Mitchell Chester & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Commissioner's Weekly Update - August 28, 2015

Commissioner's Back-to-School Message:

Last year, in my back-to-school message, I complimented our educators for having achieved the strongest academic track record in the nation; the lowest dropout rate in more than three decades; and the highest graduation rate since we began calculating the four-year rate. One year later, I am proud to salute continued improvement in these outcomes.

This week I taped a back-to-school message for one of the Boston-area television stations. My message to parents and students was simple: The Commonwealth's students can look forward to an exciting, challenging, and rewarding school year, and parents can be confident that their children attend school in the state with the strongest educational system in the nation.

A core strength of our system is the dedication of our educators to continuous improvement. Educators across the Commonwealth are upgrading the program of instruction while implementing new evaluation protocols that link educator goals to school improvement initiatives and student learning. We increasingly are turning our attention to the social/emotional well being of our youth while advancing the education they will need to succeed after high school.

This fall, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will determine whether to adopt PARCC or continue (and revise) MCAS. As strong as our educational program is, there are still too many students who meet our graduation requirements and then find out that they are not ready for credit-bearing college work or for the expectations of employers.

I am committed to promoting a balanced deliberation about the future of education policy and practice in the Commonwealth, and to preventing hyperbole from dominating the discussion. For example, contrary to some narratives that paint teacher morale in a negative light, in 2014 when more than 38,000 of Massachusetts's teachers responded to the TELL MASS survey: 83 percent considered their school a good place to teach and work; 86 percent planned to remain teaching in their school; 78 percent reported being recognized as educational experts; and 84 percent reported that they are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.

I look forward to our first full school year under the leadership of Governor Charlie Baker, Education Secretary Jim Peyser, and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Chair Paul Sagan. The thoughtful and respectful way in which the new administration has embraced the education initiatives underway is heartening. One of the unique features of the Commonwealth's education track record is continuity over more than two decades. Building on 20 Years of Massachusetts Education Reform traces the through-path of the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act up to present-day policy and initiatives.

I look forward to another productive year as we work together to ensure a promising future for all of the Commonwealth's youth. Thank you for your dedication to this effort.

Assessment Resources for Parents and Educators:

Attached to this email are two fact sheets that address questions about statewide assessments this year and the fact that the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will vote this fall on whether to use PARCC in the spring. One of the handouts is aimed primarily at parents, while the second is designed for teachers and administrators. Please feel free to share these widely through back-to-school mailings, meetings and open houses.

Picture of the Week:



Earlier this week teachers at the Elias J. Brookings Elementary School in Springfield participated in professional development to meet their goal of ensuring rigorous and robust math learning for all Brookings students.



Supporting teacher leadership: Members of ESE's Teacher Advisory Cabinet have collaborated with members of the Principal Advisory Cabinet to produce a six-page compilation of advice for their peers about [how to build a school culture that supports teacher leadership](#). Readers will find helpful tips about what teacher leadership looks like and how to foster it.

For Your Info:

- The Education Development Center, Inc. ([EDC](#)) has been awarded a STEM+Computing Partnership (STEM+C) grant from the National Science Foundation to work with the ESE over the next three years to expand and strengthen computer science education in Massachusetts. The Department is pleased to be working with EDC, MassCAN, and other STEM stakeholders to develop and disseminate curriculum resources and professional development opportunities that integrate computer science with other STEM disciplines to teachers across the state. Please see EDC's website for more information: <http://ltd.edc.org/STEMCAward>.

- Check out a new video on the Department's homepage- [Preparing Massachusetts Students for Successful Careers](#). The video highlights students and districts involved in the [Connecting Activities](#) initiative, [Career Vocational Technical Education](#), and [Adult Community Learning Services](#).

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