



**Report to the Legislature:
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Strategic Plan**

7010-0005
November 2008



This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D
Commissioner

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

November 10, 2008

Dear Members of the General Court:

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature on the Department's strategic plan pursuant to Chapter 182 of the Acts of 2008, line item 7010-0005:

"...provided further, that not later than November 17, 2008, the department shall submit a progress report... on efforts by the department to further define and advance the strategic vision of the department, along with a detailed implementation plan for realizing that vision...."

I began as your newly appointed commissioner on May 19, 2008 and scheduled myself extensively with legislative leaders and stakeholder groups so that I could learn more about the state's strategic needs and priorities for education policy. In my candidacy for the position, I signaled that closing gaps in achievement and in expectations for college and career readiness would be among my highest priorities for the K-12 system.

Informed by these discussions and reports of Governor Patrick's Readiness Project, members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and I held a retreat in early August to agree upon the following goals and priorities for the work of the Board and Department over the coming several years. They anticipate that they will revisit this list from time to time to account for changes in stakeholder needs and shifting priorities; hence, they are "working" goals and priorities.

- ***Educator Development***
- ***Curriculum and Instruction***
- ***Accountability Redesign***
- ***Supports for Students and Families***
- ***State Leadership and Operations***

The Department's senior staff has begun assigning staff responsibility for these tasks and identifying the tangible progress expected to be made by June 2009 on each priority. An internal report on progress in each priority area will be completed in summer 2009, in time to inform the Board and Department's agendas for the 2009-2010 school year and the FY11 budget process.

The Department is also in the process of reorganizing its staff to help us reach these goals and priorities more efficiently. This year's budget challenges and hiring freeze have meant that immediate implementation of the full planned reorganization was not possible. Nonetheless, the Department is making efforts to reallocate staff and prioritize new hiring to move the agency closer to its planned structure over time. More details including the organizational chart can be found in the text of the report.

If you have any questions, or would like further discussion, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: Department of Elementary and Secondary Strategic Plan pursuant to Chapter 182 of the Acts of 2008, line item 7010-0005:

“...provided further, that not later than November 17, 2008, the department shall submit a progress report to the secretary of administration and finance, the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means and the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on education on efforts by the department to further define and advance the strategic vision of the department, along with a detailed implementation plan for realizing that vision.”

Background

This was a year of transition in public education. After former commissioner David Driscoll retired in August 2007, Deputy Commissioner Jeffrey Nellhaus filled in as acting commissioner for nearly nine months until newly appointed commissioner Mitchell Chester began his new job on May 19, 2008. Dr. Chester began his work here in Massachusetts by meeting extensively with stakeholder groups so that he could learn more about the state’s strategic needs and priorities for education policy. He also signaled that closing gaps in achievement and in expectations for college and career readiness would be among his highest priorities for the K–12 system.

At the same time, Governor Patrick established the Executive Office of Education, led by newly appointed Secretary of Education Paul Reville. This office was established to coordinate the work in all levels of education from preschool to college. Its first task, the Readiness Project, was to produce a statewide 10-year strategic plan for education policy in the Commonwealth. This report was released in June 2008.

Informed by these discussions and reports, the commissioner and members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education held a retreat in early August to agree upon the following specific goals and priorities for their work over the coming several years. They anticipate that they will revisit this list from time to time to account for changes in stakeholder needs and shifting priorities; hence, they are “working” goals and priorities.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Working Goals and Priorities, 2008–2010

1. Educator Development

Work in partnership with key stakeholders to establish an effective educator workforce development system, including recruitment, preparation, licensure, license renewal, induction, mentoring, supervision, evaluation, and career enhancement.

- 1.1 Propose a licensure system that simplifies the process and ensures high standards of professional practice.

- 1.2 Identify professional teaching standards to be adopted by the Board to guide the preparation and development of highly effective teachers.
- 1.3 Identify administrator standards to be adopted by the Board to guide the preparation and development of highly effective school and district leaders.
- 1.4 Identify and disseminate exemplary practices of recruitment, preparation, licensure, license renewal, induction, mentoring, supervision, evaluation, and career enhancement.
- 1.5 Develop mechanisms to ensure that all schools and districts have strong and stable faculty and leadership.

2. Curriculum and Instruction

Work in partnership with key stakeholders to build capacity of schools and districts to provide high quality curriculum and instruction for all students and prepare them for college and careers.

- 2.1 Create a unit dedicated to curriculum and instruction to support the efforts of schools and districts to improve teaching and learning.
- 2.2 Complete the review of the English language arts and mathematics frameworks; identify the next framework to review.
- 2.3 Identify ways to incorporate the recommendations of the 21st Century Skills Task Force into state standards, instructional supports, and assessment systems.
- 2.4 Identify the goals, requirements, and desired modifications for the next phase of the state assessment system.
- 2.5 Develop a strategy for targeting professional development and curriculum resources to address the highest priority needs of schools and districts, including the need for stronger math content knowledge among teachers.
- 2.6 Develop a strategy to improve literacy for all students, with a focus on early grades, adolescents, adult literacy, English language learners, and students with disabilities.
- 2.7 Strengthen the high school curriculum through strategic implementation of the Educational Proficiency Plan, the Certificate of Occupational Proficiency, the Algebra II exam, the Certificate of Mastery, dual enrollment, and other programs and policies targeted at increasing college and career readiness.
- 2.8 Identify and disseminate best district and school practices, including lessons learned from districts and schools that are outperforming comparable schools and districts.

3. Accountability Redesign

Work in partnership with stakeholders to develop the processes for district and school review and assistance that will produce an efficient, integrated, transparent, fair, and

effective system for building the capacity of districts and schools to ensure high level teaching and learning.

- 3.1 Organize the Department to assume responsibility for all district and school reviews and strengthen the Department's capacity to intervene and provide support.
- 3.2 Form the Advisory Council on Accountability and Assistance required by statute to ensure active stakeholder engagement in improving the effectiveness of the accountability and assistance system.
- 3.3 Clarify the criteria by which districts and schools enter and exit accountability status, as well as the criteria by which charter schools are renewed, and incorporate multiple indicators in the performance expectations.
- 3.4 Revise and update the existing accountability regulations.
- 3.5 Identify and disseminate information about patterns of school and district resource allocation that may promote or impede high quality teaching and learning.
- 3.6 Streamline and integrate existing school and district review processes wherever possible.
- 3.7 Encourage smaller districts to collaborate with each other in order to achieve efficiencies and improve educational programs, including conducting studies to evaluate options for increasing district collaboration.
- 3.8 Accelerate the development of a regional system of assistance designed to build the capacity of smaller districts to improve teaching and learning, especially in schools and districts identified for improvement.

4. Supports for Students and Families

Work in partnership with stakeholders to provide students and families with access to the school- and community-based social, health, nutrition, and other supports they need to benefit from educational opportunity.

- 4.1 Initiate a systematic examination of elementary, middle, and high school practices related to dropout prevention and recovery with special attention to early indicators of dropout; identify and disseminate promising practices.
- 4.2 Work with the Department of Early Education and Care and agencies within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services on implementing the provisions of the Children's Mental Health Act.
- 4.3 Identify, pilot, and disseminate models for more effectively engaging parents in support of their children's academic success.
- 4.4 Identify ways to integrate existing state and federal grant programs in order to have greater impact on student readiness to learn; for example, coordinating the 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, after-

school and out-of-school time grants, and supplemental education services mandated under Title I.

5. State Leadership and Operations

Organize and build capacity within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to assist schools and districts.

- 5.1 Make better use of program evaluation information and other data to inform policy recommendations and practice.
- 5.2 Establish systematic and effective two-way communication with the field.
- 5.3 Enhance internal communications to make the agency more effective.
- 5.4 Update the Department's strategic plan to address the new agency focus on assistance and Readiness initiatives.
- 5.5 Organize the Department to implement these goals and priorities, including creating a unit dedicated to curriculum and instruction.
- 5.6 Update the Department's outdated grants management technology. Streamline and coordinate the grant-making process.
- 5.7 Move to the new building in January 2009.

Implementation Plan

The Department's senior staff has begun assigning staff responsibility for these tasks and identifying the tangible progress expected to be made by June 2009 on each priority. These milestones and outcomes will drive senior staff discussions throughout the year on progress towards the agency's overall vision and goals. An internal report on progress in each priority area will be completed in summer 2009, in time to inform the Board and Department's agendas for the 2009–2010 school year and the FY11 budget process.

The Department is also in the process of reorganizing its staff to help us reach these goals and priorities more efficiently. (See the organizational chart in the next section for more details.) Under the new structure, the agency is broken into two divisions: the Division for Learning, Leadership, and Information and the Division for Accountability, Partnerships, and Assistance. Within each division several new centers and units have been created, such as:

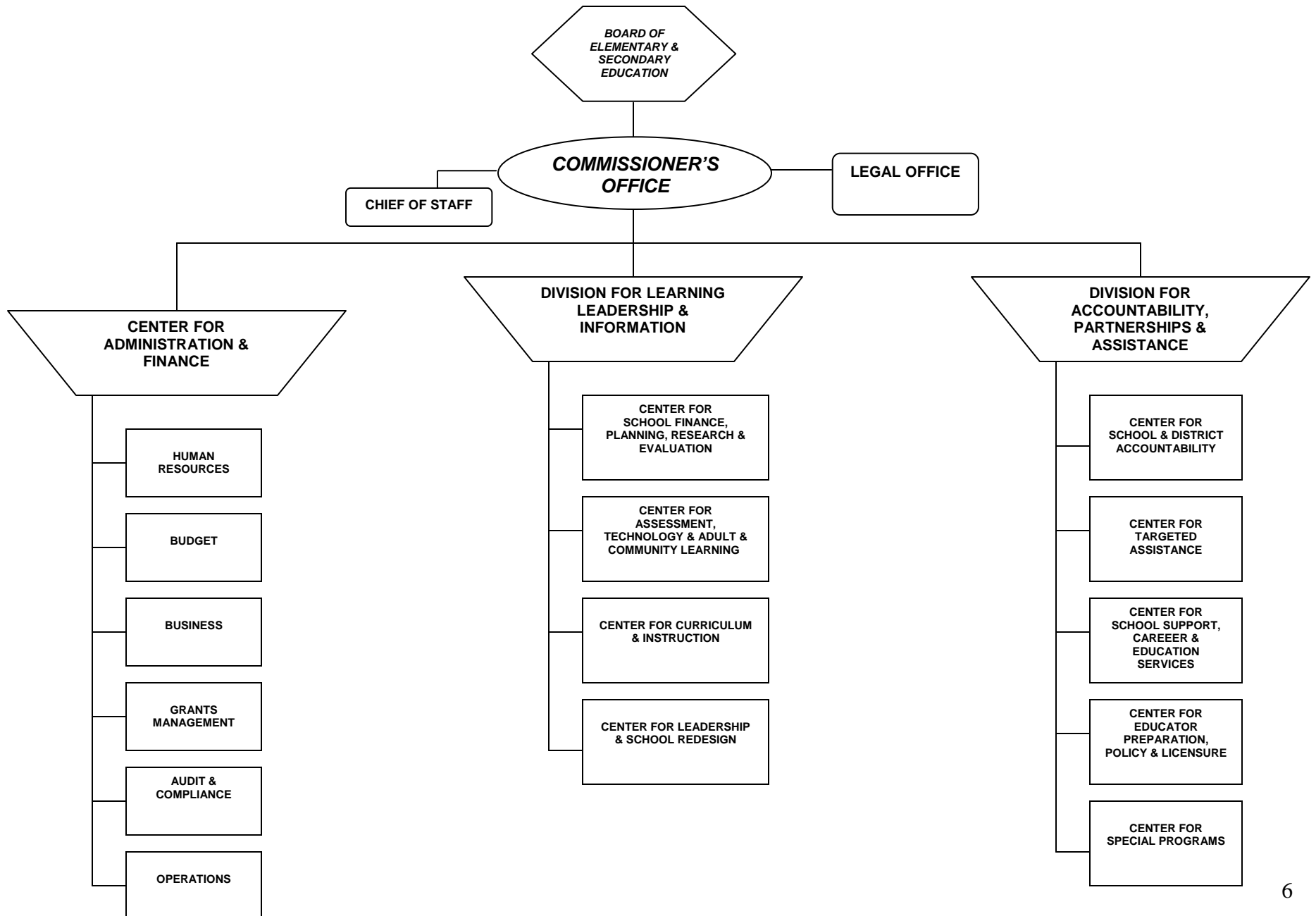
- A center for school and district accountability and a center for targeted assistance, meeting both a legislative mandate and the agency's desire to better integrate district auditing results with its targeted assistance efforts
- A center for curriculum and instruction, bringing together the curriculum specialists in literacy; mathematics, science, and technology/engineering; humanities, history, and social science; English language acquisition; and instructional technology
- A center for leadership and innovation, bringing together the charter school office; the Expanded Learning Time, Commonwealth Pilot, and Readiness Schools office; and the educator leadership team

- A center combining the previously separate functions of strategic planning, research, analysis, reporting, and school finance.

This year's budget challenges and hiring freeze have meant that immediate implementation of the full planned reorganization was not possible. Nonetheless, the Department is making efforts to reallocate staff and prioritize new hiring to move the agency closer to its planned structure over time. Similarly, its move to a new building in early 2009 will allow it an opportunity to reconfigure its use of space to promote the goals of the reorganization.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



APPENDIX A

Chapter 182 of the Acts of 2008

7010-0005 For the operation of the department of elementary and secondary education; provided, that the department, in collaboration with the commission on gay and lesbian youth established by section 67 of chapter 3 of the General Laws, shall allocate not less than \$300,000 for programming to ensure public schools' compliance with the board of elementary and secondary education's recommendations for the support and safety of gay and lesbian students and the implementation of related suicide-prevention and violence-prevention efforts; provided further, that not less than \$100,000 shall be expended for the operation of the student advisory council established pursuant to section 1E of chapter 15 of the General Laws; and provided further, that not later than November 17, 2008 , the department shall submit a progress report to the secretary of administration and finance, the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means and the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on education on efforts by the department to further define and advance the strategic vision of the department, along with a detailed implementation plan for realizing that vision.....\$16,780,047