



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

February 15, 2024

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to let you know that after six years of service, I am stepping down from my position as Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, effective March 15, 2024. It has been the honor of my lifetime to work with and for you on behalf of the students, teachers, and families of the Commonwealth.

I leave grateful for the work we have done together including, but not limited to:

- adoption of a new comprehensive health and physical education curriculum framework that is responsive to our students' needs;
- the continued diversification of our educator corps;
- the development and implementation of a new form and procedure for IEPs that will improve outcomes for students with disabilities;
- significant expansion in our early college programs and after-dark career technical education programs;
- creation of an innovative science assessment and a new civics assessment;
- promotion of more rigorous and engaging deeper learning opportunities for our students through our Kaleidoscope network; and
- our unified, successful advocacy for universal school meals and to improve early literacy education by expanding access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction for students across Massachusetts.

On this last item we are particularly grateful to Governor Maura Healey for her proposed investment in the urgently needed Literacy Launch initiative.

Ultimately, no matter the progress described above, the central, novel challenge of our time together was the Covid pandemic. Through collaboration with infectious disease physicians and multiple state agencies, we produced nation-leading Covid-19 school reopening guidance in June 2020 and served as an early and continuous advocate for a safe return to in-person learning.

Especially important were our contributions to the national research on the safety of three-feet of social distancing, our implementation of a new "Test and Stay" protocol, and the decision to require that all schools return to in-person learning beginning in April 2021, over strong objections from many, when it became apparent that in-school transmission rates were extremely low. Indeed, we provided early warnings that prolonged disruptions to in-person learning would also create significant challenges to students' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

We also issued comprehensive guidance to support students' academic and social-emotional recovery from the pandemic through our Acceleration Roadmap, and provided districts with access to mental health grants, new tutoring programs, and acceleration academies.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of our administrators, educators, students, and families, Massachusetts remained the top-ranked state on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card." But we should not underestimate the impact that remote and hybrid learning had on our students' emotional health and academic progress, particularly for urban students who largely remained in remote learning longer than their rural and suburban peers. And so the process of recovery needs to continue.

A Time for Change

After six years of service, I have come to the conclusion that now is the right time for me to pass the baton. On a personal level, my role as a son to aging parents requires more of my time, and my commitment to provide that support is not compatible with the demands of the Commissioner's job. More broadly, as I reflected on major new initiatives such as the Literacy Launch, I realized the Commonwealth needs and deserves a Commissioner who can commit on an all-in basis for at least another five years, and I simply cannot do that.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, I hope that the next Commissioner, working with the Board and Department staff, can advance a collaborative, pragmatic agenda that builds on our Educational Vision; respects our superintendents, educators, and students; and recognizes and effectively supports the realities of our post-Covid educational landscape. After guiding our schools through the pandemic, advancing initiatives to bolster teaching and learning, laying the groundwork for education innovations, and seeing initial signs of recovery, I believe the time is right for a new Commissioner to work with the Board and Department staff to implement our vision and key strategies through to completion.

For my part, after 30 years as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and Commissioner, it is time to start a new chapter. I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to serve as the Commonwealth's 24th Commissioner and look forward to continuing to be your biggest advocate on behalf of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey C. Riley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeffrey" being more prominent and the last name "Riley" following in a similar style.

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner