

## Martinez Recommended as New Commissioner

Having received the two-thirds of the Board votes as necessary, current Chicago Chief Executive Officer Pedro Martinez has been recommended by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to Secretary Patrick Tutwiler as the next Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Martinez has been one of three finalists considered by the Board, alongside former Texas Education Agency Deputy Commissioner Lily Laux and Executive Director of the Michigan Education Workforce Initiative Jack Elsey. The three finalists were interviewed last Thursday, April 17 at Mass Bay Community College.

Martinez emigrated to the United States from Mexico at the age of



**Pedro Martinez | photo via Chicago Public Schools**

five. The eldest of twelve children, he is a graduate of the Chicago Public Schools. He said in his interview that he was the first in his family to graduate from high school, and the first to go to college. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Illinois, and an M.B.A. from DePaul University in Chicago. He started his career in public

education as budget director in the Chicago Public Schools, where, as he said in his interview, he took time “to really understand the work of teachers.” After five years with CPS, he was made the Chief Financial Officer of the system.

He worked for two Nevada school districts—Washoe County and Clark County—in deputy superintendent positions, becoming the superintendent of Washoe County in 2012. He spoke at some length in his interview of the experience of rural school districts from his time in Nevada, of “how fragile rural communities are,” and of the work to ensure rural students have access to the same opportunities as their suburban and urban

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## House Ways and Means Budget Proposal Released

The House Ways and Means Committee has released its FY26 budget. Representatives are now preparing and filing amendments ahead of the budget debate starting April 28.

Below is a summary of key education-related funding items and how they compare to the Governor’s proposal. Some figures may reflect funds carried forward from the recently passed FY25 supplemental budget. It’s also common for line items to be adjusted or omitted during this stage as part of ongoing negotiations between the House, Senate, and Governor. The Senate will release its budget in May.

### KEY COMPARISONS – HOUSE W&M VS. GOVERNOR FY26 BUDGETS

**Chapter 70 Aid:** Funded at \$7.12B, up from \$6.86B in FY25 and slightly higher than the Governor’s proposal. Fully implements the Student Opportunity Act in year 5 of the 6-year implementation plan. House increases minimum per-pupil aid from Governor’s proposed \$75 to \$150 (which would benefit 77% of school districts (245 out of 318) that were set to receive an increase of less than \$150 per student for FY26).

**Circuit Breaker Reimbursement:** Funded at \$674.7M, significantly higher than both FY25 and the Governor’s proposed level. This number

includes \$190M from the recently approved FY25 Supplemental Budget that is marked for FY26.

**Charter School Reimbursement:** Level-funded by the House, the proposal would meet the state’s obligation to mitigate Ch. 70 losses; Governor proposed a 6.7% reduction.

**Regional School Transportation:** Both the House W&M and Governor Budget proposals fund the item at \$122M – representing a 23% increase over FY25. According to updated cost projections from DESE, the proposal would reimburse 98% of anticipated claims. \$15M of the \$122M allocation stems from the FY25 Supplemental Budget.

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## Grant Joins Board of Education

On March 25, **Dr. Christina Grant** was sworn in as the newest member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Dr. Grant is the Executive Director of the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University with substantial experience in education leadership, strategic management, and data-driven policy.

Her career spans roles as an educator, administrator, and executive in some of the nation's largest school systems. At CEPR, she leads efforts to unite researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in creating transformative partnerships grounded in rigorous research, with a focus on improving student outcomes and academic acceleration.

Dr. Grant previously served as the State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia, where she oversaw grants, standards, assessments, and accountability for elementary and secondary schools. She led the first revision of social studies standards in 20 years and directed a \$100 million investment in post-pandemic academic recovery programs.

Prior to her role in D.C., Dr. Grant served as the Chief of Charter Schools and Innovation for the Philadelphia School District, where she played a pivotal role in redesigning accountability metrics and managing the district's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Grant has served as a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, where she taught courses on educational leadership. She began her career as a public-school teacher in Harlem and has held leadership positions at the Great Oaks Foundation and the New York City Department of Education.

Dr. Grant holds a doctorate in education with a focus on organizational leadership from the University of Pennsylvania, two master's degrees—one in organizational leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University, and one in teaching and adolescent reading from Fordham University—and a bachelor's degree from Hofstra University.



Grant and Education Secretary Tutwiler

## MA NEWS

### STATEWIDE GRADUATION COUNCIL MEETINGS BEGIN

The first meeting of the K-12 Statewide Graduation Council was held late last month at Worcester State University. Earlier this year, Governor Healey signed Executive Order 639 that established the 33-member Council to study and make recommendations on how Massachusetts can ensure that all students graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in college, careers, and civic life, regardless of their background or location and demonstrate these qualities through a consistent statewide set of expectations. Council members include Massachusetts education association leaders and practitioners, educators, students, parents, legislators, and business leaders.

MASC President Jason Fraser, a member of the Plympton and Silver Lake Regional School Committees will represent the Association on the Council.

The council will launch six regional and virtual listening sessions starting April 10 at Taunton High School to gather feedback directly from communities, including students, families, educators, administrators, higher education experts, the business community, and the public. The council will also review current practices across the country, assess existing local variations in graduation requirements and explore what skills and knowledge Massachusetts students need to thrive in college, careers, and civic life, including potential course requirements, examinations, and alternative methods of demonstrating student achievement.

The council will be co-chaired by Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler and the incoming Elementary and Secondary Education commissioner (who is expected to be announced before the end of the month). People can learn more about the graduation council, upcoming meetings and regional listening sessions at [Mass.gov/K12GradCouncil](https://Mass.gov/K12GradCouncil).

## new commissioner

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peers. He spoke of leveraging the resources of the state in support, and in working with superintendents and districts to first ask what they need.

Prior to his time as C.E.O. in Chicago, Martinez was the Superintendent of the San Antonio Independent School District. He was leading San Antonio during the height of the pandemic, and he spoke of the weekly, then every other week meetings with principals, where one of his instructions to his team was that they would listen to the critiques of those on the ground: "they're going to complain; they're going to vent; you're going to take it, and you're not going to respond." The weekly calls ensured the district was responsive to the needs of the schools. San Antonio also passed two major building bonds during his time, enabling the district to modernize every high school and the majority of the elementary schools. He said communities are willing to

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# Guidance on non-discrimination compliance regulations

Prepared by MASC General Counsel Patrick Francomano, Esq., following release of related response to the OCR from MA Secretary of Education/Interim Commissioner Patrick Tutwiler

The US DOE Office of Civil Rights (OCR) recently requested that SEAs (state education agencies, i.e., the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)) sign a reaffirmation concerning compliance with federal non-discrimination provisions with specific references to DEI programs and *SFFA v. Harvard*, which dealt with race-conscious admissions programs at the college level. Additionally, SEAs were requested to report the signature status for each of its LEAs, (local education agencies, i.e., your school district) along with any compliance issues found within the LEAs, and the proposed enforcement plans for those LEAs.

DESE's forceful and thoughtful

response, provided by Interim Commissioner Dr. Patrick A. Tutwiler (which is posted on the MASC website), reaffirms the Commonwealth's commitment to compliance with "Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, its implementing regulation, and Supreme Court cases interpreting the same" and challenges the authority of US DOE "to demand that SEAs obtain individual certifications in this form from LEAs, report on their signature status, or propose enforcement plans in connection with a Request for Certification of this nature."

**Please note that your district is not required to take any action at this time. The original OCR communication was directed to DESE and the**

**matter remains a state-level issue.**

We will need to wait and see how OCR reacts, but obviously there is significant concern over any potential loss of federal funding and financial contingency plans will need to be developed.

This remains an unsettling and challenging time for many, including those tasked with providing the fundamental elements of a quality public education. We will continue to monitor events and work with all stakeholders. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or comments and you are encouraged to speak with your district counsel on district specific issues.

## Budget Proposal

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**McKinney-Vento:** The House bill would level-fund reimbursements for the transportation of homeless students at \$28.6M for FY26. According to updated cost projections from DESE, the House proposal represents 58% of anticipated claims for FY26.

**School Meals Reimbursement:** \$190M allocated; \$20M more than the Governor's level-funded proposal.

**Early Literacy Programs:** Funded at \$15M by the House; \$5M less than last year, and \$10M less than the Governor's proposal.

**Rural School Aid:** Funded at \$7.5M; half of last year's amount and less than the \$16M proposed by the Governor.

**Executive Office of Education:** Funded at \$3.2M; Governor proposed nearly level-funding at \$13.3M.

**Green Energy Infrastructure Grants** (School Upgrades): Funded at \$20M; double last year's allocation.

**Early College Pathways:** Funded at \$14.2M; significantly more than the Governor's \$2.5M proposal.

### ITEMS IN ONLY THE HOUSE OR GOVERNOR'S FY26 BUDGET

Line Items Omitted in House Budget (included in Governor's): Social-Emotional Learning Grants; Mental Health & Wraparound Supports; Genocide Education Trust Fund. Combined total: nearly \$14M in the Governor's FY26 plan and previously funded in FY25.

**Line Items Included in House Budget (not in Governor's):** Wellness supports; Civics Education; and College & Career Readiness. Combined total: \$2.875M.

### Development in Voc-Tech Admissions Policy

The House budget proposal includes language establishing a Task Force on Vocational-Technical Education Admissions. The 15-member group would be charged with examining and making recommendations on:

- Admissions policies under Ch. 74,
- The collection and analysis of admissions and waitlist data at both the

district and state level, and

- Standards for oversight and enforcement related to these admissions practices.

The task force would be co-chaired by the House and Senate Education Committee chairs and include legislators, agency representatives, and members from education and municipal organizations, including MASC. The group is required to hold its first meeting by September 15, 2025, conduct at least one public hearing, and file a report with its findings and recommendations by September 15, 2026. The language would also prohibit DESE from making changes to the voc-tech admissions policy before the report from the task force is completed.

**Don't forget to join us at MASC's Day on the Hill on May 6 — a great opportunity to connect with legislators and advocate for our shared priorities. Reach out with any questions!**



# Gordon and Ayers are newly appointed House Education Committee Chairs

The newly appointed Chair of the House Education Committee is Representative Ken Gordon; the newly appointed Vice Chair is Representative Bruce Ayers.

**Ken Gordon** has represented Bedford, Burlington and Wilmington since 2013. During his first term as State Representative, Gordon helped to reduce the impact of family homelessness in the district and secured permanent education funding for the children of military families stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base. He championed the Uniform Wage Compliance and the Parental Leave Acts which were both signed into law last summer.

Representative Gordon has been a lawyer for 25 years and the last dozen he has specialized in representing employees who suffer discrimination or wrongful termination at the workplace. Earlier in his career he was a sportswriter with The Palm Beach Post & Evening Times, affiliated with Boston Globe & Sporting News.

Gordon received a BA from Northeastern University and a JD from Suffolk University.



**Bruce Ayers** is a small business owner and State Representative for the 1st Norfolk District, serving parts of Quincy and Randolph. He was appointed this session to serve as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Education.

For over 30 years Representative Ayers owned and operated Ayers Handicap, where he converted vehicles for people with disabilities. Prior to his election to the legislature, he served 4 terms on the Quincy City Council. His legislative work focuses on education, economic development, public safety, and disability advocacy.

Representative Ayers is a longtime sponsor of the MA Youth & Government program, which promotes civic education for high school students. He has also volunteered for over 25 years as chairman of the Quincy Lodge of Elks Scholarship Committee.

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tax themselves if they trust you and your vision.

Receiving a call to go back to Chicago as C.E.O. in 2021, Martinez spoke of understanding the communities you're serving, of going in on the ground level and listening to those there. He spoke with pride of the progress made by English learner students during his time there. He also noted, both of Chicago and elsewhere, of receiving pushback, and of that being

part of leadership; he said, it's "not just about vision, not just about values; it's how you walk those values...[how you] stand up for those values."

During his interview, Martinez repeatedly noted his fascination with the close correlation in Massachusetts between proficiency rates and poverty rates, observing that it was growth that told more of the story. He said he would be interested in the history of how we got here. This focus on and his-

tory of closing of gaps, along with his strength as one (as Member Fisher said) who "can fight the good fight," particularly in light of the federal scene, were among the reasons cited by Board members for their votes in support.

This recommendation goes to Secretary Tutwiler, who supported his candidacy, for appointment as the next Commissioner.

The Board next meets Tuesday, April 29 for their regular monthly meeting.

Massachusetts Association of School Committees  
One McKinley Square  
Boston, MA 02109

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