



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant, Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-5023

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

March 6, 2009

Mayor Robert Correia
Chair, School Committee, Fall River Public Schools
One Government Center
Fall River, MA 02722

Dear Mayor Correia,

Enclosed is the Evaluation Report prepared by the Office of School and District Accountability here at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This Report responds to your January request for "a comprehensive, independent review of the Fall River Public Schools." The findings made by the Review Team are clear and compelling.

The Report paints a sobering picture of a school district with persistent, serious, and systemic problems. Despite this picture, I am heartened by the initiative that you took to request the review. In other circumstances I likely would have recommended to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that Fall River be declared an Underperforming District. In light of your embrace of state assistance and intervention, as well as promising signs of forward momentum in the past two months, I have decided not to recommend a declaration of underperforming status at this time.

The Report's recommendations are comprehensive and provide a sound starting point for district recovery. In order for the School Committee to demonstrate that it is committed to moving the district forward, I am directing that the following actions be implemented:

1. Recovery Plan approved by Commissioner: With direction from the Department's Office of Accountability, the Superintendent and School Committee prepare and endorse a Recovery Plan that:
 - a. Addresses the deficiencies identified in the Report;
 - b. Identifies benchmarks of progress for which the district will be held accountable; and,
 - c. Specifies the assistance to be provided by the Department's Office of Targeted Assistance.

2. Accountability Monitor: I will appoint a Monitor from the Department's Office of Accountability who will guide the planning process, observe its implementation, and report to me regularly (formally every six months) on the progress being made to achieve the benchmarks specified in the Recovery Plan.

The School Committee and district leaders will work with the monitor, who will serve as my representative to the district.

The children and young people of Fall River deserve far better than what they have been receiving from their public schools for a long time. I am hopeful that under your leadership and that of Superintendent Mayo-Brown, and with the Evaluation Report as a guidepost, Fall River is ready to move forward and put in place the changes that will drive improved results for the children of the community.

I await your reply indicating whether the Fall River School Committee and Superintendent are prepared to accept the conditions outlined above. You have my assurance that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to the success of the district and to supporting the Recovery Plan that is developed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mitch Chester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mitch" and last name "Chester" clearly distinguishable.

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

cc. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Meg Mayo-Brown, Superintendent of Schools
Karla Baehr, Deputy Commissioner of Assistance, Partnership and Accountability