



Photo by Bob B. Duffy

MTA President Anne Wass makes a point during her testimony as Tom Gosnell, president of AFT Massachusetts, looks on.

New Secretary of Education Position Created

Brett M. Rhyne, Perspective editor

BOSTON — The Legislature approved by a wide margin Governor Deval Patrick’s proposal to create a cabinet-level education secretary position and to reorganize the state’s educational apparatus. The \$1.5 million proposal was voted on the week of Feb. 4 and now awaits Patrick’s signature.

The plan’s passing was quick action on the part of legislators, who heard testimony in support of the proposal from Patrick and a number of labor and educational leaders Jan. 29.

“We need a structure that provides comprehensive accountability,” Patrick said. “With this, we’re creating a vessel to receive and implement recommendations” to improve the education of all students.

Patrick stressed that the new position would not duplicate any existing roles, but instead would serve a coordinating function among the three existing educational oversight entities: the Department of Early Education and Care; the Department of Education, to be renamed the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; and the Board of Higher Education, to

be recreated as a Department of Higher Education.

The proposal, HR4488, would add two seats to each of the three boards. The education secretary would sit on the boards but would not chair any of them.

In her testimony, Massachusetts Teachers Association President Anne Wass said HR4488 “strikes a good balance that addresses many of our concerns about making the three boards of education more representative and responsive to the stakeholders and citizens.”

“Establishing a secretary with budget and planning oversight over all three sectors,” she went on to say, “should help bring about much-needed coordination.”

Patrick’s top education adviser, Bridgewater State College President Dana Mohler-Faria, followed Patrick’s overview with a more detailed discussion of HR4488. He stressed the goal of providing Massachusetts students continuity throughout their education.

“Most importantly,” he said, “the proposal would create a seamless, direct path from pre-K through higher ed and beyond.”

As soon as word leaked out that Patrick hoped to create a secretary of education, during the week of Jan. 7, Mohler-Faria was considered a prime candidate for the job. To date, neither Patrick nor Mohler-Faria have commented publicly on the potential appointment.

But Frederick W. Clark, chairman of the Board of Higher Education and a longtime associate of Mohler-Faria’s — Clark was a Bridgewater State trustee — downplayed the possibility.

Mohler-Faria, he said, “is not interested in the position, in my opinion.” While careful to say he was not privy to Mohler-Faria’s thoughts on the matter, Clark believed Mohler-Faria “would like to go back to Bridgewater and apply what he’s learned” as adviser to the governor.

Patrick presented HR4488 to the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight, the members of which were joined by legislators from the Joint Committees on both Education and Higher Education.

On the whole, legislators received Patrick’s proposal enthusiastically. Representative William Brownsberger (D-Belmont) was the first to respond, pledging his support and offering Patrick his congratulations. Chairman Antonio F.D. Cabral (D-New Bedford) then asked if anyone else had comments for the governor.

“Other comments in that spirit would be welcome,” Patrick interjected, getting a laugh from the 100 people in attendance.

Once Patrick signs HR4488, it will become law March 10.



Photo by Brett Rhyne

Governor Deval Patrick presents HR4488 to the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight.