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EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 a.m. FRIDAY, Sept. 19

Lawrence Public Schools Show Major Progress in Year 2

Lawrence, Mass. (Sept. 19, 2014) – After Year 2 of the district turnaround effort, Lawrence Public Schools showed major improvements in MCAS scores. This builds on the trends after Year 1, which showed strong initial gains.

Released today by the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education, the results show **student growth in English Language Arts (ELA) moved up five percentage points to 52 — the highest level in district history — while math growth held at 57, which remains among the highest of any urban district in the Commonwealth.** This places Lawrence in the top quarter of gateway Cities for student growth in both ELA and math.

Student proficiency increased by three percentage points in both ELA and math. This is the first time ELA proficiency in Lawrence has increased in over four years. Math proficiency increases build on the district's 10-point proficiency jump last year.

Finally, **Lawrence again added two new Level 1 schools** (Parthum Middle School, gr. 5-8; and Leahy School, gr. K-5), bringing the total number of Level 1's to 6, up from 4 last year and 2 two years ago. Schools designated Level 1 are meeting state performance targets.

“These results validate the continued hard work of our teachers, school leaders, students and families,” said Receiver Jeffrey C. Riley. “I am especially pleased with the progress at the K-8 level, where we’ve invested a lot of time and attention over the past two years.”

He added, “We are excited about these results. Thanks to the hard work and efforts of so many people, we can say that students in Lawrence are getting a better education today than at any point in recent history. We may be the fastest improving urban district, and are climbing the ranks in terms of performance among Gateway Cities, but we are not satisfied. We still have a long way to go to give our kids the world-class education they deserve.”

A key component of the turnaround plan put in place by Riley is collaboration with teachers, including both the Lawrence Teachers Union and its national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers.

National AFT President Randi Weingarten hailed today's announcement as an affirmation of the importance of that approach.

"For public education to fulfill its obligation as an opportunity agent for children, there must be less blaming of and more collaborating with educators, parents and the broader community to create the tools, time and trust needed for student success -- that's why what's happening in Lawrence is so groundbreaking," Weingarten said. "Administrators are teaming up with parents, teachers and their union, working together to learn and execute best practices that are giving students the rich, holistic instruction with wraparound supports they need to succeed. The motto in Lawrence—'collaboration, intervention, enrichment'—was very much alive in the schools I visited there two weeks ago. I witnessed firsthand the leadership role teachers are taking in their schools."

She continued, "The MCAS results prove that returning authority to schools—where the community is welcome, and where principals and teachers are empowered to make decisions—creates a culture of trust that ultimately benefits students, parents and the communities where they live."

Added Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, "These MCAS scores clearly show that the children of Lawrence are able to achieve anything when given proper help and support, and the same is true for their teachers. We are particularly proud that results from the AFT/district alliance at the Oliver Partnership School are among the best in the city."

Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera noted the importance of these first two year's results for the long-term improvement of Lawrence's schools.

"The progress in the schools' MCAS is not just good news, it represents hard fought battles that establish a beach head in our war to reduce the achievement and opportunity gaps," Rivera said. "We are proud of the work that teachers, students, parents and Superintendent Jeff Riley and his team have done, and applaud their progress."

In addition to the dedication of teachers and students, Riley attributed the district's results to continued efforts to deepen school autonomy, while supporting schools centrally to succeed. He noted the district is focusing its improvement efforts around four pillars of great teaching and learning:

- **Rigorous standards.** Giving principals and teacher leadership teams more control over curriculum, professional development, and school schedule, to design standards-based programs that meet the needs of their students.
- **High-quality enrichment.** Increasing access to the arts, music, theater, step dancing, robotics and other opportunities for students. While the skills these activities impart may not directly show up on a test, they help ensure students are engaged in school and impart other important skills that show up later in life.
- **Effort / Mindset.** Teaching students that hard work matters and providing opportunities for students to learn beyond the school day. Over 2,000 students gave up their February vacation

and another 2,000 gave up their April to come in for vacation academies, which provide intensive instruction to small groups of students targeted to their unique needs.

- **Critical Thinking.** Schools are also working to improve the quality and rigor of their lessons, moving beyond textbook teaching to higher-order activities and lessons that engage students at a deeper level.

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