

DESE picks new K-12 commissioner

By Maya Mitchell
Boston University Statehouse Program

The Massachusetts Department of Secondary Education voted to nominate Pedro Martinez as the new commissioner of the state's K-12 education department on Tuesday.

Martinez is currently the outgoing chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools and has served as experience leading school departments in Nevada and Texas.

“This is the single most important decision that this board or any board can make,” said DESE vice chair Matt Hills. “We get this right, we get the best chance of getting the success we want in the key areas we want. If we get it wrong, it almost doesn't matter what else we do.”

The board said they were looking for someone that had practiced experience with K-12 policy, high level administrative and managerial acumen, visionary and inclusive leadership skills, commitment to diverse communities, would champion educators and students, who was a data driven strategist and more.

“[Martinez] has had progressive experience in increasingly larger and more complex organizations with significantly increased political situations,” said Hills. “This is someone who has been able to lead large organizations to get pretty significantly positive results in key education priorities that we have.”

Martinez was selected out of three finalists and 42 candidates recruited from all over the country. The other two finalists were Lily Laux, the former deputy commissioner of school programs for the Texas Education Agency and Jack Elsey, the founder and chief executive of the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative.

Two board members – Dalida Rocha and Mary Ann Stewart – said they supported Laux. Rocha abstained from voting and Stewart voted present. The vote needed a two-thirds majority to pass and nominate Martinez.

DESE chair Kathleen Craven said her decision to back Martinez was in part due to his “proven track record” working with districts and the U.S. Secretary of Education given the “uncertainty at the federal level.”

The meeting consisted of two votes– the first nominating Martinez and the second authorizing Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler to enter into negotiations with him.

If approved, Martinez will be the first Latino to hold the position.