

FRAMINGHAM

## Education chief pays visit

### State commissioner looks for ideas to apply elsewhere

BY SCOTT O'CONNELL

DAILY NEWS STAFF

FRAMINGHAM — Barbieri Elementary School's two-way bilingual program may serve as a model for the Lawrence school district, which is the target of a state takeover.

Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester visited the Dudley Road school yesterday morning, where he was led by students on a tour of the building and met with school staff and parents in focus groups.

Chester makes regular visits to districts throughout the state, but Barbieri in particular was a relevant destination given the troubles in Lawrence, which has a large population of students whose first language is not English, said Department of Elementary and Secondary Education spokesman J.C. Considine.

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education last Tuesday voted to take over the struggling district and give it to a new receiver.

Barbieri's bilingual program "is not only a model program in the state, but also nationally," Considine said. "I know (Chester) was anxious to get out there."

The district tries to keep a 50 percent mix of English and Spanish-speaking students in the program, who are gradually taught to become fluent in both languages. The students can continue to participate in the program at Walsh Middle School and Framingham High School.

"Barbieri's been doing this for a long time, and we're constantly looking for ways to get better," said the school's principal, Susan McGilvray-Rivet. "If we can share what we've learned with others, we're happy to do so."

The state is hoping to dramatically boost English Language Arts scores in the Lawrence schools, which are among the lowest in Massachusetts. On his visit to Framingham, Chester "seemed to want to know if a model like Barbieri's would work in Lawrence," said School Committee Chairwoman Beverly Hugo.

"We were definitely impressed," she said. "It really was a point of pride."

Chester is expected to name a receiver for the Lawrence schools within the next week.

That individual or group would then take over the district in January, replacing the superintendent and school committee.

In a statement announcing the takeover last Tuesday, Chester said he wants to "transform Lawrence into a district where strong educational outcomes are the rule and no longer the exception."

"I firmly believe that all Lawrence students are as capable as students anywhere in the commonwealth of learning and achieving at high levels," he said.

*(Scott O'Connell can be reached at 508-626-4449)*