

Massachusetts Association of School Committees

Conference 2014 Recap: School Leaders Encouraged about Advances/Promises in Student Achievement

In more than 75 sessions, many of them standing room only, a record 900 plus school committee members, superintendents, school business officers, educators and education professionals exchanged ideas and, best practices and discussed strategies that would directly support student achievement.

The event was the MASC/MASS Annual Joint Conference in Hyannis, which achieved not only record attendance but record reviews for its programs, speakers and focus on students.

Highlights of this year's program, much of which can be downloaded on the MASC website, included the opening night election recap and forecast from TV/radio host/political commentator **Jim Braude** and **Moe Cunningham**, professor of political science at UMA-Boston. On Thursday, General Session speaker **Doug Stone** who teaches negotiations at Harvard Law School, engaged the audience in an amusing, but thought-provoking walk-through of how to accept and learn from feedback in our professional and personal lives.

On Friday, conference participants were in awe of speaker **Herman Boone**, the former coach of the award-winning high school football team, the Titans, who used his common sense, inspirational and thought-provoking manner, tinged throughout with humor and tenacity, to show members how to face challenges as school leaders and to be courageous in working together to build a unified team.

with all stakeholders with the goal of improving the opportunities for all children.

Addressing student challenges at the other end of the age spectrum was Friday lunch guest speaker **Tom Weber**, Commissioner of Early Education and Care. Weber spoke passionately—and convincingly—about the urgent need to address the learning and literacy gap that can take root even before students enter kindergarten and suggested ways in which the Department can better support the work of public pre-and elementary schools.

The four-day event was not limited to adults talking about student needs and how to help them achieve: students themselves were also featured on the program. Wednesday night honored the **2014 Skills USA Gold Medal winners** who placed ahead of all 49 states in their category competition. Wednesday evening also featured a riveting a cappella choral performance by the **Brookline High School Camerata Choir** and Friday night attendees were treated to musical selections by the **Medford High School Orchestra**. Saturday featured a "first-ever" **Student Voices Luncheon**

during which a panel of current and former student leaders (organized and moderated by Leicester School Committee member Tyler Keenan, a recent graduate of the Leicester Public Schools) spoke honestly and insightfully about their school experience, the challenges and pressures (both real and perceived) and what changes or new initiatives could be put in place to help students prepare for the world of college and work.

Friday evening also welcomed MASC's incoming Board of Directors, newly elected Life Members, and Lifetime Achievement and All-State School Committee award recipients. In addition, distinguished service award presentations were made to former Education Commissioner and current President of Fitchburg State University **Robert Antonucci**, who received MASC's highest honor—the Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. award for a lifetime of service to the students of the Commonwealth. Also honored were Brookline **Representative Frank Smizik** as MASC Legislator of the Year and **Ted Darling** from Rindge Alumni Association who was recognized as a "Friend of Public Education."

In turning over the gavel to incoming President Patrick Francomano, **Ann Marie Cugno** reminded the audience of MASC's leadership role on critical issues over the past year.

"We took the lead in slowing down the PARCC implementation process, encouraging districts to voice their concerns about the pace and requirements of the new test and engaging DESE in conversations to consider those concerns.

"As recent surveys have shown, including one by Panorama Education—a 2014 Conference Sponsor Partner—the education community is increasingly aware that funding inequities are among the greatest challenges that MA school districts are facing. For years, MASC has been at the forefront of those insisting that the foundation funding formula needs to be rethought, and recalcul-

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MA NEWS

DESE PROPOSAL TO LINK LICENSURE TO ED EVALUATIONS IS RESCINDED

In response to feedback from the field, much of it taking place over the course of more than five hours of open meetings and discussions at the MASC/MASS Joint Conference last month in Hyannis, DESE has pulled back its proposed draft polity options that intended to link licensure renewals to educator evaluation.

The Department received considerable opposition from school leaders and administrators about the proposal which was introduced with no warning and less input. In a letter to administrators and faculty explaining the decision to rescind the initiative, the Commissioner indicated that he had hoped the options would be a catalyst for exploring potential refinements to the licensure system. "While we are not interested in linking employment evaluations with licensure, we are interested in suggestions for refinements to licensure. To this end, we continue to look for input on current and potential requirements for licensure...and are interested in feedback on both the shortcomings and the strengths of the existing licensure system. In addition, we are seeking input on the possibility of three categories of licensure: beginning licensure, license renewal, and advanced licensure."

MASC will provide updates on this topic as we learn them.

TOOLS for SCHOOLS

SHARE THE JOY OF READING WITH STUDENTS IN NEED

Your school (or your family) can add to your library shelves and at the same time provide books to children and programs where quality reading materials are in short supply. BookBugs (www.BookBugs.net) is a recently launched online bookstore whose mission is to get all children excited about reading, with particular emphasis on reaching out to underprivileged students who may have limited access to age-appropriate books that they will enjoy. For every three books your district (or you as an individual) purchase through the online bookstore, BookBugs will donate one to a child in need. This 3-for-1 giving program will empower not only your students but those in less fortunate communities as well.

In addition to its social mission, BookBugs is also focused on helping students improve their reading skills through their partnership with Lexile (www.lexile.com) which can help librarians, parents and other professionals find books closely tailored to a children's reading abilities and ensure that books are continually challenging young readers. Lexile scores provide a



BookBugs

detailed analysis of the reading difficulty of books (with over 200,000 books currently in their rating system), based on a child's actual reading ability rather than simply based on grade level. A book subscription service is available and subscribers will complete a short survey to help BookBugs learn more about your reader(s) and your reader(s) interests and preferences. Books are matched to your reader's ability (though you will get a chance to "veto" any book before it is sent)

and over time the books will increase in difficulty to make sure the reader is improving at an appropriate pace. And best of all, subscribers know that they are also contributing to programs in their communities that are focused on improving childhood literacy. For more information: www.BookBugs.net or contact Dave Rader at Dave@BookBugs.net.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, January 10
Foundation Budget Review Commission Public Hearing
Location: TBD

Thursday, January 29
Division I Meeting: Budget & Finance Issues
7:00pm Location: TBD

Panorama Education Surveys Education Leaders on Priorities/Other Issues



schools." The online survey generated more than 300 responses.

Other findings included attitudes toward teacher pedagogy, with 75% of superintendents viewing professional development opportunities as useful for teachers, while only 51% of school committee members believed the same.

In the increasingly targeted area of parental engagement, 43% of sub-

urban respondents considered their district parents as engaged in school improvement initiatives, but only 8% of urban respondents said the same.

Based in Boston, Panorama Education works with school districts nationwide to run student, parent and teacher feedback surveys. Panorama's survey and data analysis platform provides school district leaders with powerful insights into feedback on topics like school climate, learning environments, parent engagement and more. To learn more about Panorama's surveys and analytics services for school districts go to www.panoramaed.com.

REPORT ON RESOLUTIONS 2014

The following is a report on actions taken on the resolutions that were considered by the Delegate Assembly at the annual meeting in Hyannis on Wednesday, November 5.

RESOLUTION I: GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENT COSTS

(Submitted by the Framingham School Committee)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees file for and support legislation that will require institutions providing out-of-district placements for education to file End-of-Year Reports that reflect in detail and inclusiveness that of corporate annual reports and stock offering schedules, and post salaries with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

An amendment was proposed by the Delegate from Brookline such that the amended resolution would read as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees file for and/or support legislation that will require institutions providing out-of-district placements for education to file End-of-Year Reports with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that include, but not be limited to: 1) detail on any corporate earnings and stock offering schedules, 2) all staff and board salaries, and 3) an independent financial audit, consistent with that required of Education Collaboratives under MGL Chap 40, Sec 4E and 603 CMR 50.08(2).

Without objection, the amendment was accepted following a request by the delegate from Framingham who sponsored the initial resolution.

The amended resolution was approved on a voice vote.

RESOLUTION 2: UNIVERSAL QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN ACCESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

(Submitted by the Framingham School Committee)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees file or support legislation that will provide the appropriation for universal pre-k in Massachusetts and will take the steps necessary to provide access to good, quality universal pre-k for all children in Massachusetts.

The resolution was approved, as submitted, on a vote of 69 (in favor), 34 (opposed) and 3 abstentions.

RESOLUTION 3: CHARTER SCHOOL REFORM

(Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees call upon the legislature to enact charter school reform legislation that will include provisions that:

- Require BESE to consider social and economic impact upon the districts from which new or expanding charter schools would recruit students.
- Require a strong provision to prevent skimming and suspensions from charter schools that return students whom they no longer wish to enroll to the sending districts.
- Finance reform so that charter school expropriations from local Chapter 70 funding does not severely damage the sending districts.
- Require timely reporting on accountability with meaningful data on student attendance, expulsions and

suspensions, student at economic risk (low income) in comparison with sending districts.

- Establishment of benchmarks to measure success
- Establishment of a formula for evaluating school districts that uses a "growth" component that is not less than 50% of the formula.
- Require on an annual basis the reporting of best practices and innovation to the "sending" school districts.

The resolution was approved, as submitted, on a voice vote.

RESOLUTION 4: FINGERPRINTING

(Submitted by the MASC Resolutions Committee)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees calls upon the legislature to establish such legislation and require that the administering agencies:

- Conduct a periodic system review to consider means of streamlining and reducing costs of operation.
- Ensure that teachers be fingerprinted upon their initial licensure under the supervision of DESE.
- Establish the requirement that teachers be fingerprinted upon their re-certification if they are not already fingerprinted.
- Establish DESE as the clearing-house for all fingerprinting checks for all educators.

An amendment was proposed to eliminate the final bullet (see italic). The amendment was adopted with three votes in opposition.

The amended resolution was adopted on a vote of 61 (in favor) to 30 (opposed).

RESOLUTION 5: REINSTITUTION OF EARMARKING

(Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees supports the reinstatement of federal earmarks for school districts, regional school districts and municipalities through the federal appropriations process.

The resolution was approved, as submitted, on a voice vote.

school committee members in the process of choosing an assessment instrument and to refrain from committing to any instrument before this process is complete.

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RESOLUTION 6: UNFUNDED MANDATES AND NEW TESTING

(Submitted by the Arlington, Chelmsford, Lincoln-Sudbury, Mendon-Upton, Northbridge, Holbrook, Woburn and Worcester School Committees)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees calls upon the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the legislature to refrain from adding new mandates including new tests and other initiatives and to revisit the mandates already imposed on districts with a view to reducing interference with classroom instruction, thus allowing educators to do their work.

The resolution was approved, as submitted, on a voice vote.

An amendment was proposed by the delegate from Tantasqua Regional to strike the words "conduct further examination of options for a state evaluation and accountability system and to" and inserting after the word Education the following: "to suspend implementation of the Common Core standards and PARCC assessment and to conduct an examination of Massachusetts education standards and its evaluation and accountability system. Such evaluation should. . ."

An amendment was proposed to the amendment to replace the word "suspend" with "reexamine."

The amended amendment was approved on a vote of 58 (in favor), 27 (opposed) with 11 abstentions.

The resolution, as amended, was approved on a vote of 69 (in favor), 21 (opposed) with 3 abstentions.

PROPOSALS TO AMEND THE MASC BY-LAWS

The following by-law change to Article VIII by adding the following paragraph:

"During the interim period between meetings of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee may take such actions on behalf of the Board as it deems prudent on matters that require immediate action and shall report such action immediately to the full membership of the Board of Directors."

The change was approved on a voice vote.

The following by-law change to Article V, subsection 4 to delete the following sentence:

"Division officers shall take office on July 1 following election."

And to substitute the following: "Division officers shall take office on January 1 following election. The meeting shall be held at or in advance of the Annual Meeting of the Association, or, if a quorum cannot be reached, then as soon as is practical."

An amendment was proposed to change the date of July 1 to December 31.

The amendment was approved on a voice vote, and the change to the by-law, as amended, was approved.

A motion was made to adjourn. The motion was approved and seconded. The meeting adjourned at 5:10pm.

RESOLUTION 7: ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN MASSACHUSETTS

(Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees urges the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to conduct further examination of options for a state evaluation and accountability system and to substantially involve educators and

The final resolution reads as follows:
BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees urges the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to reexamine the Common Core standards and PARCC assessment and to conduct an examination of Massachusetts education standards and its evaluation and accountability system.

Such evaluation should substantially involve educators and school committee members in the process of choosing an assessment instrument,

Joint Conference

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lated. In last year's budget the Legislature reconvened the long-stagnant Foundation Budget Review Commission. At this time I am proud to say that MASC is represented with two seats on the 26-member Commission which over the next few months will be visiting districts around the state hearing from education leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members on how to improve the ailing and inadequate formula.

"Incoming President Patrick Francomano and I represent you on that Commission, as well as on the PARCC Advisory Committee which is truly the hot seat in town right now. We will keep the membership informed of our discussions and encourage you to reach out to us with your thoughts and concerns."

In his own remarks, **Francomano** continued the theme of leadership to support student achievement and the courage to stand up to individuals and decisions that could undermine or impede progress to date.

Recalling the words of John Adams as they were incorporated into the MA Constitution, "*it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all*

future periods of this commonwealth, to cherish. . .the public schools and grammar schools in the towns" he asked whether anyone in the audience was feeling cherished by the legislature lately?

"While MASC has many strong supporters on Beacon Hill, there are too many who do not fully appreciate the fundamental importance of public education and the challenges associated with teaching all our children," he noted. The current funding formula "outdated and fundamentally flawed" prevents us from providing all students with the vibrant, comprehensive, and challenging educational opportunities they deserve."

The Frameworks/Common Core controversy? "We need to ensure that our standards are developmentally appropriate and whatever evaluation system is used it must be a fair and reliable measure of student achievement—not a tool to undermine public education or demoralize students, teachers and administrators."

Charter school reform? "Charter schools must be held to the same standards of transparency and accountability as all other public schools, and evaluated as to whether they are meeting their original charge

as "incubators of innovation." Are they truly repositories of best practices, or at best a minimally retooled product at the expense of children and taxpayers, or worse yet, a vehicle for 21st century resegregation."

"What creative solutions can we develop to address how race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status contribute to the significant achievement gaps among our children—a situation that is morally deplorable," he asked. "What can we do to ensure that 40-60% of our students who receive a diploma from us don't arrive at college doorsteps requiring remedial classes? What type of culture can we create that will establish the credibility of our teachers, administrators and school committees as the true guardians of high quality, cost-effective public education?"

With these challenges, Francomano set the agenda for the upcoming year, but concluded "we have shown ourselves to be above the petty fray. Our voices will continue to be heard and respected and we will make every effort to engage in meaningful, collaborative problem-solving."

MASC

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