

DAY ON THE HILL: A Critical Time for our Critical Issues

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of NOW.”

Those are the words of Martin Luther King, spoken in April, 1967. The urgency that he referenced was the war in Vietnam but today, almost 50 years later, it’s another equally divisive and entrenched struggle that school leaders are engaged in: specifically, the battle to sustain adequate and equitable funding to ensure academic success and improved outcomes for all students.

In this wildly unpredictable (!) election year, our list of priorities has never been more critical. Chapter 70 funding. Charter school appropriations. PARCC (and/or) MCAS 2.0. The (mostly ignored in the Governor’s 2017 budget) Foundation Budget Review recommendations. Proposed ballot questions that could have last-

ing (and devastating) impact on public schools and their students. The inability of local budgets to fund the unprecedented costs of health care, special education and the services required by students in suburban as well as urban districts who are facing the insidious challenges of poverty and diminished resources.

With the state budget season underway and the looming possibility of increased and costly requirements despite stagnant funding, NOW is the time for vigorous and positive action. Never has it been more imperative for MASC to remind legislators that if Massachusetts is to continue to lead the nation in the strong performance of its students and its strong economic engine, Beacon Hill and locally elected leaders must commit to providing the necessary resources and supports.

MASC President Jake Oliveira (Lud-
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IN MEMORIAM



Roberta G. Doering

MASC mourns the passing on March 20 of Roberta Doering, a 47-year member of the Agawam School Committee.

Mrs. Doering also served as President of both MASC (1986) and the National School Boards Association (1995), the first person from Massachusetts to serve on the NSBA board of directors and its executive committee.

She also served on numerous state and national education study commissions, including the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the American School Health Association’s AIDS Advisory Committee and chaired several committees of the Mas-

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Gillette Stadium Hosts MASC/New England Dairy Council “Breaking the Cycle of Poverty” Program



More than 125 school committee members, superintendents, business managers and food services personnel (representing more than 35 school districts from across the state) participated in teams at the recent MASC-New England Dairy & Food Council program “Breaking the Cycle of Poverty: One Meal at a Time” held on March 8 at Gillette Stadium. The event, which coincided with National School Breakfast Week, brought together proponents and practitioners who help make possible healthy eating and lifestyle choices in MA school classrooms. MASC President Jake Oliveira of Ludlow welcomed attendees to the program and introduced keynote speakers who included, among others, MA Congressman James McGovern, Columbia University Professor and Researcher

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NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS APPROVED BY BESE

New charter schools will be opening later this year in Brockton and Springfield and existing charter schools in Boston and Everett will be able to add seats following the February 23 vote by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. The decision to approve the expansion was approved on a 7-3 vote.

The New Heights Charter School in Brockton will enroll students from Brockton, Taunton and Randolph in grades 6-12. The Libertas Academy Charter School in Springfield is projected to open to students (grades 6-12) in the city in the fall of 2017. The New Heights Charter expects to open in August, 2016.

In Boston, three current K-8 schools will consolidate into one school and add a high school. The Neighborhood House school in Dorchester will also add a high school to its existing K-8 program.

In Everett, the Pioneer School of Science will add kindergarten through grade 6 to its existing 7-12 program.

Last fall, Governor Baker filed

legislation that would lift the current cap of 120 charter schools state-wide. Following a hard-hitting round of well-researched and documented protest (led by the State Auditor and MASC among others) over the funding, accountability, approval and selection/retention inconsistencies that charter schools inappropriately benefit from—to the detriment of local public schools, the state legislature agreed to appoint a special committee to review concerns and (hopefully) arrive at a legislative compromise.

Should the committee be unable to reach a solution, the issue would be put to the voters as a special ballot question “An Act to Allow Fair Access to Public Charter Schools” at the November, 2016 election. If approved by the voters (and proponents of the legislation have pledged huge sums of money to fund awareness of the initiative), the BESE would be able to approve up to 12 additional Commonwealth Charter Schools each year above the limit set by current law, but restrict the number of new students to one percent of the total MA student population (currently about 980,000 students). The proposed ballot leg-

islation would also prioritize new charters in districts that have the lowest 25% of student performance based on state measurements.

MASC and other charter cap lift opponents have been forthright in explaining why lifting the cap at this time is unwise public policy (for comprehensive documentation, go to www.masc.org). As an alternative, MASC has supported a series of reforms that include: establishing strict measures against selective recruitment and subsequent discharge of students; local approval requirements for new and expanded charter schools; some measure of oversight of charters by local officials; guaranteeing full funding of the charter school reimbursement account (beyond year one); and transparency for compliance with the Open Meeting, Public Records and state Ethics laws.

Charter school expansion and the proposed ballot question will be on the agenda at MASC’s Day on the Hill at the State House on Tuesday, April 26. Register to attend the program and receive all the supplemental materials at www.masc.org.

Board of Education Update

reported by Tracy Novick, MASC Field Director

At the March meeting of the Board of Education, DESE Commissioner Mitchell Chester announced that Jessica Huizenga, currently assistant superintendent in Cambridge, has been appointed receiver for the Southbridge Public Schools. Prior to her time in Cambridge, Dr. Huizenga was interim superintendent in Freetown-Lakeville. She will begin in the district on May 2.

In addition, the Board also discussed recommendations that are being implemented in Holyoke and Southbridge. The latter includes separating the middle and high school into two buildings; the development of a turnaround plan now that the receiver has been

appointed; and a broader reach-out and discussions for improvement at all levels with stakeholder groups.

There was also a presentation by the strategy consultant The Parthenon Group of their final recommendations to the Commissioner regarding the reorganization of DESE: under the proposed recommendations the Commissioner has more direct reports; there is a single Deputy Commissioner, and a more empowered Chief of Staff position. The newly proposed Strategy and Research department may have some oversight under the data management piece of the Foundation Budget Review Commission recommendations.

The main focus of the meeting

was an update on the federal ESSA, with an emphasis on the financial aspect of it. While some Title programs are going up in funding, others are going down, so DESE concludes that the net effect to the state as a whole is flat. DESE further pointed out that this makes up just 5% of education spending in Massachusetts. The other discussion of note regarding funding is the provision that school turnaround funding now is to come out of state Title I funding; it was noted that the 7% that ESSA calls for would be less than 4% plus turnaround funding (what is done now), though long-term funding could be more than that.

BESE member Ed Doherty further requested that DDM’s be put on an upcoming agenda, as

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DAY ON THE HILL

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low) reminds members that “this is a chance to capitalize on the momentum and energy that school committee members have taken up in their districts advocating for local support for the ban on raising the charter cap and the Suburban Coalition resolution on Chapter 70 funding. Day on the Hill will provide you with the resources you need to get your message to legislators about the short and long-term consequences of continuing to under-fund key programs that support student growth and achievement.”

With so many members signing on to recent school-related initiatives, MASC encourages districts to bring local stories to legislators on April 26. The House will be in session that day, so legislators will be in the building and they and their education aides have already been alerted to the MASC event. Don't forget to make an appointment to meet them in their offices and/or invite them to join you at the student-catered lunch in the Great



LEFT TO RIGHT: Education Committee Co-Chairs Representative Alice Peisch and Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz; State Auditor Suzanne Bump; Senate Ways & Means Chair Karen Spilka

Hall. The main portion of the program will include important updates on funding and regulatory issues, and the opportunity to hear from guest speakers including **Senate Ways & Means Chair Karen Spilka** (a former member of the Ashland School Committee), **Education Committee Co-Chairs Representative Alice Peisch** and **Senator Sonia Chang Diaz**, and **State Auditor Suzanne Bump** who is preparing to introduce a major legislative initiative to address the costs and implementation time of education-related legislation and regulations.

NEW THIS YEAR: As in the past, MASC encourages districts to bring

students to Day on the Hill. Students may attend all or part of the program at no charge (but they must be registered). This year, a special session is being designed specifically for students to introduce them to the issues and the legislative process that bills are subject to. The session will be held before the lunch break and will be led by, among others, Representative Sean Garballey of Arlington (who began his public career as the student representative to the Arlington School Committee).

Registration information is being mailed to all members and is posted online. Please contact the MASC office if you have questions (800-392-6023) and check the website for updates and advance materials (www.masc.org). We look forward to seeing you at the State House on Tuesday, April 26.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE SECRETARIES: Are there newly elected members on your committee? Send names and addresses to MASC registrar Sam Cheesman (scheesman@masc.org) so that we can send them their new member packet of materials and get them on our mailing list for upcoming mailings and alerts.

Roberta Doering

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sachusetts Board of Education, including its Basic Skills Advisory Council and the Western Massachusetts Regional Education Council. In addition, she was also actively engaged in several advisory committees for the MA Interscholastic Athletic Association, which presented her in 2009 with their Distinguished Service award.

In 2010, on the occasion of her 40th year on the school committee (all the years served consecutively), the district voted to rename the local middle school the Roberta G. Doering Middle School in tribute to her service and commitment to the students of Agawam. In

November of 2010, MASC presented its highest honor, the Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, Jr. award, to her for lifetime distinguished service. In announcing the award, MASC President Kathleen Robey applauded Roberta’s commitment “to advancing the cause of public education and the passion she consistently demonstrated as an advocate for students and public education. A staunch supporter of local school governance and high standards for school committee members, she has been the model of gracious but firm, open-minded but principled, public service. Advocating for children was how Mrs. Doering made her life.”

Many in the Agawam and Springfield communities will also remember the numerous other local and civic activi-

ties with which she was involved. These included many terms as a member of the Agawam town meeting and personnel board; as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Baystate Medical Center in Springfield on which she served as Vice Chair of its Finance Committee; and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Springfield Library and Museum Association. In addition, she was also actively involved in YMCA governance at both the state and national level: serving as President of the Springfield YMCA (the first woman elected to that office in its 139-year history; as Chair of the Western New England YMCA Cluster and as the East Field Representative to the National Board of the YMCA of the USA.

Board of Education update, *continued from page 2*

student work no longer need (by federal requirement) be part of teacher evaluation; the Commissioner noted that the law does, however, require that students have access to “effective teachers,” thus the state has to have some way of identifying effectiveness.

Finally, the Board received an update on the budget. The Commissioner spoke of a discussion he had with Treasurer Goldberg regarding technology: while there is as yet no official announcement, there is interest in MSBA providing no interest grants to districts

to update technology. Also, as part of a discussion of whether there might be waste in the \$16 billion of spending on education in Massachusetts, Commissioner Chester again raised the question of how new money might be spent, as he did during deliberations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission. He pointed to the new Strategy and Research department as a way in which the state would work to ensure (for example) that money intended for ELL students was spent on them.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, *continued from page 1*

Dr. Charles Basch, Hatfield dairy farmers Darryl and Lucinda Williams as well as New England Patriots player Devin McCourty, former player Jermaine Wiggins and Fitchburg middle schooler Kaden Scopelliti who is the 2016 MA Fuel Up to Play60 Student Ambassador. Sessions focused on: • the science behind why healthier (better nutritioned) students are better learners; • how school breakfast programs can boost student achievement and a district’s bottom line; • how to build a successful school breakfast team; and • best practices. Slide presentations from the sessions can be downloaded from the Events page on the MASC website as well as the link to the special “Fuel Your Community” grant that was announced during the event through which all MA schools are eligible for up to \$4000 to increase access to school breakfast and summer meals.

SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 2 (SAT.)

**Charting the Course and
Multigenerational
Communication Workshop**

West Bridgewater
Middle-Senior High School

APRIL 9-11 (SAT.-MON.)

NSBA Annual Conference
Boston Convention Center

APRIL 14 (TH.)

**MASC Regional Schools
Committee meeting**

Assabet Valley Voc.,
Marlboro

APRIL 26 (TUE.)

DAY ON THE HILL

The State House, Boston

APRIL 29 (FRI.)

**COSCAP Spring
Conference**

North Middlesex Reg. Voc.,
Pepperell

MASC

Boston, MA 02109

One McKinley Square

Massachusetts Association of School Committees