

Legislators of the Year; Tip O'Neill; and Distinguished Public Service Awards to be Presented at Joint Conference

Bridgewater State University President Frederick Clark, U-Mass (Boston) Associate Professor Maurice Cunningham, State Senator Christopher Walsh and Representative Sal DiDomenico will be recognized during the upcoming Joint Conference for their vision, their service, their commitment to public education and as advocates for the students of the Commonwealth.

Clark, who will be presented MASC's Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr. award at the Keynote Dinner on November 1 became President of Bridgewater State in 2015, having previously served the University as Vice President. In that role he worked to expand the number of paid internships for BSU students, and developed and implemented a number of programs to provide college access and supports for at-risk students. Prior to his work at

BSU, Clark served as Chairman of the MA Board of Higher Education, a post to which he was appointed by Governor Deval Patrick. In this role he was instrumental in enhancing the effectiveness of public higher education programs. He also served as executive officer of the MA State Universities Council of Presidents and was a catalyst in the strategy that led to the transition of six of the nine state colleges to state universities and worked to strengthen collaborative efforts between the universities and public K-12 education programs.

A graduate of BSU and Suffolk Law School, Clark credits his years working for Congressman Joseph Moakley as a key component in strengthening his commitment to public service. MASC Immediate Past President Jake Oliveira, who worked with President Clark on the Board of Higher Education, notes that "having known Fred for more than a de-

cade, he is one of the most decent, good hearted people I have ever worked with. As a close aide to the late Congressman Joe Moakley, a protege of Speaker Tip O'Neill, Fred learned early on from these giants of Massachusetts politics what it means to give back and to work to better your community."

At the 2016 Joint Conference, **UMass Boston Associate Professor Maurice "Mo" Cunningham** gave a compelling presentation based on his research of the "dark money" that supported the ballot question to increase the number of charter schools in the Commonwealth. Last month, the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) which investigated the funding trail around the charter ballot question validated Cunningham's research, noting that the New York-based organization, Families for Excellent Schools-Ad-

continued on page 3

Test Results on the Horizon! What to Expect This Year.

With several rounds of changes on testing behind us, a new federal law overseeing education, and a new administration in Washington, it's easy to lose track of what we can expect to see when these changes come home to school districts. To help members better understand the new MCAS assessment, MASC has put together the following primer on what to look for when the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education releases MCAS results and accountability levels the week of October 16.

High schools will receive the same types of information they have been receiving in past years.

Grade 10 took the legacy MCAS and will continue to do so this coming year. Grade 10 students will receive test results; high schools will receive all accountability data. High schools will receive PPI information and accountability percentiles. High schools will be

assigned accountability levels based on testing information, on graduation rates, and (as necessary) on test participation rates, as in past years.

No new schools that took the new test will be assigned to Level 4 or 5 this year.

Schools which took the new MCAS this spring cannot be harmed by those test scores, by vote of the Board of Educa-

tion in 2016 and reconfirmed this past spring. DESE has already issued a statement that no new grade 3-8 schools will be assigned to "underperforming" categories this year.

Schools with students in both grades 3-8 and grades 9-12 may be assigned Level 3 for persistently low graduation rates.

continued on page 2

State Auditor Report on Regional School Districts

The Office of State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump has conducted a study of the local cost impacts of state statutes, regulations and policies impacting regional school districts, and provided recommended changes to support these educational institutions. What follows is a PRELIMINARY REPORT, with the full report to be released shortly.

While highly regarded throughout the country, MA elementary and secondary public school districts share significant funding challenges. Moreover, many of the state's academic regional school districts (RSDs) face particular challenges due to factors such as changing demographics, changes in the level and sources of funding they receive, and issues of governance and operating structures.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural issues in the funding of regional schools discourage further regionalization.

- The Commonwealth should provide financial incentives in amounts that allay and overcome municipal reluctance to regionalization.
- Legislature should fully fund its commitment to reimburse 100 percent of regional transportation expenses, or set a consistent level of reimbursement to support long-term planning.
- DESE should develop a mechanism to provide earlier and more frequent reimbursement of transportation expenditures.
- The Commonwealth should offer an efficiency-sharing stipend to encourage transportation cost-cutting.
- The Legislature should allow certain uses of regional transportation authorities to provide school district transportation services.
- The Commonwealth should consider providing planning grants to examine the combination of existing RSDs into larger groupings.
- The Massachusetts School Building Authority should provide guidance on criteria used to determine if it seeks

to recapture grant money provided to school districts that close school facilities that have previously received MSBA funding.

Regional agreements require periodic review and updating as financial, operating, and demographic changes occur.

- RSDs should review their agreements every five years.
- Agreements that require legislative action should be resolved to allow the normal process of district-based approval and DESE concurrence to move forward.

Enrollment-based annual assessments for member communities can cause conflict, inequities, and budget delays within RSDs

- The Legislature should simplify the budget adoption process to allow RSDs with three or more member to approve budgets based on population.
- The Legislature should empower DESE to pursue a pilot program that would result in a single tax rate across all member towns in a RSD.

Implementation of the Foundation Budget review Commission recommendations will have a positive impact for RSDs

- The Legislature should adopt languages in S 217 to establish a commission on RSD funding.
- State statutes affecting educational cost reimbursements should be revised, including educator evaluation, foster children and students in state care, and reimbursement aid for education of children on a military base.

The current system for inter-district choice and "tuition-in" stipends contribute to disparities in per-public reimbursements for RSDs

- The legislature should work with DESE to revise the arrangement for inter-district choice reimbursements and tuition-in. Tuition-in communities should be encouraged to join regional districts. ♦

Test Results

continued from page 1

Schools, for example, serving grades 7-12 may be assigned to Level 3 this coming year if they have had persistently low graduation rates.

Schools with students in grades 3-8 testing less than 90% of students (by grade or by subgroup) will be assigned Level 3.

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, the state must in some way assure that students, both by grade and by subgroup (ELL, special education, low income) are tested. For 2017, DESE has chosen to do this by assigning those schools that do not meet 90% participation (by grade and by every subgroup) Level 3.

All other schools with students in grades 3-8 WILL NOT receive accountability levels this year.

Under the new testing system and the state's newly accepted ESSA plan, 2017 is a reset year on accountability levels. Schools using the new MCAS will NOT be assigned an accountability level, save for the above-mentioned reasons. These schools also will not receive PPI indexes or school percentiles. Likewise, districts (aside from single school secondary only districts) will not receive district accountability levels.

The new MCAS is a more difficult test, and it is expected that the test results will reflect that.

The state projects that student results will be more in line with the most recent results of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). There will be fewer students achieving in higher categories, not because student learning has been lost, but because the state is applying a higher standard.

Students in grades 3-8 will receive individual results on the new MCAS (released to districts the week of October 23) on a new parent-guardian results report.

Students will receive their individual results in the ELA and mathematics tests on a new report. Test results range from 440 to 560, and scores, as determined this summer through teacher

continued on next page

continued from previous page

panels, fall into four levels:

- **Not Meeting Expectations:** student performance on this test does not meet grade level expectations; family and school should coordinate academic assistance and/or additional instruction.
- **Partially Meeting Expectations:** student performance on this test partly meets grade level expectations; school and family should consider whether additional assistance is needed.
- **Meeting Expectations:** student performance on this test meets grade level expectations; as results are vertically aligned across grades, the student is on track to succeed if achievement continues at this level.
- **Exceeding Expectations:** student performance on this test demonstrates mastery of the subject matter and exceeds grade level expectations. Parents and guardians will also be given: a range of where the student could expect to perform if given the test multiple times; a comparison relative to the school, district, and state; performance by reporting category within the subject area; and number of points earned by each question. Questions are described on DESE's website, so students and families may see the questions as they review the report.

MA NEWS

New Members on Board of Education Introduced

At last month's Board of Education meeting, two new members of the Board were sworn in: **Amanda Fernandez**, who replaces Penny Noyce, and **Martin West**, who replaces Roland Fryer.

Fernandez is the founder and CEO of Latinos for Education, which describes itself as "building an ecosystem of Latino advocates by infusing Latino talent into positions of influence." Previously, she served as Vice President of Diversity and Inclusiveness for Teach for America. Among her current associations is a seat on the KIPP-Massachusetts Board of Trustees.

West is a Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a faculty research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and an editor at Education Next, an online education reform site. West, who advised the Romney campaign on education issues, is a strong supporter of school choice. He testified before the HELP Committee prior to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, advocating for a continuation of grades 3-8 and high school testing as a measurement of student growth, while returning power back to the states.

To learn more about the state's new assessment and accountability system, plan to attend the Joint Conference session on this topic on Thursday, November 2 (2:30-3:45pm). The session will be presented by education

researcher/former director of the Center for Education Policy—MTA Kathleen Skinner; MassInc research director Ben Forman and MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher. ♦

Awards

continued from page 1

vocacy (FESA), that supported the initiative had egregiously violated campaign finance laws by "receiving contributions from individuals and then contributing those funds to the ballot question committee in a manner intended to disguise the true source of the money." The organization was subsequently slapped with a \$426,000 fine—the largest in state campaign history—which effectively put FESA out of business.

Cunningham, who will receive MASC's 2017 Distinguished Public Service award in Hyannis at the Life Member/School Leader Banquet on Friday, November 3 is being honored for his research and writing on the dark money contributions to influence the outcome of last year's ballot question.

"None of this would have hap-

pened had Mo Cunningham not identified and pointed everyone to the source and flow of dark money and continued to expand public knowledge of these irregularities," said MASC President Patrick Murphy. "He pursued the matter, not as an issue related to charter schools, but as an issue of integrity in government. Now our colleagues in other states are looking into the same dark money contributions in their states."

Legislators of the Year

Also being presented at the Conference will be MASC's Legislator of the Year awards, which this year recognize the efforts of **Representative Christopher Walsh** (Framingham) and **Senator Sal DiDomenico** (Cambridge/Everett/Chelsea/Charlestown) on behalf of public education.

MASC President-Elect Beverly Hugo, a member of the Framingham

School Committee, credits Walsh with a legacy of prioritizing legislation related to early education and K-12 students. Currently serving as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Education, she noted that "Representative Walsh has made a commitment to learning the issues in-depth, in part by participating at numerous MASC meetings with area school committee members and focusing his efforts on children and family issues."

Since his election to the State Senate in 2010, Sal DiDomenico has been a vocal advocate for children and families and an ardent champion of MA public schools. MASC Legislative Counsel Stephen Finnegan who has worked closely with DiDomenico on a number of MASC initiatives notes that "the Senator has been a leader in promoting legislation focusing on education,

continued on page 4

Friday/Saturday Focus on Poverty/the Opioid Crisis/ Student Health and Safety/and School Funding Issues

Are you: over-scheduled?
Over-committed? Over-stressed?
Over-whelmed?

Yes?

MASC can help with that.

Take a 36-hour break from all that “stuff” and join other school leaders in Hyannis for the Friday-Saturday portion of the MASC/MASS Joint Conference program. The day and a half will feature “can’t miss” sessions on the state of the economy; the opioid crisis and the looming marijuana issue (including comprehensive school programs and policies to effectively address abuse disorders); SEL, mental health education and safe

driving initiatives; and a number of sessions that will focus on supporting students and families in poverty, and school district immigration and residency issues.

There’s even a session on therapy animals in schools featuring (furry and on-site) Mr. Wuffles (British Bombay mix), Maddie (golden retriever), Fiona (great dane) and Indie (tabby cat). And yes, you can pet them.

And last not but not least, everyone’s favorite topic: money (and budgets—real v. alternative facts; plus cost saving strategies and contracting/ negotiations concerns).

And the savings are yours as well:

the Friday-Saturday registration is a reduced low rate, the hotel has plenty of rooms for Friday night (and they will extend the rate through the weekend if you want to have your family join you for a weekend get-away (the large indoor pool and hot tub are open--don’t forget your bathing suits).

You’ll return to your district refreshed, re-energized and with critical new information and ideas to help you help your students and district achieve.

Register online at www.masc.org and for detailed information #MASCconf17 ♦

Awards

continued from page 3

and children’s health and human services. Last year, DiDomenico spearheaded the Senate’s *Kids First* initiative which is focused on identifying best practices and innovative

ideas for investing in and supporting children across the Commonwealth—basically mirroring MASC’s long standing children’s services safety net initiative.”

Most recently, in his role as Vice Chair of Senate Ways & Means, he has worked to secure additional

funding for schools that have been negatively impacted by the change in the way the state counts low-income students and is continuing to work to broker a long-term solution. ♦

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