

Joint Conference 2012 Recap: Leadership, Learning and Empowerment in and Age of Accountability

Neither Hurricane Sandy nor the following week's nor'easter kept more than 700 school committee members, superintendents, school business officers, collaborative directors, administrative personnel, exhibitors, presenters and other special guests in the public education community from attending the most ambitious—



Questions at School Law 101 session

and wide-scale—MASC/MASS Conference to date.

Held in Hyannis November 7-10, despite an ominous weather forecast, the program once again featured an earlier Wednesday start time allowing for three rounds of panel sessions on key school finance and school reform topics including new ELL regulations; financial operation reviews; exemplary business practices; evaluative walkthroughs; and bargaining health insurance. Throughout the three-day event, many sessions drew such an audience that they were occasionally standing-room only.

Once again this year, the MASC/MASS Conference Planning Committee was joined by members of the MA Association of School Business Officers (MASBO) and MA Organization of Educational Collaboratives.

This resulted in an expansion in breadth and depth of critical programming and “something for everyone” as MASC President Penny Blackwell explained.



Middlesex DA Gerry Leone on strategies to keep students safe.

“The feedback we have gotten has been overwhelmingly positive. People have told us that the speakers and sessions were exceptionally good and above all, timely, and the scheduling allowed for more informal interaction. In addition, the special “Friday-Saturday” discount registration option made it possible for school commit-

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Local aid targeted in mid-year budget cuts

Citing lower than anticipated FY2013 tax receipts, Governor Patrick has announced a series of mid-year across-the-board spending cuts to help cover an anticipated \$540 million shortfall, including approximately \$9 million in local aid, \$11 million in special ed circuit breaker reimbursements, and additional reductions in programs for homeless student transportation, mental health and school-based health programs, as well as a number of programs administered by the Department of Children and Families.

Some of the proposed cuts (which the Governor explains as necessary

owing to the economic uncertainty over the potential federal “fiscal cliff” spending cuts and tax increases) will need legislative approval, but all are expected to have a significant impact on residents. Some of the shortfall would be closed by drawing on monies in the state’s rainy day fund, and while the Governor is still hopeful of collecting more in tax revenues this budget year than in FY2012, economic observers including MA Taxpayers Foundation executive director Michael Widmer cite the anemic economic recovery and slower than anticipated growth. In addition, pro-

jections cited by the Governor Patrick anticipate more than \$300 million in lost state revenue this year alone if the President and Congress fail to reach a compromise before year’s end.

MASC is actively contacting the legislative leadership calling for them to reject the cuts to local aid, and urges school committee members to make their local senators and representatives aware of the impact of these cuts on their schools and communities.

The MA Budget and Policy Center has prepared a complete list of cuts and dollar amounts to line items, which can be accessed online at: massbudget.org

Report on Resolutions 2012

Following is a summary of the actions taken on the six resolutions that were considered at the 2012 Delegate Assembly held at the Resort and Conference Center in Hyannis on Friday, November 9. 104 delegates were registered.

Resolution 1: Establishment of a Special Commission of the Legislature for the Study of Mandated Reports and Data Submissions for School Districts

Submitted by the Framingham School Committee

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: MASC file legislation which would have the effect of establishing a special commission of the Legislature, the purpose of which will be to determine the extent to which public school personnel are required to prepare and submit reports and data that are mandated by state and federal laws, agency regulations, and past practice notwithstanding whether the reports and data are a valuable part of improving student achievement. The commission will identify mandated reports and required submissions of data mandated by law, regulation or administrative directive, and it shall examine their value to benefit student achievement, identify those which are duplicative or redundant, and propose recommendations that may, but are not restricted to, eliminate, modify or otherwise revise them.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The commission shall recommend legislation to establish an office of paperwork and regulatory reduction to oversee the departments within the Executive Office of Education including the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Early Education and Care and the Department of Higher Education and to require that there be a financial and programmatic audit of any proposed regulations or agency directives that shall include a determination of the amount of time deemed to be necessary for compliance with regulations and directives and estimates of all the expenses required for local agencies, including local and regional school districts, charter schools and edu-

cational collaboratives, to fulfill the requirements of the regulations and directives on an annual basis before any regulations, directives or mandates are imposed, and further, that no regulations shall be promulgated by these agencies unless the costs of compliance, administration and implementation are provided to local education agencies, including school districts, charter schools and education collaboratives. **The commission will have a year to complete and report their findings to the legislature.**

FINAL REPORT FROM THE MEETING: The Chelmsford School Committee offered an amendment to the last paragraph of the resolution (see deleted language and new final sentence above) that was accepted by Framingham as a friendly amendment.

THE RESOLUTION, AS AMENDED, PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

RESOLUTION 2: Modification of the Circuit Breaker Formula

Submitted by the Framingham School Committee

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: MASC file legislation which would have the effect of modifying the Special Education Circuit Breaker so that the Legislature would assist school districts by helping to fund more of the cost burden of educating students in out-of-district placements, the cost of which is \$125,000 or more by increasing the Special Education Circuit Breaker funding to districts from 75% of the cost after 4 times the foundation formula to 100% of the cost after 4 times the foundation formula.

THE RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AS PRESENTED.

RESOLUTION 3: Health Insurance Coverage for Medically Necessary Treatment in School

Submitted by the Brookline School Committee

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: MASC supports House Bill H1531 (2012 Session) or any other proposed legislation which would require all government and private health insurers to cover medically necessary expenses for children and young adults with educational deficits and/or learning disabilities from 3 years of age to 22.

THE RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AS PRESENTED.

RESOLUTION 4: Funding for Educator Evaluation System

Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: MASC bring to the attention of the Auditor of the Commonwealth that the implementation of a statewide educator evaluation system represents an unfunded mandate under the law, and, further, that the Auditor of the Commonwealth be requested to identify for the General Court the cost of the unfunded mandates related to educator evaluation so identified so that the legislature may appropriate such local financial aid as may be required.

THE RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AS PRESENTED.

RESOLUTION 5: ADEQUACY STUDY

Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The Massachusetts Association of School Committees reaffirms its advocacy positions on funding of the public schools by calling upon the General Court to take steps necessary to determine the appropriate funding level for public schools and to make such adjustments in the Foundation Budget and Chapter 70 funding formulas as may be required:

- The legislature should ensure that all districts receive sufficient state financial assistance so that all municipalities and regions receive adequate funding, meaning that all districts are able to budget public schools at or above the state's foundation budget.

- That the foundation budget should be adjusted to meet the true costs of providing an adequate public education for all students.

- In order to make an accurate determination of adequacy, the legislature should authorize a formal "adequacy study" to determine the true cost of providing an appropriate current education.

THE RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AS PRESENTED.

RESOLUTION 6: Election of Governing Boards of Commonwealth Charter Schools

Submitted by the MASC Board of Directors

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: MASC file legislation to require that all members of governing boards of Commonwealth Charter Schools be elected by **elected or appointed** representatives of the member communities or appointed by elected representatives of member school committees.

FINAL REPORT FROM THE MEETING: An amendment was proposed by the delegate from Nashoba Valley Voc. Tech. to add the words "elected or appointed" in the final paragraph of the resolution.

THE RESOLUTION, AS AMENDED, PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE OF 66 (IN FAVOR), WITH 11 (OPPOSED) AND 11 (ABSTENTIONS).

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tee members with tight work/family commitments and districts in difficult economic circumstances to participate in at least part of the conference."

In addition to the full slate of school leader-related programs, the conference also included a day-long program for those who keep school leaders organized and help the district run smoothly—namely school committee secretaries and administrative assistants. Organized by the executive committee of MASC's COSCAP (Council of School Committee Secretaries/Administrative Personnel) group, the program included important information on iCORI Review and updates on recent regulations and guidelines for school district filings and policy. More than 70 members attended the well-received Friday session.

Over the four-day program, more than 60 panels and special interest clinics were presented, many focused on issues of immediate concern to school committee members including the new educator and administrator evaluation regulations, the ramifications for collective bargaining, using data to promote student achievement and, as always, the economy and innovative ideas from school districts on how to meet increased demands more cost-efficiently and more productively.

Conference highlights included the traditional Wednesday night keynote dinner following which Commissioner Mitchell Chester, Deputy Commissioner Alan Ingram, MASC President Penny Blackwell and MASS President Paul Dakin engaged in a lively discussion on current education issues, asking questions and clarification of one another on topics including timing of the new educator evaluation regulations; the recently released college and career readiness report; funding to meet the needs of immigrant students, ELL teacher training and the impact on districts who will lose RTTT funding next year. Earlier in the evening, the Commissioner also joined with the Department of Public Health in presenting to the Lexington and Worcester

school districts the 2012 DESE/DPH School District Health and Wellness awards. Thursday and Friday General Sessions were standing room only as attendees lined the edges of the room on Thursday to hear TV/radio host Jim Braude moderate a post-election analysis and discussion featuring Commonwealth magazine executive editor Michael Jonas, political

MASC President Penny Blackwell and Legislators of the Year Rep. Alice Peisch (left) and Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz (right)



Friday General Session speaker Meira Levinson

advisor/freelance columnist Jennifer Braceras and MA AFL-CIO President Emeritus Robert Haynes.

The General Session was preceded by a slate of panels, including a featured session on student safety from a law enforcement perspective, led by Middlesex District Attorney Gerard Leone.

Thursday also featured the immensely popular networking/buffet lunch (followed by lively attendance in the exhibit hall for the Ice Cream Social, generously sponsored by Cape Cod Dairy). In the evening, the Leadership Awards banquet honored the 2012 All-State School Committee and Lifetime Achievement Award recipients (a complete listing of this

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2013 Executive Committee, left to right: Ann Marie Cugno, Medford, President-Elect; Patrick Francomano, King Philip Reg., Vice President; Penny Blackwell, Upper Cape Cod Voc., Immediate Past President; Mary Jo Rossetti, Somerville, President; Jake Oliveira, Ludlow, Secretary-Treasurer

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year's honorees, including photos, is posted on the MASC website).

The Friday General Session opened with greetings from NSBA Secretary-Treasurer Anne Byrne, a member of New York School Board Nanuet (New York) Union School District and who has been a frequent attendee at MASC programs and events. Byrne was followed by keynote speaker Meira Levinson, a professor at the Harvard School of Education who delivered a thought-provoking insightful message on civic engagement and student empowerment, calling on school leaders to provide opportunities for students, especially the most disenfranchised, to become involved in the school's decision-making processes and help them become engaged as citizens and community participants.

"We send the message to our students that they are these bundles of needs and unless we can help them commit to being part of the solution to the social problems, the

downward, troubled trajectory will continue. We the adults need to give kids the tools to say 'there's something broken in our community and not only that but here's what I think about how to fix it.'"

Friday afternoon highlights included the leadership luncheon at which Education Committee Co-Chairs Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz and Representative Alice Peisch (a former member of the Wellesley School Committee) were honored as MASC's Legislators of the Year. Luncheon was followed by MASC division meetings at which elections were held and topics were suggested for upcoming programs. Also on the Friday agenda was the Association's annual meeting at which delegates considered resolutions focusing on modification of the circuit breaker formula; a commission to study mandated reports and other data requirements for school districts; health insurance coverage for medically necessary treatment in school; educator evaluation funding; ad-

equacy study; and election of governing boards of commonwealth charter schools (see page 3 for a full report on actions taken by the delegates).

The assembly also voted the incoming slate of officers for 2013: Mary Jo Rossetti, Somerville, President; Ann Marie Cugno, Medford, President-Elect; Patrick Francomano, King Philip Regional, Vice President; and Jacob Oliveira, Ludlow, Secretary-Treasurer. Delegates also paid tribute to two veteran school committee members who were voted Life Membership: Herbert Abelow of the Southern Berkshire Regional School Committee and Karl Lord of Tri-County Regional Vocation Technical School Committee. These newly elected Life Members were also recognized along with their Life Member colleagues at the Friday Night Leadership/Life Member reception and dinner.

A special tribute was also given at the Friday night banquet to one of MASC's most distinguished alumnae, Dr. Ogretta V. McNeil, a former member of the Worcester School Committee, and one of the founders of MASC's Urban Division and the first chair of Division IX. A native of Washington DC, she came to Massachusetts to attend graduate school in psychology at Clark University and eventually joined the faculty at Holy Cross where she became a well known and highly regarded clinical psychologist and advocate for children. Presenting Dr. McNeil with MASC's Distinguished Service award, President Blackwell remarked on the many challenges that McNeil had confronted—and risen above.

"Ogretta was tough. She worked for everything she ever had and she passed that work ethic on to her students. Some of her students used to joke that you came to her class with your notebook in one hand and your summer school application in the other. Yes, her classes were tough, but students credited her with teaching them an invaluable life-long lesson: no one was going to hand it to you unless you earned it."

Mark your calendars for Conference 2012: November 6-9.



Distinguished Service award recipient Dr. Ogretta McNeil and President Blackwell



From left to right: Paul Dakin, President, MASS; Deputy Commissioner Alan Ingram; Commissioner Mitchell Chester; MASC President Penny Blackwell