

## Preview: Day on the Hill 2010

### School leaders brace for fiscal storm

For school leaders, the first weeks of the new year have seen major changes that will impact across the education spectrum: the newly enacted MA Education Reform law contains important provisions around collective bargaining, underperforming schools and districts, Horace Mann and Commonwealth charter schools, Innovation schools, and regional transportation; DESE and districts rushed through the process of applying for federal Race to the Top grants; and in Washington, the President and Secretary of Education have proposed sweeping revisions to the No Child Left Behind law, including broad changes in how schools are judged to be succeeding or failing, as well as eliminating the law's (ill-conceived and unattainable) 2014 deadline for bring every American child to academic proficiency.

At the same time, Governor Patrick's and the President's proposed budgets—both recently released—underscore the daunting challenges school committees will face as they put together their own FY11 budgets. Though both have promised to maintain (and in the President's case, even increase) school spending levels, the ongoing fiscal fallout may make it difficult for legislators to support enhanced school funding in the face of so many other urgent demands. And while the pool of available resources shrinks, accountability and achievement requirements for schools and students have grown exponentially, with both the

President and the Governor tying new monies to demonstrated achievement. For districts, it has never been more imperative to remind legislators of the driving need for additional and sustainable resources in order to meet the many-layered challenges of educating all children to a 21st century standard in an era of global competition and economic recession. These and other issues will lead the agenda at MASC's 2010 **Day on the Hill program at the State House on Tuesday, March 30**. Members are encouraged to bring the message that real achievement and accountability can only be accomplished with real funding increases, and remind their legislators of the soaring price tags associated with complying with state and federal

requirements.

This year's program will include critical discussions around the future of education funding in an era of higher expectations; the need for additional flexibility around the many competing assessment requirements; and a renewed call for legislative commitment to comprehensive school funding.

**Keynote presenters** include: Governor **Deval Patrick** (invited); and (confirmed) Senate Ways & Means Chair **Steven Panagiotakos**; House Ways & Means Chair **Charles Murphy**; Senate Education Committee Chair **Robert O'Leary**; and House Education Committee Chair **Martha Walz**.

School committee presence at Day on the Hill is critical, according to MASC President **Kathleen Robey**. "We are very encouraged by newly enacted Education Reform legisla-

[continued on page 3](#)

### School funding/NCLB reform lead MASC/Congressional dialogues

As school districts face one of the most challenging budget seasons in decades, made even more difficult by the onslaught of state and federal mandates, 10 members of MASC's Federal Relations Network took their case to Capitol Hill this month along with nearly 1000 other school board members from across the country as part of the School Leadership/Federal Relations summit presented by the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

In visits to Capitol Hill, the Massachusetts delegation had lengthy, productive discussions with Congressman Michael Capuano and education advisors to Senator John Kerry and Congressmen Richard Neal, James McGovern, Edward Markey, William Delahunt, John Tierney and Barney Frank, in which MASC advocated for comprehensive reform of NCLB in order to provide more flexibility for schools, as well as

[continued on page 2](#)

# School leaders take MASC message to Congress

continued from page 1

a level of federal funding that is more commensurate with the extensive obligations the federal law places on schools. MASC members also presented compelling testimony on the negative ramifications of the NCLB mandate, as well as the need for full federal funding of IDEA; the impact of student mobility on school districts and student achievement; continued support of vocational education; and how current Social Security provisions make it difficult for districts to hire high quality teachers from private industry.

In workshops and breakout sessions during the three-day event, attendees were briefed on key education issues by NSBA staff, including the urgent need for members to advocate strongly for accountability changes to NCLB and for adequate funding for public education, not only to help stem losses during the ongoing economic downturn, but also to enable districts to support the costs of educational mandates.



**Pictured left to right: Patrick Francomano (King Philip Reg.); Debra Bibeau, Immediate Past President (Amesbury); Kathleen Robey, President 2010 (Marlboro); Mary Jo Rossetti, Secretary-Treasurer (Somerville); Michael Gilbert (Whittier Voc. Tech.); Dorothy Presser, President-Elect (Lynnfield); Lisa Berry (Plainville); Ann Marie Cugno, Division II Chair (Medford)**

According to NSBA Associate Executive Director Michael Resnick—NSBA's eyes and ears on Capitol Hill—2010 is a volatile election year and nervous legislators are eager—and more likely—to deliver for their constituents. “Last year, Congress opened their wallets to Wall Street so the banks wouldn't fail. Remind your legislators that if schools had even a fraction of that money, we could ensure that none of our kids would be failing either!”

Veteran Washington political commentator Norm Orenstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, warned about the political realities confronting federal policymakers as they consider how to divide up the budget pie in the acutely bipartisan environment that exists on Capitol Hill. The challenge for school board members, he advised, is that “when lobbying your legislators, you will need not only to make the case for building a first class education system, but make the case for why education should take priority over other key line items (defense, homeland security, Medicaid, Medicare etc.)” And while not overly encouraging about education's prospects in the current political gridlock, Ornstein nonetheless

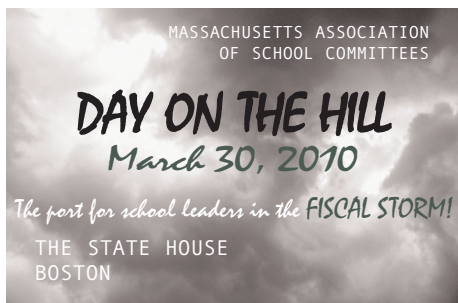
acknowledged “Capitol Hill knows that among voters, there is a great desire to move beyond partisanship in order to get things done”—among them, a revamp of NCLB.

A featured portion of the program was a presentation by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who reiterated the President's goals for education and the administration's commitment to education, both in ARRA funds last year, RTTT grants and the proposed \$4 billion increase in the 2011 budget “the largest investment in education since the GI Bill.” Duncan also reaffirmed the President's determination to fix and reauthorize NCLB, acknowledging numerous problems with the law including unfairly labeling some schools as failing and forcing many schools to eliminate non-tested subjects. Among the changes the administration has proposed are eliminating the 2014 deadline for all students achieving proficiency and replacing the current one-size-fits-all accountability system with a more multi-faceted approach for identifying schools that are truly failing their students. The Secretary also responded to audience concerns about mayoral takeovers (“our intent is to encourage districts to partner with other private and governmental entities, not to be taken over by them”), and competition around RTTT dollars (“we're not taking money from anybody to give to somebody else—we're just interested in closing the achievement gap and raising the bar for all children”). But the biggest round of applause came when Duncan announced the administration's plan to directly fund student loans for college, cutting banks out of the process thereby “saving us literally billions a year for the next decade.”

*MASC Secretary-Treasurer Mary Jo Rossetti, a member of the Somerville School Committee and Chair of MASC's Advocacy Committee, contributed much of the information included in this report.*

## Survey: Factors Influencing Student Achievement

The Massachusetts Coalition of School-Based Health Centers (the Coalition), in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, is conducting a survey to learn about school officials' views on the most pressing factors influencing student achievement. The Coalition has been funded by the Nellie Mae Foundation to better understand the complex challenges currently facing educational decision makers in their district. Please take this short survey, which is posted on the MASC website homepage ([www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)). It should take less than 10 minutes.



continued from page 1

tion, and are pleased that so many MASC initiatives were included in the bill. The Joint Committee on Education members have made a point of throughout the legislative process of seeking our input on regulatory and funding concerns and have appointed an unprecedented number of MASC members to participate on advisory committees."

Nevertheless, Robey cautions, the Governor and the legislature will be faced with many competing demands and "it is imperative that we impress upon them the urgency of moving forward to make fiscal and regulatory reform an education priority."

Day on the Hill registration information is being mailed to all school committee members and superintendents and the registration information is already posted online. As in the past, MASC encourages members to invite their student representative to the school committee to join them at any portion of the program absolutely free of charge.

Please contact the MASC office if you have any questions about the program (800)392-6023 or check the MASC website for Day on the Hill registration information and updates: [www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org). We look forward to seeing you at the State House on March 30.

## **masc** UPCOMING EVENT

**FEBRUARY 25 (TH)**

### **Division IV Annual Meeting**

Featured Topic: Collective Bargaining in Tough Times

Grafton High School, Grafton

6:30pm

All MASC divisions welcome and encouraged to attend!

# Two-thirds of State School Districts Sign on for "Race to the Top"

By the January 13 deadline, two-thirds of the state's public school districts and charter schools had signed a pledge to support the state's pursuit of up to \$250 million in Race to the Top (RTTT) funding, a new federal grant designed to transform public education nationwide.

In all, 256 school districts and charter schools signed on, representing 86% of the state's low-income students and 72% of K-12 students statewide.

"Race to the Top" is a competitive \$4.35 billion grant program launched by the Obama Administration to assist states in implementing aggressive education reform strategies to turn around low-performing schools and support world-class teaching and learning. Approximately 40 states are expected to apply for the funding. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Massachusetts is eligible for approximately \$250 million.

Large, small, urban, suburban and rural districts from across the Commonwealth signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), signaling their commitment to implement the initiatives outlined in the grant. Of the 256 that signed on, 147 are traditional school districts, 58 are charter schools, 31 are regional school districts and 20 are vocational schools.

To participate, districts were required to submit an MOU signed by the superintendent, school committee chair, and union leader. If the state is awarded the grant in April, participating districts will have 90 days to submit work plans detailing how they will use their funding to implement four required activities: (1) Improve teacher and principal effectiveness; (2) Ensure effective teachers and leaders in every classroom; (3) Turn around the lowest achieving schools (only for districts with Level 4 or 5 schools under the state's new accountability system); and (4) Use data to improve instruc-

tion. Participating districts may also choose to implement two additional activities: Roll out a statewide P-12 teaching and learning system and increase college and career readiness.

The state's RTTT application focuses on four key initiatives:

- Developing and retaining an effective, academically capable, diverse, and culturally competent educator workforce;
- Providing curricular and instructional resources that support teacher effectiveness and success for all students;
- Concentrating great instruction and supports for educators, students, and families in the lowest performing schools;
- Increasing the focus on college and career readiness for all students.

In addition to the 256 that submitted the required signatures, an additional 61 districts submitted incomplete MOUs. These communities were unable to gain the support of the superintendent, school committee and union, but submitted their MOUs to put their interest on the record.

States that secure Race to the Top grants are expected to be designated as the preeminent states for future funding opportunities, including support through the reauthorization of the Elementary Education Act and from national foundations, such as the Gates Foundation, who have indicated that they will strongly consider investing in states that have won Race to the Top grants.

Race to the Top funding is meant to supplement, not supplant, other state and federal education funding. If Massachusetts is awarded funds, which could amount to \$250 million, half of the amount the state receives would be passed on to participating districts using the Title I formula. The remaining 50 percent of funds may be used by the state, and some could go to districts in the form of competitive grants or funding for pilot initiatives.

# because you asked

In recent weeks, a number of members have called the MASC office with questions about school-sponsored trips and whether districts may accept free or subsidized travel for staff members who serve as chaperones.

Naomi Stonberg, Esq., a founding member of the MA Council of School Attorneys, responds in the following advisory.

## SCHOOL-SPONSORED TRIPS/CHAPERONES

Many school systems sponsor and/or sanction out-of-state trips for students in the district where teachers serve as chaperones. Most of these trips take place during school vacation periods. Usually the travel agency that sponsors the trip provides a free or reduced trip to the chaperones, including the staff members. The arrangement, where private entities such as travel agencies provide a free or reduced trip to school department employees who act as chaperones, raises issues under Chapter 268A, Sections 3, 19, and 23.

Most School Committees have a policy that requires them to approve out of state trips. As part of this approval process, the Committee should first make the determination that the trip serves a legitimate educational purpose and that the benefit to the students and the educational process outweighs the private benefit to the teachers, the tour company and/or the chaperones. Once that determination is made, there are two approaches that can be taken if the School Committee decides that it would like to continue the practice of authorizing school-sponsored trips with free or

subsidized travel for staff members and chaperones.

One option would be for the individual to use a provision in the State Ethics regulations, 930 CMR 5.05 (1), which permits public employees "to receive free or discounted travel and lodging expenses, including meals, of substantial value that serve legitimate public purposes . . ." The public employee must file a disclosure in writing of the travel and expenses to be covered. The Superintendent should file, in the same manner as the employee's disclosure, a statement "that the travel serves a legitimate purpose and that the benefit to the government of the employee's participation in the travel or event outweighs any non-work related benefit to the employee" or the travel agency "taking into account the extent to which such free or discounted travel may convey an appearance of special benefit for any employee." The disclosure should be filed with the School Committee and with the Town Clerk.

Another approach would be for the travel agency to provide a gift to the School Committee of the free travel.

The School Committee could accept the gift and the School Committee and/or the Superintendent could distribute the travel vouchers to staff members and/or chaperones. The benefit and value of the travel vouchers would belong to the School Committee. This is similar to the arrangement where educational institutions provide the school department with tuition vouchers for supervising student teachers.

Both options, in my judgment, would require School Committee votes authorizing the travel and authorizing the impacted individuals to receive the free or reduced travel and lodging.

If a School Department employee is organizing the trip, he/she must make a written disclosure to the appointing authority (the Superintendent of Schools) that he/she has a financial interest in the trip and must describe the financial arrangement. The Superintendent should make a written determination in advance that the "interest is not so substantial to be deemed likely to effect the integrity of the services" which the school district "may expect from the employee." The employee should make this disclosure on a form which can be found on the State Ethics website. (Go to [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov) and enter "State Ethics Commission" in the search area which will bring you to their website.)

If you have any questions, consult with school counsel or call the "Attorney of the Day" at the State Ethics Commission: 617-371-9500 or 888-485-4766.

Massachusetts Association of School Committees

One McKinley Square, Boston MA, 02109

(617)523-8454 (800)392-6023 FAX: (617)742-4125

[www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)