

## ESEA Reauthorization Bill Proposed

**S**ENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER, CHAIR of the Senate Committee on Education, Labor and Pensions has introduced the “Every Child Ready for College and Career” Act of 2015 in working draft form with the hope of identifying areas of agreement and working out points of disagreement toward the goal of reauthorizing ESEA. What follows is a preliminary analysis prepared by NSBA and MASC of Alexander’s working draft.

Calling NCLB now unworkable, Alexander explained that there was plenty of blame for why it has not been reauthorized. Original provisions, if strictly applied, would label as underperforming almost every one of our 100,000 public schools – not the original intent of the law, according to Sen. Alexander. In the meantime, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has granted 42 state

and territorial waivers which resulted in another unintended result, according to Alexander—it allowed Duncan to tell states what tests, accountability standards, and tactics must be used in exchange for lifting the current AYP accountability system. Because of this, US DOE “became a national school board – and that was not our intent.”

There are real differences between the current NCLB law and Alexander’s proposed legislation on 4-5 major issues including strategies for improvement, means of assessment, levels and volumes of testing, and even the role of the federal government.

In very brief summary: the proposal gives more flexibility to the states and, with state approval, to local education agencies (LEAs) or individual school districts.

As many of us have long anticipated,  
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## MSBA accepting SOIs For FY15

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (“MSBA”) has begun accepting Statements of Interest (“SOIs”) for consideration in Fiscal Year 2015. The following provides program detail and closing date information to guide local actions and approvals for those planning to file:

- The SOI closing date for districts submitting under the Accelerated Repair Program (“ARP”), which is primarily for the repair and/or replacement of windows, roofs, and/or boilers in an otherwise structurally sound facility, will be **February 13, 2015**.
- The SOI closing date for districts submitting under the CORE Program, which is primarily for projects beyond the scope of Accelerated Repair, including extensive repairs, renovations, addition/renovations, and new school construction, will be **April 10, 2015**.

Submitting a SOI is the critical first step in the MSBA’s program for school building construction, addition/renovation, and repair grants. It allows districts to inform MSBA about deficiencies that may exist in a local school facility and how those deficiencies inhibit the delivery of the district’s educational program.

### SUBMITTING AN SOI

This year the MSBA is introducing a new process by which districts will be able to assign district user access to the MSBA’s SOI System. Superintendents will be asked to complete a District Access Form, which is available on the MSBA’s website at [https://systems.massschool-buildings.org/District\\_Access\\_Form/pub/](https://systems.massschool-buildings.org/District_Access_Form/pub/). Once the access form is filled out, signed and sent to the MSBA, the Superin-

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## MASC members raise key issues at Foundation Budget Review hearing

In pointed, well-documented testimony at the Foundation Budget Review Commission hearing earlier this month, MASC members **John Hockridge** (North Adams) and **Devin Sheehan** (Holyoke) reinforced the urgent need to recalculate the aging and inadequate school funding formula. The public hearing, held on January 10 in Northampton, drew over 300 education leaders, teachers, parents, community and business members who shared with members of the Commission concerns about the woefully underfunded formula and the crippling impact that certain discrete categories of costs are having on local school budgets.

The long-stagnant Foundation Budget Commission, which was reconvened by the Legislature as part of last year’s budget, has been holding a series of public hearings across the state on how to improve the ailing formula (see page 4 for additional dates). Commission members in attendance included the legislature’s Education Committee Co-Chairs, **Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz** and **Representative Alice Peisch**, as well as **Senator Patricia Jehlen** (a former member of the Somerville School Committee) and **MASC President Patrick Francomano**.

In his testimony, Hockridge reminded members that that many of the cal-

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# Should MA Invest in Statewide Universal Pre-K?

A Boston Globe Point - Counterpoint



*The Sunday January 11 issue of the Boston Globe included a point-counterpoint column on universal pre-K in the Commonwealth. Beverly Hugo, a member of the Framingham School Committee and recently elected Secretary-Treasurer of MASC, was invited to offer the affirmative position to the question of whether the state should make such an investment. Her comments are reproduced here.*

Early education and care of our state's four and five-year-olds is critical, especially for children with high needs such as those who are homeless or transient, economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, victims of trauma or civil unrest, or in special education programs. Massachusetts should recognize that value by investing in a statewide program.

The 21st century workforce will demand academic expectations that might penalize students from under-schooled households. These children arrive in school with a gap in language skills, cognitive deficiencies, and fewer social and emotional competencies. These shortcomings produce less engaged, poorly motivated, and unsuccessful students. According to a well-known study, the "30 Million Words Project," by the time a child of poverty turns four years-old, he/she will have heard 30 million words less in this short time span than a child from a wealthier background. This gap, which directly affects language development and performance in school, may be irreversible and is a primary factor in producing the phenomenon of disparity that educators call the

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## ESEA Reauthorization Bill Proposed, **continued from page 1**

Alexander would limit federal authority in many instances by deferring to local control, which for the current Congress means state control with the authority to delegate locally at the discretion of the state. It is unlikely to tone down the vehement debate over Common Core standards and the PARCC assessment system since the state would still be authorized to identify an accountability system as well as a set of standards. Common Core and PARCC would almost assuredly be acceptable, but so would several other options, including returning to the Curriculum Frameworks and traditional MCAS if Massachusetts wished to maintain its earlier system.

Key provisions of the working draft include:

- Allowing states the option of going to a more flexible testing schedule that could exclude certain grades.
- Giving states the ability to craft their own testing and accountability measures.
- With state approval, school districts could develop their own assessment systems provided they meet the state standards and regulations and data transparency.
- States could authorize their own accountability systems provided certain criteria were met. This would allow Massachusetts to continue what it is doing and would eliminate the need for waiver applications.
- States could determine for themselves the plans for turning around underperforming schools. Certain criteria would also be required, but there are no specific menus of tactics states would need to deploy (e.g. some of the older strategies that were viewed as too prescriptive such as mandates that "half the teachers must be terminated," "remove the principal," or "convert an underperforming school to a charter school"). While these would not be required, they could be adopted at state discretion. This will probably eliminate any federally mandated system such as the Adequate Yearly Progress method of assessing student achievement, a method largely repudiated at this time but still in place for states without waivers. The proposed strategy is designed to prevent

the accountability system from being created by the US DOE. In 2003, the widely repudiated system was created not by Congress, nor by any state, but by bureaucrats within the US Department of Education. New accountability measurements under Alexander's proposal would permit growth models of achievement to be determined at state discretion.

- Standards for teacher qualifications and licensure would be permitted based on local state statute rather than federal determination.
- Measurement of English Language Learner achievement would be relaxed. This may be an attempt to address the problem of forcing students who do not speak English to take tests in English.

However, federal appropriations for education are unlikely to grow as the actual authorization levels are flat-lined. Several smaller grant programs are eliminated including school counseling, dropout prevention, math and science partnerships, "EvenStart" school leadership, and physical education.

States would also not be subject to the maintenance of effort requirements, but it will be more difficult to use federal funds to replace locally budgeted levels ("supplanting"). Funding for the Charter School program would continue. Also, some limited intra-fund transferability would be allowed.

Alexander has begun holding open hearings on the draft proposal in order to gather input in advance of filing formal legislation. **MASC will keep the membership apprised of further developments as to the progress of the bill.**

**SAVE THE DATE  
DAY ON THE HILL**

**Wednesday, April 29**

**The State House, Boston**

## MASC members raise key issues, *continued from page 1*



**John Hockridge**

culations within the foundation budget have not been adjusted since 1993 and therefore do not provide an adequate measure of the true costs that districts in 2015 are encountering. As an example he noted that the budget assumes a fixed 3.75% number of students within a district to be special needs. "The actual number, at last count for special education students for all school districts in MA is 17.1%. In my community of North Adams, more than 26% of our students are classified as special needs, with other Berkshire County communities experiencing similarly high sped percentages."

For the foundation budget to represent the true minimum level of adequate funding for school districts, the special education calculation should be at least 15%, Hockridge said. In addition he also proposed that some of the services that districts are currently responsible for might be more appropriately covered through medical/health insurance coverage.

Sheehan's comments focused on the need for a revised formula to address the financial repercussions for districts who are enrolling growing numbers of

transient, mobile and homeless students as well as sky-rocketing costs of employee and retiree health insurance.

"Our transient and homeless students are truly our students at greatest risk, and in greatest need of help. They have no alternative than the traditional public school district; they have minimal, if any, outside resources and tend to represent not only families at economic disadvan-

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**"Our transient and homeless students are truly our students at greatest risk, and in greatest need of help. They have no alternative than the traditional public school district."**

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tage, but the poorest of the poor."

He also provided a detailed summary of how state aid to school districts is compromised when a charter school moves into town. Most people, he explained, don't realize that the dollars the district forfeits to the charter for each student is not the average state aid per student but the average of total per-pupil spending in the district. Since in most communities state aid is supplemented by taxpayer dollars, those departing

monies come from local citizens who had no choice but to accept the charter school in the district—a school which has no accountability to the district for either performance or expenditures.

Sheehan concluded with a special plea to the Commission to "not punish schools with hard-working teachers and local leaders who in classrooms every day confront the insidious forces of poverty, transience and unemployment by linking financial assistance through Chapter 70 to performance on standardized testing. This is not the appropriate tool to solve the larger societal problems undermining student achievement."

The hearings, which are scheduled to continue through March, will inform recommendations due from the Commission later this year on adjustments to the Foundation budget formula.

Sheehan, a six-year member of the Holyoke School Committee, also serves as Chair of MASC's Division V (Connecticut Valley). Hockridge, a 13-member of the North Adams School Committee, is Chair of MASC's Division VI (Berkshire).



**Devin Sheehan**

## *Boston Globe Point - Counterpoint*, *continued from page 2*

"achievement gap."

Pre-K is the most effective step to narrow the achievement gap between our top students and those several rungs below them. In conjunction with high quality licensed day-care to improve emotional and cognitive readiness, Pre-K addresses racial, linguistic and socioeconomic inequities.

Children living in poverty are at heightened risk because they often lack developmentally-appropriate interactions with adults and peers. They have fewer books read to them, hear encouragement less often, and develop a smaller vocabulary, stifling their creativity and intellectual energy. They are less able to develop the cognitive and emotional skills necessary in academic settings and in society.

They will spend less time accessing instruction and will require supplementary support in order to stay in school and reach their potentials.

Parents of pre-school children who create a stable, caring and responsive environment for their kids are empowered to be better mothers, fathers, and adult role models. Stable, high quality care also enables parents to join and stay in our workforce.

Most importantly, it stabilizes and supports all our families and ensures that children enter kindergarten not just ready to learn but ready to succeed.

*Jim Stergios, Executive Director of The Pioneer Institute, provided the rebuttal.*

## MSBA program details

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tendent will then be able to authorize district users access to the system as deemed necessary for submitting an SOI. Instructions for the Superintendent to become the District User Manager are embedded in the form as are instructions on next steps.

Submitting an SOI should not be difficult and districts do not need to seek professional assistance to complete an SOI. The process of completing and submitting an SOI will, however, require dedicated time from the district to comply with the submission requirements, especially the local vote requirements. MSBA recommends that districts plan ahead and allocate sufficient time.

**For full detailed information on application requirements go to: [www.massschoolbuildings.org](http://www.massschoolbuildings.org).**

# Former School Committee Members Appointed to Key Leadership Positions

Two former MA school committee members have been appointed to key leadership positions in the Senate by newly elected Senate President Stanley Rosenberg.

**Senator Karen Spilka**, a former member of the Ashland School Committee, has been appointed Chair of the powerful, budget-writing Joint Committee on Ways & Means. **Senator Patricia Jehlen**, a former member of the Somerville



(left to right) **Senator Karen Spilka**, **Senator Patricia Jehlen** and **Congresswoman Katherine Clark**

School Committee, will continue to serve on the Joint Committee on Education as its Vice Chair. She will

also serve as Chair of the Elder Affairs Committee, Assistant Vice Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, and as Chair of the newly created Committee on Innovative Education, whose responsibilities will include looking at charter school accountability.

In addition, **MA Congresswoman Katherine Clark**, who is also a former MA school committee member (Melrose) as well as state senator and representative, was appointed Assistant Whip in the 114th Congress by Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, of Maryland.

## Calendar

**Tuesday, February 10**

FOUNDATION BUDGET REVIEW  
COMMISSION HEARING

The State House, Room 222  
10:00am

**Wednesday, February 11**

MASC BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
MEETING

Marriot Courtyard, Marlborough  
6:00pm

**Saturday, February 28**

FOUNDATION BUDGET REVIEW  
COMMISSION HEARING

Florence Sawyer School  
11:00am

**Monday, March 9**

FOUNDATION BUDGET REVIEW  
COMMISSION HEARING

Location: (Boston) TBD  
4:30pm

**Saturday, March 14**

CHARTING THE COURSE

Assabet Valley Voc. Tech., Marlboro  
8:00am-4:00pm

**Saturday, March 21**

CHARTING THE COURSE

King Philip Reg. High School  
Plainville

8:00am-4:00pm

**MASC**

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