

## MASC DAY ON THE HILL

**A**S THE WILDLY UNPREDICTABLE 2016 election season torpedoes toward the summer conventions, school leaders in MA are once again caught in the midst of the equally contentious state budget debate. At issue this year are struggles over public policy items that could have long-term and devastat-



MASC President  
Jake Oliveira

ing consequences for districts and students, including guaranteed adequate and equitable funding; charter school reform, services and supports for students and families at risk; and the furor over state standards and testing.

At MASC's recent **DAY ON THE HILL**, more than 300 school committee members, administrators and student leaders brought a strong, clear message that legislators need to commit to providing the resources and political will to support the recommendations of the 2015

Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC) report. Those findings, released last November, deemed the 23-year old Chapter 70 funding formula grossly inadequate to meet current educational costs.

In his opening remarks, **MASC President Jake Oliveira** of Ludlow reminded attendees of their influence on Beacon Hill as elected officials and the high regard in which school leaders are held in the State House offices on account of their commitment and expertise on school issues.

"You are uniquely positioned to speak with authority on issues that are so critical to our communities and our students. We know the power of school committees: we saw it during the recent charter school reform debate where our concerns for accountability, funding and local input were addressed in the senate bill. We know that the bureaucratic adversaries of local control are trying to undermine our efforts and the voices of the voters in our cities, towns and regions, but our principle recourse has always been to the

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**-MASC President Jake Oliveira**

legislature where we have the ear of policy makers who are more about the 'commonweal' than the insider politics of those with the common 'wealth'."

"Cultivate those relationships."

The morning program featured remarks from key legislative and executive office representatives. **Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz** and **Representative Alice Peisch**, Co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on Education who also co-chaired the FBRC, reinforced the critical importance of school committee presence at the State House, particularly during the week when the budget was being debated in the House.

Peisch, a former chair of the

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## Testing Assistance Program for Lead in School Drinking Water

**ALERT:** In a continued effort to ensure safe drinking water in schools around the Commonwealth, on April 26, 2016, Governor Charlie Baker and State Treasurer Deb Goldberg announced that \$2 million from the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust (MCWT) will fund cooperative efforts to help Massachusetts public schools test for lead and copper in drinking water (see <http://www.mass.gov/governor/press-office/press-releases/fy2016/officials-2m-to-test-school-drinking-water-for-lead.html>). The funds, to be used by the

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), will provide technical assistance to ensure that public school districts can sample the taps and water fountains in their schools, and to identify any results that show lead and copper contamination over the action level. Note: the program will also cover early education programs that are publicly owned or operated.

During the week of May 2, 2016, MassDEP and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Second-

ary Education will make available to school districts, municipal officials and others a "Request for Interest" and associated form needed to participate in the technical assistance and sample analysis program. More information about this program can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/drinking/testing-assistance-for-lead-in-school-drinking-water.html>, and more will be added to this page in the days ahead.

# Day on the Hill

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Wellesley School Committee, acknowledged some of the contradictions that legislators are confronting in their efforts to provide more Chapter 70 resources.

"While the House's budget is significantly higher (\$23.6 million) than the Governor's, it is the case that we are also dealing with declining enrollment and little to no inflation which has an impact on the Foundation budget. We are truly doing the best we can to ensure that all communities are held harmless. If we are able to implement some of the FBRC recommendations, it would be a relief to many districts."

*"At the end of the day, one of the reasons that Massachusetts has been doing so well is that we instituted high standards in 1993 and have reviewed and modified them over the years to ensure that they remain relevant."*

—Representative Alice Peisch

The ultimate objective, she insisted, is to improve educational opportunities for all students, especially those in districts facing significant challenges of poverty, homelessness and uncertain employment. Sometimes, however, "the mechanism to do that has an impact on some districts that is less desirable for other districts. At the state level, we are trying to balance the needs of

competing communities. That's why we rely on your input as we try to determine the impact of our decisions on all stakeholders. We want high quality education for all: there are just different opinions about how we get there."

Peisch also addressed members' concerns about the impact of the federal change from "free/reduced lunch" to "low income" calculation. "We are working on ways to help districts that are negatively affected by the language change to get some relief from the funding cuts that have resulted. It is my expectation that over the coming months there will be some refinement in that formula—a change implemented by the Department of Agriculture which unfortunately didn't factor in the wide-ranging consequences."

Concluding her remarks, Peisch expressed worry about the likely ballot questions, most especially the proposal to eliminate the Common Core standards. Noting that in the Commonwealth "we adapted those standards to reflect our specific goals for student achievement and trained our teachers in those MA-focused standards. Changing direction at this point in time will render six years of work irrelevant."

She also indicated that many voters may be, mistakenly, equating their mistrust of the related PARCC test to the Common Core. As part of the "MCAS 2.0" test redesign process, she noted, DESE is reaching out to parents, teachers and other stakeholders for input. At the end of the day, "one of the reasons that MA has been doing so well is that we instituted high standards in 1993 and have reviewed and modified them over the years to ensure that they remain relevant. To abandon them now seems foolhardy."

Taking on another of education's 800-pound gorillas, **Senator Chang-Diaz** reported on the efforts of the Senate to put forward the RISE (Reform, Innovation and Success in Education) Act. That initiative, she explained, had as its initial goal addressing charter reform so as to allay a ballot vote in November. "In crafting this bill—which was not easy for any of us—we really listened to

## Vocational Schools Serve Up Five-Star Cuisine

MASC thanks the culinary arts students and chefs from the following vocational-technical schools who prepared and catered an outstanding array of breakfast and lunch selections that approximated a round-the-world culinary tour. Special thanks to **Lou Trudeau** (Assabet Valley) who coordinated menus and logistics; **Ayanna Clark** at the State House Events Office; and **Rep. Angelo Scaccia** and his able assistant **Michelle McLaughlin** who secured space and passage for staff and students.



Students (and desserts!) from Whittier Voc. Tech.

**Participating vocational-technical schools were:** Assabet Valley; Bay Path; Blue Hills; Bristol-Plymouth; Cambridge; Diman; Essex; Everett; Greater Lawrence; Greater Lowell; Greater New Bedford; Keefe; Lynn; Medford; Minuteman; Nashoba; Northeast Metro; Old Colony; Pathfinder; Plymouth South; Smith; Somerset-Berkley; Somerville; South Shore; South-eastern; Tantasqua; Upper Cape; Weymouth and Whittier.



From left to right: Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz; Senate Ways & Means Chair Karen Spilka; Auditor Suzanne Bump; and Representative Alice Peisch.

you and the concerns about local control and enrollment and funding abuses that school leaders have consistently and diligently articulated over the past couple of years. The final language of the legislation was broadened to reflect not just the charter “issues of the moment” but tried to incorporate both the original intent of charters as well as the fiscal recommendations of the FBRC. Throughout, our focus was on not just the 4% of students in charters, but the other 96% as well.”

In spite of all good intentions however, Chang-Diaz and Peisch both agreed that it would be a steep and rocky (and probably unlikely) challenge to get the bill through the House and that the chapter cap issue would probably be resolved on the ballot. Is there hope for a positive outcome, she was asked?

“The question isn’t whether we can thread the needle, but whether there is an eye in the needle. It’s very small, but I believe there is one. My only wish is that we stop pitting groups against each other, and acknowledge that there are best practices to share so we can get on with the work of education. The alternative is the ballot question, and whether that fails or not, we will have done a huge disservice to our students because of all the related issues that are incorporated in the RISE act that will have gone unaddressed.”

**State Auditor Suzanne Bump**, whose office produced a scathing report last year on misstated charter school enrollment and waiting list numbers, has followed up on her department’s 2014 analysis of unfunded mandates and expanded the scope in a recent—and never

before released—study of the impact of legislation on local communities. This report, which has never been produced before, catalogs all legislation over the past five years with significant financial impact, not just the unfunded mandates (the definition of unfunded mandates is very restrictive she noted and not every piece of new legislation, no matter how costly, meets that that precise definition).

The final report (which is posted on the Division of Local Mandates (DLM) website) identified 97 statutory provisions that have significant impact on local government, princi-

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**—Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz**

pally in the areas of employee benefits; public safety; elections; and education. “If these are the areas we value,” she noted, “then the legislature should ensure that you have the resources to fund these initiatives.”

In addition, Bump also announced two amendments put forward by her office to help address some of these issues. The first would give the DLM authority to review proposed legislation for its fiscal impact and recommend alternatives; the second would require state agencies to file municipal impact statements with the Secretary of State’s Office, the DLM and the Local Government Advisory Committee when adopting, amending or repealing regulations in order to allow for more analysis

and discussion on the impact of proposed changes on communities. Bump indicated that, despite the valiant efforts of Rep. Ted Speliotis, neither amendment passed the recent House budget debate, but she encouraged attendees to voice their support with Sen. Kathleen O’Connor Ives who is taking it up in the Senate.

“Your voice is more powerful than mine. You are at the ones who have to adapt to these laws and stretch your budgets accordingly. I have heard from many of you that this effort will make far more difference if we can understand the impact of legislation before it becomes final, and am hopeful that this will prevail in the next legislative session.”

Concluding the morning program was Senate Ways & Means Chair, **Senator Karen Spilka**, a former Ashland School Committee member and strong supporter of education issues and MASC. “We appreciate your taking the time to come here today. We are very aware of you and look to you for input on these critical issues.”

Spilka noted that Chapter 70 funding has been a key issue with her since her days on the Ashland School Committee when she began to realize the inequities in the formula and how even five years into its existence, it no longer met the needs of districts trying to provide high quality education and services. In 1998, she convened a Chapter 70 roundtable group of legislators, stakeholders, school leaders and others to discuss the adequacy, equity and predictability of the formula. Fifteen years later, she noted, “the adequacy piece still eluded

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us. That's why the FBRC was established to look at the structural basis of funding education. When the Foundation Budget was passed in 1993 it was a very important step but almost immediately became obsolete. MCAS didn't exist, technology was a minor detail, health care and other benefits had not yet become the behemoths they are today, the challenges of ELL, special needs and our transient and homeless students

*"If these are the areas we value then the legislature should ensure that you have the resources to fund these initiatives."*

**—Auditor Suzanne Bump**

were under the radar. These are realities that need to be addressed as the Commission rightly noted. And I am happy to learn today that well over 100 school committees, boards of selectmen, and local finance committees have voted locally to support the recommendations of the Review Commission."

"Our goal is to be able to sustain more resilient schools that will educate stronger and more resilient

children who will grow up to become active, contributing citizens in a productive commonwealth. We can't expect economic growth to just happen on its own. It starts by investing in quality education for all our kids."

Spilka applauded MASC's initiative in looking at education policy in the larger context of social welfare: "poverty, violence, trauma, families struggling with addiction are all realities many of our young learners face every day. It's why it is important for all of us to remember that even as we make our funding formula more equitable and adequate, we must be making our commonwealth as a whole more equitable and adequate. We can start by investing more money in early education and funding initiatives to help families at risk access the services they need when they need them."

The Senate's RISE Act, which started out as a charter school bill she explained, evolved into an overarching effort to address funding fairness, adequacy and innovation on multiple levels. When asked about where the dollars for the ambitious program would come from, Spilka suggested the millionaires' tax ballot question could be a start. "In my role on Ways & Means, you can be assured that I will do everything

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**—Senator Karen Spilka**

possible to fund the recommendations of the FBRC and put that money toward our students and their future. Yes, our fiscal situation is tight and we are having to identify priorities, but there is no doubt in my mind, that our students and the future of our state are at the top of that funding list."

And at this point, she concluded, "I know I am the only thing standing between you and your meetings with your legislators, and of course—lunch!!!"

Following the Senator's remarks, **MASC President-Elect Patrick Murphy** of Barnstable provided a brief review of MASC's policy priorities (see below for a complete list) before school leaders scattered to their legislators offices and the more than 40 student representatives met with **Representative Sean Garballey** (a former member of the Arlington School Committee), **Representative Steve Ultrino** (a former member of the Malden School Committee and MASC Division Chair) and **Alex Pratt**, a legislative aide and current member of the Littleton School Committee.

## MASC 2016 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Support for Early Education Programs
- Strengthen the Children's Services Safety Net
- Funding Revision of Chapter 70
- Full Funding for the SPED Circuit Breaker
- Charter School Funding Reform
- Restoration of Funding for Regional Transportation
- Full Funding for METCO
- Mandate and Regulatory Relief
- Charter School Operational Reform
- Support for Mobile Students
- Support for Small and Rural School Districts
- Approval of School Improvement Plans
- Retention of Medicaid Covered Reimbursements
- Coverage for Medically Insured Services in Schools

## REGISTER NOW!

Friday, May 13

9:30-11:30am

### Important Updates on:

- Mastery/Competency-based education
- DESE update on MCAS 2.0

### Presented by:

MASC Division VII

### Location:

Cape Cod Collaborative  
418 Bumps River Rd  
Osterville, MA 02655

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

# Social Media: OMG!

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## What it is? Who uses it? How to use it effectively. What NOT to do!

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Are you looking to get involved in social media to promote your school district and engage your community but don't know where to start? MASC Field Director Tracy Novick has extensive experience with social media and has been working over the past several months to enhance the Association's online presence. In an upcoming MASC workshop (Saturday, May 21 at Cape Cod Voc. Tech. in Harwich), Novick will discuss various platforms to make social media work for you and she provided the following overview in answer to some frequently asked questions.

**MASC:** What do you plan on sharing with school committee members during your upcoming presentation on social media and its challenges?

**NOVICK:** We'll start by talking a bit about social media itself and what it can be used for. We'll also talk about the different social media platforms, who uses them, and how best to reach your various audiences. We'll cover some pitfalls and some legal concerns, as well. I also encourage people to bring their questions, from "what is this Twitter thing, anyway?" to whatever issues they're running into as current users of social media.

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**MASC:** How can school districts use social media to build trust?

**NOVICK:** I don't know of a district that doesn't talk about how they wish they could get the good stories in front of people. With social media, you can, and it's free! Many of those you most want to reach with your stories are online and reachable via social media. Social media also is an excellent way of gathering information about what is going on in your district, in the state, and at various levels of government. It has an immediacy that can't be matched.

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**MASC:** What social media platforms do you recommend for school districts?

**NOVICK:** It may sound flip, but truthfully, whichever one is actually going to be used. Social media is absolutely one of the things where a school committee can push it on the district, but it dies due to lack of buy-in by district personnel. Native users of social media (who come in all ages) are best equipped to make it happen for a district, but active school committee members can often be as much of a benefit to the district as district personnel online.

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**MASC:** Would you recommend there be only one general district Facebook page?

**NOVICK:** While it's a good idea for a district to have some presence on Facebook, it doesn't have to

be limited to that. There are districts, for example, in which the superintendent is very active on Twitter and is an effective voice for the district there; those who have embraced it also create district community online by sharing the work of others in the district. Individual schools can use their Facebook pages to update parents on school activities and notices. Updates on a district building project can be fun to follow on Instagram.

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**MASC:** Can you give an example of when using social media being done well by a school committee or a school district?

**NOVICK:** Snow days can be a real test of how a district handles social media. A Twitter feed I really recommend on this (and in general) is Peel Schools, which is in Mississauga, Ontario. The night before a possible snow day, they interact with students, update information as they have it, and show great good humor in doing so. It really gives a positive impression of a district that cares for its students, takes its responsibilities seriously, while still being human about it. Locally and similarly, I'd recommend Jim Adams, the superintendent of the Ashland Public Schools, who does the same.

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**MASC:** Any advice for a school committee member who is a newbie to social media?

**NOVICK:** Come on May 21! Beyond that, it's fine to join and just watch for awhile. Follow some people you respect, and find out who they follow. Watch how others use their social media presence to share information. Figure out what the "rules" are and how best to work within them. You don't have to jump in all at once.

And ask for help if you need it!

save  
the date

# MASC calender

**Friday, May 13**

**Division VII Meeting**

Cape Cod Collaborative, Osterville

**Thursday, May 19**

**Regional Schools Committee Meeting**

Assabet Valley Voc., Marlboro

**Saturday, May 21**

**Charting the Course/  
Social Media: OMG!**

Cape Cod Voc. Tech., Harwich

**Wednesday, June 1**

**Healthy Food Fuels Hungry  
Minds: Stakeholders Conference  
for School Food**

Harvard University, Cambridge

**Saturday, June 18**

**Charting the Course**

Tahanto Junior-Senior High School,  
Boylston

**Wednesday, May 18**

**MASC Board of Directors  
Meeting**

Marriott Courtyard, Marlboro

**Wednesday, June 8**

**MASC Board of Directors  
Meeting**

Marriott Courtyard, Marlboro

**Wednesday, July 13**

**MASC Board of Directors  
Meeting**

Marriott Courtyard, Marlboro

## SENATOR ANN GOBI RECEIVES LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD



During the morning program at Day on the Hill, MASC President Jake Oliveira presented MASC's 2015 Legislator of the Year award to Senator Ann Gobi of Spencer. Gobi, who previously served in the House (2001-2014) before she was elected to the Senate, has been a champion of regional, small and rural school districts and was one of the leaders on the recent opioid legislation. A former history teacher in the Leicester Public Schools, Gobi acknowledged that in her current role "every day, some education issue comes up. I rely on MASC and its members to let me know what is important and what I can do to be helpful."

**New MASC Partner!**

**MIRICK O'CONNELL**

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**MIRICK O'CONNELL**  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

We are very excited to announce our newest MASC Partner, Mirick O'Connell! MASC Partners are a select group of education service providers that show their commitment to Massachusetts school leadership through their support for MASC programs. Look for Mirick O'Connell at upcoming events and check out their website to learn more about the services they offer school districts!

**MASC**

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