

Day on the Hill participants rally in support of continued funding

MASC'S DAY ON THE HILL SPEAKERS—WHO included some of the state's most influential legislative leaders and fiscal savants—were remarkably consistent in their appraisal of the budget cycle now underway: while Massachusetts leads other states in recovering from the global economic crisis that sent revenues, jobs and industries into free-fall in 2008, the recovery is sluggish and unpredictable at best. For school districts, that is likely to translate into continued reduced or level-funding for many education-related line items.

Nevertheless, whether due to the prior week's warm spring temperatures or the Governor's promise of an additional \$145 million in Chapter 70 monies, the more than 300 stalwart attendees who convened in Gardner Auditorium on March 27, were in a more optimistic, or at least realistic,

frame of mind than in prior years.

MASC President Penny Blackwell

(Upper Cape Cod Reg. Voc. Tech.) started off by thanking members for their advocacy efforts throughout the year, "without which we would not have successfully challenged a number of recent threats to locally governed public school districts." These include the counterintuitive AYP sanctions that resulted in labeling 85% of top-ranking MA schools as "underperforming" and bureaucratic attempts to force district consolidation. She also noted the persistent lobbying efforts on the part of the members and the Board of



More than 300 school committee members, superintendents and students listened to updates on the budget and pending legislation.

Directors that helped ensure that K-12 education spending did not suffer the drastic funding cuts that many other social service providers have over the past three budget cycles.

Those successes aside, though, Blackwell listed the battles ahead:

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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 Chefs Lou Trudeau (Assabet Valley) and Steve Miranda (Old Colony) who coordinated menus and logistics; to Joanne Rene 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.

Participating vocational-technical schools were: Assabet Valley, Bay Path, Blackstone Valley, Blue Hills, Bristol-Plymouth, Cambridge Rindge and Latin, Cape Cod Tech., Greater Fall River, Everett, Greater Lawrence, Greater Lowell, Greater New Bedford, Keefe Tech., Lynn, Minuteman, Nashoba Valley, North Shore, Northeast Metro., Old Colony, Pathfinder, Plymouth South, Shawsheen, Somerville, South Shore, Tantasqua, Upper Cape, and Whittier.

HOUSE APPROVES SCHOOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE BILL

A BILL REQUIRING MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS TO DEVELOP a “written medical emergency response plan to reduce the incidence of life-threatening emergencies” appears poised to head to Gov. Deval Patrick’s desk after winning unanimous approval in both the House and Senate. Under the bill (S.2132) emergency response plans would be required to include methods for establishing “rapid communication” among different parts of school campuses during an emergency, estimates of emergency response times to different areas on school grounds, contact information for officials who need to be notified in an emergency, safety precautions to prevent classroom emergencies, and access to CPR training for teachers, coaches, trainers and other school staff. The bill doesn’t require schools to obtain automatic external defibrillators, which are used to revive people suffering cardiac arrest, but it requires schools that have such devices to include their location in emergency response plans, as well as the location of those trained in its use. Under the bill, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would be required to work with the American Heart Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics to develop a model plan.

SECTION 1. This law shall be known, and may be cited as “Michael’s Law,” in memory of Michael T. Ellsessar, age 16, who died suddenly of cardiac arrest suffered during a high school football game, and was not immediately treated with an automated external defibrillator.”

SECTION 2. Chapter 69 of the general laws, as appearing in the 2010 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after section 8 the following section:-

Section 8A. (a) Each school committee and commonwealth charter school board of trustees shall ensure that every school under its jurisdiction has a written medical emergency response plan to reduce the incidence of life-threatening emergencies and promote efficient responses to such emergencies. The plan shall be in addition to the multihazard evacuation plan required by section 363 of chapter 159 of the acts of 2000.

Each plan shall include:

- (1) a method for establishing a rapid communication system linking all parts of the school campus, including outdoor facilities and practice fields, to the emergency medical services system and protocols to clarify when the emergency medical services system and other emergency contact people shall be called;
- (2) a determination of emergency medical service response time to any location on campus;
- (3) a list of relevant contacts and telephone numbers with a protocol indicating when each person shall be called, including names of experts to help with post-event support;
- (4) a method to efficiently direct emergency medical services personnel to any location on campus, including to the location of available rescue equipment;
- (5) safety precautions to prevent injuries in classrooms and on the facilities;
- (6) a method of providing access to training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid for teachers, athletic coaches and trainers and other school staff, which may include training high school students in cardiopulmonary resuscitation; and
- (7) in the event the school possesses an automated external defibrillator, the location of said device, whether or not its location is either fixed or portable, and those personnel who are trained in its use.

Plans shall be developed in consultation with the school nurse, school athletic team physicians, coaches and trainers, and the local emergency medical services agency, as appropriate. Schools shall practice the response sequence at the beginning of each school year and periodically throughout the year and evaluate and modify the plan as needed. Plans shall be submitted once every three years to the department of elementary and secondary education on or before

September 1, beginning in the school year immediately following the effective date of this act. Plans must also be updated in the case of new construction or physical changes to the school campus.

Included in each initial and subsequent filing of a medical emergency response plan, each school district
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shall report on the availability of automated external defibrillators in each school within the district, including, the total amount available in each school, the location of each within the school, whether or not said device is in a fixed location or is portable, those personnel or volunteers who are trained in its use, those personnel with access to said device during regular school hours and after, and the total estimated amount necessary to ensure access during school hours, after-school activities, and public events.

(b) The department of elementary and secondary education, in consultation with the department of public health, shall develop a model medical emergency response plan in order to promote best practices. In developing the model plan, the department shall refer to research prepared by the American Heart

Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and other relevant organizations that indentifies the essential components of a medical emergency response plan. The department shall biennially update the model plan and post the plan on its website.

SECTION 3. The department of elementary and secondary education shall submit a report to the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives who shall forward the same to the chairs of the joint committee on education and the chairs of the senate and house committees on ways and means on the implementation of this initiative, the number of students and personnel certified each year in first-aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, and the number of schools that opt out of instruction in cardiopulmonary resuscitation as required by section 1 of chapter 71, on or before July 1, 2013.

TIPS to EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY:

Working with your legislators and making your concerns known isn't just for Day on the Hill. Below are some insights from lawmakers and their all-important aides on how to communicate your message most effectively.

KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS. Legislators trust people they know. Make it a point to know your local legislators—and their aides! Communicate with them regularly. Attend their local "office hours" and community meetings.

Also, take the time to assemble information about your legislators before you contact them on an issue. Many public policy makers have experiences that can relate to the issues you will raise.

PLAY A TEACHING ROLE. Provide helpful and accurate information. Legislators appreciate having timely, factual information that is reliably accurate and free of rhetoric. When you have information that is important or research that bolsters your point of view, share it with legislators and their staff. Don't forget to provide them with contact information and offer to serve as a resource for them.

COMMUNICATE WITH THE STAFF. Legislative staff are an important part of the process. They review and analyze legislation, attend hearings and community meetings, and assist legislators in developing positions. Also, they are often the legislators of tomorrow.

BE VISIBLE. Let them see you at the State House. Let them read about your stances in the local media.

RESPECT AND UNDERSTAND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS. Lawmaking is part of the political process. It takes time to hear everyone with a point of view, special interest, or area of expertise. Legislators are under constant pressure to appease several interests. School committee members, who respond to more single-issue constituents (parents) than anyone else should understand that.

RESPECT THE TRUTH. Your credibility, like your word, is as good as it is consistent. When you are careless with the truth, or selectively economical with your facts, you damage your credibility.

BRIEF IS GOOD. Make your point and don't waste time. And when you write, spend words as you would spend money. Keep it simple.

Say thanks. School committee members know how rarely people thank them for the difficult and controversial work they do. When your legislators deliver for you or supports your bills, make it a point to let them know that you're paying attention and that you're grateful.

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charter schools that continue to drain local budgets while being accountable to no one locally; the hours of mandatory, often duplicative, reporting requirements that school districts must meet; efforts to centralize decision-making in state or federal capitols, away from the people who know your district and what is best for the students of your district; and finally, the roster of unfunded mandates, including the recently rolled-out educator evaluation system that must be implemented over the next two years. This cumbersome process (and “if you’re not confused by it, you haven’t been paying attention”) is likely to require considerable investments of time and money in order to be effective. “Fortunately, in the area of unfunded mandates, we have a strong ally who has taken up our cause: State Auditor Suzanne Bump, who will be with us later this morning.”

Blackwell also noted other initiatives in which MASC has emerged as a national leader including bringing to light the challenges faced by mobile, transient and homeless students and the impact of these challenges on local school districts; an organized school council training program encouraging parents to take an active role; drawing attention to the role of the children’s services safety net in helping meet the demands of at-risk students; and, most recently, as co-leader of the School District Governance Project that is currently training teams of school committee members and superintendents on how their actions and decisions impact student achievement.

President-Elect Mary Jo Rossetti (Somerville) reinforced the impor-

tance of reminding legislators that public schools remain under attack “and our assailants are as skillful as they are deceitful.”

Public education, she noted, is an \$800 billion business in this country and “the people who see dollar signs where you see children, all want a piece of it. And when profits are the motive, it’s never good for children.”

Rossetti also urged members to take the opportunity of today’s visit to remind legislators about the importance of parent empowerment, civic engagement, and role of elected local citizens to determine what’s best for their kids. “Alert your representatives to the problems that follow when education reform profiteers use their big corporate money to underwrite a campaign to blame schools and teachers for the effects of poverty, and try to impose policies that have no chance of success.”

Vice President Jacqueline Doherty (Lowell) reported on MASC’s federal lobbying efforts and the stalemate around No Child Left Behind and the onerous impact of AYP and related sanctions.

“Despite the state’s current waiver from AYP (in return for implementing educator and administrator evaluation guidelines), we continue to see Title I money diverted to private providers, an erosion of public confidence in our public school system, and other devastating penalties that have no impact on raising student achievement.” Unfortunately, she added, the upcoming election and the divisive partisan politics make it unlikely that the law will be revised this year and “we’ll continue to be stuck with the most foolish federal law since Prohibition.”

Doherty also spoke in support of state initiatives currently under consideration, including an MASC-field bill

relative to special education placement (H.1062). This legislation would protect school districts from being required to pay additional costs when DCFS moves students with disabilities to private, residential placements, regardless of whether the child has been succeeding in his local school.

The first of the day’s guest speakers was **Senator Katherine Clark**, a former member of the Melrose School Committee, who currently serves as Senate Chair of the Committee on Public Service. In that role she strongly influenced critical amendments to the 2010 Education Reform Law that preserved and strengthened the authority of the school committee and in 2011 was honored as MASC’s Legislator of the Year.

Clark noted that one of her reasons for running for the legislature was “I wanted other people up here to understand the challenges school committees face trying to educate our kids. It’s a second job for most of you.”

Acknowledging the additional strain put on districts by the recession (“school districts have carried the economic downturn on their backs”), she is committed to trying to sustain support for the Governor’s proposed increase in local aid and Chapter 70 funding. “We are also aware that you are dealing with the effects of the many social service cuts that have had serious consequences for your students and their families.”

State Auditor Suzanne Bump, a former member of the legislature and a former Labor Secretary, was introduced by Blackwell, who credited Bump with helping to change the culture of union and management relationships during her tenure. Most recently, she has stepped to the forefront on unfunded mandates and the

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important role school committee members have in overseeing the spending of the public's money.

Regarding recent allegations of misspending and sloppy management at several collaboratives, Bump graciously thanked MASC for providing important input into her office's investigative efforts. She reminded members "When you decide to spend the public's money on anything, there is an implicit promise—and expectation—that it is going to be wisely spent. In your role as fiscal watchdogs and guardians of your budgets, I encourage you to do what auditors do: follow the money. Do not be afraid to ask how the money was spent? was it well spent? could we spend it better in the future?"

Bump has also entered the unfunded mandates fray, specifically as regards school district responsibilities related to transporting homeless students under the federal McKinney-Vento program. "These dollars that you are spending, for a program that the state took on, is money that is not being spent in the classroom" and urged attendees to ask their legislators to provide funding to cover these costs.

Michael Widmer, President of the MA Taxpayers Foundation and one of the state's most highly respected fiscal analysts, sounded a (cautiously) encouraging note, reporting that the "this long, horrible global recession" is finally turning around and the economy appears to be moving in a positive (albeit slowly) direction. He was slightly less glowing about the prospects for the MA FY13 budget, noting that the Governor's proposed budget is based on approximately a billion dollars in tax revenue, includ-

ing new bottle, soda and cigarette taxes that the legislature has said it will not support. "The Governor is also counting on \$400 million from the rainy day fund, which I also think the legislature won't approve."

Widmer also acknowledged that even with the economic recovery (and MA pulling out ahead of other states), it's unlikely that the state will be in a position any time soon to restore the spending cuts that have taken place and predicted that as the federal government sends fewer dollars to state coffers, states are going to be left to their own devices. With the possibility of cuts in Medicaid and lost job growth that may never return, "communities are going to have to face the reality of greater dependence on property taxes to sustain local revenues."

Pointing to some of the principal budget busters, employee and retiree benefits among them, Widmer noted that districts can't assume they can continue to increasingly subsidize benefits and preserve teachers in the classroom. He advised acting sooner rather than later to consider changes that would both save money, preserve a generous package of benefits and ensure that program and professional staffing would be maintained. He concluded by suggesting that retiree health care needs to be a legislative issue and urged attendees to bring this to the attention of their senators and representatives.

Education Committee Co-Chairs, **Representative Alice Peisch** and **Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz**, concurred that "we are really trying to keep your concerns and frustrations at the front of what we do here. We have heard from many of you about the impact of additional rules and

mandates, and we are trying to see if we can get you some relief."

Both Chairs indicated that the number one budget priority is ensuring continued growth in Chapter 70 and circuit breaker funding, although acknowledging that education accounts are competing with many, more depleted, social services. Peisch explained that the school funding adequacy study, which was not moved forward in the current session, was delayed only because "DESE is in the final stages of a similar study and the committee thought it best to wait to see the Department's results in order to determine how best to proceed."

The program wrapped up with **House Ways and Means Vice Chair Marty Walz**, whose comments were cut short by an unanticipated (and fortunately uneventful) state-house-wide fire alarm. Walz, who is the former Chair of the House Education Committee and who guided the Education Reform Act of 2010 to its successful passage, addressed concerns around the proposed virtual schools bill. She assured attendees that virtual schools were not replacements for in-district schools, but instead an opportunity for districts to offer online classes to give students—particularly dropouts, athletes, artists, young parents, and those with medical issues—a greater range of options. She also promised that the accountability and funding issues would be carefully scrutinized.

Walz also took a moment to comment on several bills around high school graduation, sharing her belief that "increasing the mandate age from 16 to 18 is not going to be a good thing for kids who don't want

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to be in school in the first place. Do we want students to stay in school until they are 18? Absolutely. But we need to look at alternatives for those who aren't succeeding in the current school structure. As you know better than most, one size does not fit all."

Once it was determined that the

fire alarm was an accidental event, attendees made their way to the Great Hall where nearly 100 MA culinary arts students and their chefs served forth an expansive array of gourmet options. Concluding the formal program in Gardner, President Penny Blackwell reminded attendees of the afternoon session on the new educator evaluation regulations and noted that the "good news is the

economy is coming back, and more strongly in MA than elsewhere. The better news is that the governor and our legislative leaders have acknowledged that as a state and a nation, we will not fully recover, nor will we successfully compete on a global scale without making the education of our children our primary focus."

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 26 (Th)

Regional Subcommittee Meeting
Assabet Valley HS, Marlborough

April 28 (Sa)

Charting the Course
Greater Lawrence Technical School
(Hosted by MASC Divisions I and VIII)

April 30 (M)

Educator Evaluation Regulations
Algonquin Regional High School,
Northborough

(Hosted by Division IV)

May 7 (M)

Educator Evaluation Regulations
Nessacus Middle School, Dalton
(Hosted by Division VI)

May 19 (Sa)

Charting the Course
Barnstable High School, Barnstable

June 1 (F)

Council of School Attorney (COSA) program
Educator Evaluation: Implications for Collective Bargaining
The Publick House, Sturbridge

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