

Day on the Hill to focus on budgetary priorities

DAY ON THE HILL speakers will address the severe fiscal challenges that school districts scrambling to prepare balanced budgets are now encountering. These include, but are not limited to: significant increases across all cost centers, not only in contracts but in special education and transportation costs; many social/emotional/academic support needs stemming from the pandemic have not only not gone away, but in many cases exacerbated, although the federal funding that supported programs to address these is about to expire; and the widespread misunderstanding that these deficits would be addressed by SOA dollars, money that



is not available for such purposes nor was it designed to do so.

MASC has put forward its legislative priorities that address budget, students and families, local control, and the future of education, which are outlined on page 2 of this Bulletin. Presenters will discuss some of the key issues they are hearing from

education leaders and constituents, and how the legislature might consider addressing some of these concerns. Invited speakers include: **Russell Johnston**, Interim Commissioner, DESE; **Rep. Denise Garlick**, Chair, House Committee on Education; **Rep. Steven Ultrino**, Vice Chair, House Committee on Education; **Rep. Carol Doherty**, sponsor of Ways and Means amendment (page 3).

Following the morning program at the UMA Club, attendees are invited to join their legislators and their aides in the Great Hall at the State House for a buffet lunch, prepared and catered by students from over 20 MA vocational schools.

Holyoke poised to exit state receivership

After nine years of receivership under the MA Department of Education, Holyoke is beginning the process of transitioning to return to local control. The transition news was announced by Interim DESE Commissioner Russell Johnston at a special meeting on March 25.

State officials plan to hold a series of meetings with Holyoke over the next five months, with the goal of having a plan in place by August that spells out the details and timeline of a return to local control.

At a Board of Education meeting the following day, Johnston noted that he was particularly encouraged by the commitment of Holyoke School Committee members to continuing to focus on improvement steps outlined in the existing state turnaround plan for the district, including improvements in the graduation rate, and expansion of early education seats and participation in early college programs.



MASC Division X Chair Virginia Simms George (front row, left) was one of the honorands at a recent event at the State House at which legislators and Governor Maura Healey (second from right) celebrated Black leaders, trailblazers, and changemakers who have made important and lasting contributions to their communities.

MASC 2024 PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

As the legislature prepares to address the ramifications of the state's ongoing revenue shortfall, compounded by the cessation of many federal pandemic-related funding assistance programs, MASC puts forward the following priorities for consideration in developing the FY25 state budget, and establishing new policies that will support sustained and appropriate educational funding and equitable opportunities for MA students.

Many of the priorities listed below are long-standing MASC initiatives; others, which have grown out of the current fiscal storm, were developed by the Board of Directors in collaboration with members and supported by resolutions at the 2023 Delegate Assembly.

These priorities will be discussed in greater detail at MASC's Day on the Hill program on Monday, May 6. More analysis on each of these issues is available in the **2024 PUBLIC POLICIES PRIORITIES** document that is posted on the MASC website.

FUNDING

- Adjusting the Chapter70 Inflation Index closer to 4% (\$217 million ask)
- Full Funding for the Student Opportunity Act
- Establish \$100 Per-Pupil Minimum Increment as Base Number for Future Years (\$34 million ask)
- Full Funding for the Special Education Circuit Breaker (total of \$552,738,989 when funded at current levels)
- Full Funding for the Rural Schools Bill at \$60 Million (this is a \$45 million ask)
- Full Funding for Regional Transportation (\$9 million ask if level-funded)
- Full and Stable Funding for METCO (\$3.5 million ask)
- Establishing Regional Reserve Assessment Funds and Expanding Vocational Education Reserve Funds (H.2076)
- Earmarking Special Funding for Small and Rural Districts
- Support for MA School Building Authority: Uncap Current Limit and Approve Funding that Reflects Current Needs

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- Children's Services Safety Net
- Counting Students Where They Live
- Addressing Concerns of Native Americans in MA
- Protect the Right to Privacy as a Matter of Equity

ISSUES REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE ACTION

- Re-Forming the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Rethinking the State Accountability System
- Retention of Medicaid Reimbursement for Covered Services
- Charter School Oversight and Reform
- Vocational Technical School Enrollment
- Update Open Meeting Law
- Create a Special Legislative Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Relative to School Finance Structure and Distribution

FUTURE OF EDUCATION

- Establish Incentives for More Students to Become Educators
- Continued Support for Leadership Diversity Incentive

LOCAL CONTROL

- Retain a Powerful Voice for the Community in the Oversight and Governance of its Public Schools
- Retaining the Evaluating Authority of Elected School Committees



MASC President and Holyoke School Committee member Mildred Lefebvre had a featured role at the NSBA Annual Conference last week. Mildred serves on the NSBA Board of Directors as Chair of the National Hispanic Council.



MASC Past President Devin Sheehan, a former member of the Holyoke School Committee who is currently serving on the Greater Commonwealth Virtual School Board, was recognized at NSBA's conference in New Orleans. Devin is the incoming President-Elect of NSBA, having served the past year as Secretary-Treasurer.

Budget and Open Meeting Law amendments proposed in response to MASC advocacy

An amendment with significant impact on school committee ability to interview administrator candidates and plan for such interviews has been proposed as a change to the current language in the Municipal Empowerment Act/Open Meeting Law, Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a)8. The amendment has been submitted by the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government. The existing language would be replaced by the following:

To consider or interview applicants, including the preparation of interview questions for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however that this clause shall not apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening; nothing in this section shall prohibit all members of a school committee, city council, town council, select board, or board of alderman from participating as members of the preliminary screening committee meeting in executive session for the purposes of this section.

This proposal would give the full membership of a locally elected board the ability to participate in the initial screening and interviewing of candidates for positions whose appointment is delegated to that board such as town managers or school superintendents. In addition, the proposal recognizes that a confidential interview may also include drafting questions in executive session to be posed to candidates as part of an initial interview.

An amendment to the budget proposed by **Representatives Carol Doherty** (Taunton) and **Adam Scanlon** (North Attleborough) would establish a special legislative commission, **the School Finance Review Commission**. This Commission would study and make recommendations

concerning strategies for creating a more equitable distribution of Chapter 70 school aid to municipal and regional districts as well as other entities that receive chapter 70 school aid.

The commission shall study the long-term effects of strategies for distributing chapter 70 school aid including, but not limited to: (i) annual per-pupil allocations; (ii) hold harmless provisions to preserve the level of funds in periods of declining enrollment; and (iii) the establishment of reserve funds for extraordinary circumstances; (iv) the long-term fiscal trends in school districts experiencing declining enrollment; (v) an analysis of the fiscal health of regional school districts and the impact of regionalization on each contributing municipality. Especially in low-income and middle-income areas, including funding impacts on each contributing municipality; (vi) the impact on school districts of meeting increased costs while receiving only minimum Chapter 70 per pupil aid; (vii) the sustainability of providing high quality education in districts receiving minimum per pupil aid; (viii) the impact on municipal finances and services on communities receiving minimum per pupil chapter 70 aid.

The Commission shall also make recommendations regarding strategies for distributing chapter 70 school aid, including but not limited to: (i) considering alternatives for generating additional revenue to be delegated to chapter 70 school aid for the previous 5 fiscal years; (ii) reviewing the calculation of the foundation budget to provide adequate and stable allocation of public funds for school districts; (iii) reviewing the impact of economic conditions on the elements of the foundation budget; (iv) considering alternative means of distributing available revenue by studying previously used strategies, proposed new strategies and such other proposals as may be offered to adapt current practices; and (v) researching the effectiveness and viability of alternative means of addressing economic factors such

as: inflation, recession, loss of state revenues, emergencies or changes to state or federal law that affects eligibility for public benefits and the effect that loss of such classification may affect the ability of school districts to provide a mandated standard of education; (vi) establishing and including a low and declining student enrollment factor within the foundation budget; (vii) characterizing the structural conflict in the current chapter 70 funding formula between declining enrollment and increasing costs for school districts, and identifying means to resolve this conflict.

The Commission shall file a report and recommendations to the clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate; the Chairs of the House and Senate Committee on Ways and Means; and the Chairs of the Joint Committee on Education by no later than December 31, 2025.

These proposed amendments will be discussed in more detail at MASC's Day on the Hill program: Monday, May 6. REGISTER NOW.



Unlocking Clean Energy Opportunities for Schools

School districts that do not file federal taxes are eligible for some fully refundable credits under the Inflation Reduction Act—your school district may be eligible to receive federal funds for green infrastructure (things like installing heat pumps or buying electric vehicles) this fiscal year. Schools may also be eligible to access other grants and credits through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

MA Senator Edward Markey's office is committed to ensuring MA schools can access this funding, so please don't hesitate to reach out if they can be a resource for you! The best points of contacts for questions are Sade_Nabaha@markey.senate.gov or Katherine_Morfill@markey.senate.gov.

OCPF wants to hear from YOU!!



By Jason Tait, Office of Campaign and Political Finance education director

You're busy, working on school budgets, teacher contracts, student issues and other topics, but the Office of Campaign and Political Finance wants to remind you of the state's campaign finance law obligations.

There are approximately 2,500 sitting school committee members in Massachusetts who are required to file campaign finance reports with local election officials. Our state agency, known as OCPF, spends resources in direct outreach to candidates, PACs and parties who are registered with us, such as mayors and state senators. We don't have your addresses, so we've asked for space in the MASC Bulletin to share crucial information.

OCPF'S VITAL INFORMATION

- **Organize:** All candidates must organize with the local election official using the M101 form, regardless of whether they have a campaign committee.

- **Bank:** Open a separate bank account to deposit campaign funds. An EIN from the IRS is usually required by most banks.

- **Report:** School committee members must submit campaign finance reports to the city or town clerk, even if they don't raise or spend money.

- **File:** Submit campaign finance reports (M102 form) eight days before a preliminary or general election, and annually in January. In towns, reports are also due 30 days after the general election.

- **Fundraise:** Collect donor names and addresses, with a \$50 cash contribution limit per calendar year and no anonymous donations allowed.

- **Prohibitions:** Businesses cannot contribute, raffles are prohibited, and individual contributions are capped at \$1,000 per calendar year.

- **Out-of-Pocket Expenses:** Candidates may use personal funds for direct expenditures, disclosed on Schedule E of the M102 form.

- **Public Employees:** Appointed and compensated public employees may not solicit or receive funds for any political purpose at any time.

- **Education:** Take a 20-minute municipal online training course by searching "class" on www.ocpf.us, highly recommended.

- **News:** Subscribe to OCPFReports newsletter via jason.tait@mass.gov for updates on filing reports, legal case resolutions and general news.

The primary goal tied to the rules above is public disclosure of campaign finance activity in our elections, and our hope is to help you through that process. Our office is available to answer your questions and provide additional guidance at 617-979-8300, and OCPF@mass.gov.

OCPF is an independent state agency that administers the Massachusetts Campaign Finance Law, Chapter 55.

NATIONAL



NAEP TO LOOK AT CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND ACHIEVEMENT

The next "nation's report card" will take a more nuanced look that previous assessments at how students' socioeconomic status affects their academic achievement.

The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) will introduce a new composite measure

of student income that takes into account broader family and school resources.

It will incorporate student eligibility for school meals, and other federal safety-net programs; total share to students eligible for income-related programs at a school; number of printed books in a student's home; and, for grades 8 and 12, the education level of either parent.

The index allows test scores to be disaggregated for high, middle, and low-income students.

Because the index uses data that NAEP already collects, researchers and policymakers will also be able to retroactively apply the new poverty measures to some 20 years of student data.

NAEP has traditionally analyzed test scores based on a student's eligibility for federal free or reduced-prices meals. But more schools with high concentrations of low-income students are not permitted to offer free lunches schoolwide, diluting the proxy for poverty.

Mark your Calendar: COSCAP Leadership Lunch Workshop Series

Join your COSCAP Board for a 3-part Leadership Lunch Workshop Series (virtual), beginning Wednesday, April 24th from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m. Additional sessions will be held on Wednesday, June 5th and Wednesday August 7th. Sessions will run from noon until 1:00 p.m. Presenters include: **Valerie Annear**, Director of Educator Prep and Licensure, Springfield College, formerly Chief of Academics–Holyoke Public Schools; **Dr. Kate Fenton**, Educational Consultant and retired Chief Instructional Officer, Springfield Public Schools.

These one-hour immersive networking sessions are designed to enhance the skills and capabilities of executive assistants and administrative professionals.



This workshop series focuses on three key programs, each with four components to foster mindfulness, maximize influence, network, and reflection.

All components will be delivered with a research-based approach throughout the workshop, incorporating evidence-backed strategies and real-world examples.

Participants will leave with enhanced skills, a deeper understanding of the power of influence, and a strategic mindset to contribute to the success of their administrative teams.

Please sign up on the MASC website: <https://www.masc.org/event/coscap-leadership1/>

AVOIDING THE FISCAL CLIFF: Fixing the Inflation Calculation

The following letter was submitted to the Joint Ways and Means Committee from MASC, MASS, the MTA, and MFT-MA.

The Chapter 70 aid amounts in the FY25 House 2 budget do not account for the actual costs of recent inflation because of a flaw in the way inflation adjustments are calculated in Chapter 70. Fixing that flaw would increase Chapter 70 by about \$217 million. Inflation has, of course, been very high in recent years.

The inflation rate for the time period that determined the FY24 Chapter 70 inflation adjustment was 8.01% and for FY23 it was 7.08%. But the law caps the annual inflation adjustment of the foundation budget at 4.5%. As a result, districts did not receive funds to cover a significant portion of inflation that they had to pay for in expenses.

The way the Chapter 70 formula originally worked, that would not be a long-term problem because the lost inflation would automatically be added back to the foundation budget in the following year. But a technical change made almost a decade after the law was passed inadvertently changed that. Now when the cap reduces aid below the level needed to keep pace with inflation, that reduction is locked in forever and reduces future aid.

A simple fix that maintains the 4.5% cap but makes sure that the formula makes up for lost inflation would solve the problem. That would increase Chapter 70 aid by \$217 million, with additional under-inflation “catch-ups” in future years. It is important to make a permanent change in the law so that all of the aid lost is eventually made up. That is necessary to allow the Commonwealth to meet the real-dollar targets in the Student Opportunity Act.

To implement the change, the legislature could use an updated version of the language in the original Education Reform Act along these lines: The dollar amounts specified in this subsection, other than those for employee benefits and fixed charges, shall be adjusted for inflation by multiplying the amounts for fiscal year two thousand twenty-one and subsequent years by the ratio of the value of the implicit price deflator for state and local government consumption expenditures and gross investment in the first quarter of the prior fiscal year to the value of that same deflator in the first quarter of fiscal year two thousand nineteen. The annual 4.5% cap would be preserved, as would the separate inflation adjustment for employee benefits and fixed charges.

We can provide data on how these changes would affect specific districts.

13 obstacles that top districts' current safety concerns

As of April 4, there have been at least 87 school shooting incidents on a K12 campus since the start of the new year, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database. It's already dangerously close to 2020's total tally of 116, which is why security is a top-of-mind issue for school leaders in 2024.

In an effort to capture the current state of school safety, Raptor Technologies recently published the findings from their 2023 survey of nearly 300 members of the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) about the challenges educators and SROs currently face.

Respondents were asked to identify what they believe to be the most pressing safety obstacles currently affecting their school districts. Following are responses in order of most to least common:

- Student social media use, such as TikTok challenges
- Funding for security updates
- Mental health issues
- Budget for additional SROs
- Bullying
- Untrained school staff
- Physical security
- Hardware/badge panic button lacks functionality
- Inconsistent drills
- Lack of true safety plan
- Lack of admin support
- No visitor or volunteer screening
- Lack of board and/or community support

The newest addition to this list represents the most commonly named concern among school safety professionals: social media's impact on student well-being. Nearly 64% of respondents said this is currently an issue in their schools.

Additionally, the survey highlights the growing need to protect students in this digital age as concerns about social media, cyberbullying and AI grow.

The report emphasized the importance of school leaders recognizing the signs of distress in students early on so that intervention can take place. The authors of the survey identified several warning signs specific to elementary, middle and high school students to be on the look-out for, including: (elementary) overreacting to minor issues; stomach-aches and headaches; difficulty concentrating; hiding; regression behaviors; (middle/high school): withdrawing from friends or activities; dramatic changes in students' grades; becoming secretive; presence of bruises; irregular attendance; excessively tired, unkempt or hungry.

"Proactive measures are essential, including tools that enable staff to collect and analyze data on student behavior," the survey reads. "These tools can help in early situations from escalating and maintaining students' academic engagement."

This article by Micah Ward appeared in the April 8, 2024 issue of District Administration.

