

Gomez and LaNatra Named as MASC Legislators of the Year

The MASC Board of Directors is delighted to honor **Senator Adam Gomez** and **Representative Kathy LaNatra** as the Association's 2024 Legislators of the Year. The awards recognize their respective efforts and continuing leadership in the areas of collaboration, cooperation, and civility, and for their tireless advocating for social and economic justice for students and families.

Rep. LaNatra (D-Kingston) is currently serving her third term as State Representative of the 12th Plymouth District. She serves as Vice Chair on the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing; she also serves on the Joint Committee on Ways & Means, the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies, and the House Committees on Ways & Means and on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight. She was named by Speaker Mariano to serve on both the Future of Work Commission, as well as the Madeline Amy Sweeney Award for Civilian Bravery 2021 Selection Committee.



Throughout her tenure, Rep. LaNatra has been a steadfast champion for public education, consistently supporting policies that ensure equitable resources and opportunities for all students across the Commonwealth. Her work on key legislative initiatives has been instrumental in advancing critical issues such as school funding, student mental health, and support for educators. She has also been a strong advocate for fully funding the Student Opportunity Act, increasing per-pupil funding, and ensuring students have access to universal school meals. In addition, she has prioritized school safety by supporting state funding for School Resource Officer programs to keep schools secure.

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Charting the Course: Schedule 2025

In response to members' questions about MASC's upcoming Charting the Course programs, the Field Directors recently set the 2025 calendar for those sessions. The programs will be held on the following dates, in person, in the listed districts. Save the dates.

And don't forget, the complete Charting the Course program will be held during the upcoming Joint Conference in Hyannis: Friday, November 8 (1:30-5:00pm) and Saturday, November 9 (8:30-11:45am). Members can attend this program at no charge, even if you are not attending the conference. Email to register to attend: aandronico@masc.org

The following dates are for 2025

January (date to be determined)
Everett

March 8
Bay Path Reg. Voc. Tech. (Charlton)

March 22
Berkshire Hills (Stockbridge)

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Best practices for school finance

As another school year gets underway, it is a good time for school committees to review best practices in school finance outside of deliberating and passing of the budget. Here are some places to start.

It all begins with the superintendent.

While the superintendent is the instructional leader for the district, the superintendent's role also includes oversight of the district's finances. The superintendent must ensure that the budget is expended by cost center in line with the allocations of the school committee and is aligned with district goals. The superintendent, alongside the school committee chair, must also create and maintain a strong working relationship with the municipal leadership that is based on mutual trust and respect.

There is no substitute for a strong relationship with your school business official.

Under MGL Ch. 71, sec. 41, it is the school committee that contracts with the school business official for a district. While this individual then works for and is evaluated by the superintendent, the relationship between the school business official and the school committee, established under contract, underlies the budgeting responsibilities of the school committee. Members of the school committee should have the means to ask questions

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LOOKING WARILY AHEAD TO FISCAL YEAR 2026

Though it may seem as though you've only gotten your FY25 budget approved, planning for FY26 has already begun in districts. With that in mind, we wish to bring the following to your attention:

Though the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will not calculate the rate for the foundation budget for FY26 until the end of December, that rate is based on changes from last October to this October.

As of the publication of this Bulletin, that rate is trending below 2%.

Members will recall how difficult the low inflation rate of 1.35% made budgeting last year, hampering the progress made in moving districts out of hold harmless, and stymieing much of the positive influence of the Student Opportunity Act's fourth year of implementation. MASC, MASS, AFT-MA, and MTA jointly called on the Legislature at the Joint Committee on Ways and Means hearing to carry forward some of the inflationary rate above the 4.5% cap in FY23 and FY24 for fiscal year 2025. Disappointingly, that did not happen.

We bring this to your attention for your early planning and advocacy.

Charting the Course

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May 3

Nashoba Voc. Tech. (Danvers)

May 17

New Bedford

June 7

Greenfield

June 21

Worcester

September 13

Smith Voc. Tech. (Northampton)

October 4

Tri-County Voc. Tech. (Franklin)

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about the district's finance and budget process. Concerns raised by the school business official regarding the budget should naturally be part of the communications to the school committee.

Grants are approved by the school committee prior to expenditure.

Under MGL Ch. 44, sec. 53A as well as MGL Ch. 71, sec. 37A, as further outlined by the Department's guidance, grants received by the district must be accepted by the school committee before being expended. It is wise to view grants as a contract: the district is receiving the funds in exchange for committing to do specified things. The school committee should receive enough information in their approval process to evaluate any grants' alignment with established goals.

New endeavors should have a clear financial plan before approval; once approved, they should be regularly check on for financial outcomes.

School districts regularly consider adding new programs or changing how services are delivered. When such decisions are being considered, the financial plan of any such changes must be fully vetted by the school committee. The committee should ensure that all foreseeable initial spending is included in the plan; that provision is made for changes in expenses; that multiple years are provided for; and that the unforeseen is included. Prudence dictates that the committee be affirming but conservative when making changes.

Set clear cost centers and monitor them.

School committees in Massachusetts pass the annual budget at the cost center level. Cost centers are locally agreed upon levels of spending; they should be created to align with salary and non-salary items. All involved—the school committee, the superintendent, the school business official, those in the finance office—should be clear on what the cost centers are and what is included in each. Setting cost centers at a level that allow for all involved, including the public, to see where money is being expended provides for the transparency necessary for public finance. Cost centers should be a balance: they should not be so large as to making spending virtually invisible, while not being so small that minor changes must all come back to the committee.

Monitoring the costs centers over the course of the year is part of the essential work of budgeting by the school committee.

Projections of cost centers should be a significant part of a quarterly budget review.

While reporting on how much of a cost center has been spent, how much remains, and how much is encumbered is useful, it is crucial that regular budget reviews by the school committee include projections. A spending projection is an estimate, based on information known at the time, of how much is expected to be spent by year's end. As so much of a district's spending is in salaries, and as staff retire or go on leave, and are replaced by others making more or less, a district must track how much, given those changes, is expected to be spent by year's end. With New England's weather and the volatility of utility markets, supply chain uncertainty, and other elements of district spending also being subject to change, school committees should inform themselves of such projected changes.

Transfers are voted by the full school committee.

If the administration foresees that a cost center will fall short due to spending being over that which was passed by the school committee during their budget setting, it is the school committee that votes a transfer from a cost center that is projected to be spent at less than the amount budgeted. This is done on administrative recommendation. Funding from cost center to cost center cannot be done without a vote of the full school committee.

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Legislators of the Year

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A strong vocal advocate for increased collaboration between state and local education stakeholders, MASC thanks her for recognizing that a strong partnership is essential for meeting the diverse needs of students and families.

A native of Hanover and resident of Kingston for over two decades, a small-business owner, realtor, and proud mother of four LaNatra has seen firsthand the mounting challenges working families face. She is committed to a bipartisan approach to policymaking that will help keep the region prosperous and safe for our children and grandchildren.

State Senator Adam Gomez (D-Springfield) is a lifelong native of western Massachusetts. He is the first Latino from the Hampden district to serve in the MA Senate. He is the father of three, a former business owner, and is the proud member of a family of veterans. In honoring him with this award, MASC commends his commitment to and persistence in supporting legislation that addresses discrimination and bias, in communities and in schools. Throughout his career as Senator, and prior to that as a Springfield City Councilor, he has been a strong advocate for social justice issues such as criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, equal education opportunities for all, and civil rights.

Currently completing his second term in office this legislative session, the Senator has helped pass several landmark pieces of legislation into law through bills he has sponsored, including ensuring the state's Victim and Witness Assistance board membership has equitable and fair representation; providing undocumented immigrants the ability to have a driver's license; and eliminating hair discrimination from workplaces and schools. He serves as the Senate Chair for the Joint Committee on Cannabis Policy; Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws; Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion; and as a member of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.

Frequently Asked Questions About Student Representatives on the School Committee

The Association has recently received a number of questions regarding student members on Massachusetts school committees. In order to clarify the role of this mandated position, we offer the following answers to these FAQs:

Are school committees in Massachusetts required to have a student member?

Yes. Under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, section 38M, a student member is required.

How is this student representative selected?

The student representative is the chair of the student advisory committee, elected by the members of the student advisory committee prior to the first day in June in any year to serve in that position for one year.



How is the student advisory committee selected?

The student advisory committee is a five-member body, elected by the students of the high school or high schools of the district.

What further role does the student advisory committee have?

The school committee is required by law to meet every other month with the student advisory committee during the months that school is in session.

Must the student representative be a single designated individual?

Yes, as the student representative is the elected chair of the student advisory committee.

What role does the student representative play at meetings?

The student representative serves as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the committee, without the right to attend executive sessions unless expressly granted by the individual school committee. They have the right to address any matter before the committee.

Is the student representative there to deliver a report?

While a student representative may deliver a report if that is the wish of the student advisory committee and school committee, the role of the student representative is to be the voice of the student body on matters before the committee during the public meeting of the committee.

Note student representatives may wish to join the Massachusetts Association of Student Representatives to collaborate with other student representatives from across the state in their work.

Got Questions?

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From budgets and buses to the impact of AI and Title IX changes, if you've got questions, field directors at the MASC Joint Conference booth can help you with answers.

When you're visiting the Exhibit Hall, stop by MASC's Booth 36.

Not registered yet: there is STILL TIME. www.masc.org

MASC's Got Answers!

MASC Lifetime Achievement and All-State School Committee Winners Announced

The following members have been nominated by their colleagues and the MASC Board of Directors in recognition of their contributions to the Association and to their students and school communities. The awards will be presented at the Friday, November 8 Life Member/Leadership Awards dinner during the upcoming conference in Hyannis.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Connie Barr, Needham
Michael Greis, Needham
Tara Jacobs, North Adams
Emily Lebo, Quincy
Barbara Reynolds, Montachusett Reg. Voc. Tech.
Diane Swenson, Montachusett Reg. Voc. Tech.

ALL-STATE

Division I: Lauren Conoscenti, Andover
Division II: Ward Hamilton, Northeast Metro. Voc. Tech.
Division III: Dawn Byers, Whitman-Hanson Reg.
Division IV: Alysia Butler, Hopedale
Division V: Elizabeth Deneeve, Greenfield
Division VI: Christina Conry, Mt. Greylock Reg.
Division VII: Apryl Rossi, Wareham
Division VIII: Ross Barber, Montachusett Reg. Voc. Tech.
Division IX: Colleen Dawicki, New Bedford
Division X: Jeri Robinson, Boston

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Spending should always align with the goals set by the school Committee.

The most important action the school committee takes each year in pursuit of the goals set is passing the budget. The allocations within the budget are what enable the district to move toward the direction set by the school committee. Ensuring, through quarterly budget monitoring, that spending is supporting goals, and making changes in spending if warranted in pursuit of those goals is a necessary school committee responsibility.

Asking informed questions is part of the public process.

School committee members are elected and appointed from the

public. They have a wide variety of life experiences; they also have a wide range of skill and understanding of school finance. That is a strength, rather than a weakness, as ensuring that the finances of the district are clear to the public is also part of the school committee's role. As such, committee members should ask informed, thoughtful questions about the budget, both at budget setting and at quarterly budget reports. Such questions should stem from community values and from the goals set by the committee, and they should be supported by each member's ongoing education in school finance.

For more on this topic, plan to attend the Thursday, November 7, 4:00-5:15PM session on School Committee Budget Authority and Fiscal Responsibility at the upcoming Joint Conference in Hyannis. Not registered?? You still can: www.masc.org!

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