

# MASC *Bulletin*

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www.masc.org

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES

## Governor files education reform package

Includes proposals to lift charter school cap and establish “turnaround” Readiness Acceleration Schools

**I**N A HASTILY CONVENED MEDIA EVENT held last week at the Museum of Science, Governor Patrick, flanked by US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, unveiled his plans to increase accountability for school performance and student achievement and establish a new model of Readiness Schools across Massachusetts.

Earlier that day, the Governor filed legislation that would create an estimated 27,000 new charter school seats in about 30 of the lowest performing districts across the state and expand the state’s authority to intervene in underperforming schools. The legislation is also being touted as strengthening the Commonwealth’s position as it competes with other states for \$4.35 billion in federal “Race to the Top” funds being made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

In order to qualify for these funds, Duncan has said states must demonstrate a strong desire to transform public education by partnering more aggressively with low-performing schools, enhancing opportunities for autonomy and innovation and expanding the number of charter schools.

The Governor insisted his proposal will turn around underperforming schools more quickly and effectively and provide more targeted support to struggling students. The availability of new Readiness Acceleration schools that will operate as innovative in-district options for all Massachusetts students and families is designed to address the persistent achievement gap.

According to the Governor, who was also joined by MA Education Secretary

Paul Reville and DESE Commissioner Mitchell Chester:

- In 2008, 70 percent of English Language Learners and 40 percent of low-income students in the Class of 2010 failed to meet MCAS graduation requirements.
- Based on 2008 statewide graduation data, approximately 70 percent of African-American and 60 percent of Latino students graduated from high school in four years compared to approximately 90 percent of White students.
- On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Massachusetts showed some of the largest achievement gaps between White students and African-American and Latino students, and between lower- and higher-income students in reading and mathematics.

### Specifically, the charter proposal:

- Lifts charter school spending caps in the lowest-scoring 10 percent of school districts from 9 percent to 18 percent.
- Invites only successful charter school operators with demonstrated records of



Governor Patrick and MASC Division IV Chair Shirley Lundberg, a member of the Northborough-Southborough Reg. School Committee, discussed the Governor's education initiatives and the state of school finance at a luncheon visit at Britney's Restaurant in Northborough on July 22, one of several stops the Governor made that day in Worcester County.

student achievement to apply to open, or expand, charter schools.

- Compels providers to make efforts to recruit and retain populations of low-income students, persistently underperforming students, English Language Learners, students receiving special education and students who have dropped

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## MASC files testimony in support of in-district charters

**I**N A PACKED HEARING ROOM AT THE STATE House last week, MASC presented powerful testimony to members of the Joint Committee on Education in support of Boston Mayor Menino's bill that would authorize in-district charter schools.

The Mayor's bill, which was filed earlier in the week, was followed several days later by legislation sought by Governor Patrick that would double the

number of charter school seats allowable in the state's lowest performing districts and enable that state to take over approximately 30 underperforming schools across the state and convert them into charter-like schools that could be managed by a third party. (see related article, page 1).

Under the Mayor's proposal, local school districts would be able to convert

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# MA News

## MCAS improvements: shorter tests; faster results

New improvements to the state's assessment system have resulted in the fastest turnaround of student results in the program's history and plans to significantly reduce testing time in future years.

Preliminary student level results from the 2009 English Language Arts (ELA) MCAS exam were provided to districts late last month, marking the first time educators will have the entire summer to review data from the tests administered the previous spring.

The data made available to districts are preliminary, and do not include results from the MCAS-Alt, which will be scored over the summer. Because these results do not include all test-takers and are still considered preliminary, school, district and statewide numbers have not yet been calculated. These numbers will be made public in early September, allowing districts ample time to examine the student-level data and report any discrepancies back to the Department.

Beginning next year, preliminary ELA results and multiple-choice Math results for grades 3–8 and 10 will be made available to districts by the end of June, and will include results from students with severe special needs, who participated in the MCAS-Alt.

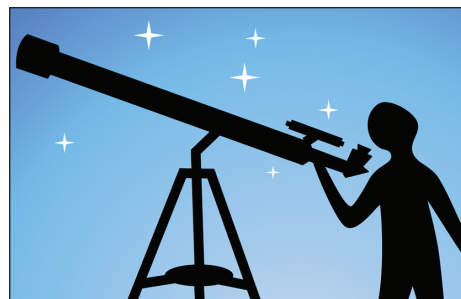
Also beginning next year, testing time will be decreased on the grades 3–8 ELA, Math, and Science, Technology and Engineering exams. The ELA Reading Comprehension tests for grades 3–8 will be reduced from three 45-minute sessions to two 60 minute sessions; the Math exams for grades 3–6 will be cut from two 60 minute sessions to two 45 minute sessions; the Math exams for grades 7 and 8 will be reduced from two 60 minute sessions to two 50 minute sessions, and the STE exams for grades 5 and 8 will be reduced from 60 to 45 minutes per session.

## Grants awarded for Readiness Schools

Late last month, the administration announced that 16 school districts across the Commonwealth will receive

# MASC/MASS JOINT CONFERENCE 2009

Check out the conference **EARLY BIRD** registration that was mailed to all members and superintendents last week. Program highlights/hotel/meals and registration information are included. Also online, updated frequently, at [www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org).



**PLEASE NOTE:** Members who took advantage of the “End of Year Special Conference Savings” registration offer for \$225.00 will need to register for conference meals and hotel accommodations since these were not included in the “Special Savings” offer.

grants to establish innovative, in-district “Readiness Schools.”

The 16 districts will develop plans to launch up to 22 schools beginning in Fall 2010. Totaling \$200,000, the grants range from \$10,000 - \$36,000 per district and will provide educators with the necessary resources to begin designing the new schools.

These schools will utilize increased flexibility and autonomy in one or more of these key areas: curriculum, budget, staffing, school schedule and calendar, and school district policies.

They can be developed as new schools or as conversions of existing schools, and each school will operate under a performance contract that sets specific goals for student achievement and school improvement.

The grant announcement kicks off the implementation of the Readiness Schools initiative, one of the primary proposals that emerged from Governor Deval Patrick’s Education Action Agenda last summer. The initiative also is a key part of the Commonwealth’s forthcoming application for federal “Race to the Top” education funding, which will provide more than \$4 billion to states to promote education reform.

**The initiative will support the establishment of three types of Readiness Schools:**

- **Advantage Schools**, in which school faculty and leadership primarily will be responsible for developing the “innovation plan” and performance contract under which the school operates;
- **Alliance Schools**, in which external partners such as colleges, museums, and other organizations will play a

central role in developing the innovation plan, and will be held accountable for meeting the terms of the performance contract;

- **Acceleration Schools**, which will be conversions of underperforming and chronically-underperforming schools implemented through innovation plans and performance contracts developed by the Commissioner, with input from local stakeholders.

The grants, which are funded through the state’s Targeted Assistance program, will allow districts to plan and implement strategic reforms to improve student achievement during the 2009-10 school year, and leverage those reforms to establish Advantage and Alliance Schools beginning in Fall 2010.

## GRANTS WERE AWARDED TO THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

### Adams-Cheshire/North Adams:

\$10,500 to support the development of a new, two-district, middle-grade Advantage “virtual school” in partnership with the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts;

**Ashburnham-Westminster:** \$10,000 to support the development of an Advantage “school within a school” serving grades 2-5;

**Boston:** \$36,376 to support the development of two Advantage high school conversions and a new grade 6-12 Advantage School;

**Fall River:** \$10,800 to support the development of up to two schools (Advantage or Alliance);

**Gill-Montague:** \$11,080 to support the development of up to two schools, including an Alliance elementary

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# Ed reform

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out or are at risk of dropping out.

The Readiness Acceleration Schools initiative expands the authority of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to intervene in underperforming and chronically underperforming schools.

## The Readiness proposal:

- Provides the Commissioner with the ability to develop a performance contract and an “innovation plan” with local stakeholders.
- Enforces the inclusion of wrap-around services to meet social service, health and workforce development needs of students and families.
- Allows for greater autonomy and

flexibility in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing and district policies.

MASC has issued statements to the membership and the media regarding the Governor’s proposals to raise the charter school cap and to grant very broad powers to DESE to declare schools underperforming and impose a state or private takeover of said schools.

MASC is particularly concerned that the charter proposal neither addresses the charter school funding flaws, nor other problem areas the Association has identified in the past, including phantom students, inflated waiting lists, excessive reserves, and the extent to which charters are often “drop out factories” from which the more difficult to educate students are “counseled out” and sent back to the districts from

which they came.

MASC is also concerned about aspects of the Readiness Acceleration schools legislation, particularly as regards granting broad authority to DESE to determine schools underperforming. Given that MA has set the “highest in the nation” proficiency standard for No Child Left Behind AYP measures, and outperforms every other state on national standards, there are many MA schools that, because of these exceptionally high standards, fail to meet some category of AYP. And while MASC believes the current leadership at DESE is trying to work with districts to address these challenges, the potential for misusing this authority becomes far greater should there be a less public-school friendly administration in the future.

# masc testimony

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underperforming schools into in-district charter schools.

Menino offered the plan as a way to close a persistent achievement gap between different groups of students. The in-district charters would run much like the state’s charter school program, but with a key difference being that the in-district schools would be established, supported and managed by local school committees, rather than the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

In its testimony in support of the in-district charters, MASC noted that the model proposed by the Mayor is the standard for charter schools in most other states. There, communities decide for themselves whether to establish a

charter school in their district rather than, as is the case in Massachusetts, having the charter imposed on the city, town or region, resulting in a serious loss of Chapter 70 money.

MASC also noted that the in-district charter model would address the fair funding problem because school districts would authorize the schools, set the funding levels, oversee spending, monitor and assess accountability and ensure the integrity of their operations. The schools would be fully public, subject to open meeting and public records laws, and state ethics and conflict of interest statutes.

Authority over the schools would remain with the district, which would then have the opportunity to use both stronger management tools and local governance strategies to help them

improve student achievement and close the achievement gap.

MASC Secretary-Treasurer Dorothy Presser, a member of the Lynnfield School Committee who represented MASC at the hearing, noted “we commend Mayor Menino for recognizing that the opportunity to expand workable, locally authorized and overseen charter schools that offer new strategies and stronger management tools for our districts is one that will be welcomed by school committees and superintendents.”

Also speaking for the Association were Legislative Counsel Stephen Finnegan and Executive Director Glenn Koocher.

The MASC testimony in full is on the MASC website, as is a background briefing on charter schools prepared by MASC and presented to the legislators as backup information.

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school and a program serving students with autism;

**Greenfield:** \$15,000 to support the development of up to three Readiness Schools by Fall 2011, including an elementary school conversion, middle school conversion, and new 8th grade program;

**Lynn:** \$10,500 to support the development of a Readiness School conversion at the elementary or middle school level;

**New Bedford:** \$10,500 to support the development of a high school conver-

sion, with potential public higher education partners;

**North Middlesex Regional:** \$10,500 to support the development of a new grade 5-12 school in partnership with Teachers 21;

**Pittsfield:** \$10,500 to support the development of an Advantage elementary school;

**Ralph C. Mahar Regional:** \$10,500 to support the development of a secondary-level Readiness School, using the Gateway to College model, with a potential community college partner

**Randolph:** \$10,500 to support the development of one Readiness School (Advantage or Alliance);

**Revere:** \$10,500 to support the development of an Advantage elementary school conversion;

**Salem:** \$10,500 to support the development of an Alliance elementary school conversion, in partnership with Salem State College;

**Somerville:** \$19,144 to support the development of up to two K-8 conversions, including one modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone.

# Education Policy Fellowship Program invites MASC applicants

## Education leaders: take note.

Northeastern University is inviting applications from school committee members and other education leaders for its nationally recognized Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP)—a 10-month program for early and mid-career professionals in education and related fields. The program is organized around three major elements: understanding and impacting public policy; developing leadership skills; and networking with other professionals.

Fellows attend two out-of-state national meetings each year—one focused on leadership and one on policy (in Washington, DC)—where they meet fellows from twelve other state EPFP programs.

**Reading School Committee member Elaine Webb** (who participated in the 2008-2009 program) and **Lynnfield School Committee member Dorothy Presser** who participated in the program in 2005-06, strongly encourage members to take advantage of the unique experience the fellowship offers. "For me, one of the key components was the perspective it provided on education policy and how it is created at both the state and federal level. It was invaluable in broadening my understanding of issues, not just those that affect me and my community, but the larger mega-needs and issues of educa-

tion policy and leadership", Webb said. Presser noted that "the program was also a great opportunity to interact with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. What I learned has definitely helped me become a more effective school committee member, MASC board member and in my work with the Suburban Coalition." An EPFP 'class' typically includes teachers, school administrators, DESE professional staff, and individuals from community-based organizations, policy advocacy organizations, and higher education.

The Massachusetts EPFP site is based at Northeastern University and is part of a national program of the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. Coordinators for the program in Massachusetts are Professors **John Portz (who is also a member of the Watertown School Committee)**, former Massachusetts Governor **Michael Dukakis** who teaches in the Political Science Department and **Dorothy Presser**.

For more information and application, visit: [www.epfp.neu.edu](http://www.epfp.neu.edu) or contact John Portz at 617-373-3391 or [j.portz@neu.edu](mailto:j.portz@neu.edu).

Applications are now being accepted through August 29 for the 2009-2010 year. Costs include \$2700 for tuition, and approximately \$1900 for the opening retreat, and travel costs to

the two national conferences. Total costs are estimated to be between \$4500 and \$5000.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**September 8 (Tu)**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MEETING** The State House,  
Boston

**September 8 (Tu)**

**JOINT EDUCATION  
COMMITTEE READINESS  
PROJECT OVERSIGHT**

**HEARING** The State House,  
Room A-1

**September 9 (W)**

**MASC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS MEETING**

Marriott Courtyard, Marlboro

**September 11-12 (F-Sa)**

**CHARTING THE COURSE**

Berkshires

**November 18-21 (W-Sa)**

**MASC/MASS JOINT**

**CONFERENCE** Resort and  
Conference Center, Hyannis

## Massachusetts Association of School Committees

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Debra L. Bibeau, President

July 28, 2009

Dear MASC Members:

As we confront what could be one of the most difficult fiscal years for school committees, we want you to know how MASC is responding to the challenges we all face. As you do for your students, we are trying to do more for our members even though finances are tight. In fact, we are tightening our belts, too. The MASC dues structure will remain the same as FY 2009 and we have frozen the salaries of our staff for the next year.

We have prioritized service to our member school committees as job one. We will also be working very hard on public policy priorities that include:

- getting the fiscal and regulatory relief we need to get through the recession;
- restoring transportation aid;
- keeping 100% of Medicaid reimbursements;
- enacting charter school administrative and funding reform;
- mobilizing to protect school districts from being restructured, reorganized or consolidate against their will;
- ensuring that Readiness Schools are subject to school committee approval; and
- preserving the role of school committees as the voice of parents, community members, and local taxpayers over public schools.

We will continue to provide the services you need whenever you need them, including evenings and weekends. This includes handling the daily volume of member calls, member orientations, training and workshops in districts, policy reference services, legal guidance, reference on open meeting, public records, and ethics/conflicts of interest issues, development of customized resources, assistance with superintendent searching, and other customized services that you seek.

Your colleagues on the Board of Directors and our staff are accessible to you whenever you need us. That's why we put our contact information and the staff cell phone numbers on our web site and in our materials. We meet at night, and we expect that when you need us you will call us at any time.

We have expanded the 2009 publication of the MA General Laws to include the new Open Meeting, Public Records, and Ethics law changes that Governor Patrick signed earlier this month. You will have the new book within three weeks.

We are making our Joint Conference with the superintendents in November both timely and accessible to you with important up-to-the-minute briefings and important content. We are working to make this event affordable for every member.

We appreciate the support that you have given to MASC as we collaborate with you to promote public schools and excellence among our fellow school committee members. We look forward to serving you in the coming academic year.

Call us whenever you need us. We will be here for you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra L. Bibeau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debra L. Bibeau, President