

## MASC LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE AND NEW TRAINING PROGRAM

Last month, in response to member requests, MASC introduced a new, more easily accessed and researched web-site, as well as a new member service focused on effective district governance that will be available to all members at no charge.

### **WEBSITE OFFERS ADDITIONAL FEATURES/RESOURCES**

According to MASC President Ann Marie Cugno, the decision to undertake a redesign of the web was driven by a number of concerns. Chief among these was the need for members to be able to more easily access information on the site, relating both to MASC services as well as the support tools that can help school committee members be more effective leaders and advocates for public education in their communities. Also, in addition to new links and resources, a Twitter feed has been added to get important information to members as quickly as possible.

For members who were familiar with the prior website, there are a number of improvements and new features. MASC Field Director Mike Gilbert, who oversaw development

of the site, hopes that tools such as the new topic-based drop down on the home page; major topic links in the page footer; the cleaner front page that clearly displays upcoming events and the Twitter feed; enhanced services information and resource documents and publications; as well as expanded event and calendar listings and information for COSCAP members will make the site more user-friendly. [continued on page 2](#)

### **DISTRICT GOVERNANCE PROGRAM**

Also last month, MASC introduced a new member service available to all districts. The District Governance Program is a series of five workshops designed to help school committees and superintendents develop effective strategies for working together with a focus on improving student achievement. Committees can take advantage

of all five workshops or select just those sessions on a particular topic at the time it is relevant to their work as a committee. As a member service, there is no cost to participate in any or all of the workshops. MASC provides all the resources, materials and trainers as well as ongoing support to the participating committees.

Rather than being a “one size fits all” program, the training is targeted and tailored to meet the particular needs and challenges of each district. One great advantage of the program is that the entire committee, with the superintendent, participates together. This workshop format provides the opportunity for meaningful dialogue among committee members and the superintendent and promotes a shared vision for the district and a stronger working relationship among

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### **DAY ON THE HILL: MASC Advocacy Campaign Keeps Focus on Public Education and Student Achievement**

Sequestration. The sluggish economy. An overload of new initiatives. The groundswell of opposition to Common Core and PARCC. Worries about (another) lean state budget.

As school committee members, you are all too familiar with these challenges and their potential impact on student achievement. The fact that Massachusetts public school students continue to rank number one in the

country and among the top in the world owes largely to your persistence in keeping the spotlight on student learning and advocating for public education as a priority and key to our economic future.

With budget season once again underway, school leaders are struggling to balance the increasing number of regulatory demands and mandates (health, nutrition, background checks, educator evaluation), and the escalating need for programs and services (extended day, transient, homeless, special needs, ELL) with the prospect that many education accounts will continue to be either

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# MASC Governance Project Honored with National Award

Last month, MASC's District Governance Support Project received a national honor for a project that has helped Massachusetts school committees improve teaching and learning in their districts. Presented by the National School Boards Association, MASC was awarded the 2014 Thomas A. Shannon Award for Excellence at NSBA's Leadership Conference in Washington DC.

The Massachusetts District Governance Support Project (DGSP) was a joint initiative of MASC, MASS and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This project, which began in 2010 and was fully implemented in 2013, was part of a larger professional development initiative that includes a professional development program for principals, a new superintendent induction program, and a labor management partnership.

"Our goal was to use the research on how boards advance teaching and learning and to make our members part of the solution," said MASC Presi-



**The Thomas A. Shannon Award for Excellence was presented to a team from MASC for developing the District Governance Support Project.**

Pictured left to right: MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher; Field Director James Hardy; Communications Director Jenifer Handy; Field Director Dorothy Presser; MASC President Ann Marie Cugno (Medford); Field Director Michael Gilbert; MASC Immediate Past President Mary Jo Rossetti (Somerville)

dent Ann Marie Cugno. "If we want our democracy to include school governance, it's an effort that must succeed."

MASC staff and collaborators produced a seven-part training program which focused on different strategies for participants to understand and undertake their roles in a way to improve outcomes for students. The MASC staff engaged in training in targeted districts across the state to ensure that school committees understood the state's new, comprehensive educator evaluation system. As part of the program, a highly detailed school committee evaluation tool was developed and utilized as well.

Building on the success of the program, MASC has recently adapted key elements and will now be offering this district governance training to all districts, at no charge, on a customized basis. Contact MASC or your field representative for more information, or to participate.

The Thomas A. Shannon Award, named after a former executive director of NSBA, is a national award for leadership in public education given annually by NSBA.

## NEW GOVERNANCE TRAINING PROGRAM

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members.

Research has shown that school committee governance practices can help or hinder student achievement. The District Governance Program was developed based on this research in order to help committees develop practices that foster improved student achievement. The training and tools can be used by committees to help make significant strides toward doing those things that will close the achievement gap, work more effectively as a local board and make lasting improvements in their contributions to student success.

### **FIVE KEY WORKSHOPS ARE AVAILABLE AS PART OF THE PROGRAM:**

- **Building the Foundation:** This workshop is designed to help the school committee and superintendent work together collaboratively as a high-functioning governance team.

It's an essential workshop for when a new superintendent or new committee members come on board or as a periodic tune-up.

- **Framing the Work:** This workshop covers alignment between the district's mission, vision and long-range planning. It provides the opportunity to discuss the district's academic needs and to ensure that the superintendent and school committee have a shared vision of goals and direction for the district.

- **Monitoring Progress:** This workshop helps ensure the tools are in place to monitor progress toward achieving district goals. It covers aligning SMART goals in the superintendent evaluation to district goals and demonstrates the use of data to monitor progress.

- **Effective Meetings:** This workshop is designed to help committees "work smarter, not harder" at meeting-time, making sure time is spent effectively and focuses on student achievement

and the district's goals. Committees will learn about specific tools that can be adopted to ensure smooth and effective meetings focused on student progress.

- **Sustaining Progress:** The final workshop provides committees with the tools to sustain effective governance practices into the future, through changes on the governance team, and to ensure continued focus on improvement in student achievement.

Additional workshops are also available on Collective Bargaining for Student Achievement, Budget and Finance and Superintendent Evaluation.

This award-winning program (see article above) is a genuinely powerful way for school committees and superintendents to have a real impact on student achievement. Please contact Dorothy Presser at MASC if your committee or superintendent would be interested in any of the District Governance workshops.

# SINCE YOU ASKED.....

In recent weeks, the MASC office has received numerous calls from members asking about the open meeting law requirement and how it applies to school committee retreats and issue-specific workshops. MASC extends its thanks to **Elizabeth Valerio, Esq.**, a founding member and Past President of the MA Council of School Attorneys, and her colleague **Hilary Detmold, Esq.** for providing the following guidance on this important issue.

## The Open Meeting Law and School Committee Retreats and Workshops

After elections in the winter and spring, many school committees engage in workshops or “retreats” to train members on teamwork and improve communication among current and new members. School committees, like other public bodies in Massachusetts, must comply with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25. The Open Meeting Law requires that all public bodies post notice of meeting at least 48 hours in advance (except in an emergency) and to include in the posting a list of topics on which the chair reasonably anticipates discussion during that meeting. Any meeting of the school committee is considered a “meeting” under the Open Meeting Law if it includes a quorum of committee members, and if they engage in any deliberation. Therefore, the Open Meeting Law applies to all meetings including workshops and retreats where a quorum of the public body or a quorum of any subcommittee of the public body deliberates on any public business within its jurisdiction. However, a quorum of the school committee or any of its subcommittees may attend seminars, conferences, workshops, and retreats without posting and without making the meeting open to the public, provided that the members do not engage in any deliberations on any public business within their jurisdiction while in attendance. Facilitated retreats and educational workshops where the program is designed to train a general audience usually do not require posting provided that members of the public body do not engage in deliberations while attending these retreats, workshops,

and programs. For example, many school committee members attend the MASC/MASS joint conference in Hyannis every fall, where they listen to speakers and attend seminars and trainings. Provided that these school committee members will not and do not engage in deliberations while in attendance, there is no need to post these programs as meetings under the Open Meeting Law even if a quorum of the school committee is in attendance. If, however, during a school committee’s retreat, the members discuss their goals for the year, or the specific roles and responsibilities of the school committee, committee members, or administrators, such discussions will likely be considered to be deliberations on “public business within its jurisdiction” and subject the retreat to the Open Meeting Law requirements.

School committees are always advised to consult with counsel about these matters, and to air on the side of caution and post the workshop or retreat. Even if the public is given notice of an upcoming school committee retreat or workshop, school committees should consider whether the meeting is “open” to the public in a practical sense. If, for example, the committee will be traveling to a remote location outside of the municipality to hold the retreat, it is unlikely that the meeting will actually be considered open as members of the public may not be able to travel far distances to attend.

The Open Meeting Law defines a meeting as “a deliberation by a public body with respect to any matter within the body’s jurisdiction; provided, how-

ever, ‘meeting’ shall not include:

- (a) an on-site inspection of a project or program, so long as the members do not deliberate;
- (b) attendance by a quorum of a public body at a public or private gathering, include a conference or training program or a media, social or other event, so long as the members do not deliberate;
- (c) attendance by a quorum of a public body at a meeting of another public body that has complied with the notice requirements of the open meeting law, so long as the visiting members communicate only by open participation in the meeting on those matters under discussion by the host body and do not deliberate . . . .” (M.G.L. c. 30A § 18) (emphasis added)

School committees are advised to consult their legal counsel regarding compliance with the Open Meeting Law when scheduling retreats, workshops, and conferences.

*Elizabeth Valerio and Hilary Detmold are attorneys with the law firm of Deutsch Williams and are members of MASC’s Council of School Attorneys.*

### Saturday, April 12

Tantasqua Reg., Fiskdale  
• Charting the Course (8am-4pm)  
• Pre-Event Advocacy Program (9am-12:30pm)

### Tuesday, April 29

The State House, Boston  
**DAY ON THE HILL**  
(8:45am-2:45pm)

### Saturday, May 3

Ludlow High School  
• Charting the Course (8am-4pm)  
• Role of the Chair/Difficult People (9am-12:30pm)

### Saturday, May 17

Cape Cod Voc. Tech., Harwich  
• Charting the Course (8am-4pm)  
• School Board’s Role in Student Achievement (9am-12:30pm)

**For registration information:**  
[www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)

## DAY ON THE HILL, continued from page 1

under- or level-funded in FY15. In addition, as the first round of PARCC testing begins in the coming weeks, print and social media assaults on local control and democratically elected school leadership have gone viral—and overboard!

If school committees are to navigate these unsettled waters successfully, it will require a full team effort beginning with you and your colleagues. **Never has it been more imperative for MASC to remind legislators that if Massachusetts is to continue to lead the nation in the high performance of its students and its strong economic engine, Beacon Hill and locally elected leaders must commit to providing the necessary resources and supports.**

MASC President Ann Marie Cugno (Medford) reminds members: “We know we share a common vision for high achieving students prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century global economy. MASC’s newly revamped advocacy program at **DAY ON THE HILL** is a vital opportunity to talk to legislators about what we need *now* to keep our schools strong and what we must do to ensure a strong future for our schools and our students.

So join your colleagues at the **State House on April 29** for this high



energy event that will include information and background on key issues, plus insights from key legislators, and guidance on how to advocate effectively. There will be ample time allotted for you to schedule meetings with your legislators and bring the message of the need to support and strengthen services in this era of high expectations and excessive regulation. And of course, one of the highlights of the day continues to be the superlative lunch buffet prepared and presented by students from many of the state’s vocational technical schools.

Registration information is being mailed to all members and is posted online. Please contact the MASC office if you have questions (800) 392-6023 or check the MASC website for updates ([www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)). We look forward to seeing you at the State House on Tuesday, April 29.

## WANT TO LIGHT A SPARK BEFORE DAY ON THE HILL?

**Come to Pre-Event Advocacy Saturday on April 12!**

Tantasqua Reg., Fiskdale

Advocacy isn’t a one day a year activity. In order to be effective, advocacy is about getting your message out all year round—in your home districts as well as on Beacon Hill.

To assist you in your advocacy efforts, MASC is offering a jump-start on key issues at our Pre-Day on the Hill Event Advocacy program. We’ve invited legislators to talk about how legislation evolved on Beacon Hill and what information and actions are helpful in moving an issue forward, not only at Day on the Hill, but throughout the year.

Can’t make Day on the Hill? Advocacy Saturday will provide you with information and background to take to your community and you’ll learn how to advocate and deliver your message powerfully and effectively to legislators and your local constituents.

**For registration and more information: [www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)**

**MASC**

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