

Upcoming MASC Day on the Hill Tackles 2018 Budget Concerns

And no matter how one may wish it differently, the state's fiscal outlook for the upcoming year is cautious at best and downright grim at worst.

School leaders: last Fall, your actions—your local initiatives—were a pivotal driver of the successful effort to defeat Question 2 (the attempt to raise the charter school cap). The public, and above all, your legislators need to hear from you again on the critical need to address the educational inequities and alarming achievement gaps that have resulted from the antiquated 1993 funding formula. **DAY ON THE HILL** can help jumpstart those efforts.

The budget cycle now underway on Beacon Hill promises to be one of the most challenging, and possibly contentious, in recent memory. K-12 education funding—which the Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC) concluded is severely

underfunded to the tune of \$1-2 billion—is just one of many competing priorities that legislators will be trying to reconcile in the weeks ahead. As the budget debate snakes through the legislature, it is critical that school leaders remind their elected officials of the urgent need to address this deficit.

Over the past six months, MASC and school committees have met with members of the legislative leadership to reinforce the need to modernize the funding formula—a point on which few legislators disagree, but which they acknowledge will be a difficult sell without school leader support, especially as realities of the state and federal budget cuts come more clearly into view.

While the state continues to grapple with lower-than-anticipated tax revenues and soaring pen-

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School Leaders/Administrators/Educators Speak Out at Ways & Means Education Hearing

Reported by MASC Field Director Tracy Novick

There were two main themes that emerged in testimony at the education hearing before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Wednesday, March 29 at UMass-Amherst: the impacts of issues outside the classroom on the classroom, and the need for funding reform in both K-12 and higher education. The first came through most clearly in testimony from Commissioner of Higher Education Carlos Santiago,

who spoke eloquently of students who were making choices between buying books and buying food, who have faced homelessness by bunking with friends in dorms. He praised staff at universities and community colleges who are working to mitigate the impacts of these issues on their campuses. This was echoed later on by Lynn Senator Tom McGee, who spoke of the importance of K-12 school nutrition programs, after school programs, and

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PAY ATTENTION TO BERKSHIRE COUNTY

This Letter to the Editor by MASC Division VI Chair John Hockridge (North Adams School Committee) was distributed to Commonwealth Magazine and various regional news dailies. Hockridge is also the Chair of the Berkshire County Education Task Force.

This may come as a surprise to some, but not everybody's from Boston.

In small, rural and otherwise distant school districts across the Common-



John Hockridge

wealth critical issues are in play, altering our demographic and economic profile. In Berkshire County, there's a grass roots effort to effect important changes in local school districts thereby enabling these districts and their communities to determine their own destiny. If successful, this may pilot similar much needed change in many other small districts in the Commonwealth.

Berkshire County has seen a decline of over 20% in student enrollment since 2000, with another 10%-plus decline anticipated over the next decade. This has gone hand in hand with a steep reduction in overall population as job opportunities disappeared with the loss of major employers and as the post-graduate youth population left the area in search of more lucrative opportunities. As a result, birth rates have declined steadily and the median age of the county population has risen to 46—ten years older than the Common-

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Pay attention to Berkshire County

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wealth's median age.

At the same time, Berkshire County loves its schools, no matter their size, many with fewer than 200 students. We value our educators and administrators, share their dedication and care for our students and are proud of the quality education they provide to all our children. Yet we are concerned about what may happen to the quality of education if the enrollment and financial trends continue—which seems inevitable if significant change is not realized at the local level.

Since July 2015, a group of thirty Berkshire County school committee members, school administrators, municipal leaders and business leaders—the Berkshire County Education Task Force—has been volunteering their personal time, meeting every third Saturday morning to address the challenges of a decline in student enrollment, near stagnant financial resources and reduced academic offerings. The group retained the UMASS Donahue Institute to help with a Phase I compilation of school district and municipality

past, current and trending data, paid for through local funding by banks, non-profits and school districts. They also retained the District Management Group of Boston to partner with them for their Phase II effort of exploring expanded shared services, consolidations of neighboring districts where appropriate, and creating “super regions” paid for by state funds appropriated through DESE legislative earmarks.

Over the past few months, members have made presentations to forty-five school committees, selectboards and city councils. They have also presented to Governor Baker and Education Secretary James Peyser.

The task force is now organizing several regional community outreach meetings and student focus groups throughout the county's school districts to hear what students, parents, educators and other stakeholders aspire to for academic and extracurricular offerings that they don't currently have. The goal is to model options around the stakeholder's priorities from greatly upgraded shared services among school districts all the way to the creation of new “super” regional

school districts, and everything in between. Based on the findings from these county conversations, the group will present their recommendations to school committees and municipal select-boards and city councils. It will then be up to the schools and the municipalities to decide whether to implement the recommendations.

In developing these recommendations, the group is exploring all issues, including academics, extra-curriculars, regional transportation, health insurance, infrastructure, and the economies of the schools and the municipalities. A further complicating challenge is that many of Berkshire County's municipalities are now near their tax levy limits and several are approaching their tax ceilings, which limits the level of local financial support.

Franklin, Hampshire, Worcester and Barnstable counties are going through similar population, student enrollment and financial stresses. Pay attention to Berkshire County! They just might have the right formula for success as they continue to create paths to controlling their own destiny. ♦

Ways & Means Education Hearing

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summer programs in giving students some steps towards equity. Tim Collins, President of the Springfield Education Association, cited Hubert Humphrey in his comments: “A society is measured by how they care for the most vulnerable...with tight budgets, those are the people that are getting hurt the most.”

In testimony from teachers, from superintendents, from town administrators, and from school committee members, there was a call for implementation of the Foundation Budget Review Commission's recommendations. Mayor Bill Martin of Greenfield took questions at length about the impact of residential placements on his district's budget, and the inadequacy of how the state assesses special education costs. “We've begun to ask when

will the first one million dollar student happen?” he commented. Brendan Sheran, chair of the Pittsfield High School social studies department and president of their teachers' union, said, “Our students deserve the people, the materials, and the physical school environments necessary to flourish,” speaking of the Pittsfield budget, which is projected this year to cut 65 positions. North Adams School Committee member John Hockridge, who is also Chair of MASC's Division VI (Berkshires), noted that in a recent survey, districts across the state had reflected the priorities of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, as well as regional transportation and charter school reimbursement, when asked about budgetary concerns. In response to testimony, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier of Pittsfield noted that requests for minimum per-pupil increases were in conflict with calls

for implementation of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, moving the state further away from equity rather than towards it.

Early on, in response to his testimony, Senator Chang-Diaz directly challenged Secretary Peyser regarding the needs that would be presented over the course of the day: “It is difficult for me to understand, Mr. Secretary, why you have stated publicly that you oppose increases in taxes to meet these persistent unmet needs.” He responded that it was above his pay grade to discuss revenue, that his job was to work with what we currently had. Senator Pat Jehlen, a member of the Joint Committee on Education, later raised the issue again, pointing out that Massachusetts is eighth from the bottom in equity in school funding. Tim Collins put it more bluntly: “Two years of short-changing our schools to the tune of 2 billion dollars a year is unconscionable! It's educational malpractice!” ♦

DAY ON THE HILL

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sion and health care costs, the fiscal news from Washington throws even more confusion into the mix. The purported federal spending plan—the deepest percentage reduction in 35 years—includes extraordinarily deep cuts in funding for key domestic programs on which states and communities rely. According to analyses from the MA Municipal Association and the MA Center for Budget and Policy, these cuts would significantly jeopardize the Governor's budget which relies on \$11.43 billion in federal revenue, most of which (\$11 billion) is for health and human services and \$200 million for education. In addition, the President's proposal would eliminate the entire \$3.3 billion Community Development Block Grant program, slash Community Service Block Grants (which fund a variety of vital local human service needs) and hit dozens of other programs that benefit communities, families and disadvantaged neighborhoods. And on the federal education front, \$9 billion in cuts (13% reduction) has been proposed for the Department of Education, eliminating the 21st Century Community Learning Centers which provide before and after school and summer programs and slicing \$2.4 billion from state grant programs that will have a trickle-down effect on cities and towns.

These are just some of the challenges that state and local lawmakers are contending with. If education funding is to come through this cycle stronger than before, legislators need your ideas, your support, your initiative.

Currently, there are several key pieces of legislation that address education funding and equity gaps, among them, *S.223, An Act Modernizing the Foundation Budget for the 21st Century*, filed by Senate Education Committee Chair Sonia Chang-Diaz. The bill would fully implement the FBRC's recommendation to update the formula using actual averages from the state government's

health insurance network to adjust insurance estimates, increase the assumed special education in-district enrollment and out-of-district costs to reflect reality, and adjust ELL and low-income components to align with 21st century best practices.

Senator Chang-Diaz, House Education Committee Chair Alice Peisch, Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen Spilka and Representative Jay Kaufman have been invited to **DAY ON THE HILL** to present their insights on the budget proposals and projections for the state of the economy in the coming year.

REGISTER NOW to join them, other legislators and legislative aides at this year's revamped (and **RELOCATED**) Day on the Hill program on Tuesday, April 25. MASC also encourages members to bring their student representatives and other student/student government leaders to attend and participate in the program. Questions from students on the legislative process and how the issues in this year's budget debate will impact them, their schools, their classmates and their communities will be taken up the program keynote speakers. There is no charge for students to attend, but they must be registered to ensure that we have sufficient materials and resources for all.

Members are also encouraged to schedule meetings with legislators and their staff at their offices in the State House after the **DAY ON THE HILL** program ends at 11am.

Don't know how to reach your legislator? Contact information for all legislators is included in the MASC 2017 Legislative Directory which can be accessed on the MASC website at: http://www.masc.org/images/events/2017/doh/MASC_DOH-2017_Legislative-Directory.pdf

Register online (\$35.00, includes continental breakfast and all materials) at: www.mac.org or for more information, call (617)523-8454 or (800)392-6023. ♦

MA NEWS

MA Adopts Revised English Language Arts and Math Standards

At its meeting on March 28, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously to adopt revised learning standards in math and in English language arts and literacy. The revised standards are unique to Massachusetts and reflect the Commonwealth's commitment to maintaining the highest quality curriculum standards in the nation.

The revised standards are the product of more than a year of work by Massachusetts educators and DESE staff. Educators drew from their experience with the existing standards, and the recommendations also reflect feedback received through public comment, including through an online survey.

In English language arts and literacy, the changes include:

- Multiple cross-references to make the reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language standards more coherent;
- Instructional examples and samples of student writing from Massachusetts classrooms to clarify the meaning of the standards; and
- An explanation of how literacy instruction — particularly in the early elementary years — is intertwined with mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and other subjects in a well-balanced curriculum.

In math, the changes include:

- Stronger learning progressions for pattern recognition in the early grades; the measurement of circles in the middle grades; and ratio, rate and proportions in the middle grades; and
- Added guidance for making decisions about course sequences that includes pathways to calculus and other advanced mathematics courses.

The newly approved standards describe what students should know and be able to do in English language arts and literacy and in math at each grade level. The standards are not a curriculum, and they do not specify which materials teachers

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Petition in support of foundation budget recommendations implementation

As FY18 district budgets are being finalized, school committee members are encouraged to share with their communities the urgent need to support revisions to the Foundation Budget (see for example S.223 "An Act to Modernize the Foundation Budget" sponsored by Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz). Posted on the MASC website is a petition to state legislators urging implementation of the Foundation Budget Review Commission's recommendations. Please sign and share with your community.

THE TEXT OF THE PETITION READS AS FOLLOWS:

In light of the 2015 findings of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, the increasing urgency of school budgeting gaps across Massachusetts, and in support of Senate bill 223:

"We are convinced the providing a high-quality education to every student within the Commonwealth regardless of wealth, income, educational background, or zip code is not only a matter of constitutional obligation but of generational responsibility."

We, the undersigned, agree with the Foundation Budget Review Commission regarding both the constitutional obligation and generational responsibility the Commonwealth holds for all of our students. We recognize the ever-increasing gaps among schools and the increasing dependence of our municipalities on local revenue to fund our schools. We appreciate that it is this dependence, and the inequities that result from it, that the foundation budget was intended to alleviate. We share the concern that in continuing to postpone reform of the foundation budget, we jeopardize the good work of public education and thus the health of our democracy itself.

As such, we, the undersigned, call for implementation of the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission with all available speed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, April 25

Day on the Hill

8:30-11:00am

Grand Lodge of Masons, Boston

Saturday, April 29

Charting the Course

8:00am-4:00pm

Upper Cape Cod Voc. Tech., Bourne

Saturday, May 6

Charting the Course

8:00am-4:00pm

Holyoke High School, Holyoke

Thursday, May 18

Regional Schools Committee Meeting

6:00pm

Assabet Valley Voc. Tech. Marlboro

MA NEWS cont

should use. In Massachusetts, curriculum, materials and methods are determined at the local level.

The revised standards are the result of a vote the Board took in November 2015 on Commissioner Chester's recommendation to work with Massachusetts preK-12 educators and higher education faculty to identify changes to the English language arts and literacy and math standards that would ensure the Commonwealth's standards match those of the most aspirational education systems in the world and prepare students well for college, careers, and civic participation.

The Department will help districts implement the new standards starting with the 2017-18 school year. The next-generation MCAS will be aligned to the standards starting in spring 2018. ♦

PLEASE NOTE: Lunch arrangements for Day on the Hill

Due to the renovations at the State House, MASC is unable to host the traditional student-catered luncheon at this year's Day on the Hill event. At 11am when the program concludes, attendees are encouraged to go up to the State House and meet with their legislators/legislative aides. We will provide a list of locations in the area where attendees can get lunch.

MASC

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