

Commissioner Riley Featured at MASC Forum in Holyoke

On Thursday March 29th, the new Massachusetts K-12 Commissioner, Jeffrey Riley, met with over 100 school committee members, school administrators, teachers and other education leaders at a Western Massachusetts School Committee Forum held at the Delaney House in Holyoke. Riley, previously the receiver of Lawrence Public Schools, outlined his priorities going into his new role as commissioner and hosted a question-and-answer session to hear the concerns of school leaders and administrators.

Devin Sheehan, President-Elect of MASC and Vice-Chair of the Holyoke School Committee, gave a brief introduction prior to Riley taking the stage in one of his first public engagements. Throughout the forum, the new Commissioner

stressed the importance of communication, empowering educators, and providing the best possible future for MA students.

Questions raised during the evening ranged from topics concerning vocational schools to the current issue of the foundation budget review. When asked about his ninety-day plan, Riley discussed how he will be working hard to hear the opinions of everyone. He wants to get input from not only committees and boards, but teachers, students,



Day on the Hill: Are You Registered Yet?

Program Update: MASC's Day on the Hill (upcoming: Wednesday, April 25) will feature a segment on new strategies around students and families presented by **MA Senator Sal DiDomenico** (Everett) who founded the pivotal Kids Count Project and **Representative Aaron Vega** (Holyoke) who is Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Students and Families. MASC has also invited incoming Senate President **Karen Spilka** (who currently chairs the Senate Ways and Means Committee) to provide insights into the FY19 budget prospects.

The program will also feature state budget projections relative to education from **Noah Berger**, director of the MA Budget and Policy Center, and, of course, the

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Board of Education opposes arming teachers

While the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education generally declines to take positions on items not under its purview, the recent calls in the national press for the arming of teachers caused a rare exception. At their March meeting, the Board unanimously passed a resolution opposing the arming of teachers. The resolution reads as follows:

WHEREAS the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education was deeply troubled by the February 14, 2018 shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that killed 14 students and three adults, and equally troubled by previous school

shootings, including the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado that killed 12 students and one adult, and the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut that killed 20 students and six adults; and

WHEREAS there is no evidence-based research showing that arming teachers would reduce casualties in mass shootings; and

WHEREAS allowing guns in schools by other than law enforcement would increase the risk of accidental shootings of students and other bystanders; and

WHEREAS teachers are first and foremost educators and therefore should be employed solely on the basis of their

educational skills and credentials, not their skills as a security officer;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education believes arming educators will make schools less safe, and the Board opposes any move to do so.

NOTE: In 2013, the MASC Board of Directors issued a formal position paper on School Safety that addressed expanding the safe and drug-free schools act and other strategies to protect students, **including banning the sale of assault weapons.** The complete text of the position paper can be accessed at: <https://www.masc.org/member-resources/advocacy/position-papers>

Board of Education discusses personalized and competency-based learning

A special March meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education last month focused on personalized and competency-based learning. The Massachusetts Personalized Learning EdTech Consortium (MAPLE), formed by the Department last year, speaks of personalized learning as “tailoring the instructional environment — what, when, how and where students learn — to address the individual needs, skills and interests of each student.” This paired with competency-based learning—ensuring each student masters a skill before continuing—was presented as a student-directed learning environment that yet still holds to the high standards of skills and knowledge we expect from students in Massachusetts.

A panel opened the Board discussion with some general theories of prac-

tice, but it was, as usual, the practitioners and students who brought the discussion to life. A principal from Revere spoke of the school using technology to move learning to “anytime anywhere.” Teachers have found that they are not rushing through the curriculum anymore. A teacher from Melrose spoke of her own classroom using portfolio assessments as students learn at centers and choose from learning menus as they all work towards mastery. A student from Boston Day and Evening Academy described the shift attending such a school had made in her own attitude towards education: “It made me feel like education was way more important than I thought” and made her for the first time think about what happened after high school. She also stressed the importance of relationships in personalized instruction, that it is teachers knowing their students

and knowing their lives beyond the classroom that allows teachers to adjust work to their students as each student moves towards mastery.

Both Acting Commissioner Wulfson and student member Hannah Trimarchi asked questions pointing to the tension with mastery learning: namely that we run our systems on a time basis and that there are periodic tests. The responses of the various panel members noted that it did raise questions of time in school, of types of assessments, and of how assessments are evaluated.

MAPLE’s work is created around the needs of districts. Through surveying teachers, they have found that for such work to be effective, teachers need more and better professional development, time and funding for implementation, and time and space to see such learning in action.

Riley

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and parents as well. He stressed making people a part of the process.

On the topic of the foundation budget review, Riley spoke of how the current formula is not working for everyone and that he does not at the moment see the state revenue there to be able to fix this problem. He said we therefore need to ask, “What can we do to do better?”

Another hot topic of the evening was how to promote non-MCAS subjects. Many subjects, such as history, are being pushed to the side and not receiving the same attention as subjects that have MCAS testing, such as math and English. Riley said “we need to treat all of our subjects equally” and that he is open to offering a History MCAS. He does, however, worry about the amount of time that students spend testing instead of learning. He also said that he feels that we need to support world languages because “every student deserves a well-rounded educa-

tion.” He hopes that all students will one day be able to speak multiple languages.

When asked about his opinions on charter schools, Riley discussed how the main concern for parents is that their children are provided with a strong education, whether that be in a public school or charter school. He discussed how he asked both charters and unions to run schools in Lawrence and spoke of how he made charters a part of the district. Riley stressed the need to get extremists on both sides to come together.

Riley also addressed the growing importance of community colleges in the commonwealth, especially as tuitions at private institutions grow out of reach. Many students, he noted, have historically shied away from community colleges and instead attend costly schools that put them into heavy debt. On this issue, Riley said he believes that “the stigma about community colleges is coming to an end.” He spoke of how “it’s important that we do a better

job explaining the opportunities and financial advantages that community colleges offer because students who get their associates with a 3.0 GPA can easily attend schools such as UMass for exceptionally low rates.”

On the topic of career and technical education, Riley spoke of how students need to be allowed to pursue their desired education, but noted that “this can often be difficult because you end up asking eighth graders to decide their future.” He said that “vocational education is a critical skill” and that “we need to increase footprint space.”

“I think it was great to come out to the western part of the state as one of my first events,” Riley said. “It’s really important that we talk to all of the folks that are involved in education. We had school committee members, superintendents, students here today and part of my job is to get out and listen to everyone as we plan for what’s next.”

This report was prepared by Emily McGuinness, Editor, Holyoke High School Herald

LEGAL ALERT

Town Administrator's Evaluation by Selectmen that followed the longstanding practice was found by the Supreme Judicial Court to violate the Open Meeting Law.

This decision must be adhered to by School Committees when evaluating the Superintendent.

While this decision involved the distribution of the Town Administrator's evaluation to the Board of Selectmen, it followed the advice given to school committees for evaluation of the superintendent as found on the Attorney General's website. The chair of the Board had circulated to all board members, in advance of the public meeting where the town administrator's evaluation was to take place, board members' individual written evaluations, as well as a composite written evaluation, of the town administrator's performance. The Board made public all written evaluations after the open meeting. The issue before the SJC was whether the Board violated the Massachusetts open meeting law, G. L. c. 30A, §§ 18 and 20 (a), which generally requires public bodies to make their meetings, including "deliberations," open to the public.

On January 3, 2012, the five-member Board held an open meeting during which it reviewed the procedures it intended to follow in conducting the annual performance evaluation of the town administrator. The Board agreed that, by the end of the month, its members would submit individual evaluations to the chair, who would compile the evaluations and draft a composite evaluation. The composite evaluation was to be distributed to all board members in advance of the scheduled March 28, 2012 open meeting at which the Board planned to discuss the town administrator's performance and issue a final written evaluation. The Court acknowledged that the procedure the board chose to follow was largely consistent with the Attorney General's guidance to public bodies regarding performance evaluations, which was available on the Attorney General's web site as follows:

"May the individual evaluations of an employee be aggregated into a comprehensive evaluation?"

"Yes. Members of a public body may individually create evaluations, and then submit them to an individual to aggregate into a master evaluation document to be discussed at an open meeting. Ideally, members of the public body should submit their evaluations for compila-

tion to someone who is not a member of the public body, for example, an administrative assistant. If this is not a practical option, then the chair or other designated public body member may compile the evaluations. However, once the individual evaluations are submitted for aggregation there should be no deliberation among members of the public body regarding the content of the evaluations outside of an open meeting, whether in person or over email."

In January of 2013 the Attorney General responded to a complaint filed by a registered voter of Wayland claiming that the procedure used by the Board violated the Open Meeting Law. The Attorney General found that the Board's conduct had not violated the Open Meeting law. Five Wayland registered voters then filed a complaint in the Superior Court and the Judge found that the Board violated the Open Meeting law, and further stated that the opinion of the Attorney General be stricken. Wayland appealed this decision.

The SJC concluded that the Board's conduct violated the Open Meeting Law by circulating individual and composite evaluations, expressing the opinion of the Board members to a quorum in advance of the public meeting, thereby affirming the decision of the Superior Court. However, the SJC held that the lower court did not have the authority to strike the opinion of the Attorney General.

The SJC provides some guidance to local governments by concluding that the result in this case would have been different if the Board had made the individual and composite evaluations publicly available before the open meeting. For example, the Board could have posted the evaluations on its web site and made paper copies available for inspection at or about the time that the evaluations were circulated among a quorum of board members.

I will be in communication with the Attorney General's Office concerning this matter, and will keep you advised of further developments. I advise school committees to contact its Legal Counsel, and to adhere to this opinion when evaluating the superintendent. *(Report prepared by MASC General Counsel Stephen J. Finnegan, Esq.)*

Spilka to become new MA Senate President

Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen Spilka will take over as President of the MA Senate the week of July 23, succeeding acting President Harriet Chandler.

The transition, announced last week, is scheduled to occur days before the Legislature wraps up formal sessions for the year, rather than waiting until January 2019 when the new Legislature is officially sworn in.

While the shift is being promoted as a way to ensure stability, Spilka's ascension will mark another major shift in the Senate where she is now on track to become the third Senate president in the past eight months.

Chandler took over as acting Senate president in December when Sen. Stanley Rosenberg relinquished the position following allegations of sexual assault made against his husband, Bryon Hefner, and a subsequent Ethics Committee investigation into whether he had broken any internal rules in relation to those allegations.

"Senate President Chandler has served the Senate admirably in these challenging times. I look forward to continuing to benefit from her wise counsel throughout

my presidency, as I have during the many years of our friendship," Spilka said in a statement.

"I have asked Senator Chandler to continue on as a valued member of my leadership team, commensurate with her experience and in the best interests of the Senate and I do not

anticipate any significant changes in the Senate organization this year."

A Spilka presidency that launches in the summer would give her the relative quiet five months of informal sessions to adjust to the post and gear up for the 2019-2020 legislative session. The timeline also means Spilka is poised to again lead annual Senate budget talks as Ways and Means chairwoman in May.

Both Chandler, of Worcester, and Spilka, of Ashland, are among the many Senate incumbents seeking re-election during what's been a tumultuous session in the Upper Branch.



Senator Karen Spilka at MASC 2016 Day on the Hill



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luncheon buffet prepared and catered by MA vocational school students.

REMEMBER: Due to renovations at the State House, the program portion of the day is being held at the Grand Lodge of Masons, 186 Tremont Street (corner of Tremont and Boylston street). The luncheon and meetings with legislators will begin at noon in the Hall of Flags at the State House, directly opposite the Boston Common.

MASC encourages members to have students join them at this important advocacy opportunity. There is **NO CHARGE** for students to attend, but they must be registered to ensure that we have materials and badges for everyone.

To register online: www.masc.org/events-and-conferences-2/day-on-the-hill

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