

Joint Conference Update: Featured Speakers; New Information

THURSDAY GENERAL SESSION

BILL DAGGETT, founder of the International Center for Leadership in Education and nationally recognized for his proven ability to move preK-12 education systems towards more rigorous and relevant skills and



knowledge for all students, will be the **Thursday, November 2 General Session speaker.**

Daggett's message to school leaders has emphasized

the importance of creating environments and curricula that focus on children's futures rather than maintaining the status quo. Describing his upcoming presentation, Daggett noted that "the rules, regulations,

teaching practices and traditions that exists in today's American education system were created during the Second Industrial Revolution, over a century ago. As we attempt to meet the needs of today's students who have lived their entire lives in the technological/information-based Third Industrial Revolution, this system is being challenged." It's about to be challenged even more, he believes, as we enter the Fourth Industrial Revolution—a fusion of technologies that most of us can't begin to imagine.

To be prepared for this changing world, he contends, today's students need a future-focused education program that prepares them with a different set of skills and knowledge than what is currently being taught. In his

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MASC challenges insidious efforts to "reinvent" public education

In a stinging Letter to the Editor MASC President Patrick Murphy responded last week to an earlier editorial in The Boston Globe by education researcher and author David Osborne. In his editorial Osborne criticized the achievements of public schools to date and gave a strong shout-out to the results of school takeovers and the more recent school empowerment zones initiative. (The latter is also currently the subject of intensive debate on Beacon Hill as the legislature considers a proposal to expand the empowerment zone strategy without local approval and to the detriment of local control.)

Following is the text of Murphy's response to Osborne as it appeared in the Globe on Monday, September 11.

David Osborne presented many declarations of success in his column "A new paradigm of public education" (*Opinion*, Sept. 5), suggesting facts that are not fully in evidence from various attempts at innovation for 21st-century public schools.

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OCPF reveals sources of charter school ballot question "dark money"

A wealthy New-York based organization that supported the 2016 state ballot question to increase the cap on charter schools (Question 2) was slapped with a \$426,466 fine last week after officials found that the group was illegally hiding the identities of its donors.

According to the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) which investigated the funding trail, the fine on Families for Excellent Schools—Advocacy (FESA) is the largest in state campaign history. In its findings, OCPF concluded that FESA had violated the campaign finance law by receiving contributions from individuals and then contributing those funds to the Great Schools Massachusetts Ballot Question Committee in a manner intended to disguise the true source of the money.

"Massachusetts voters deserve to know the identity of those who attempt to influence them before election day," said OCPF Director Michael Sullivan. "Complete and accurate disclosure of campaign activity is the cornerstone of the campaign finance law."

Between July 2016 when Question 2 qualified for the ballot and the election on November 8, the Great Schools Massachusetts Ballot Question Committee reported receiving more than \$15 million from FESA—70% of the \$21.7 million total amount reported. As a general

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LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS PENDING ED REFORM PROPOSALS

The MASC Legislative Committee at its September 11 meeting recommended some key principles for any future education reform bills, including the current legislation sponsored by Rep. Alice Peisch that would expand the options to implement empowerment zones. Key principles would include local approval and oversight of any restructured schools; collective bargaining with the school committee; and no attempt to undermine local decision making.

The Committee also did not support proposed legislation that would allow a single regional school committee member to approve non-payroll warrants.

Further, the Committee recommended some amendments to proposed legislation to prevent the sexual abuse of children. These included: (1) implementing no-cost professional development for faculty members who would need new training; (2) requiring that all proposed regulations be run by the Joint Committee on Education before they were issued; (3) providing greater clarity for “boundary violating behavior” that might be considered abuse; (4) limiting the liability of public employees who act in good faith to prevent abuse. Members also asked for follow-up over concern for mandatory sentences rather than allowing a judge to weigh all considerations prior to sentencing and sentencing accordingly.

The Committee also supported required reimbursement for all special education transportation costs.

Stephen Finnegan, MASC Legislative Counsel, will follow up on these recommendations and they will also be on the agenda during the Legislative and School Law 201 sessions at the upcoming Joint Conference in Hyannis.

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presentation, Daggett will share various strategies that are successfully addressing these new concerns, including zero-based budgeting, new staffing patterns, and innovative instructional practices that will prepare students for the world in which they will live and work.

Not registered to attend the conference? You still can. Register online at www.masc.org.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY SPECIAL

For members whose schedules don’t make full conference attendance possible, MASC is once again offering a special reduced Friday-Saturday rate of \$195.00. Friday consists of a full day of programming with more than 25 sessions and featured programs to choose from. This year’s Saturday morning program includes “not-to-be-missed” sessions on school budgets (real v. alternative facts); anatomy of negotiations; the responsibilities (and risks) around student activity funds; strategies (that really work) for serving low-income students; and a special double session on crisis communications (crises: you remember those, right?). A full listing of sessions can be found in the brochure that was

recently mailed to all members and superintendents (and can be found on the MASC website and the conference app).

The Saturday sessions will be followed by our popular STUDENT VOICES lunch, which this year will feature a Sunday “60 Minutes” format during which four student leaders from diverse communities will share their thoughts on issues of the day (bullying, the opioid crisis, social media, social-emotional learning). How successful do they think the adult efforts to address these challenges have been? What could be done differently? Are there school policies or interventions that would be more effective? What do students think about their educational “big picture?” What’s been most important to them: Acquisition of knowledge? Learning how to learn? Learning to work with others? Where did their best learning occur: in a classroom? From a particular teacher? An extra-curricular opportunity?

These are students you make decisions for daily. Their input is critical—and immensely valuable. Join them and your colleagues for lunch.

Dark Money

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rule, nonprofits such as FESA are not required to disclose their donors if they are not engaged directly in political activity. However, the OCPF investigation revealed that FESA, which has promoted charter schools across the country, was soliciting checks specifically to support Question 2.

After the election, campaign finance officials subpoenaed bank records from FESA that showed it was raising money from donors and then giving it directly to Great Schools Massachusetts. Great Schools Massachusetts, unlike FESA, was required to disclose its donors. So those who donated to FESA avoided having their names revealed during the campaign.

According to the final OCPF report:

- FESA was actually a ballot question committee and as such was required to organize and disclose its donors.
- FESA did not disclose its campaign finance activity in a timely or accurate manner.
- FESA provided funds to the Great Schools Massachusetts Ballot Question Committee in a manner intended to disguise the true source of contributions.

In addition to the fine, the group was also forced to reveal its donors showing it was anonymously receiving major checks from two Baker administration officials and numerous wealthy contributors from the world of high finance in Massachusetts, New York, and other states.

The donor list showed the group

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MASC Testifies at Education Committee Hearings

MASC Field Director Tracy Novick provided the following report.

The Joint Committee on Education has been holding hearings this month regarding bills filed this Legislative session, several of which are of interest to MASC members.

The hearing on Tuesday, September 5 opened with testimony from Secretary of Education James Peyser in support of H. 304 and S.279. These parallel bills are those described as “empowerment zone” bills, often citing Springfield’s Empowerment Zone as an example. Peyser, representing the Baker administration, described these as promoting an “innovative approach to district governance” and a means to “unlock the potential of every educator.” Under questioning from Senator Patricia Jehlen, Peyser conceded “we’re in early days” in terms of outcomes of this model, but he added that “reception has been really remarkably positive.”

Senator Lesser then testified in support of his bill, joined by Springfield Superintendent Daniel Warwick and others from Springfield. Lesser spoke of the “trauma” of schools put under state receivership, citing Holyoke as an example; he described his bill as a way for districts to avoid such an outcome. Warwick and others spoke specifically of the experiences of Springfield in their zone.

New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell also called for passage of the bill, citing his district’s experience in setting up a zone in New Bedford that was then rejected by the teachers’ union. He felt the district should be empowered to set it up even with such a rejection.

Joint testimony by the teachers’ unions featured Springfield Education Association President Maureen Colgan-Posner, who contrasted the work being done in Springfield with the language of the bill. In particular, Colgan-Posner pointed out the lack of local voice in the structure set up within the bills. Rep. Alice Peisch, who jointly chairs the committee and is lead sponsor of the House bill, responded that she appreciated the comments made, remarking that she knows of no bill that emerges from the legislative process as originally filed.

Others testifying noted, as MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher did in comments to the *The Boston Herald*, that this was an attempt by those who had lost in last year’s charter school vote to move forward under other cover. While MASC did not testify, MASC offered testimony calling those points into question.

Testimony on other bills at the hearing included that of Westwood

School Committee member Tony Mullin, testifying in support of later school start times.

Much of the attention during the hearing on Tuesday, September 12 focused on S.308, sponsored by Senator Michael Rush and supported by the Mass Teachers Association. This is something of an omnibus bill, combining implementation of the Foundation Budget Review Commission recommendations with legislation on recess, a testing freeze, and more. MASC offered testimony on H.324, offered by Representative Steven Ultrino (a former member of the Malden School Committee and Chair of MASC’s Division II), which would ensure that a school committee member serves on the Massachusetts Board of Education.

The testimony concluded with the following observation: “In addition to their knowledge and understanding of local concerns and the impact of state policy on individual schools and districts, school committee members represent the very basic element of American democracy – in fact several of you know this from your own service on a school committee – and members bring to the table both knowledge of law and regulation, but also an appreciation of the values and priorities of municipalities and regions.”

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Having been soundly defeated in their attempt to expand charter schools, public school critics now turn to more subtle alternatives that articulate the noble goal of improving student outcomes as camouflage for quasi-public and privatization strategies: expanding the power of state bureaucracies to direct local instruction, while minimizing the voice of parents and community to affect their children’s classrooms in favor of the magical policy unicorn of school choice. They limit the inherent power of collegiality by restricting the ability of teachers and locally elected leaders to influence how schools work best in their communities. Most important, Osborne’s perspective that what he believes is good for Boston must be good for the rest of the Commonwealth’s K-12 schools is simple academic laziness.

We encourage the Legislature to consider a wide range of strategies that look not only at creating greater regulatory freedom for all local school districts but also at student wellness in an era of emotional stress for too many children. Failing to even acknowledge the insidious impact of poverty, the multifaceted forces of health, social, and emotional challenges, and the Commonwealth’s failure to adequately fund urban and rural districts is just another piece of evidence that these public school critics have lost their ability to imagine what the next paradigm for public education should be.

I hope the Legislature begins a serious discussion of what our educational system should look like in 20 years. But it needs to be made clear that the Commonwealth’s best-in-the-nation status for K-12 education is the result of the sustained, great work of hundreds of local school districts rather than Osborne’s favorite research subjects.

—Patrick Murphy, President, Massachusetts Association of School Committees

Lifetime Achievement and All-State School Committee Award Winners Announced

On Friday, November 3 at the annual Joint Conference Life Member/Leadership Awards banquet, the following MASC members will be recognized for their contributions to the Association and to their students and school communities.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Leonard Beaton, Ashburnham-Westminster Reg.
Robert Fichtenmayer, Upper Cape Reg. Voc. Tech.
Richard Lacteal, Central Berkshire Reg.
Caroline O'Neil, Easton
Stephanie Peters, Hull
Clifford Sylvia, Wareham
Richard Weader, Framingham
Cheryl Sweeney, Newburyport

ALL-STATE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Division I: **Meredith Tedford**, Marblehead
Division II: Mayor **Jeannette McCarthy**, Waltham
Division III: **Ida Gordon**, Randolph
Division IV: **Joshua Schonberg**, Ashburnham-Westminster Reg.
Division V: **Elizabeth Marsian-Boucher**, East Longmeadow
Division VI: **Kathy Yon**, Pittsfield
Division VII: **Terri Medeiros**, Falmouth
Division VIII: **Ford Spalding**, Minuteman Reg. Voc. Tech.
Division IX: **Mayor Joseph Petty**, Worcester
Minority Caucus: **Virginia Simms George**, Assabet Reg. Voc. Tech.

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received checks from Amos B. Hostetter Jr., the former cable television magnate from Boston, who gave \$2 million; Seth Klarman, the billionaire chief executive of Baupost Group, a Boston hedge fund, who donated \$3.3 million; and Alice Walton, an heiress to the Walmart fortune, who gave \$750,000.

Paul Sagan, who chairs the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which oversees charter schools, donated \$496,000. Mark Nunnely, a former Bain Capital executive who was recently promoted from his position as Baker's chief information officer to a Cabinet post overseeing cybersecurity, gave \$275,000. Nunnely's wife, Denise Dupre, contributed \$275,000.

Maurice Cunningham, a political scientist at the University of Massachusetts Boston, who was spoke on the issue of the ballot question's "dark money" trail at the 2016 MASC/MASS Joint Conference in Hyannis said the cloak of secrecy helped Families For Excellent Schools-Advocacy project an image as a grass-roots organization focused on helping urban youth.

MASC

Boston, MA 02109

One McKinley Square

Massachusetts Association of School Committees