

## SCHOOL LEADERS AND STUDENTS CALL FOR EQUITY AND ADEQUACY IN SCHOOL FUNDING AT ANNUAL DAY ON THE HILL PROGRAM

Nearly 80 students and 150-plus school committee members took the message of full and fair funding to the State House on Wednesday, May 1 as a signature component of MASC's annual Day on the Hill advocacy program.

MASC President Devin Sheehan welcomed participants to the morning program, held again this year at the Grand Lodge of Masons owing to continuing renovations in Gardner Auditorium at the State House. The importance of school committee advocacy can not be underestimated, Sheehan insisted, especially with so much at stake this year as legislators consider how to address education under-funding issues.



MASC President Devin Sheehan, Sen. Jason Lewis and Rep. Paul Tucker.

And when school committee members speak, legislators listen, Sheehan noted. "Forty members of the legislature were once school committee members, including the current Senate President, the past two Senate Presidents, one of the Education Committee Chairs, three of the four ranking

members of the House Leadership and many others. They've struggled with the same issues that you face."

Those issues, MASC's 2019 Legislative Priorities, were then summarized by MASC President-Elect Deborah Davis, Vice President Ellen Holmes, Secretary-Treasurer Denise Hurst and Immediate Past President Beverly Hugo. These included: restructuring the way schools are funded so that more money is provided to districts in need and every district receives additional funding; full funding for the special education circuit breaker; full funding, as was originally promised, for regional school transportation; full funding of the charter school mitigation account; continuing support for the METCO program; assistance to struggling small and rural districts; and a legislative directive such that no state or private agency would be able to implement an alternative management program or alternative school in a member district without the full approval of the school committee. (For a complete list of MASC priorities, see page 3).

Noting that school committee members can't do their work alone, Sheehan commended the many friends MASC has in the legislature, and in particular the association's 2018 Legislators of the Year: **Senator (and Senate President Emerita) Harriette Chandler** (Worcester) and **Representative Aaron Vega** (Holyoke)

## Auditor calls for improvements in educational services for students in foster care

State Auditor Suzanne Bump has called on state leaders to work together to improve the state's process for providing and paying for educational services for children in foster care. The call comes as the result of a study, *Educational Services for Students in Foster Care and State Care*, that was released on April 23.

The report highlights challenges that strain the current system for providing education services for students in foster care. These include communication and cooperation roadblocks between child welfare and local education staff, confusion caused by federal law, a shortage of transportation resources, increasing demand and a disproportional impact on resource-strained communities. In the report, the Auditor lays out steps to improve funding structures, intergovernmental collaboration, and transportation.

"We have a responsibility to ensure that every student in the Commonwealth has the opportunity to reach their full education potential. Too often, however, the educational success of students in foster care is hindered by not only placement disruptions and a high rate of specialized educational needs, but also a complex

### SENATE WORKING GROUP FORMED TO STUDY CHANGES TO TAX POLICY

At a press conference earlier this month, Senate President Karen Spilka announced that she is convening a working group to study the state's tax code with the goal of producing legislation for the 2021-2022 session. The 21-member Revenue Working Group includes outside interest groups and legislators on both sides of the aisle. Her intent is to have a report completed by the July 2020 end of formal sessions.

In her remarks, Spilka noted that the Commonwealth has "the sorry distinction of leading the nation in income inequality. Our intent is to look at the tax code in a real, systematic manner that I don't think has happened on a combination of the corporate level and personal-income level in decades."

Finding new revenue has become a recurring debate topic on Beacon Hill, particularly in recent years as calls have increased for greater investment in education and transportation. MASC has been in the forefront of those advocating for remediation to the education funding formula that a 2015 Commission reported is underfunded by as much as \$1 billion annually. A report released this February warned that the state faces an \$8.4 billion shortfall in transportation funding.

Spilka has indicated that addressing those issues is a top priority which, along with climate change and housing, "we need to address as a commonwealth. Some of it is policy, some is support and this working group will tackle the revenue side of it."

House Speaker Robert DeLeo has suggested that his members will approach new forms of revenue "later this year." Revenue-related bills are vetted in the Legislature by the House-controlled Joint Committee on Revenue.

The working group will be overseen by Senator Adam Hinds of Pittsfield, who also co-chairs the Revenue

Committee. Hinds noted that working group members have already identified several common themes to address, including how the tax code must be modified to keep up with a changing economy and how to improve "fairness." According to Hinds, the only comprehensive reform of the state tax code took place more than a decade ago and focused on corporate taxes only.

What exactly the group will ultimately recommend is unclear. Members come from a range of backgrounds including business organizations, labor unions and think tanks. Their views on taxes are likely to be divergent as well.

In addition to Hinds, the other working group members are: Sen. William Brownsberger (D-Belmont); Sen. Ryan Fattman (R-Sutton); Mass. Building Trades Council AFL-CIO Frank Callahan; Mass. Business Roundtable Director JD Chesloff; Springfield Regional Chamber President Nancy Creed; Northeastern University law professor Peter Enrich; Coalition for Social Justice Director and Raise Up Massachusetts co-founder Deb Fastino; TechNet Executive Director for Mass. and the Northeast Christina Fisher; tax policy attorney Hilary Bacon Gabrieli; SEIU Mass. State Council Director Harris Gruman; Mass. Voter Table Director Beth Huang; Mass. Taxpayers Foundation President Eileen McAnney; Worcester Chamber of Commerce President Tim Murray; Mass. Society of CPAs President Amy Pitter; Associated Industries of Mass. Executive Vice President John Regan; Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera; Mass. Budget and Policy Center President Marie-Frances Rivera; Greater Boston Chamber President James Rooney; national Democratic Party voter protection attorney David Sullivan; and Mass. AFL-CIO President Steven Tolman.

### INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT UPDATE

At the April Board of Education meeting, Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnson gave a status report on the progress of the IEP

improvement project. He reviewed for the Board and attendees the ultimate goal of the project which is to ensure that students with disabilities have the best possible access to general curriculum content and the skills to participate in all aspects of the school. Embedded in this goal are these expectations:

- That teachers will know how to respond to the needs of students with disabilities and will use that knowledge to proactively work with students across the coursework and life of the school.
- That students with disabilities will gain the knowledge and skills to prepare themselves effectively for postsecondary opportunities, career training options, economically viable careers, and healthy, productive lives.
- That families of students with disabilities will understand the key aspects of how the student learns and what families can expect will be provided to their sons and daughters during the course of the school year.

Johnson explained that the Department will be focused on improving the process in advance of improving documentation and that the process will be driven by student needs and strengths. A detailed communication plan and opportunities for stakeholder engagement has been announced and the Department is seeking feedback at [improveIEP@doe.mass.edu](mailto:improveIEP@doe.mass.edu). They will be updating all documentation, including "Is Special Education the Right Service?" and a parents' guide. This will be launched as a small pilot in the fall (not at the beginning of the school year). The emphasis is on finding reliable assessment data showing a student's strengths and weaknesses, and then working on finding supports for the right solutions. The Department will be looking to use the state's part of IDEA in funding this work at the state level.

# DAY ON THE HILL

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**Senator Harriette Chandler and Representative Aaron Vega**

who were in attendance.

Chandler, whose first elected office was as a member of the Worcester School Committee, noted that despite her long-standing interest in education issues, her legislative career has been as a member of the Public Health rather than the Education Committee. Nonetheless, she noted, “being here with you today, I feel like I’ve come home. Now, more than ever, the role of school committees is vital to the future of our state, our economy and our nation. We need your wisdom, your passion and your initiative to move us forward. This is the year of education. We need you to push us along to make sure that happens.”

**Representative Aaron Vega**, a native of South Holyoke and one of that city’s first Latino at-large councilors, has worked closely with MASC as an advocate for children and families, with particular attention to the challenges of immigrant and disadvantaged children.

Vega concurred with Chandler that everyone on the Hill is poised to make this “the” education year. In discussing the three education funding bills that are before the legislature, he predicted that the final solution may not be perfect, may not be to everyone’s liking, “but we are trying to make as much happen for you as possible. It’s your voice and your advocacy that are pushing this conversation to ensure that education is fully and fairly funded. We are all trying to get to the same endgame. But we need to be pushed.”

MASC Past President Jake Oliveira

next introduced the first of the morning’s keynote speakers, Salem **Representative Paul Tucker** who serves as Vice Chair of the House Education Committee and who was the lead sponsor of one of the three current bills that addresses the need to recalibrate the education funding formula.

Tucker stressed the importance of collaboration and compromise as the branches work to reconcile the different bills.

“It’s very likely the final bill will look very different than when first presented, but there is a sense that we are undertaking a grand bargain, and will work to get the best of what we have to work with. The momentum is there to get this done.”

Tucker also raised the challenge for rural districts which include declining enrollments but soaring transportation costs. “It’s easy for us to live in a bubble up here on Beacon Hill where we don’t see things in districts the way you on the ground do. Today is the most important day for your voices to be heard. We need your information, your stories, to pierce that bubble. Tell us what we need to do. There is a willingness to listen and to compromise, but it’s going to take all of us to get this bill done this year.”

Sheehan next introduced **Senate Education Committee Chair Jason Lewis**, whose district includes Malden, Medford, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield and parts of Winchester.

Lewis, who has served in the Senate since 2014, was appointed to chair the Education Committee at the beginning of this year. To prepare to lead the Committee at this watershed moment, Lewis said he has been crisscrossing the state talking with education stakeholders, getting their input on concerns and priorities.

Lewis reminded attendees that Massachusetts own 19th century education advocate Horace Mann was committed to the need for a great public education for every child regardless of economic and/or social circumstances.

“I am proud of our many accomplishments thus far, but they mask significant disparities in achievement opportunities across the state, particularly for children with English language or other needs and challenges.” Nor is this gap solely an issue of equity or racial justice, Lewis continued. It’s a critical workforce/economic issue. “If we want to ensure a thriving economy, we need to ensure that our students—the citizens and employees of the future—have the skills to succeed in the workplace, and in life.”

Lewis reiterated that the top priority will be fixing the Foundation budget to provide fair and adequate funding, noting that five years ago he sponsored legislation that re-established the Foundation Budget Review

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## MASC 2019 Legislative Priorities

- Funding Revision of Chapter 70 Aid to Reflect 21st Century Needs
- Local Approval for School Transformation
- Support for Early Education Programs
- Strengthen the Children’s Services Safety Net
- Full Funding of Special Education Circuit Breaker
- Charter School Approval/Funding and Reimbursement Reform
- Full Funding for Regional School Transportation
- Full Funding for METCO
- Support for Small and Rural School Districts
- Retention of Medicaid-Covered Services
- Coverage for Medically Insured Services in Schools

## MASC in the Spotlight at NSBA Convention

MASC was a strong and visible presence at the National School Boards Association annual conference held in Philadelphia March 29-April 1. The Association took an active role in both leading governance and advocacy discussions at the annual delegate assembly, presented a number of well-received professional development sessions, and the Cambridge School Committee was one of the recipients of the 2019 Magna Awards for their support of the innovative. MASC and Massachusetts school committees presented sessions on new school board member boot-camp; communicating to multi-generational constituents; building community relationships to enhance student achievement; city and school partner-



ships; how constituent services relate to school board policy-making; building capacity as educators and advocates for change; effective use of social media; using teacher evaluation in school turn-around. Presenters included members of the MASC Board of Directors and staff; Cambridge school committee and staff; Springfield school committee and staff; and Hopedale school committee and staff. Pictured at left during a break at the Delegate Assembly are MASC delegates (seated, left to right): Minority Caucus Chair Mildred Lefebvre (Holyoke); President Devin Sheehan (Holyoke); President-Elect Deborah Davis (Northeast Metro Voc. Tech.); and Secretary-Treasurer Denise Hurst (Springfield). Standing is MASC Past President Jake Oliveira (Ludlow) who is serving his second year of his second term on the NSBA Regional Board

of Directors. The Assembly, which considered more than twenty resolutions related to the Affordable Care Act, IDEA, Gun-free School Zones; ESSA; School Safety; Social Security; and Student Data Privacy, among others, also elected Devin Sheehan and Mildred Lefebvre to positions on NSBA Board of Directors as a Regional Director (Sheehan) and a Director of the National Hispanic Council (Lefebvre).

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Commission and directed it to study the effectiveness of the then 20-year-old formula. “The three bills that are before us this year are built on the recommendations that the Commission presented. Yes, there are some non-starters in the Governor’s budget, but no one wants to have happen this year what happened last year,” where at the 11th hour, the discussion imploded. “We know we need to up the percentages for special education, possibly by lowering the threshold for when the circuit breaker kicks in and revisiting the skyrocketing costs of special education transportation.

Lewis also acknowledged other concerns, such as the need to attract and retain great teachers, particularly teachers from minority populations. Other areas of concern include expanding access to high quality, affordable early education in all districts and the crisis of cost in higher education forcing students to choose between attending college or incurring staggering debts to do so.



Devin Sheehan and Suzanne Bump

Lewis concluded with a cautionary note: difficult conversations are ahead about where the dollars will come from to fund these initiatives. “We don’t want to pass a bill, set expectations and then not be able to deliver on funding. We need to hear from you and above all your support to identify additional revenue sources.”

Concluding the morning program was **State Auditor Suzanne Bump** who outlined key points of the *Educational Services for Students in Foster Care* initiative that her office put forward the prior week. (A more detailed summary of the report appears on page 1 of this *Bulletin*.)

Noting the enormous financial and

logistical burden on school districts of educating students in foster care, Bump contends that State government should be underwriting the cost. “The State is not meeting commitment to you or to these children.”

Bump also stressed the importance of educational continuity, and was adamant that children in foster care should have the same opportunities as kids in stable homes.

“There are currently 6,800 children enrolled in foster care. The extreme challenges they face become your challenges when they enroll in your district.” She cautioned however that money alone won’t solve the problem and suggested that the bureaucracies that are responsible for the care and education of these children (Department of Children and Families and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) need to step out of their silos so as to collaborate more efficiently, coordinate resources and reach out for federal funding options.

“This isn’t just a moral failure of

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# Day on the Hill in Photos



Clockwise, from upper left: MA vocational students serve up a global cuisine in the Great Hall at the State House; Everett School Committee member Frank Parker and Everett students cross the Common on their way from the Masonic Lodge to the State House; Northeast Metro Voc. Tech. culinary arts students and MASC President-Elect Deborah Davis, a Northeast Metro school committee member; waiting for the morning program to start, Lowell Superintendent Jeannine Durkin and teacher/advisor Thomas Thornton with students from the district at the table in the foreground; calories, calories—but nobody's counting today. . .



**MASC thanks** Chef Lou Trudeau of Assabet Valley for coordinating the Day on the Hill luncheon buffet and the chefs and students from the following districts who prepared and served up a fabulous spread of toothsome delights: Assabet Valley; BayPath (Southern Worcester Reg. Voc. Tech.); Bristol-Plymouth; Diman (Greater Fall River); Essex; Everett; Greater Lawrence; Greater Lowell; Greater New Bedford; Lynn Tech.; Minuteman; Nashoba; Northeast Metro.; Old Colony; Pathfinder; Plymouth South; Shawshen; Smith Tech.; Southeastern; South Shore; Tantasqua; Upper Cape Cod; and Whittier.

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governance. Unless we can effectively address the educational and social challenges these vulnerable students face, we will pay for it down the road in terms of lost wages, limited opportunities and poor life choices. You and your schools are often the only continuity, stability, and role model for these kids. I am proud to partner with you in providing best possible opportunities for students in MA."

The Auditor's comments were received with standing applause, and then it was up to State House for meetings with legislators and the much-heralded buffet lunch, prepared and catered by vocational students from 23 Massachusetts school districts.

Many additional photos from the Day on the Hill program and lunch event are posted on the MASC website at: <https://www.masc.org/events-and-conferences-3/day-on-the-hill>. Materials from the program, including the 2019 Legislative Priorities resource guide; Talking Points cards; and Advocacy Tips are also posted on the site.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

register online at [www.masc.org](http://www.masc.org)

**Saturday, May 18**  
Charting the Course  
8:00am-4:00pm  
Essex Tech., Danvers

**Saturday, June 8**  
Charting the Course  
8:00am-4:00pm  
BayPath Voc. Tech.,  
Charlton

**Saturday, June 22**  
Charting the Course  
8:00am-4:00pm  
Minuteman Voc. Tech., Lexington

**Friday-Saturday, July 12-13**  
MASC Summer Institute/Equity Summit  
4:00-6:00pm (Friday, July 12)  
8:00am-12:15pm (Saturday, July 13)  
Marriott Hotel, Marlboro

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bureaucracy and a lack of resources and expertise. This burden is particularly acute in low-income communities,” Bump said.

Since 2012, the number of school-aged children in foster care has increased by 20 percent. At the end of the 2018 school year, MA had approximately 6,800 public school students in foster or state care. The federal Administration of Children and Families reports that the top reasons for placement in foster care include neglect, parents with substance abuse problems, and caretaker inability to cope. According to DESE, students in foster care are more likely to attend multiple schools, experience chronic absenteeism and significant discipline incidents and drop out of school that the general student population.

Providing education services to students in foster care can pose a huge financial strain on school districts that is not offset by local tax revenue or funding from the state. This strain is exacerbated by the difficulty school districts face in budgeting the costs of educating foster care students due to the unexpected nature of their placements and their higher than average likelihood of requiring costly special education services.

In the report, Bump calls on the state to assume the full expense of educational services for students in foster and state care.

The report also points to the difficulties in meeting the needs of these students as education and child welfare officials struggle to coordinate with each other given the often confusing state and federal laws related to the education of children in foster care. To improve this collaboration, the report calls for:

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to collaborate to provide staff training on making placement decisions in the best interests of children;
- Maintenance of an up-to-date list of students in foster care and relevant information related to their school placement;
- Implementation of electronic backpacks for students in foster care to ensure schools promptly receive information about the education needs of incoming students; and
- An improved process for recognizing the past academic achievement of students in foster care who have frequently changed schools, similar to

efforts implemented to support children in military and agricultural families.

Transportation for students in foster care is another issue that directly, and negatively, impacts school districts. Federal law requires that changes in school placements for students in foster care should be minimized and that, unless otherwise determined, remaining in their original school district is deemed in the best interest of the student. This often requires that school districts coordinate transportation for students in foster care from the district in which they have been placed to the district in which they attend classes. Currently districts are expected to cover these transportation expenses. To address these challenges, the report suggests:

- The Commonwealth cover the full cost of educational transportation for children in foster care;
- DCF and DESE coordinate in order to receive federal reimbursements for a portion of these expenses;
- Funding be provided to DESE to hire transportation subject matter experts to help school districts implement best practices to reduce these costs; and
- Continued support for the legislative commission that is studying school transportation funding.

The full report is available at [www.mass.gov/auditor](http://www.mass.gov/auditor)

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