

## Massachusetts Association of School Committees

### Statewide Graduation Council releases Interim Report

Earlier this month, the K-12 Statewide Graduation Council issued its recommendations for high school graduation requirements, following the 2024 ballot law vote to eliminate the MCAS graduation requirement. The Graduation Council was formed by the Governor in January, 2025 and charged with advising the Governor and the legislature on the development of a statewide graduation requirement.

The Council, whose membership includes MASC President Jason Fraser, was charged with identifying: what students should know and be able to do before they graduate; how students should demonstrate their achievements in ways that accurately reflect their skills and knowledge; and, what conditions should be in place to promote meaningful and

equitable student experiences. The interim report recommended that high school students would take end-of-course tests designed, administered and scored by the state. Passing the tests would not be a condition of receiving a diploma as was the case under the MCAS requirement. These would be administered at the end of specific high school courses such as Algebra 1, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies,

In addition to the tests, the council also recommended that students "demonstrate mastery" by completing capstones or portfolios that would be designed, administered and scored locally. Additional recommendations include that students complete a "rigorous program of student that aligns with the admission requirements for higher education," developing and

maintaining and individual career and academic plan, completing federal or state financial aid forms, developing financial literacy skills, and having the option to earn state-designated seals of distinction.

The final report is due in June, 2026. Over the next six months, the Council will discuss which courses should have an assessment, the weight and role of the tests in determining readiness to graduate, and accommodations and alternative formats for students with disabilities, English learners, and newly-arrived immigrant students. The recommendations require legislative action after they are filed. The full report can be accessed at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/reimagining-high-school-reimagining-readiness/download>

### DELEGATE ASSEMBLY 2025: Report on Actions Taken

MASC's 80th annual meeting was held on Friday, November 14 during the annual conference in Hyannis. A total of 92 delegates representing school districts across the state were registered and participated in the deliberations.

The meeting was led by MASC President Jason Fraser (Plympton/Silver Lake Regional). The Association's financial report was presented by Secretary-Treasurer Stephanie Clougherty (Carver). MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher and General Counsel Patrick Francomanno, Esq. served as Parliamentarian and Legal Counsel for the event.

Approved for Life Membership were: Helen Charlupski (Brookline); Charlie Ellis (Nashoba Reg. Voc. Tech.); Katherine Hennessy (Marlborough); Jane Oakes (Gill-Montague Reg.); Senate President Karen Spilka (Ashland); and Mary Ann Stewart (Lexington/MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education).

Elected to the MASC 2026 Board of Directors were: as President-Elect, Beverley Griffin Dunne (Peabody/Essex Tech.); as Vice President, Stephanie Clougherty (Carver); and as Secretary-Treasurer, Michelle Bodin-Hettinger (Marlborough). Denise Hurst (Springfield) who is the 2025 President-Elect becomes President on January 1, 2026.

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# LOOKING BACK AT CONFERENCE 2025



Conference attendees welcomed **Education Commissioner Pedro Martinez**, who joined DESE in June, having most recently served as Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools. He acknowledged that the past few months have entailed a great deal of listening and learning for him as he visited districts and classrooms across the state. Martinez identified challenges he has seen, including the post-pandemic impact on students, the increased economic distress in urban and rural communities, the conundrum of rising costs and declining enrollments, and the persistent achievement gaps between income groups.

As part of the process to address these challenges, the Commissioner summarized the Department's educational vision where (1) all students are known and valued; (2) learning experiences are relevant, real-world, and interactive; and (3) individualized supports enable students to excel at grade level and beyond. These, he explained, underpin the Department's three established strategic objectives: whole student supports; deeper learning; and a diverse and effective workforce. "We are working to identify priority areas where DESE will focus intensively in the months to come and gather further input on these initial priorities." In conclusion, Martinez referenced the upcoming release of the K-12 Statewide Graduation Council's interim report, and emphasized the importance of stakeholder feedback and collaborative discussions moving forward.



**MASC 2025 Board of Directors** (front row, left to right seated): Virginia Simms George (Assabet Voc.) Chair, Division X; Barbara Davis (Holbrook) Chair, Division III; Denise Hurst (Springfield) President-Elect; Humera Fasihuddin (Hadley) Chair, Division V; (standing) Mildred Lefebvre (Holyoke) Immediate Past President; (back row, left to right): Devin Sheehan (Holyoke) MASC Past President/ 2025-26 President, NSBA; Sue Mailman (Worcester) Chair, Division IX; Charlie Ellis (Nashoba Voc. Tech.) Chair, Division VIII; Bridget Garabedian (Tewksbury) Chair, Division I; Michelle Bodin-Hettinger (Marlboro) Chair, Division IV; Beverley Griffin Dunne (Peabody/Essex Tech.) Vice President; Tina Games (Monomoy) Chair, Division VII; Stephanie Clougherty (Carver) Secretary-Treasurer; Jason Fraser (Plympton/Silver Lake Reg.) President. Not pictured: Deborah Davis (Northeast Metro Tech.) Chair, Division II; Carrie Greene (Mount Greylock Reg.) Chair, Division VI.



Just last week, I was re-elected to my fifth term on the Springfield School Committee," **MASC 2026 President Denise Hurst** told the 250 Life Member dinner attendees. "A few days later, she said, her youngest son, Jackson, asked her to explain what a school committee does. "So I went into this long diatribe about making schools better for kids. When I finally finished, Jackson said "So...you're working to make the world better?" "Not the world," I said but he interrupted: "Yeah, Mom—the world. Because if you're helping the kids in Springfield, and other school committee members are helping the kids where they live, and all those kids grow up and go out into the world...then you are making the world better."

Hurst asked members to think about that: "the world our students will inherit, and the world we have the power to shape. How MASC can continue to lead, to elevate, and to serve as the convener for school committees across the Commonwealth, ensuring that each of us, in our communities, contributes to the collective good. And how we will stand firmly for public education in both federal and state legislation and advocacy—and as well all know, this work is not for the faint of heart."

When we strengthen our schools, she concluded, "we strengthen our communities. When we strengthen our communities, we strengthen our democracy. And when we strengthen our democracy, yes—as Jackson reminded me—we help make the world better."



**The Exhibit Hall** drew a record number of attendees this year seeking information on products and services ranging from early learning to college and career readiness, plus architects, AI, and school meal selections. And ice cream, a perennial conference favorite.

## Conference 2025



Friday General Session panelists approached the subject of recent events—local, state, and federal—with insights, humor, and no small amount of courage. Led by Boston Public Radio host **Jim Braude**, the panel of school leaders, and fiscal and legislative savants spoke to the challenges—known and unknown—that will influence direction, guidelines and likely fiscal support for education in 2026 and beyond.

**Phelton Moss**, Managing Director of Government Relations at the National School Boards Association (and a member of the St. George's County School Board in Maryland), spoke to the recent government shutdown, raising concerns that school districts may find themselves confronted in January with the same challenges in the event of a second shutdown. "There are 12 appropriation bills with little movement happening around them and education is likely to get caught in upcoming funding debates. Title 1, Perkins, Headstart, ACA—these are all in the Republican line of fire. We are not out of the doghouse."

**Brockton Superintendent Priya Tahiliani** shared the day-to-day experiences of her faculty and students. "They feel the fear and anxiety caused by unpredictability." She spoke of trying to navigate an ever-shifting landscape, where much of what the administration and faculty are trying to do for the students and school community may prove unsustainable in the current political climate. "If we are to come through this, we need to be aligned, work together, and empower community engagement. We need to activate the power we have to move forward. Brockton is a wonderful diversity of students, many of whom are suffering from a long list of challenges right now. Our goal is to figure out how to manage this landscape so as to help them through it."

**Doug Howgate, Executive Director of the MA Taxpayers Foundation**, gave the audience the state financial perspective, noting the importance of focusing on how resources are managed over time. "Massachusetts is in relatively stable shape, but we need to make sure that cost pressures remain sustainable, because our state/federal partnership is changing in fundamental ways. We don't know what the feds are going to do, or what kind of funding we will ultimately have. We are going to have to make some tough decisions. One thing we do know is that 255,000 people are going to lose health coverage." On the subject of education funding, he noted that "SOA did what it set out to do. We now have to work on the next step for education finance."

**MASC President Jason Fraser** acknowledged all the districts who have recently shared their stories of the impact of financial cuts in the face of increased costs, which are projected to grow even more out of budget in the coming year. Fraser pointed to the underfunded IDEA costs that are not met by the Circuit Breaker; the need for a doubling of Title I dollars; and support for struggling rural communities and the 67 districts whose SOA allotment does not match local needs. "We need to decouple rural school aid from Chapter 70 and for urban and suburban colleagues to support rural school aid. We've all got to pull in the same direction." In addition, he noted, the pending ballot initiative that would drop the income tax would cripple districts at a loss of \$4.5 billion. "The future depends on us funding education."



### **MASC and MASS thank the Laborers' International Union of North America New England Region**

(LiUNA!) for their generous support of Conference 2025 including sponsorship of the Wednesday and Thursday night social (karaoke and cornhole after dark) events.



On many fronts, the Conference welcomed and celebrated diversity—including several four-footed representatives who provided security (?) and therapy (!)

Conflict, especially high conflict, has seemingly become embedded in day-to-day life recently. Meetings dissolve into deadlocked arguments; colleagues and family members accuse one another of false opinions/behaviors and trust goes down the drain; "us" versus "them" scenarios become self-perpetuating and ultimately defeating. Why do we get trapped in this downward spiral? How do we get out of it?

**Veteran journalist and best-selling author Amanda Ripley** has taken on the challenge of explaining the underpinnings of conflict, how it begins, how it digs in, and how to avoid going down the conflict rathole in the first place by understanding behaviors that inspire change. "The level of conflict is not likely to go down in our current turbulent times," she said. The only option is to get better about how we deal with it.

According to Ripley, conflict itself isn't the problem. In fact, conflict is important and essential, especially in a diverse country like the US. "Good conflict is useful and from which we emerge stronger with greater understanding of options. We need to learn to manage conflict before it becomes dysfunctional."

Ripley cautioned about fire-starters, the trip wires of high conflict. (1) humiliation (no one is more dangerous than someone who has been humiliated); (2) corruption (both situations and people); (3) splitting issues or people into two opposing, non-negotiable camps; (4) conflict entrepreneurs (people or companies who exploit conflict for their own ends, often money or power). "You need to distance yourself from the conflict entrepreneurs in your orbit. They delight in conflict, and will goad you into positions it may be impossible to extricate yourself from."



In high conflict, any intuitive thing you do will almost certainly backfire, Ripley noted. "You have to learn to do the counter-intuitive thing. It requires practice, especially when you are under stress." Ask questions, she advised, interrupt the thought train in a bad situation. Take an interested, personal approach. "You have to persuade when people are dug in. Ask questions or tell a story that shows vulnerability on your part. "Remember, there are always more people and forces involved in high conflict than you may realize. Don't set out to win the fight; start by trying to understand the fight. Unlocking the backstory is the key to making the conflict understandable, and hopefully, resolvable."



#### **MASS President Karen Crebase,**

Superintendent, Hopedale, convened the Wednesday keynote dinner and set the framework for the conference event reminding attendees that "our work in public education is, at its core, a collective effort. Strong school systems are not built by one leader, one voice, or one office. They are built when superintendents and school

committees work in genuine collaboration—rooted in trust, communication and a shared vision for students." Crebase noted that over the past five years MA school leadership teams have navigated a global pandemic, changing guidance, shifting expectations, increased social and political pressures in local communities, and an increasingly complex educational landscape. "These challenges did not come with roadmaps, and we know there will be more challenges ahead. But we also know that MA has some of the strongest schools in the nation because of the strength of our partnerships. When we lead collaboratively—when we listen to one another, support one another, and remain grounded in what is best for children—we are unstoppable."

Photos taken by Chris Kisiel, a recently retired member of the Woburn School Committee, and owner of Tasher Studio. He can be reached at [Photos@TasherStudio.com](mailto:Photos@TasherStudio.com)



#### **MA Teacher of the Year Luisa Sparrow**

brought the audience to its feet in applause at the conclusion of her reminiscence about her less-than-ideally imagined first day teaching and what she has learned in the intervening years about identifying what is important in motivating the day-to-day, often difficult challenges of teaching and leading.

"I want to begin by thanking you, school committee members. The work you do is not always visible to the wider community. It happens in long meetings, in budget discussions, in difficult phone calls, and in countless decisions that rarely make the headlines, but that make all the difference for our students. Your work behind the scenes ensures that classrooms have what they need to thrive, that schools remain safe, welcoming places to learn, and that every child has access to opportunity."

Acknowledging that her role teaching in a multi-grade classroom in Boston for 5th and 6th graders with intellectual disabilities presents a different set of daily challenges, she noted that the "Why" behind what she and school leaders do remains the same: "It's always about the students."

What does it take to keep showing up day after day, and what keeps us grounded, she asked. "Pay attention to the 'glimmers,' she told the audience— those small moments of joy or connection that remind you everything is, at heart, okay. When (not if) you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit. "Each of you carries an extraordinary responsibility. You make decisions that shape the lives of students you may never meet and you do it with integrity, patience, and purpose. It's not always easy work; it's not always visible work. But it is important work. And no one else can do it."

# MASC Strategic Plan Announced

Conference Leadership Lunch attendees were given a preview of the Association's newly released Strategic Plan researched and developed by the Board of Directors over the past 18 months. MASC President Jason Fraser explained as follows:

"MASC has adopted a new five-year strategic plan (2025-2030) that reflects the voices and priorities of members from across the Commonwealth. Anchored in our mission to achieve excellence in school leadership through ad-

vocacy, training, and service, the plan builds on extensive member input and organizational analysis to reaffirm our core values of equity, collaboration, mentorship, and accountability. It establishes service pillars that strengthen advocacy for public schools, expand professional development and mentorship, and provide comprehensive governance support to school committees statewide.

To bring this vision into practice, the plan outlines strategic goals that will guide our work over the

next five years encompassing standardized onboarding and succession planning for leadership, modernizing and expanding member resources through the MASC website and handbooks, and upgrading technology systems to enhance conferences and member engagement. Together these initiatives position MASC to lead with clarity, continuity and innovation, ensuring our members are supported in advancing student success and strengthening public education across Massachusetts."

The full plan can be found on [masc.org](http://masc.org)

## DELEGATE ASSEMBLY 2025 continued from page 1

Current President Jason Fraser becomes Immediate Past President at the same time.

Following are actions taken on the single resolution proposed this year, as well as the six expiring resolutions. The 2023 Delegate Assembly approved an amendment to the By-Laws that resolutions will expire at the conclusion of the Delegate Assembly three years after their adoption. Expiring resolutions may be reconsidered and readopted by the delegates at the annual meeting at which the resolutions would expire. The full text of the proposed as well as the expiring resolutions are printed in the 2025 Delegate Manual and are posted on the MASC website.

As noted by the Resolutions Committee, the expiring resolutions were all adopted by clear margins at previous MASC Delegate Assemblies and have been part of MASC's advocacy platform for three or more years. Therefore, the Resolutions Committee submitted the expiring resolutions as a slate to be voted up or down as a group and not to be separated out for individual votes. The delegates voted the six expiring resolutions as a single slate. The resolutions, listed below, were reapproved on a unanimous vote.

- Regarding Sanctuary Laws for Transgender Students
- To Increase the Maximum Balance Allowed by the Special Education Reserve Fund
- Membership of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Preserving Local Governance of Massachusetts Schools
- Personal Financial Literacy Education
- Establishment of a Regional School Assessment Reserve Fund

Following are the actions taken on the newly proposed resolution.

### **RESOLUTION 1: REMOVING BMI TESTING FROM SCHOOLS**

*(Sponsored by the Grafton School Committee)*

BE IT RESOLVED that MASC urges the removal of the BMI screening requirement from all public schools.  
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that MASC urges the express banning of BMI screening in all public schools.

An amendment to the resolution was presented by the delegate from Quincy.

#### **The amendment edited the resolution as follows:**

BE IT RESOLVED that MASC urges the removal of the BMI screening requirement from all public schools.  
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that MASC urges the express banning of BMI screening in all public schools *except when a student's health care provider requests the screening with parental/guardian approval.*

The amendment was approved on a count of 56-33.

The resolution, as amended, was approved on a voice vote.

## NSBA announces information/networking program for school board leaders

NSBA is inviting all school board members and senior school district staff to join their recently reconfigured National Connection (NatCon) information and networking program. With content that is targeted, relevant, and easy to access, MA and other state school committee members can place their local issues in a national context.

NatCon members receive access to a wealth of resources to drive educational equity and excellence. Through NatCon participation, districts remain connected to daily industry news, an award-winning magazine (the American School Board Journal), up to 20% savings on NSBA Signature Events registration (Annual Conference; Advocacy and Equity Institute; CUBE Annual Conference), and early access to relevant information and data, including reports and webinars.

For more information, or to register:  
<https://www.nsba.org/membership/national-connection>

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