

DESE Update: Title 1; Snow Days

Districts alerted to Title 1 cutbacks

In early March, DESE updated superintendents and those who manage grants that Title I allocation for the upcoming year is expected to be less for the state and for districts in Massachusetts.

While the federal budget that was passed by Congress and signed into law virtually level funded the federal entitlement grants, allocations to states and then in turn to districts are recalculated each year based on the demographics that determine funding.

This coming fiscal year for school districts, the state has learned that the Massachusetts share of the federal poverty total has dropped by 10%. That will in turn decrease the Massachusetts share of Title I funding, and, in turn, the district by

district allocations will also be less.

The state has recommended that districts plan for a Title I allocation that is 85% of the current year's allocation. DESE has also shared a spreadsheet, giving the recommended 85% and alerting districts that may be on the cusp of losing particular eligibilities within Title I (thus making their losses more severe).

School calendar: 180-day requirement

By state regulation, public schools in Massachusetts are required to have a 180-day school year calendar and 900 instructional hours for elementary school and 990 instructional hours for secondary school. Any days missed before April 1 must be made up with full school days.

For days missed after March 31, the Commissioner has indicated that he will consider waivers to the 180-day requirement—but NOT to the instructional hours—if the following criteria have been met:

- The district has used all five snow days; and
 - Will still meet the instructional hours requirement; and
 - Scheduled out through Friday, June 26, 2026 with snow days rescheduled as full school days; and
 - Repurposed any remaining districtwide professional development days and any remaining school closure days (e.g. Good Friday) outside of April vacation and required holidays.
- As a reminder, the release date for seniors may be: "up to 12 school days before the regular scheduled closing date of that school."

IN MEMORIAM: Paul H. Gorden

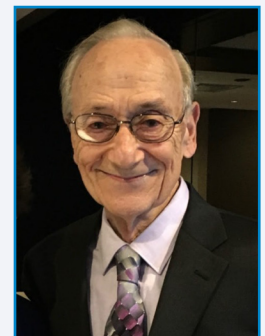
Paul Gorden, former MASC Executive Director, passed away suddenly on March 3. He had celebrated his 97th birthday three days earlier.

Paul joined MASC in 1974 as a field representative, having previously been an active member of the Ware School Committee. He was appointed Executive Director in 1977 and served the Association in that capacity until his retirement in 1996.

As Executive Director, Paul was a staunch advocate for local control, and the role of school committees in public life. He created the model for the MASC Superintendent Search program and the MASC Policy Service. He was committed to strengthening the partnership between school committee members and school administrators and connected with school leaders across the state.

In retirement, Paul remained an active life member, and was a welcome presence at many annual conferences and delegate assemblies. He was predeceased by his beloved wife Norma, who encouraged and accompanied him to many MASC events during his years as Executive Director and in retirement.

Godspeed.



Use Your Agenda to Meet Your Goals

Our close colleague, Nick Caruso, field director at the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, shared the following article with us, and we think that the guidance provided would be helpful to our MASC members.

By Nicholas Caruso, Associate Executive Director for Field Services and Technology, CABE

Boards of education exercise their governance responsibilities through meetings. Your authority and your ability to govern well rests within your board meeting agendas. If your board is focused on achieving success with your district goals, your meeting agenda can enhance your work or stifle it. Do your meetings last for hours and do you feel like most of the time you spend is inconsequential? It may be time to review your agendas—both in substance and in practice.

The Agenda as a Strategic Tool

For many board members, the agenda is seen as a mere "to-do" list for the evening. The agenda is the most powerful tool a board has to signal its priorities to the administration and the community. If your district's primary goal is improving student literacy, but "Student Achievement" appears at the very end of a four-hour meeting under "New Business," you are sending a message that the "Killer B's" (Buildings, Budgets, Books, Boilers, etc.) take precedence over classroom instruction.

A strategic agenda ensures that the board's limited time is spent on high-leverage activities. To shift from a reactive board to a proactive one, you must move beyond simply "receiving reports" and start engaging in "intentional governance."

The Anatomy of a Time-Wasting Meeting

Why do board meetings often drag into the late hours of the night? Usually, it is because boards fall into the trap of micromanagement or repetition. When a board spends thirty minutes debating the color of the high school gymnasium floor or how much horsepower should the new snowblowers have, they are performing management tasks, not governance tasks.

Furthermore, many boards waste time by having staff read reports aloud that were already provided in the board packet. If your agenda is structured around oral presentations of written materials, you are essentially paying your administrators to read to you.

Best Practices for Goal-Oriented Agendas

To transform your meetings, consider implementing the following structural changes:

- **The Consent Agenda:** This is perhaps the most effective tool for reclaiming time. Routine, non-controversial items—such as meeting minutes, monthly financial reports, and simple policy decisions—should be grouped together for a single vote. If a member has a question, the item can be pulled for discussion, but otherwise, these "business-as-usual" items should take minutes, not hours.
- **Front-Loading Student Success:** Place the items most critical to your district goals at the beginning of the

meeting. When board members are fresh and the public is most engaged, allow for discussion of curriculum updates, student performance data, and strategic plan milestones.

- **Timed Items:** While it may feel rigid, assigning a tentative time limit to each agenda item keeps the conversation focused. It forces members to get to the point and prevents a single topic from hijacking the entire evening.
- **Connecting Items to Goals:** Every action item on your agenda should explicitly state which district goal it supports. If an item doesn't align with your strategic plan, ask yourself: Why are we spending time on this tonight?

The Role of the Board Chair and Superintendent

The agenda-setting process is a partnership between the Board Chair and the Superintendent. This "leadership team" must act as the gatekeepers of the board's time.

Before the meeting, this team should review the proposed items through the lens of the district's mission. Is there enough information for the board to make a decision? Is the board being asked to "do" something (approve a policy) or just "know" something (receive information)? Information-only items can be handled through a weekly board update memo rather than taking up precious public meeting time.

Engaging the Public Authentically

A well-structured agenda also respects the public. When meetings are disorganized and focus on trivialities, the community loses trust in the board's ability to lead. By creating a transparent, goal-aligned agenda, you show parents and taxpayers that you are focused on what matters: the students.

When the public sees the board spending two hours discussing progress on their strategic plan, they see a board that is invested in the future. When they see a board arguing over parliamentary procedure for two hours, they see a board that has lost its way.

Conclusion: Measuring Your Impact

At the end of your next meeting, take five minutes for a "meeting debrief." Ask yourselves:

1. How much of our time was spent on our top three goals?
2. Did we add value to the district tonight, or did we simply rubber-stamp administrative tasks?
3. Are we closer to our vision for student success than we were when we walked in?

Governance is not about the number of hours you sit in a chair; it is about the impact of the decisions you make while you are there. By taking control of your agenda, you take control of your district's future. Don't let your goals be sidelined by a poorly planned meeting—put them at the center of the table where they belong.

Black History Month and Women's History Month - 2026

Leaders of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

In recognition of both Women's History Month and Black History Month, we honor the following leaders of our past, present, and future. MASC hopes to continue honoring those people who were influential in educating and mentoring students and administrators, some of who are not as well-known as they should be, but whose contributions remain a testament to their pioneering and innovative work and to their dedication to the proposition that all children have the right to learn and thrive.



Caroline LeCount (1846-1923)

The first black woman to attain credentials to teach, she became a teacher and principal in the Philadelphia, PA school system in the 1860s where she taught until retiring in 1911. An

outspoken advocate for black teachers, she was also a prominent speaker and researcher for the eminent black sociologist and writer W.E.B. DuBois.



Hazel Bernice Harvey Peace (1903-2008)

A prominent African-American educator, activist, and humanitarian in Fort Worth, Texas. As a child, she spent hours in the city's Carnegie Public Library

where, because of segregation, she could borrow books but not stay and read them. She spent 50 years as a teacher and administrator and bequeathed her estate to historically black colleges having taught in several prior to her retirement.



Anna Julia Cooper (née Haywood; 1858-1964)

African American author, educator, and activist. Although born enslaved, Cooper pursued higher education at Oberlin College in Ohio, where she

earned a Bachelor of Arts in 1884 and a master's degree in mathematics in 1887. At the age of sixty-six, she completed her doctoral studies at the University of Paris, making her the fourth African American woman to earn a PhD. Cooper's scholarly contributions to sociology started with her first book, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*, which is widely acknowledged as one of the first articulations of Black feminism and gave her the often-used title of "the Mother of Black Feminism".



Rita Pierson (1951-2013)

Teacher, mentor, and educator, widely known for her public speaking and for creating the message "Every Child Needs a Champion."

Recognized for her philosophy of inclusion, relationship-building, and focusing on the individual child's needs, her work continues to be a resource to educators and civil rights advocates across the country.



Maria Baldwin (1856-1922)

While widely known as an advocate for civil rights, Baldwin gained more fame as one of the nation's first Black principals, serving for over 30 years at the Agassiz School in Cambridge, MA.

There, in the city where she was born, she introduced new methods of teaching mathematics and began art classes. She was the first to introduce the practice of hiring a school nurse. Her school was the only one in the city to establish an "open-air" classroom, and the poet E. E. Cummings was one of her students.



Ruth Batson (1921-2003)

A prominent leader for civil rights and equal educational opportunity for all children both in Massachusetts and on the national scene. A Boston native and Boston University graduate she

championed school desegregation for over 50 years. The first black woman on the Democratic National Committee and the first woman elected president of the NAACP's New England Regional Conference, Batson was also one of the founders of the state's ground-breaking METCO program.



Mary McLeod Bethune (née McLeod; 1875-1955)

Mary McLeod Bethune was a leader among African American women. In addition to her work on civil rights, she started the private school that became Bethune-Cookman University, which was the first Black college for women in Florida. As a teacher and mentor, she created the first industrial school for girls - a forerunner of today's vocational programs. In addition to her work in education, she was a good friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and considered one of the most influential African American women in America for many years.

MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS



Carlotta Walls LaNier (née Walls)

The youngest member of the Little Rock Nine, a group of African-American students who, in 1957, were the first black students ever to attend classes at Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, Walls LaNier pursued her college education and obtained a graduate degree before embarking on a lifelong career as an advocate for educational opportunity, taking her message across America as an acclaimed speaker and activist.



Jean Maguire

One of the leading advocates for the children of Boston, Jean Maguire was a founding member of METCO and served as its executive director for many years. During the most challenging days of the Boston desegregation process, Maguire served on the school committee providing a powerful voice for students and families. She remains, at 95, a role model and advocate for children.



Joyce Abbot

An educator for more than 30 years, she earned a reputation for her innovative strategies in the classroom and as a mentor for students. Considered an "everyday hero" by the *Philadelphia Daily News*, she inspired the naming of the popular television series, "Abbot Elementary" that was produced by a former student.



Gloria Ladson Billings

She is credited as one of the nation's most successful teacher educators for her work in both the theory and practice of classroom instruction. She was a member of the faculty and is now professor emerita at the University of Wisconsin. Her book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* is a highly regarded work.



Dr. Darcy Fernandes

Formerly the Superintendent of the Athol-Royalston Regional School District, Fernandes was instrumental in mentoring aspiring administrators in the MA Department of Education's Influence 100 program. She now leads the Specialized Supports section of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.



Dr. Sonia E. Dinnall

A native of Springfield, MA, Dr. Dinnall is a nationally recognized educational leader committed to implementing strategies that address inequities and bridge learning gaps in student achievement. With over thirty years of experience in education, she has excelled as a classroom teacher, school leader, and administrator. Notably, she holds the distinction of being the first woman and first Black woman to serve as Superintendent in the history of Springfield Public Schools.



Dr. Thea Stovell Herndon

In a career focused on children and young adults that spans 35 years, Dr. Herndon is currently in her 8th year as Superintendent of the Randolph Public Schools. She

also served more than a decade as Director of Youth Services for Volunteers of America, and worked for ten years in various roles at a charter school in Dorchester. She says her career was shaped in part by her own experience as an elementary student in the METCO program, riding a bus to and from Newton every day until she enrolled in a Boston exam school for high school. A cornerstone of her educational philosophy is that a student's geographic location should not impact the quality of education they receive.



Dr. Melanie Curtin

Dr. Curtin spent over two decades as educator in the Weymouth public schools before becoming the district's Superintendent in 2024.



Jeri Robinson

Chair of the Boston School Committee, Jeri Robinson has spent over 40 years working with children, including teaching and consulting in early education. She is the

developer of the PlaySpace exhibit, (one of the earliest prototypes for early learning family spaces in children's and other museums), and for many years, has provided training and consultation to schools, early child programs, museums and other organizations. She has a long association with Wheelock College which awarded her an honorary Doctorate in Education.

This compilation of Black and women leaders was authored by MASC Division X officers Virginia Simms George and Christina Horner.



Virginia Simms George

A member of the Assabet Valley Vocational Tech. School Committee. Virginia is a Virginia native and proud graduate of Virginia Union University, an HBCU school. An impassioned advocate for civil rights, she has fought discrimination and bias for over 60 years. Today she continues that work, speaking with students and leading MASC's initiatives on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She is a member of the MASC Board of Directors as Chair of Division X (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). She received a M.Ed from the University of Maryland in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling.



Christina Horner

A member of the Wellesley School Committee, Christina Horner is Vice Chair of MASC's Division X. For over 20 years, she has been an educator, administrator, and, for a decade, a METCO director, opening doors for tomorrow's leaders. Currently she provides professional development to a new generation of teacher-leaders and as an advocated for today's students.

Report on SPED Transportation Released

Last month, the Office of the Inspector (OIG), as required by Section 2A of Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2025, released a report on special education transportation. Massachusetts, the report noted, is quite rare in its funding model, as it is one of only six states that require districts to fund transportation up front, receiving reimbursement in a subsequent fiscal year. As members are aware, this model requires districts to front load and carry these costs, limiting the use of funds that might otherwise be committed.

Among the findings is a recommendation that the Legislature make statutory changes, requiring that transportation vendors provide detailed pricing information at the procurement, contract negotiation, and billing stages. They recommend at the Department collect transportation contracts from districts, providing a common public repository of school transportation

Friday, March 27 | Noon | **MASC Learning Lunch**
Topic: Legislative Process (originally scheduled for 4/10)

Monday, March 30 | **Day on the Hill** |
The State House, Boston

Friday, May 1 | Noon | **Learning Lunch**
Topic: School Committee role in the MSBA process

Saturday, May 2 | 8:00am-4:00pm | **Charting the Course**
Peabody, Higgins Middle School

Friday, May 14 | 6:00-8:00pm | **Division III Meeting
Dinner and Legislative Update**
Southeastern Reg. Voc. Tech., South Easton

Wednesday, May 16 | 8:00am-4:00pm | **Charting the Course**
Marshfield, Marshfield High School

Friday, June 5 | Noon | **Learning Lunch**
Topic: MASC Services

Saturday, June 6 | 8:00am-4:00pm | **Charting the Course**
Fitchburg, Crocker Elementary School



bid documents and contracts so as to increase competitiveness in contracts. The OIG also urges further support from the Legislature for regionalization of services, as possible.

The OIG called attention to at least four reports on school transportation costs over the

past 20 years, including from the State Auditor and from a 2018 special legislative commission, observing "there has been limited follow-through with these recommendations." The OIG through this most recent report urge action "to address these issues once and for all."

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