

MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES for CHILDREN

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Changing conditions for many . . . Helping one at a time.



MAC's Mission

MAC's mission is to be an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal educational and life opportunities. MAC works to overcome these barriers by changing conditions for many children, while also helping one child at a time. For nearly 40 years, MAC has responded to the needs of children who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, disability or limited English.

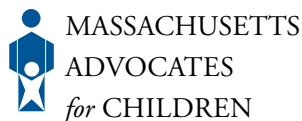


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MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL ASSISTANCE CORPORATION

"We do not merely have a social responsibility to assure that our children and youth have decent life chances and prosper. We have a sacred obligation to do so."

—HUBIE JONES, MAC FOUNDER

Young Adults with Disabilities Benefit from Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Program

Members of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, as well as many college presidents, were very impressed by the presentation organized by MAC, the Institute for Community Inclusion and the Special Education Collaborative at its February 20 board meeting on the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment (ICE) pilot program. ICE enables young adults with severe disabilities to take college courses with their non-disabled peers. The highlight of the meeting was presentations by two students currently participating in the program. Cassidy, a 19 ½ year old young woman with Down Syndrome, made a very effective PowerPoint presentation to relate her experience taking classes at the local community college studying culinary arts, her on-the-job learning at a local diner and the senior center, and her career goal of working for a caterer. The best parts of attending college are, in her words, "having independence, learning a professional job, meeting new people and friends, going to campus for basketball games and hanging out, taking classes for my career, and being a college student like my brother."

Cassidy and her fellow student with autism who spoke that morning to the board, as well as many other young adults with severe disabilities, would

not be having this life-changing opportunity were it not for the ICE program, which develops partnerships between high schools and public institutions of higher education. Without this innovative program, many young adults with disabilities like Cassidy who have not passed MCAS would more than likely be isolated in a separate classroom in their high school until age 22, when the legal mandate for special education services ends. Instead, they are now able to attend college courses with their typical peers, gaining the academic, social, and employment skills necessary to succeed when they turn 22.

This innovative program was created in 2006 thanks to the wisdom of legislators and the advocacy of MAC and the many critical members of the Special Education Collaborative that is convened by our organization. MAC was instrumental in developing a broad consensus among special education leaders in the state to secure passage of this ground-breaking legislation. MAC continues to advocate vigorously for continued funding and support for this initiative which provides a critical pathway from education to employment and/or independent living skills for young adults with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

Advocacy Focus on English Language Learners in the Boston Public Schools

A priority area for the Boston School Reform project is educational equity for the 18% of students in BPS who are English Language Learners. A recent study for BPS identified late entrant ELL students as one of the four highest risk groups for dropping out, with a four-year graduation rate of only 36%. Latino students overall consistently have the highest dropout rate of all ethnic groups, with an annual rate of 11% in 2005-06. (Latino males had an annual rate of 12.3%.)

With the Latino Education Action Network (LEAN)/ELL Work Group it convenes, MAC has regular monthly meetings with the Director of the Office of Language Learning and Support Services (OLLSS, the former bilingual department). In the

last meeting, LEAN members presented their priorities with the director: 1) an expanded Newcomers Assessment and Counseling Center, 2) prevention of cuts to ESL teachers and professional development specialist staff, in light of the enormous gaps that already exist and have led BPS to be out of compliance with state standards, and 3) the creation of a Newcomers Academy that will serve SIFE students (students with interrupted formal education) and recent arrivals. A number of these priorities have been included in the director's proposed plans for the next school year. MAC staff and members of LEAN were also invited to a meeting to discuss strategies to develop a Family Advisory group for the OLLSS department.

Whole School Approach to Impact of Trauma on Learning Takes Root in Quincy

Three Quincy Public Schools teams of 12 administrators and teachers from each of two elementary and one middle school completed a pilot seminar in April 2008 on “Trauma-Sensitive Schools” conducted by Lesley University’s Center for Special Education and MAC’s Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (in partnership with the Harvard Legal Services Center). The seminar used MAC’s report *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* as its text and consisted of five two-hour sessions. The seminar served as both a professional development pilot for Lesley on trauma and learning and a model for implementing a trauma-sensitive school approach in Quincy. Each team is currently working on a school-wide action plan to be finalized in May.

In a March 25 presentation to the Secretary of Education and the Board of Education on Quincy’s comprehensive efforts to address its drop-out problem, Janet Powell, Quincy’s Senior Director of Student Support Services, passed out copies of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. She noted the role of the trauma-sensitive schools grant program in supporting 250 students identified as high risk for dropping out and emphasized the importance of whole school/whole child approaches to address the drop out problem. At the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s now yearly “Trauma Sensitive Schools Conference,” TLPI will moderate a panel consisting of educators from the Quincy Public Schools and the Ludlow Public Schools entitled, “Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Getting Started,” where Quincy’s experience through the Lesley University seminar, in addition to the pioneer work implementing the framework from *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* at the East St. Elementary School in Ludlow, will be shared with other schools interested in whole school approaches to trauma sensitivity.

High Demand for Children’s Autism Medicaid Waiver Slots

Demonstrating an extraordinary need in the Commonwealth for autism services, over 1,100 families submitted applications during a ten day enrollment period in November 2007 to participate in the lottery for 80 slots that would enable low-income families to receive in-home intensive services for their young children with autism at risk for institutionalization.

These services, to be provided through the Children’s Autism Medicaid Waiver, will enable children with autism under age 8 to remain in their homes and communities and to make significant progress in the areas of social skills, language acquisition, nonverbal communication, and reductions in challenging behaviors.

MAC, through the Autism Special Education Legal Support Center, has successfully led advocacy efforts for this program since 2005, first at the state house with enactment of legislation and subsequently with the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) to assure implementation of the program. MAC worked with its many colleagues in the autism community to conduct outreach to families that face cultural and language barriers to inform them of this important opportunity.

We continue to advocate with DMR for full and effective implementation of the program and the legislature to increase the state funding so as to leverage federal Medicaid dollars and enable more children to benefit.

Somerville Public Schools Take Steps Towards Inclusion

With the support of MAC’s Somerville Special Education Advocacy Project (SSEAP) and its Somerville for Inclusion parent group, the Somerville School Committee has prioritized inclusion as one of its six long-range goals. In turn, the School Department has begun the process to raise awareness of the benefits of inclusion and to develop a plan for implementing the long-range goal.

The School Department began by inviting Dr. William Henderson, principal of the nationally-acclaimed inclusive O’Hearn School in Dorchester, to speak at the opening workshop for teachers at the start of school in September. Dr. Henderson was invited back to serve as the keynote speaker for SSEAP’s and the parent group’s Inclusion Awareness Day community event co-sponsored with the School Department on Saturday, November 17 at the Kennedy School which drew over 120 parents, elected officials, and school personnel. Joining

him on the panel discussion were Superintendent Anthony Pierantozzi; Keith Jones, Somerville resident and community activist; Bonnie Thompson, a Somerville parent and member of the Somerville for Inclusion group; and Deborah Connell, special education director from the school department. The Somerville Board of Aldermen issued a proclamation commending SSEAP and the school department for the success of the Inclusion Awareness Day event.

School personnel have also joined Somerville for Inclusion parents and SSEAP staff on three site visits to the O’Hearn School to learn first-hand about how inclusion works in the classroom and is integral to the school climate and culture. Somerville for Inclusion parents and MAC staff are participating on the follow-up committee established by the superintendent to develop plans for implementing more inclusion opportunities in the Somerville schools.



Top photo – From left: Dr. William Henderson, keynote speaker; Jerry Mogul, MAC, moderator; and panelists Anthony Pierantozzi, Deborah Connell, Bonnie Thompson and Keith Jones.

Bottom photo – Dr. William Henderson, keynote speaker, addresses the audience while Jerry Mogul, event moderator, looks on.

MAC "Thanks for Giving" Night a Big Success

Photos by Harry Brett

MAC's 4th annual Appreciation Event took place on November 29, 2007 at City Year in Boston attended by over 120 supporters. Massachusetts First Lady Diane Patrick was on hand to give J. Keith Motley, Ph.D., Chancellor of UMass Boston, the Community Leadership Award. "Keith has been deeply committed to making the Boston community a better place for its children. He saw with great alarm the adverse conditions faced by many children in Boston and the resultant educational failure. He knew that Boston could not have strong universities that attract students from all over the state and country and turn its back on the children living in the shadows of those great institutions." Mrs. Patrick then went on to describe the various schools and community-based youth programs that Dr. Motley has founded or supported.

Dr. Motley was pleasantly surprised and graciously upstaged by the deeply moving recitation of his award-winning essay on community violence by Tony Arthurton, Jr., a 7th grade student at the Mildred Avenue Middle School in Mattapan and a participant in one of the important community programs Dr. Motley has supported, Do the Write Thing Challenge. Tony was a national finalist in the program's essay contest on youth violence, asking children to write about how it affects them and what they can do about it. Tony's essay was entitled, "Violence in My Life."

Eliza Wilson, board member of Do the Write Thing Challenge and a UMass Boston graduate student, also surprised Dr. Motley with a scrapbook of letters from children who are participants in the various youth programs Dr. Motley supports.

Other appreciation awards were made to Brian Price, Director and Clinical Professor of Law at the WilmerHale Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School, MAC's partner in the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative; Ann Guay, a MAC volunteer with the Autism Special Education Legal Support Center; and past board members Margaret Burnham, Alfrida Coombs and Robert Fallon. All spoke from the heart in gratitude for the recognition and in appreciation of the important work that MAC does for children and families.

Miren Uriarte, Ph.D., MAC board member and director of the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, gave a riveting keynote address on the educational needs of immigrant children.

The Bank of New York Mellon was the presenting sponsor of the event, and Faith James, MAC board member and bank representative, was the event chair. Over \$30,000 was raised from corporate and individual sponsors.



First Lady Diane Patrick greets Event Chair Faith James and Boston School Committee members Rev. Gregory Groover and Helen Dajer.



Keynote speaker Dr. Miren Uriarte greets First Lady Diane Patrick.



First Lady Diane Patrick introduces UMass Boston Chancellor J. Keith Motley as the MAC Community Leadership awardee.



Dr. Keith Motley congratulates Tony Arthurton, Jr.



Tony Arthurton, Jr. reads his award-winning essay, as First Lady Diane Patrick looks on.

Coalition Forms to Combat Unfair School Discipline and Exclusion Policies

Under the banner of the Education Law Task Force, a number of overlapping initiatives have merged into one coalition to develop advocacy strategies to change school district zero tolerance policies across the state. The coalition has launched an outreach effort to students, parents and advocates to collect stories of students unfairly excluded from school for minor offenses that did not pose a danger or threaten school safety. Along with collecting stories, the coalition is analyzing data and best practices to eventually publish a report in the context of a campaign to change laws and policies that unfairly harm too many students and that contribute to the “school to jail” pipeline that disproportionately affects students of color.

Coalition members include, along with MAC, representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Center for Law and Education, Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts, Disabilities Law Center, Ed Law Project, Legal Assistance Corp. of Central Massachusetts, Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Suffolk University Law School Juvenile Justice Center, and WilmerHale Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School.

Organizational News

MAC welcomed two new board members in September, **Dalia Nuwayhid** and **Kelley Leuchter**. Dalia is an attorney and has worked at both Merrill Lynch and Fidelity Investments. She is currently at home with two young children. Kelley is MAC’s new treasurer and works at Health Care for All as its accounting manager.

MAC welcomes two new staff members in 2008 for its Autism Center. **Ann Guay** has been hired to work part time as its Policy Coordinator, and **Catherine Mayes** has been hired to provide intensive technical assistance to Helpline callers for children with autism. We are sad to see two staff members leave MAC this year: **Alexandra Peredo Carrion**, staff attorney working on both the Autism and Somerville projects, and **Stephanie Melton**, development manager.

In order to increase our capacity to respond effectively to the growing number of Helpline calls, MAC has recruited volunteers with expertise on special education matters. Thanks so much to **Erin Keaney**, **Kristin Wesolaski**, **Beth Walsh** and **Rachel Wurtman**.

MAC is pleased to announce that the Boston School Reform project staff – **John Mudd**, **Kim Janey** and **Samuel Hurtado** – will be honored at Freedom House’s annual gala on May 15.

Finally, MAC board and staff completed a nearly two year strategic planning process with a plan for the next three years comprised of both organizational and programmatic goals. The latter affirmed

Whole Foods Day Nets Big Gain for Autism Center

MAC raised over \$46,000 for its Autism Special Education Legal Support Center thanks to the generosity of Whole Foods Market, which chose MAC as the recipient of its “5% Day” in 13 stores throughout eastern Massachusetts on October 16, 2007. From Bellingham to Bedford, MAC volunteers and staff set up tables at each of the stores to hand out literature and speak with store customers about the program. Miss Teen Massachusetts USA, Katie McNiff, who has a younger brother with autism, visited three of the stores and signed autographs for children. Many thanks to Pirjo Silen, manager of the Whole Foods Market store in Newtonville, for playing a lead role in supporting this charitable event.



From left- Julia Landau, MAC; Pirjo Silen, Whole Foods Market; Jerry Mogul, Leslie Lockhart and Ruth-Ann Rasbold, MAC; Sara Engel and Kristina Geller, Whole Foods Market.



Katie McNiff, Miss Teen Massachusetts USA, greets customers at Newtonville Whole Foods Market Store at the 5% Day for MAC’s Autism Center.

our current strategic directions and projects, and called for new efforts to improve special education in the Boston Public Schools and to improve our capacity to serve new immigrant and non-English speaking communities. Organizational goals came under the categories of increasing MAC’s visibility and fundraising capacity and continuing to improve and strengthen our infrastructure.

MAC Advocacy Briefs

- The Boston School Reform project has recommitted its provision of technical assistance and leadership development to the Boston Parents Organizing Network (BPON) and three of its grantee programs: East Boston Ecumenical Community Council, Freedom House, and Jamaica Plain Parents Organizing Project.
- Community Partners With The New Superintendent, supported by MAC's Boston School Reform project, meets regularly with BPS Superintendent Carol Johnson and her leadership team to help reduce the achievement gaps and improve school system strategies in the areas of family and community engagement, English-language learners, teacher recruitment and hiring, and "turnaround" schools.
- MAC is pleased to note the appointment of Michele Brooks, former School Committee member and director of BPON, to serve as the new director of the Department of Family and Student Engagement at BPS.
- The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) and Children's Law Support Project (CLSP) continue to work closely with legal services advocates in DVASS (Domestic Violence and School Safety Work Group) to provide education to schools in addressing safety issues related to children and families affected by domestic violence. The group has agreed to present a workshop at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's annual conference on Trauma-sensitive Schools in May. The workshop will provide information to schools on legal issues involved in restraining orders and sharing school records in situations of domestic violence.
- TLPI is partnering with the Center for Public Representation (CPR) on outreach and advocacy to create the linkages and collaborations that must be in place for schools to collaborate with the new Medicaid mental health system that is being set up as a result of CPR's successful "Rosie D." lawsuit.
- TLPI continues to convene its team of evaluators working toward publishing the next report, which will include a set of interdisciplinary guidelines on performing trauma-sensitive evaluations to help educators understand the role that trauma may be playing in a child's learning, behavior, and relationships at school. Annotated chapter summaries and preliminary drafts of the discipline-specific chapters are presently being reviewed by the group.
- All the special education bills MAC has advocated for this legislative term were reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Education. The bills are continuing through the legislative process.
- MAC and the Center for Law and Education were successful in advocacy efforts to obtain a new, more equitable policy from the Department of Education regarding the use of readers for English Language Arts and calculators for the Math MCAS exams.

Case Example

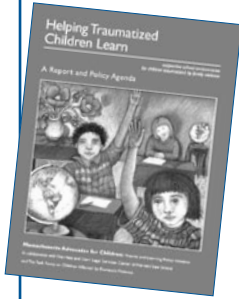
MAC provided legal representation to four children with autism with Latino, Spanish-speaking parents. The children, ranging in age from 6 to 14, had been placed in a separate public school designed for students with emotional and behavioral problems. These students were placed in substantially separate classrooms for children with autism housed in this segregated school. None of the children in these autism classrooms was provided services, such as appropriate augmentative and alternative communication, Applied Behavioral Analysis, individual discrete trial teaching, or direct home services that could have helped them progress academically and socially. Furthermore, the school and home program staff were not properly trained to provide appropriate services for children with autism, evaluations and extended school year programming were inadequate and adequate translators and interpreters were not provided.

As a result, two of the students, who were both 13 years old, were still not able to communicate; in fact, the district's speech therapist was recommending termination of services for lack of progress. After effective advocacy, the same speech therapist implemented the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) for the first time and both of these students were immediately able to use the system and began to progress.

MAC attorneys obtained independent evaluations, including on-site classroom observations, for the four students, and the evaluators documented that the services and placements were inappropriate. After intensive negotiation at the Team level and the initiation of litigation at the Bureau of Special Education Appeals for three of the students, MAC succeeded in obtaining, through settlements, out-of-district placements for all four students in programs specializing in educating students with autism. The first student to benefit, a six year old who was previously denied the opportunity to participate in school parties and field trips because of unaddressed behaviors related to his disability, has been in his new school placement long enough to show marked progress in his behavior. The parents of all four children are thrilled with the prospect of their children flourishing in their new schools. They have become inspired to be active advocates and vocal leaders not only for their own children, but also for other parents of children with autism in their school district with the goal of improving the public school programming in the district for all students with autism.

Reports Available on MAC Website

Visit MAC's web site at www.massadvocates.org to purchase or download these reports.

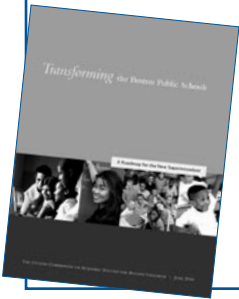


MAC's *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*

MAC's *The Educational Rights of Children Affected by Homelessness and/or Domestic Violence: An Advocates Manual*



The Citizen Commission on the Academic Success for Boston Children's *Transforming the Boston Public Schools: A Roadmap for the New Superintendent*



Because MAC is an independent advocacy organization, we do not accept any public funds that will compromise our ability to advocate effectively on behalf of children or families.



Therefore, we rely very much on private donors—individuals and foundations—to support our high quality advocacy work. Your contribution will help us continue the work described in this newsletter. Visit www.massadvocates.org/donate to learn ways in which you can contribute to MAC.

