



MAC'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Address by MAC Executive Director, Jerry Mogul, at 40th Anniversary Gala Celebration

As you may know, MAC's report on bullying of children with ASD was released today and featured prominently in the Boston Herald.

That bullying of children with autism is so pervasive- all across the Commonwealth- city, suburb and town- and so heartbreaking to read the stories by the parents—it is discouraging to think that here is yet another way that some children are denied an opportunity to be successful in school.

In the same way, for all the progress we have made over the past 40 years, and it has changed thousands of lives, it is still discouraging to know:

- that students are still suspended and expelled for no good reason,
- that so many LEP students have been struggling without educational supports since Question 2 passed seven years ago,
- that achievement gaps persist,
- that too many schools are failing too many children, and
- that too many students are dropping out at a time when education is the only portal to a successful and productive adulthood.

It is discouraging.

But where others see insurmountable barriers, to be a child advocate is to see progress, to seize opportunities, to build relationships, to stir hope.

To be a child advocate is, as Hubie Jones has said, to convert a social condition into a social problem. Conditions we have to live with. Problems we can solve.

And so while we know that progress is not linear, and sometimes it seems like we are fighting the same battles over and over, we do make progress.

It is progress when we help children and young people like Andre get the right diagnosis of a hidden learning disability and watch him turn his life around.

It is progress to see children like Yolheri make amazing gains that their parents didn't even dare dream was possible, because we were instrumental in getting him the best educational placement and services.

It is progress to have the Boston school superintendent and the school committee really listen to the community groups that we work with and agree to put quality schools and parent choice first.

It is progress when a young woman with Down Syndrome makes a powerful PowerPoint presentation to a room full of public college presidents and convinces them that the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment program MAC successfully advocated for is worth having on their campus.

It is progress when a local school official from Quincy or Brockton stands up at a legislative briefing to announce how their becoming a trauma-sensitive school has made a measurable impact in their schools' climate, suspension rates and test scores.

And it is progress to see legislators watch with rapt attention while children who are non-verbal demonstrate how Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices can help them communicate and thus participate and thus succeed in class. Policy makers, as a result of MAC's advocacy efforts, are learning how crucial these AAC devices are to help this population of students overcome barriers and reach their full potential-- if only enough teachers were trained to effectively use this technology with the students.

And so in the face of this heart breaking condition of children with autism being bullied, we say this is a problem, and part of the solution can be using the law to require IEP teams to provide each child on the spectrum with specialized teaching, supports and services to empower them to respond effectively and avoid bullying. And we will make progress again when Rep. L'Italien and Sen. Jehlen, the lead sponsors on the bill, have convinced enough of their colleagues to pass this law, and when the governor signs it, we will be there to monitor its implementation to make sure that it works as it was intended.

We know that the work never ends, the challenges don't cease. To quote Hubie one more time, "Advocacy is not about in one day out the next, in one month out the next. The issues we're concerned about mean having a lifetime commitment to children."

We can only act in the present so that 40 years from now, when our successors celebrate MAC's 80th anniversary, they will look back to our time and speak of it with pride, that our accomplishments reverberated through the years and touched succeeding generations of children and families in ways that we can't even imagine.

But we can't do this without you. For while we celebrate MAC's anniversary and achievements tonite, we know full well that we are but part of a larger movement for change. The landscape of child advocacy in Massachusetts is such that we must work in concert to have any chance of succeeding. It is exciting that there are some of you in the room who might be inspired tonight to join our journey, and it so gratifying that there are so many of you here tonight with whom we already work so closely.