



# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

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**Wishing you a happy and healthy holiday season!**

## *MCAS Victory for Students with Disabilities*

Students with disabilities now have a level playing field to appeal their MCAS results, as Governor Romney just signed a bill into law taking an important step to help ensure fair and equitable participation of students with disabilities in MCAS. Mass. Advocates for Children (MAC) worked tirelessly with legislators, parents and other advocates to craft a consensus bill removing the discriminatory barriers to the appeals process while still maintaining high standards for students with disabilities.

## *Autism Project Gets Big Boost*

Responding to the urgent needs of the increased number of children diagnosed with Autism, MAC launched its new Autism Special Education Legal Support Center last year with support from the Nancy Lurie Marks and the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundations. Our success in the first year led to a major award of \$450,000 over the next three years from Jane's Trust, which will increase our capacity to help individual families and achieve systemic change that can lead to dramatic improvements for children with autism and their families.

## *Boston Students to Benefit with Tutoring*

As many as 6,000 more students in the Boston Public Schools will now be eligible to receive Supplemental Education (tutorial) Services required under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act as a result of our advocacy in coordination with the Education Action Leadership Group of the Black Ministerial Alliance.

## *Somerville Case Victory*

Two Somerville parents created the Somerville Special Education Advocacy Project to inform low-income parents of children with disabilities of their legal rights and to help them obtain timely and quality services through individual case advocacy and systemic change. We just successfully settled a case in which Somerville has agreed to set up a high quality program for an autistic child. This settlement should have the added impact of extending to other autistic children in the classroom the training and supports provided to our client.

MAC's got a new website at [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org). Watch as we continue to build it in the months to come.

Also, MAC is honored to be listed in the 2003 Catalogue for Philanthropy. Visit [www.catalogueforphilanthropy.org](http://www.catalogueforphilanthropy.org) and find the MAC listing under "children and youth" in the "human services" section.

## MAC'S Mission

*To improve the educational and life opportunities of children throughout the Commonwealth, especially those who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, limited English, or disability. We work to assure that all of these children will have full access to the services and resources -- particularly in the areas of public education, health and welfare, and legal representation -- to which they are entitled and which will enable them to reach their fullest potential.*

# School Exclusions: Leaving Too Many Children Behind

*"We all make mistakes. Young people are no exception. Is society's best interest being served by long-term exclusions from the very education that will allow them to become productive members of our future society?"\**

Fran Doran, parent of a Duxbury high-schooler who received a nine month suspension for a first offense: bringing a small amount of marijuana to school.

Student exclusions (expulsion or suspension of more than 10 consecutive days) increased to 1,620 in 2000-2001, a 22% increase over the prior two years, 70% for black students, 62% for females (though males still make up 75% of all exclusions) and an astonishing 306% for children age 10 and under (see chart).

Disturbingly, black and Latino students continued to be excluded disproportionately in 2000-01, as they accounted for about 20% of total school enrollment and 55% of the exclusions.

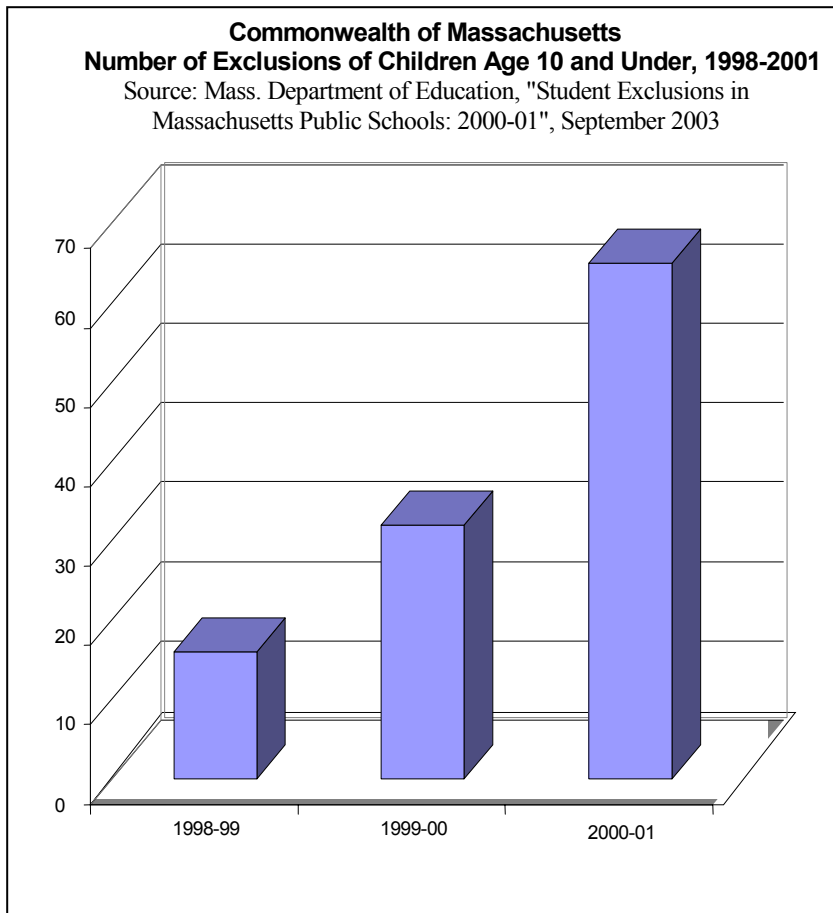
While these increases may have reflected the adoption of zero tolerance policies by many school districts during the "Columbine era" of the late 1990s, there is now some incentive for schools to address behavior problems pro-actively, as the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires each state label schools "unsafe" if they exclude too many students. There is also a body of research and cost-effective approaches, called "positive behavioral supports," that have been shown to reduce school problem behavior.

MAC is leading an advocacy effort to support House bill 1260 which would start to redress some of the shifts in power in recent years assumed by school districts over student exclusions. These bills would do the following:

- Require a hearing after a "cool-down" period to allow students to re-enter school;
- Take away per-student state funding from school districts which do not provide an alternative education for excluded students;
- Require school districts to consider referring excluded students for special education and to notify parents of their right to refer for an evaluation; and
- Provide grants to schools to adopt innovative programs, like "positive behavioral supports," that address the underlying needs (e.g., trauma-related) of students whose behavior interferes with learning.

On October 28, MAC organized testimony before a legislative hearing of the Joint Education Committee. Legislators were very supportive of the bill. Please contact yours to help students like Fran Doran's son get a second chance.

*\*As quoted in the October 29, 2003 Patriot Ledger.*



## MAC Updates

**Staffing:** Welcome to Lisa Martin, an attorney with extensive experience in special education, who has joined the MAC staff on its Somerville project.

**Special Event:** There are few people who have changed the civic landscape in Boston for the better over the past 40 years than Hubie Jones, a highly-respected, much-loved leader and mentor. Hubie was also the founder of MAC in 1969 and its board chair for nearly 20 years.

To honor the extraordinary contributions he continues to make in the city, MAC will be holding a special tribute to Hubie Jones on Friday, April 30, 2004 at the Westin Hotel. Contributions will benefit both MAC and the creation of the new Hubie Fund, a donor-advised fund at the Boston Foundation, that will enable Hubie to support the causes and programs he cares about in the areas of arts, leadership development, collaboration and child advocacy.

For further information and sponsorship opportunities, please contact: 617-267-8862.