

# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES for CHILDREN



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

## MAC's Mission

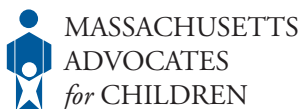
MAC's mission is to be an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal educational and life opportunities. MAC works to overcome these barriers by changing conditions for many children, while also helping one child at a time. For over 30 years, MAC has responded to the needs of children who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, disability or limited English.



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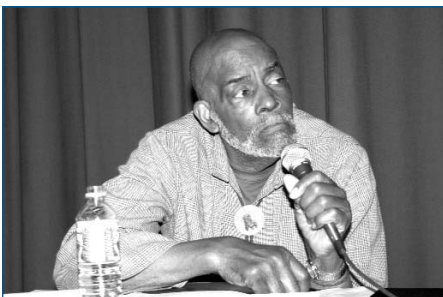


*"We do not merely have a social responsibility to assure that our children and youth have decent life chances and prosper. We have a sacred obligation to do so."*

—HUBIE JONES,  
MAC FOUNDER

## Boston School Reform A New Superintendent for Boston Schools

During this past year, the Boston Public Schools initiated a search process to replace its superintendent, **Thomas Payzant**, who had been in that position for 11 years. MAC has been deeply engaged with advocacy efforts to assure a community voice in the selection of a new superintendent, which unfortunately has been seriously delayed. First, we have played a lead role on the membership and staff of the Citizen Commission on the Academic Success for Boston Children, headed by MAC founder **Hubie Jones**. The report, *Transforming the Boston Public Schools: A Roadmap for the New Superintendent*, was released on June 27 and makes an urgent call for transformative change and greater accountability and transparency in order to close the achievement gaps, reduce the drop out rate, and achieve excellence for all students. The report found the need for major improve-



(Top) Caprice Taylor Mendez of Boston Parent Organizing Network testifies at hearing. (Bottom) Commission member Mel King listens to testimony.

## Inside

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Special education legislative successes, **p. 3**

ments in the areas of teacher quality, literacy and math instruction, district leadership, family and community engagement, special education, English language learning and respect for parents and students. The report is available for free download or order at MAC's website, [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org).

Although a platform for further change has been built over the last eleven years, too much in the school system is still broken. Laudatory goals and good intentions are not enough.... This roadmap report is a cry for skilled execution driven by a compelling vision... A major paradigm shift is required to have a high-performing school system with an affirming, supportive culture...

—Citizen Commission report, **p. 7**

Second, MAC has also been involved in the formation and staffing of Community Partners for a New Superintendent, a diverse group of over 30 community leaders who developed a set of guidelines and hiring criteria that they presented in meetings with the mayor, school committee chair, and the search firm. One of its co-chairs, **Rev. Gregory Groover**, was selected to serve on the official Search Committee. Community Partners and Citizen Commission members will continue to play an important role through the selection process and after to assure implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

## Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative

### Release of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* Generates Statewide Enthusiasm

The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) was put on the map by the release of its groundbreaking report, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, in Framingham last October. It was greeted by an overwhelming response from educators, parents, advocates, and policy makers. This response marked the beginning of the next and current phase of TLPI's work: infusion of trauma-sensitive approaches in schools throughout Massachusetts and beyond.

Opinion leaders in Massachusetts responded enthusiastically to *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, calling for changes to address the needs of children traumatized by violence. Massachusetts Commissioner of Education **David Driscoll**, speaking at the press conference releasing the Report, called the document a "major breakthrough for the Commonwealth's children." The Boston Globe published a lead editorial calling upon legislators to "...invest more. In time all Massachusetts educators should be able to say to traumatized students: We can help you cope and succeed." Boston Public Schools Superintendent **Thomas Payzant** sent the Report to all principals, recommending that they, "read and study this important report and share with staff."

Since its publication, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* has generated excitement from educators and others across the state, and even around the country. To date, over 7,000 copies of the book have been distributed and over 5,400 were viewed or downloaded on-line. We have received book orders and requests from across Massachusetts, from 20 other states, and from three countries (Ireland, Canada, and Australia). At least 13 local or national websites link to the book. One of TLPI's collaborators, Children's Hospital



State Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll speaks at release of report in Framingham.

Boston, presented this work at the World Congress on Traumatic Stress in Buenos Aires in June.

Schools in Belchertown, Cohasset, Conway, Boston, Easthampton, Peabody, Revere, Somerville, Framingham and Triton Regional (Newbury, Rowley and Salisbury), and others have ordered multiple copies—in some cases up to 500—to stimulate school-wide discussions

and planning. At least 50 school districts across the state now have the book. Orders in the hundreds, and even over a thousand, were made by various state agencies, such as the Departments of Social Services, Education and Public Health, to distribute to employees, grantees and constituents. The report was also extensively distributed to school nurses, special education administrators, and school superintendents across the state.

*Helping Traumatized Children Learn* was the centerpiece of a statewide conference held by the Department of Education in May, on "Removing Trauma as a Barrier to Learning," attended by over 200 educators who met also by region to discuss ways to create a trauma-sensitive environment in their schools. The report has resonated with many in the field of education and mental health who are seeking ways to help struggling students. It provides a deep understanding in the language of educators of the psychological impact of trauma on cognition, language, learning and behavior. It then provides a very practical "flexible framework" of how schools can create a supportive environment for these children through a schoolwide infrastructure and culture, staff development, linkages with mental health professionals, academic instruction, non-academic strategies, and school policies, procedures and protocols.

Since the release of the Report, TLPI has conducted a multi-tiered education campaign through trainings and presentations to local, state, and national organizations of educators, mental health experts, and legal advocates. *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* has also served as a catalyst to create communication and collaboration among several state-level programs serving children traumatized by violence and other children at high risk.

*Helping Traumatized Children Learn* includes recommendations to accomplish TLPI's long-term public policy goal to ensure that traumatized children succeed in school. The successes of the education campaign of this past year have substantially increased opportunities for achieving that goal. MAC will continue to implement TLPI through its partnership with the Hale & Dorr Legal Service Center of Harvard Law School. Lesley University is partnering with TLPI to help move the policy agenda forward by working over the next year to bring educators from across the state together to discuss ways teacher training institutions can teach educators how to help children achieve at high levels despite any overwhelming experiences they may have endured.

## Changing Conditions for Many Special Education Administrative and Legislative Successes

### Autism Legal Support Center

MAC's Autism Special Education Legal Support Center achieved two major successes this past year. Working closely with parents, autism experts and its advisory committee, MAC provided fact sheets, gave testimony and held a legislative briefing that helped win the support of the Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver legislation, sponsored by **Rep. Barbara L'Italien** and **Sen. Robert Antonioni**, which was signed into law in October. The bill directs the Commonwealth to seek a Medicaid waiver to maximize federal reimbursement for intensive in-home services, critical to support children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their homes and communities. These services can make an extraordinary difference in the quality of life for young children with ASD and their families.

Since the bill passed, MAC has convened a statewide group of autism experts, service providers, parent leaders, and attorneys to develop recommendations regarding key implementation issues critical to the children's autism Medicaid waiver, including eligibility, range of services, and professional qualifications of service providers. At the same time, MAC has continued to vigorously advocate with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the state legislature for full and effective implementation of the waiver legislation. As a result, the just-passed state budget, with the strong support of many key legislators, has appropriated \$2 million in the Division of Autism budget to implement the waiver and provide services for young children with ASD.

Another important legislative victory for children with ASD was a new Autism IEP Bill introduced by Rep. L'Italien which was signed into law in April. This new law, which has the potential to serve as a national model, requires the IEP Team of every child with ASD to consider and *specifically address* the full range of a child's complex needs resulting from ASD, including verbal and nonverbal communication needs, sensory needs, social needs, academic needs, and the need for positive behavioral services. Effective in October 2006, this law can help ensure the provision of state-of-the-art supports and services designed to enable children with ASD to reach their full potential.

We would like to express our heart-felt appreciation to **Ann Guay**, who has volunteered at the Center for approximately 10-15 hours per week since October 2005. Ann had stepped back from her career as an attorney to care for her child with ASD. She sees the profound needs that all children with ASD and their families have, and so she channeled her

energies to help MAC and the Center in our systems change work. Her energy and expertise were pivotal in the advocacy that led to the successes described above.

### Transitioning from Special Education

The Special Education Collaborative, convened and staffed by MAC, plays a unique role in the sometimes contentious world of special education. It is composed of major stakeholders in the field—state education and human service leaders, legislative leaders, parent organizations, advocates and others who are often on opposite sides of the issue—and seeks common ground and consensus for systemic change in order to help children succeed. Formed in the wake of MAC's very successful public education campaign to inform high school students with disabilities who failed MCAS of their rights and options, the Collaborative identified the key area of high school transition as a priority concern.

The Collaborative has just achieved a major legislative success...establishing a Concurrent Enrollment for Student with Disabilities pilot program... in this year's state budget.

The special education law requires school districts to provide transition services for all students with disabilities. The greatest concern is for those with severe disabilities who will not graduate with their class and may continue to receive special education services until age 22. These young adults will require coordinated planning, often with state agencies, so they can transition to post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. This is a particularly heart-wrenching time for parents as their children transition from the mandated protections of the special education law in school to the less certain services and opportunities available to them when they become adults.

The Collaborative, with MAC's leadership, has just achieved a major legislative success. An exciting new initiative, establishing a Concurrent Enrollment for Student with Disabilities pilot program, was included with a new \$2 million line item sponsored by **Rep. Tom Sannicandro** in this year's state budget. All too frequently, public school options for students ages 18-22 with severe disabilities who

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## Reaching Out to Diverse Communities

The increasing presence of immigrant and culturally diverse communities in Massachusetts presents a challenge to organizations like MAC which advocate for the needs of children with disabilities. There are significant language and cultural barriers which make it difficult for parents to obtain special education placements and supports that can help their children. MAC has been working in four different communities and learning methods to help overcome those barriers.

The key lessons learned include partnering with a local, community-based organization that shares the culture of the parents; revising training curricula to make them more participatory and engaging for parents, some of whom are non-literate in their own languages; providing intensive, individualized support; and assuring that professional translation and interpreting services are available. In the Somerville Special Education Advocacy Project, MAC has had a partnership with the Haitian Coalition and the Welcome Project in order to provide outreach, legal clinics and trainings to the city's Haitian, Latino and Portuguese populations. In Boston, MAC has partnered with the Jamaica Plain Parent Organizing Project of City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) to intensively train 25 Latino parents about their rights under the special education law. The parents identified as a common concern compliance issues around securing quality evaluations for their children and are now working through BPON to mount an educational campaign to promote systems change in the Boston Public Schools.

In the Autism Project, MAC staff work in close cooperation with the Haitian American Public Health Initiative (HAPHI) in Mattapan-Dorchester. We hired a Haitian parent consultant to conduct outreach and help our staff further our understanding of Haitian culture, linguistic barriers, and literacy issues in order to establish more effective outreach and training methods. The training curriculum was modified to include extensive question and answer periods, small groups, scripted and staged role-plays, and model translated IEPs to illustrate key provisions of the special education process and to teach about specific issues pertaining to autism and IEP services. To help individual parents, MAC staff conducted IEP and legal clinics, with extensive individualized follow-up to assist families in addressing linguistic and cultural barriers.

In Lawrence, we have begun to work with Class, Inc. (the Citizens League for Adult Special Services), which also runs the ARC chapter, to gain an understanding of critical issues that have proven to be barriers to Spanish-speaking families of children with autism spectrum disorders in the Lawrence Public School system. MAC has conducted a needs assessment and two sessions of educational training with the parents.

### Advocating for English Language Learners in Boston

MAC and its Latino Education Action Network (LEAN) have been concerned about the impact on Boston children of the Unz Initiative ("Question 2") which dismantled bilingual education starting in 2003. Since then, the Boston Public Schools has failed to follow up and monitor the progress of the over 9,000 children who were removed from bilingual classes and placed in sheltered English instruction (SEI) classes or mainstreamed into the regular classroom.

One indication of the disastrous results of this massive social experiment was the precipitous drop in the MCAS

scores for Latino 10th grade students in 2005. In two different state tests, Boston scored among the lowest cities for its English language learners.

In response to these and other concerns, MAC and LEAN organized a meeting with school superintendent **Thomas Payzant** and high-ranking BPS administrators. We were successful in getting a commitment to on-going meetings to review data collection, communication with non-English speaking parents, training of regular education teachers, and other key issues.

## MAC’s Second Annual Appreciation Event Honors Our “Champions of Children”

On December 1, 2005, at the Massachusetts Bar Association, MAC held its second annual Appreciation Event in front of over 100 people. Eight individuals were honored for their commitment and dedication advocating for children, including former board members **Stephen Rosenfeld** and **Edie Howe**, legislator **Alice Wolf**, community advocate **Jacqueline Rivers**, pro bono attorneys **Edward Haber** and **Theodore Hess-Mann**, former MAC executive director **Steven Bing**, and former MAC special education advocate **Sheila Deppner**.

Speakers **Margaret Burnham**, MAC Board member, and **Mariama White-Hammond**, executive director of Project Hip-Hop, presented the keynote address in the form of a rich dialogue about the challenges facing young people in the Boston area. Corporate and law firm sponsors of the event included the MENTOR Network, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Davis Malm & D’Agostino PC, Neighborhood Health Plan, Partners HealthCare, Rosenfeld & Rafik PC, Citizens Bank Foundation, Kotin Crabtree and Strong LLP, and Stern Shapiro Weissberg & Gann LLP.



*Clockwise from top: honoree State Representative Alice K. Wolf (left), with keynote speaker Margaret Burnham; former MAC board chair and honoree Stephen Rosenfeld (left), with current co-chair Ron Eskin; (left to right) Sojourner Rivers, Stephanie Barrett, honoree Jacqueline Rivers, Rev. Eugene Rivers, and Sharon Barrett; (left to right) Anne Hess-Mann, honoree Ted Hess-Mann, MAC project director Julia Landau, honoree Edward Haber, and Jamie Logan.*

## Legal Support for Children and Families

### New Advocates Manual Published

In May, MAC released our new Advocates Manual, *The Educational Rights of Children Affected by Homelessness and/or Domestic Violence*. The manual is distinguished by its interdisciplinary reach—covering such diverse topics as special education, educational rights under the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, shelter rights and restraining orders. As such, it is of value to a broad swath of legal services and private attorneys who practice in the fields of housing, benefits, family law and education. The manual has already been distributed to each legal service office, family shelters across Massachusetts and many community groups. MAC has held trainings for various legal services practice coalitions (family law, housing, benefits, i.e.), and, in combination with attorneys who are members of the Domestic Violence and School Safety (DVASS) committee, has begun providing the training to community groups, including Boston Health Care for the Homeless at the Boston Medical Center and the Domestic Violence Roundtable for Middlesex County at the Waltham District Court. MAC and DVASS are coordinating plans to offer more trainings in the fall. The manual has already sparked more referrals to special education attorneys from various other legal service practice areas such as benefits and housing. The publication was edited by **Michelle Lerner**, a consultant to MAC with many years of legal services experience. Contributing authors included: **Kathryn Rucker** (Committee for Public Representation), **Jeffrey Wolf** (Massachusetts Law Reform Institute), **Dana Kandel Sisitsky** (Greater Boston Legal Services), **Michael Gregory** (Hale and Dorr Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School), **Susan Cole** (MAC) and **Colby Brunt** (MAC). A copy of the manual can be downloaded or ordered on the MAC website.

## Two MAC Senior Managers Honored

**Susan Cole** and **Julia Landau**, two of MAC's senior managers, each received prominent recognition by their colleagues for their extraordinary advocacy work. Susan Cole was honored by the Massachusetts Bar Association at its Annual Meeting in the category of Legal Services Award on March 24, 2006, at the Copley Marriott Hotel in Boston. Susan was honored for her leadership in building the Children's Law Support Project as a vital coalition within legal services that has achieved significant legislative and administrative victories for children at risk because of homelessness, family violence and disabilities. The award also recognized her leadership in creating the innovative Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative to raise awareness and advocate for systemic solutions to the impact of trauma on learning and behavior in school. (see p. 2)

Julia Landau received the fourth annual Doug Flutie, Jr. award at the Autism Update Conference of Children Making Strides and the Flutie Foundation on May 1, 2006, at the Westin Hotel in Waltham. Julia was honored for her leadership in creating the Autism Special Education Legal Support Center which, with its talented and dedicated staff, has trained thousands of parents and professionals across the state over the past four years, provided direct advocacy services for hundreds of parents of children with ASD, and has achieved systemic changes that can benefit many children with ASD for years to come. (see p. 3)

Congratulations Julia and Susan for your outstanding work on behalf of children in Massachusetts.

### Transitioning from Special Education

*(continued from page 3)*

have not received a high school diploma are limited to segregated special education programs, isolated from the community. This program will open doors to appropriate options in public higher education by enabling school districts, working in partnership with state institutions of higher education, to offer students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in credit or noncredit inclusive programs (with necessary services and supports, as determined through the school district's IEP process). This new concurrent enrollment program will increase school and work success for students with severe disabilities who fail MCAS—a vulnerable group of students who too often are left behind as others graduate.

## Case Advocacy Update

At the heart of MAC's advocacy work is helping individual families get supports for their children so they can thrive in school. There are few things a parent wants more for their child than the education they need to be successful in life. Our intake "Helpline" receives over 600 calls a year from parents and professionals for information navigating the complex and confusing special education system, as well as for assistance advocating for their child who has been expelled or suspended at school. Many concerns are handled through advice on the phone by MAC Intake Coordinator, **Leslie Lockhart**. Leslie helps parents to advocate for their children at Team meetings and answers detailed questions about Massachusetts special education laws and policies. Leslie tries to assist callers in finding a pro bono attorney or advocate after determining that a family is in need of legal representation. (See box for case example.)

In addition, MAC attorneys and advocates provide technical assistance to legal services attorneys across the state. For example an advocate at Greater Boston Legal Services called up to get assistance for a client whose family law case she was handling. As her case proceeded she discovered that her client's son was not receiving appropriate special education services at school because of an incorrect diagnosis. We supported the mother in obtaining an independent evaluation and provided access to an advocate to assist the mother at the Team meeting to ensure proper services were put in place for the new diagnosis. Another legal services advocate was assisting a family who was homeless and needed information on the child's education rights. We provided the attorney with the correct information and made sure the attorney had a copy of our newest publication, *The Educational Rights of Children Affected by Homelessness and/or Domestic Violence*.

### Case example

"Christine" was a single mother whose 18 year old son "David" was in 11th grade and failing several subjects. He had not passed MCAS and had made little progress in school in several years. His goal was to be a chef and he worked part-time at Wendy's. The staff at his school had no ideas for this boy except to suggest he move to an alternative school, although he had no behavior or discipline issues. His mother was afraid for him to do this because he lived in a dangerous neighborhood, and the fact that he had friends at school offered some safety. Christine called MAC, desperate for her son to stay in school, graduate and be able to work toward his career goal. In discussing the situation, MAC learned that David had learning disabilities and an individual education plan (IEP) but the services it specified were not helping him. Further he had not been evaluated since 7th grade and no transition planning had been done to help him move from high school into adult services and work. MAC suggested that the Mass Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) might be able to help David reach his career goals, but the school needed to refer him to the agency. MAC then coached Christine on how to present this information to the school. She called back a few days later after she met with the school. An evaluation was planned for her son, and they had referred him to MRC—Christine saw hope for her son for the first time in years.

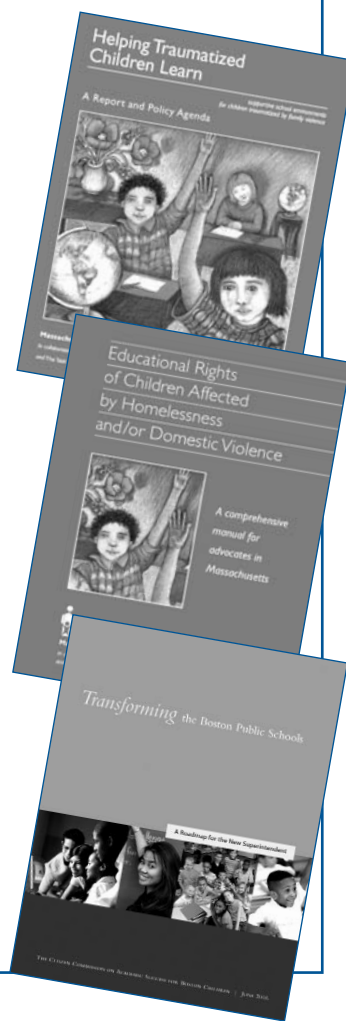
## Reports Available on MAC Website

Visit MAC's web site at [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org) to purchase or download these reports.

MAC's *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* (see p. 2)

MAC's *The Educational Rights of Children Affected by Homelessness and/or Domestic Violence: An Advocates Manual* (see p. 6)

The Citizen Commission on the Academic Success for Boston Children's *Transforming the Boston Public Schools: A Roadmap for the New Superintendent* (see p. 1)



## Organizational News

MAC is planning its third annual appreciation event for Thursday, November 30, from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the John Adams Courthouse in Boston. The event is an opportunity for us to thank our supporters and honor those who further the field of child advocacy from a number of perspectives—elected officials, volunteers, community leaders, for example. Among the honorees will be long-standing MAC board members, **Jeannette Atkinson** and **Ron Eskin**, who have played vital leadership roles in the organization and are stepping down in September. We are very pleased to have **Keith Jones**, President/CEO of SoulTouchin' Experiences, as our keynote speaker. The event is free. Please check our website in September for more information and sponsorship opportunities.

MAC's Board of Directors is looking forward to welcoming **Ruthann Rasbold** as a new member in September. Ruthann brings a wealth of experience to MAC. She currently provides training and technical assistance to Head Start programs throughout New England as a Disability Specialist at the Donahue Institute of the University of Massachusetts. Prior to that, she was with the Federation of Children with Special Needs for 17 years.

Finally, MAC moved its offices on June 1 to 25 Kingston St., near Downtown Crossing in Boston. The staff is very thrilled with the additional space we have and the beautiful interior. Stop by and visit if you have a chance!



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](http://www.massadvocates.org/donate) to learn ways in which you can contribute to MAC, or use the attached envelope for your convenience.