



# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

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## Recent MAC Highlights

- Advocated successfully for key elements in the highly-publicized Anti-Bullying bill (Ch. 92) signed by the Governor and in subsequent administrative actions by DESE:
  - The new law incorporated the Anti-Bullying bill -- H.3804: An Act Addressing Bullying of Children with Autism – sponsored by Rep. Barbara L'Italien and advocated for by MAC to ensure that IEP Teams address bullying of children on the autism spectrum, specifically focusing on the skills necessary to help individual children avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. In support of that priority legislation, MAC had issued an explosive report, *Targeted, Taunted, Tormented: Bullying of Children with Autism*, based on the results of an online survey responded to by nearly 400 parents from across the state.
  - Responding further to MAC's advocacy, the new law addresses the needs of children with other types of disabilities as well. Specifically, the IEP must address skills needed to avoid and respond to bullying for all children with a disability that affects their social skills development or that otherwise makes them vulnerable to bullying, harassment or teasing.
  - MAC and TLPI successfully advocated for DESE's Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to be organized and drafted in conformance with the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework set forth in Section 19 of Chapter 321 of the Acts and Resolves of 2008. The model plan issued by DESE can be viewed at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/bullying/>. Linking the anti-bullying work in schools with the framework will strengthen the shared goal of both initiatives: creating safe and supportive school environments for all students throughout the state.
  - MAC and eight other members of our Education Law Task Force (ELTF) co-authored a set of recommendations on the proposed regulations related to notice to parents and to law enforcement. DESE recommended that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopt many of the recommendations made by the ELTF, which BESE approved in late September. Examples include the addition of a requirement that notices to parents be provided in their primary language, that police departments need not be notified in situations in which bullying can be handled appropriately within the school, and that any disciplinary action should balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.
- Led the advocacy efforts for the passage and enactment of a new law that would revise the regulations for colleges to assure that teachers of children with moderate or severe disabilities are trained in the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication and other assistive technologies (AAC) - Chapter 299 of the Acts of 2010 - to enable non-verbal children with disabilities to participate in class and be placed in a least restrictive environment.
- Facilitated (by TLPI) a collaboration between Lesley University Center for Special Education and Brockton Public Schools to pilot the first of three courses designed to lead to the development of a graduate level trauma certificate program. The first course of the series provides an overview of the impact of trauma on learning and the framework for creating safe and supportive learning environments, using MAC's groundbreaking report, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, as the primary text. TLPI is working with Lesley as it pilots the course in two Boston Public Schools and develops the next course, which is focused on the classroom.
- Formed a new coalition (called Boston United for Students) and organized a community forum to raise the voice of parents, students and community leaders in the contract negotiations between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers' Union, in partnership with the Citywide Parents Council, the Boston Student Advisory Council, the Boston Parent Organizing Network, the Municipal Research Bureau and others. Key issues identified by parents and students include improving teacher evaluation, hiring and assigning the best teachers, and strengthening parent/student role in school governance.

- Responded to more than 900 parents and others through our Children’s Law Support Project **Helpline**, providing advice, referrals, technical assistance, and in some cases, full legal representation. As a result, many children received needed educational placement and services.
- Led successful intensive and lengthy advocacy efforts concerning the move proposed by DESE of the **Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA)** from DESE to the Division of Administrative Law Appeals (DALA). Working closely with private and public interest lawyers and parent advocates, MAC collaborated with key leaders in the House and Senate in negotiating with the administration to craft legislation that ensures the BSEA is moved in a manner which preserves its expertise, independence and professional integrity.
- Played a leadership role in a coalition of the Education Law Task Force to advocate for bills that would **reduce the impact of overly harsh school discipline policies**. Promoted revisions to the Boston Code of Conduct that were adopted by the Boston School Committee, including creation of the Code of Conduct Advisory Committee of which MAC became a member.
- Advocated for an increase in the range of programs designed to serve **English language learners in the Boston Public Schools** and served on the School Committee-led ELL Task Force to develop major policy recommendations.
- Worked closely with the **Brockton Public Schools** as they embark on a district-wide effort to create **trauma-sensitive schools** using the Flexible Framework set forth in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn (HTCL)*. This work is also providing the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) with invaluable information which will be incorporated into the second volume of *HTCL*.
- Provided input and participated in efforts by Boston Public Schools to make **systemic changes to improve special education in Boston**. MAC is participating in a planning process by the new leadership of the department to make structural changes and continues to represent individual children through legal advocacy and to provide support to the BPS Special Education Parent Advisory Council (PAC).
- Led a community effort to move **BPS** to focus on **equitable access to quality schools** and successfully advocated for a delay in proposed changes to the student assignment policy that could have displaced 10,000 students and would have left many families stuck with underperforming schools.
- Played a lead role in drafting the Framework for “creating safe and supportive school environments and collaborative services” required by the Children’s Mental Health Act (MGLc321 Sec 19) to be presented by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to the legislature, the governor and office of the child advocate. This framework, adapted from the flexible framework in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, lays the groundwork for statewide policy to promoting improved linkages between **mental health and schools**, including through the Community Behavioral Health Initiative (implementation of the “Rosie D.” court order)
- Provided technical assistance to a group of **Latino families in Lawrence** to advocate with the school department for quality in-district programs for students with autism.
- Worked with the **parent group in Somerville** to support implementation of the school district’s goal to increase inclusion opportunities.
- Maintained **state budget line items** for MAC priority programs: the Children Autism Medicaid Waiver, Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Program, and Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (i.e., trauma-sensitive schools).
- Continued our exciting partnership with the **DLA Piper law firm**, which is providing extensive pro bono assistance in special education related to Boston, autism and statewide areas of concern.