



RECENT HIGHLIGHTS 2011

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Law: MAC advocated successfully and provided significant input into the Model Plan disseminated by DESE that it be based on the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative's (TLPI) Flexible Framework, as adapted by the DESE Behavioral Health and Schools Task Force. MAC then provided extensive input to the DESE technical advisory for implementing the provisions of the law related to students with disabilities. MAC also collaborated with DESE in the writing of a related resource guide for schools also organized by the Flexible Framework. All documents were approved, posted and disseminated by DESE. MAC then created a new training for parents, professionals, and teens with disabilities which focuses on new statutory provisions that require both school-wide efforts to create safe and supportive school environments for students with disabilities as well as requirements for IEP Teams to address bullying of students with autism and other types of disabilities. A total of 20 trainings have been conducted, reaching hundreds of parents and professionals.

Schools and behavioral health: As a result of three years of intensive advocacy to improve linkages between schools and behavioral health, a legislatively-created task force headed by DESE achieved consensus on a report proposing that each school in the state be required by 2017 to implement the *Schools and Behavioral Health Framework* (which is based on the TLPI Flexible Framework). TLPI has already proposed legislation to implement this recommendation and organized a successful hearing.

Community Voice in Teachers' Contract: As a founding member of the Boston United for Students, a broad-based coalition of parent, student, and community organizations, MAC was instrumental in organizing major community events and advocating directly with the school administration and teachers union to adopt the four priorities of the coalition related to teacher evaluations, flexibility in teacher hiring and reassignment, parent and student voice in school decision-making, and meaningful longer school days.

Lawrence: MAC has continued to support organizing efforts of the Lawrence autism parent group and conduct litigation of individual cases. As a result, the Lawrence school district contracted for approximately \$100,000 to work on-site with experts from a renowned private special education school to help develop five (5) revamped specialized classrooms to address the behavioral and other learning needs of young children with autism. The district is expanding its efforts to eight (8) additional specialized autism classrooms this school year.

Helpline and case advocacy: MAC staff and volunteers responded to more than 900 parents and others, providing advice, referrals, technical assistance, and in some cases, full legal representation. As a result, many children received needed educational placement and services. MAC attorneys provided full representation for 47 students; pro bono attorneys represented 18 students.

Transition: MAC mobilized a successful statewide effort, involving youth with disabilities, parents, and educators in support of *H.159 An Act to Promote the Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post Secondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living*, including a legislative hearing and a statewide petition collecting over 1000 signatures in support of the bill presented to Gov. Patrick in a press event. The bill was just passed by the House!

Teacher Evaluations: MAC, following the lead of the Boston Student Advisory Council, worked with other members of the Boston United for Students Coalition to successfully advocate that the new teacher evaluations include student feedback, student growth performance data, and a four category rating system. These recommendations were approved by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Special education in the Boston Public Schools: MAC's advocacy, in conjunction with efforts of other parents and advocates, led BPS to continue providing important extended school year services for students with disabilities over the summer, avoiding a 17% reduction of services. MAC staff have also worked extensively on policies and practices in BPS which have prevented children with autism from receiving critical ABA services, as well as delays in evaluations and placements for children transitioning from early intervention to BPS at age three. DLA Piper has provided significant pro bono support to MAC's Boston special education efforts.

ELL Advocacy: Because of our years of advocacy, BPS developed a better assessment and placement system for English Language Learners, and more teachers are being trained so that ELL students are being taught by qualified instructors.

Budget line items and associated legislative advocacy: a. Special education Circuit-breaker account-increased \$80 million to mostly replace the impending loss of federal stimulus funds; b. Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver – increased from \$2.5 million to \$3 million to serve more young children with autism at risk of institutionalization; c. Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment grant program – the Legislature recognized the importance of sustaining and replicating the ICE model, where colleges partner with school districts to include students 18-22 with severe disabilities on the college campus, by continuing to level fund after completion of the first five-year pilot. Participation of a new four-year university, Bridgewater State University, along with partner school districts will provide another important transition inclusion model. Enrollment was sustained this year at similar levels despite the 40% reduction in state funding. d. Safe and supportive learning environment/alternative schools grant program – level-funded

School Discipline bills: The Education Law Task Force School Discipline Work Group, convened by MAC, drafted two school discipline bills that were filed in January by Rep. Wolf. The comprehensive bill would improve the fairness and outcome of exclusion hearings, and require alternative education services for excluded students. The companion bill would better define the disciplinary exclusion reports that school districts are required to submit to DESE, and would require DESE to analyze these reports and to respond to them when schools report significant numbers of disciplinary exclusions. The Work Group met with DESE and representatives of the opposition to the bill, and organized testimony at a successful legislative hearing.

Somerville: MAC is working with parent leaders to strengthen the PAC and develop inclusive models in the district, while addressing needs of individual children and families through individual advocacy.

TLPI trainings: Educators in Brockton, Holyoke, Boston and Lynn have received trainings on the impact of trauma on learning to help them develop "trauma-sensitive" schools that will enable the many students impacted by trauma to succeed. MAC/TLPI was called upon by the *U.S. Department of Justice* to conduct a webinar for 18 teams in localities around the country which were writing applications for two federal grant programs.

Achievement Gap: Because of our advocacy around the achievement gaps, MAC has been invited to participate in the BPS Achievement Gap Advisory Group and has raised the importance of diversity in teacher hiring, among other issues

Massachusetts Autism Commission: MAC was appointed by the governor to serve as a member and has been working intensely to develop a final report which is expected in early 2012.

ARICA: MAC worked with other members of Advocates for Autism in Massachusetts (AFAM) to draft a proposed memorandum for DESE to distribute to school officials regarding the new autism insurance law (ARICA), clarifying a school district's continuing obligation to provide and pay for special education services such as ABA.

Graduate-level trauma certificate program: Based on a collaboration between TLPI and Lesley University Center for Special Education, the first course of the series used *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* as the primary text and has been provided to 150 educators in Brockton, Boston and Plymouth. The second course focuses on supports for individual students to be provided in the context of the trauma sensitive school and was piloted in Brockton in Spring 2011 with 25 educators.

DLA Piper Education Rights Project: MAC continued the 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. 30 attorneys have contributed their expertise to individual cases and systems