



2012 HIGHLIGHTS

- In collaboration with the School Discipline Coalition of the ELTF, MAC played a leading advocacy role in the passage of c. 222, **An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School**. The new law is designed to keep high risk youth in school by reducing unnecessary exclusions and preventing drop outs. For the first time, schools are responsible for educating general education students who they exclude long term, by means of alternative educational services, such as tutoring, alternative placement, and online/ distance learning. Additional due process reforms and drop-out prevention provisions are included in the new law.
- MAC led a successful statewide campaign to enact the **Act to Promote the Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post-Secondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living**, the law that provides for transition specialists to help ensure that students age 14-22 with disabilities receive special education transition planning and services. The new law revises requirements for educator licensure to provide a specialized transition endorsement for special education teachers and rehabilitation counselors. Since the bill was enacted, MAC has submitted recommendations to develop regulations necessary to implement the new law.
- MAC/TLPI (Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative) successfully mounted a major campaign, including sending a letter containing extensive legal analysis, to legislators on behalf of 11 non-profit organizations to exclude the Governor's proposed Outside Section 6 (OS6) from the state budget. OS6 would have nullified extensive state laws and regulations **protecting confidentiality rights** for families who use EOHHS agency services.
- The settlement of the **Boston Teachers Union contract** dispute incorporates most of the provisions outlined in the priorities of the coalition MAC helped form, Boston United for Students.
- MAC is playing a leadership role in assuring that equity of quality schools across the city drives the decision-making process in the revision of **Boston's school assignment plan** currently underway.
- A **new website for TLPI** is currently under development thanks to MAC being awarded a \$250,000 three-year grant from the Oak Foundation to enhance TLPI's ability to support and sustain schools and districts to create trauma-sensitive whole school environments. In addition, a follow-up **Implementation Guide** to the "best seller" *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* is being written. Both the website and the Guide are scheduled to be launched in June 2013.
- MAC and pro bono co-counsel at DLA Piper filed a **class action lawsuit against the Boston Public Schools (BPS)** that focused on the unmet needs of young children with autism and other disabilities turning three years old and transitioning from early intervention to BPS. Many of these young children remained out of school for months at a time due to BPS' inability to provide adequate and timely evaluations, placements and services. BPS has made significant progress in resolving these problems. Since the lawsuit was filed, BPS created 22 new early childhood classrooms to serve the increasing number of three year-olds with autism and other disabilities. The judge ruled that the plaintiffs must first exhaust their claims with an administrative law judge before addressing the requested system-wide relief. Plaintiffs chose not to appeal this ruling.

- Two universities, Bridgewater State University and UMass Boston, launched the **Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment** program for young adults with severe disabilities.
- MAC assisted more than 900 callers to the **Helpline**, including full representation for 28 families and 50 referrals to pro bono attorneys or advocates. The online survey of Helpline callers has consistently registered a satisfaction rate of approximately 85%. Forty-eight legal trainings were provided to 906 parents and professionals.
- MAC launched **two new in-house fellowships**: a) the *Advocate Training Fellowship* which provides intensive advocacy training by MAC to selected Somerville parents of children with disabilities; and 2) the *Youth Leaders Fellowship*, which provides unique opportunities for young adults with intellectual impairment and autism to gain advocacy skills by participating in MAC case advocacy, legislative advocacy, and legal trainings.
- MAC continued to play a leadership role in the broad-based Coalition to Restore Special Education Funding, comprised of other advocacy and parent groups, school providers, and statewide education associations, to advocate for full funding of the **special education circuit breaker account**. After achieving an \$80 million increase last year, the coalition met its goal this year of an additional \$30 million which fully restored the account to the pre-federal stimulus level.
- MAC collaborated with Kotin, Crabtree & Strong and other advocacy organizations to address "**Procedures Lite**", an initiative by a number of school districts to encourage parents of students with disabilities to waive essential rights and protections in an effort to reduce paperwork and procedures. As a result of these advocacy efforts, DESE issued an advisory stating that "Procedures Lite" did not comply with special education law.
- MAC/TLPI has developed a "basic rights" training for **Children's Behavioral Health Initiative** staff, to facilitate their knowledge about the special education process and how they can help families, including when and how to refer cases to attorneys for assistance, ranging from brief advice to full representation. This training has been provided to approximately 120 CBHI staff thus far in the Boston and Metro Boston regions.
- Boston School Reform staff worked with the East Boston Latina Mothers Group to support their advocacy efforts for culturally competent educational opportunities in the community for their children that would encourage a sense of pride in the child's Latino identity. The advocacy work resulted in a pilot program – **Heritage Academy** – that Boston launched in August and will continue on Saturdays during the school year.
- MAC's Autism Center provided additional support to the *Parents Concerned for Children with Autism in Lawrence* which successfully advocated for additional resources in order to improve the educational opportunities provided to children in-district.
- Legislative progress is being made on H.4284, **An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools**, promoted by MAC/TLPI based on the recent recommendations of the Task Force on Behavioral Health and Public Schools. TLPI continues to provide consultation to schools in Brockton, Boston, Lynn, Holyoke and others to develop trauma-sensitive schools.
- The Boston School Reform team reconvened the **ELL Work Group** to review the new settlement agreement between Boston and the Department of Justice and monitor its implementation.