

MASC/MASS Conference - Opening Remarks

Hello, I am Eric Conti. I am in my 11th year as Superintendent in Burlington. It is an honor to be speaking to you this evening as President of MASS.

I want to begin by recognizing our officers at the head table - Past Presidents, Julie Hackett (Lexington) and Mary Bourque (Chelsea), President Elect, Brad Jackson (Holliston), and Vice President Bob Baldwin (Fairhaven). MASC President, Beverly Hugo from the Framingham School Committee and Burlington School Committee Member Martha Simon.

I also want to welcome the New Commissioner - Jeff Riley. I know you realize, like all of us, that any state or district accolade is the result of the work of people. What I notice at National Conferences is that while there are many politicians leading school districts in other states, there are educators leading in Massachusetts. To have a Commissioner who has demonstrated success in the classroom as well as school and district leadership illustrates the wealth of quality educators we have in Massachusetts. There is no group more committed to improving the lives of children and families in the Commonwealth than fill this room. We look forward to collaborating with you, Commissioner, as you define the direction for our continued

excellence for the students we serve. I'll introduce you again after dinner.

The MASS focus this year is on three primary areas - promoting the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, expanding computer science pathways, and improving the stability of district leadership. These three areas do not mean we are abandoning social/emotional learning. This part of our work never ends.

As stated, a primary area of focus will be to promote the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission. I recognize that there are parts of this conversation that are extremely complex. I also think that the premise is simple. The state should keep its promise. While we will advocate that all districts need additional resources to deliver the high level of quality education our students deserve we also need to recognize the significant demographic changes that have taken place in many of our schools and the need to provide the additional resources needed to create real opportunities for success. If we, as MASS and MASC members, believe as organizations that one of our primary core values is equity, then putting our state-wide support behind the efforts of some of our colleagues to get the resources promised to them as a part of Ed Reform should be something to which we can all agree. I want to recognize the efforts of our urban colleagues,

especially Kathy Smith from Brockton, Maureen Binienda from Worcester and Mary Bourque from Chelsea, for leading the charge for equitable state funding. As our funding gaps widen, so do our achievement gaps. The argument for updating Foundation spending; however, can't just come from districts in most need of the funding. It needs to come from districts, like Burlington, who are already spending far more than the foundation levels established 25 years ago. We all need to be as invested in advocating for the state support for underserved communities such as Brockton, Worcester and Chelsea as we are in advocating for the continued state and local support of our own students. We all need to make this commitment. Some of the best instruction in Massachusetts is taking place in urban and rural districts with the least resources. Our local budgets and the state budget are statements of values. We all need to fight to put meaning back into what has become a meaningless foundation formula.

To build on some outstanding work last year, we need to focus on updating our Massachusetts curricular pathways, from elementary through high school, to include expanded opportunities for computer science instruction. These pathways have to be made available to all of our students - urban, rural, suburban - comprehensive, Chapter 74, and college prep high schools. We are in a 50 state competition - moreover, a global competition. We need all of our students to have an

understanding of this new literacy. While we have new Digital Literacy and Computer Science standards, we have to guard against standardization. At a recent presentation, Lydia Smyers the GM for Education at Microsoft, explained to our high school students that there are currently 19,470 open computing jobs in Mass while we produced only 1,953 Computer Science Graduates. Moreover, 85% of the jobs available in 2030 do not currently exist. While this date may seem far off, this year's entering kindergarten class will graduate in 2031!

Expanding CS pathways is more than about producing more computer scientists. All of our graduates will need a solid understanding of computer science to be literate/contributing citizens in 2018 and beyond. In addition, computer science pathways are a perfect place to promote personalized learning and have the state recognize district developed assessments as measures of progress and proficiency. We all need to continue to collaborate to expand these opportunities through organizations like MAPLE if we are to remain globally competitive in Massachusetts.

The third area we are advocating is leadership stability. Tom Scott tells me that superintendent longevity in Massachusetts is about 5 years with a turnover of about 20% each year. Look around the room. We all have strengths and areas to improve. What should be obvious to anybody is that those of us who are

given time: to learn and shape the values of a community, to establish positive relationships, to get to know families, to make mistakes, to be coached and learn in the job, are having more success changing culture and are reaching more children. Stability in leadership does not equate to stagnation. In fact, my experience has been the opposite. We should continue to work closely together, like with the superintendent's induction program, to clearly communicate that a revolving superintendency is not in the best interest of any community. The partnership and communication between MASS and MASC is critical to establishing the foundation from which schools can be rethought and redesigned for the next 25 years.

Thank you for the honor of addressing you this evening. Without a model of positive national discourse, it is up to us as local leaders to demonstrate civility in our respective communities. Politically motivated and incendiary language misses that there are incredible, innovative, joyful and creative things happening in all of our districts. Massachusetts schools are optimistic places. Our students, teachers, and administrators are the finest in the country. We need to join the commissioner in celebrating the excellent teaching that is occurring every day in each of our districts.

I look forward to sharing the journey of two such teachers with you tomorrow morning. Thank you.