In recent years national and state education policies have been developed without full consideration of their effect on student learning and the classroom. As a result, it has become more and more evident that our voices as educators are needed at the table to advocate for effective education policies. Many of us have advocated effectively at the local level, but now is the time to make our collective voices heard at the state and national levels.

As the leading curriculum and instructional organization in the Commonwealth, MASCD maintains dialogue with policy makers on issues affecting education and provides information to inform their thinking. MASCD is emerging as a significant voice on major education policy efforts through letters, emails, faxes, telephone, face-to-face conversations, testimony we provide at legislative hearings, and through our Influence and Advocacy efforts. Our recent influence and advocacy efforts have centered on three bills:

1. **Educator Quality Bill** – Massachusetts House Bill 4157
   MASCD has been working for the past four years to provide expertise and generate support for educator quality legislation in the Commonwealth. MASCD leaders have presented an overview of the legislation and strategies for grassroots support to 11 professional organizations, including school business administrators and many discipline-specific organizations. Massachusetts House Bill 4157 compliments previous state education reforms on standards and accountability for students and equitable funding of school districts and focuses attention on the missing piece of education reform—educator quality.

2. **Massachusetts Wireless Learning Project** – Massachusetts House Bill 1219
   MASCD provided testimony to support legislation for one-to-one computing.

3. **An Act to Improve Quality Physical Education** – Senate Bill 334
   MASCD provided testimony to support legislation expanding quality physical education programs.

Most recently, MASCD endorsed the ASCD Legislative Agenda and has taken a leadership role in Massachusetts with respect to high schools by launching a state-wide **High School Redesign Task Force**. The data reflecting the need for this initiative are based on the fact that our high schools face significant challenges; high school dropout rates have increased, too many high schools fail to engage students in authentic and challenging work and, most importantly, too many students are ill-prepared for productive employment and college study.
In September 2006, MASCD convened a task force that includes 35 representatives from an array of constituent groups including practitioners, professional associations, higher education, legislators, business and policy organizations, and the Department of Education to develop a multi-year plan to insure that each student is challenged and engaged in high school and graduates with 21st century skills.

We acknowledge that there are positive practices in many high schools, and there are initiatives underway aimed at improving high schools. But there is no widespread sense of urgency to redesign our high schools and no coordination of the disparate improvement efforts across the state. The task force believes that implementing our vision for high schools will require broad-based awareness of the need for change and leadership for redesign. To that end, the MASCD’s High School Redesign Task Force has informed the Governor’s Office of its initiative and urged Governor Patrick to convene a commission to develop a blueprint for high school reform.

Dennis Richards, Mary Forte Hayes, Marinel McGrath, and Peter Badalament visit Massachusetts Congressional offices.

The work of the High School Redesign Task Force has been supported financially and through in-kind services by an ASCD Influence Grant, Microsoft’s Partners in Learning, the EDCO Collaborative, and the Massachusetts Secondary Schools Administrators Association (MSSAA).

It is my sincere hope that you will heed this clarion call to become an “educator-activist.” Your voice is needed in advocating sound education policies and best practices for our students. Deepening public discourse is important to any legislative agenda and YOU can play a key role in promoting such discourse. Your experiences provide perspectives on policies and practices that can have a positive influence on learning, teaching, and leadership in the Commonwealth. Without our voices, others will shape the policy agenda. The consequences can be devastating to children and learning. We know that we can count on you to be an advocate and partner in realizing MASCD’s vision of educator quality and high school redesign – both of which will have a tremendous effect on the lives of all Massachusetts students.

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Educator-Activists: A Call to Action

By Irwin Blumer
Boston College

When educators at all levels are asked about whether they see their roles as being involved in formulating public policy, the answer is almost always, “No, I’m an educator, not a politician.” This may explain why we fail to make the progress we need to support our schools and our students. It is okay not to get involved in politics as long as you are not interested in controlling your own destiny. Stay out of the debate, and those willing to become involved in politics will be more than happy to tell you, the educator, the person closest to students, what to do. Then again, if you choose not to get involved, you have no right to complain.

Spheres of Influence
As educators, we are responsible for a political entity called a school or a school system. We are responsible for what happens therein and take on the role of ensuring that all our children obtain a rigorous education. It certainly involves authority and power: who has it and who doesn’t. And given our unique governing structure, it involves interacting with school committees, local and state governments. At the school level, “governing” also means interacting with parents, school councils, and community members.

Whether we recognize this aspect of education or not, we work in a political world. This impacts how we work with people to change schools. In Reframing Organizations, Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest that schools engaging in change consider four frames, one of which is the political frame. This frame recognizes that different interest groups within a school system compete for power and scarce resources. To be successful, schools must have a carefully developed political map. Who are the advocates for the plan? How can coalitions be built to support the plan? What is the difference between bargaining and negotiations? How do you know when to compromise? These are the questions that educators need to answer when they have a vision based on values and goals that they want to implement.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002), in their book Leadership on the Line, describe this process as engaging in adaptive change – deep organizational change: a change of values, ideas and the ways the organization accomplishes its work. This requires each of us to reexamine our self-perception of the role of educators. They offer the following advice: when entertaining adaptive change, don’t go it alone. Find partners and alliances that will work with you and support your vision. Keep the opposition close. Most times we don’t want to hear from people who oppose our vision. Yet the involvement of the opposition is critical for your success.

A Call to Action
We live in a republic where those who elect our officials have a responsibility to commu-
communicate with them about serving their constituents. How can educators actively work to influence state and local officials who impact education? First of all, educators can be an effective voting block; we all must vote! Beyond this, we must communicate with public officials on matters concerning education. We have colleagues who already model ways to effectively accomplish this. Consider Perry Davis, superintendent in Dover-Sherborn, and Shelley Berman, superintendent in Hudson, both of whom did considerable research into special education in Massachusetts. This resulted in an extensive report that was endorsed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS). Copies were distributed to all legislators, editorials were written, presentations were made before legislators and their aides, and superintendents testified at hearings. These efforts resulted in major policy changes and the creation of circuit breaker funding that supports special education costs in our districts in a much more favorable way. Similar work is now being done with legislators to help them understand the importance of including the costs of special education transportation in the circuit breaker formula.

In another example, Hudson superintendent Shelley Berman also convened a committee of superintendents to study the effect of charter schools in the Commonwealth. This resulted in the creation of an extensive and thoughtful position paper supported by MASS that is following the same political process as the special education report. Minor changes that were beneficial to local school districts were made last year in how charter schools received funding from local communities. We are hoping for even greater changes this year for both funding and process issues. If superintendents and school committee members had not contacted their legislators, this effort would not have been successful.

Then again, consider the impact of educator influence in modifying funding for schools. With inadequate funding from the state, more and more communities are faced with voting on overrides. What does this require? Many people need to get involved in doing the work if an override is to pass. A rationale for the override must be communicated so that voters understand the issues involved and the importance of their support.

**On the local level, pay attention and get involved in school committee and other local elections. Make sure people who support education are elected to office.**

This cannot be done by the school system, but rather must be done by parents and other concerned citizens. Educators are among the concerned citizens who must get involved. Supportive voters must be identified; they must receive communications through mailings and phone calls, including contact on the day of the vote. People are needed to stand outside polling places with signs supporting the override. Poll counters are needed to keep track of who has voted and who still needs to be contacted to vote. Certain communities have been very effective in putting together a pro-override coalition. Educators can learn from the successes in neighboring communities. This is local politics at its best.

**Conclusion**

Educational organizations such as MASS are recognizing the need to become actively involved in the political process to affect legislation and policy decisions made at the state level. What is missing is the involvement of all of us on the front lines of education. All educators should be registered voters and should actively vote. We should go even further and be actively involved in the campaigns of candidates who support our causes. On the local level, pay attention and get involved in school committee and other local elections. Make sure people who support education are elected to office. And once we get candidates elected, we need to constantly communicate with them about what we expect of them: emails, letters (short concise letters are much more effective than “form” letters), and telephone calls all have an impact. Elected officials listen to their constituents; have their contact information readily available and speak up often. If an official is not available, talk to an aide – who will report what you say.

Consider this final example of how educators can make a difference. Last year, the initial allocation of Chapter 70 funding was much lower than needed. The political reaction by superintendents, school committees, and local officials was unified, strong, and clear. Legislators heard their concerns, and the final allocation was higher than originally recommended. This year, the Chapter 70 allocation for schools in the House budget is again woefully inadequate. The same process of contacting legislators is underway, with constituents demanding that Chapter 70 funds for schools be increased; however, educators have actually gone one step further in this process. For the first time, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Municipal Association have joined as a coalition to support much needed revisions to the Chapter 70 formula. This formula change would guarantee equity,
ann marie miele accepts her MASCD Mentor Award from susan villani.

Each year MASCD honors several mentors who are nominated by their peers because of their exemplary support of new teachers. Two award winners were featured in a previous issue of Perspectives. It is now our pleasure to feature the other two Mentor Award recipients of 2006, Ann Marie Miele, of the Burlington Public Schools, and Claudette Recore, of the Bellingham Public Schools.

A colleague and two new teachers whom Ann Marie Miele mentored wrote:

“Ann Marie guides the transition and reflective practice of a new teacher . . . she guides the mentee through the pre-conference stage for reciprocal observations and those of peers with strong performances in areas matching the new teacher’s needs . . . helps the mentee examine the data in light of personal performances, potential curricular adjustments, and future directions for both instruction and formative assessments. . . . ”

“Ann Marie has mentored a number of new teachers. All have learned from her the importance of knowing the developmental needs of the children, the extensive diversity of the curriculum, the scope and variety of lessons to be planned, and, most importantly, the incorporation of self-reflection.”

“I could write for the rest of my life and not be able to accurately express the gratitude, motivation, and inspiration that I receive from her each day.”

“Ann Marie Miele, my mentor teacher, was and continues to be the most influential person in my teaching career. . . . She expresses her ideas in a way that I always feel respected and valued. . . . I feel so blessed to have such an incredible mentor.”

Continued on page 8.

References


Dr. Irwin Blumer, a long-time member and supporter of MASCD, is a Research Professor for Educational Administration and Higher Education at Boston College.
Public Servants and Policy Making:
Guidelines for Action

By Frederick M. Hess
American Enterprise Institute

Like the general public, many educators have strongly
held opinions about American military action, polic-
ing, suburban sprawl, and health care. In a democratic
society, these opinions on major policy can be voiced
appropriately, and students can be encouraged to learn to
do the same. The problem is some of these same educators
express frustration with the “political” interference of legis-
lators, interest groups, and public officials in schooling. Or,
as one Washington, D.C.-based teacher advocate bluntly
said, “We get sick and tired of these bozos trying to come
into the schools and tell us our jobs. We’re the experts. We
know what works. I wish all these non-educators would
just shut up, take care of their own jobs, and let us take care
of ours.”

Such outbursts represent a troubling disconnect with
the American tradition. “Politics” is the public engaging in
the public domain’s business – through its chosen repre-
sentatives. The process by which representatives of uneven
conviction, character, and competence propose policy and
monitor public servants inevitably feels like interference to
those on the frontlines – whether they are teachers, police
officers, diplomats, or public health officials. What might
be viewed as “interference” is the hallmark of a free people
engaged in the messy, often disheartening spectacle of self-
government. This engagement is precisely what is encour-
aged when students are taught to be active, civic-minded
citizens.

Public Servants and Policy Making

In fields like police work or national defense, as in
education, experience and expertise are valued. Police
officers and soldiers are honored. However, this respect
does not allow those on the front lines to write laws or set
foreign policy. While many decisions are generally de-
ferred to professionals within their areas of expertise, their
desires or personal preferences should not guide policy
decisions about the death penalty, criminal sentencing, or
U.S. involvement abroad. The expertise of police officers
or soldiers does not excuse them from public direction.
Teachers, doctors, computer programmers, and candle-
stick-makers all have an equal vote when debating policy
and selecting the leaders who will determine policy. The
same is true in environmental protection, transportation,
child welfare, and so on. In each of these cases — all areas
of public service — input from professionals is valued, but
their preferences should not shape public policy. It is the
public’s country and the people’s taxes, and public employ-
ees should accept that.

However well-intentioned practitioners may be, their
interests might be distinct from those of the public. The
public has the right to reject the preferences and opinions
of its public servants. For instance, police officers have
identified likely criminal suspects based on characteristics
that targeted certain groups based on race and/or gender.
Some police might have believed that this “profiling”
helped them identify likely suspects. Nonetheless, con-
cerned about equal protection, many states and commu-
nities have explicitly prohibited profiling. Even if police
believe that racial profiling would help them reduce crime,
police have to abide by the public’s desire to protect inno-
cent people.

Schools are paid for by public monies and filled with
the public’s children. Public school educators are public
employees. Schools and students are there at the behest
of the larger community (whether it be local, state, or na-
tional), and it is this public that has the right to determine
what should be taught, how progress should be deter-
mined, and how conflicting values should be weighed.

Educators put themselves in an awkward position
when they describe legislative efforts to overhaul licensure
requirements, address low-performing schools, or restruc-
ture teacher pay as acts of “interference.” The presumption
that teachers should have a sole voice or be deferred to
regarding policy is in opposition to the ideals of a demo-
cratic nation — the implication being that educators are
entitled to regard public institutions and public resources
as a private preserve.

Implications for Educators

Should educators sit on their hands and quietly acqui-
esc to the preferences of those who have less experience
with schools, students, or schooling? No. Educators DO,
however, have an obligation to respect and abide by the
rules of democratic debate.

Like all other public servants, educators have the right
to make their voices heard. They need not be reticent, but
resorting to claims that “we are the experts, and our opinions should be controlling” shuts down the democratic process. Most people would likely, and rightly, be angry if they heard CIA operatives or police officers make such arguments. Educators have preferences like all other citizens, but there is no reason that a democratic society should overweigh the preferences of one group or another. Teachers (like CIA operatives or police officers) may share certain values or possess certain interests that clash with those of the general public, resulting in conflict. Teachers may think their salaries should be higher or that schools should not hesitate to educate children who are in the country illegally, but non-educators may view such considerations in a different light and judge them by different criteria. Moreover, training and professional experiences do not give educators special wisdom on questions such as how much teachers deserve to be paid, what society should expect of its schools, or how to craft immigration policy.

Respecting the process of democratic debate is an essential component of our common heritage, and, in its own ugly, limping way, it works. The reason farmers have a voice regarding educational policy and teachers have opportunities to help determine agricultural policy is not because amateurs have brilliant solutions, but because the democratic process provides clear rules of engagement and forces contestants to frame arguments in ways that speak to the entire community.

Absent democratic pressure, there are incentives for experts to create pocket “thought-worlds” that buffer them from scrutiny or debate. The creation of these spheres of expertise, in universities or public agencies or accrediting bodies, allows conventional wisdom to grow untrammeled and provides no ready way for anyone except those apprenticed into the thought-world to challenge the status quo. The result is that the only way to make change is to storm from the outside, creating an all-or-nothing politics that must be moderated by democratic engagement.

In short, democratic “interference” is the process by which the public and public servants negotiate their relationship. Educators should engage in debates about federal, state, and local policy secure in the knowledge that their collective voice is one among many and aware that they have no special claim on the outcome. Accepting this gracefully is not only the right thing to do; doing so enables educators to boost their influence and credibility with public officials.

Finally, it is worth understanding that where educators possess unrivaled expertise is not in what educational policy should be — but in how educational policy should take its form. Generally speaking, educators know vastly more about pedagogy, curricula, assessment, learning, and child development than citizens or policymakers. This suggests that, even when they may disagree with certain policies or goals, educators have a critical role to play in shaping and implementing them. Asserting expertise in a professional and temperate way can help curb simple-minded initiatives, ameliorate implementation headaches, and win new allies.

Guidelines for Action

There are at least three guidelines that educators should keep in mind when contemplating policy. First, it is essential to rely on evidence and reasoning that make sense to non-specialists. This is especially important because district and state policy cannot be constructed one classroom at a time. Policy needs to apply to whole swaths of schools or classrooms; it therefore needs to be framed in terms of programs, incentives, or mandates, rather than particular practices. This means arguments are much more effective when they address institutional, organizational, statutory, and contractual issues, rather than when they are focused on specific practices or special cases.

Second, whenever possible, educators should seek to deploy their expertise by focusing on means — how to pursue a goal, how to implement an approach, how efforts should be supported or studied — rather than ends. Why? Quite frankly, ends tend to be a matter of gut feeling. They are a product of culture, economics, and broader social forces. Educators will enjoy much more success convincing policymakers that there are better, more sensible, more educationally sound ways to pursue those ends.

It may be tough for educators to accept ends with which they disagree, but it is worth taking a deep breath
and seeking the rationale for, and potential utility of, the decision. Policymakers will be eager to grant educators immense influence in shaping the tactics and specifics of proposals if the educators are seen as credible. For an example of how such a collegial relationship can work, look no further than the immense autonomy that civilian leaders grant military officers in planning the strategy and tactics of operations. In schooling, consider how those superintendents who have embraced NCLB-style accountability as a useful tool — whatever their intimate thoughts might be about standardized assessment — have been lionized by state and federal officials. They have been listened to, their suggestions have been solicited, and policymakers have worked to address their concerns. By accepting the policy determination as legitimate, these educators have been able to influence its design and implementation.

Third, when educators are truly uneasy with what policymakers propose and feel obligated to argue ends, they should try to empathize with the point of view and argue the issue while granting the policymakers good will and innocent motives. Quite simply, it’s good practice to presume the decency and good intentions of one’s opponents. Too often, in education and elsewhere, we have fallen into the practice of vilifying those with whom we may disagree. Doing so closes the door to fresh thinking and fosters stagnation. Presuming that our opponents want to do the right thing, but simply disagree on what that is or how we might get there creates the possibility of finding common ground. It opens the door to compromise and helps avoid the scorched earth and ad hominem politics that have become so much a part of the education debate.

In Conclusion

These lessons won’t ensure that educators like or approve of current education policy. But they will help promote a healthier, more thoughtful policy process — and one more attuned to the insights and concerns of teachers, principals, and district officials.

Frederick M. Hess is Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and co-author, most recently, of No Child Left Behind Primer (2006). A former high school teacher and professor of education, he holds an MEd in teaching and curriculum and a PhD in government from Harvard University.

MASCD Mentor Award Recipients—Continued

A colleague and a new teacher whom Claudette Recore mentored wrote:

“As a first year teacher, I can clearly recall the anxiety that I felt on the days prior to school’s start. Upon entering the building on the first day of teachers returning to school, Claudette Recore, a fellow special education teacher, approached me and introduced herself without knowing that I was the new member of her department. Claudette managed to make me feel comfortable on one of the most anxiety-filled days of my life.”

“Whenever I have a question or concern about anything, Claudette puts aside whatever she is doing to listen and support me. Claudette has helped me by observing my teaching and giving me immediate, concrete feedback on how I can improve my teaching methods. Even more than listening, advising, and answering all of my questions, big and small, Claudette inspires me to be a better teacher.”

“Just recently I had to test a student. I had never given this test before and neither had anyone in my department. Claudette sat with me for an hour after school to figure out how to give this test. The next day she sat with me for over 2 hours to score the test.”

“When we were short on trained mentors, Claudette willingly took on two more non-professional status teachers. She does a terrific job of truly listening to them and then providing them with opportunities to reflect on their practice.”

As fellow educators, we stand in grateful respect of Ann Marie Miele’s and Claudette Recore’s efforts to support new teachers. Their accomplishments have helped to make a successful transition for new teachers and have enhanced the education of students. Their work is an inspiration to all.
Politics is often seen by educators as little more than a distraction from their daily work in classrooms. While most educators care about the needs of their students, they see politicians as caring only about issues that impact their constituents.

Their cynicism is not without cause. Thanks to politics, our schools were once segregated and our state funding for education once favored richer communities at the expense of those less well off. The courts have since taken care of both issues; however, for many veteran educators, these memories still linger today, perpetuating a negative perception of politics.

Except, of course, when one mentions the name, Jack Rennie . . .

A Role Model for Educator Activists

Jack Rennie was a community and business leader who founded the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), which eventually developed the vision and blueprint for the state’s 1993 Education Reform Act. How this sweeping reform law was developed and passed serves as a prime example of how sometimes a solution can only be found by merging politics with all the stakeholders, including educators.

In the early 1990s MBAE published “Every Child a Winner,” a report outlining educational reforms happening across the country and detailing what did – and did not – work. This generated interest among business leaders statewide who were concerned about the lack of basic skills possessed by recent high school graduates.

What happened next was truly public policy and politics at its best. Business leaders, educators and legislators joined in the discussion, all with the understanding that the existing problems could only be solved if all parties were heard. Rennie took the lead and worked tirelessly to involve as many constituencies as he could, including the governor, educators, legislators, teacher unions, parent groups, and advocates for students with special needs.

In the end, an agreement was reached: the Massachusetts Legislature promised an unprecedented amount of additional state education aid in exchange for a pledge from schools and districts to establish measurable goals that held students, schools and educators to high standards of accountability. Ultimately, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act was developed from these efforts and signed into law in June of 1993. The sweeping nature of this law garnered the attention of the nation’s Council of Chief State School Officers, which named our reform law the one with greatest potential to be effective in the nation.

Now, a cynic could argue that this law came about only because of good luck, good financial times, or that a pending lawsuit before the State Supreme Court forced politicians to take action. While all this may be true, there is no question that the end result has been great success.

Since 1993 we have had 13 straight years of progress in student achievement, as evidenced by the Massachusetts Department of Education. We lead the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and SAT, and more than 80 percent of our students are passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exams on their first try.

For me, Jack Rennie has provided a model for all of us in responsible positions to follow. He did not see “politics” as a negative instrument, but one that if used correctly, could be the very tool needed to improve our public education system.

A Legacy for Educators

Education Reform is the best example of politics’ positive effect on public education. Two historic laws, however, illustrate the way major change is more typically achieved through the political process by forcing the hands of lawmakers with threats. The Special Education and Bilingual Education laws were both spurred by a groundswell of support for necessary change by parents and advocates.

Each law ultimately had a positive impact on students, but neither came without a price. The cost of special
education services has become so prohibitive since the inception of the special education law that some might argue that regular education students have been shortchanged. And the bilingual education law has since been all but repealed. Three years ago it was replaced by Question 2, a contentious law which requires students be given one year of sheltered English immersion before being mainstreamed into regular education classrooms.

Both of these historic laws illustrate the way major change is more typically achieved through the political process. Parents had legitimate concerns about their children’s education, the educational and political systems were slow to respond, and children suffered. The impending cost of making the necessary changes stalled the political process until the sheer force of advocacy took over, lawsuits were threatened, and the laws were pushed through.

I have often said that if Horace Mann were to return today, he would marvel at the technological changes but would be comfortable in the public schools because they haven’t changed much since his time. Change in education is hard to achieve because the two systems – educational and political – do not readily accept change.

**In Conclusion**

Educator-advocates need to be more proactive and advocate positions that are based on research, common sense, and the will to make things right for our students. When handled correctly, there is no question that educator influence and advocacy can have a positive impact on education.

The best tack is not to force the hands of lawmakers, but to follow the example of Jack Rennie. While the advocates for special education and bilingual education – like Rennie – were spurred by the need to improve opportunities for children, only Rennie took the lead, examined the problems at hand rationally, reached sound consensus with all parties involved, and sidestepped the anger and contention. In the end, he helped create a reform law that not only improved the quality of public education in this state, but made Massachusetts a leader nationwide.

For me, Jack Rennie has provided the model for all of us in responsible positions to follow. He did not see “politics” as a negative: he saw that, if used the right way, politics could be the very tool we needed to improve our system of public education.

David Driscoll is concluding his eight year tenure as Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As Commissioner, he has overseen the development of the state’s curriculum frameworks, implementation and expansion of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the development of the state’s School and District Accountability System and the development and administration of the Educator Certification Test and new licensure regulations. Driscoll has also served as President of the Council of Chief State School Officers, Chairman of the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement Board, and is a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, the Board of Higher Education, and the Board of Early Education and Care.

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**Why Redesign Our High Schools?**

According to a 2004 study by the National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education, just 76 percent of Massachusetts students who enter high school as freshmen graduate four years later, and just 29 percent of those students eventually earn a college degree. A disproportionate number of Latinos and African American students drop out of high school. And yet there are few jobs left today that do not require some post-secondary education. The time to better coordinate our efforts to prepare students for college and careers is now.

We acknowledge that there are positive practices and improvement initiatives underway in many Massachusetts high schools. But there is no widespread sense of urgency to redesign our high schools from the ground up, and no coordination of disparate improvement efforts across the state.

The MASCD task force includes representatives from an array of constituent groups including practitioners, professional associations, legislators, business and policy organizations and the Department of Education.

The task force held its second meeting in December, and we reviewed reform efforts in other states. We concluded that implementing our vision for high schools will require broad-based awareness of the need for change and leadership for redesign. We are committed to improving the Commonwealth’s high schools and welcome the participation of our members. Visit [www.mascd.org](http://www.mascd.org) for more information.
Any definition of today’s principal-ship has to include the need for advocacy and activism on behalf of students and their families, staff, and school administrators. Principals must work with their superintendents and school committees to promote their schools to the community and to local government.

A principal usually has minimal exposure to the broader dimension of politics as it relates to local, state, and federal government. Politics don’t seem as pressing as handling parent phone calls, the upset youngster, or the hundreds of other daily tasks. Yet, if principals wait until they have the time, they will miss opportunities to play a role in shaping educational policy. In recent years, as the Federal Relations Coordinator for the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA), I have had an opportunity to witness why it is important for principals to take the leap into the world of politics.

Why Advocacy?

There are several reasons why school administrators should take the time to cultivate relationships with government officials.

1. People who need direct, accurate information about schools, programs, and children are voting on policies that affect our daily lives.
2. The media provide information about schools, school programs, and school reform efforts that is often biased or inaccurate.
3. Education advocacy groups make the effort to build relationships with our policymakers; however they do not always have the same goals, agenda, or information as those of us who are directly involved in the educational process.
4. In the several years that I have filled the role of MESPA liaison to our state and federal legislators, politicians have hungered for “stories” about the impact of their work on our work. How much more effective might their work be if they could hear us before they make critical decisions?

Getting Started

Advocacy is manageable and effective when practiced at any of three levels: town/city, state, and federal. The key is to build a connection with the policymakers who represent the area in which your school is located.

Elected officials care first about their constituents/voters. They need to know the people and issues in their districts. As a principal at any level, you have numerous opportunities to inform your government officials of what is going on in your school. If you have a newsletter, have one sent routinely to elected officials’ offices; this constituent mail is a refreshing change from the typical voter mail that will inevitably be read by a staffer and be sent on to your senator, representative, or local lawmaker. Find out what form of communication these lawmakers would prefer. For example, in Washington D.C., faxes and email have become the preferred method since all paper mail is carefully checked.

Often, at the federal and state levels, staffers work on education issues and are courteous and generally interested in what we have to say. Once routine communication is established, groundwork for the next step is in place.

Invite policymakers to visit schools. During an election year, photo opportunities are highly prized. The secret is to work around the policymaker’s schedule. Though state and local lawmakers’ schedules are easier to work around, don’t shy away from inviting your federal lawmakers to schools. Having visited lawmakers’ offices several times in Washington, D.C., I have seen examples of photos, letters of thanks and children’s drawings posted for visitors to see. With luck, your representative also plays a role on a committee that has a direct link to education, such as the Education, Health and Human Services, or Appropriations Committees. When schools have lawmaker visitors, questions about policy impact are at the top of the agenda: Has the decrease in Title 1 funds affected you? How are you conducting the testing for your...
children on the autism spectrum? What a principal has to say during a political visit carries weight. Politicians’ visits to your schools often strongly influence their votes.

Principals should look to their professional organizations for information and guidance about “hot” issues which may help bring to political awareness. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has a legislative action web page with easy-to-use links that make it nearly effortless to contact local legislators (http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=32). This web site also contains the latest developments that might be difficult to track in other ways. Daily actions at the federal level are monitored by the NAESP, and news bulletins are routinely posted at their web site.

Making a Difference

Being involved does make a difference. At the federal level, several major issues have been brought to the attention of Congress as a result of information provided by groups of educators. I have seen lawmakers’ jaws drop when I have provided them evidence of the challenges confronting our students as a result of their policy decisions. Most of our professional organizations have paid lobbyists, and they certainly have the skills and political networks that principals don’t have the time to cultivate. Yet, it seems that our politicians listen differently when they hear from school officials. Principals’ voices matter because our stories are not polished or practiced. We speak for students, public education, and excellence in the classroom; there is no hidden agenda.

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Principals involved in education during these challenging times are driven by a commitment to insuring that all children will experience success in school. Politicians share this goal, but they need school administrators’ help in seeing the whole picture. Principals are so busy managing their schools that other groups with louder voices can distort what is really happening in our schools. It is important to be aware of who might be the most appropriate spokesperson to a political group. For example, in my town the superintendent and two school committee liaisons invited the state representatives to conduct a forum for parents regarding the issue of funding mandates. While district funding is under the purview of the superintendent and school committee, the principals can use this opportunity to exchange information with lawmakers regarding the effects of funding cuts on a particular school.

Principals’ voices matter because our stories are not polished or practiced. We speak for students, public education, and excellence in the classroom; there is no hidden agenda.

There are certainly times when town selectmen, a mayor or managers, state senators, or representatives will have opposing points of view. Education-advocates’ effectiveness is diminished if they are only heard when they complain. Principals have so much knowledge and experience about schools and students that it is in their best interest to cultivate a continuous dialogue with interested politicians. Thanking politicians for a particular vote will also build productive educational and political relationships.

If there are contentious issues in a school district on which you wish to take a stand, it is important to clear your plans with those higher up in the chain of command. There are laws which regulate using taxpayer-funded resources to communicate about local political issues. An educator-advocate would be wise to check with district legal counsel.

In Conclusion

Principals should seek ways to extend our influence beyond our day-to-day responsibilities. We must communicate with policymakers about what we and our students are doing through ongoing, sustained communication that includes visits to our schools. While we may not see results overnight, and at times we may wonder whether it is worth taking precious time out of the school day to get involved, political activism is the only way that sustainable change will occur.

Christine Brandt served as Principal of the Chickering School in Dover, Massachusetts for the past nine years. She retired at the conclusion of the 2005-2006 school year.
For three years, MASCD has been an integral part of the Working Group for Educator Excellence, developing comprehensive legislation to promote educator quality throughout the Commonwealth. This legislation, H4157*, provides a knowledge-based, systemic approach to improving the educator workforce. Grassroots support is needed to insure that the bill will be funded, and each MASCD member has a role to play.

**What You Can Expect from H4157***

- Better teacher evaluation
- Expedited dismissal of unsuccessful teachers
- Increased retention of new teachers
- Serious re-examination of college and university preparation programs
- Increased opportunity for excellent teachers to take on instructional leadership responsibilities

**Details of the Legislation**

- Districts will be required to implement a comprehensive approach to build internal capacity for sustainable improvements in school structure, school culture and professional community. All districts will ultimately be required to address all of the personnel systems.
- The first year, up to 15 districts will be selected to receive funding for planning how they will address the personnel systems over a three-year period. In subsequent years, implementation will be phased in.
- Districts will not be held accountable for implementing the provisions of the bill if sufficient funds are not appropriated.
- Regional educator quality panels will be established to create criteria and guidelines to support the development and implementation of plans and to approve and disapprove funding requests.
- The Department of Education will receive funding to increase its capacity to support districts.

**What You Can Do**

You are the educational expert, and you can help deepen public discourse over what it will take to insure that every teacher and leader is highly skilled. At [www.mascd.org](http://www.mascd.org) you can

- Click on Educator Quality Legislation to stay informed. Read the bill and FAQs.
- Click on Become an Educator Advocate in order to easily communicate with legislators at the state and federal levels – on H4157* and other important issues.
- Click on Become an Educator Advocate to check out the ASCD Advocacy Guide for helpful tips.

Most importantly, make your feelings known.

- Email or call your legislators and ask them to support H4157*.

H4157* will provide the infrastructure and accountability to insure that every child has a skillful teacher and principal. Let’s work together to pass this legislation. There is nothing more important if we truly want to leave no child behind.

*At press time, the re-filed H4157 was awaiting a new bill number.*
Educators as Agents of Positive Change:
A Dozen Strategies for Success

By Joseph B. Berger and Christine B. McCormick

School of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Becoming Educator Activists

Educators tend to see politics as something that is (or should be) separate or removed from educational practice and often feel frustrated, angry, and puzzled by political activity and decisions. Yet, we live and work in a political world — and issues we care about, resources we need, and policies that guide our professional lives are all embedded in the complexities of political reality (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2004). So, why should we, as educators, become more active in advocating for our schools and influencing our legislators?

There are two main reasons why educators need to become activists. First, it is our professional responsibility. Policy, no matter at what level it is created — federal, state or local — affects districts, schools and classrooms. Involvement in policy-making and implementation processes provides proactive leadership rather than reactive management. This enables educators to shape education and their professional work environments prior to policy implementation. Clearly, once a policy is implemented, it is much more difficult to change. Second, becoming more involved in policy work advances our role as advocates for better schools and social justice and enables us not only to make an impact in our own backyards, but also to influence the broader educational context. By definition, the educator activist is proactive and far-reaching in his or her work as an agent of positive change.

Strategies for Success

It is necessary to understand the nature of public policy at large in order to identify better strategies for involvement and influence with educational policy in particular. This can be a confusing task given that there are many disparate definitions of policy — resulting in no clear definition, but a sense of “you know it when you see it” (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004). One useful definition of policy describes it as “a political process where needs, goals, and intentions are translated into a set of objectives, laws, policies, and programs, which in turn affect resource allocations, actions, and outputs, which are the basis for evaluation, reforms, and new policies” (Cooper et al, 2004). This definition helps us understand that policy is both a process and a product involving multiple actors inside and outside of education. The process is what we commonly think of as “politics,” while the product is the policy itself. As educator activists, political action is our central means for influencing policy.

As a system, policy development and implementation involve multiple levels of stakeholders who determine needs, goals, and intentions and who make decisions about how these should be translated into objectives, laws, policies, and programs. This system is not neat and linear, but is comprised of three distinct streams: (1) problem recognition, (2) formation and refining of policy proposals, and (3) politics (Kingdon, 1995). These streams may develop and operate more or less independently of one another. This can result in solutions being developed that may or may not respond to the particular problem.

Once we understand these separate streams, we can look for policy windows — opportunities when streams come together such that problem recognition, a viable solution and the current political context are aligned. Such windows of opportunity are open for only a while. Therefore, educators who want to be agents of positive change and who desire greater opportunities to shape the policy environment need to be actively engaged in defining problems, developing potential solutions, and understanding politics.

Educators who want to be agents of positive change . . . need to be actively engaged in defining problems, developing potential solutions, and understanding politics.

Think Politically — Educators can embrace rather than resist the idea that education is inherently political.

Share the news . . . pass this MASCD publication on to a colleague today!!
By thinking politically, educators can be more proactive and effective as sources of influence on policy-makers. Thinking politically means being aware of policy and intentionally thinking about how to get involved in the political processes that shape policy at multiple levels. As Tip O’Neill once noted, “All politics are local.”

**Get Involved** — Once educators have acquired a basic understanding of policy, becoming involved is the best form of active learning. Educators can get involved by staying current on key issues through the media and professional networks, attending school board meetings, working on political campaigns, meeting with local lawmakers, and many other avenues. Different forms of involvement will appeal to and work for different individuals.

**Widen Your Circle of Influence** — Teachers are responsible for what happens in their classrooms, principals run their schools, and superintendents focus on what is happening in their districts. However, each of these units exists as part of a larger system of structures and networks. By looking beyond their immediate organizational setting and scope of responsibility, educators can more effectively anticipate issues that need addressing, policy trends, and competing priorities outside of their immediate realm that may already be affecting their work.

**Recognize Policy Problems** — Many of the daily issues in any school or district can be addressed as policy problems. Bardach (2000) suggests that the best way to look for policy problems is to think in terms of surpluses and deficits. What problems occur too often? What is there never enough of? Answering these questions helps to identify policy problems and provides a means for articulating the specific nature of these problems to others.

**Define an Agenda** — Educators are limited in the time, resources, and effort they have to invest. Therefore, policy work involves making choices about what is most important. It is helpful for educators to develop a defined agenda identifying high priority issues so they can be more effective in those particular areas. Educators can then become “policy entrepreneurs” promoting their agendas through active engagement in political processes.

**Develop and Use Indicators** — Policy issues come into prominence or become items of interest through the use of indicators that suggest a problem needs attention. Indicators are generally used in two ways: (1) to assess the magnitude of a problem, and (2) to become aware of changes in the problem (Kingdon, 1995). For example, some schools do not have enough resources; indicators can be used to determine the magnitude of this problem and how it has changed over time. Policymakers consider a change in an indicator to be a change in the state of a system, which they tend to define as a problem. The actual indicator change, however, can be exaggerated or minimized. Thus, problem determination is often a matter of interpretation. Proactive identification and strategic use of appropriate indicators can help educators be more influential in the policy process.

**Develop Solutions** — Policy-makers are more inclined to react to ideas that are positive-in-tone and help them create solutions rather than to ideas that they perceive as generating more problems that will require their attention. Offering evidence-based solutions will garner a more positive response or at least will help produce other ideas to address the concerns at hand.

**Analyze Stakeholders** — The policy process involves many actors and constituents at different levels, each with different vested interests and sources of power and influence. Knowing who else is interested in particular issues, what they value, where they stand on the issues, what role they play in shaping or making decisions, and what resources they control are all pieces of information that can be invaluable in helping educators be more effective in the world of policy.

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**Accuracy and Assumptions** — Accurate information and empirical data remain the best way to make a case when trying to change or create policy. Data-driven decision-making can not only help educators make better choices within their districts and schools, but can also help them to inform decisions of external policy-makers.

**Know the Facts** — Ideology and rhetoric are rampant in politics. However, accurate information and empirical data remain the best way to make a case when trying to change or create policy. Data-driven decision-making can not only help educators make better choices within their districts and schools, but can also help them to inform decisions of external policy-makers.

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**Develop Relationships and Networks of Influence** — A good analysis of stakeholders can help individuals identify potential partners for building coalitions and alliances interested in shaping policy. There is power in numbers and policymakers are more likely to pay attention to a particular issue or solution that can demonstrate broad based support.

**Be Persistent** — Kingdon (1995) notes that policy can be defined as “an idea whose time has come.” Yet, it is not merely timing and serendipity that define when the time is right or that provide the opportunity to take advantage of policy windows when they arise — it is preparation and continuous effort to be informed and involved.
Educate Others — Educators need to educate each other and their external constituents about policy development and the political process, as well as the particular policy challenges and needs within their schools and districts. This creates a stronger critical mass of internal and external players who can advocate and influence educational policy. Educators can support each other by sharing information and by offering in-service opportunities to learn about and from policymakers and policy experts, thus creating learning opportunities and forums for advocacy and networking.

In Conclusion

Becoming an agent of positive change is demanding work, yet many educators already take on this role to some degree using the strategies discussed here. The challenge for each of us is to better understand the policy environment and then to focus intentionally and proactively on influencing the politics of education.

References


Dr. Joseph B. Berger is Chair for the Department of Educational Policy, Research and Administration at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His interests include the impact of organizational and policy structures on student access and achievement.

Dr. Christine B. McCormick is the Dean of the School of Education for the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her most recent book focuses on what educators need to understand about their students’ cognitive, social, and emotional development to be effective in the classroom.

ASCD Wants to Help You Advocate for Effective Education Policy

Education policy matters. It affects what teachers teach, what students learn, and what resources are available for schools. ASCD wants to ensure that those who know what works for students—teachers, principals, and other educators—are at the table when education policy is created. It is up to us to advocate for effective education policy that will improve, not hinder, student learning.

ASCD has launched a new program, ASCD Educator Advocates, to help educators advocate for sound education policy. Through ASCD Educator Advocates, we provide free resources to help educators advocate for effective education policy.

When you sign up to be an ASCD Educator Advocate, you will receive resources to ensure your advocacy work has a great impact with only a small investment of your time. These free resources include

- e-mail updates with the inside scoop when the U.S. Congress is in session;
- state-specific information about education policy in Massachusetts;
- action alerts to tell you when your voice can make a critical difference; and
- sample letters and talking points that make taking action simple and fast.

Education policy should be developed by the experts! With your help, we can make sure education policy supports learning and teaching at both the state and federal level. Please go to www.ascd.org/actioncenter and click the button to “Join Educator Advocates.”
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Making Algebra Accessible to All

Differentiation in the Secondary English Classroom

Differentiation in Secondary Mathematics

Heidi Hayes Jacobs & Fresh Pond Education

Faye Roupp

Jessica Hockett

Amy Germundson

March 15

Westford

Plymouth

Plymouth

Worcester

March 27 and April 10

June 26-27

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New! June Institutes on Differentiated Instruction, Grades 5-12

June 26-27, 2007 - Plymouth, MA

Differentiation in the Secondary English Classroom

Igniting Potential in Mathematics: Responding to Diverse Learners at the Secondary Level
March 27 & April 10 — Westford, MA - Registration deadline March 6

Making Algebra Accessible to All Students
Faye Ruopp, Teachers21

This institute is designed to explore the critical issue in mathematics education of making algebra accessible to all students. In particular, participants will examine the algebra curriculum and algebraic concepts outlined by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as they relate to the teaching of algebra in the middle and high school years. There will be a focus on: 1) instructional strategies that address student misconceptions, 2) the use of concrete materials and models to develop understanding, and 3) programmatic approaches that emphasize understanding algebraic thinking through meaningful contexts.

Faye Ruopp is a former secondary mathematics school teacher. She has also taught pre-service teachers in higher education preparation programs. Faye was a Senior Project Director at Education Development Center for twelve years, where she directed several National Science Foundation projects focused on the professional development of mathematics teachers K-12. While at EDC she also directed the development of a middle school mathematics curriculum, Impact Mathematics. Faye brings a broad knowledge base on differentiating instruction to teachers at all stages of their careers.

Register early at www.mascd.org

June 26-27, 2007

June Institutes on Differentiated Instruction, Grades 5-12
Radisson Plymouth Harbor, Plymouth, MA
Enrollment limited

Differentiation in the Secondary English Classroom

In today’s increasingly diverse middle and high school English classrooms, teachers need curricular and instructional approaches that respond to the varied readiness, interests, and learning profiles of all students. In this interactive institute, participants will learn subject-specific strategies for designing differentiated tasks, as well as techniques for creating and managing a flexible environment. Participants will not only discover new ways to differentiate well-known methods like journals, Socratic seminars, and rubrics, but also be introduced to advanced strategies such as tiering and online book clubs. Please bring lessons and/or units to work on at the institute.

Jessica Hockett is a doctoral student at the University of Virginia. A former secondary teacher in the Chicago area, Jessica taught English, social studies, and math for academically talented students. She won the 2005 National Association for Gifted Children Curriculum Studies Division award for her unit “In the Muck: A Study and Practice of Investigative Journalism.” Jessica works as a consultant on differentiated instruction to schools across the country.

Igniting Potential in Mathematics: Responding to Diverse Learners at the Secondary Level

Differentiating mathematics curriculum and instruction at the secondary level is both exciting and challenging. In this interactive institute, we will explore key principles of high quality mathematics curriculum and differentiation. Participants will gain an in-depth understanding and practice with topics such as designing high-quality curriculum guided by state standards, creating responsive learning environments supportive of diverse learners, applying a variety of differentiated instructional strategies related to readiness, learning profile, and interest, and managing differentiated classrooms. Please bring a mathematics unit to work on at the institute.

Amy Germundson is a graduate research assistant and doctoral student at the University of Virginia. Previously, she taught a variety of high school mathematics and physical science courses and integrated seventh grade science in the International Baccalaureate Program. Amy’s current work in schools focuses on differentiating math and science instruction.

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For more information and registration details, check the MASCD web site: www.mascd.org
Are you considering becoming an administrator?
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The Leadership Licensure Program (LLP) is a unique, Massachusetts DOE-approved, highly selective one-year program administered jointly by the Massachusetts Secondary School Principals’ Association (MSSAA), Massachusetts Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (MASCD), and Teachers 21. The Leadership Licensure Program - Superintendents Cohort (LLPS) is our newest program which is offered in partnership with READS Collaborative.

The Leadership Licensure Programs offer the following licenses:

- Principal/Assistant Principal (PreK-6, 5-8, 9-12)
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Program options for the principal and supervisor licenses include:

- Licensure only
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- Licensure plus an M.Ed. from Endicott College

Program options for the superintendent license include:

- Licensure only
- Licensure plus 24 credits towards a Ph.D. from Lesley University.

Courses for the LLP are held at the MSSAA Offices located at 33 Forge Parkway, Franklin, MA.
Courses for the superintendent program (LLPS) are held at the READS Collaborative located at 105 East Grove Street, Middleboro, MA.

Applications are being accepted now, so don’t delay. The program begins in July and ends in May 2008. Orientation for the LLP class of 2008 will be held on June 19. Orientation for the LLPS class of 2008 will be held on June 21. For more information, visit www.mascd.org/pd/license.htm.

The summer issue of Perspectives will be “New Technologies in the Classroom.”
We are now accepting submissions for prospective publication in the fall 2007 issue of Perspectives, “Reality Check: Preservice Preparation for the First Year of Teaching.”

Interested authors are invited to submit a 1-2 paragraph proposal describing the intended focus of the article and how it addresses one or more of the focus questions, as well as a brief biographical statement, including the author’s related experience or expertise. Articles may range from 1000-1500 words and should: bring forth an essential question and the tensions and challenges within the topic, inform readers of new and useful ideas and/or practices, explore some of the obstacles, “forks in the road”/choice points, and questions that are raised in what you are trying to do to provoke, entice, and stimulate readers to continue the discussion beyond the article itself. Author’s Guidelines are sent upon acceptance of article proposals. Send all proposals or requests for a sample of the publication to: Walter McKenzie, MASCD Communications Director at wmcKenzie@mascd.org.

The Perspectives editorial team consists of: Kathleen Buchanan, You, Inc.; Kathleen Buckley, Cambridge College, MASCD Board; William Bauser, Dean College; Michelle Boudreau, Southwick-Tolland Regional High School; Cindy Crimmin, Weston Public Schools, MASCD Board; Pat DiPillo, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School; Ann McGreevy, Salem State College, St. Mary’s High School in Lynn; Bonnie Polan, O’Bryant School of Math and Science; Rose Vetere, Abbot Elementary School in Westford; Susan Villani, Learning Innovations at WestEd, MASCD Board Liaison; Grace Wai, Bartlett Community Partnership School; Carolyn Wallace, Mountain View School in East Longmeadow; Douglas White, Bridgewater State College; Lelia Richardson, Copy Editor; Walter McKenzie, Director of Communications.
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