



MESPA

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MSSAA Board of Directors endorses statewide leadership coalition addressing student and faculty mental health

The MSSAA Board of Directors under the leadership of President Tara Bennett unanimously approved the endorsement of a statewide educational leadership coalition described below:

On December 4, representatives of the MA Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA), the MA Secondary School Principals Association (MSSAA), the MA Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) the MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS), and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) met to discuss growing concerns about student and faculty mental health, including social and emotional well-being. Bill Gainey, Executive Director of MSSAA/MIAA organized and convened the meeting at which MESPA President Denise Franius, MSSAA President Tara Bennett, MASS President Andre Ravenelle, MASS Executive Director Tom Scott, and MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher participated.

The group recognized that many factors have exacerbated the implications for mental health and emotional stress for students and faculty including societal factors, the economy, poverty, challenges to the family, and academic pressures from testing and accountability measures. It was noted that as students age, the factors grow to a greater or lesser extent, but that a general level of stress is growing at a measurable rate.

There was clear consensus the issues of mental health and social/emotional well-being of both students and faculty members need to become a major priority for public educators including principals and central office administrators and that the associations should collaborate in a strategy to make this happen. Further, there is a sense of urgency because of the growing degree to which stress and other social and emotional factors are emerging in both public and private schools.

The key goals of a collaborative effort would be to:

- Educate the public at large.
- Inform public policy makers, including the legislature, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), and local officials about these issues the implications of failing to address them.
- Develop and implement specific strategies to address the issues.

General strategies might include:

- Development of a coordinated master plan including a communications strategy.
- Commit resources including financial support and human capital at a level to be identified.
- Integrate organizational messaging and initiatives around the issues.

- Focus organizational events and activities around these issues in addition to other priorities
- Adopting formal organizational goals as priority objectives of the associations.
- Agree on a legislative advocacy agenda to be determined.

It was agreed that partner organizations might include MASS Inc. and the Rennie Center, among others to be determined.

Strategic tactics might include such steps as:

- Identifying the staffing patterns necessary at the school and district level to address the issues including rethinking traditional roles and descriptions of some positions.
- Sending letters to the community from educational leaders as a “call to action.”
- Developing a consensus advocacy and financial master plan.
- Make Student and Faculty Well-Being and Mental Health a theme for organizational programming including state conventions, regional meetings, and legislative advocacy.