



**MASSACHUSETTS ADMINISTRATORS FOR
SPECIAL EDUCATION**
in collaboration with
**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF APPROVED
SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS**

March 17, 2023 Virtual Conference

ASE and MAAPS

Statewide Special Education Conference

Perspectives on “Timely” Mid-Year Issues in Special Education Administration

Topics for Administrators/Leaders/School Team to Know to Improve Outcomes for Students Across the Continuum of Services

Welcome and Keynote Presentation

Katherine Craven



Katherine Craven, Chair, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; Chief Administrative Officer, Babson College

Katherine Craven currently serves as the Chief Administrative Officer of Babson College, one of the nation's leading business colleges. Katherine began her career as a budget director and policy advisor to the Massachusetts House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. Craven was named Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the newly created Massachusetts School Building Authority in 2004, where she won plaudits for her effective management and leadership. While leading the School Building Authority, Craven was also named First Deputy Treasurer of the Commonwealth. Craven left the School Building Authority and the Treasurer's Office in 2011 when she was appointed Executive Director of the UMass Building Authority and Assistant Vice President for Capital Finance for the University of Massachusetts. Craven received a Bachelor of Arts in History from Harvard University. She is a resident of Brookline, where she lives with her husband and five children.

Legal and Legislative Matters:

Legal and Legislative Matters: Special Education School Communities: Mid-Year Issues

CONTEXT SETTING:

Special Education Laws, Regulations, Advisories and guide special education teams in determining student eligibility for special education services and school district responsibilities. Keeping updated on, focused and proactive in support of special education administration improves school district capacities to support students with disabilities. Our goal is to remain mindful of meeting the needs of students with disabilities in a challenging educational environment. Mid-Year brings special and unique challenges to the process.

FOCUS:

The presentation will focus on trends and current typical administrative challenges and opportunities in meeting the mandate to serve and provide for special education students. The session will highlight proactive strategies and techniques for school special education teams in ensuring legal compliance. The session will highlight recent BSEA decisions and any legislative updates and DESE guidance updates.



Paige L. Tobin, Esq. Murphy, Lamere and Murphy, PC, special education counsel to Massachusetts School districts and consultant to ASE

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Neurodiversity: Understanding Its Relevance to Brain Functioning and Disabilities

CONTEXT SETTING: Neurodiversity: Although the term is not new, it is increasingly becoming the (practiced) nomenclature in the field of special education, with specific respect to autism spectrum disorders, specific learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorders.

FOCUS: Neurodiversity is the “new” diversity nomenclature in our schools that all educators must be aware of. Yes, it is a fact. We all know that no two brains are the same, but neurodiversity is so much more! Join Dr. Adam Lalor, Vice President for Neurodiversity Research and Innovation at Landmark College, [to hear a presentation](#) about neurodiversity and its implications for education. Attendees will learn about neurodiversity, the profiles that comprise it, how to approach it in the classroom, and strategies for supporting neurodiverse learners in the classroom.



Dr. Adam Lalor, Vice President for Neurodiversity Research and Innovation at Landmark College

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Gender Diversity: Creating positive and strengths-based school and team leadership practices that are proactive in supporting gender diversity

CONTEXT SETTING:

Creating a school culture of respect that embraces all students is a given, a right and responsibility of all schools. To do so creates a school community that is enriched by all its members.

FOCUS:

This session will focus on the terminology, best practices, and opportunities for school leaders in educating, responding to and fostering the unique needs of gender diverse students in our school communities. Participants will gain strategies, techniques, and resources in strengthening support systems for students who identify as gender diverse.



Jeff Perrotti, Founding Director of the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students, a collaboration of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (DESE), author and consultant
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DESE:

Mid-Year: Challenges and Opportunities for School Communities

CONTEXT SETTING:

Strengthening outcomes for students with disabilities is the primary focus of special education school teams and administrators, across the continuum of schools and programs serving Massachusetts students. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is in continuous efforts to provide the necessary information to school communities to the needs of students.

FOCUS:

This presentation will focus on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) timely and relevant mid-year information for school communities, special education teams and administrative leaders in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. The session will highlight a range of DESE advisories, guidance and current initiatives to support strengthening mid-year school outcomes, including updates that effect end of the year special education practices. The presentation will also address efforts to strengthen collaboration with other student advocacy agencies relating to mid-year.



Dr. Russell Johnston, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner and State Director of Special Education, The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, former; MA Superintendent of Schools, Special Education Director, special education teacher

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Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEI):

Shifting Racial Inequity in Special Education: The Urgent Need for Race Conscious Remedies A National and Local Issue

CONTEXT SETTING: We are experiencing a crisis at the national and local level regarding the intersection of race and disability in our educational system. The scope of this problem was reflected in a study, *Disabling Inequity*, published in November 2021 by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, an initiative of UCLA's Civil Rights Project. The report is a call to action to address the lack of awareness and knowledge regarding significant disparities in special education as regards children and youth of color. These issues, which have been dramatically exacerbated by the social disconnection related to the pandemic, include critical questions regarding eligibility for special education services, inclusion versus separation and the quality of alternative educational programming, and the trend to view Black and Brown boys disproportionately as being misdiagnosed as having emotional and behavioral disorders. This latter issue was poignantly addressed in a November 20, 2022 Boston Globe article, *New Special Education Report Raises Questions About Bias Against Boston's Black and Latino Boys*. This subject implicates important system issues regarding race, class, and opportunity. There is a critical need to address these issues., see e.g., *Racial Inequity in Special Education*, Editors Daniel Losen and Gary Orfield 2002, and *The New Racial Disparity in Special Education*, Caroline Brooks, *The Educator*. These issues are relatively under-reported but a critical part of the school-to-prison pipeline.

FOCUS:

This presentation is designed to be descriptive- in outlining the scope of the problem- and prescriptive and candid about developing remedies that address systemic as well as implicit or unconscious bias. It is imperative that we embrace strategies that promote equity for all of our children in all contexts. Doing is vital not only for positive youth development, but to best protect public safety. Research has demonstrated that youth who are tracked into alternative education programming or who are inappropriately categorized as behavioral problems are much more likely to drop out given what experts have called the "benign bigotry of low expectations." Students who do not graduate high school are five to eight times more likely to later enter our juvenile and criminal systems, see e.g., *Arrested Futures*, ACLU-Citizens for Juvenile Justice, 2012.



Jay Blitzman, First Justice of the Middlesex Division of the Massachusetts Juvenile Court (Ret), Interim Executive Director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Children, Lecturer at Harvard, Northeastern University, and Boston College Law School, Faculty Member of the Center for Law Brain & Behavior (M.G.H.-Harvard Medical School), Boston University Center for Antiracism Research, Founder and First Director of the Roxbury Youth Advocacy Project, Co-Founder of MA Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CFJJ), Advisory Board Member, UTEC Lowell, MA, Massachusetts Access to Justice Fellow with More Than Words (MTW)

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The Massachusetts Problem Resolution System (PRS) Process: From Mystique to Understanding

CONTEXT SETTING: The Federal Office of Special Education requires states to implement a Problem Resolution System for special education. The Massachusetts State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is implementing the PRS process accepting complaints from parents and other entities regarding special education. DESE has developed procedures and processes for PRS. LEAs are responsible to respond to the complaints.

FOCUS: Will provide an overview of the (DESE) PRS operation and a step-by-step review of the way cases are handled regarding special education in PRS from receipt to issuance of a closing letter. Participants will learn the purpose of PRS, the overall parameters guiding PRS decisions including the newly designed PRS procedures and the trends in PRS complaints. The presentation will highlight strategies and techniques for LEAs in responding to PRS complaints and PRS district findings.

Barry Barnett, Director, Problem Resolution Systems Office, The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

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“In diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”
-Maya Angelou