



**October 30, 2020 Virtual Conference**

***Starting the School Year Informed and Strength-Based:  
What Every Special Education Administrator and School Team Needs to Know,  
Especially During COVID-19.***

**Featuring Presentations by Experts/Leaders in Education,  
School Health, Law and Legislation  
Champions & Trusted Experts in Education and Special Education**



**Featured Presentation**  
***COVID-19 and State Legislation:  
From the Perspective of a Massachusetts State Senator***

**SESSION FOCUS:**

This session will provide a discussion on the hot topics and concerns specific to State legislation and the status of Education Bills and needs, including legislation that Senator DiDomenico supports regarding Social/Emotional Learning. The session will highlight the process for moving forward with the challenges and opportunities of proposed education related bills, the potential impact of COVID-19 on overall education funding, and the potential for support from State and Federal sources.

**PRESENTER:**

**Senator Sal DiDomenico** has served a diverse Massachusetts' district that includes the communities of Everett, Chelsea, Charlestown, as well as sections of Allston-Brighton, Cambridge and the West End of Boston, since 2010. In addition to his various committee assignments, he currently serves as the Assistant Majority Leader of the Massachusetts Senate.



**A Welcome Message**  
***Special Education Leadership during COVID-19:  
Targeted Updates on Mandates, Regulations and Advisories***

**PRESENTER:**

**Dr. Russell Johnston**, Senior Associate Commissioner of The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), State Director of Special Education, former (MA) special education teacher, Special Education Administrator and Massachusetts School Superintendent



***COVID-19 and the Re-Opening of Our Schools:  
Commentary from the Director of School Health Services,  
Massachusetts' Department of Public Health Services***

**CONTEXT SETTING**

As families, school administrators and policymakers make decisions about their children returning to school, it is important to consider the full spectrum of benefits and risks of both in-person and virtual learning options. Parents are understandably concerned about the safety of their children at school in the wake of COVID-19. At the same time, the potential impact of closed schools on the social, emotional, and behavioral health, economic well-being, and academic achievement of children, in both the short- and long-term pose significant concerns as well. As decisions are being made regarding the return to school, it is important for all involved (school administrators, teachers, health care staff, and the larger community) to be aware of and consider the full spectrum of risks involved in both in-person and virtual learning options.

**SESSION FOCUS**

We all share the varying degrees of anxiety as we begin to develop a "new normal" regarding public education and, more specifically, the provision of specialized instruction to our special education students. This session will provide the current "health/safety related coaching" to share with your district in order to assist in providing school administrators with appropriate and accurate health precaution information regarding staff anxiety, student and personal health concerns, and parental anxiety/health/safety concerns.

Discussion will include how school staff (including school nurses) make use of current, "best-practice" protocols when dealing with students/families that choose to do "in-person" or hybrid plans (part-time virtual / part-time in-person). There will be some focus specific to protocols needed for the provision of special education transportation.

**PRESENTER**

***Karen Robitaille, MBA, MSN, RN, NCSN***, Director of School Health, Massachusetts Department of Public Health



***A Call to Action:  
Addressing Social Justice, Equity, SEL and Schools***

**CONTEXT SETTING**

There is a great need in our country and in our State to recognize the demand for social justice and equity in our schools and we need to do something about it NOW! As school administrative leaders and educators, we have an obligation to bring the issues of social justice and equity to the forefront of our leadership. Social justice and equity must be central to discussions around whole school efforts designed to meet the needs of all learners. Our charge is to responsibly educate and empower all of our students. There are many challenges, as well as many opportunities, as we move this critical educational need to an advanced awareness and provide the conditions for student success!

**SESSION FOCUS**

This session will focus on discussing the systemic issues of social justice and equity in our schools, the impact of these barriers, and the unintended consequences to student achievement and student well-being. The discussion will put a spotlight on the intersection of social justice and equity through the social and emotional learning lens. It will include a proactive approach to building systems capacities in our public schools that are culturally responsive, expansive, and accountable.

Participants will learn strategies and techniques necessary to identify the multiple barriers to social justice and equity and for using SEL as the pathway to social justice and equity in our schools. Social and emotional learning emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and is student centered and student empowering. A key take-away: Equity and Equality are not Equal.

**PRESENTER**

*Kamilah Drummond-Forrester, M.A., C.A.G.S., MRC*, Assumption College, Director of Open Circle, facilitator with the National SEED Project of the Wellesley Centers for Women, consultant and trainer to public school districts, equity/diversity expert. Email: [kdrummon@wellesley.edu](mailto:kdrummon@wellesley.edu)



***In the Year of COVID-19, Legal and Legislative Matters Matter,  
Especially in Special Education***

**CONTEXT SETTING**

During this unprecedented school year, the legal and regulatory issues of special education have been complex and ever changing. Massachusetts school district leaders and administrators have worked with continued rigor in providing remote learning for students while managing the uncertainty of school building closures due to the public health crisis.

As schools begin the new COVID-19 school year, special education will continue to be a primary focus in public schools with the need for continued vigilance in meeting mandates, regulatory requirements and advisories.

**SESSION FOCUS**

This conference segment will highlight the current legal, legislative and advisories necessary in providing strength-based decision making during flexible models of remote, hybrid and in person educational teaching and learning environments. The presentation will reference student evaluations, time-lines, compensatory services, staff and family communication documentation. There will be discussion on current “hot topics,” such as education law and MA DESE special education advisories. Also included will be commentary on BSEA, PRS and other related special education areas of import.

Additionally, discussion will provide highlights of ASE Advocacy work regarding legal, legislative, regulatory and advisory efforts during COVID-19, including discussion on future and on-going special education administrative advocacy efforts for student and school district needs in managing COVID-19 special education.

**PRESENTER**

*Paige Tobin, Esq.*, Murphy, Lamere and Murphy, PC., legal and legislative expert in special education, counsel to Massachusetts school districts and consultant to the Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education. Contact: Murphy, Lamere and Murphy, P.C., 781-848-1850, email [ptobin@mlmlawfirm.org](mailto:ptobin@mlmlawfirm.org)



***Students’ SEL and School Re-Entry:  
The Potential Impact of Trauma/Anxiety***

**CONTEXT SETTING**

The social, emotional well-being and mental health of Massachusetts Students and supporting them is a **top priority** for school teams as students begin the new school year following an abrupt closing of school buildings due to COVID-19. School plans should include a variety of pathways to evaluate the needs of students who will be facing a new normal school year, with potential hybrid learning structures and potential school closings due to public health needs. Schools will need to be responsive to student needs in new and flexible ways given the unprecedented school conditions.

## SESSION FOCUS

Discussion specific to effective evaluative screening, assessment and strategies in determining the impact of the pandemic on previous symptoms and/or new symptoms of trauma and/or anxiety in order to inform school practices for delivery of services to students with disabilities and the necessary interventions needed to support them. Additionally, this session will highlight responsive practices necessary to engaging students in learning and effective ways to communicate student needs to families. Participants will learn practical tools for student assessment and school intervention services for school-based teams.

## PRESENTER

*Jean Lindquist Grady, Psy.D.*, Clinical Director, Central Massachusetts Collaborative, expert regarding student assessment and services. Email: [jlgrady@cmasscollaborative.org](mailto:jlgrady@cmasscollaborative.org)



## *IEPs in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond*

## CONTEXT SETTING

Coronavirus has resulted in a myriad of issues that all of us must face. Special educators face additional challenges with the need to provide ongoing individualized instruction and support and the need to continue IEP services, IEP development, progress monitoring, and annual and 3-year re-evaluations during our current situation. Instruction and support with school building closures in mid-March 2020 have continued remotely in synchronous and asynchronous formats. These require progress monitoring approaches that result in accurate reports even though the full traditional model may be different at times due to public health needs.

IEP writing and development should always be based on solid, best practices such as observable and measurable goals and objectives, goals based upon needs that arise from the disability, and clearly defined specially designed instruction. IEPs during the time of COVID have revealed issues when less-than-best practices are employed.

Challenges with progress monitoring and reporting compound when goals and objectives are based upon curriculum and services rather than on areas of need related to the disability or when goals and objectives are in less than observable and measurable format. Additionally, the difference among accommodations, modifications and specially designed instruction has not always been distinct and provision of these remotely is confusing when they become co-mingled.

## SESSION FOCUS

This session will provide guidance in keeping the “I” in Individualized Educational Programs and proactive practices for special education team decision-making for remote learning as well as in-person learning. Discussion will illustrate proposals, strategies, and suggestions for IEP development, progress monitoring and 3-year reevaluations that are student-based, best practice oriented, structured to specifically designed instruction and aligned with requirements set forth by DESE.

## PRESENTER

*Allan S. Blume, M.Ed., Ed. S.*, consultant to school districts, expert in special education IEP development. Email: [Jpallan1969@gmail.com](mailto:Jpallan1969@gmail.com)

## **MASSACHUSETTS ADMINISTRATORS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

*“In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity”*

-Sun-Tzu, Ancient Chinese military strategist, general, writer & philosopher

