



April 2019

MARS Newsletter

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARS Annual Meeting
Wednesday, May 29, 9:30-11:30
Assabet Valley Regional Voc-Tech

MARS Executive Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 29, 11:30-1:30
Assabet Valley Regional Voc-Tech

EOY Financial Report Training
Tuesday, June 4, 8:00-12:00
Assabet Valley Regional Voc-Tech

E&D Balance Sheet Prep. Training
Thursday, June 6, 8:30-12:00
Assabet Valley Regional Voc-Tech

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools is to promote the best possible educational opportunities for students attending regional schools throughout the Commonwealth.

In order to fulfill this mission, the Association will study and seek solutions to regional problems and provide for closer cooperation among and effective communication between all administrators and school committees of regional school districts.

MARS TESTIFIES AT BILL HEARING

On April 9th, a contingent of MARS members testified before the Educational Committee in support of Senator Adam Hinds' bill regarding funding for rural schools. Superintendent Michael Buoniconti (Mohawk RSD), Superintendent Sheila Muir (Quabbin RSD), Maureen Marshall (MARS Asst. Exec. Dir.) and Superintendent Tari Thomas (Ralph C. Mahar RSD) spoke eloquently about the growing difficulty in managing rural schools, most of which are experiencing declining enrollments. A consistent part of the message was the lack of economy of scale in rural schools, leading to higher costs amid declining ability for rural towns to fund their schools.

GOOD NEWS FOR REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEES

In 2014, Section 16A of Chapter 71 of MA General Laws was amended to allow school committees to appoint one of its members to sign warrants. Because the language did not specifically mention regional schools, this change from a mandatory three-person signing to a single signer did not apply to regional schools. House Bill 271, approved on January 10, 2019, addressed this oversight. The second paragraph of the law now reads: *"The regional school committee may designate any 1 of its members for the purpose of signing payroll warrants and accounts payable warrants to allow for the release of checks provided, however, that the member shall make available to the board, at its next meeting, a record of such actions. This provision shall not limit the responsibility of each member of the board in the event of a noncompliance with this section."* Thank you to our legislators, Bradford Hill, Timothy Whelan and David Linsky, who proposed this legislation.

PROPOSED EDUCATIONAL AMENDMENTS FAIL IN HOUSE BUDGET

On Monday, April 22nd, the House rejected the following amendments:

- #846 - Change Circuit Breaker reimbursement from 4x to 3x the state average of foundation budget per pupil
- #932 - Increase Regional Transportation by \$4.6M to bring to 100% reimbursement
- #992 - Increase minimum per pupil aid from \$30 to \$50
- #1150 - Provide \$9M in aid to rural schools
- #1279 - Increase Chapter 70 aid by \$100M
- #1360 - Increase Educational Reserve by \$5M

While this was disappointing, we are very appreciative of the efforts that went into what was accomplished. As MARS encouraged, colleagues lobbied for an increase in Chapter 70 (over and above the Governor's amount). Resultantly, the House supported \$30 per pupil base funding. Hopefully this sets the table for greater support by the Senate. Most significantly, with MARS advocacy, the House increased regional transportation to an 80% reimbursement level.

MARS CONSULTANTING GROUP

Can help you:

Update Regional Agreement

Envision District Future

Form Regional School District

Expand/Contract Existing Regional District

Assess District Fiscal Stability

Assist District working with MSBA

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Contact Us

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Can Excess and Deficiency Funds (E&D) be used as a funding source for FY2020?

A. Yes and no.

Yes, if the E&D is certified by the Department of Revenue (DOR) prior to the School Committee adopting the budget and submitting it to the local appropriating authority for the assessment vote.

No, if the E&D has not been certified by DOR prior to the vote. If the District seeks to use E&D after the vote, it must follow the procedures outlined in the statute. Such action may impact local assessments.

The ability to appropriate E&D expires on June 30.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

1. **Preparing the Balance Sheet for E&D or Free Cash Certification.** This training is for anyone who is involved in filling out the district's or municipal End-of-Year Report: new and no so new business officials, town accountants, controllers, auditors and finance directors. This first of two days will be offered on June 4, 2019 from 8:30-12:00 noon at Assabet Valley Regional Vocational High School
2. **Completing the DESE FY19 End-of-Year Financial Report.** Learn about and work on the completion of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's required End-of-Year Report (EOYR). This is day one of a two-day workshop designed for anyone involved in filling out the district's EOY Report and is especially beneficial for those who are new to their financial role in the district.

For more information and/or registration for either or both trainings, please go to: http://www.theabrahamsgroup.com/Courses_Balance_Sheet

NEXT MARS MEETINGS

Due to a scheduling conflict with a fellow organization, the meetings are moved from May 14 to May 29

1. MARS Annual Meeting for the Membership
Tuesday, May 14, 2019
9:30-11:30 am
Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School
Lecture Hall
2. MARS Executive Board Meeting
Tuesday, May 14, 2019
11:30 am to 1:30 pm
Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School
Board Room