

## Welcome 2021: A New Year's Message from MAAPS

### Eds, Meds ... and Special Ed

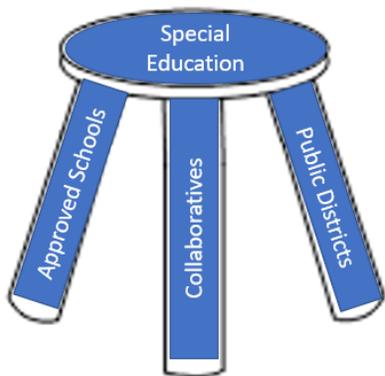
Did you know that Massachusetts is known as the “eds and meds” state? It is a nickname that we should be proud of, especially in a global pandemic. Institutions of higher education (“eds”) and medical facilities (“meds”) are part of what keeps Massachusetts moving forward, as best we can, during this crisis.

We are all deeply grateful to the essential medical workers who keep us safe. And it is thanks to the work of teams of people at Massachusetts-based Moderna that we have a vaccine for COVID-19, which I plan to take at my earliest opportunity.



On the “eds” side of the state moniker are, of course, our remarkable universities. But often overlooked, and yet exceptionally important, are the other “eds” that make Massachusetts so distinctive: Our Commonwealth’s extraordinary special education system.

**Massachusetts should also be known as the “special ed” state.** In Massachusetts, we should all be proud of our special education system. We have world-renowned special education schools. These special education schools are staffed by amazing workers, who have been on-campus educating students throughout the pandemic.



### Continuum of Services

I like to think of special education as a stool with three legs, each leg an option available to students to meet their unique needs. Public schools educate most special education students, but for some learners with more specialized needs, an Educational Collaborative or an Approved Special Education School (day or residential) is the right option. Collectively, all three serve public school students and are licensed and approved by the state and publicly funded.

The state’s most recent data shows that 50% of students in

Massachusetts are considered “high needs” at this time, so a continuum of services is needed now more than ever. Massachusetts should be applauded for this spectrum of services for students with high needs, including education options for some of our most vulnerable students.

## **Special Education Schools have been educating children in person nearly the entire pandemic**

Early on in the pandemic, Governor Baker's Administration acknowledged that for some students with special education needs, remaining at school is the safest option for them. With support from the Baker Administration, Residential Schools for students with special needs have remained open throughout the pandemic. In fact, since July 95% of Approved Special Education Schools have been educating students on campus. Approved Special Education Day Schools and Educational Collaboratives, which are the proper learning environment for some of our most challenged learners, reopened campuses as early as July, and are serving most students in a hybrid or fully in-person educational model.



*School nurses at Melmark New England, an Approved Special Education School, in March 2020*

### **Federal Stimulus is Needed to Keep the Special Education System Operational**

Of course, to educate special-education students in-person during a pandemic comes with many health and safety precautions, including the need for added staffing hours, protective equipment, and facility changes. We cannot expect and require specialized schools to be and remain open without giving them the tools they need to operate safely. Several schools are under deep financial strain now, and some have had to close or merge. It will be a sad outcome indeed if the special education schools we have fought so hard to keep operational during this pandemic cannot make it through the pandemic.

### **Hope for Better in 2021**

From federal stimulus to vaccine opportunities, there is reason for hope in 2021. While the impacts of 2020 will be with us for some time, there is also room for gratitude. In 2020, we witnessed so many heroes who dedicated themselves to others – hospital workers, in-home care personnel, vaccine creators, bus drivers, grocery store workers, and many more. The essential workers at Special Education Schools should be celebrated among the heroes of 2020. After all, we are the Eds, Meds, and Special Ed state.

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