

New Beginnings, New Goals: An Interview with Greg Pronevitz

by Gerri Fegan, MSLA President



On July 2, 2010, I had the pleasure of interviewing Greg Pronevitz, the new Executive Director of the Massachusetts Library System, to discuss the organizational transition and MSLA's relationship. I thank Greg for his candor, humor, and for his support of school libraries.



Gerri: *What is the most urgent agenda item?*

Greg: The immediate concerns are filling [staff] positions. Yesterday we had our first staff meeting with everyone except the delivery specialists, and it was such a good atmosphere that after the merger and hard times, everyone was ready to move ahead. The big thrust for training will be in the fall. We'll start moving content to the website from the regions.

Gerri: *This has been a challenging year, but we all agree that the grace during this transition has been noteworthy.*

Greg: The staff has been wonderful about this. It was an emotional rollercoaster and people were relieved when it finally ended.

Gerri: *How will services change with two offices?*

Greg: Right – the office in Waltham and one in Whately. The model for MLS advisors, what we used to call trainer-consultant, is that they will spend a lot of their time working from home and working in libraries and at different events around the state.

Gerri: *What will be their duties?*

Greg: Their duties will be to provide training in response to user needs, both themselves and hiring outside trainers. They will also be doing advisory services so they can respond by phone, email, or in person, or in meetings to address the needs of libraries in different areas.

Gerri: *What about Youth Services?*

Greg: We have Sarah Sogjian who specializes in youth services.

Gerri: And this year we have three school librarians on the MLS board. This is wonderful. What will be their roles?

Greg: All of the board members will be establishing policies for MLS, making decisions about our budget and our future. The staff has been going crazy over the past few months trying to get the organization started, though I think they're taking a little breather now. It's been a long road. So I'm putting together an agenda for our first board meeting on July 22nd in which I will be executive director. I am thrilled to have the privilege to be in this position.

We will be advertising our advisory services and getting all the other services out the door.

Another really important thing that we're working on is looking for statewide online content, the databases. We have a substantial budget for that and we're looking for something to implement as soon as possible that would supplement the Gale and ProQuest contracts.

They're planned to continue for two more years, but in addition to that, each of the regions renewed a lot from the selections they had and that will go on. We're looking to add something hopefully by the fall to the statewide license.

Another priority that might interest schools is the MassCat project. The MassCat project was brought forward from the regions and it was considered a priority by the transition team. This is one of the services that's going to benefit from the merger because now MassCat is much easier to manage. Nora Blake, our MassCat manager for many years, will lead the charge and we're going to have some other people helping her with training and support. We think we can expand MassCat more easily so school libraries may be more interested in learning about the opportunities there. We want to find ways to encourage schools to join MassCat.

Gerri: *The audience for your efforts may not be the school librarians, but the administrators who determine the technology used in school libraries, the superintendents, principals and heads of technology. This type of decision comes from the top down.*

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SCHOOL LIBRARY

CERTIFICATION: *I'd like to develop an easier way to do it. If we could find a way to get an authoritative statement from a principal online, that might be the best way.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: *We want to have professional development in all of the six regions. Let's work on this together – this makes sense. Together we can reach more people with important information.*

ADVOCACY: *It's time to focus on school library issues. We want to help advocacy efforts for MSLA.*

Greg: How do we reach those people?

Geri: *If it comes from the Commissioner of Education, if it is discussed on the superintendents and principals listserv and contains professional development for administrators, they can make decisions in favor of MassCat.*

Greg: The other thing that we haven't tackled right away is the school library certification. Some of the regions have done it recently, some have not done it recently because of the changes going on, but we need to get back on track doing that. If we could find a way to get an authoritative statement from a principal online, that might be the best way

Geri: *We can help! We have worked to create a statewide database of all Massachusetts schools that include the names of school librarians working in our schools. It was created using the SIMS database from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Is there any way this database can help?*

Greg: When we do a mailing, we mail to the principal and we send a copy to the library teacher. It's usually the library teacher who stimulates the form being filled out. We need the signature of the principal on the form. They're the ones who certify that the school has the appropriate staffing for membership so it has to go to them. We'd like to do it electronically, so if there's a way to get the email addresses of the principals, that would be useful.

Geri: *That's available through the DESE and through the MESSA listserv. And I would think that every school librarian should be on the lookout for this survey.*

Greg: Another useful thing would be to find an easy way to report student population, or size, of all members. When I go to a vendor and say I need a statewide price, they're going to ask for the population. I'm not sure how that's going to affect licensing in the future because of the geo-location system that's being implemented in the state. That may reduce the value of an MLS membership for superintendents and principals, but they can offer it because it's available. The training that would come from MLS wouldn't be available if the school is not a member.

The other thing we'd like to work with MSLA on is having a presence at your conference. We'd love to have a chance to talk to your members about us.

Geri: *We will be introducing you at our Monday morning keynote address, and there will be a special luncheon table set up for you. It is our pleasure to have you at our conference.*

Let's talk about professional development. We have kept the regional structure on our board this year.

Greg: We want to have professional development in all of the six regions. Let's work on this together – this makes sense. Together we can reach more people with important information. MSLA has been so supportive of the needs of public libraries that it's time to focus on school library issues. We want to help in advocacy efforts for MSLA.

Geri: *We have a new legislative chair, Julie Farrell, who can share our goals with MLS. Thank you for your kind words and for everything you've shared today. I'm sure our members will look forward to our collaborative advocacy efforts.*

June 1, 2010

Press Release

from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners



MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF
Library Commissioners

Pronevitz named Massachusetts Library System Executive Director

The Executive Board of the Massachusetts Library System (MLS) is pleased to announce that it has selected Gregory Pronevitz as the first MLS Executive Director. Mr. Pronevitz will assume his new role on July 1, 2010 when the new Massachusetts Library System begins operating as the sole provider of regional library services for the Commonwealth's libraries. These services were previously delivered by six regional library systems but FY2011 state budget reductions necessitated restructuring and consolidation into one system.

Approaching library issues from a statewide perspective is not new for Mr. Pronevitz. He has been a key leader in many statewide projects that benefit libraries across the Commonwealth such as the Massachusetts Statewide Delivery Committee and its Autosort RFP Task Force, the MassCat shared ILS for smaller libraries, and the Digital Commonwealth, a portal to the digital content of Massachusetts cultural institutions. Prior to his position at NMRLS, which he held for twelve years, Mr. Pronevitz was director of library technologies at OHIONET, Ohio's OCLC network, where he managed OCLC training and support, a shared ILS for academic libraries, a statewide training program for public libraries, and internal IT services. In addition, he has nine years of professional and management experience in academic and special libraries.

The entire fifteen-member MLS Executive Board selected Mr. Pronevitz after an extensive search, review, and interview process in which, at a final interview, the three leading candidates presented their vision for MLS. These presentations and the questions that followed were streamed live or the web.