

## The State of Our Union... By Sandy Kelly, Immediate Past President

As the MSLA board changes and the presidency is now in Gerri Fegan's capable hands, it is time to reflect on some of the events that have shaped our association over the past two years. I have had the opportunity to meet and work with some of the finest school library educators in the state and our country. MSLA now has over 800 members, a new name and an updated logo celebrating its third birthday at the 2009 conference. It has gone by quickly. Change and progress in education comes in small increments but ultimately these changes can have a lasting impact.

**The MSLA Vision Statement** sets out lofty goals and they have been difficult to reach. However, achieving rigorous standards and high expectations are worth our every effort for the positive impact they will have on our children's future. A poor economy, changes in leadership in our state and at the national level have continued to impede education issues. I have learned over the years that good things seldom come easily and neatly packaged. More importantly, I have had the good fortune to work with a stellar Executive Board toward these goals. I extend a heartfelt thanks to all of our board members and to our Executive Director, Kathy Lowe; you have made immeasurable contributions to our association over the past two years of my presidency.

In order to achieve our vision we must have "school library programs that are fully integrated into the instructional program." They must "provide for all students' educational needs," and be managed by credentialed staff to "provide resources and instruction that promote students' achievement." MSLA has developed new liaisons and built collaborative relationships in an attempt to create broad support for this vision.

**Legislatively we have developed a strong presence at the State House** and jointly with MLA have lobbied consistently each April for better school and public libraries. Many members have nurtured contacts with their local representatives and senators with phone calls and by attending legislative breakfasts. This enabled us to

impress the Education Committee at the State House when we testified to get HB 564 through the Legislature. The bill failed due to the committee's reluctance to open the Chapter 70 laws. At that time, the Governor's Readiness project had begun their deliberations and they believed that many such issues would be addressed by reopening Ch70 at a later date. A new Library Caucus is in place at the State House, ready to advocate for the needs of school and public libraries. A new Education Committee with new leadership has been briefed about the needs of school libraries and the stage is set to move our initiatives forward when the time is right. Nationally, MSLA had a strong presence on Capitol Hill in Washington DC when Senator Jack Reed proposed the SKILLS Act requiring a school library teacher in every school by the year 2011.

Here at home, we have established good rapport with **Governor Patrick's office** and many of us attended and spoke at his transition team meetings when he entered office. Since that time we have also attended Town Meetings that he has held. Kathy Lowe, Gerri Fegan and I were present at the release of the Governor's Readiness Committee report. Kathy and I also held positions on the P21 Advisory Committee and were able to bring the importance and relevance of information literacy skills and school libraries before the committee. As the Governor deals with devastating fiscal issues, and attempts to begin implementing some of the Readiness initiatives, we will continue to collaborate with our other supporters.

MSLA had supporters present at the majority of **Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE)** meetings during the past school year. These advocates included students, parents, MSLA members and a superintendent who spoke on behalf of the need for strong school libraries. We were pleased that the BESE accepted our invitation to hold their April meeting at the Chelmsford High School new Learning Commons. "More than ever," we need to demonstrate for our educational leaders what good school library programs and good information

literacy teaching looks like. Our Standards Chair, Valerie Diggs hosted this event. Valerie has also been an active participant in the latest revision of the English Language Arts Frameworks, soon to be released.



Our new **Commissioner of Education, Dr. Mitchell Chester**, has graciously welcomed us twice to his office to discuss school libraries. Our recent interview with him is included in this MSLA Forum. Dr. Chester supports strong educational programs that will impact student achievement and critical thinking, particularly in areas of English Language Learners, students with disabilities and underperforming schools based on ethnicity. We look forward to recognizing Dr. Chester for his generosity of time, interest in our work and support of strong educational programs at our Sunday conference dinner on October 5<sup>th</sup>. He is intelligent, a good listener, and understands good educational practice. Dr. Julia Phelps, the new DESE Director of Curriculum, will also join us. Dr. Phelps became an advocate of school libraries when working as an administrator in districts with good programs. Dr. Phelps has agreed to assist us in gathering data that might currently exist on the state of school libraries in the Commonwealth.

MSLA recently formed **collaborations with MTA and the Massachusetts PTA**. Clare O'Neill, Patsy Divver, Ann Collins and Heather Macpherson attended the annual Massachusetts Teachers Association conference and presented *A Resolution in Support of School Libraries*, which passed unanimously. The resolution was written by MSLA Advocacy chair, Judi Paradis. We will work with MTA President Ann Wass to provide as much detail and documentation in support of our goals in the fall. A representative of the Massachusetts PTA attended one of our board meetings and they provided a letter in support of school libraries to the Board of Education.

MassCUE joined with MSLA in 2007, approving a **joint statement** that encourages cooperation, resource sharing, and supporting one another. It defines our common goals and sets the stage for similarities and differences in our jobs. The new MSLA revised standards document will include an appendix that cross references the information literacy skills with the informational technology skills that DESE approved as recommended technology standards for students.

MassCUE President Annamaria Schrimph extended an invitation to our members to present at their joint conference next October to be held at Gillette Stadium with the MA Association of Superintendents. Seizing the opportunity to share our expertise with superintendents from all around the state, we have many MSLA members who will present:

- ❖ **Kathy Lowe** will deliver *School Libraries: Learning4Life*.™ Kathy is now an official AASL L4L trainer. Her workshop will provide an overview of the *AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and demonstrate how content learning is advanced when school library media specialists and classroom teachers in the context of classroom curricula teach 21st century skills.
- ❖ **Pat Fontes** will have a presentation entitled *Promoting and Teaching Ethical Research Using NoodleTools*.
- ❖ **Chris Steinhauser** will demonstrate curriculum collaboration with a team of teachers showing how to use wikis to give students a more global platform for their research.
- ❖ **Linda Redding and Vicki Wright** have a program entitled *Students as Producers and Consumers of Digital Content*.
- ❖ **Joan Collins** has a collaborative project, *Global Literature Circles with Technology*. Her team has transformed the traditional literature circle by doing everything online: country and author research; book discussion in Moodle; communication using Skype.
- ❖ **Heather Macpherson** presents, *PQARs & the Research Process Using Technology Literacy & Wikis*

Each of these members will model for our administrators what most of us do in our daily jobs to promote 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. MSLA will also have a table and slideshow running called *A Day in the Life of a School Librarian*. We are grateful to MassCUE for their gracious inclusion.

As individual members, we are all responsible to support the Vision and Mission of MSLA by modeling daily our

skills and knowledge for students, teachers, administrators and parents. Our collective efforts to demonstrate and tout our own abilities will move us all closer to success of our goals. I hope every member stays connected, networking with your colleagues and keeping the MSLA board informed of your achievements and needs.

**Please remember:  
TOGETHER, WE ARE STRONG**

### Speaking up for School Libraries by Sandy Kelly

The March issue of *Educational Leadership*, the journal of the American Association of Curriculum and Instruction (ASCD) published an article, "What Research Says About ... Media Literacy," by Jane L. David. Ms. David states, "One of the most basic strands of media literacy emphasizes the skills and knowledge students need to locate and critically assess online content." In her summary of the research available on teaching critical thinking skills, web evaluation and the different skills students need to read digital information versus print there was no mention of school library teachers or the research available on the impact of school libraries on student learning.

In response to this oversight I submitted a letter to ASCD and am please to know it was published in the June issue. My letter expressed my concern that many educators in leadership positions have never been exposed to quality school-library media programs staffed by certified school library teachers. I referenced the Scholastic monograph, *School Libraries Work*, the new *AASL Standards for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners* and the new *L4L, Learning for Life* initiative, which is the AASL implementation plan for the new standards. I stated, "Good school library teachers and media specialists have extensive education and teaching experience on the issues you have addressed in your article such as website evaluation, proper and ethical use of the wide range of print and electronic resources available to our students today, and much, much more."

#### Read Ms. David's article:

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/mar09/vol66/num06/Teaching\\_Media\\_Literacy.asp](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/mar09/vol66/num06/Teaching_Media_Literacy.asp)

#### Read my letter in its entirety:

<http://r.smartbrief.com/resp/qZhQdyvanAasgTCibSwCCicNVMpT>