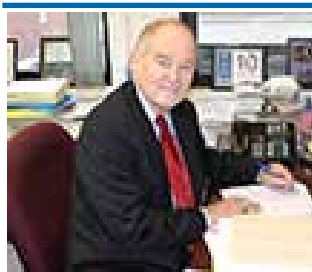




The Advocate



April 2014



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Keep the Cap on Charter Schools

During 2013 and 2014, the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) has vigorously opposed raising the cap on charter schools. Raising the cap will take much needed resources away from students in the regular public schools, and the impact is greatest in the urban public schools where the number of students living in poverty abounds.

However, our concerns do not end there. Generally, charter schools do not enroll a proportionate number of English language learner and special needs students. Of course, the regular public schools educate all comers.

We strongly believe that all those working in public schools (the law defines charter schools as public schools) should meet the standards set by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. However, while licensure is required of teachers in the regular public schools, teachers in charter schools need not be licensed.

Of course, we believe that all educators need to be treated fairly. Since the overwhelming number of teachers in charter schools are unlicensed, they are not entitled to professional teacher status. Teachers in charter schools need to be licensed and need to be eligible for professional status.

We shall continue to oppose raising the cap on charter schools.

Below are two letters to the editor I

wrote. The first one is to *The Boston Globe*; the second to *The Boston Herald*. Neither was published.

Also below is an op-ed article written for the *Globe* by Ed Doherty, Assistant to the AFT MA President. As of the writing of this article, it has not been published.

We shall need all of you to participate in this campaign. We shall keep you informed about our activities and how you can participate in the campaign to protect our regular public schools and the students learning there.

Keep the Cap on Charter Schools

In his opinion piece, "Hub lawmakers should listen to voters, not unions," the author seems to imply that members of teachers unions are not the voting public. Of course they are. They work and live in many communities just like everyone else. In fact, educators vote at a very high rate. Like any other American they have a right to speak and, hopefully, to have their voices heard.

Teachers unions are democratic organizations and are one method, but not the only one, teachers use to express their opinions.

Mr. Stergios' claim that "Boston's district schools, the traditional form of public schools, rank in the bottom 10 percent of all schools in the state" is based, I assume, on the results of the MCAS tests. If growth in academic achievement were the measure, Boston schools and many other urban schools would probably not be in the bottom 10 percent. Is not academic growth an important indicator of a school system's success?

Students in Massachusetts are number one on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, a renowned national test. Our students are number one in the western world on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study test.

Even though this is the case, the futures of thousands of our children are still in jeopardy because of the pernicious impact of poverty. Poverty cannot be used as an excuse for educational problems, but it is an impediment to achievement. We must address it. Let's help our students get out of poverty by investing more services and resources in their communities and in the regular public schools which educate the overwhelming number of our students.

Why not try that rather than raising the cap on charter schools?

Thomas J. Gosnell, President
American Federation of Teachers
Massachusetts

Our Students Deserve Better

The Boston Globe editorial entitled "Ed reform has done wonders; it's time for the next round" gives charter schools much attention.

The latest information from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education indicates that many charter schools still have far fewer special education and English language learner students than the regular public schools. The Commonwealth's regular public schools welcome all these students who frequently require many more services than the regular education students so that they can succeed.

Massachusetts has developed demanding licensure requirements for teachers and other educators in the regular public schools. These include passing rigorous exams, completing extensive and ongoing course-

work in content and pedagogy and earning a Master's degree. Except for the need to pass the exams, charter schools teachers are not required to meet the other criteria. In addition, they are not eligible for professional teacher status. They should have to meet the other criteria and be eligible for professional teacher status.

The long-established public schools educate the overwhelming majority of students in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, many of these students live in poverty, and the number is increasing. A campaign to provide these students with decent housing, first rate health and dental care, excellent nutritional services, and safe and secure communities would better enable a great many of these students to achieve academic and life-long success than the removal of the charter school cap would. The time for such a campaign is right now.

Thomas J. Gosnell, President
American Federation of Teachers
Massachusetts

There's More Than One Reason to Keep the Cap on Charter Schools By Ed Doherty

Recently some lawmakers, who have consistently supported charter schools, stood up to the Boston Foundation and placed a road block in the business community's relentless efforts to expand the number of charter schools and promote its corporate education reform agenda. The reason these legislators are hesitant to go along with a further expansion is the tremendous financial drain on traditional public schools. This year alone the Boston Public Schools will lose 87.5 million

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BOSTON STRONG

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dollars to the charters. This devastating impact on our public schools' budgets is reason enough to put the brakes on any expansion of charters. However, there are many more reasons for holding the line on lifting the cap on charter schools.

For example, Massachusetts charter schools enroll a far smaller percentage of English language learners, students with disabilities, and the poorest students (those eligible for free and reduced lunch) than traditional public schools. A report by the Massachusetts Teachers Association found that a group of Boston charter schools, touted in the media as "high performing," enrolled virtually no English language learners; very few students with moderate or severe learning disabilities; and significantly lower percentages of the poorest students. These charter schools leave the most difficult and most costly students to educate in the traditional public schools.

The same MTA report called a group of Boston charters "dropout factories,"

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BIG SHOES TO FILL
AFT MA's Mike Canavan at the GBLC Legislative Breakfast with the boots worn by his late father-in-law, Somerville Firefighter George McCann, in which he collected over \$800 for families of Boston firefighters affected by the tragic fire in the Back Bay (Story on page 2)

Rallying the Troops

Senator Warren returns to be with “brothers and sisters”

As charter school supporters and other well-heeled forces continue to threaten the Labor movement, Labor and legislative leaders from across the Commonwealth came together to refocus their efforts and move forward at the 2014 Greater Boston Labor Council (GBLC) Legislative Breakfast.

On March 31 at the Omni Parker House Hotel, over 300 delegates from across the Labor spectrum gathered as one, along with scores of local, state and national legislative representatives, including Representative Frank Smizik, who sat at one of the AFL MA tables, and Senator Elizabeth Warren, who made a special trip from Washington in order to stand with those who have continued to stand with her and especially those who make the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

“Those people who rushed into that burning building carried union cards,” Senator Warren noted of the two firefighters from Local 718 who died while battling a blaze in the Back Bay just a week before.

“We have a big job to do,” Senator Warren said. “We need to make our voice heard and make it heard loud!”

Echoing the Senator’s rallying cry was Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman who delivered another stirring speech.

“We have a lot of work to do,” Tolman reiterated, “but we know working together is our mission...and that when we work together, we get what we want.”

As for his own “mission,” Tolman claimed that it was to help other communities build their Labor movements into the powerful force enjoyed in the



BACK IN BOSTON Senator Elizabeth Warren speaks at the Greater Boston Labor Council Legislative Breakfast

Greater Boston area. “We need you to stand with us on our issues,” he called, citing such pressing matters as the fight for a fair contract for Lawrence teachers. “The labor movement is on the verge of taking back our cities. We gotta’ lead the fight to take them back!”

During his rousing speech, Tolman also made sure to note the attendance of many former Labor Council officers, including former GBLC Vice President Patricia Armstrong, who graced the AFL MA table with her presence throughout the event.

“He is an exceptional leader,” said current GBLC VP Darlene Lombos of Tolman, citing his support for the growing community-labor partnerships that are helping move labor-friendly issues and advocates forward.

In his opening remarks, GBLC President Rich Rogers reminded the assembled how a young politician named Martin Walsh had spoken at the 2013 breakfast and how show-

ing support for Labor can reap such great rewards.

“When we’re with you,” he said, “it’s because you’re with us!”

The other lesson that Rogers suggested could be learned from Walsh’s winning the Mayoral race is that, despite what well-heeled detractors may say, “working-class politics work.”

Among the issues that Rogers pointed out were domestic workers’ rights and collective bargaining for early childhood workers (an issue that is being championed by the AFL).

“We need to treat public employees with the respect they deserve,” Rogers suggested.

As for the current debate on lifting the cap on charter schools, Rogers was clear and decisive. “We oppose lifting the cap,” he said, noting that charter schools only serve five percent of students but take far more of the education budget. “Let’s focus on the other 95 percent.”

In speaking of the most important issues facing the Commonwealth today, Speaker Robert DeLeo again repeated his mantra of “Jobs, jobs and more jobs.” He also argued for the raising of the minimum wage to \$10.50 over three years and pledged further support for bills that support domestic workers.

Before continuing the discussion about labor and the workforce in the Commonwealth, Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Rachel Kaprielian lead a standing ovation for Local 718 President Edward Kelly and promised him and all of his brothers and sisters in labor that she stands for them and that “My door is always open.” She then went on to explain recent and pending legislation so that the assembled supporters could support the various bills more effectively.

“These are examples of the good we can do when we work together,” Kaprielian said. ■

Charter School Cap

Continued from page 1

noting that about 50% of students initially enrolled in these charter schools leave before completing the school’s academic program. Many Massachusetts charter schools suffer extremely high attrition rates.

Another issue that should be addressed before the legislature considers allowing charter schools to expand is the question of teacher licensure. Currently, teachers in charter schools are not held to the same high professional standards for Massachusetts licensure as the teachers in traditional public schools. Charter school teachers should be held to the same standards, and they should be required to become certified and recertified under the same terms as all other public school teachers.

Another flaw in the charter school structure is that local school committees and communities have no control over the design, approval, operation or renewal of charter schools. Rather, charter schools are approved and overseen by the state board of education. The schools themselves are managed by independent boards of trustees and must answer only to them. While 330 million tax payer dollars are being diverted to charter schools statewide, local communities have no say in the approval or operation of charters.

Perhaps most disturbing about the charter school movement is that it facilitates the creation of segregated learning environments where students are more isolated by race, class, ability, and language than in the public districts from which they are drawn. Sixty years ago, in the landmark school desegregation case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Justice Earl Warren wrote, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate education facilities are inherently unequal.” Taxpayer dollars should not be used to create separate school systems - district and charter.

At the same time that the business community is clamoring for more charter schools, the Boston Globe is reporting on a study that finds that more Massachusetts children are living in poverty (Metro section, March 26, 2014). There is overwhelming evidence from the research that family income is one of the most accurate predictors of academic success or failure. But the business community does not want to hear about poverty; it would rather keep its head in the sand and blame teachers for our students’ poor academic achievement. And when poverty is raised as a factor in explaining poor test scores in our urban school systems, business leaders and the media often dismiss the idea as “blaming the victim.” However, the reality is that poverty does have a devastating impact on many of our children, and it does affect their performance in our schools.

The business community should spend more time trying to address the issue of children living in poverty and less time trying to privatize our public schools. That would provide a much greater service to the students of Massachusetts.

The legislators who stood up to the Boston Foundation did the right thing. There should be no consideration of lifting the cap on charter schools until these and other problems and inequities surrounding charter schools have been addressed and rectified.

If you have any questions or comments, you can email me at tgosnell@aftma.net. ■

Please go to www.aftma.net to sign a petition in favor of keeping the charter school cap.

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Tierney and Teachers Seek Support

North Shore Congressman speaks in Lynn

By Sarah Phelan

With the 2014 midterm election campaigns underway, U.S. Congressman John Tierney spoke with several local members of the AFT MA in an after school session at the Lynn Teacher's Union Office on Monday, February, 24. At the special event, Tierney not only asked for the teachers' continued support, but he also discussed the pressing issues that public school educators are currently facing.

"We invited Congressman Tierney here to not only thank him for his many years of leadership, but to let him know that we need him now more than ever," said LTU president Brant Duncan, as he welcomed the Congressman and invited the approximately 30 teachers who had come directly from their classrooms in Peabody, Lynn, and Tierney's hometown of Salem, to take part in an hour-long Q&A session.

Mandates Choking Education

Kathy Coman of Pickering Middle School in Lynn was the first to speak about what soon became the main topic of conversation – government mandates on education, "No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top have decimated and disappointed those of us in education," Coman said.

Citing the amount of paperwork required of modern public school teachers, the veteran Coman admitted, "I started to feel as though I didn't like my job anymore." Assuring the assembled that her students were not to blame, Coman explained that the real issue was, "too many assessments, the evaluation process – it's a burden, and it's killing a lot of us."

Bruce Nelson, president of the Peabody Federation of Teachers, agreed, "It is not the job of teaching that people hate, it's the things that take you away from teaching."

Jessica DiGianfelice of Peabody High School, a 17-year veteran, says



UNITED FOR TEACHERS Congressman John Tierney, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell and Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan

that it is also choking out the new workforce, "I am a teaching mentor as well, and I have young teachers who are leaving because of these mandates – they are so involved in all of the requirements they are asking me, 'When do I work on teaching?'"

With the AFT MA motto, Reclaim the Promise of Public Education, hanging on the wall behind him, Tierney responded, "I can't imagine how difficult it is if you're losing faith. Teaching is very challenging and we trust teachers to keep lighting the fire in our students and if there are elements that are killing that fire, that should motivate us to look again."

However, Tierney agreed with some aspects of the federal mandates, including NCLB, and RETELL (Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners). "Disaggregation of data is a good thing, but it is what you do with it." Tierney noted how the courts tell us that every child is "entitled to a fair and appropriate education," but they do not advise as to how to provide this,

"The part that disturbs me the most, is that teachers are not part of policy decisions," he added. "We're all about holding people accountable, but the best systems are the ones with peers telling other peers what is going

right and what isn't. The right people need to be involved in the decision-making."

Teachers Need Resources

The Common Core adaptations from state to state were pushed by the governors of the states, but during the discussion of the shift, teachers were distressed by the idea that assessments were going to be computerized without ramping up the available technology in the school districts. Tierney shook his head, seeing it as a case of, "Here's what we want you to do. We'll give you the tools later."

Resources were the next hot button topic, but surprisingly, the ones deemed most necessary were not paper, pencils, professional development, or access to the internet. Laura McGaughey-Marquez, a social worker from Lynn's Connery Elementary School, noted the success of the programs available in her public school, but sustained that the building needed to be determined as a Level Four school to receive the necessary support. "We have additional personnel, language support, additional curriculum support, health support," she said. "We have been able to address a lot of those non-academic barriers

to success, and provided a way to have families better connect with our schools."

The teachers, despite their frustrations, continued to reiterate that their deep love for teaching was what kept them coming to school day after day. Tierney congratulated them for their dedication and the results of their work. "The plan to corporatize education works to demonize the teachers," he stated. "We look at the data from different countries, and if we are to look at Massachusetts, we're doing pretty damn well."

Nelson agreed, "Where are our trophies? We're defending champs!"

What can the Congressman do?

Citing problems with the current state of Congress, as well as the American people's frustrations with their effectiveness, Tierney admitted, "There is an element who think that 'cooperation' is a dirty word." Even so, he defended the process overall, reminding his constituents that over his tenure, there have been some definite successes. "We created the Higher Education Act of 2008, which we are continuing to build upon. We're driving down the deficit, and we are looking to create a strong budget that allows us to make investments in the economy."

In addition to advocating for vocational education, as well as science and technology initiatives, Tierney looked to the future with creating a bill for funding Pre-K programs, "We used to look at higher education, but over the years we have learned through research that the single most important element to successful educational outcomes is Pre-K education." Unfortunately, funding remains an issue.

"We are still working to create policies that are just, and there are a lot of people who are working with us," Tierney concluded. "We will continue to fight for a common purpose. Thank you for giving me a chance to fight that fight." ■

Sarah Phelan is an ELA teacher in Lynn.

Putting it Together: Joseph Poli

In this age of education technology, there is still much to be said for putting your hands to work at something other than a keyboard.

For every search engine, there are thousands of real engines. For every firewall, four walls. That is why teachers like AFT MA Executive Board member Joseph Poli are still so vital to our educational landscape.

Poli began teaching in 1983 and has served for the past two decades at Southeastern Regional.

"I have had a long and busy career," Poli says, recalling developing a love for "anything mechanical" while still a student himself.

In 1981, Poli was asked by a friend to help in an academic shop class as a substitute. "Apparently, the teacher of record had walked out unexpectedly and the school was in a pickle for a sub with metal work skills," Poli explains. Always eager to build something – whether it be in his garage or in the community – Poli took the gig and the rest, as they say, is mechanical his-

tory. "What started out as a temporary thing," Poli observes, "has lasted 30 plus years."

In addition to teaching for over three decades, Poli has also been involved in union activities for a long time as well, serving his academic community and his colleagues in various capacities, including Shop Steward, Vice President, and President. "I am also the Grievance Chair here at local 1849," he notes.

While the chance to share his expertise and to inspire younger builders is rewarding for Poli, he admits that teaching was not his original goal.

"It just seemed to evolve that way," he says. Even so, Poli has "no regrets."

As he was "a product of vocational education," Poli sees great value in the practice. "My inspiration to teach comes from all the craftsmen that taught me how to work with my

hands," he explains. "They all are in my thoughts as I pass along their words to young people just starting out."

As he continues to serve students and the larger academic world, Poli looks forward to many more years of building and of helping others to do the same.



BUILDING COMMUNITY
AFT MA Board Member Joseph Poli



ROLL 'EM! Members of the Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School Bowling Team who recently won the Worcester County Bowling League titles in all three divisions

The Truth is Right Here

Boston Truth Coalition unites community for justice

While many see school as a place where essential truths are learned, fewer and fewer of these are making it outside of the classroom walls. As the corporate educational structure continues to grow, the realities of education are being threatened with ever-greater obstacles and obfuscations. Fortunately, there is a dedicated team of educators and stakeholders who are doing something to combat the onslaught of what educational expert Diane Ravitch calls the “hoaxes” of education.

Since August of 2013, the Boston Truth Coalition (www.bostonedtruth.org) has been gathering people, ideas, and other resources in an ongoing effort to return truth and sanity to education, for our students, our colleagues, and everyone.

Organized in time to work with the new Mayor and Superintendent, Boston Truth has already help organize many major events, including December’s Day of Action, at which hundreds of educators and students came together to show the support for the schools and programs that have supported them for decades.

While the growing group of participants brings a wide array of ideas and influences to bear, the Coalition is based primarily on a set of principles (called the Principles of Unity) under which they are all united. Among these principles are the ideas that public schools are, in fact, public institutions that are therefore subject to the will and desires of the people and that must welcome and serve all people, not just a select few. The Coalition also supports the premise that stronger schools make for stronger communities and should offer a rich and varied curriculum tied to assessments that are used to support instead of punish. In addition to avoiding testing-related termination, the Coalition believes that all teachers should be appropriately trained and dedicated to their calling, instead of seeing time spent in the classroom as simply a way to pass time before moving on to another career.

“The Principles of Unity were created with input from community members, students, and educators from all across the nation,” explains BTU

Director of Organizing Jessica Tang. “They reflect the experiences, knowledge, expertise, and needs of parents, educators, students, and community members in Greater Boston.”

According to Tang, the goal of the Principles and of Boston Truth is to create a “community-based vision of what quality schools look like so that we can collectively work together towards making this vision a reality for all students.”

Principles that Unite Us

- ✓ Public schools are public institutions.
- ✓ Our voices matter.
- ✓ Stronger schools sustain stronger communities.
- ✓ Assessments should be used to improve instruction.
- ✓ A rich and varied curriculum is the key to student success.
- ✓ Quality teaching must be delivered by committed and respected educators.
- ✓ Schools must be welcoming and respectful places for all.
- ✓ Our schools must be funded for success and equity.

In addition to appealing to teachers and students, the Coalition has also proven intriguing for a number of parents, including Boston Public School alumnus and parent and education advocate Karen Kast-McBride. Having originally been “recruited” via social media to speak at a press conference and rally regarding charter schools last June (see July, 2013 issue), Kast-McBride has become more and more involved in the Truth movement.

“Throughout several meetings following our Day of Action at the State House,” she recalls, “we worked together to figure out how to solidify the Coalition to form stronger partnerships among the major education stakeholders in Boston and effect the changes needed to realize our goals.”

Kast-McBride claims to have envisioned an organization like the Coalition for some time and is very grateful that it is finally a reality.

“As former chair of the Boston Special Needs PAC,” she explains, “I always felt that there should be a group that brought together students, families, educators and the community to work together to ensure the

highest quality education for every student.”

In addition to appealing to a number of individuals, the Coalition’s principles have also been agreed to by many other organizations, including the AFT and AFT-MA, Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC), Boston Teachers’ Union (BTU), Citizens for Public School (CPS), Save our Schools (SOS), Teacher Activist Group (TAG) Boston, Jobs with Justice (JWJ).

“Each group has worked separately on issues important to all of us,” Kast-McBride explains, noting how much more effective they have already proven to be now that they are united under the Coalition’s principles. “Within each of the groups is a faction that is common to them all and had been underutilized: families and parents, who are actively involved in their children’s education, schools and community, and are also voters, so not easily ignored or maligned.”

As many members of BTU and other teachers’ unions are oft accused of caring more about their jobs than their students (a common tactic by those who would obfuscate the truth of the situation), Kast-McBride and others contend that the Coalition is all the more important as it gives union members and other stakeholders a forum in which to express themselves honestly and to show where their hearts and minds truly lie, all while combatting the lies told about them.

“Many students are not old enough to vote,” Kast-McBride points out. “Therefore they are often ignored, no matter how well spoken.” As so many

student and professional organizations are united in the Coalition, however, Kast-McBride contends that it will be difficult at best to ignore them anymore.

Among the most active students are members of the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC), including 2012 BPS graduate Carlos Rojas.

“BSAC is a founding member of the Boston Truth Coalition,” Rojas explains, noting that the Coalition came to be when BSAC and the Boston Teachers Union combined forces to stop legislation that would lift the cap on charter schools across the Commonwealth.

While he thanks his colleagues at BTU and in the other partner organizations, Rojas echoes Kast-McBride in suggesting that it has been the students who are truly leading the charge against charter schools.

“Students have been the ones to drive the spirit and values of this campaign,” observes Rojas, who is also a member of the youth empowerment organization Youth on Board, “and have been at the center of the work since day one.” Rojas goes on to point out that, “with the support of the adult and partner organizations,” students “led the successful attempt” to stop pro-charter school legislation in June of 2013 and “continue to lead” in many important projects and plans. In fact, according to Rojas, the three main campaigns of the Coalition involve “injecting authentic community voice” in Boston’s search for a new superintendent, working with Mayor Walsh to establish a School Equity Task Force that would “examine...the effect of charter schools on equity in BPS” and, stopping pending legislation that would raise the cap on charter schools. Despite the power he attributes to his fellow students and others in the Coalition, Rojas is eager to encourage others to contact legislators, come to rallies and do all they can to support these important efforts.

Even before the elections, the voice of Truth had clearly gone forth and had been heard by all nominees. “Boston Truth...[was] extremely active,” Kast-McBride recalls, “which led to education becoming the most talked about and important issue throughout this election cycle.” ■

Diary of a New Teacher

Lori Anderson York

General music grades 1-5
Placentino School & Miller School
Holliston, MA

Many first year public school teachers are young and right out of college. I am one of those new teachers for whom this is a second career, so to speak. Even so, it is no less meaningful, and perhaps even more so.

I’ll admit it- I am in my late 40’s (okay, very close to 50) and have always taught music privately. My experience goes back to college when I taught piano and voice lessons. After graduate school, I had the privilege of singing with the San Francisco Opera for seven years. While this was my full time job, I still taught on the side. Life moved on and I left the opera, moved

back to New England, started teaching voice lessons on a regular basis, had two children of my own and decided to start my own business teaching early childhood music and movement classes. So you might be asking, why enter the world of public education? Good question.

It’s quite simple- I love teaching music and was up for the next challenge in my career. I say “challenge” because music teaching jobs are not easy to come by due to many years of budget cuts and the uphill battle to keep the arts alive. Fortunately for me, I knew of a job opening right in my own town. Holliston is a great school district with a supportive culture, and I knew the schools well because my children attended them. I did have one problem, however, as my teaching license had expired. So I hit the books, studied for



SIREN CALL
Music teacher
Lori Anderson
York followed
the music in her
heart

the MTEL, took the tests and luckily passed the first time! The process took almost nine months but I was determined.

As any good musician knows, a little practice every day will bring success. This philosophy works in life as well. I have always subscribed to the idea that if I work consistently at a project each day, you can reach any goal.

Once again, it worked and my dream was realized. I teach music to children in grades 1-5. I am learning

constantly, failing regularly, trying again and again to share my passion for music. What keeps me up at night and in the early morning hours is my racing mind with thoughts and ideas of what to try next. Will it work? Am I teaching a concept in ways my students will understand? How do I assess their knowledge? And on and on it goes. Working with my mentor has been extremely valuable and the collaborative spirit in our district is wonderful!

While the fact that I may not be the typical young, fresh out of school, first year teacher bothered me at the beginning of the year, I have come to the realization that my prior teaching and life experience bring a perspective that is worthy. As teachers, our openness to continued learning sets us apart, not because we are better, but because we are dedicated. My passion for a strong and vibrant music program in my schools is what keeps me going day in and day out. And the journey continues for what I hope to be a long and successful teaching career. ■

“An Integral Part of Our System”

Paraprofessionals Stay Strong at Conference

With the constant risk of privatization or loss of benefits hanging over their heads, it is very difficult these days to be an educator. As much as those who work with students may care for them, many have their own needs and obligations that deserve attention as well.

For her first AFT MA-BTU Paraprofessional Conference (which took place April 5 at the BTU Hall in Boston), Josefina Lascano organized a day that focused on ways in which paraprofessionals can take care of themselves so that they can support each other and their students.

After requesting a moment of silence for the fallen Boston firefighters, Lascano (who’s son-in-law is in the Boston Fire Department) opened the event by expressing what an “honor” it was to be with her colleagues, many of whom had shown their dedication by driving for hours to be in attendance.

“In spite of the tough times we are all facing statewide with budget cuts and layoffs,” Lascano observed, “we are a very strong group.” In fact, Lascano went so far as to borrow from a famous city slogan when she said, “We are Para Strong.”

“Paraprofessionals will always be number one,” she said. “No matter what we face, we will be strong and together we can face tough times.”

Before introducing other esteemed speakers, Loscano recognized and thanked members of the paraprofessional council, BTU staff and administrators from AFT MA. She then welcomed the record number of paraprofessionals by district, expressing her personal appreciation for their attendance, participation, and support.

BTU President Richard Stutman then took to the podium to add his own words of welcome and appreciation.

“We see paraprofessionals as an integral part of our system and of what we do every day in our classrooms,” Stutman said. “They are ambassadors of what we do best in schools. They are spokespeople for our organization and definitely important members of our Union.”

Stutman noted that BTU has 80 paraprofessionals who are licensed to teach and that his district also offers career lane advancement for paraprofessionals.

“In our organization, paras have an equal vote and a good role in what we do every day,” he said. “We are very

appreciative.”

Trading in his dapper bowler (which he wore as a tribute to Loscano and her millinery maven predecessor Jenna Fitzgerald) for a Red Sox hat, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell kicked off his “favorite conference” by welcoming his colleagues and thanking them for “how much you contribute to the boys and girls in the classroom.” Lauding Massachusetts educators for the nation- and world-leading academic

results they engender and encourage, Gosnell made special mention of AFT MA’s newest paraprofessional contingent from

Masconomet. “You are an indispensable support,” he said to them and to all of the paraprofessionals. “It is wonderful to represent you.”

Before the event began, Fitzgerald recalled her more than two decades of life as a Conference organizer and expressed how “excited” she was to have her beloved friend and colleague taking over. “With Josefina in charge,” Fitzgerald assured, “there will be a full agenda of activities. Josefina will greet the paras from across the Commonwealth with a smile, confident that everything will be ready for paras to enjoy a day designed just for them.”

And so it was! Kicking off the official program was a presentation on stress reduction by Charlestown High School’s resident social worker Social Worker Jenna Parafinczuk. “I respect the work that you do,” Parafinczuk said. “You work really hard and that has effects on the body.”

After discussing the biological bases for stress, Parafinczuk mentioned that, while it can be a “motivator,” too much stress can be “very unhealthy.” She then handed out a set of Life Change Index forms that encouraged the paraprofessionals to assess their

daily levels of stress and the sources for it and to see how even relatively small issues can add up to major problems that can affect our health and also our abilities to care for ourselves and others. “This is especially true if the stressful situation is ongoing,” she noted, citing such situations as an upcoming assessment or potential layoff. “You need to be very clear about what you can and can’t do so you do not become overwhelmed.”



PARA STRONG Paraprofessional Council Director Josefina Loscano with immediate predecessor Jenna Fitzgerald and AFT MA President Tom Gosnell at the 2014 BTU - AFT MA Paraprofessional Conference

Parafinczuk also pointed out how working with colleagues or even students who are stressed can affect us. “It can take a toll on us physically, mentally and emotionally,” she suggested. “We need to really take care of

ourselves so that we can care for our students.”

In the second seminar, Paraprofessional Council members Christine Buttiglieri and Casandra Samuel walked their colleagues from Boston and elsewhere through some of the latest advances in school system technology, including the HUB (<https://hub.cityofboston.gov/>), on which all paraprofessionals can get an idea of what is going on in Boston in terms of employment and other potential attractions.

“Some elements are particular to BPS,” Samuel noted, “but they are helpful to all, especially as most districts are moving to computer-based records.”

From sign-in to log-off, Samuel and Buttiglieri walked their colleagues through the process of accessing, using and protecting their information on the new systems. After taking questions, participants were given time to establish or check on accounts in order to be able to take full advantage of these electronic offerings.

The third session that each group of paraprofessionals attended at the Conference was a presentation by Sarah Greenwood School teacher Liz

Vara on how to make a bilingual classroom work. Though she had started her career in a segregated classroom, Vara is now part of a fully-integrated program that results in students who are not only bilingual but also bi-literal and bicultural.

“I am now teaching everything in both languages,” Vara explained, noting how her most recent assessments revealed 92 percent progress in both languages for all students.

“How do we do it,” she asked. “The paraprofessionals!”

Seeing the paraprofessional in her room as a co-teacher and treating him accordingly, Vara says she is able to support all students more efficiently and more effectively.

“He is a teacher too,” she emphasized, noting that, when speaking with the paraprofessional, she always asks, “What are we doing?”

“My para is not for photocopying,” she said, “because I know how the machine works too. He is right there next to me.... My principal sees that we work as a team and that we are all there for the kids.”

Vara then offered tips for other paraprofessionals in bilingual classrooms, including learning the other language, creating informal assessments with their lead teachers, going to conferences such as this one, and taking advantage of all the other resources AFT offers.

“Everybody has an effect in the classroom,” Vara said, “and that includes the paras.... Our program would not be where it is today without our paras.”

After going through all three sessions and having the questions answered by the expert presenters, participants reconvened in main hall for a final health-conscious program—a surprise Zumba class featuring Kathleen Dortch, a long-time teacher at the Umana Academy who is also a certified Zumba instructor.

“It doesn’t matter what shoes you are wearing or what shape you are in,” Dortch encouraged. “Just come and move!”

After sweating to some great music for a bit, the paraprofessionals gathered in the next room for a delicious lunch that doubled as a career-supporting networking and idea-sharing session.

As a final thoughtful touch, Loscano presented a birthday cake to Fitzgerald, both of whom received a warm ovation.

“Paraprofessionals deserve this day of appreciation,” Fitzgerald said, “and a great big thank you for all that they do. Thank you one and all!” ■

Meet Your Colleague: Harold Jones

A lifelong advocate for progressive change, Harold Jones came to Boston from his native Pittsburgh in 2000 to attend Northeastern University School of Law. It was there that Jones truly found his calling.

“I was always interested in social justice,” he recalls, “and I have always wanted to be a lawyer....It was in law school that I found my passion for worker’s rights.”

As he came to see the larger impact that workplace relationships have on society and on the individual, Jones became involved in the labor movement as a way of protecting the rights of the individual against what was already becoming a more challenging and powerful corporate advancement.

“The labor movement provided

both fair process and democracy to our professional lives,”

Jones points out, noting that, in addition to serving the movement in a professional capacity, he has also volunteered with such organizations as Massachusetts Jobs with Justice and the Volunteer Lawyers Project in order to help as many people in as many ways as possible.

While working part-time as a staff attorney for AFT MA, Jones also continues to serve the community through his ongoing efforts with organizations such

as Massachusetts Interfaith Worker



DEDICATED DEFENDER
AFT MA Attorney Harold Jones

Justice, for whom he has prepared worker’s rights materials, and supported fundraising efforts by drafting appeals and grant proposals and tracking incoming donations. Among the larger campaigns on which Jones worked were efforts to support immigrant workers against exploitive business owners and to prevent Wal-Mart from opening stores in communities that enjoyed thriving local retail.

Before joining the AFT MA team,

Jones also served as Legal Director for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 888 in Boston. There, he represented the union in arbitrations and unfair labor practice litigation and coordinated outside counsel work. All of these skills and experiences will surely serve Jones well as he delves more deeply into the world of education.

Speaking of education, Jones has completed an internship with the Massachusetts Teacher’s Association. As such, he is not only keenly aware of the issues we all face but also experienced in the direct effects they can have on a teacher and a school.

“I love being a part of the labor movement,” Jones says, “and like being in-house at a union, rather than a firm, because then I am part of the union and movement instead of a hired gun.” ■



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Sitting Out the SAT

The College Board recently announced that its SAT exam would no longer require students to write an essay, reversing course 9 years after the SAT required an essay as part of its College Entrance Exam. The maximum score will drop back to 1600 with separate scores for math and English, just like the old days.

College Board's President, David Coleman said, "the road to success is not last-minute tricks or cramming, but the learning students do over years" (*Washington Post*, 3/5/14). Testing preparation companies had shown that using a few high-powered words, writing longer essays, and writing clear but unsubstantiated claims improved essay scores.

The beginning of this century has been rough for the SAT. In 2001, the University of California administration dropped the SAT scores as the basis for college admissions, starting the switch to "holistic" measures, which gave students choices between SAT exams and other forms of evidence for college admissions. In 2004, the College Board renamed the SAT as the SAT Reasoning Test, following changes since its inception in 1926 from Scholastic Aptitude Test to Scholastic Assessment Test in

1990 to dropping all words in its title to simply SAT 1 in 1993.

Originally based on IQ tests, the SAT changed to assessment when IQ tests went out of fashion, then required an essay when educators questioned the writing skills of high school graduates, and finally changed its focus to reasoning when critical thinking became the "new" thing in education.

These name changes show the SAT as a high-stakes test in search of something to test.

The College Board also dumbed down the SAT in 1995, by giving higher scores for the same number of correct answers. This change was based on the argument that many high school students who were not as well prepared were now taking the test.

These changes are best understood as the business model of the College Board - the private non-profit company that owns the SAT - to retain earnings, which totaled \$750 million in 2011. Complaints from its customers were increasing, and SAT's competition was gaining.

In 2012, SAT's rival in the testing market for college admissions, American College Testing (ACT), which doesn't require an essay, passed the

SAT in the number of students taking admissions tests. In response, SAT dropped its required essay exam and hired Coleman, one of the main designers of the Common Core State Standards, in order to connect the SAT to the Common Core, which has now been adopted by 45 states.

In economics, the College Board would be called a discriminating monopoly, similar to airlines that charge ticket prices based on customers' willingness to pay. With its branding, increasing its customer base through Common Core, and offering coupons to low-income students, SAT is trying to become the BJs of student high-stakes testing.

The SAT also changed through the years because it has been proven wrong consistently. It's early claims that it tested innate intelligence rather than learning was proven wrong by Stanley Kaplan and many others who made billions training students to raise their scores.

The SAT finally dropped its claim that students couldn't study to raise their scores when it began offering students The Official SAT Study Guide in 2004.

Kaplan and the others in the raising SAT scores industry showed that teaching to the test makes perfect sense when all that matters is the test score.

In an odd twist, increasing SAT scores through better preparation, including memorizing tricks, may have improved the SAT's prediction of student success in college. As any teacher knows, studying matters more than intelligence in educational success. Students who studied more for the SAT and improved their grade showed greater aptitude for college.

Testing how well students take tests may be a good predictor of success in colleges where multiple-choice questions are the norm, but it doesn't select good students or improve either high school or college education.

Testing seems to me necessary for admitting students to colleges where applicants outnumber student slots. There is evidence that the SAT subject tests, which measure knowledge in a specific field, and advanced placement tests, which can give college credit for courses, provide better selection of students likely to graduate in that field.

There is also evidence that high school grades, ranking in class, and letters of recommendation help select students likely to succeed in college.

These measures connect more to high school education and teachers, which makes more sense to me than universal high-stakes testing. ■

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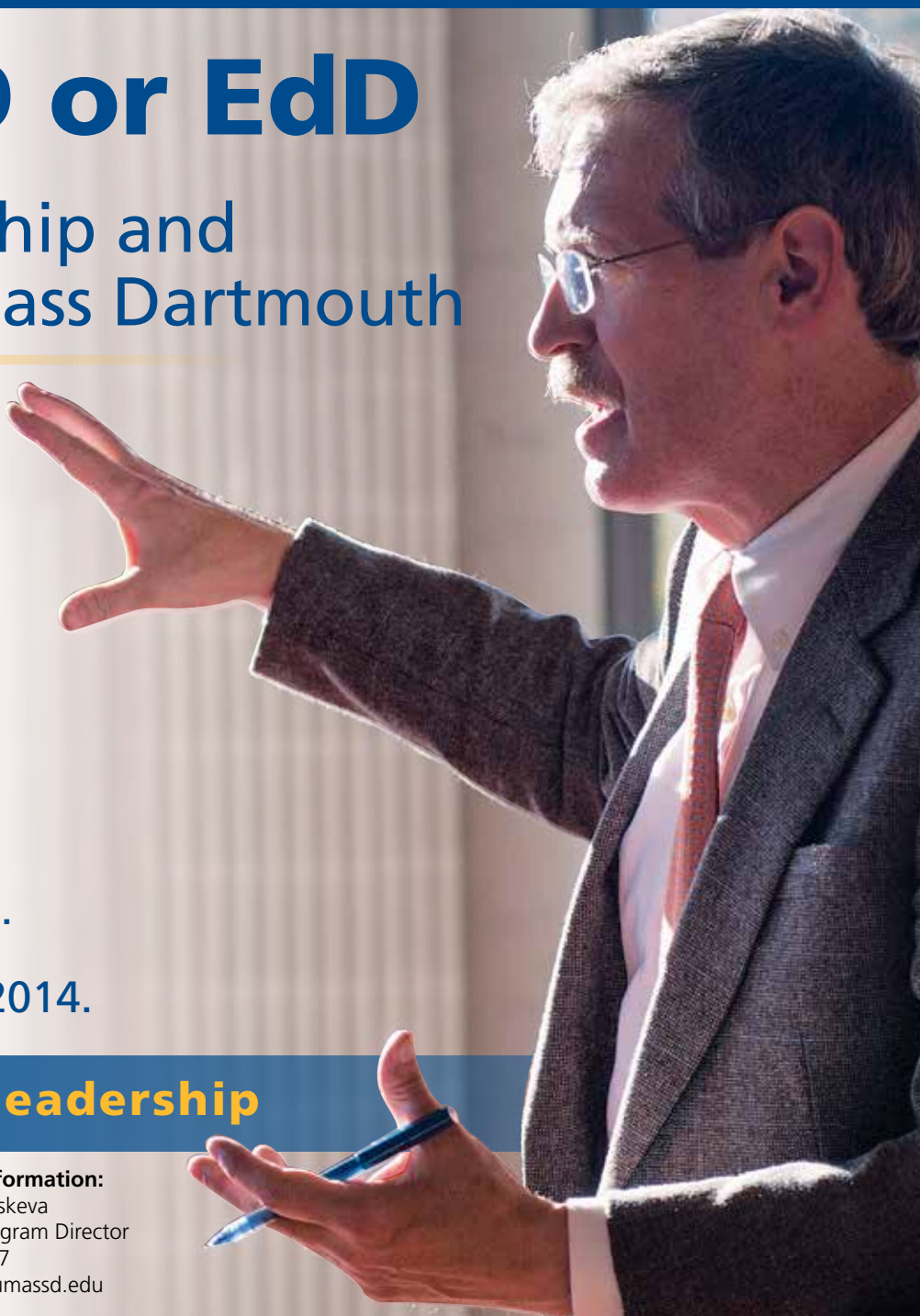
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Retiree Corner

Marie Ardito, Co-founder
Massachusetts Retirees United
www.retireesunited.org



SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement
Thursday, May 1, 4-6 p.m.
Miller School Library -
235 Woodland Street, Holliston

Monday, May 12, 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Blackstone Valley Regional Tech
65 Pleasant Street, Upton

Marie Ardito's presentation is directed to people retiring in the next 10 years from public sector jobs. It provides an understanding of the retirement system and options, as well as a legal checklist, tips for protecting assets, advice about understanding Medicare, and much more.

Understanding Social Security and Medicare
Saturday, April 26

This seminar discusses how Social Security is factored, how penalties affect you, eligibility for Medicare, and more.

How to Protect Your Nest Egg and Plan for Your Family
Saturday, June 21

This seminar, presented by Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie, discusses wills and trusts, gifting, Medicaid Qualifying Trusts, probate, joint tenancy, direct transfers, and more. Howie is a member of both the MA and NH Bar Association, National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, NH Conflict Resolution Association and the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys.

Both of these seminars are offered at 314 Main Street, Wilmington, Unit 105 from 10 to noon.

To register for any seminar, email mardito@retireesunited.org or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number attending.

In-Security

How would you feel if you kept getting bills saying you were overpaid for your Social Security Benefits? And how would you feel if the amount on those bills ranged from \$15,909.60 to \$25,216.60?

This is what happened to Winifred Tappan, a retired teacher from the state of Colorado. In her book, *Grappling With Government Abuse: My Social Security Nightmare*, Tappan speaks about her eight-year battle with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and her eventual victory. She speaks of knowing over 10 people in her area alone who had been billed by the agency for so-called "overpayments." In a recent interview, Tappan also discusses the story of a retired school nurse in Illinois who was told by the SSA that she had been overpaid by \$49,000 and asked to return it!

There have been instances of this happening at the state level where the State Retirement Board has demanded the return of overpayment. Our formula is easier to understand, however, as we have all the information we need to check that the formula was used correctly in determining our pension. Our pension is factored based upon our three highest consecutive years, not necessarily the last three years (even though for most it turns out to be so). Social Security Benefits are figured based upon the average of the 35 years in which you earned the most. They are also indexed, which means they are adjusted for an inflation fac-

tor for the years they were actually earned. Social Security is then averaged in a tier system in which recipients earn a percentage of the amounts in each tier. Even using the SSA's explanatory handout, "Your Retirement Benefit: How It Is Figured," it would take hours to compile the information (not to mention more than a vbit of luck). Nowhere on that form does it deal with the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which affects the amount you will be penalized because you are retired with a pension from a non-contributing state.

So what actually can you do to make sure that you do not meet the plight of Tappan and many others like her? In the 15 years that I have been retired, I have been dealing with the SSA on a variety of matters. Never have I met more ineptitude! How can we have this in an agency that deals with peoples' futures? After being asked the same question by two members in amatter of days, I made eight phone calls to the SSA and received eight different answers, all of which turned out to be wrong. It took intervention by then Senator Kerry's office for me to get the correct answer.

When I went to a Social Security office prior to starting to collect, I told the administrator there that I was collecting a public pension from Massachusetts and was subject to the WEP penalty. When I asked for the amount I could expect to collect, the SSA administrator gave me a printout

that frankly pleased and surprised me. Unfortunately, I would later discover that she had not factored in the WEP, even after my explicitly telling her that I was affected by it.

If your Social Security payment seems high, be sure to ask if they have factored in the WEP. If the answer is yes, tell the person at the SSA that you want it put on your official record that you asked this question. Also, be sure to make a note for your personal records of the date you made the phone call or visit. While this may not be fool proof, it should definitely help if you have to go through an appeal process in the future. Also make sure you let them know when you are applying that you are collecting a state pension from Massachusetts. Keep all communications you receive from the SSA leading up to and beyond the time you receive your benefits.

Thank you, Winifred Tappan, for being such a gutsy octogenarian and for carrying your teaching beyond the classroom in educating us about not taking things sitting down. We can fight the government and win! And thank you MRU member, Karen Holmes, for bringing this fantastic woman and her book to my attention.

If you would care for a copy of Tappan's book, please send \$9.95 (plus \$3.50 S & H) to Wini's Books - 2273 James Street, Montrose, CO 81401. It isn't a big book, but it is huge with information! ■

Benefit Bulletin: What AFT does for you

In this new series, we hope to inform our members about the many benefits of belonging to and participating in AFT. Should you have any questions or comments, send them to advocate@aftma.net.

AFT-MA members know that their union is with them. Together, we work to improve the lives of our members, our families, our communities and our students. Away from the job, AFT-MA members can look to AFT+ Member Benefits to help save money, access valuable services and provide assistance in time of need.

Many of the AFT+ benefit programs are through AFT's affiliation with Union Plus, the AFL-CIO benefits program. Many new Union Plus programs have been added to the AFT + roster of benefits to bring you savings on an even wider array of products and services. As an AFT Massachusetts member you are entitled to over 30 Union Plus offerings, including: term life and disability income insurance, the AFT credit card, travel and entertainment discounts and AT&T wireless discounts.

The AFT+ Credit Card is actually more than one card. All program cards feature unique assistance benefits which have provided more than \$1.7 million union cardholders facing financial hardships since 2009. After just three months, cardholders may be eligible for the following grants:

- Job Loss Grants of \$300 to help eligible cardholders who have recently been laid off.
- Strike Grants of \$300 to provide assistance to eligible cardholders who are on a union-sanctioned strike or experiencing a lockout.
- Disability Grants of \$1,600-\$2,700 to help eligible cardholders who have lost significant income due to a long-term illness or disability.
- Hospital Grants of \$1,200 to aid eligible cardholders with large, unreimbursed hospital expenses.
- Disaster Relief Grants of \$500 to help eligible cardholders facing financial hardship due to a natural disaster.

These grants are part of the Union Plus assistance program that assists eligible members facing hardships due to layoffs, hospital costs, disability, mortgages and high college costs. Through these new and expanded programs, Union Plus will help even more union families. Also, all grants approved for eligible cardholders are paid by check, and they never have to be paid back.

- AT&T Discounts- All AFT members are

eligible to save 15% from the nation's only unionized wireless carrier, AT&T, on select monthly wireless plans, just because you're union. Additionally, AFT+ Credit Card holders are eligible to receive up to a \$100 rebate on the purchase of a new smartphone from AT&T, as well as up to a \$100 rebate when switching from non-union wireless providers.

- Union Plus Mortgage through Wells Fargo- AFT Massachusetts members can get use the Union Plus mortgage for their mortgage or refinancing needs. This program, which features a range of assistance pro-

grams, including interest-free loans and grants to help you make mortgage payments when you're disabled, or become unemployed is unique in that it is available to the children and parents of members, too. Over the life of the Union Plus mortgage assistance program, more than \$10.3 million in assistance has been provided to union members across the country.

For more information on the Union Plus benefits offered to AFT members, visit UnionPlus.org/AFT, or for more information on the AFT+ Credit Card, visit AFTcard.com. ■



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Feeling Good About Data

Educator's Opinion

By Mary Beth Numbers and Patricia Rourke

Every teacher needs reassurance that what we do makes a difference. Our successes are evident when we start looking at data.

After taking part in an initial data training workshop by TERC's Using Data Initiative instructors, a group of teachers from Holliston Public Schools selected data coaching as their professional learning goal. With just more than half the year invested, each member of the group is greatly encouraged by our achievement, our improvements, and our camaraderie.

We are rich with data! What teachers did with the data varied significantly, however. Today's technology affords us the opportunity to disaggregate grade level data to spur classroom comparisons, item analyses, sharing of successful strategies and cross-classroom groupings.

We began by taking an inventory of our data knowledge as well as the areas of data coaching that piqued our interest. TERC's Using Data Initiative helped us identify and verify the causes of specific learning problems, develop research-based instructional solutions, and brainstorm monitoring plans to address these gaps.

The Data Coaching study group recommended gathering teachers from multiple grade levels to augment the discussions in order to identify curriculum progressions and options for teaching strategies. Feedback from the teachers indicated that they were interested in starting with a focused topic area that would have significant impact on the long-term success of the students in mathematics. Though we began with just one content area in one grade level, the team soon agreed it would be best to identify key topics at each grade level based on the success of the initial pilot. In the past, our data analysis had prioritized the review of summative assessments. Instead, we now reviewed pre-assessment data, decided what items were already mastered, discussed our expectations for the end



CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS Holliston teachers Natasha Merten, Nen Locke, Christina Powers, Kelly Comings and Elizabeth Denison discuss data at their recent workshop

of the unit, and compared strategies for teaching the lessons. The detailed discussions led to collaboration between teachers and, in some cases, triggered flexible groupings between classes after the core unit was taught in a heterogeneous setting. Once the topic was complete, we collected summative data. Occasionally this exceeded our expectations we were able to proceed to the next unit without major interventions.

We are now planning an intervention session based on the subtraction with regrouping topic in grade 2. Our process will be teaching the core unit, providing Tier I interventions with individual lessons, and completing a post-assessment to determine the level of need for each student. Teachers are also collaborating to create an intervention plan for high

needs students as well as enrichment lessons for high achievers. We will complete an item analysis of our summative assessment to identify areas for curriculum interventions and modifications, as well as student learning needs and levels. Classroom teachers, special educators, and administrators will join efforts and instruct common intervention lessons across the grade for all levels to ensure success in this standard.

Our journey with data analysis began years ago and is ongoing. This is a reflection of the technology tools we now use and our expanded analysis of data. The result is a cultural shift toward data-informed decision-making, instructional excellence, and shared responsibility for the success of all students. This journey has provided new, unanticipated rewards. As our world changes, so our standards, demographics, and technology will change, and teacher practices and student success will advance. Learning success for future students will be grounded in the products of thoughtful, dedicated, collaborative data teams. ■

Mary Beth Numbers is a Grade Leader for Holliston Public Schools

Patricia Rourke is the STEM Coordinator (PreK-5) for Holliston Public Schools.

Getting with the Guild: Labor support stands strong

While the idea of guilds traces back to Medieval times, their premise and promise remains vibrant and vital today. That is why over 1800 individuals and institutions continue to identify themselves as members of the Boston-based organization known simply as The Labor Guild (www.laborguild.com).

Since 1945, the Guild has served our community by providing labor education and professional training programs at its own school, as well as neutral election services, networking and leadership opportunities, and a comfortable and supportive place to meet and discuss the issues of the day.

"The Guild is open to everyone interested in workplace democracy and good faith labor relations," says Vice President Jeff Bollen, who was raised in a "union household" and worked his own way up through the ranks from Shop Steward to Secretary Treasurer of his own union and then to the Executive Board of the Guild. "The staff at the Guild treats everyone as welcomed family members. They are warm friendly and dedicated to the Guild's mission [of] assisting labor unions and workers of all industries."

Based on a belief in the dignity of the individual as the "cornerstone" of a just system, and on the mission of promoting justice and order in the workplace, the Guild supports principled collective bargaining and strives to foster and maintain a healthy and productive labor environment. Whether members come from the worlds of labor, management, law, or any other place in which stakeholders hold sway, they are welcome to participate in and benefit from the Guild.

According to Executive Director Allyson Every, the idea for the Guild arose when Pope Pius IX released an encyclical in 1931 that urged the laity to "get involved in educating other workers about worker rights in a constructive way." Many parishes, including those in Boston and Lynn, took up the charge almost immediately and made major inroads towards developing what eventually became the Guild.

While it is officially affiliated with

the Archdiocese of Boston, Every assures that the Guild is ecumenical and open to participants of any faith. When asked why it traces its roots back to the Church, Every explains how, in the United States, "an awful lot of the founders of the labor movement were Catholic and Jewish," and cites what she sees as "a real compatibility in the Judeo-Christian social justice themes." Ever since its founding, however, the Guild has been open to and accepting of all people and views and has a history of supporting even the smallest minorities in their quests for justice.

"People came in from all religions," Every recalls, "and all regions."

Though the organization lost membership to another call of duty during World War II, with the help of then Archbishop Cushing (who had come from the labor movement himself), the Guild was revitalized after the War. While a further diminishment set in as the Federal government began setting wages and corporations began offering health care and pensions, the Guild has remained strong. In today's economy, where many of these "guarantees" are no longer such, the Guild may be more important than ever!

Immediate past President George Embleton first learned of the Guild while working in a clerical position at the Boston Public Library. "Although I had strong interest in the union, I was quite uninformed," he admits. "The Guild opened a new world to me!"

Upon attending his first Guild event, Embleton knew he had found a supportive place. "The atmosphere was truly welcoming," he says. "I was surrounded by dedicated unionists from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life." And while many of his fellow Guild initiates were admittedly "insecure in their labor pursuits," Embleton suggests that everyone "exhibited zeal for promoting fair workplaces, and were eager to share their

knowledge and experience."

Eileen Norton, Director of Organizing for the Massachusetts Nurses Association, also came to the Guild in the 1970s and has been a part of it ever since. "[The Guild] provides the best in labor education and has the most qualified teachers," she says. "It also provides you with a connection to other labor and management people that you don't find anywhere else."

While everyone in the Guild is happy and eager to share their knowledge, the Guild also offers formal classes on a wide variety of labor-related topics in both day and evening sessions so that all can participate and benefit.

"Over 45,000 people have gone through different programs," Every attests, noting how

"a ton of those people have become officers, labor activists and just been more involved." The Guild currently counts about 60 international union presidents and all the heads of the MA AFL-CIO as alumni. "We think we have been positive contributor to a more positive atmosphere."

"There is nowhere I know of where everyday working people can get a labor-oriented professional education well taught by experts in the field as at the Guild's School of Labor Relations," Bollen says. "The Guild provides a positive boost to the...labor movement [and] I recommend the school to all who are interested in making their union stronger."

The larger the Guild's alumni association grows, the more resources members have to draw upon for further learning and support. "What we are finding now is all of our executive secretaries have forged really close relationships with all sorts of sectors in the labor community," Every notes.

In addition to hosting classes, the Guild also hosts negotiations. "We also coordinate election administration for a number of unions and even for smaller organizations like condo organizations," Every explains. "That

creates other relationships."

Another way by which the Guild rewards participation and passion for fair practices is through its annual Cushing-Gavin Awards (named for two of the Guild's most notable leaders - Cardinal Richard Cushing and Fr. Mortimer Gavin). Each year, the Guild recognizes and honors exceptional professionals from all sectors and encourages excellence and enlightenment in all members of the community.

"I think it is a very meaningful award for the recipients," says Every, "and for the Guild!"

In addition to being a fan of the Guild's many offerings, Every is also an experienced participant.

"I took courses while at The Globe," she recalls. "I learned how to be a more effective steward and, a year or so later, ran for president. I very much doubt I would have done that if I had not developed that confidence and come to understand the nuts and bolts of labor relations."

While Boston's Guild school is the last of its kind in the United States (down from a national high of 200 such sites), Every is encouraged about the Guild's future.

"We have survived because people want us," she suggests. "The labor movement community pushed for our creation and they have sustained us."

To show its appreciation, the Guild is constantly striving to offer new services and provide for its members in new ways. "We are constantly trying to keep in touch with that community," Every pledges, "so we can offer services that are relevant and useful and to give them an opportunity - no matter what sec they are in - to be part of something and to hear and work with ideas that they can bring back and contribute to their organizations."

"The Labor Guild has been a champion for workers," says AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, "and it continues to be a champion for workers." ■