



The Advocate



AFT Massachusetts
38 Chauncy Street
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Boston, MA 02111

April 2015

“Forever Starts Today”

AFL-CIO rallies members at State House to oppose GIC changes

Despite the workday scheduling of the event, a line formed out the door of the State House on the morning of April 2 in anticipation for a labor-wide lobbying effort in opposition to proposed changes to health care rates from the GIC.

As has been detailed in previous issues, the GIC is proposing to raise rates for health care starting July 1, 2015. The changes will effect all 420,000 GIC participants in over 60 municipalities and has an estimated price tag of over \$160 million.

In an effort to stop these proposed changes and to point out that every public employee (including legislators and aides) will be effected, members of nearly every labor union in the Commonwealth – from the Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists (MOSES) to the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts (PFFM) to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the representatives of both the MTA and AFT MA – gathered in Gardener Auditorium to be briefed on the situation and to better understand what they and their friends and colleagues can do to help.

In his stirring introduction, Massachusetts AFL-CIO President and former state legislator Steve Tolman reminded the crowd why they had gathered in “the people’s house.”

“We want to make sure they care,” he said of his former colleagues and their followers. As he had been in the State House for many years, Tolman also offered some inside advice when he suggested that the lobbyists use their power as public employees to “go anywhere” in the State House and to only ask to come back later if their



LEADING THE LOBBY
AFT MA President Tom Gosnell speaks on AFL-CIO Lobby Day April 2

interlocutor becomes confrontational.

“Get to know the staff,” he advised. “Talking to them is the same as talking to the legislators.”

After Tolman got the crowd fired up and prepared, David Holway, national president of the National Association of Government Employ-

ees (NAGE SEIU) and a former State House staffer, went over some of the details of the GIC proposal and some talking points for effective lobbying.

“A state employee is a state employee,” he noted. “We are all affected by it...[and] we should all pay the same!”

MTA President Barbara Madeloni then took the microphone to remind the assembled how “unfair” the proposal was and how it only stands to benefit the health care providers and not the customers.

“If we work together,” she suggested, “we can fight for fairness.”

Before PFFM President Ed Kelly pointed out how public employees are “actuarially tied” to the GIC by law and encouraged his fellow labor members to “get our arms around what we can,” AFT MA President Tom Gosnell rose to offer a few words of encouragement and a call to action.

“The view is to have employees pay,” Gosnell observed. “We’ve got to change that.”

Though there are plans to suggest changes to the budget that is due out in less than 90 days, Gosnell noted how this is only part of a much longer and larger struggle for fairness and equality.

“The fight goes on forever,” he said, “and forever starts today!” ■

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Informed and Essential

Annual paraprofessional conference a magic-filled day

By Michael J. Maguire

The theme of this year’s statewide paraprofessional conference was “Paras are Informed and Essential.” Boston Teachers Union (BTU) Paraprofessional and Substitute Field Representative Josefina Lascano began her opening remarks by acknowledging the diverse jobs that paraprofessionals perform every day. When these tasks are performed well, she observed, the paras contribute to the overall success of the classroom.

BTU president Richard Stutman stated, “we could not run our schools without you.” BTU vice president Patrick Connolly thanked the paras for “helping me and helping the students” when he worked for 12 years as a special education teacher at Madison Park High School.

Boston Public School superintendent John McDonough continued the theme of the conference by praising the paras for their work. “You are confident in your own success,” he said. “You create the space for teaching and learning to occur.”

AFT MA president Thomas Gosnell declared that paras are an essential part of Boston’s success. Boston ranks first in urban district of comparable size, due in large part to how well the paras assist the classroom teachers. “Paras in urban areas often have

greater student needs,” Gosnell said. “We need your help most of all.” Gosnell also pledged that he would fight at the state level for continued Title I funding.

After the opening remarks, the nearly 100 paras attending the conference split into three groups. The groups rotated through three breakout sessions, each focusing on different parts of a para’s job. The topics were chosen in response to the comments left on the exit tickets from last year’s conference.

Paras in the Inclusion Setting

Stephanie Fitzpatrick, an occupational therapist at the Jackson-Mann K-8, gave a humorous workshop on the importance of the para in an inclusion classroom. She stressed the importance of quickly and accurately assessing the individual needs of each student and suggested that the keys to a successful inclusion setting include verbal prompts, proximity, wait time, modeling, encouragement and praise, and redirection.

Unfortunately, she noted, consultation time with other teachers is often misused. A quick chat in the hallway is not a consultation, but merely a check-in. A consultation is a formal, professional process to help

the student achieve. A consultation is not an expert coming in with a magic wand who is there to fix problems or to vent. It is when the adults in the student’s school day come together to craft a plan for the student to succeed. Consultation is a time for reframing, understanding and accessing knowledge and experiences so that the para can help the teacher in the classroom. This model is designed to help the student cope, adapt, and succeed in the regular classroom setting. First, the

Continued on page 4



WORKING TOGETHER TO REPRESENT IN LOWELL
State Representative Rady Mom of Lowell (front row, center) with members of United Teachers of Lowell



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

The Opportunity Gap

Students in Massachusetts are the highest scoring students in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test and the highest in the western world on the Trends in International Math and Science Study. Yet we continue to hear about the achievement gap. What a misnomer. The gap is not in achievement but in opportunity.

Very many of our students, particularly those in urban and rural areas where the participation in the subsidized breakfast program is quite high, need much more support. Poverty runs rampant. Poverty is pernicious.

We can never use poverty as an excuse for lack of achievement, but a refusal to recognize that poverty is a major cause of a lack to opportunity is a disgraceful denial of reality.

Students, who do not have adequate medical and dental care, who lack good nutrition, who live in substandard housing, who may not come to school with the skills that those not living in poverty have, and who may not be fluent in English, need more support.

American history is filled with examples of attempts to respond to social situations so that a greater number of people can have greater opportunity.

One of the foremost examples is the establishment of the public school system. Its establishment was based on the premise that an educated person will have greater access to opportunity. During the nineteenth century the number of schools grew at an accelerating pace. Massachusetts, even then, was in the forefront as schools sprouted up in practically every city and town.

In the twentieth century education had become so prized that state legislatures decided that it should be compulsory up to a certain age. Looking at this decision from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, it may not seem revolutionary or innovative, but it was. This decision reduced the opportunity gap.

When the economy collapsed in the nineteen thirties, inadequate medical and dental care, lack of enough food, and a rapid decline in the number of jobs led to a social disaster. Widespread hunger and lack of shelter threatened opportunity.

This disaster provided great impetus to the development of social programs that led to the creation of what is now called the safety net. The premise is that no one should have to be at the mercy of impersonal economic forces when the basic needs of one's existence are at stake.

We need such commitment now. Whatever gains America made in the last century, they are insufficient to the elimination of today's opportunity gap.

Imagine what sufficient medical and dental care, sufficient nutrition, and sufficient housing would do for our students.

Imagine what sufficient funding would do for our public schools which the enormous percentage of our boys and girls attend. Smaller class sizes, better technological equipment, better facilities, better wrap around services, richer curricula, more staffing. This would be a real opportunity to reduce the opportunity gap.

The so called achievement gap is the result of the opportunity gap. Enhanced opportunity will produce enhanced achievement.

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

BOLD PRINT

The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) is extending its Customer Service 'Hotline' hours to include 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. in addition to 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The direct line is 781-381-6600.

□ □ □ □

Got news to share?
Send it to advocate@aftma.net

Help Samira

Samira Sarkis has sickle cell disease and needs to find a bone marrow donor.



Her parents are Angie Sarkis, an educator at Lawrence High School, and Tony Sarkis, an educator at the Greater Lawrence Vocational School.

For information on how to help, contact Leigh Sullivan at Dana-Fabrer Cancer Institute at 866-875-3324 or Leigh_sullivan@dfci.harvard.edu, or go to www.bethematch.org. Please use promo code **Samira2015**.

THANK YOU!

Register NOW
for the
2015 AFT-MA
CONVENTION
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Contact your Local
leaders for information

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A New Civics Center Opens in Boston

Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate gives guests a seat

Among his many attributes and accolades, the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy was known as a champion of education who tried to allow and encourage his constituents to feel involved in the processes of government. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that a new institute has been created in his honor and memory adjacent to the campus of his late brother’s Presidential library.

The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate (www.emkinstitute.org) is dedicated to educating and encourage discourse about and participation in the American system of government.

“The Kennedy Institute is dedicated to educating the public about our government through the history and contributions of the United States Senate,” explains Institute President Dr. Jean F. McCormack (who previously served as Chancellor of UMass Dartmouth for 13 years). “We want to inspire people to be civically engaged at every level, to believe that engagement makes a difference. We aim to be one of the nation’s leading organizations dedicated to advancing civic dialogue and education and encouraging individuals to become active participants in their own communities.”

Through cutting-edge technology, inspirational architecture, and comprehensive research facilities, the Institute (which opened last month) provides visitors with information and experiences that bring historical and contemporary debates to life.

“The Institute offers a cutting edge approach to presenting the history, pivotal role and accomplishments of the U.S. Senate,” McCormack suggests, noting that the technology and personal engagement used at the Institute constitute a “proven approach for promoting civic learning and

encouraging young people to become more engaged in the civic affairs of their own communities.”

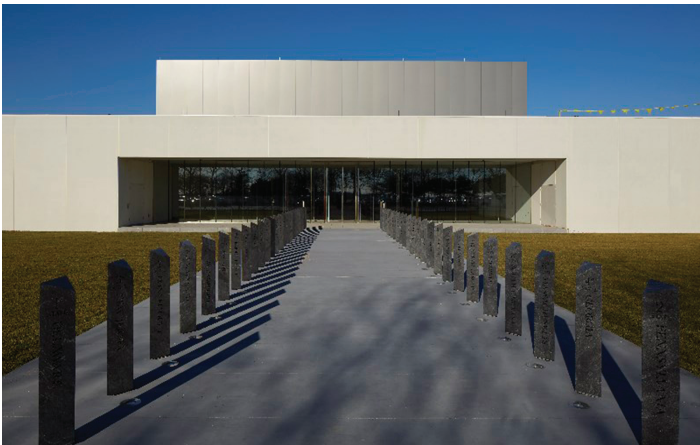
Among the specific offerings housed within the 68,000-square foot edifice are a reception area that can host special events, exhibit and classroom space, conference facilities and even a café where visitors can discuss what they have learned. Perhaps the most exciting element, however, is the Senate Immersion Module (SIM), a full-scale

representation of the Senate chamber where guests can use tablet computers to engage their legislators and laws. As part of the world’s first open-source museum exhibit, participants engage with computer-generated elements, live actors and each other, making an impact on their own governance while they learn more about it!

Especially as civics and social studies classes are being threatened and cut in so many schools to allow more time and resources to be dedicated to more testable subjects, the importance of the Institute is all the greater as it gives students, teachers, parents and others a place to explore and research the ways in which this nation is run and to devise ways to make it better for us and for our descendants.

“Generations of Americans have become increasingly disengaged from

the democratic process,” McCormack observes. “The Senator wanted to do something that would engage and inspire them and make them understand and appreciate how the democratic process actually works. He loved the Senate and being a Senator and believed that if young and old knew more about it and had a chance to experience it, they too would see its power to craft the policies that shape our nation.”



A NEW HOUSE OF LEARNING
The Edward M. Kennedy Institute

With Senator Kennedy’s vision in mind, the Institute’s educational programs have been designed and are actively sup-

ported by a distinguished board of advisors, including Neema Avashia, a teacher at the Dever-McCormack School in Boston.

“I became involved in the...Institute in 2010,” recalls Avashia, explaining that she was invited by her colleagues to serve on an education subcommittee to consider how the Institute can serve students and the community most effectively. Among the “tremendous opportunities” that the 2013 Boston Educator of the Year and co-founder of the Countdown to High School initiative has been able to experience as part of the Institute committee are a trip to Washington, DC, in 2013, during which she travelled with Senate staff and spent time in the actual chambers in order to as-

sure the accuracy of the replica. “It was pretty incredible to get to sit in the Senate gallery with a former Senate parliamentarian and hear his take,” she recalls. “Bringing experiences like that back to my students has been a huge benefit of being involved with this work.”

As the Institute is within walking distance of her school, Avashia has already visited with her students and looks forward to returning. In order to entice people from further away, however, she knows that the exhibits and the overall experience has to be intriguing and accessible.

“What level of text complexity is appropriate? How do students move from one aspect of the SIM to the next? What level of facilitation do they require, and how much are they able to tackle on their own? What role do teachers play as their students move through the SIM?” she asks. “These are some of the questions we’ve been tackling through our work.”

As she realizes how “abstract” governance can be (especially to those who are not receiving a proper grounding in civics), Avashia hopes the Institute serves not only as a means of filling gaps, but as a place where students can become excited about their community and ways to serve it.

“It is difficult to convey to students the complexity of lawmaking...in the absence of the opportunity to actually experience [it],” she observes. “By allowing students to become Senators for a day, and really engage in learning a bill thoroughly, and then doing the persuading and horse trading that happen around legislation, they gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.... I think the creation of the Institute will benefit students all over MA for this reason.” ■

Benefit Bulletin: Pet Protection

In this 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.

Whether they meow, bark, squeak, fly, swim or slither, pets are part of the family, too. That’s why Union Plus offers three programs that make it more affordable to keep your pets healthy.

Through AFT + Pet Services there are discounts on routine veterinary care and pet-related products for your furry, scaled, or winged companions. And for dogs and cats alone, there’s insurance that helps defray medical costs in case of injury or illness.

To get more information about these AFT + member benefit programs, visit UnionPlus.org/AFTpets:

1. Union Plus Pet Health Care Savings, provided by Pet Assure, provides savings for all veterinary services, including routine pet health care and coverage for all animals. It may be used with Union Plus Pet Insurance – or with any pet insurance -- to save you even more money. Pre-existing conditions are covered. Here’s what you get when you sign up for Pet Health Care Savings by calling 1-888-789-7387 and

using discount code UPFREE or by visiting UnionPlus.org/AFTpets and using discount code UP2003:

- First three-month membership for \$1 per month
 - 10 percent discount on Pet Assure membership, bringing it down as low as \$6.95 per month
 - 25 percent discounts on all veterinary services from a growing network of over 2,500 veterinarians nationwide
 - Up to 50 percent savings on pet-related products and services such as pet food, grooming, boarding and training
 - Free pet ID tag and 24/7 locator service for each enrolled pet
2. Union Plus Pet Health Insurance (for dogs and cats only). When your dog or cat gets sick or is injured, the last thing you want to worry about

is money. For peace of mind, and real savings, enroll your pet in one of the several Union Plus Pet Health Insurance programs provided by Quick-Care. Flexible plans start as low as \$11.99 a month. Call 1-866-473-7387 or visit UnionPlusPets.com to find out which program is right for you.



NO PAWS FOR ALARM
AFT takes care of pets too

3. Pet Food, Medication and Toy Discounts. AFT members can purchase pet food, supplies and medication at highly competitive rates online at UnionPlus.org/AFTpets with this program. In addition to the already great pricing available, AFT members get a 10% discount on all purchases of supplies, and \$1 off all prescription medication and flea & tick products. Save an additional 5% when you use your AFT + Credit Card.

We all love our pets, and they depend upon us for their health, so visit UnionPlus.org/AFTpets today to get details on all the Union Plus Pet Services. ■

Do YOU know someone who should be featured in Summa Cum Laude?

Do you want to recognize a teacher, student, staff member or graduate?

Send their information to advocate@aftma.net



Sedaka as Scholar

BPS teacher takes political tips from popular songwriter

Educator Opinion
By Michael J. Maguire

There comes a time in many a relationship when you slowly realize that your partner is losing interest. For me that time was January 13, 2010. On that date I stood up in the hall of the Boston Teachers Union and spoke against nominating Martha Coakley for US Senate. Suddenly, the words of Neil Sedaka’s “Breakin’ Up is Hard to Do” came flooding into my head.

**Don’t take your love away from me
Don’t you leave my heart in misery
If you go then I’ll be blue
‘Cause breaking up is hard to do**

Mere days before my public display of heresy the Massachusetts House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly for a misnomer of a bill entitled An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap. The crux of the matter was Democrat legislators voted overwhelmingly for more charter schools. I wanted to send a message to the Democrats that teachers would not be taken for granted. I gathered some supporters but I failed to achieve a majority vote in the union hall.

**Remember when you held me tight
And you kissed me all through the night
Think of all that we’ve been through
Breaking up is hard to do**

Traditionally, Democrats and teachers unions were inseparable. Nearly one hundred years ago, the AFL worked hard to elect Woodrow Wilson. Over the years Democrat presidents needed the support of the unions to win. Truman credited auto workers for his victory. Carter courted teachers and, as a thank you for his victory, established the Department of Education. Today things surely are different. Both locally and nationally the Democrats have caused more harm to public education than have the Republicans. Yet the AFT-MA remains loyal to the Democrats. At what cost, I wonder.

**They say that breakin’ up is hard to do
Now I know-
I know that it’s true
Don’t say that this is the end
Instead of breaking up
I wish that we were making up again**

The AFT-MA certainly wants to keep

the romance going. In the October, 2014 edition of the *Advocate*, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell acknowledged that Martha Coakley’s position on



DOWN DOOBY-DO DOWN DOWN
Professor Sedaka

charter schools is “dreadful.” Nonetheless Mr. Gosnell urged us to vote for gubernatorial candidate Martha Coakley as the lesser of two evils. It seems to me that AFT MA knew that Coakley was a flawed candidate but did not want to break up with the Democrat party for fear of being alone. I would rather be alone for the right

reasons than in a relationship for the wrong reasons.

**I beg of you don’t say goodbye
Can’t we give our love another try?
Come on, baby, let’s start anew
‘Cause breaking up is hard to do**

The Democrats are looking to regroup and rebrand for the 2018 governor’s race. As the Democrats start anew, let us teachers play the field. We ought not fall in love with the first candidate who smiles at us. We ought to play hard to get and should not be afraid to take time off from dating in order to focus on our career for a while. Perhaps we should even flirt with other parties. Perhaps the Democrats will then

pay us the attention we deserve. And if they don’t, then we’ll know where we stand. Breaking up may be hard to do, but perhaps it is long overdue. ■

Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin and Ancient Greek at Boston Latin Academy.

Para Conference

Continued from page 1

teacher and para formulate expectations. Then, they plan strategies for achieving mini -goals, such as working on one worksheet at a time instead of giving an anxious student multiple worksheets or tasks at once.

Autism and ABA

Seth Bartholomew, Assistant Director Office of Special Education and Student Services, led a workshop on autism. Today, 1 in 68 children is autistic. In 2000, it was 1 in 168! Today, autism is the fastest growing developmental disability. It manifests in all races and ethnicities but is five times more likely to occur in boys than girls. Certainly more reporting and awareness is contributing to the increased prevalence of autism, but the simple answer to what causes autism is still not known.

For educators, the why is not as important to what we do. Our job is to help students grow and make progress. Bartholomew spent a few minutes explaining that vaccines don’t cause autism, but explained that genetics is the leading factor in today’s studies. He also talked about helping autistic students with safety skills, social skills, transitions, and routines. To help the student, he encouraged looking at what specifically about a transition might be difficult for them. Is it ending one favored task, the chaos of the leaving one situation for the next, or is it the dislike of the next task?

In order to help deal with these challenges, Bartholomew spent time helping paras understand how the

world looks and feels for the autistic student so that they can be better prepared to help them succeed in the class. A good general strategy, he suggested, is to limit verbal instructions. Giving a child a four-step process can be overwhelming; so Bartholomew suggested that teachers instead give

yell” is harsh and puts a student on the defensive, whereas “Do keep a neutral tone” is encouraging and specifically gets at the heart of the matter.

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is the scientific analysis of the relationship between behavior and the environment (i.e., response to stimuli).

ABA works because it is systematic, data based, and simple. “When you praise good behavior, you are likely to see more good behavior,” concluded Bartholomew.

Students with Trauma

Colleen Labbe, a K-2 teacher at the Lee Academy Pilot School

in Dorchester, and Anita Sintes, a kindergarten teacher at the Hernandez, gave a workshop on how to help students who live with trauma in their daily lives. According to Labbe and Sintes, trauma is not an event, but a response to a stressful experience where one’s ability to cope is overwhelmed. Chronic trauma impacts brain development. Development of

higher-order functions is also delayed when a child is more occupied with surviving today’s stress.

Every day events can be unintentional and unexpected triggers for students. Sights, sounds, smells, touches, shame, anxiety, change of structure and/or anticipation can cause stress. The impact can be detrimental to student’s work in school and their life outside as well. Paying attention in class or following instructions in any scenario can become difficult. The key is to create an environment for learning. The goal is to have the student feel safe. Predictability helps and flexibility is needed. When the student is feeling overwhelmed and is not ready to learn, having a space away from the regular class activities can be helpful. Instead of it being a punishment like a “time-out” spot, the student can have more of an empowering experience because they independently opt to move from the stressful environment to a “safe space.”

After the three workshops, lunch was served and conversations began. To help all unwind from the seriousness of the morning’s activities, comic magician Evan Northrup entertained the crowd for nearly an hour. All told, it was another powerful and productive paraprofessional conference. ■



STANDING STRONG IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS
Josefina Lascano (fourth from left) and colleagues at the 2015 AFT MA/BTU Paraprofessionals Conference

instructions one step at a time. He also emphasized that staying calm is crucial and that it is often better to ignore a seemingly rude or disruptive behavior than to draw attention to it and risk escalation.

Bartholomew also reminded the conference attendees that “Don’t” statements are confrontational. Saying something like “Don’t speak loudly or

180Dayz
www.180dayz.com
By Scott Hubeny

Panel 1: A man in a green vest says, "SO, WE ARE GOING TO BE USING A NEW TEACHER EVALUATION TOOL TO MEASURE YOUR PERFORMANCE." A man in a brown vest responds, "UM, OK, WHAT IS IT?"

Panel 2: The man in the green vest holds up a purple hula hoop and says, "JUMP THROUGH THIS HOOP!"

Summa Cum Laude: Sean Stellato

As any Boston sports fan knows, behind every great team is another great team- the fans, coaches, managers, and others who encourage the players on the field to achieve their goals. Salem native Sean Stellato is one such person.

Growing up as one of three brothers, Stellato had a lot of positive influences and inspiration for both his athletic and academic life. “My brother Michael was my first coach who got me into sports,” Stellato recalls. “He was a great role model and motivator.”

While he excelled at many sports, Stellato found a particular affinity for football and basketball. “I knew I wanted to make sports my life when I played my 1st Cartoon League basketball game at the age of 7,” he recalls.

While at Salem High School, Stellato set multiple records and lead the football team to the conference championship in 1994. On the basketball court, Stellato helped the Salem team go undefeated and win the 1995 State Basketball Championship. “The sports programs in Salem were outstanding,” Stellato says, recalling his many “dedicated coaches who volunteered their time to bring out the best in the athletes.”

Speaking of bringing out the best, a 40-yard touchdown pass with no time left during a game against Winthrop earned Stellato a place on the TV special “7 Wonders” as one of the top

seven athletes in the country. After graduating from Marist College (where he was the leading receiver during the 2000 and 2001 seasons and where he was also selected to the MAAC All-Academic team for both football and basketball), Stellato pursued a career in professional football, playing two seasons in the Arena Football League.

After playing many sports for many years, Stellato decided the could be of more support as a supporter of his favorite players. “I took the baton as far as I could go as a player,” he reasons, explaining that seeing the business side of sports from the player’s perspective helps him support his clients today.

Stellato now serves as an NFLPA & NBPA Certified Contract Advisor, who has worked with the likes of such local legends as New England Patriots Kyle Arrington and Kyle Love, as well as current clients like leading rusher Jonas Gray, Super Bowl punt record holder Ryan Allen and defenseman Joe Vellano.

“We’ve had an agreement with each



FINDING SUCESS AND PASSING IT ON
Salem sports star Sean Stellato

other from Day 1,” Arrington explains. “I go out there and play as hard as I can, and Sean takes care of everything off the field.”

As he had made an impact on the field (and court), Stellato was quickly able to make one off the field as well. “My first client was Christian Koegal,” he says, mentioning the famed UMass punter. “When I was getting undrafted players more opportunities than guys who were drafted, I knew it was only time before I would really make a dent in the industry.”

In addition to supporting players as an agent, Stellato has also helped many others through his books. His memoir, *4th and Long*, told of the challenges of trying to make a career in professional sports.

“You’re too small,” Stellato smiles, recalling the claim he heard from many coaches and critics. What Stellato apparently lacked in stature, he made up for with heart and drive and it has been these elements that have helped him both on and off the field.

“There is so much I have learned throughout my career that I am looking forward to giving back to today’s youth,” he says.

As is true of his athletic pursuits, Stellato says that he takes inspiration for his books from family. “After I

wrote my memoir,” he says, “my dad gave me the idea on my next book.... My father, mother, brothers all encouraged me and my late grandmother...will always be my inspiration.”

The recently-released *No Backing Down* was awarded the 2014 Book of the Year Award by Mascot Books. Six years in the making, the book tells the true story of the 1994 teacher’s strike in Salem that resulted in football coach Ken Perrone’s defying a cease and desist order and coach his team to an appearance in the high school Super Bowl. “I remember a lot of my years at school,” Stellato says. “All the occurrences - both happy and sad - inspired me to write No Backing Down.”

On April 30, a *No Backing Down* film party will be held at Kowloon in Saugus. Among the scheduled special guests are Patriots Jonas Gray, Ryan Allen & Joe Vellano.

In addition to being a successful agent and accomplished author, Stellato also helped create The All-American Fundamental Showcase (www.all-americanshowcase.com), which he describes a, “a skills tutorial that lay’s down the foundation to assist younger athletes in developing a skill set that will enable them to display their talents.” Stellato notes that this year’s Showcase event will be held July 19th at Lynn Manning Field and will be hosted by Patriots’ Jonas Gray.

Just as he must continue to hustle to outmaneuver other agents, Stellato tries to inspire and encourage his clients and others to keep working hard to make their mark. “I am able to share my real life experiences with athletes,” he suggests, “so if they face similar situations they are prepared on how to attack the process.” ■

Policy Perspective: Hard times in Holyoke

By Cory O’Hayer

Holyoke is located in the heart of the college-centered Pioneer Valley, with UMASS Amherst and several prestigious liberal arts schools located nearby. The city’s schools, however, have been lackluster for years, with a high dropout rate and low MCAS scores long plaguing the postindustrial city. Fifteen percent of third grade students perform at grade-level, and the dropout rate is three times higher than the state average. Nearly all schools in the district are level four, and one is already under state control. The district as a whole has been “underperforming” for over a decade, and it has become increasingly likely that the Holyoke Public Schools will fall under state receivership.

The only other city in Massachusetts to have its entire school system taken over by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is Lawrence. The two cities share a very similar history, as both cities are planned communities that prospered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as industrial titans. Today, both cities suffer for lack of that industry, and must support a similarly disadvantaged economy. Holyoke’s families have the second-lowest median income in the state, at \$37,299. They are surpassed only by families in Lawrence, who take home a median income of \$36,073. Both cities have some of the highest unemployment rates in the Commonwealth: Holyoke’s unemployment rate is 165% that of Boston, while Lawrence’s unemployment is 225% of Boston.

Though Lawrence has reported gains since entering receivership, it has also seen a large amount of veteran teachers leave the district. As teachers have had increased hours, responsibilities, and evaluations, jobs

outside the district have become more desirable. The State takeover has had a major negative consequence for recruiting and retaining educators, with schools under state control often seeing annual teacher turnover rates in excess of 50%. A similar number can be expected of Holyoke.

Mitchell Chester, the state’s education commissioner, has pushed strongly for a vote for state receivership in Holyoke and has claimed that poverty should not be destiny. Though poverty has long proven as strong indicator in poor academic performance, and standardized tests and curricula have only made the correlation more clear, to remove local authority from Holyoke will not necessarily bring higher returns. Holyoke has seen improvements without direct intervention. Since 2011, Holyoke’s four-year graduation rate has increased nearly 22%. The district’s superintendent, who has held the job for nineteen months, has urged patience.

Holyoke’s public schools are not in an ideal situation. The Paper City’s needs and often transient population require extra attention and support and need to find a comprehensive solution that will answer problems such as the city’s high poverty and crime rates. To rush the district’s public schools into state takeover, rather than relying on local control to contribute to the district’s improvement, is not a solution worth merit. If Holyoke is to improve its schools, a comprehensive approach that focuses on the entirety of the inequity of education access must be addressed. ■

Cory O’Hayer has a Master’s degree in urban education policy from Brown University and works in the Boston Public Schools.

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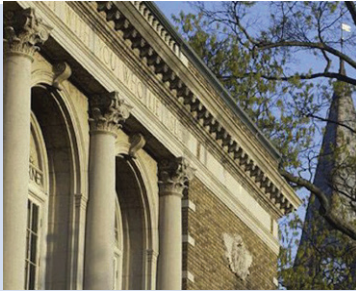
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On Campus

**Susan Krumholz, President
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895**



Paying for Performance

Performance-based funding is billed as the model of the day for funding higher education. No less than President Obama has said that it will lower the cost of education, increase access, and reduce student debt.

I recently attended a national conference of higher education unions, representing both AFT and NEA. There were plenty of exciting and challenging issues raised in a short time - from unionizing contingent workers (the subject of my last column), to the national attack on unions and the privatization of higher education. Among those, performance-based funding (PBF) loomed large and imminent. A recent report by the National Conference of State Legislators (www.ncsl.org/research/education/performance-funding.aspx, retrieved 4/2/15) indicates that five states have PBF in place at two-year public higher education institutions, six states at four-year institutions, and eighteen states at all public higher education institutions. Several others are considered to be “in transition.” Massachusetts is in the first category, but the rhetoric on campus suggests that we at four-year institutions are not far behind.

So what does it mean and what are the real implications? Performance-based funding (also referred to as outcome-based funding) relies on a series of performance measures to determine funding, such as the number

of years it takes the average student to graduate. It functions in much the same way as test scores do when they are used to determine funding for K-12; it punishes those with lower scores for making less progress toward some predetermined goal. Measures used in higher education include retention rates, average time to degree, percent of degrees in STEM, and percent of students employed full-time in their field one year after graduation (some states, such as Florida, look for employment in that state).

The oft-cited goal of PBF is to align a college’s goals with the goals of the state, but are we talking saving money here or creating and capturing a workforce?

All of this begs the question of whether we are still institutions of higher education, or merely job training programs. To quote Aristotle, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” At least one purpose of higher education, as I understand it, is to provide our students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enter the world as competent and questioning citizens. But perhaps I am naive? So lets talk about some of the less esoteric failures of PBF.

In a number of states, PBF is being used as a pretense to reduce state funding to public higher education. The American Council on Education predicts that, following current trends, some states, Massachusetts

among them, “will reach zero funding for higher education before 2050” (Mortenson, www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/state-funding-a-race-to-the-bottom.aspx, retrieved 4/2/15). I am not suggesting here that PBF is the cause of the funding decreases. These began long before PBF entered the arena. The contention is that it will be used as a tool by which, campus by campus, public higher education will disappear or become private education as the declining state support results in ever-higher tuition and fees.

Performance-based funding has a disproportionate impact on institutions serving disadvantaged and atypical students. UMass Dartmouth has a wonderful diversity of students, but many of our students come from homes that are economically unstable. As a result, it is not unusual for students to withdraw mid-semester to attend to an ill family member, or to have to take a semester or two off because their parent lost a job and they need to work for a while in order to afford to finish their education. These factors have nothing to do with the faculty, the course work, or even the administration of the institution. As a result of PBF, institutions around the country serving more vulnerable populations have lost funding, requiring them to raise tuition, and in some cases close their doors altogether.

And then there is the concern about unintended consequences. One such consequence is a lowering of academic standards to aid retention. Anecdotal

evidence has suggested watering down of course content and inflating grades to minimize failure and dropout rates. Another supposedly unintended consequence is the tightening of admissions. As discussed above, low income and marginalized students are the most likely to reduce an institutions performance outcome. So logic follows that, if you want to increase your score, decrease your at-risk student population.

Finally, just as test scores fail to measure a student’s learning, so too PBF fails to reflect the quality of an education. As the Mortenson report states, PBF “offers few ‘shades of gray’ in a multifaceted, complex environment.”

Maybe there are positive ways to provide incentives. In 2012, the Governor of Massachusetts created a pilot program called the Completion Incentive Grant Fund, offering funding for low-income students who persist in completing their degree. This program appears to provide incentives to the student rather than the institution; thus addressing some of the concerns surrounding PBF.

At the risk of repeating myself, I continue to question what the state’s goals have to do with education; creating a competent workforce is fine but it is not the same thing as fostering the growth of intelligent individuals. If we teachers spent less time and energy trying to prove we are doing our work through testing and collecting data, we would have a lot more time to return to what we love - TEACHING. ■

Food for Thoughts

GBLC breakfast brings labor together

Despite the fact that the Edward M. Kennedy Institute was opening just across town (please see story this issue), hundreds of devoted labor members gathered at the Omni Parker House in Boston for the Greater Boston Labor Council (GBLC) Labor Breakfast.

“We know that this is where we get things done,” said GBLC Vice President Darlene Lombos. “The Labor movement here in MA is real and vibrant and relevant!”

After discussing the many issues facing Labor in the Commonwealth, and encouraging everyone involved to “do more and do it together,” Lombos invited Father James Flavin

To lead the assembled in an Invocation in which he prayed that people “find work that fits their lives,” just as so many in the room had.

Before notifying the crowd of upcoming Labor events (including the April 14 “Fight for \$15” event in support of a higher minimum wage), GBLC Organizer Lindsay McCluskey recognized the many local legislators who had come to participate in the breakfast, including Senators Kenneth Donnelly, Pat Jehlen, Anthony Petrocelli and Michael Rush and Representatives Dan Cullinane, Patricia Haddad, Frank Smizik and Steve Ultrino. The co-chairs of the State Education Board - Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz and Representative Alice Peisch - were also in attendance and were recognized.

“There is much more that we need to achieve,” McCluskey said, “and we look forward to partnering with you.”

After Natalicia Tracy of the Brazilian Immigrant Center came to the podium to thank the assembled laborers and legislators for supporting her colleagues and constituents with the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (calling it a victory that belongs to all of us”), GBLC Executive Secretary Rich Rogers took the mic to ask for a moment of silence for Officer John Moynihan who had been shot while serving and was in the hospital.

Once the appropriate time had been allotted for prayers and good wishes, Rogers drove into an impassioned speech on workers’ rights.

“As a local labor movement,” he observed, “it is our obligation to fight with passion and convictions to maintain MA as a labor stronghold and with all the support in this room, we intend to do just that”

He then asked the assembled legislators to do their part to support the many laborers who regularly support them.

“It is something you have in your control,” he suggested.

Among Roger’s main points was the need for greater funding for tradi-

tional public schools. “We urge you to take another look at the false charter school rumors,” he said. “Maybe I am a skeptic, but when I see hedge funds fighting for education reformers, I am skeptical.”

He also emphasized the importance of funding for paid family medical leave, tuition equity for undocumented students, and tax credits for film and television industry.

“If we continue to work together,” he concluded, “we can make our commonwealth a great place to live and work.”

Rogers was followed by MA Building Trades Council President Frank Callahan, who reminded the crowd that the first reception at the Kennedy Institute had been held for his constituents, on the insistence of the Senator’s widow.

“Every person on that job was paid in accordance with their skills and their job classification,” he pointed out, “not their race or gender. That is what we stand for!”

Next, it was time for MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman to stoke the crowd with his pointed commentary. Recalling the oft-cited theme of “reform before revenue” that was prevalent when he was a member of the State Legislature, Tolman noted that “the revenue never came” and that real wages have been “essentially flat” since 1979.

“Without a strong organized voice that unites all workers and their fami-

lies,” Tolman suggested, “there can be no solution.”

Using the state of education as an example, Tolman observed that MA is “top in the nation in terms of education,” but also noted that recent policy changes allow teachers to be fired if students are seen as underperforming.

“That is not what we want,” he said, “but I do not hear the screams about it.... We gotta’ work together and understand that...the teachers’ problem is our problem. We’re all in it together [and] unless we are united, we are gonna’ be annihilated!”

When former educator Haddad (who is now Speaker Pro Tempore) rose to speak, she admitted how difficult it is to follow Tolman, but gave it a valiant effort.

“We all know Labor plays a critical role in strengthening our economy here in the commonwealth and across our nation,” she suggested, noting that MA now has the highest minimum wage in the nation. “MA is poised for incredible growth...[but] we must and will create new jobs.”

Looking out at the assembled group of supporters, Haddad said, “I believe the groups in this room have a bright, bright future,” and suggested that “the relationship between the House of Representatives and Labor is growing stronger.” In an effort to further strengthen that relationship, Haddad suggested that her doors and those of her colleagues were open to Labor.

“We’re here to talk to you,” she pledged, “and were here for your help because only your advocacy can show us the right direction.” ■





Retiree Corner

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



An Issue of Justice

Over the course of this past year the media has devoted a lot of time on a significant issue affecting a large population; equal pay for equal work. We who are working or retired from a public sector teaching job in Massachusetts do not fully appreciate the significance of this.

Most of us worked and retired after the 1960's when collective bargaining corrected the disparity that existed in this state between male and female with respect to salary. It is noteworthy that not all those teaching in all states enjoy equal pay. There are still some states in which the discrimination in pay exists. Even in states that resolved the problem, we still have those living in retirement that were victims of this gender discrimination. Just because one is not a victim does not mean we should not appreciate the issue or get involved with correcting it.

Women did not always have the opportunity for a college education. Before the advent of financial aid, if a family could only afford to send some of their children to college, males were given the opportunity. They were seen as the breadwinners. For example in 1960, 9.7% of males completed a four-year college compared to 5.8% of females. Many women did not go to

college until after their youngest child started school.

Poverty in our country has a distinctly feminine face. According to a study done by Teresa Heinz Kerry, "the largest segment of our population is poor, elderly women." Many of these women worked as professionals, but their years in the workforce were reduced because society expected them to also be caregivers. It did not matter if this caregiving was to an aged family member or a child. For the most part it was the woman who was expected to provide the service.

Massachusetts is one of the only states that corrected this act of discrimination, which occurred when women were forced to leave the classroom because they were pregnant. At the time, Representative Rachael Kaprielian made it her job to get this corrected because she was so concerned about the difference in the pensions of females to their male counterparts due to this act. Former State Senator Katherine Clark, now Congresswoman for the 5th Congressional District, listened when Massachusetts Retirees United, the only organization fighting to have this benefit extended to those already retired, testified on the issue and helped get the bill

passed and into law in April 2012.

There are over 69 million women in the workforce. Some 10 million of them are the sole breadwinners in their families. They are not working to supplement their spouse's salary, as they are the only source of support in the family; they are victims of the prevailing attitude about work and pay.

One concern that has become evident to me in retirement is the plight of the single woman or the person who becomes a widow to support themselves. It is one thing to manage on one salary when one is young and has the freedom and opportunity and health to perform a second job. But how do they do it in retirement on one pension or one Social Security check?

The next time all of us, who are in dual households balance our checkbooks, take note of the difference in our monthly income if something happens to one of us. Will it change our lifestyle when our spouse dies or our Social Security check and/or a good part or our entire pension is diminished? Will there be things we will have to do without?

The tragedy of not demanding equal pay for equal work is that the suffering never ceases. Not only do women feel the effects during their

SENIOR SEMINARS

How to Protect Your Nest Egg
Saturday April 18, 2015, 10 am-noon
Saturday June 27, 2015, 10 am-noon
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

This free seminar by Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie deals with wills, trusts(irrevocable and revocable), gifting, probate, joint tenancy, direct transfers upon death, and much more.

Preparing for Retirement
Thursday, March 26, 3:30-5:30
Methuen Education Association
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen

Wednesday, April 29, 2:45-4:45
Chelsea High School, Room B3205
299 Everett Avenue, Chelsea
Chealsea teachers/support staff ONLY

Tuesday, May 5, 2:30-4:30
Blackstone Valley Regional Voc-Tech -
Teacher's Café Annex
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.

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

working years, but it also follows them into retirement. Let us voice our support for all efforts made to correct this injustice. ■

Our President on Our President

Randi Weingarten on new "Decision 2016" election platform

In anticipation of the recent announcement of the first major presidential candidate (Sen. Ted Cruz), and with more candidates likely to follow suit soon, I want to update you on the steps we have taken to implement the resolution passed by the AFT executive council at its February meeting regarding the AFT's 2016 presidential endorsement process.

The guiding resolution essentially instructs the AFT to do three things:

- Begin a listening process with AFT members to learn about the issues that are important to them for the upcoming presidential election;

- Conduct research on the candidates and their positions on the issues, and then inform AFT members about those positions; and

- Engage members and affiliates in the presidential endorsement

process, and seek to broaden ways to do so.

To this end, I am pleased to announce the launch of the AFT's "You Decide: Election 2016" (www.aft.org/election2016). You Decide is the initial platform the AFT will utilize

to engage and inform our members about the presidential candidates. The site will be updated frequently—both to provide up-to-date information on the candidates and to give members the opportunity to tell us about the issues and concerns that are most

important to them for this election.

AFT leaders and staff have already begun speaking with some of the nascent presidential campaigns. As in the past, we will ask all announced candidates to complete the AFT issues questionnaire so we can have a clearer picture of where they stand on issues that affect our members, their families and their communities.

In the coming weeks, we will take additional steps to engage our members in the endorsement process, including digital engagement, telephone town halls and member meetings. We will continue to update you as we move forward in this process.

If you or your staff have particular ideas that you think may help engage our members, let us

know. In the meantime, please share the You Decide site with your affiliates and members.

The AFT and our affiliates have a long and proud history of listening to and engaging our members. I am excited about the role our members can play in helping elect a president of the United States who will share our vision for America's future.

Randi



A Union of Professionals

AFT 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ENDORSEMENT

Year: 2015

WHEREAS, members of the American Federation of Teachers are engaged participants in the political process that defines and strengthens our democracy; and

WHEREAS, the AFT and our affiliates are committed to advancing the American dream for the people we have the honor to represent and those we have dedicated our lives to serving—our members, our families and our communities—through educational opportunity for all students from birth to college; mitigating the circumstances of poverty; rebuilding the middle class; strengthening the institutions that serve our communities; improving the economy; valuing workers, and giving them voice through collective bargaining rights; fostering democratic principles that allow all who call America home to have access to the American dream; and

WHEREAS, the AFT and our members have a long and proud history of pushing against inequality and unfairness, and toward opportunity and equality for all; and

WHEREAS, the 2016 presidential election will be an opportunity to choose a candidate who shares the AFT's vision for America's future; and

WHEREAS, members of the AFT are engaged participants in the political process that defines and strengthens our democracy; and

WHEREAS, the 2016 race for the presidency already has begun with individuals announcing their candidacies, resources being raised to support candidate campaigns, and with candidates formalizing their positions on the issues of importance to AFT members; and

WHEREAS, the AFT not only has a proud history of engaging and listening to members, and a track record of researching issues important to our members; educating one another on those issues; and communicating those values aimed at giving everyone a fair shot at success; but our union also has a history of providing a guiding resolution for presidential endorsements in primaries and general elections:

RESOLVED, that it is premature to endorse a candidate for president of the United States, but because the 2016 presidential election process already has commenced, the American Federation of Teachers has a responsibility to begin a listening process with AFT members to learn about the issues that are important to them for the presidential election, and will seek to broaden the ways to do so; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT research candidates' positions on issues that are important to our members, inform members about those positions, and take steps to engage members and affiliates in the presidential endorsement process.

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Legislator Profile: Sal DiDomenico

Having spent many years in the hospitality field before entering politics, Senator Sal DiDomenico still recalls the warmth and support his earliest educators offered him and the inspiration it engendered for his personal and professional life.

“I remember it vividly,” the Senator says of his time in the Head Start program in Cambridge. “It was a neighborhood school a block from my home and I would walk with my parents. I learned how to read and had a truly fun experience.”

Though “fun” may not be a word all students use to describe school, DiDomenico attributes this choice of term to his teachers. “My kindergarten teacher was really instrumental in making me feel comfortable and facilitating the desire to learn,” he explains. “She was a very warm and compassionate person.”

DiDomenico says that it was when working with struggling students that his teacher truly shone. “I remember other kids having a hard time,” he says, “and I remember how she treated them. It certainly left an impression on me and I still remember 38 years later.”

Senator DiDomenico recalls having had the privilege of learning and working with similar teachers throughout his academic career. “Every teacher from then on was great,” the Everett resident says of his childhood in Cambridge. “It was a tremendous district for learning and central for the community.” Senator DiDomenico also recalls some of the social benefits associated with attending a neighborhood school. “All the kids I grew up with were there,” he recalls, “and the content and curriculum were particularly strong.”

In addition to learning a wide range of academic subjects, DiDomenico learned how to work with and support others by observing his own talented teachers. “The teachers I spent time with were so kind and constantly going the extra mile for the kids. They made sure that even those who required a little extra help got what they

needed. Seeing the way those teachers interacted with each other and the students definitely influenced who I am today.” He continued, “My love of education and my passion to make sure people have the experience I had is what pushes me to do what I do in the Senate.”

Interestingly, before he was invited to serve the public in his current role, DiDomenico served as a member of the expert staff of some of the area’s best hotels. When asked how he came to his previous occupation, the Senator explained, “The Royal Sonesta was right down the street from my house and I had gone there for years. It helped fuel my interest in getting involved in that industry.”

As in his schools, DiDomenico was fortunate to work with “a lot of great people” at the hotel and was almost ready to settle in for a career, but fate had other plans.

“At the same time, I was a City Councilor in Everett and had worked several campaigns,” he explained, noting that his inspiration also came from his father, a man many people turned to when they needed support. “I wanted to help people as my father did, and then my Senator called me to and asked me to be his Chief of Staff.”

After over two years in this position, DiDomenico found himself running for his former boss’ empty seat. Now that he is in a position of influence where he can serve more than one person at a time, DiDomenico has pledged to do all he can to help those who helped him so much as he was coming up. “I want to make sure today’s students have the same opportunities I had,” he says.

As a member of the Education Committee, DiDomenico has more opportunity than most address the many important and often contested issues related to education in this State. “My

top priority is education,” he says. “There is no doubt about it – and early education in particular.”

Living in Everett, where every child goes to preschool at age three, DiDomenico questions why all children do not have the same opportunities and vows to fight on their behalf. “It is my goal that every child can have a curriculum-based program for three and four year olds,” he maintains. If they do not have this, he points out, children will already be behind when they reach kindergarten will surely suffer later on.

“There is no doubt that there is a clear relationship between preschool and that third grade reading level,” he says, noting what has been determined to be a key benchmark for academic achievement. “Preschool is essential and has been a major focus throughout my time as a State Senator.”

In addition to being dedicated to children and educators at work, DiDomenico is also similarly dedicated at home. In addition

to keeping an eye on how his children are doing in school, he is also keenly aware of the situations faced by his wife, a special education teacher. “My wife and I met long before she became a teacher and before I began my career in politics,” he explained. “Obviously, we have common interests in that our children and all children are given the proper opportunities to succeed.”

As his interests at home mirror those at work, DiDomenico assures people that he is just as devoted in both places. He also takes what he learns from his children and wife to inform his work as a state Senator. “My support for teachers and public educators is always there,” he pledges. “It is not just a job for me. If I left the Senate tomorrow, I would still be



LEARNING IS “FUN”
Senator Sal DiDomenico

When Art and Math Collide

Student art show features geometry

Educator Opinion

By Susan Baxter , Renee Popek and Pat Rourke

The Common Core State Standards have re-shaped our curriculum and re-designed classroom instruction. New initiatives are implemented, and teachers are asked to do more with less. We all wonder how we are going to meet all of the expectations in our classrooms and still allow for the art and fun of education in the process.

In the fall of 2013, David Keim, Principal of the Fred. W. Miller Elementary School in Holliston, MA, met with art teachers Renee Popek and Susan Baxter to consider ways that they could integrate geometry with the art curriculum. The goal was to continue the strong visual arts education that the students were already receiving while incorporating geometric concepts and terminology into art units that were more math based.

The art teachers were already applying many math concepts with some of their units, so it was a natural extension to add geometric components. They met with STEM Coordinator Pat Rourke to learn more about the enVisionMATH Common Core math curriculum used by the Holliston Elemen-

tary Schools. Together they reviewed the math curriculum and decided that, in order to successfully integrate geometry with the Visual Art curriculum, they would need to introduce the math concepts and terminology at the primary level. They decided to use a spiral approach similar to the strategy they use in art and consecutively build upon learned concepts each year with more in-depth and complex lessons. Researching and planning together, the group developed art and geometric lessons for all the grades that they teach, from grade one to grade five.

The inclusion of geometric concepts and terminology are an enhancement of an already rich and diverse art curriculum that is based upon the Massachusetts Art Curriculum Framework and the Holliston Public Schools Fine and Performing Arts Standards. When one is well versed and knowledgeable in pedagogy, as well as being highly skilled educators in the Visual Arts, developing an art education curriculum that includes elements of geometry is an appropriate goal.

The new curriculum resulted in

projects that demonstrated student understanding of both standards. With the help of the Holliston Education Parent Teacher’s Organization an art exhibit and our annual Math Night were combined with a focus on geometry. Every student in both the Placentino and Miller schools had a piece of art on display. Each piece had a description of the art and math

standard being demonstrated. Math-related questions that parents could ask their children were also suggested. In addition, some of the math activity stations were run by art teachers.

Among the projects and skills engaged were the creation of symmetrical pictures using crayons, paper folding and scissors and the use of power polygons to trace shapes and create pictures. Students were given directions for these projects based on their grade level and the geometry standards that correlated to that grade. One art project developed by grade five students was meant to pose a discrete math problem related to exponents, but when the grade one students found the giant block designs they created their own patterning problem and solved it with small



fighting for teachers.” “After all,” he says, “If we do not support our teachers, our future leaders will not be able to succeed as we need them to do.”

DiDomenico also emphasized a focus on safety as well as a number of other crucial elements he believes are necessary for our schools. “The three things we need to be sure to do for our kids are to keep them healthy, keep them safe and educate them,” DiDomenico suggests. “We need to close the achievement gap that exists in our educational institutions and ensure there are enough wraparound services for all children and support for teachers.”

While many focus on outcomes and the apparent needs of the student, DiDomenico suggests paying more attention to the needs of the teachers as well. “Teachers are not just teachers,” he suggests. “They are mentors and confidants and often take on a parental role. We need to make sure that our teachers have the resources to keep up with the demands, as well as the challenges, of the 21st century.”

DiDomenico has continued to be a champion for teachers and do all he can to provide them with what they need so that they may share their talents with others. As somebody who received a public education, DiDomenico is proud of his teachers and their colleagues and has worked diligently to support them. “Many of our public school teachers do not get the credit they deserve for doing all they do under certain constraints,” he suggests. “They do an extraordinary job balancing many demands while making sure our children are prepared for whatever the future holds.”

As he so fondly recall his earliest teachers from decades before, DiDomenico also suggests that teachers play a large role in shaping the lives of their students. “Teachers are unique,” he says, “because there aren’t many professions where you can have such a profound and long-lasting effect on somebody’s life.... If you do not believe that teachers have an effect on who you are, then you are not being realistic about the role of teachers.” ■

group collaboration. Other activities involved using the program SCRATCH in the computer lab to program the design of shapes, solving area and perimeter programs using geoboards, solving geometric puzzles using versatile tiles and playing the geometry games from the enVisionMATH program used by the school system.

Such a massive undertaking could only be accomplished as a community. Prior to the event, the local parent group, HEPTSA, helped set up the math activities, framed the artwork, and provided refreshments for the volunteers. Over 30 teachers volunteered to run the math stations so all family members could attend the event. In addition, grade 8 students from Adams Middle School returned to their former elementary schools to assist the teachers and students by supervising the activities and technology equipment. The modeling they provide for the elementary students is always well received and reminds the younger students that math is a fun and cool thing to do. The event brought over 400 members of the Miller and Placentino educational community together for an evening of fun and the culmination of a standards based art project with a mathematics flair. ■

Susan Baxter and Renee Popek are art teachers in Holliston. Pat Rourke is Holliston’s PreK-5 STEM Coordinator.