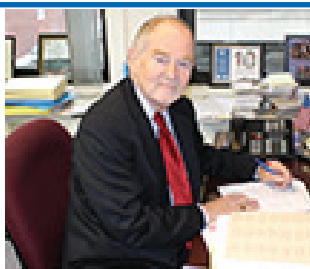




# The Advocate



April / May 2016



## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

**Thomas J. Gosnell**  
President, AFT Massachusetts

## Save Our Public Schools

The United States of America was the first major country to support universal free public education. Within the USA Massachusetts, led by Horace Mann's fervent advocacy, became the national leader. The first public school in the USA was in Boston.. Free public education now exists in all fifty states.

Public education is one of the bulwarks of American democracy.

However, threats to public education are widespread. One of the major threats is the sustained attempt to underfund public education. Of course, when it is underfunded, the challenge to educate our students at the level to which they are entitled is overwhelming. Then the underfunder assert that public education is failing to educate the students. Then they claim we must find alternatives.

One such alternative is charter schools. Although the law declares them to be public schools, in reality they operate as private schools. Look at some, and these are only some, of the following differences between them and the regular public schools:

1. Public school teachers need to be licensed. Charter school teachers need not be.

2. Public schools must accept all students. We gladly do so. Charter schools have far fewer special needs students with significant disabilities and English language learner students who have much progress to make before they are fluent in English. In the regular public schools there are English language learners who are not fluent, some even illiterate, in

their native language. The regular public schools gladly accept all these students.

3. In some charter schools the dropout rate is very substantial. Where do these students go? To the regular public schools.



**STANDING UP FOR THEMSELVES...AND THEIR TEACHERS**  
On March 7, students from Boston Public Schools rallied around the State House demanding full funding for their schools while others testified against mishandling of funds (Please see stories on pages 6-7)

In Massachusetts for every 96 students in the regular public schools, four are in the charter schools. The financial impact on the regular public schools is devastating, particularly in urban areas where the number of students living in poverty is very high and where most of the charter schools exist. The regular public schools lose hundreds of millions of dollars because their budgets must fund charter schools.

Now the charter school proponents are attempting to place on the ballot in 2016 an initiative petition to raise the statewide cap on charter schools. Currently state law places a cap on charter schools both statewide and in the cities and towns. In fact, two years ago the Massachusetts State Senate said enough and rejected by a vote of 26 to 13 an attempt to raise the charter school cap.

The Massachusetts Education Justice Coalition (MEJA), composed of parents, students, Citizens for Public Schools, the MA Teachers Association, the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, (AFT MA), a number

of AFT MA locals, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, is leading the effort to save public schools by defeating this initiative petition. AFT MA is an active and proud member of MEJA.

What can all of us do to save our public schools and to defeat this initiative petition? Here are some suggestions:

1. As the campaign develops to defect the initiative petition, all of us will have opportunities to be involved. Grassroots participation is essential. We'll keep you informed.

2. Educate family and friends about what is at stake. AFT MA can provide you with helpful information.

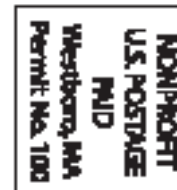
3. If you belong to organizations that have a connection to or an interest in public education, get on the agenda.

AFT MA can provide you with helpful information.

The competition for the voters' hearts and minds will be intense. The charter school proponents have publicly stated that they are prepared to spend 18 Million dollars to get this initiative petition passed. 18 Million dollars is a mighty challenge, but we shall not be deterred.

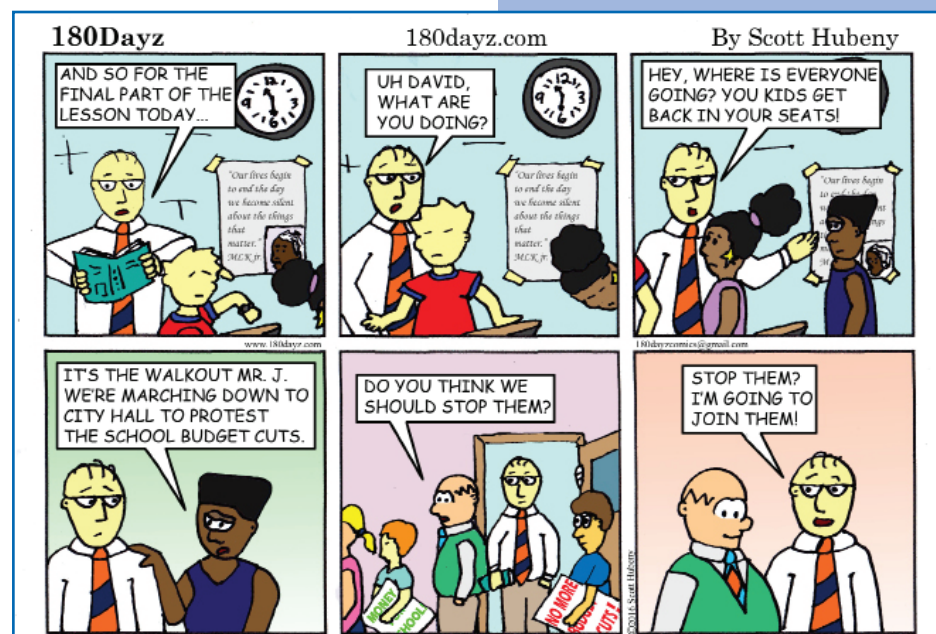
AFT MA will be an outspoken and articulate advocate, in conjunction with MEJA and all of you, in the campaign to save our public schools.

If you have questions or comments, you email [tgosnell@aftma.net](mailto:tgosnell@aftma.net). ■



## In This Issue

- 2 President Weingarten Visits AFT MA
- 3 TotY, ESSA, and AFT MA  
AFT Responds to SCOTUS
- 4 Local President's Report: 100% Membership  
Policy Perspective: Engaging young members  
Flying High at Wentworth
- 5 Walk In Unity May 4  
Benefit Bulletin: College Care
- 6 Feature Focus: Charter schools
- 8 Peabody Supports Visually-Impaired Students
- 9 Educator Opinion: Speech teachers  
Paraprofessional Perspective: Play Power
- 10 On Campus: "Ready" for "Success"  
Wentworth Renovates Library
- 11 Retiree Corner: Never in debt
- 12 ASP Brings Bard to School



## Help keep the cap on charter schools

Go to <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/keep-the-cap-on-charter-schools-2>

and write to your legislators.

**Together, we can WIN!**

# Membership Matters

## AFT President visits to support colleagues

As the Commonwealth prepared to go to the polls to speak their minds and hearts in what has become a critical (and at times comical) presidential race, AFT President Randi Weingarten came to visit in a show of support for her colleagues in the Bay State.

Association, Weingarten was especially intrigued with the situation surrounding the passing of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

"How can people with lifetime tenure question tenure?" she asked, referring to the Justices.

In reference to the Friedrichs

case itself, Weingarten suggested that it had been "manufactured" and that the plaintiffs had been "recruited" and the appeals "predetermined," all in an effort to weaken unions and labor across

the country. She also recalled being "in total shock" regarding the Court's response to legal briefs presented by AFT.

"People have rights to have dignity in the workplace," she concluded,

noting how public schools are also under attack from what she called the "flood" of charter schools and other forces of so-called "education reform."

"In an effort to find a silver

lining in recent educational policy, Weingarten pointed out how, with the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools cannot be "destabilized through testing."

Moving on to the presidential election, Weingarten explained the endorsement process and offered evidence for AFT's backing of Hillary Clinton.

"I realize there are challenges regarding her gender and regarding trust," Weingarten admitted of her long-time friend, "but she is more passionate...than any person I know."

Though AFT is endorsing one candidate, Weingarten went on to point out that, even if some members prefer others, they are free to vote as they choose. "There are two ways to speak your mind," she suggested, "the ballot box and the bargaining table."

Speaking of ballots, Weingarten then discussed the pro-charter school ballot initiative that AFT MA is vehemently opposing and suggested that it could be used as an effective way to engage members.

"Let's focus on what binds us together," she said. ■



### SHARING STRENGTH

**AFT President Randi Weingarten addresses the AFT MA Executive Board during a recent visit**

Among the diverse topics she discussed were the economy gap and privilege, health concerns in schools, and how teachers can come to learn from their students.

"We often have a lack of shared experience," she observed, suggesting that it was therefore harder for some teachers to "walk the walk for all people." As a result, Weingarten continued, there is "a level of anger on all sides" that, she suggested, was "really, really scary." Despite the fact that such issues are "difficult to talk about," Weingarten urged her colleagues to realize that they are "what we as a union need to talk about."

As a former social studies teacher and attorney who testified before the Supreme Court in the recent hearing of Friedrichs v. California Teachers



### WARM EMBRACE

**Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin shares a smile with President Weingarten**

**The Advocate**

The official publication of  
AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO

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**Massachusetts students and schools rank No. 1 in the U.S.**

**AFT Massachusetts congratulates students, teachers, paraprofessionals and education support personnel.**

Our students are among the nation's highest achievers, and our schools rank no. 1, according to "America's Report Card."

Together, Massachusetts educators, parents, students and community members continue to make real progress.

**Let's keep working together to reclaim the promise of public education.**

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# BOLD PRINT

The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) Customer Service "Hotline" is now available 9:00-noon and 2:00-5:00 PM Monday through Friday.

The direct line is 781-381-6600.

□ □ □ □

The Massachusetts Library Staff Association (MLSA) is proud to welcome Sandwich Public Library and looks forward to supporting its newest members.

□ □ □ □

Longy School of Music of Bard College will mark their 100th year this year with a series of special events (including a series of 100-second compositions) and nearly \$200,000 in grants for music library expansion, building renovations, and to support educational initiatives.

For information, visit [www.longy.edu](http://www.longy.edu).

□ □ □ □

On May 21, the Boston-area Educators for Social Justice Conference will take place at Fenway High School in Boston. For information and to participate, email [besjinfo@gmail.com](mailto:besjinfo@gmail.com).

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The Berklee Institute of Creative Entrepreneurship (BerkleeICE) and Citi Performing Arts Center have launched a new Music Business curriculum entitled "Performing Arts Centers: Sustaining Relevancy / Making an Impact" that is designed to introduce students to the roles of performing arts centers in urban environments and to encourage them to suggest how such centers can succeed in a competitive market.

More information can be found at [www.berklee.edu/focused/ice](http://www.berklee.edu/focused/ice).

□ □ □ □

The U.S. Green Building Council has awarded Berklee's 160 Massachusetts Avenue building LEED Gold certification. Opened in January 2014, the residence is the college's first custom-built facility. In addition to housing 369 students, it also boasts 23 practice rooms, six common areas, a dining hall that doubles as a performance space, and a 14,000 square-foot music production complex.

□ □ □ □

Do you have news to share? Send it to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)

# Helping Every Student Succeed

## Teacher of the Year joins ESSA planning board

**G**rowing up as a public school student and the daughter of proud public school worker, Audrey Jackson saw value in education, hard work, and having that work be valued. Perhaps it is no wonder then that she was recently named MA Teacher of the Year (TotY) and also invited to participate in a committee that will have a say in developing regulations related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

As she continues to represent the Commonwealth as TotY, to work with her colleagues on ESSA, and to prepare to address the 2016 AFT MA Convention on the weekend of April 29-30, Jackson took a moment to reflect on her career, her practice, and her values.

When asked what prompted her to enter education — particularly public education — Jackson admits to being “mystified by the broad difference in the experiences on high school students and by what would now be considered the ‘Achievement Gap.’” In an early effort to engage her mystification, Jackson worked as a teaching assistant at the MIT-Wellesley College Upward Bound program while an undergraduate at Williams College. Her next engagement was with elementary students as a research assistant participating in a three-year, federally funded research project called “Thinking Through Art” at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

“I felt warmed by the Boston Public Schools students I met and observed because they shared such great insights about the art,” she recalls. “They were not trying to get a ‘right’ answer. They were just explaining what they felt and interpreted about what they saw.”

Given that many of the schools and neighborhoods these students were from were cited for “needing improvement,” Jackson was encouraged by the personal insights about students’ inherent strengths and resiliency she was able to garner during her time at the Museum and inspired to remain with this age group going forward. Since then, Jackson has been able to not just perfect her practice (a process which she insists is ongoing and never-ending), but also to strengthen her understanding of her students and

their needs.

“I feel that mastery is more than just mastering subjects,” she suggests. “It is about helping each kid and giving kids a chance to develop skills and the agency to influence their future and their future choices.... That is why I have committed myself to helping



**AWARD-WINNING ADVOCATE**  
**BPS Teacher Audrey Jackson**

every student in my class thrive and succeed, both academically and in terms of their sense of identity and agency.”

Despite the fact that she grew up in rural VT, Jackson was drawn to Boston because, she says, “I wanted to live somewhere that was more diverse and yet not so far from home.” She was also intrigued and attracted by the opportunity to engage and support

people who may be seen by others as “underdogs” and those who might need a little extra support to thrive, in part, she says, because those who may be perceived as “needing help” often just need to hear that their voice and contributions are valued.

“I was grateful for the diversity and the richness of perspectives I found in college and so I wanted to work in a place where that was valued,” Jackson explains. As she was a product of public schools, Jackson also wanted to support such systems because, she observes, “that is the baseline where we need to raise the bar.”

Working at the Joseph P. Manning Elementary School in Jamaica Plain, Jackson is part of a team-taught classroom that includes students with challenges of all sorts, including many who have been identified as emotionally impaired (EI). In order to be able to understand and serve her students more effectively, Jackson pursued a Masters in Human Development and Psychology at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, where she was awarded the Faculty Tribute and Intellectual Contribution Award.

“I studied educational neuroscience and how trauma affects children’s development,” she recalls. “That research has helped me help students understand themselves and develop strategies so they can have a better understanding of, and a sense of control over, their emotions and behaviors.”

This passion to serve her students and to constantly improve and refine

her practice made Jackson a natural candidate for TotY. Still, she says, she was humbled by the outpouring of support from her colleagues and students.

“It was a blessing whether I won or not,” she says. “I felt heartened and blessed to be nominated.... No one gets into teaching to be recognized beyond the classroom, so any celebration or recognition is awesome in and of itself!”

Jackson was also enriched by the opportunity to look back at her own academic life and what it has meant to her and her students and colleagues.

“I am proud to say that my students have shown growth in terms of assessments and also in terms of more informal assessments,” she smiles. “All of the children I have worked with are having some form of success and that is something I am really proud of!”

After being notified of her nomination last spring, Jackson submitted a series of essays and participated in a set of interviews, classroom visits and solo and group projects that allowed and encouraged her to engage other excellent educators and to learn from them as well. Since being named TotY, Jackson has been able to appear on local news stations and also to participate in local and national events with colleagues. Among the highlights have been a TotY meeting in San Antonio, a visit to meet President Obama that is scheduled for this coming May, and, of course, her forthcoming talk at the AFT MA Convention.

“At the Convention, I hope to discuss policy perspectives and the power of teacher voice and teacher leadership,” she says. “I [also] hope to be able to discuss the power of different teaching styles...[and] I look forward to talking with AFT about what is important to them.”

Other future opportunities include a trip to Space Camp in AL (which Jackson may not be able to attend due to funding issues) and a final meeting with her award-winning colleagues at Princeton at which they will discuss next steps.

“I am still teaching full time,” she notes, thanking her talented and supportive co-teacher, Victor Joyner, her “amazing” principal, Ethan d’Ablemont Burnes, and other colleagues, “so I have been trying to balance these opportunities with doing right by my kids.”

In addition to being nominated and eventually named TotY, Jackson has also been invited to participate on the

Negotiated Rulemaking Committee for ESSA.

“It is a great way to connect local teachers and also with the national perspective,” she observes of this additional role, noting that she has been working closely with AFT Executive VP Mary Cathryn Ricker who is a non-voting member of the 24-member committee.

Though the committee is limited in its scope to elements of ESSA that have to do with Title I of ESSA (which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (with high numbers of children from low-income families to ensure they can meet academic standards), Jackson says that it still has been encouraging to have some say in educational policy.

“It’s been awesome to learn about it and to be at the table and to share and bring up the perspectives of teachers,” she says.

And while her new roles have opened Jackson’s eyes to other possible routes to supporting teachers and students, she is more than happy to remain with her beloved fifth graders and to continue to try to be an even better teacher every day.

“I am curious about what will happen with public education and I hope that there will always be a way to continue to bring teacher voice to the table to ensure that public schools, teachers and kids have their interests both protected and celebrated,” she says, “but my heart is still tied to the magic that comes from working closely with a child and the real impact you can have both each year and as you watch their trajectory change and grow.” ■

**AFT MA**  
**congratulates**  
**Audrey Jackson**  
**on being named**  
**MA Teacher of**  
**the Year**  
**and looks**  
**forward to**  
**hearing from**  
**her at the**  
**2016 AFT MA**  
**Convention**  
**April 29-30**

## AFT President responds to SCOTUS

On March 29, the Supreme Court decided to uphold Agency Fee, thereby removing - at least for the time being - a major obstacle to Union strength.

Here is the official letter from AFT President Randi Weingarten:

To AFT leaders,

This morning the Supreme Court weighed in on the Friedrichs case. It issued a one-sentence opinion affirming by a 4-4 vote the decision of the Ninth Circuit upholding the Abood decision and our right to collect fair share fees under the First Amendment. So, in non-lawyers’ terms, it means we won.

The court’s ruling today means that for those states with fair share laws there are no changes, including to current opt-out procedures for fee payers. While the Friedrichs case is now concluded and our rights to collect fair share remain intact, so much of our other work continues: our member engagement and community work; our electoral work; our social, educational and economic justice work; our work against austerity and for students, patients and all those we represent and serve; and our advocacy around the Supreme Court replacement for Justice Scalia.

Randi



As we continue to improve and expand upon our website ([www.aftma.org](http://www.aftma.org)), we also continue to encourage members to make use of it and, in the process, to save paper.

If you would like to receive an electronic version of the *Advocate*, send an email to [advocate@aftma.org](mailto:advocate@aftma.org).

# 100% Membership

## President's Report By Bruce A. Sparfven

The Educational Services Unit (ESU) of Local #1895, representing all professional staff on the campus of UMass Dartmouth, has maintained 100% union membership for many years. While the recent Fredricks case has caused a movement among unions to reach out to agency fee payers to join their respective locals as union members, the ESU has consistently maintained full membership based on its "welcome approach" to newly hired professional staff.

Many years ago, the executive board of the ESU wanted a way to welcome new professional staff hires to the University as well as sharing the benefits of joining a union. We established a welcome lunch program in which newly-hired professional staff members received personal invitations to be taken to lunch by a board member or building representative.

Given that each potential professional staff member receives a copy of the union contract when a hiring contract is extended, we felt it would be an opportunity after a new professional staff member arrives on campus to explain what our union is about and to go over important language items in the contract.

All new employees are also invited to the next general membership meeting where they are introduced to and welcomed by all in attendance.

When I was elected to the leadership position of the ESU in 1995, there were 90 union members. Currently, membership stands at 251 union members.

There is nothing better than that personal approach where all questions can be addressed as well as the benefits of belonging to a union beyond the salary and working condition items. ■



**STAYING ENGAGED**  
AFT MA Vice President and Local 1895 Chair Bruce Sparfven (right) with MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman

## Policy Perspective: Engaging Young Members

### By Cory O'Hayer

How do we make young members more active in their unions? Union leadership has struggled to find an answer while union membership has been declining nationally at an alarming rate. One oft-cited statistic is the fact that in 1954, nearly 35% of the American workforce was unionized, compared to just 11% today. Charter schools, typically non-union, are active in 43 states. While educators have the largest unions in the country, 23 states are right-to-work, and with the results of the Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association case potentially gutting public-sector unions, the stakes have never been higher.

Teacher retention has long been a major problem for school districts, especially in urban education. With programs such as Teach for America requiring members to work as teachers for only two years, teaching has been marketed nationally as more of an experience than a lifelong profession to be mastered. Many young educators therefore see no point in contributing to unions that seek better working conditions as they do not view themselves as professionals who share a common objective with tenured, experienced employees.

A teacher's first year is often chaotic, and young educators who plan on being career teachers typically rely on peer support as they aspire to improve their craft. New teachers often seek out experienced staff as well for constructive criticism and insight. Professional development may fulfill state requirements with workshops and day-long trainings, but real coaching often comes from the shared best practices of the teaching community. A community that, with the threatened de-professionalization of the career, may one day no longer exist.

One of the leading reasons for

teachers to leave the profession is the job insecurity that has become so familiar in recent years. With Boston facing a budget cut for its schools in the tens of millions of dollars, schools have taken drastic measures to plug funding gaps. Many teachers lacking professional licensure have found their positions, even those essential to school functionality or accreditation, cut and unlikely to be restored. For some teachers, receiving a pink slip has become an annual tradition.

On March 9, 2016, Boston Teachers Union representatives voted to hold building representative elections in May rather than September. The shift was made in the hopes of maintaining an active membership in the run-up to this summer's collective bargaining negotiations. This notion is misguided, as new teachers will have representatives for whom they did not vote, therefore removing these new hires from the democratic process and their right to select their representation. Furthermore, it will prohibit educators without reasonable assurance of retaining a position at their school from standing for election.

Teachers unions have become the most visible facet of American organized labor. However, if the trend of young educators regarding teaching as a stop-over rather than a profession continues, and if unions continue to take measures that prohibit teachers from establishing careers, charter backed ballot initiatives and the Friedrichs case may be unnecessary if unions are to be made irrelevant. It is the inability of leadership to engage and support their new membership that will ultimately render our organization obsolete. ■

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



### RED-Y TO SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS

On February 12, the Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals held a Wear Red to Show your Love for Educators Day. Hundreds of paraprofessionals, educators, building staff, and other district employees in more than 20 schools participated. Since the event, over 6,000 people have visited the Federation's "Wear Red" Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Springfield-Federation-of-Paraprofessionals-766960446751204/?ref=hl>).

## Catching the Buzz Wentworth develops drones

The students at Wentworth Institute of Technology have long been known for being on the cutting edge. With their latest project, they may be very well looking into the future, or at least getting a better perspective on today.

As part of Wentworth's Rapid Prototyping class (which is comprised of both Mechanical Engineering and Industrial Design students) students recently launched a series of workable drones.

Though the undeniable cool factor of the drones may have been the key to attracting top students, Professor Steve Chomyszak maintains that the point of the class was "to teach the process of design, engineering, project management, making and testing."

"The assignment for each team was to design and build a [copter] using a set of electronic/electrical components which were specified the previous semester," explains Chomyszak. "Each team had to utilize six different

prototyping methods in their [copter], and it had to fly.... Each team needed to also consider the amount of lift available with the motors and props that were specified, the battery life, access to vital components, aesthetics, craftsmanship, flight control, etc."

After weeks of prototyping and development, the drones were tested on Sweeney Field. Of the 11 tested copters, 10 flew successfully on their maiden voyages. "That's not bad for the first time we ever attempted something like this," Chomyszak observes.

Though the results were successful and the process greatly enjoyable, Chomyszak maintains that the rigor of the course was evident throughout.

"The course was intense," says Chomyszak, who is also the new director of Wentworth's pioneering EPIC program (see December, 2014 issue). "All of us learned a great deal from the experience and we received lots of great feedback." ■



### UP AND AWAY

Wentworth students test their self-developed drones on Sweeney Field

# Walk Into Involvement

## May 4 event intended to #ReclaimOurSchools

On February 17, 40,000 parents, students, and educators protested the deteriorating state of public education not by walking out, but by walking in. As part of an unprecedented show of support for public school education, walk-ins were organized at over 800 schools in 30 major cities across the country.

On May 4, The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) is doing it again.

On that morning, parents, teachers, administrators, and students are encouraged to arrive at their schools 30-45 minutes early and to gather as a group in front of the building. After a peaceful rally that can include speakers and chanting, the group is encouraged to enter the school as one body, showing strength and solidarity in support of the type of education all students deserve.

“Walk-Ins are an easy way to make a public statement in support of public education,” suggests AROS Director Keron Blair who cites unionized educators as “the strongest defenders of public education and the millions of families who benefit from it.”

According to AFT Human Rights and Community Relations Department Director Eric Zachary, the idea of a Walk-In first arose in St. Paul as part of their union’s contract campaign. “It was then used in Milwaukee against school closings and state takeover,” he explains.

Since then, similar organizations and events have spread across the country, becoming a national movement that engages and supports all students, educators, and stakeholders.

AROS is an organization made up of students, parents, educators, and

support professionals who are united in their support of public schools. In addition to helping organize the Walk-In events, AROS also offers a wide array of other resources on their website ([www.ReclaimOurSchools.org](http://www.ReclaimOurSchools.org)), including pledges, petitions, and other resources for anyone who

(tion), positive discipline policies and affordable education for all.

According to their website, AROS has come together to demand high quality, well-funded public schools, to stop the “state takeovers” of public school districts, to put an end to “over-testing,” and to demand accountability for charter schools and racial and restorative justice in every school.

“We have come together around a common commitment to public education.” Their materials maintain. “We believe that the only way to give every child the opportunity to pursue a rich and productive life, both individually and as a member of society, is through a system of publicly-funded, equitable and democratically-controlled public schools.”

Emphasizing how now, more than ever, access to good public schools is “a critical civil and human right,” AROS echoes AFT in its commitment to “reclaim the promise” of public education.

In calling people to action, AROS hopes to engage not only students, teachers, and parents, but also legislators, union members, and anyone who stands to benefit from a stronger public school system and a more equitable education system. In addition to AFT, AROS also includes representatives from NEA, SEIU and other state and national Labor organizations, especially those engaged directly in the educational realm.

Though the walk-in event in May is expected to be exponentially larger than previous events, Zachary notes that there are already plans in the works for an even larger walk-in scheduled for late September/early October to coincide with the presidential election.

“The goal is to impact the national narrative about public education, show a growing movement for the public schools all our children deserve...and show solidarity among educators, parents, community, and students,” Zachary suggests, noting that each individual event will also deal with local issues as well as the national educational landscape. “By impacting the national narrative, we hope that opens up more space locally, and vice versa.”

“Walk-ins are a way to lift up the benefits and needs of our public schools,” Zeron concludes. ■

wants to support public education and defend it as the bulwark of democracy that it has always been.

Among the Alliance’s base principles are public schools are public entities that help create strong communities, student voices matter, and that quality teaching must be delivered by trained professionals who care about students and want them to succeed. Their goals include full funding for neighborhood-based public schools, less standardized testing (and only testing that helps improve instruc-

## Benefit Bulletin: College Care

With high school graduation season looming just around the corner, the word “college” can make parents and students alike break into a cold sweat. Students may wonder what the “best-fit college” will look like, as well as how they’ll manage getting that coveted admittance letter in the mailbox. The worry certainly doesn’t stop for parents either, who are concerned about how they’ll manage the college nest egg, scholarship applications, and any post-graduate debt in the face of mounting tuition expenses.

Fortunately for union members, AFT + has years of experience pointing students and parents in the right direction while they navigate the entire college planning process—from selecting target schools to preparing for standardized testing and making college affordable. Here is just a sampling of all the ways you and your loved ones can save time, money, and stress:

### College Counseling Discounts

With an extra hand, parents and students can divide and conquer the daunting college application process.



**READY TO GROW**  
AFT helps students succeed

Collegewise, a division of The Princeton Review, offers a 15% discount to union families who want to take the stress and fear out of applying for college. With more than 15 years of experience helping more than 7,000 students attain their educational dreams,

Collegewise counselors can assist each student with researching ideal colleges, selecting the best standardized tests to take, and writing those dreaded admissions essays, among other services. As the nation’s largest college counseling company, Collegewise offers a free 30-minute initial consultation to see how they can help your student.

### College Test Prep Discounts

A little preparation can indeed go a long way. AFT families can save 15% to 60% on standardized test prepa-

ration materials from The Princeton Review. A whole suite of test preparation materials are offered in several convenient formats—from the common undergraduate admissions tests, all the way to post-graduate tests for professional or graduate school. As one of the most-trusted names in the industry, Princeton Review guarantees that you’ll get a higher test score or your money back.

### Scholarships

Who says there’s no such thing as free money? For over 20 years, Union Plus has distributed over \$3.7 million to more than 2,500 working families in annual college scholarship awards to union members, their spouses and dependents. In 2015 alone, 106 union members and union family members (with 11 winners from AFT, including Rebecca Adler of Andover, MA, whose mother is a member of AFT Local 3569) were awarded \$150,000 in scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$4,000. Applicants are evaluated according to academic ability, social awareness, financial need, and appreciation of labor. The scholarship application is available from June to January each year.

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### Student Debt Reducer

Imagine a good chunk of change to flush that student debt down the drain. Accredited college graduates who are holders of a Union Plus Credit Card, Mortgage, AD&D Insurance or Life Insurance policy for at least six months may be eligible\* for a one-time \$500 grant if they have at least \$10,000 in outstanding federal or private student loan debt. Act now—these Student Debt Reducer Grants are only available until all the funds have been awarded!

For mobile text alerts about education-related deadlines, visit [Union-Plus.org/Education](http://Union-Plus.org/Education). ■

## FEATURE FOCUS:

### “Do the Right Thing” Colleagues testify v. charters

**O**n March 7, students, educators, administrators, and legislators met at the State House to rally and speak against legislation that would raise the cap on charter schools and potentially drain as much as \$100 million each year from public schools. This annual loss would be in addition to the estimated \$408 million that are currently being diverted to charter schools in the Commonwealth.

Appearing as part of a coalition organized by the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance and testifying alongside MTA President Barbara Madeloni and MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman, AFT MA Assistant to the President Ed Doherty spoke on behalf of AFT MA President Tom Gosnell. He recalled working with the late Al Shanker, the AFT President who “first came forward with the idea of charter schools.” In Shanker’s proposal, these schools were to serve as “educational laboratories” for developing “innovative programs and practices” which would then be shared with other public schools.

“Charter Schools were started as an experiment,” Tolman maintained, “and the new ideas they generated were supposed to trickle back to the public school system. Instead, they have drained much needed public school funding and set up a two-tier system of education.”

According to Doherty’s testimony, “these schools would be located pri-

marily in urban areas and serve those students who were the most academically challenged.” Though they were to be “run independently by groups of dedicated and talented teachers” and “given a great deal of freedom,” Doherty noted that, in Shanker’s original plan, charter schools would still operate within the “regular” school system.

“We have gone far astray from Al Shanker’s vision,” Doherty maintained. “Today we are on the verge of creating two parallel public school systems – separate and unequal.”

While he admitted that some charter schools continue to serve “academically challenged” children, Doherty pointed out that the majority of them enroll “a significantly smaller percentage of English Language Learners and students with severe mental or physical disabilities than traditional public schools.” He went on to point out how many charter schools “aggressively coun-

sel out students who do not live up to their academic standards or their rigid discipline codes.” As a result, Doherty observed, “it is not unusual to find charter school with a forty to fifty percent attrition rate.”

Despite the fact that many charter schools are not serving their communities equitably and are not living up to President Shanker’s original goals, the Commonwealth is considering

As hundreds of Boston students protested outside the State House, demanding full funding for their public schools, Doherty noted how “all of our urban districts are facing severe budget shortfalls” and how class sizes continue to grow while vital support staff and life-enriching programs like music and art and even athletics continue to be cut, thereby limiting opportunities for students even further.

In her testimony, Madeloni suggested that the students who had risked disciplinary action to assemble at the State House “are not asking for a third way that splits the baby in half in order to satisfy the private interests of charter proponents, but asking to keep the baby whole and give it more nourishment.”

“We are going in the wrong direction,” Doherty concluded, warning that continuing down this path could “endanger...public education as the cornerstone of our democracy.”

“In the birthplace of free universal public education,” Madeloni echoed, “we need to ask ourselves if we are really committed to funding that for every child.”

“Lifting the cap on charter schools may well benefit a small number of students,” Doherty demurred, “but it will do great harm to a much larger number of our children. I strongly encourage you to do the right thing.” ■



#### UNIFIED AGAINST CHARTER SCHOOLS

**On March 7, AFT MA Assistant to the President Ed Doherty testified in the State House alongside MTA President Barbara Madeloni and MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman against raising the cap on charter schools**

raising the amount of annual funding these schools receive. “Massachusetts now spends over \$400 million on charters,” Doherty noted, “and Boston alone will lose \$120 million to charters this year.”

## Real Numbers Matter CPS exposes charter school misinformation

**A**cross the Commonwealth and the country, charter schools are touted as popular and in demand; so much so that many claim to have hundreds if not thousands of students on alleged “waiting lists.” Charter school supporters often use these lists as evidence to support their case for raising or eliminating any caps on charter school expansion.

In a recent analysis, Citizens for Public Schools ([www.citizensforpublicschools.org](http://www.citizensforpublicschools.org))

examined and exposed these claims for what they are – propaganda based upon falsehoods and manipulated statistics, many of which come directly from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Having suspected the waiting lists for years, CPS was encouraged by the recent review of charter schools by State Auditor Suzanne Bump (see January, 2015 issue) to dig a little deeper. In so doing, however, they quickly came to see that much of the problem was very close to the surface and easy for anyone who looks through the official reports to see.

“All the research is based on pub-

licly reported DESE data and reports,” notes AFT MA Director of Education Policy Daniel Murphy.

Among the issues involved is the fact that, in addition to Commonwealth charter schools, which are subject to the “cap” that some seek to raise or remove, DESE also included waiting lists for Horace Mann schools.

However, as the cap does not apply to Horace Mann schools, those lists are neither appropriate nor accurate.

“It is as if someone asked

you to count the apples at your farm,” offers CPS Executive Director Lisa Guisbond, “and you counted peaches too!”

Many of the students cited by charter school supporters were actually taken from prior lists which, with the permission of DESE, had been rolled over and counted again in subsequent years, even after Bump had warned against such practices. Also, most of the 34,000 students on the alleged lists are from schools districts where the cap allows for many more charter school seats than exist now. Therefore, the state could approve more seats

without lifting the cap.

At the end of the analysis, CPS’s results suggested that the actual number of students who are apparently waiting to get into charter schools is less than 15,000. This is far fewer than the 34,000 claimed by DESE in a report that was issued on February 18, 2016 and fewer still than the 53,000 claimed in 2013. Even so, champions of charters continue to use the larger numbers to support their cause in an effort to garner support for pro-charter legislation and to perhaps win a ballot question in a future state election.

Looking further back, a 2013 study by the Boston Foundation (long known as a major charter supporter) suggested that, just because they are on a waiting list does not mean that students actually want to go to a charter school and that they may just be applying to or showing interest in

schools turned them down and that a student’s odds of being invited to a charter are “roughly comparable” to receiving their first choice among Boston’s district schools.

“Whatever the true number of students affected by the cap,” Guisbond says, “this must be weighed against the tens of thousands of students who choose to attend district schools, only to have them closed or have their art or music or science or other valuable programs curtailed while public tax money is diverted to charter schools.”

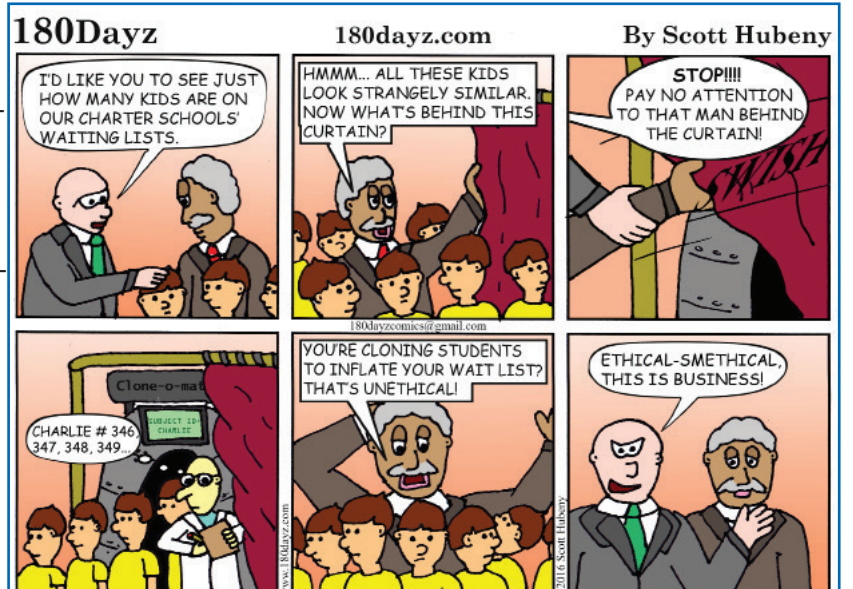
While the charter waiting list situation may be manufactured, Guisbond is keen to point out that authentic waiting list issues do exist and must be dealt with effectively.

“Roughly 17,000 are on waiting lists for pre-school,” Guisbond observes, noting the growing amount of real evidence that suggests how quality preschool can shrink achievement gaps. “Why don’t we have a ballot question bankrolled by \$18 million from wealthy financiers to cut that waiting list?” ■



#### A PLACE AT THE TABLE

**BPS students testify in favor of maintaining the cap on charter schools**



# Dealing with Charter Schools

## Are Charter Schools the Answer?

### Educator Opinion

By Michelle Celona O'Neill

Working at the inner city high school located in the part of the city where I grew up has me questioning the very system I absolutely love to work in. Not only are there two established "charter" middle schools just a stones throw away from the "public" middle school on my side of the tunnel, but there is a brand new charter high school being built literally around the corner from our 90-year-old building. Why? Does the education establishment really believe that this will solve the problem of standardized test underperformance? Are they questioning the integrity, commitment, ability, and professionalism of my colleagues who work tirelessly day in and day out to educate our students? These questions made me think of a film I saw a while back and all the feelings it stirred up after I viewed it. Please keep in mind that this is just one public school teacher's point of view on education, poverty, civil liberties, and charter schools.

The 2010 film *Waiting for Superman* is one of those films that leaves you with more questions than answers. This movie was marketed as an innovative, brave and insightful film that showcased public education reform. What I saw was an infomercial for charter schools disguised as a film dedicated to education reform in America. Davis Guggenheim is obviously a motivational moviemaker or he would not have an Oscar. However,

claiming that charter schools are the answer to the broken educational system is naïve and condescending to the American people, especially those of us that choose to serve America's children by teaching in the public school system. This movie over and over again puts the blame on teachers and unions for the allegedly "failing" public school system, when the reality seems so obvious to educators working in that system.

Let's talk about the fact that we are not all teaching and learning on equal playing fields. Maybe the reformers should take a look at the fact that the "No Child Left Behind Act" was great in theory but lacked in depth. There were (and are) many children being left behind through no fault of their own except for the fact that they were born into poverty.

This film showcased the failing, underperforming, "dropout factories" masquerading as public schools. Notably, none were in middle-class or wealthy communities. So I ask you, are our children being left behind? Are the teachers' at fault? Maybe it's the unions who are plotting to take down America by sabotaging the children? Maybe it's the parents' fault for allowing their children to grow up in areas where they are deprived of equal

opportunities, because we all know poverty is a choice, right?

Let's talk about the apparent inequity when it comes to access to materials and real estate. I am very confused about what seems like an obvious fix. I may be as inexperienced as Geoffrey Canada and Michelle Rhee were at the beginning of their journey into reform, but I agree with the



STILL "WAITING"  
Michelle Celona O'Neill

Horace Manns and Diane Ravitches of the world that public education should be standardized. Public school should be equal across the board. All American children should be able to get a free public education that is truly fair and just. All public school buildings should have the same resources regardless of the economic status of the community. All American children

should have teachers who are well-trained, respectable people and the public school system should allow for all students to have access to an education that prepares them for the life they are promised in the Constitution of the United States of America. At the very least, children should have an education that was expected from the Common School standard, an education good enough that wealthy kids would want to be educated in the same locations as their less fortunate peers.

What is the charter school lottery

process really teaching our children? What impression does it leave on the poor students in America? These children are being taught at a very young age that their success is dependent on chance; that the only way for them to achieve a good education is through the luck of the draw, not from the sweat of their brow. America was built on the idea that if you worked hard enough you could achieve and work your way up from the bottom. How can anyone believe that to be true anymore when there are over 2000 failing public schools across the nation and when we have the reality of Locke High School - a high school that served over 60,000 American students over a period of fifteen years and only 20,000 of those students graduated? How do we explain that to the 40,000 parents and guardians of those children? Oh right- We don't because it's systemic. They don't ask because their generation lost hope and their fight long before their children did.

This film has left me with more questions than answers. One question that seems to keep on resurfacing is why our Government or the Department of Education did not just buy all those children a regular lottery ticket and pass them out on the first day of kindergarten and send them on their way with the hope that they will become rich overnight? It seems less cruel than what they actually did. ■

Michelle Celona O'Neill is a Special Education English Teacher at East Boston High School.

## Launching the Campaign

### Leaders gather at State House against charter expansion

On Wednesday, March 16, teachers, students, administrators, and legislators gathered on the steps of the State House to officially launch the Save Our Public Schools campaign against raising the cap on charter schools (www.SaveOurPublicSchools-MA.com).

The campaign, which is being organized by the MA Educators



**KICKING OFF THE CAMPAIGN**  
AFT MA President Tom Gosnell (center) surrounded by colleagues at the State House press conference that launched the Save Our Public Schools campaign from the MA Educators Justice Alliance (MEJA)

Justice Alliance (www.masedjustice.org) was introduced by Campaign Chair Juan Cofield, president of the New England Area Conference of the NAACP.

"What we have is a dual school system," Cofield observed, noting that, as "Brown v. Board of Education" showed, such a system is "inherently unequal."

Cofield went on to posit that "every organization that has a responsibility to educate children has the responsibility to educate all children," and that "this is not what charter schools do." He therefore suggested that "all

resources should be focused on developing a school system that is topnotch for all."

Representing the Worcester City Council and Mayor Joseph Petty (all of whom have come put publically against charter schools), Worcester City Councilor Khrystian King detailed the \$28 million that is taken from public school funding each

year to pay for charter schools in Worcester. "We need the money for infrastructure," he insisted. "We need to expand our investment toward public education."

Citizens for Public Schools Executive Director Lisa Guisbond noted that local school committees have "no say in...the expansion of unaccountable charters" and that the State often approves new charters "over the strong protests of local people." If charters are allowed to expand further, she said, "more children will be denied the right to a strong public education," as well as the loss of such vital programs

as art, physical education, and wrap-around services.

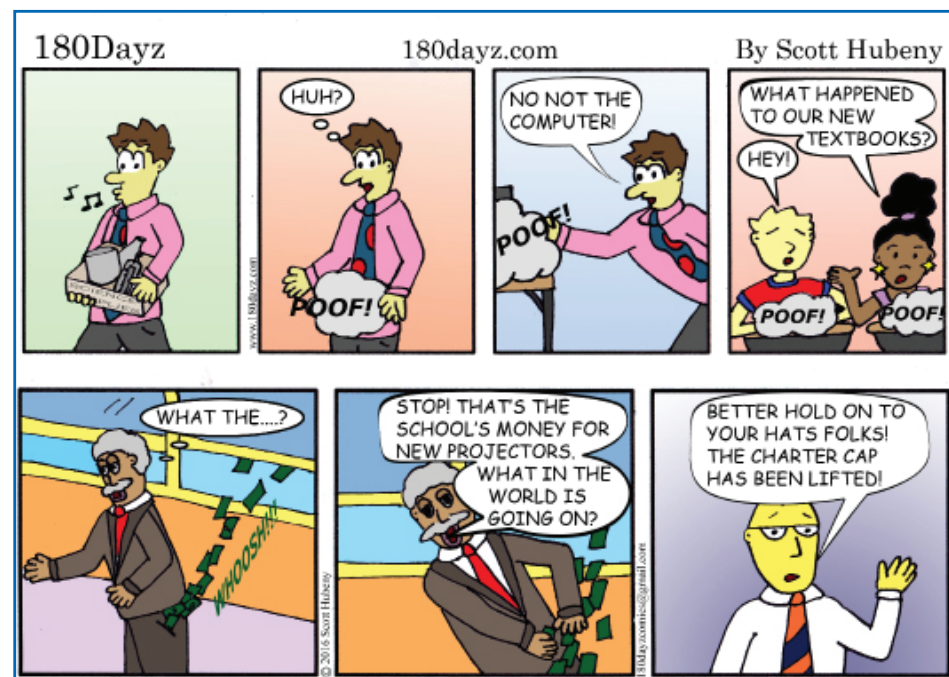
Echoing Cofield, Guisbond also queried, "instead of continuing to foster the inevitability of charters, why not support...quality education for all?" She also suggested that we "hold our state education leaders accountable...for developing systems that support all students."

"Our goal is to create the schools our students deserve," explained Boston Education Justice Alliance Coordinator Marlena Rose.

Recalling the daily calls she received when her daughter was a student in a charter school suggesting that she was "not a good fit" (calls which turned to accolades after Rose organized other parents to investigate such claims), Rose also told of her

daughter's daily tales of "demerits" that were handed out for such "infractions" as fidgeting, wearing the "wrong color" socks or even inquiring about how many demerits a student had. She also told of a "Wall of Shame" where failing grades were posted, suggesting that such public punishment caused ostracism and trauma for many of the students.

"Students feel they have failed, when really the charter schools have failed them," Rose concluded. "I do not want one penny of my tax dollar going to a system that works this way." ■



# Seeing Beyond Vision

## Peabody supports visual-impaired students

With an almost daily onslaught of high-stakes tests and the challenges that come with a lack of funding, school is challenging enough these days. How much more so, then, for those who have trouble seeing the chalkboard or reading their books?

Fortunately, many districts and communities are doing what they can to support these students in particular in an effort to minimize another potential “gap” among students.

In April of 2014, educators and administrators from the Peabody Federation of Teachers (PFT) got together with Peabody Mayor Ted Betencourt and members of the Peabody Lions Club (including current interim Superintendent Herb Levine) and Peabody Access TV to establish Beyond Vision: A Tribute to Peabody’s Sight Impaired Community.

According to former Peabody High School student and current Peabody parent Jen Buchanan, Beyond Vision was intended to be a recurring celebration to recognize the contributions of students, adults, and seniors who experience a visual disability.

“Because vision loss has traditionally affects a smaller group of people in the population,” Buchanan points out, “the perception most people have is we are deficient or helpless individuals who can only hold a tin can to collect money to survive. So how would it be possible for someone with a visual impairment be productive in their community? This is a perception that needs to change since it is not accurate.”

The first Beyond Vision event was initiated and developed by Peabody Public Schools Vision Specialist and Lions Club member Pamela Sudore. Having served as director of the Lowell Association for the Blind, and having worked with the Perkins School for the Blind, the Carroll Center for the Blind, Sudore and was one of two teachers involved in developing the bill that became the Braille Law that ensures Braille literacy for all legally-blind students.

“Pam is among the hardest working

teachers in the system,” says Peabody Federation of Teachers President Bruce Nelson, “and is, obviously, very passionate about her work.”

When asked how the event came together, Sudore explains, “I initially approached the Peabody Lions Club to do a special event to acknowledge the successes and contributions of

Peabody’s visually Impaired residents.... They eagerly accepted the challenge!”

At this event (for which Superintendent Levine served as Master of Ceremonies), 38 individuals ranging in ages from two to 100 were recognized with Braille and large print certificates for their bravery, fortitude,

and dedication both to learning and to educating others about the sight-impaired community.

“It was...[an] enlightening event,” recalls Lions Club President Stephen Calhoun.

“We wanted people to know there are over 300 sight-impaired citizens in the City of Peabody that need help,” Calhoun explains, noting that, according to Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira, this is third-highest population of in the region, behind Lawrence and Lynn. “We [also] wanted people to know that here are over 30 students in our school system that are imbedded in our classrooms and functioning alongside sighted students and functioning well.”

Not only are the Lions the world’s largest service organization, but, Calhoun points out, eye research is among their top priorities. In addition to hosting events like “Beyond Vision,” Lions groups all over the nation raise funds for research and provide community support for people dealing with challenges in their daily lives. In addition to donating glasses and vision examinations, Lions Club members have also donated supportive technologies to students and community members in need.

Among the many beneficiaries of this support is Peabody High School Freshman Mandy MacKenzie.

“I have learned how to use technology in school,” MacKenzie says when asked how the Peabody programs have benefitted her, expressing special thanks for the iPad that she received from the Lions Club that she is able to use to enlarge or even read print and to email her work to teachers and to develop her Braille skills. “I felt honored at the Beyond Vision event and hope there will be more!”

Another beneficiary of academic support from the Peabody Public Schools is Kayla Bentas, who works in Secretary William Galvin’s Corporations and Elections divisions. “I do data entry, mail notifications, and checking annual report filings for corrections,” she explains, noting that she also helps train other clerks in the use of

voting machines for the legally blind.

Blind since the age of nine, when a benign tumor impinged upon her optic nerve, Bentas was able to use the supports of Sudore and her colleagues to continue her education in public school, instead of having to transfer to a specialty school.

“I got my books in Braille, my worksheets in Braille, graphs and charts along with all other images in raised 3-D style so I could feel them,” she recalls. “They even were very supportive when I got my guide dog and brought her to school with me every day!”

Since graduating from Peabody High School, Bentas has received a Bachelor’s degree in Business Management at Suffolk University. When not working at Secretary Galvin’s office, she volunteers with the Lions Club.

“I want to make a difference in the Peabody community and also spread awareness to those who are new or have dealt with being blind,” she explains. “There are so many resources out there for our disability, but, unfortunately, not all of us know about the benefits and advantages that are out there to help us and take our side on things.”

Bentas credits the “Beyond Vision” event with helping her city realize that there are many legally-blind people in Peabody and that they can be productive contributors to the community, just like everyone else.

Like Bentas, Buchanan became legally blind later in life due to a medical situation that involved a brain tumor. Though she admits to going through “a few months of...true and utter despair,” the mother of two says that, with the help of her family and her community, she was able not only to find her way out of that thought process but to also find that she can do pretty much everything she did before she lost her sight.

“I want my kids and anyone else experiencing vision loss to feel the same way,” Buchanan says. “It has always been important for me to be as strong as possible for my children and going through vision loss is no exception.”

Even with her family’s support, Buchanan admits to feeling moments of isolation. That is why she is so grateful that Sudore introduced herself.

“It was really nice to have a person approach me,” Buchanan recalls, noting how “energetic” Sudore was and how comforted and supported she made her feel.

“She talked to me as though I was a person first and vision impairment just happened to be something that I had to cope and adjust to,” Buchanan says. “She was amazing!”

In addition to bringing attention and support to the vision-impaired members of the community, Buchanan suggests that Beyond Vision also gave them an opportunity to meet and support each other.

“It was an opportunity to exchange

information about the achievements of a person with visual impairments and resources available in the community to support those efforts,” she says. “The Beyond Vision event did a great job raising awareness in the community about blindness and vision impairment and how extremely accomplished most people are even with the challenges of vision loss. It was also an opportunity to share the value an individual person provides to another person or the community as a whole.”

In addition to Superintendent Levine and other members of the Peabody academic community, the event in Peabody City Hall was also attended by Senator Joan Lovely, State Rep, Leah Cole, and City Councilors Tom Walsh, Joel Saslaw, and Tom Gould. There was also a personal video message from blind mountain climber Erik Weihenmayer (the first blind person to climb Mt. Everest) and signed copies of a book by Michael Hingson, whose guide dog had helped people escape from the 78th floor of the World Trade Center on 9/11.

“Peabody’s award recipients represent the No Barriers mindset,” observed Weihenmayer, citing the name of his foundation. “Despite the challenges we face, what’s inside of us is much stronger than what’s in our way. It’s not about breaking records, adrenaline sports, or climbing Mt. Everest. We are responsible for each other, accountable to each other, believe in each other, and we all win together”.

That collaborative spirit was well represented at the event and continues to be so in the community.

“As an active Lions Club member for many years the Beyond Vision event was the best tribute I have ever attended,” said Jeannine Gentleman, who served as Lions International District Governor from 2010-11. Gentleman went on to suggest that the Peabody Lions Club was “the first to recognize the contributions of an entire community while establishing lasting partnerships with the residents, local businesses and community leaders.”

Another major supporter of the event was WGBH, the public broadcasting station which pioneered both Closed Captioning and Descriptive Video Service (DVS) to support viewers and listeners with visual and hearing impairments.

“WGBH has been serving those with sensory impairments in MA and the country,” said WGBH’s Director of Community Engagement Larry Goldberg.

“Beyond Vision...[was] a pioneering event,” Sudore observes, noting it represented the first time visually-impaired residents have been supported and recognized by their own community. “We are currently working on nominations for our next Beyond Vision event to be held annually, as we continue our community recognition and support for those who live with vision loss. It is my hope that the Beyond Vision concept will spread to other communities in New England and throughout the country!” ■



**SHOWING THE WAY**  
Peabody teacher Pamela Sudore



**A STUDENT OF VISION**  
Peabody student Mandy MacKenzie (center) with her parents, Lori and Scott MacKenzie



**SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF...AND OTHERS**  
Salem High School teacher Rick Adams makes a point during the Labor CAN conference in Peabody on March 19, 2016



# Who is the “Speech Teacher”?

## Educator Opinion

By Miriam Rodriguez and Anna M. L. Williams

Speech Teachers are typically nationally board-certified clinicians with Master’s degrees in the development, diagnosis, and treatment of speech, hearing, and language disorders. They hold and maintain certification from the Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) and a state license to provide quality services in schools. Wearing many hats in a school system, they are also known as Speech & Language Pathologists or Therapists.



**THE “SPEECH TEACHERS”**  
Miriam Rodriguez and Anna M. L. Williams

Speech teachers help students, including English Language Learners, of all ages with a variety of speech and language delays and disorders. Some include articulation, speech fluency, voice/resonance, phonological disorders, auditory processing, expressive language, and social language disorders. They administer standardized tests, develop educational and therapeutic goals and objectives, deliver specialized instruction both inside and outside of the classroom, and provide professional, family, and community support.

Helping to foster the development of clear and effective communication is the speech teacher’s ultimate goal. Treatment typically consists of rou-

tine, specialized instruction to individual students, small groups, or whole classrooms in periods ranging from as little as five minutes to an hour or more. There are many students who receive speech therapy and for a variety of reasons, including developmental delay, weak muscles around the mouth, a sensory integration disorder, cleft lip/palate, a breathing or swallowing disorder, a stuttering disability, a hearing impairment, pervasive developmental disorder, and autism.

Therapy can last from a few weeks or months to a few years, depending on the student’s needs. It is designed to maximize effectiveness, efficiency, and naturalness of communication, so that students can establish and maintain meaningful relationships with others and be able to feel successful in school.

Speech teachers also routinely communicate with parents, colleagues, other therapists, and administrators to provide education about how speech and language skills are linked to the Common Core State Standards. Sharing research and information with parents, other specialists, and teachers, they talk about speech and language goals in relation to the classroom curriculum. Examining the standards, developmental expectations, and the connections between language and learning, they discuss the potential barriers for children with speech or language challenges to mastering the standards. They discuss data about student learning, provide

teacher support, examine the fidelity of interventions, and study students’ responses to intervention.

The Speech teacher is not the man or lady “down the hall”, but the



colleague who works with students that have been tested and qualified for speech and language therapeutic services under current Special Education laws. Similar to certified classroom teachers, they have to implement multiple learning strategies and techniques to meet the needs of their vast and diverse caseload. Just like in the classroom, speech teachers are constantly adjusting and learning new ways to assist their students in becoming more effective learners and better communicators. These specialists welcome the opportunity to consult and share strategies and techniques to better assist the needs of students in all settings. They are not simply the teachers who help children who do not “talk correctly.” In essence, speech teachers are invaluable specialists not only as instructors, but also as master collaborators and licensed clinicians, who help bring unique solutions to classroom teachers that are challenged with meeting the tough, current educational standards in language and literacy. Once known as the “Speech Teacher”, now s/he is the multi-fac-

eted speech and language specialist who is ready and willing to be part of the whole community that is called Education. ■

Miriam Rodriguez-Fusco is a 17-year, ASHA certified, bilingual SLP veteran of the Lynn Public Schools.

Anna M.L. Williams is a 32-year, ASHA certified SLP veteran with the Lynn Public Schools.

**Do you have ideas and stories to share? Send them to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)**

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# The Power of Play

Paraprofessional Perspective  
By Marcy Winer

Children in kindergarten need to learn the basic routines of school. They need to be respectful, socialize appropriately with their peers, follow directions given by their teachers, learn skills in math and English language arts, meet grade level requirements and receive formal state mandated assessments. They also need to play.

Years ago, a colleague coined the phrase “Kindergarten Boot Camp,” which referred to the ongoing testing and rigor children experience in kindergarten. The standardized tests that each state implement and the lack of freedom given to the teachers to teach result in less playtime for children and more academics. The pressure to perform is great for these students. Many of them become overwhelmed, shut down emotionally and need to take a break to regain focus.

Movement breaks (or “brain breaks,” as they are often rightfully called) are extremely beneficial to children. Popular web sites such as gonoo-

dle.com, cosmickids.com and Zumba.com offer children yoga poses, silly dance movements and short bursts of activity that are appropriate for classroom use. They also allow the students and teachers to get a little physical, stretch and move their bodies and take a productive and restorative time-out. We use these websites in our class on a regular basis, especially during these long New England winters when recess is often restricted. The children enjoy the interactive way they are moving and challenging their bodies for a few minutes. It is also a great way to pause the academics and energize everyone so they can all engage the next lesson of the day more effectively.

Kindergarten play - whether it is inside the classroom-based play center, in a physical education class, or outside at recess - gives children enormous benefits. Children who play together engage in dialogue, strengthening their linguistic skills. They also gain social, emotional, and problem-solving skills by working cooperatively with their peers. Play time also allows and encourages children to explore and enhance fine and gross motor skills.

Early learners need to explore! Among the more popular spaces are science centers and puppet theaters.



**PLAY-FUL PARAPROFSSIONAL**  
Marcy Winer

Children can experiment with appropriate materials and put on costumes and shows that encourage creativity and offer opportunities to explore and engage texts in new ways.

All of this play is useful in making connections with children who are absorbing these fun activities. What they are really doing is making real-world connections to stories, situations, and social engagements, all of which will prove beneficial as they grow. The imaginations that children use and develop in kindergarten are wonderful and they need play time to develop their senses of confidence and maturity as they communicate with others.

Consider the sad and growing rate of obesity in our youth today. It is a scary thought that play at school may be their only outlet for physical activity at all. The increasing role of technology that is used on a daily basis by early learners is evident. Technology can be positive and educational when used appropriately in the classroom and at home, but not when it is abused and allowed to take the place of physical activity and real-world engagement. Parents need to keep young children moving and engage them in healthy activities to move their bodies and restrict technology.

A report from the Alliance for Childhood titled “Crisis in Kindergarten. Why Children need to Play in School”(Miller and Almon, 2009) emphasized the importance of movement and the value of play for children. Research was done in Germany on 50 play-based kindergartens versus 50 early-learning centers. The results showed that, by the age of ten, the

children in the play-based kindergartens excelled in reading, math, social and emotional skills, and creativity-creativity. This is not surprising at all!

Children are naturally inquisitive and want to play. They learn that play is part of exploration and exploration is part of play.

The best way to keep kindergarten children playing is to make a time and a place for them to do that. Allow a small block of “free-play” into the schedule. Let them become interactive on their own while providing guidance and a choice of varied activities and watch them grow! ■

Marcy Winer has been a paraprofessional in Lowell for over 10 years. She also is the founder of the literacy program Project DEAR (Facebook.com/ProjectDear).

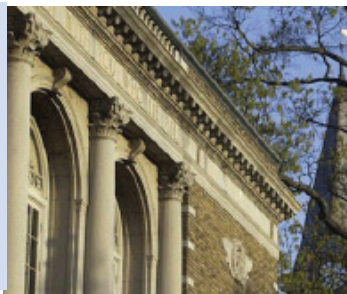
**Are you a paraprofessional with ideas and stories to share?**

**Send them to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)**



# On Campus

**Elizabeth R. Lehr**  
Director CAS First-Year Success Program  
Lecturer, Department of English  
Faculty Program Coordinator - Navitas  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth



## “Ready” for “Success”

**A** February 24, 2016 article written by Katie Lannan and published by the Massachusetts State House New Service calls our state colleges and universities to task for failure to redefine our mission by thinking not about “college and career readiness,” but about “college and career success.” The article, titled “Needs of Students and State Forcing Shift in Higher Education,” reported on an appearance by Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Carlos Santiago, before state lawmakers and staff to present a report by the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy about the “condition of education” in our state. Also appearing was Rennie Center Executive Director Chad d’Entremont who was responsible for redefining our conceptual framework as mentioned above.

The Rennie Center report further

calls for educators to help students develop a skill set that it has identified as critical to college success. This set includes the ability to set goals, self-motivate, monitor progress, seek help, and persist through challenges. These skills have long been integrated into the mission, curricula, and advising practices at UMass Dartmouth, and I suspect, at all of the other state universities and colleges. So it was somewhat puzzling to read that the Rennie Center believes that “focusing on developing these skills could help improve postsecondary enrollment and completion rates.” We agree., which is why we already have this covered!

Why would the Commissioner of Higher Education rely on the Rennie Center to explain this to lawmakers, when the experts who work in higher education have already figured it out and taken the actions proposed? And

what is the Rennie Center anyway? It is a think tank. The Center’s website ([www.renniecenter.org](http://www.renniecenter.org)) includes a clear mission statement that reads like an educational dream. Its supporters include other education nonprofits, corporate sponsors, and the United Way. The Center provides expertise in data collection and analysis and also takes a role in policy-making. It is certainly comforting to know that a lobbying organization like the Center can collect data on higher education in Massachusetts and come to the same conclusion that we came to and acted upon years ago.

At UMass Dartmouth, we have long run first-year courses in which students learn the importance of setting goals, taking responsibility, seeking help when needed, keeping track of their grades, and persistence, among many other things. Most colleges and universities in the U.S. employ similar models in their first-year curricula. The issue, therefore, is this: In this time

of shrinking state budgets for higher education, the February 24th presentation places the onus on universities and colleges for not doing something they already in fact do and do very well. Our access to the state legislature and to policy is through our Commissioner of Higher Education, but Dr. Santiago calls on the Rennie Center.

We would be curious to know what the Commission of Higher Education paid for this research and respectfully suggest it is money that would have been better spent if given directly to Massachusetts colleges and universities to support their continuing efforts.

We understand the difference between “readiness” and “success.” However, it is unclear to us why the Rennie Center believes our focus on readiness is misguided and that we lack a focus on success. Both are needed. We, the educators, know this. ■

AFT Local 1895 President Susan Krumholz contributed to this article.

## Stacked in Students’ Favor Wentworth renovating historic library

**E**ven in these days of technology and portable information, there is still nothing like a library. That is why it may be no surprise to learn that, even at such an esteemed center of progressive, technologically-advanced education as Wentworth Institute of Technology ([www.wit.edu](http://www.wit.edu)), renovations are under way at their historic library.

With designs by the famed architectural firm of Perkins & Will (whose portfolio also includes the library at Cornell University, the public library in Washington, DC and the award-winning Sammamish Library in Washington State), the renovated library will use modern technology to consolidate the traditional stacks, thereby allowing more room for multi-media materials and study space and more natural light to illuminate it all and to enhance the connection between inside and out.

“The new library will be a space that feels different and looks different,” suggests Wentworth Library Director Kevin Kidd, “so that students

can act differently.”  
As \$5 million of the estimated



**AN EPIC PLACE TO LEARN**  
Artist rendering of the Douglas D. Schumann Library

\$15 million project has been underwritten by 1964 Wentworth graduate and trustee emeritus Douglas D. Schumann, the renovated space will be named after him.

“This gift will help us transform the existing library into a library of the future,” said Wentworth President Zorica Pantić. “[It] will provide spaces for learning and interdisciplinary collaboration not only to the students of today but for the generations to come.”

“This is a gift in the truest sense of the word,” added Vice President for Institutional Advancement Paula Sakey. “[It] will enrich the intellectual lives of countless students on this campus for decades to come.”

According to Kidd, the space will

represent not only an improvement on the schools’ already noteworthy learning space, but a space that students can call their own and where they can come to engage with each other and the ever-expanding world of information.

At the dedication ceremony, Kidd marked what he sees as “the transformation of this space from a very traditional library to a dynamic, technology-driven learning space...to a library where students take control of and responsibility for their own learning.”

As demonstrated through the development of the pioneering EPIC program (see December, 2014 issue), Wentworth has long recognized the importance of engagement and collaboration in education and how

the entire community and even the environment affect and enrich the learning experience. From quiet spaces where students can sit and think to bustling flexible spaces where they can all exchange ideas, the new library will truly have something for every type of learner and every academic need.

In addition to providing a space where the on-campus Wentworth community can interact, the new library will also offer more ways for members of the community to explore and engage the world outside through the online Wentworth community. The proposed changes are so profound, in fact, that College of Engineering and Technology Dean Frederick Driscoll cites the project as one of the most important he’s seen in his 50 years at Wentworth.

“You can’t overstate how much this means for the Institute’s academic life,” Driscoll says. ■



**SO PROUD THEY COULD FLIP**  
Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School’s Cheerleaders were crowned Regional Champions for the first time in the school’s history

### Help keep the cap on charter schools

Go to

<https://actionnetwork.org/letters/keep-the-cap-on-charter-schools-2>

and write to your legislators.

**Together, we can WIN!**



# Retiree Corner

**Marie Ardito, Co-founder**  
**Massachusetts Retirees United**  
[www.retireesunited.org](http://www.retireesunited.org)



## SENIOR SEMINARS

**Preparing for Retirement**  
Wednesday, April 6, 2016, 2:15-4:15 PM  
Tuesday April 12, 2016, 3:15-5:15 PM  
Wilmington Public Library Meeting Room  
175 Middlesex Avenue, Wilmington

Wednesday, May 11, 2016, 2:30-4:30 PM  
Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School Cafeteria Annex  
65 Pleasant Street, Upton

Tuesday, May 17, 2016 3:15-5:15 PM  
Lynn Teachers' Union Hall  
679 Western Avenue, Lynn

These free seminars, presented by Marie Ardito, deal with issues one should address in preparing for retirement from a public sector job in MA. They are open to ALL.

**How to Protect Your Nest Egg**  
Saturday April 16, 2016, 10 to noon  
Saturday June 25, 2016, 10 to noon  
314 Main Street, 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.

**The following seminar is especially important for those who entered the realm of public-sector work later in life.**

**Understanding Social Security and Medicare.**  
Saturday, April 9, 2016, 10 to noon  
314 Main Street, Wilmington

Learn how Social Security is factored and how penalties may affect you. Eligibility for Medicare will also be discussed.

To register for any seminar, email [contact@retireesunited.org](mailto:contact@retireesunited.org) or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar you wish to attend, your name, phone number, and the number of people who will be attending.

**BE INFORMED**

**BE INVOLVED**

## NOT Ever In Your Debt

Many times over the years I have written about debt; in particular warning about credit card debt. Those who attend my Preparing for Retirement Seminars are often given a homework assignment that has to do with using credit cards that carry a balance. For their assignment, they must take a credit card out of their wallet, put it in a drawer, and keep it there until the balance is completely paid off, irrespective of how many years it takes. Once this is done, they can take it out and put it back into their wallet. If they should fall back into their bad habit and start carrying a balance again, they are told to perform what I like to call "plastic surgery" and to actually cut the physical card in half. Often, those in attendance laugh at this idea, and I am frankly not sure how many do the assignment. However, just as there are people who should not drink, smoke, or gamble, some cannot and should not have a credit card. They simply do not know how to use it.

Debt is a frame of mind. It is often learned early and, through the years, can become a way of life. It is a mindset in which a person does not learn such statements as, "I can't afford it," "I don't need it," "I don't want it," and "I'm content with what I have." No matter when or how it arises, however, it is a serious problem that must be dealt with responsibly.

As someone who grew up with par-

ents who lived through the Depression, frank statements about what we could and could not afford and what we did or did not need were often used without apology or embarrassment. I remember when I was going to give a big list to Santa one year because I thought gifts were free, my mother promptly told me that Santa sent a bill to my father at work for anything above a couple of items. The list was promptly discarded.

Things are so much more expensive today than years ago. One could buy a house for less than a car costs today. I remember articles being written when I was young about how many bags of groceries you could get for \$5. You could fill your tank up with what one gallon of gas costs today. I remember thinking the last course I took before retiring for PDPs cost me more than my entire Master's Degree program. As luxuries and even necessities become more expensive, debt has been rising as well. Many people spend as much as two years (if not more) paying off a two-week vacation that they initially put in a credit card. The problem can easily get out of control!

No matter how much you make or how much you are able to save, it is important to know how to budget for what you truly need and then how to decide what more you can truly afford. One of the first bills to pay is to yourself by saving. Even if it is just a few

dollars a week, saving not only helps you budget and prepare for the future, it also teaches you the importance of doing it. There are numerous books and websites that can help you prepare your budget. No matter how you go about setting it up, however, the most important part of a budget is learning to live by it.

No matter how much you may have saved or spent in the past, you cannot afford to go into retirement in debt. Not only should you be debt free as you begin your retirement journey, but you should have at least six months worth of savings to cover all your monthly expenses. After all, you never know what may come up between now and when you retire and how expenses may add up afterwards.

Should you wish to gather more advice concerning this topic, please come to one of our seminars. The information is free and will help you be free from debt. ■

### ATTENTION TEACHERS:

MRU will be conducting Living in Retirement as an Informed Retiree Seminars throughout MA.

If you have a retirement group in your district, please email [contact@retireesunited.org](mailto:contact@retireesunited.org) to schedule a free seminar.

### ALSO

Thanks to an initiative by AFT MA, the Non-Public School Bill has again been filed.

H2426, filed by Representative Timothy Toomey, Jr., will allow the purchase of up to four years of non-public school service.

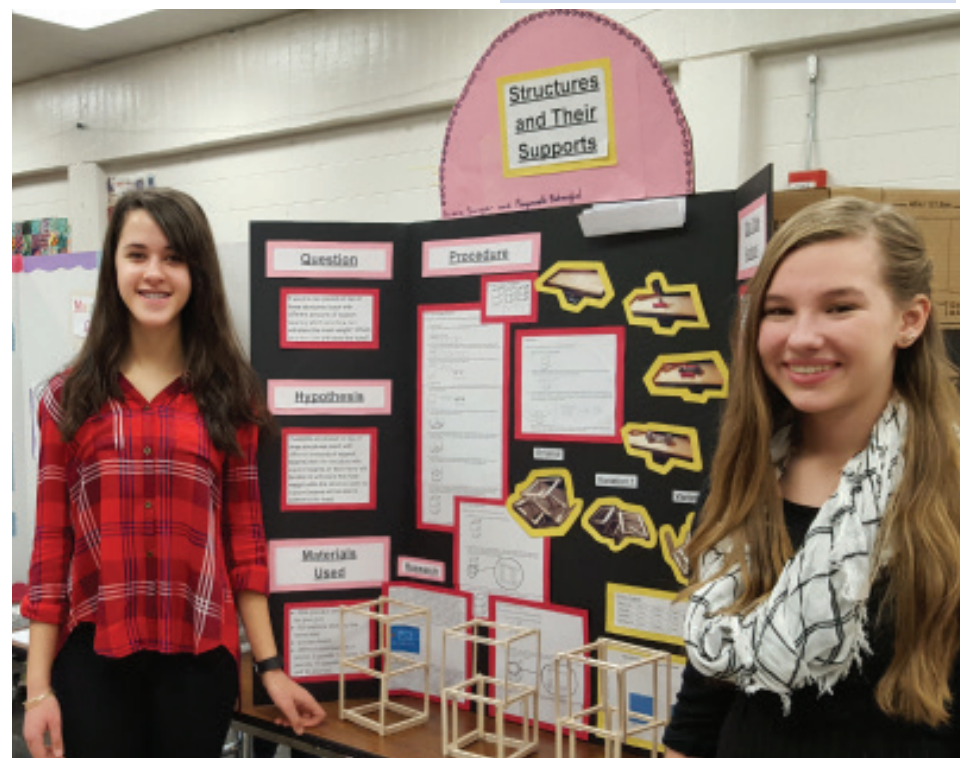
Contact the Representative at Timothy.Toomey@mahouse.gov and let him know of your interest in the bill and to be made aware when a hearing will be conducted. Make your Representatives and Senators aware of your interest in the bill and ask them to support it.

**AND YOU THOUGHT  
TWO HOURS AT THE GYM  
WAS GOOD FOR YOUR HEART...**



**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**  
to spend 2 hours per week playing with young homeless children in one of more than 120 shelter-based Playspaces across the state.

To find out more, visit [horizonschildren.org/playspace](http://horizonschildren.org/playspace) or call 617-553-5488



### ALL'S FAIR IN SCIENCE

Students at Locke Middle School in Billerica show off their Science Fair projects. The Fair was attended by Science Department Director Cathy McCulley. Superintendent Tim Piwowar and representatives from Boston's Museum of Science.

# “Stand and Unfold Yourself”

## Actors' Shakespeare Project brings learning to life (and vice versa)

For many students, William Shakespeare is just another “dead white guy” whom they have to get through in order to graduate and be considered “smart.” For those who are fortunate enough to engage his texts with support from the talented educational team of Actors' Shakespeare Project ([www.actorsshakespeareproject.org](http://www.actorsshakespeareproject.org)), however, the words of the Bard can become essential descriptions of and connections to their everyday lives.

While Boston is blessed with many amazing and award-winning performance groups,

most of them perform in home venues, which requires audiences to come to them. Some offer outreach programs, but these often run into challenges concerning how to connect the theatre's community and the audience's. Actors' Shakespeare Project (ASP) strives to see the entire city as an artistic playground where Shakespeare resonates across neighborhoods and audiences.

“We're not interested in going in and saying, ‘Look what we as experts have to share with you,’” explains ASP's Director of Education Programs Mara Sidmore. “We want to engage in a mutual learning process to discover what we all can learn from working on Shakespeare together. We want [people] to own their own stories and find themselves in Shakespeare's universal, time-tried stories.”

As it has no “home” theatre, the intentionally itinerant ASP has to go into the community to perform, partnering with students and others in the community in an effort to engage them with the text and with each other in more meaningful ways.

“Outreach implies we are going into a community and offering services,” Sidmore suggests. “Community work involves forming relationships [and] working together to learn from one another.”

Though Shakespeare is often a “given” in the curricula, Sidmore says that ASP tries to help the words come alive and become more a part of life for the students than they might be if just assigned as any other reading.

“There is a philosophical belief that, if [students] become fluent in Shakespeare as a piece of knowledge,” she suggests, “it helps serve them as lifelong learners because the stories, text, and characters are referenced in so many ways and so many places.”

Instead of just explaining those common references, ASP begins conversations with these texts and encourages participants to see where their own stories intersect and how these lines are still relevant today.

“We start from there,” Sidmore explains, “and see what stories we have as humans...that resonate with the text.”

Instead of starting with the question of, “Why do we have to read this?” ASP asks, “Why does it matter to students today and what can they gain from being exposed to and exploring Shakespeare.... And what can we as artists learn from the students?”

Another key difference between ASP and many other performance groups is that many members have taught or currently teach. Their own work with youth of all ages helps inform ASP education programs and allows them to continually extend

the learning in the ASP community through classes, workshops, and other partnerships in the schools and throughout the community.

“We learn as much from students and school communities as they do from us,” notes Sidmore, who worked in many middle and high schools before garnering her Masters of Fine Arts in acting. “The teaching work informs us as artists and humans. The students surprise us with what they understand about Shakespeare, which then informs our own learning about Shakespeare. We are not the experts here; we are participants in a mutual learning process.”

As the process is shared, Sidmore suggests that it is also bi-directional. “We see that part of our role as artists is not just to present our work but to be in dialogue through a learning process with other people,” she says.

As they venture forth into various communities, ASP is especially adept at reaching and engaging people who may not be considered by other companies or who may simply not have access to professional theater. “We are interested in the universality of Shakespeare's language and text,” Sidmore says, “and what happens when people across lots of different backgrounds investigate that together.”

Having originally started as a partnership with the Department of Youth Services to engage students who were involved in the criminal justice system, ASP's education programs have expanded across the Commonwealth and continue to reach into new and ever-more-diverse communities each year. When asked how ASP has developed such a strong relationship with Boston schools, Sidmore explains that the BPS Arts Expansion Initiative has played an extremely significant role.

“The City has been working hard to expand arts education in schools across the district,” Sidmore explains, “and arts organization partners are key to their initiative.”

According to Sidmore, ASP works closely with the BPS Arts Office to “align with their priorities, which includes increasing the numbers of students receiving regular, high quality arts instruction throughout the school day. We work together to identify which BPS schools would be a good mutual match each year, and where there might be opportunity for growing theater as a discipline.” Once engaged in these specific schools each year, many students and teachers recommend ASP programs to colleagues. “We often form a relationship with one passionate teacher who brings us in and introduces us to others and it grows from there,” she explains. “It is about relationship-building.”

ASP also receives funding and support from the National Endowment for the Arts' Shakespeare in American Communities program. “The focus of that is to see that young people are exposed to professional high-quality Shakespeare theatre,” Sidmore explains. “They want students who might not otherwise have the option of going to the theater to be exposed and engaged and also to have a hands-on learning component built in.”

Thanks to support from the BPS Arts Expansion, ASP is able to offer some of its programs at a low cost or free, which is significant when schools grapple with their individual budgets. Many schools that may not

be able to afford other programs are able to bring ASP in and offer their integrative approach to their students and faculty. Another option that ASP makes available is its annual summer Teacher Institute, which is offered in partnership with Salem State University. ASP also works with a cohort of English Language Arts and Fine Arts teachers throughout the school year, offering professional development for teaching Shakespeare.

“It allows teachers to come learn an immersive, a kinesthetic, and an artistically-based approach,” Sidmore observes. “It also helps us engage and build relationships with teachers, many of whom call on us for further support or invite us to come to their schools. We have been told that our Institute is both personally transformative and rigorous in its demand for real application back to the classroom. We're playing- unpacking the text- approaching it not as literature, but as living, breathing, art. It's refreshing for all of us!”

As they are a “Project,” Sidmore explains that performance is just one part of what ASP does and that, like Shakespeare's words, their work with his plays is always changing according to the audience. “We are committed to not just having a professional season,” Sidmore says, “but seeing our plays as the centerpiece of a larger project.”

For example, Sidmore suggests, when working with Julius Caesar, ASP may make a special effort to engage people who have dealt with political unrest, such as veteran communities. Similarly, for King Lear, they may reach out to elder communities to discuss the issues related to aging in Western culture. “We...learn from them and have their experiences educate our process,” Sidmore says. “We explore beyond the plays.”

When working with students, ASP often raises the many complicated issues with which younger people grapple every day. Among these are the questions of gender, love, loyalty and rivalry that Shakespeare was so adept at capturing and that still ring true 400 years later.

“We let the students use whatever skills they have,” Sidmore explains, noting that what are often treated as readings (which was not Shakespeare's intention) often become multi-media affairs. “If there is a student who is a spoken word artist, we want him or her to illuminate the text through original spoken word pieces that connect to our selected scenes. If we have hip-hop artists or improvisational dance artists, we want them to use those talents and incorporate them into the show. Shakespeare needs to be now!”

One of the most profound examples of student engagement is at Boston Day and Evening Academy, where ASP maintains a presence throughout the year.

“In December, BDEA has what they

call Project Month,” Sidmore explains. “We are one of the Projects and work in tandem with some of the ELA staff. It is a special class where students spend essentially six hours every day for four weeks with their teachers and ASP teaching artists, and, at the end, there is a culminating “sharing” performance that we affectionately call a “mash-up.” It's a showcase of what they learned in whatever way is appropriate for them, and while it always includes Shakespeare's text, it could also include video or originally devised movement or spoken word pieces or elements of a set; it's up to the ensemble to help shape the outcome.”

After helping the students “get the play on its feet,” the actors and educators from ASP encourage them to “ask and answer why they care and why the language resonates with them.” Last December, ASP worked through *The Taming of the Shrew*.

“We told the whole story and had students playing all the roles,” she recalls, “but we also had all of their voices included in exploration of gender dynamics and relationships between themselves and their parents and issues of love and courtship and dating, so the text was illuminated more fully in the context of the students' voices.” By taking the texts out of a standard desk-based classroom and off of a simple reading list, ASP strives to help students and others get more deeply engaged with the plays.

“Because we are actors,” Sidmore suggests, “we believe that young

people need to work in ways that connect their words and actions in a powerful way.” Especially for kinesthetic learners, this added dimension of performance and physical engagement opens doors and opportunities that simple readings cannot. It also allows them to speak their voices; voices which have often been silenced or are currently required to be silent, and this can be revolutionary for teenagers who desperately need to be seen and heard.

“The advantage is that we get to play,” Sidmore observes, “and we hope that, by activating the voices, bodies and imaginations of the students through Shakespeare's texts, that there is then a feeling of opening.”

When asked for one line that epitomizes ASP's philosophy, Sidmore turns to Hamlet and the line in which the troubled prince comes upon his friends who are guarding the castle that should by rights be his yet which has been usurped by a villainous uncle.

“‘Stand and unfold yourself,’ the guard says to Hamlet,” Sidmore quotes. When asked what it means and why it is so relevant (as ASP suggests all of Shakespeare's words are), Sidmore replies, “We can open and change who we are and we see that students can do that through their performance and that, in the process, they gain confidence in their own stories and empathy for other people's stories. The opportunity to take a positive risk and receive accolades for that risk is powerful for the students with whom we work.” ■



For den Photography

**CLASSROOM DRAMA**  
BPS teacher Stephanie Nikolaou (seated) and Salem State graduate student Danah Kelley participate in ASP's educational workshop