



The Advocate

August/September 2016



Saving Our Public Schools Together SOPS unites champions of public education

When a ship is in trouble and in need of support, the communications officers send out an “S.O.S.” which is the international Morse code signal for “Save Our Ship.”

These days, the craft of public education is under attack and the troops need to be rallied in order to set it back on its proper course.

Fortunately, there is a new organization called Save Our Public Schools MA (www.saveourpublicschools-ma.com) that is helping teachers, administrators, parents, and others unite against

the people and ideas that would sink our schools and our students.

“We are a political action committee formed in compliance with the State office of Campaign and Political Finance,” explains Juan Cofield, Chair of Save Our Public Schools (SOPS) and President of the New England Area Conference of the NAACP (NEAC). “Our two primary missions are to inform and educate parents and taxpayers of the severe harm that would come to public schools if Referendum 2 were passed, and also to advocate for the defeat of Question #2.”

While the Boston City Council recently voted to oppose the forthcoming ballot measure, much is left to be done to make sure it is defeated statewide.

“The time is now for us to talk to voters about what’s at stake,” urges SOPS Youth Director Carlos Rojas Álvarez.

According to 2016 records, public schools across the Commonwealth will lose over \$400 million in public funds to help pay for students who transfer to charter schools. Therefore, the more charter schools that are allowed to open, the more funds will disappear from public education. Instead of offering students a so-called “alternative” to public schools that makes their old schools weaker, SOPS posits that the funds could be used to improve the public schools and thereby eliminate the apparent need for charter schools.

“Many parents have been told that charter schools offer the best opportunities for their children,” Cofield observes. “They have been sold a bill of goods! What we need to do is improve the public schools so even the worst performing schools become the best performing schools.”

Combining the formidable forces of such organizations as AFT MA (and many of its locals), AFL-CIO, MTA, the Boston Education Justice Alliance (BEJA), the MA Education Justice Alliance (MEJA) and Jobs with Justice

(JWJ), SOPS is intent on uniting the educational community and the communities that are served by it to keep the cap on charter schools and keep public funds in public schools.

“Our public schools cannot afford to lose vital funding while we are seeing programs cut and activities reduced,”

- Charter schools siphon money from district public schools that could be used to improve education for all students.

- The charter school ballot question would allow 12 new charter schools to be opened each year and would also allow entire school districts to be run by private charter operators.

- Even though charter schools are required by law to recruit and retain high-needs stu-

dents, studies show that most charter schools fail to enroll as many English language learners, special needs students or economically disadvantaged students as the school districts their students come from.

- Charter schools in urban areas have especially high discipline and suspension rates, allowing them to boost their test scores by pushing out students who are more difficult to educate. In 2014, Roxbury Preparatory Charter suspended 59.8 percent of its students, with 94 percent of these suspensions for nonviolent, noncriminal, nondrug-related behavior.

- Many charter schools suspend students of color and students with special needs at a disproportionate rate. In a recent study, more than 500 charter schools suspended black students at a rate that was at least 10 percentage points higher than for white students and over 1,000 charter schools suspended students with disabilities at a rate that was 10 or more percentage points higher than

Continued on page 9



maintains BEJA Coordinator Marléna Rose.

“The campaign is currently made up of various parents, educators, students, unions and community groups,” explains SOPS Communications Director Janna Knospe. “Volunteers and organizers are working together throughout the state to talk to voters

For more information about Question 2, please see page 12

about the importance of voting no on the November ballot question regarding the charter school cap.”

“We want to promote our short-term goals...by turning out these groups’ memberships to our volunteer opportunities,” explains SOPS Community Organizer Max Parish, “and to promote our long-term goals of raising awareness in the community of the school-to-prison pipeline and high-stakes testing and drawing community interest, not just for this campaign, but for future ones as well that tackle the privatization of public schools and public services.”

In addition to defeating the ballot measure, SOPS is also dedicated to driving home some key facts amidst a sea of misinformation and massaged numbers. Among these are the following:

- Parents and students are under-represented on MA charter school governing boards and 60 percent of charter schools in MA have no parent representation on their boards of trustees.

- Charter schools are publicly funded, yet local communities have no power to oversee their approval or how they operate.

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GIVING MEANING TO CONVENING
AFT President Randi Weingarten stands with representatives of AFT MA at the 2016 AFT Convention in Minneapolis
(Photo by Column Whyte)



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Vote NO on Question 2. It's BAD for Our Schools

The lead article in this edition of *The Advocate* describes Save Our Public Schools (SOPS), the umbrella coalition formed to defeat Question 2, the initiative petition to substantiate increase the number of charter schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The article explains why the supporters of public schools are so concerned about a cap increase.

Remember that for every four students in charter schools, 96 are in the public schools. Simply put, the schools which educate the vast majority of students in Massachusetts will lose much. They need more resources, not less.

The back page of this issue is a comprehensive but concise list of points that we can make in support of our campaign to defeat Question 2.

What can each one of us do? I shall mention some of the actions I mentioned in my article in a previous edition of *The Advocate* and will also provide some additional ones.

* Speak to friends and neighbors. Cite the issues discussed in this newspaper.

* Make sure that supporters are registered to vote.

* Get involved in activities sponsored by SOPS, your local union, and the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA). SOPS has a number

of ways to get involved. Go to saveourpublicschoolsma.com.

* Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Use the information included in this newspaper. Local newspapers are usually very eager to print letters from people in the

communities for which they write.

* Urge your school committees and the local governing bodies to take a position against Question 2.

* Above all, vote on Tuesday, November 8, 2016.

VOTE. VOTE. VOTE.

If you have questions or comments, you email tgosnell@aftma.net. ■

For more information about Question 2, please see page 12

BOLD PRINT

The hours for the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) 'Hotline' (781-381-6600) are now Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM and 2:00-5:00 PM.

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Resident cartoonist Scott Hubeny is raising funds for a calendar based on his popular "180 Dayz" comic.

For information and to contribute, go to www.180dayz.com.

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Longy School of Music of Bard College will mark their 100th year this year with a series of concerts and other events. Part of the festivities includes a series of 100-second compositions, as well as honors from the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce & the Harvard Square Business Association, and nearly \$200,000 in grants for music library expansion, building renovations, and to support educational initiatives.

For information, visit www.longy.edu.

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

QUESTION 2 on the ballot this November would allow the state to approve 12 new Commonwealth charter schools every year forever, eventually draining billions of dollars from our schools and destabilizing our public education system. It would encourage charters to expand into areas where they don't exist now, taking critical resources away from successful public schools.

❌ LOST FUNDING
This year alone, charters will divert more than \$400 million from public schools. That's money districts desperately need so they can offer more science, technology, arts and music classes, as well as preschool services and smaller class sizes. The money should be kept in the public schools for the benefit of all students.

❌ NO LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY
Charter schools are not accountable to their local communities. The state often approves them over the united opposition of the communities where they will be located. That's wrong. Local communities should have the final say on what kinds of schools they want.

❌ 'SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL' EDUCATION
Charter schools are divisive, creating a two-track system described by the NAACP as "separate and unequal." They typically underserve English language learners and special needs students, leaving public schools with fewer resources to educate a higher-need population.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: Our opponents have millions of dollars from hedge funds and corporate backers. We rely on people power to stand up for children in our public schools. If some of our public schools are falling short, we should fix them — not keep taking money away and giving it to unaccountable charters.

SaveOurPublicSchoolsMA.com [@SOPublicSchools](https://twitter.com/SOPublicSchools) #KeepTheCap [FB.com/SaveOurPublicSchools](https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurPublicSchools)
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**The 2016
AFT MA
Leadership Conference
is October 1, 2016
at the
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel
Westborough**

Be Ready to Lead

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Getting On Board

AFT MA Executive Board serves all members

In addition to being guided by the national offices of AFT and the AFL-CIO, members of AFT MA are also privileged to the support of their Executive Board.

Each year, vacancies on the Board are filled through open elections at the AFT MA Convention. Once elected, members meet at regular intervals to decide upon matters that will affect the entire membership.

But what does it mean to the members to be part of the Board? Why do they ask to be nominated? What are their goals?

Deborah Blinder has been a Spanish teacher and building representative in Holliston for more than 30 years.

"My years as a building representative...proved to be interesting work that increased the benefits for union members," she recalls, noting that benefits to AFT MA members also benefit the students.



HOLLISTON HELPER
Deb Blinder

Blinder was eventually elected vice president and then president of Local 3257, in which capacities she handled many grievances and supported her colleagues in other profound ways.

"During my time as president, the dialogue between management and workers evolved into interest-based conversations which took the members to a new level of professional respect," she recalls, citing such important acts as the achievement of parity for adoption and maternity leave and the recognition of veteran staff with a shift in pay steps and better reimbursement for course work. "Grievances were at an all time low as dialogue replaced what had been a very contentious relationship."

When an opening on the Executive Board appeared 11 years ago, Blinder was able to move into the new role.

Since then, she has served on various committees, including an environmental task force.

"I [also] worked with Anne Marie DuBois...to ensure that registration at AFTMA conventions has run smoothly," the current Convention Committee member explains.

As her local is located in Holliston, MA, Blinder enjoys and appreciates the opportunities she has had as a member of the Board. "My voice at the state level brings that perspective to the state organization," she observes, "while supporting fellow members across the state as a unified body."

As President of Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals, Catherine



SPRINGFIELD SUPPORTER
Cathy Mastronardi

Mastronardi represents the largest para-only local in AFT MA and one of the organization's few locals in Western MA. "I wanted a chance to meet with other leaders from AFT MA and to take a more active role at the state level," she replies when asked what prompted her to run for election to the Board this year.

As for what she hopes to do now that she has been elected, Mastronardi says, "I hope that we can share ideas and implement strategies that engage our members so that we can strengthen our union. There are many educational issues that will require a strong collective voice."

MA Library Staff Association (MLSA) Vice President Dan Haacker was recruited by colleague Kathy Kelley to the board.

"Kathy...wanted the MLSA represented on the board," Haacker explains. "At the time, none of the other officers of MLSA lived near to Boston. Since I had a part time job in Boston and used to go in on the weekends, I offered to be on it."

Since that time, Haacker has been a major contributor to Board policy and a major supporter of his colleagues.

"I think it is important that the interest of our public librarians has a voice on the board," he says, citing his involvement on the Committee on Political Education (COPE) as "one of the most interesting and rewarding parts of my service" and as the element of his position that has allowed him to participate in statewide conventions and educate himself and his fellow members on the issues of the day.



LIBRARIAN LIAISON
Dan Haacker

"My membership on the board has, of course, made me aware and supportive of the issues that face all of AFT MA members," Haacker says.

Amesbury High School math teacher and AFT Amesbury Education Committee member Tim Angerhofer was elected to the Board in 2012, taking over as a representative of his

district from colleague Cathy Patten.

"The Executive Board is a crucial spot where collaboration occurs to form policy positions - both internal and external - and subsequent actions," Angerhofer suggests, noting that he and his colleagues introduced the resolution opposing PARCC testing that was adopted at the 2015 AFT MA convention. "Participating on the Board is a great way to learn and understand important concerns to educators and public schools.... Sharing these matters with our local further strengthens our mutual relationship."



AMESBURY ADVOCATE
Tim Angerhofer

Like Angerhofer, Peabody Federation of Teachers President Bruce Nelson joined the Board when former Local 1289 President Ed Sapienza stepped down in 2006. Crediting Sapienza with keeping the members informed and involved, Nelson said he was inspired to "continue that tradition."



PEABODY PRESIDENT
Bruce Nelson

"At that time," Nelson recalls, "I could see how the initiatives of 'educrats' were placing an increasingly heavy burden on the backs of classroom teachers and paraprofessionals. I also recognized the importance of having the strength and resources of AFT MA behind my members and wanted to give them a direct voice in shaping our response to the threats to public education."

As today's teachers are overwhelmed by academic and administrative responsibilities and as public education is, as Nelson puts it, "facing multiple threats to its very existence," he is ever-more dedicated to giving his time and energy to informing and supporting for his fellow members and colleagues.

"Our members deserve the full-time advocacy provided by the staff and officers at AFT MA," Nelson urges, "and we, as Executive Board members, play an important role in helping AFT MA to maximize its effectiveness in support and defense of our members."

Long-time building representative and recording secretary for Lawrence Teachers Union Kimberley Barry has found her work with AFT MA rewarding in many ways.

"Union work...[has] afforded me experiences such as attending monthly general membership meetings, being a delegate at annual conventions, partaking in building rep trainings, [and] serving on various sub-committees, which include the discipline committee, school safety committee, professional development committee, and the education research committee."

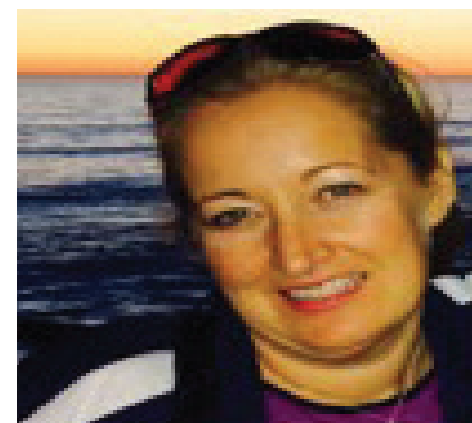
As so many other urban districts suffer from a lack of equity and resources, Barry enjoys being able to represent and speak on behalf of her colleagues and students. Having been an early member of the educator support network known as Andover Bread Loaf, Barry has always worked to bring creativity to the classroom and to support and inspire her students.

"I try to empower my students so they can break out of the cycle of poverty and create a life that we all deserve," she says, observing that high-stakes testing and teaching an aligned, packaged curriculum are "not the route to that achievement."

As her awareness of corporate involvement in public education grew, Barry became even more interested in doing what she could to inform others so they could work together against these counter-productive forces. When Lawrence was labeled a Level 5 District and placed under state receivership, Barry and her colleagues got a first-hand look at this process as charter schools swept into the city.

"During these tense times," Barry says, "I have gained an enormous amount of practice in supporting individuals in schools, defending the rights of our members, being part of the Negotiating Committee and Labor-Management Partnership Council. "With the support of colleagues at AFT, Barry has also been able to attend the Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute, West Coast Labor Management Institute, and the National Community Schools Forum. Being on the board at AFT MA has allowed her to bring her new knowledge and understanding to her colleagues and fellow members.

"I want to be part of AFT MA board to stay informed on all state and federal issues as they directly effect my local, and colleagues across the state and nation," Barry says. "I want to be part of this active group that represents what is good for students, and what is fair for teachers. I am eager to be part of a board that works to save our public schools, keep testing in perspective, and keep the rights of all our students at the center." ■



LAWRENCE LEADER
Kimberley Barry

The Hungry Child

Paraprofessional Perspective
By Marcy Winer

Nothing makes me sadder than to see a child who is hungry. No child should have to suffer from hunger in this wealthy country of ours.

When I was in elementary school, I always got extra food from the lunch ladies. I was very skinny and they probably thought I did not get fed very well at home so they piled it on. I loved the scrambled hamburger, corn and mashed potatoes that were served in the lunch room more than life itself back then. I used to mix it all up and eat every last bite. I was also very fond of a particular whipped chocolate dessert. It was served in little plastic covered cups with a tiny dollop of whipped cream. I hoarded those too and would scan the lunch table to see who would give theirs to me. I had a big appetite for a tiny girl. But I was not hungry at home.

This is not the case these days with many school systems, especially those in the inner city. Children often go to sleep hungry and come to school hungry. Most children who are hungry will eat anything that is put in front of them and often ask for second helpings of foods that other children won't even touch. Hungry children often exhibit behaviors and attitudes that well-nourished children do not. They may appear sleepy, angry, defiant and aggressive.

Many times, teachers assume that all their students have eaten, but sadly, this is not always the case. In order to be able to support my students most effectively, I always ask if they are hungry to see if that is what is bothering them.

School lunches have made slow progress over the years. I have seen new versions of macaroni and cheese switch out the white pasta for wheat pasta. That is a small but healthy change. Adding more fruits and vegetables can also reduce the number of trips to the school nurse and family doctors, if only by reducing instances of indigestion and constipation, both of which are highly distracting and distressing. Fortunately, more schools now offer salads, fruits and vegetables with lunch. Often, the children can take the fruit home if they don't eat it at lunch. During the school year, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank (www.mvfb.org) provides many students "take home bags" of pasta, crackers, sauce and fruit cups. Also, the food service company Aramark has partnered with local farms to obtain fresh produce to serve to children at lunch. That "farm to table" approach can only benefit these children and I hope to see more progress and healthy food options available in the future!

A few years back, I worked with a very health-conscious teacher. She

made me hide the chocolate muffins we got for breakfast and replaced them with granola bars. When we read the story, "Stone Soup" to the children, I had an idea about bringing in and identifying the different types



FEEDING MIND AND BODY
Marcy Winer

of vegetables that we could eat. Rather than make a soup, I ended up making a stir fry with the vegetables. Not only were we incorporating relevant topics from the story with the literacy component, we were educating the children about proper nutrition and

feeding them at the same time!

An article in *Education Week* from March 17, 2016 states that around 22% of our students are living in poverty. Poverty is all around us and children from inner city school districts are most affected. Hunger is a common barrier to learning in inner city school districts. Fortunately, many districts offer free breakfast and lunch and children are offered nutritional choices each day.

Unfortunately, the choices may not be so beneficial outside of school. Even the most well-meaning parents may choose fast food as the quick and economical solution for meals.

I remember one little girl in my

class who always had the best lunches. She always had a sandwich, a healthy treat and fruit. Her mom packed her enough food for a week!

I also remember a little boy who was always hungry. He ate two breakfasts and, at lunch time, I used to bring him down a paper bag so he could take home his leftovers, often sneaking them out before the kitchen ladies could see. I felt bad for him. He had severe behavior issues and I realized this was due partly to emotional issues that were being exacerbated by his family issues and his lack of proper nutrition. I often wondered if he had dinner at night because he was so hungry in the morning.

In the summer, our city distributes free lunch to children at area schools. I have seen plenty of families take advantage of this. Especially if they want their children to perform better academically, parents need to do all they can to get nutritious food for their children, both during and before and after the school day. Many of us know what it feels like to be hungry and how to solve that problem. Children need adults to model what healthy foods are. If schools can promote healthier eating, maybe the children can develop a love for healthy eating and continue choosing nutritional options when offered at home. ■

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](https://www.facebook.com/ProjectDear)).

Benefit Bulletin: Pledge Allegiance

Did you know that for every \$1 spent on American-made goods, an additional \$1.32 is invested in the U.S. economy?

Union Plus, the consumer benefits arm of the AFL-CIO, has been helping current and retired AFT members for 30 years with programs to save them money and to help them through hardships. As the new school year approaches, Union Plus is asking AFT

members to pledge to buy more goods that are union-made in the U.S.A.

Here is how you can get involved with this important effort:

- Go to UnionPlus.org/UnionPledge, and pledge to buy union-made.
- Union Plus will send you exclusive union-made lists to help you buy union-made!
- Five union members will be ran-

domly selected to receive a \$75 gift card to a unionized grocery store in their area.

Not only are union-made products better quality, they support companies that provide good jobs for working people right here in the United States. Even though going union takes a little extra effort, there are so many ways to make better choices with your wallet, especially when you take advantage of these lists. Among them are the following:

- Access to Union-Made Savings from Union Plus
- A Union-Made Consumer Prod-

uct Directory from Labor 411

- A Union-Made Car List from the United Auto Workers (UAW)

Buying union is an easy choice, so check the label and take the pledge to make the extra effort to give our economy and our fellow Union workers the extra support, because having each other's back is what being a union members is all about. ■

For more information, write to help@unionplus.org.

We put the



in



www.twitter.com/AFTMass

★ ★ ★ ★ ★


A Union of Professionals
AFT+
Member Benefits

**PLEDGE TO BUY
UNION-MADE
IN THE USA**

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Did you know that for every \$1 spent on American-made goods, an additional \$1.32 is invested in the U.S. economy? Union-made products are better quality products and they support companies that provide good jobs for working people right here in the United States.

Buying union is an easy choice, but it does take extra time to check the label. Take the pledge to take the extra effort. Because having each other's back is what being a union member is all about.

TAKE THE PLEDGE TODAY!
UnionPlus.org/UnionPledge
Text **PLEDGE** to **22555***



*Msg&Data Rates May Apply. Reply STOP to opt-out. Reply HELP or contact info.unionplus.org for help. Expect no more than 2msg/mo.



Meet Your Colleague: Jessica Tang

All educators are busy. Between planning and assessing their curricula to assessing their students and being assessed themselves through high-stakes testing and myriad other means, the daily demands on teachers and all who serve students reach far beyond the school bell.

Fortunately, many teachers are so passionate about their calling that they go not just one extra mile, but many, dedicating even their scant so-called “spare time” in service of students.

Jessica Tang is one such educator.

A graduate of Harvard University and Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, Tang has served in many capacities as a member of the Boston Teachers Union. Among these are Executive Board member, building representative, and, most recently, Director of Organizing. In these capacities, Tang has helped develop and implement a strategic plan to build community relations both among members and with the communities they serve. She has helped create the Boston Education Justice Alliance

(BEJA), a community coalition that unites parents, students, community members and teachers in support of public education. Tang has also been instrumental in bringing FirstBook to Boston (see August/September, 2015 issue) and working with other organizations to promote BTU programs and support public education.

“Public education is a core component of democracy,” Tang maintains, “and working towards a quality, equitable public education system that serves all students is why I do what I do.”

During her “regular” work hours, Tang was a sixth grade social studies and humanities teacher at the Young Achievers Science and Mathematics K-8 Pilot School in Boston through 2013 (when she stepped down to take on the organizational role at BTU). There, she taught six units of integrated and inclusive ELA and social studies classes and also lead field study experiences outside of the classroom as well. During her tenure at YA, Tang always received a summative teacher evaluation rating of “exemplary” in all categories and was even selected



BUSY BACKER
Jessica Tang

as a BPS History and Social Studies Fellow. In this capacity, Tang not only supported colleagues at monthly cohort meetings; she also contributed to district initiatives on curriculum, assessments, and instruction. Dedicated to all students and all ideas, Tang serves on the Boston Public School’s Teacher Diversity Work Group and is a former co-chair of the Massachusetts Asian American Educators Association.

“I’m a social justice unionist and activist,” Tang replies when asked to take a moment to describe herself. “I believe that labor and teachers unions have played, and continue to play, a really important role in advancing social, racial, and economic justice, as well as creating sustainable teaching and working conditions.”

Tang’s dedication to her colleagues and her community has not only been recognized by BTU, but by AFT MA as well. In fact, she was recently hired to write curriculum for the AFT Innovation Grant for 21st Century Lessons (see October, 2013 issue). A member of the Facing History and Ourselves Teacher Advisory Group since 2008, Tang was also one of a dozen educators selected to serve on the College Board and National Writing Project’s Young Men of Color and Literacy Work Group. She was also awarded

the Frederick Sontag Prize for excellence in urban education in 2012.

Despite a list of accomplishments and achievements that would please most departments, Tang is always on the lookout for more ways to support her students and the public education community at large. The past May, Tang was elected to the AFT MA Executive Board.

“I ran because we are facing so many challenges and attacks to public education,” she explains, “and many of these issues are statewide.”

As she has accomplished so much in Boston and had opportunities to collaborate with and learn from colleagues from other districts and other states, Tang hopes to bring her ideas to bear on the issues facing others and also to take best practices from elsewhere and introduce them here.

“I hope to learn from other locals and share my experience with and passion for organizing, coalition building and activism to continue strengthening AFT MA,” she says. “I [also] hope that I can share some of the work we are doing in Boston to organize and mobilize our members and community allies so that, collectively, we will prevail.” ■

This is the second in a series of pieces intended to introduce AFT MA members to new Executive Board members.

Meet Your Colleague: Nick DiPardo

Raised in RI by two educators, Nick DiPardo has been surrounded by hard-working educators since the day he was born.

“I grew up in a union household,” he says. “Both of my parents were active AFT members and my father was president of their local in Woonsocket.”

While other children may recall walking uphill both ways in the snow to get to school, DiPardo fondly remembers after-school trips to his father’s office and early exposure to union meetings and AFT conventions.

“I saw how difficult life was for teachers,” DiPardo explains. “Their jobs were stressful, their pensions were being attacked. It seemed like everyone would blame teachers for everything that went wrong.”

Apparently, his parents’ nurturing formed DiPardo’s nature, as he entered the Labor movement professionally as soon as he could.

“When I graduated from college,” he muses, “working in the labor movement seemed like a great way to help out hard-working teachers.”

Di Pardo currently serves as a lead organizer for AFT’s Northeast Re-

gional Organizing Project who will be supporting his colleagues at AFT MA while he pursues a Masters degree at the UMass Amherst Labor Center.

“I’ve been assigned to work with AFT MA and the locals on the charter school ballot initiative this November,” DiPardo explains, noting that his assignment runs through Election Day, when the fate of the charter school cap will be decided and the fates of many educators may be sealed.

“Whatever the level of education, educators are constantly under attack,” DiPardo observes, encouraging all AFT members to remain involved in local and national efforts in every way possible. “The charter ballot initiative and school privatization is only the most recent attack, and immediately after Election Day, I’m sure there will be another.”

Though he has also served in RI, PA and Washington, DC, DiPardo started with AFT in MA.

“I worked on the MA Early Childhood Educators Union,” he recalls, citing the pioneering joint venture between AFT MA and MTA. “I was here from 2011-2014.”

Since then, DiPardo has spent most of his time in the Pittsburgh area, working with higher education faculty and helping to form new locals.

“I successfully helped 1,000 part-time faculty at the Community College of Allegheny County and about 400 full-time faculty at Northern Illinois University join the AFT,” he says proudly.

While in MA, DiPardo looks forward to helping colleagues and learning from them as well, just as he has from his parents and so many others throughout his personal and professional life.

“At this point in my career, I’ve gotten the opportunity to work with educators at all levels,” he says, recalling experiences with k-12 teachers, as well as higher education faculty. “I’m really looking forward to using the Save Our



LIFELONG LABORER
Nick DiPardo

Public Schools campaign as an opportunity for intense internal organizing, developing new activists, and leaving AFT-MA locals in a stronger position than when I arrived.” ■

ATTENTION NEW(ER) TEACHERS

Have you been teaching for fewer than five years?

Do you want to share why you entered education?

Do you have life lessons to impart?

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VOTE ON PRIMARY DAY
SEPTEMBER 8, 2016

Summa Cum Laude: Ralph Jaccodine

Many musicians come to Boston to pursue their personal and professional dreams. And for a growing number of these, the road runs through Berklee.

While at the world-famous school of music, artists meet other like-minded people with a driving passion to express themselves through song. They also learn how to turn that passion into a career.

Among the leaders of the artist management muster at Berklee is Ralph Jaccodine.

Having started his own career as a performer, Jaccodine knows well the trials and tribulations (as well as the glory and the fun) involved in a musical life. As he understood the difficulties involved in making it as a performing musician, Jaccodine diversified his passions while in high school in Allentown, PA, promoting shows by the likes of Hall and Oates, Kiss, Rush, and Styx as a member of the city's high school student government. He then went on to promote shows at the University of Notre Dame, including a concert by Bruce Springsteen.

"That experience brought me a complete fascination with the business of music," Jaccodine explains. "I was in a small town and suddenly these huge, shiny busses pull in and everybody in town comes out."

And while the bands would "blow everybody away and then move on to the next town," something stuck with Jaccodine that shaped his career and his life.

"To be able to meet the artists and see it all, I really caught the bug and found that I really had a lot of passion for the whole circus act," he smiles.

In 1994, Jaccodine co-created Black Wolf Records with friend and fellow industry expert Mike Dreese, who had created the popular and enduring Newbury Comics record store. Ralph Jaccodine Management (www.ralphjaccodine.com) was born soon after as a company that, Jaccodine says, was "built on integrity and tenacity." These dual qualities have helped Jaccodine steer his curated family of clients amidst the tidal waves of a tumultuous industry.

"The philosophy is indie and fiercely independent with global reach in mind for our artists," explains Jaccodine, noting that his company also founded Black Wolf records with award-winning singer/songwriter Ellis Paul. "The goal is...building lasting careers, focusing on working hard and doing things the right way for the right reasons."

As he was in Boston and working with many nationally-touring artists, Jaccodine was often invited to speak and present at Berklee.

"I was pretty familiar with the folks in the faculty and Berklee's status in the music world," Jaccodine explains. "I also really like talking to student(s) because I feel I have a lot to offer them because I have 25 years of hard-earned experience as a manager."

The more Jaccodine got to know the school and its faculty and students,

the more he wanted to be a part of it.

"Years ago, I asked my management client Livingston Taylor why he was so excited to be teaching at Berklee," Jaccodine recalls. "He said it was because he was among the best, most talented faculty and students in the country. That stuck with me!"

And while he admits that he was initially reticent to share his wisdoms with the students, Jaccodine says the he now relishes the opportunity.

"When I first started to talk to students, I was very nervous because I did not feel I was an authority figure on the business of music," he

recalls. "But now that I have been managing artists for so long, I feel confident that I am the expert on one thing, my career and my years of experience and the lessons I have learned from the trenches of the music industry."

As he lives what he teaches, Jaccodine has been able to bring a rare, real world perspective to his classes and his students. "Because it is my day job, I have to be up to date and so I can bring that updated information and perspective to the students," he reasons. "It is a really good feeling to be able to help them!"

At Berklee (where he won the Dean's Award for Innovation and Service in 2015), Jaccodine also wears multiple hats, serving as an Assistant Professor in the department of Music Business/Management, co-managing the Berklee Music Law & Management Club, and also developing a series of professional development seminars with the Boston Managers Group, which he started 20 years ago with ex-Aerosmith manager Tim Collins.

"The club brings speakers in for the students and the community-at-large," Jaccodine explains, listing such other austere speakers as Don Law of Live Nation, Panos Panay of SonicBids, Derek Sivers of CD Baby, and Berklee President Roger Brown and also mentioning a recent seminar with Rock and Roll Hall of Famer John Oates. "I am trying to bring a lot of energy and great talent to Berklee."

Jaccodine has also been able to gain a great deal from his time at the school as well. Among his Berklee-bred clients are Shun Ng and Rebecca Loeb (see January, 2015 issue), and long-time friend Taylor. "I also mentor many of my students and others at the school," Jaccodine says.

In his role at Berklee, Jaccodine is able to support and influence many young artists and future managers. When asked who influenced and inspired him, Jaccodine again mentions Collins and Dreese.

"In 1992, I came to Mike ranting and raving about Ellis Paul, and how great this guy's music was. He quickly

brought me down to earth saying those two words that have haunted me ever since- 'Nobody Cares!'"

While Dreese's response drove home the hard reality that, for the most part, music is seen as disposable, it also encouraged Jaccodine to work even harder to make people care about the songs and songwriters who mattered to him.

"Mike's challenge to me back...was 'How do I make people care about the music I care about?'" Jaccodine explains. "I have made a career out of spreading...the music of other people I care about."

In fact, Jaccodine takes Dreese's words so to hear that he continues to see his role not just as manager, but also as proselytizer.

"Personal management has to be a holy crusade or nothing at all," Jaccodine observes. "You have to have confidence that people will care. Spreading my artist's music is how I feed my family, but just as important... it is how I feed my soul."

In an effort to repay his mentors and to help them support each other and other colleagues, Jaccodine has also organized a manager's roundtable, of which Collins and Dreese are integral parts. In fact, Jaccodine recalls, Collins was there from the beginning.

"I had a few months of calling myself a manager under my belt when I called Tim," Jaccodine recalls. "Tim was on top of the food chain for managers and I just wanted to meet him, touch his garment and hope that something would rub off on me."

After what turned out to be an extensive conversation, in which Jaccodine was able to share his knowledge of the MA music scene with the eminent manager, Collins offered to reciprocate.

"I asked him to help me form a 'bunch of managers' so we can help each other out," Jaccodine explains. Thus was the Boston Manager's Group born!

"As a manager," Jaccodine suggests, "I am supposed to know how to guide a career without question, the artist places their trust in my guidance. I need to be an expert."

While Jaccodine says that the Group helps him and other managers find the answers and garner the support they need to help their clients and to hopefully help strengthen and grow the music scene and the industry at large, he still feels that his main role is as an educator.

"I feel like I have found my calling in teaching," Jaccodine says. ■



LEADING BY EXAMPLE
Ralph Jaccodine (photo by Lisa Fehl)



READY TO ROLL

Salem alum and top sports agent Sean Stellato (center) prepares to launch the film version of his popular book "No Backing Down" which details Salem High School's champion season amidst a teacher's strike. With him are client Tye Smith (Seattle Seahawks) and award-winning producer/screenwriter Angelo Pizzo ("Hoosiers," "Rudy").

Do you have stories and ideas to share? Send them to

advocate@aftma.net

Just Say “No”

Educator Opinion

By Miriam Fusco

How do you respond to someone who wants to move their child into a charter school?

Do your homework!

The original purpose of charter school was to serve as a laboratory in which best practices could be developed and from which traditional public schools could learn. Personally, I wouldn't want my child to be used as an experiment. Be that as it may, in my many years as an educator in the public school system who shares responsibilities of educating students in a community where a handful of charter schools exist, not once have I encountered the sharing of any “wisdom” obtained from charter schools.

All details of charter school operation – including the school's name, organization, management, and curriculum – are set by the charter, which also outlines how the school will measure student performance. A charter school has freedom and autonomy from state and local rules in terms of staffing, curriculum choices, and budget management. Charter schools can be operated by any person who can meet the requirements for opening a charter school. They can also de-

termine the rules of hiring and firing and accepting or rejecting whomever they want, including students, despite the ostensible use of a lottery system. Charter schools can also choose how much funds will be allocated to the actual student learning and they can decide what students should be learning and how their learning will be measured.

These freedoms seem to offer an unbalanced amount of power among charter school operators, parents, educators, and students and creates a system that historically has been proven ineffective and unhealthy for developing successful participants in any community.

If your child's school is falling short, instead of running to another school with its own set of problems, stand up and fight for more funding to make your child's school a place you want your child to be. Voice your opinion, get involved, and I promise that you will be surprised with the results.

Why gamble with your child's education? Charter school rules on funding, operational requirements, and accountability vary widely. Why send your child to a school system that has no continuity or guarantee for your investment? Why trust a school system that does not allow taxpayers to know, decide, or voice how their tax dollars are used?



KEEP THE CAP
Speech and Language
Pathologist Miriam Fusco

Public Education, Inc.

Educator Opinion

By Shirley Jones-Luke

You and your colleagues are sitting in an auditorium at the end of another busy day. People are tired, but feel that they've accomplished much. No one knows what the meeting is about and there is a lot of murmuring in the audience. Finally, the CEO and President come to the podium. They have somber expressions on their faces. The audience immediately quiets down and focuses their attention on the executives. You could hear a pin drop.

The CEO comes to the mic, gripping the podium and looking straight into the curious faces in front of him. He begins by thanking everyone for attending the meeting (not that they had a choice; it was mandatory) and explains the reason for the meeting is to discuss findings about the company that show strength in some areas, but not in key sectors. The CEO then announces that there will be some cost-cutting and that everyone will be affected. He then defers to the president to provide details.

The president takes the mic off the stand and walks in front of the podium, sitting into the crowd. He thanks everyone again for their presence and confirms the CEO's words. The company is not doing well. Their main product, once a stellar item, has had many complaints. The product's

success has plummeted. Revenue is down. Clients are looking to other companies. The president goes on to say that changes need to be made for the company to remain viable. He announces that they are restructuring the company and all employees must re-apply for their jobs. No one is guaranteed a position in the company's restructuring. The CEO and the President will still be in charge under the new structure. Those employees who are not rehired will be provided employment assistance headed up by the company's human resources department. Interviews will begin as soon as all positions have been posted.



BUSINESS AS USUAL
Shirley Jones-Luke

This scene is often played out in corporate America. Unfortunately, it is also a scene that has happened at many schools as well. Recently, this scenario played out at Madison Park Technical & Vocational High School (MPTVHS) which is in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. The staff at were told just prior to the Christmas holiday that the school was designated as a Level 4 by DESE and would go into “turnaround” status. All employees, from custodians to teachers, would have to reapply for their jobs.

In February of this year, teachers and other staff members received their



Charter school staff tend have fewer years of experience and are paid less than those at a traditional public school. Nearly 30% of charter school teachers have less than three years of full-time teaching experience compared with 12% percent of those at traditional public schools. How can you trust that your child will receive a quality education when the school system's teachers work with such minimal experience and support? Personally, I would not like my child to always be educated by a “beginning” teacher. I would prefer that my child have the benefit of being educated by a more seasoned teacher for as many years as possible.

The charter school system is designed to use funding ear-marked for the traditional public schools, leaving them with less resources to educate the students the charter school system does not. How can one support a system that takes away financial support from the very system it was designed to help improve? The concept doesn't make sense at all! The charter school system was designed to offer another educational option for some students, not to replace one that was designed for all. How can one support this movement, knowing that it operates to serve a few by weakening a system

excess letters. These letters officially informed teachers that they had to reapply for their jobs. All staff were guaranteed an interview if they reapplied for their positions. If they were not interested in returning the MPTVHS staff could apply for available positions within the district. Positions at MPTVHS would be posted on an ongoing basis.

In March, positions began appearing on Talented, BPS's hiring portal, and teachers began to apply. In April, interviews began. Sadly, the majority of teachers who were interviewed were not rehired.

Many teachers, such as myself, have spent their entire teaching career at MPTVHS. I have been teaching for nearly fourteen years. Those years have been filled with challenges and triumphs. My colleagues took me under their collective wing and helped me through many tough times. In order to give back, I have contributed to the school's ILT. I have led professional development sessions. I have mentored new teachers. But most importantly, I have helped many students to reach their goals and graduate.

Now my future and that of many of my colleagues is in doubt. In an effort to cut costs, BPS (and many other public schools) may be sacrificing the best and the brightest for the sake of the almighty dollar. A recent McKinsey consulting report paid for by the district suggested that BPS should close 30 – 50 schools and lay off up to 900 teachers. It was also suggested that BPS hire “cheaper staff.” Essentially, senior teachers are too expensive and must be gotten rid of. But

that serves many more?

As we have so much at stake, both in terms of our livelihoods and our children's education, all of us must do all we can to oppose the growing charter school system in Massachusetts and across the nation until the rules, regulations and funding policies are changed so that they do not negatively impact the traditional public school system. We must continue to oppose a system that is not accountable to the communities in which they operate. Local communities should have the final say in what kind of schools they want in their communities. We must continue to oppose a system that provides a separate and unequal education to all students.

The U.S. Constitution requires that all children be given equal educational opportunity no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. So, this November, I'm hoping everyone will raise their voices by voting no to the lifting the cap on charter schools. Just say “NO”. ■

Miriam Fusco, M.S. CCC-SLP, is a 18-year bilingual speech/language pathologist in the Lynn Public Schools.

what is the cost of the knowledge lost?

If students are a “product”, what happens when that “product” is not properly prepared for the customer? These “customers” would be employers and post-secondary schools. Employers want employees with the skills to meet the demands of the 21st century. Colleges and universities need students prepared for the rigors of higher education. If students are not properly prepared, they will not be able to acquire good-paying jobs or to handle the workload of college. This would cheat the district out of a highly educated workforce. The money the district saves now will not match the cost of what it will lose in the future.

Also, how can a district attract and retain talented teachers when candidates see how colleagues are treated in the district and in the media? Someone considering a teaching career may have second thoughts. If they go to other districts or even other fields, students are deprived of quality teachers and a quality education.

My colleagues and I are dedicated teachers with experience and talent. We want to teach. We want to contribute to the future of our community. We believe in our students. We need our district to believe in us and not sacrifice us to satisfy their bottom-line. The students at MPTVHS (and at every public school) deserve teachers who know them and understand their needs. Districts need to find other ways to save money without sacrificing talent. There is simply too much at stake. ■

Shirley Jones-Luke is a BPS educator, writer, and poet.

SOPS MA

Continued from page 1
for students without disabilities.

- A study of charter high schools in Boston showed that only 40 percent of those enrolled as freshmen made it to graduation, compared to 80 percent of those enrolled in the Boston Public Schools.

- Charter schools often vastly exaggerate claims about the number of students on their waitlists. An analysis of state data suggests that fewer than 15,000 students are affected by the charter school cap, and the State Auditor has found that many charter schools roll over their waiting lists from year to year, regardless of whether students are still interested.

- Many students who apply to charter schools choose not to attend when they are offered seats. A 2013 study conducted for the pro-charter Boston Foundation found that 47 percent of Boston students who were offered seats in charter school lotteries turned them down.

- More Boston students are on Boston Public Schools waitlists than on charter school waitlists. This year, the Boston School Department reports a total of 20,161 students on district school waitlists.

- Charter school students often struggle in college because many charter schools follow a tightly scripted curriculum geared to increasing test scores rather than to encouraging inquiry and understanding.

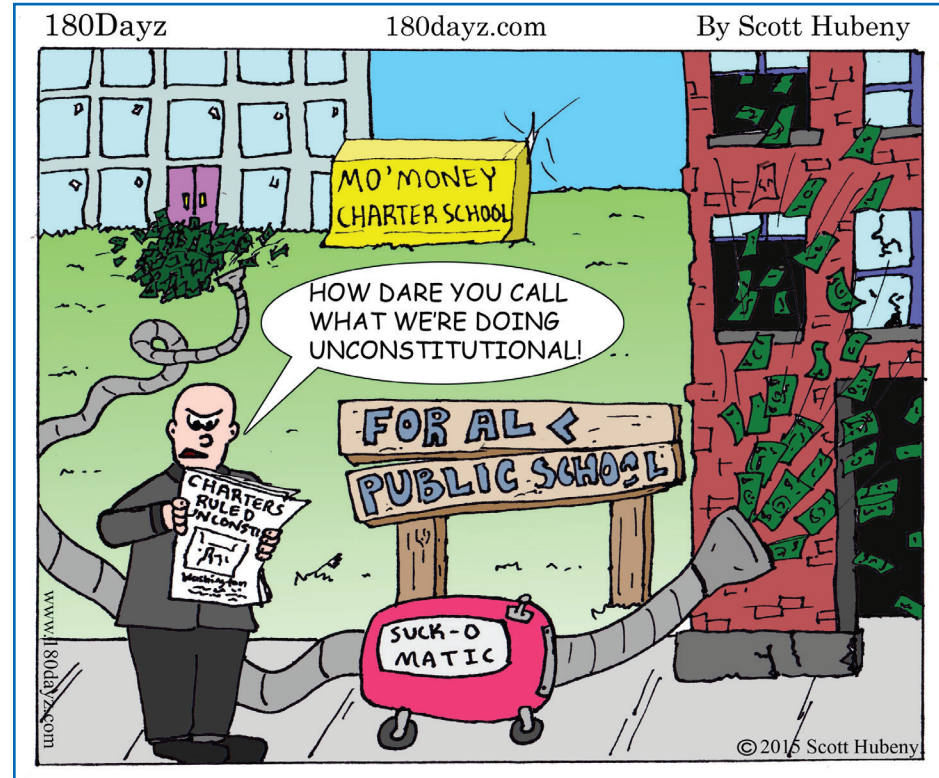
- Many charter schools have high teacher turnover, which is disruptive for students and staff alike. Teacher turnover at charter schools is typically about 25 percent compared to 14 percent at district public schools.

As so many of these issues have particular bearing on students of color, Cofield and his colleagues at the NAACP are dedicated to doing all they can and have been for some time.

“In 2010, the NAACP passed a resolution which...indicated that they stand for and advocate for high-quality, free public schools for all,” Cofield recalls, placing the emphasis on “all.” With this resolution firmly in mind, Cofield is keen to point out that, if the referendum were passed, it would diminish quality education for all students over time, not just those in certain districts or in certain situations. He therefore urges everyone to get involved.

“The greatest way to get involved is through our phone banking and canvassing opportunities,” Knospe suggests, noting that interested individuals can go to the website and look under “Events.” For those who wish to be involved on a longer-term basis or who just want to be kept informed regarding SOPS MA activities, there is also a “Join Our Team” link on the website as well.

“People can host house parties or be the leader for a neighborhood action like a canvassing or a phone bank,” Knospe says. “We are always looking for teacher and parent spokespeople, so if anyone has stories about the campaign or that will support the campaign, they can share their stories on the website as well and/or write letters to the editors of various publications or letters to representatives.”



Among SOPS’s many parent spokespeople is Field Organizer Malikka Williams, whose child experienced “harsh disciplinary treatment” in a charter school.

“My goal as a parent,” Williams says, “is that people will have an open heart that the SOPS campaign is not to take away charters or to continue [to] divide, but to give the people that have suffered...courage to fight for equal and quality education.” Williams goes on to posit that problems arise and divide when decision-makers only consider certain statistics (often in certain areas). “My goal in this campaign is to get parents more involved in decision making around public education and to have a strong voice around what education has to look like when serving our children.”

As those who support charter schools are apparently planning to set

aside \$18 million for their campaign, the team at SOPS MA emphasizes the importance of getting involved and fighting dollars with numbers. As AFT MA President Tom Gosnell noted in his most recent President’s Message (see June/July, 2016 issue), “the campaign will be intense and fierce,” and members need to exercise all the power they can muster by registering to vote and contacting their representatives on a regular basis to make sure their voices are heard.

“Speak to friends and neighbors about the issue,” Gosnell advised, “Emphasize what important contributions the regular public schools make to society and the economy. Emphasize that Massachusetts students are number one in the nationwide National Assessment of Educational Progress test and number one in the western

after year.”

While they are clearly happy to take money away from public schools, most charters do not take an equal share of ESL or SPED students. As a result, their testing and other achievement rubrics are also often skewed.

“We also believe that schools should take every kind of child,” Guisbond says, “and that is not the case for charter schools, which do not educate the same proportion of kids with the most significant disabilities or English language learners.”

While charter schools are the main target for SOPS, there are other goals as well. When asked what he and his colleagues hope to accomplish, Parish offers a short and long answer. “Not only do we want to crush the opposition on this ballot question,” he says, “we want to collect e-mail addresses for future campaigns...and also form long-lasting progressive partnerships with individuals and organizations in the regions we are working with to create a sustainable movement towards improving the quality of public education and the experience and treatment of teachers moving forward.”

While the ballot question is the core of the campaign, Rose agrees that there are other goals as well.

“We seek to build informed communities, versed in budget, testing and accountability and other issues related to education justice,” she explains. “This work will continue far after the elections.”

No matter what they do, however, the members of the SOPS coalition will stay focused on our students and the future of public education in MA and beyond.

“We need to protect education access for all students and make sure all students have resources,” Knospe maintains, urging colleagues to do all they can to be involved and to make sure they are heard. “The more people we have on the ground, the more people we can talk to and the more good we can do.” ■

world on the international math and science test. Emphasize that maintenance of this level of achievement requires the investment of resources rather than the loss of resources.”

“To those who say public schools are failing across the board, we say, not true!” says Lisa Guisbond, director of Citizens for Public Schools (www.citizensforpublicschools.org), which is one of the main members of SOPS. “If some public schools are struggling, the last thing they need is to lose critical resources. It makes no sense to cripple public education, a pillar of our democracy.”

When asked why Citizens for Public Schools (CPS) joined the coalition, Guisbond replies, “we see the ballot question as a dire threat to the health and well being of the schools that serve the vast majority of our students, so there was no question that we would join this fight.”

Guisbond’s group recently released a study that revealed that, despite claims to the contrary by those who support charter schools, the numbers they often cite regarding students who are waiting for openings in charter schools are grossly inflated and often dishonest (see April/May 2016 issue).

“Since a key part of CPS’s mission is to make sure there are enough public funds for our public schools,” Guisbond explains, “we were naturally concerned about the [charter school] ballot question, which threatens to take up to an additional \$150 million away from district school budgets year



As we continue to improve and expand upon our website, we also continue to encourage members to make use of it and, in the process, to save paper.

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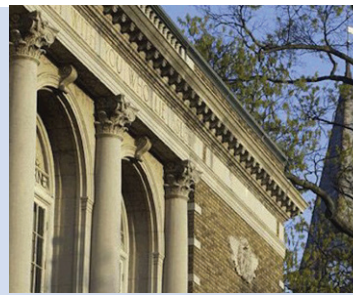


PLAYING BALL
Representatives of AFT MA take in a game at Target Field while at the 2016 AFT Convention in Minneapolis (Photo by Column Whyte)



On Campus

Susan Krumholz, President
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Let's Consider Prison Education

The entire University of Massachusetts system is facing cuts and, much to our chagrin, our students will see tuitions increase. I could write here about the value of a properly-funded state university or the importance of offering affordable education, but I have done that in several columns. Instead, I am going to write about something near to my heart - prison education.

Despite the fact that crime rates have steadily fallen since 1993, incarceration in the US increased to 1,508,636 in 2014 at an estimated national cost of \$52 billion. Only 22.6% of the total those incarcerated have a high school diploma and 12.7% some secondary education. A recent study by the U.S. Justice Department found that prison education reduced recidivism by a remarkable 43%. There are several well-regarded prison education programs and the hope is more will emerge since several pilot research programs have recently been funded. Locally, programs at MCI Framingham and MCI Norfolk are run through Boston University's Metropolitan College. Other prominent prison education programs include the Bard

Prison Initiative that offers courses in six prisons across NY, and the CA-based Prison Education Project (PEP) that offers college courses in 11 facilities taught by faculty from over a dozen state colleges and universities.

All of these programs do good work, with few external resources. I want to write, however, about something a bit different.

For the past decade, I have been involved with Temple University's Inside Out Prison Exchange Program. Since 2003, Inside Out staff have trained over 300 faculty members from 37 states (as well as Australia and Canada) to teach college courses in prisons. What makes this program unique is the joint learning environment. "Outside" students from area schools enter the jail classroom and are asked to sit in every other seat. When the "Inside" students (i.e., the prisoners) arrive, they fill in.

Every Fall semester, I take 15 UMass Dartmouth students with me into the Bristol County House of Corrections to study the foundations of American justice with 15 incarcerated men or women. By the time of the closing ceremony you can only distin-

guish Outside from Inside students by the clothes they wear. What makes this program special? To begin, it costs relatively little to offer. Salary is the largest expense, but the school is paying me to teach the 15 Outside students anyway. Some schools bus the Outside students, but the facility also bears some of the expense, including providing books for Inside students. For the Outside students, there is learning, but also growing. They discover that we are not defined by our worst day and that the Inside students are not that different from them. The Inside students have the chance to take a college course that otherwise wouldn't be available to them (especially in county jails where little is available after GED/HSE classes). Many of them discover that they are intelligent and that school can be enjoyable. This is often in stark contrast to their early experiences in schools that were often less than successful. And they discover that college students are not so different, that they can fit in. Perhaps most importantly is that, as many Inside students will be out soon, they will have a real chance to enter college, if only they can find

their way there. Programs like this point the way.

As a teacher, there is nothing I do that gives me more satisfaction or feels closer to what I believe teaching is about. I am not alone. As of last month, there were 38 trained instructors at a dozen schools - public, private, universities and community colleges.

Think this isn't about education budgets? In 2014, Massachusetts had 9,670 "criminally sentenced" inmates in the prison system, with an annual cost of \$53,040.87 per person. Over 10,000 more are in county jails. Jail costs vary by county but the average is about \$48,000 per person. The prison education program at Bard College claims that inmates who participate in their program only have a 4% rate of recidivism; those who earn a degree in prison on have a 2.5% rate. PEP estimates that educating just a fraction of those currently incarcerated would reduce overall recidivism by 1%. A mere 1% reduction (200 individuals NOT incarcerated at approximately \$50,000 a year) would be a savings of \$10 million - money that could be spent on education! ■

The "Right" Education for You

Educator Opinion
By Ronda Goodale

Almost 10 percent of all students who attend an American high school drop out. Dropout rates are even higher for Black (12 percent), Latino (33 percent) and urban students (22 percent). Approximately 66 percent of the students who graduate high school enroll in college. Of these, however, about 40 percent drop out. As a result, only about 32 percent of Americans over 25 have a college degree. All of this data provides powerful evidence for the need to broaden the focus of our educational goals in the United States.

The dominant theme of high school curricula in the United States is increasingly college focused. Every president, regardless of party, has identified college attendance as a major educational goal. We have made yearly gains in high school completion rates for students generally, but still need improvement in completion rates and in Black, Latino, and urban populations. A closer examination into the underlying causes behind dropout rates would help us more effectively provide the supports needed to increase high school completion rates.

Our heavy emphasis on attending college may have many unintended emotional as well as financial consequences for students, teachers and parents. Since college is such a major focus, almost all students perceive college as the preferred life pathway. As a result, many end up attending college (at least for a time) without considering career options that might

not require a bachelor's degree or for which alternative preparation might be more appropriate. Many labor-related jobs, such as electrician and plumber, are based upon a mentoring system and are just a few examples of viable choices that do not require a college degree.

Sadly, most students are not counseled about these sorts of options. In fact, many are exclusively encouraged and supported to attend college. If they choose a different pathway, they may be made to feel that their choice is wrong or that the goal is not as worthwhile. Not only do many students who choose not to attend or graduate college feel less accomplished, they feel even worse if they begin college and then drop out.

The other challenge associated with college attendance involves the financial obligations that may be incurred regardless of whether a student eventually graduates or not. The financial issues are often not fully grasped by young people and it is not until their obligations to institutions get in the way of their pursuing the dreams that their education was supposed to support that they find out they are greatly trapped.

Students should be helped to explore their interests and passions and also potential costs and benefits. Technology can offer not only access to information, but also simulation. Therefore, schools should encourage students to try on and try out different options and to weigh their respective

costs and benefits before deciding. Also, schools should not just provide models of college-educated adults and provide only college preparatory courses for students. A range of employment options should be considered and there should be more positive discussion of post-high school training for students. At very least, all students should be

trained in survival skills that promote their sense of agency.

The reality is that many students will end up without a college degree. They should not feel any failure associated with the fact they have taken a different path. Teachers need to use examples in their classes of different type of successes in life. With increasing technological advances, the types of jobs available will continue to change, as will the training needed for success in the job market. We therefore need to infuse more practical courses into our high school curricu-

lum to enable our students to optimally benefit from current and future opportunities.

Although we focus on students attending college, we still have far too many dropouts at the high school level. We therefore need to consider providing more options in and after high school. Work and training in the community, on-line options, and even half-day school attendance models with more individually-tailored options that supports a diverse student population are all means to improve the applicability of high school education to workforce demands. More intensive supports provided in the pre-high school years will also help reduce dropout rates. We need to therefore to investigate how we may both guide students and reshape the content of the curriculum we provide to them. College should be looked at as one of many pathways, not the only viable one. ■

Ronda Good is a retired Boston teacher who now teaches at Cambridge College and other area colleges and universities.



DECISIONS. DECISIONS.
College may not always be the most appropriate path for all students.

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Retiree Corner

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



SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

These free seminars deal with most of the issues one should address in preparing for retirement from a public sector job in MA. They are open to all.

Wednesday October 5, 2016
3:15-5:15 PM
Natick High School
15 West Street, Natick, MA

Thursday March 30, 2016
3:30-5:30 PM
Methuen Educational Association
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Suite 1-204
Methuen, MA

Living In Retirement

This free seminar is directed toward those who retired on a public service pension and deals with many issues confronting retirees, including health insurance, Medicare, Medicare B penalty and surcharge, Social Security, working in retirement, legal and tax-related issues.

Thursday September 28, 2016
10:30-noon
Methuen Educational Association
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Suite 1-204
Methuen, MA

Additional seminars are currently being developed.

To request or register for seminars, call MRU at 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number of people who will be attending. You may also email contact@retireesunited.org.

Remember: Lack of information or misinformation is costly to a retiree!

The True Figure

The most expensive words in a senior's vocabulary are the words "I thought." Retirees must always ask the questions so the statement can be changed to "I know."

Unfortunately, the government does not always give all the facts. I have repeatedly told people that, by law, we are entitled to either our own Social Security or half of our spouse's, whichever is greater. I have explained how the offset works and how, because our pension comes from MA (as is the case in 14 other states and some Federal pensions), we have an offset number that deprives us of receiving any of this as a spousal or survivor benefit.

Losing half of a spouse's Social Security is bad enough. Recently, I found out how that translates to a survivor benefit. Upon the loss of my husband, I received a boilerplate letter from Social Security expressing condolences on the loss and telling me what my benefits would be going forward. When I did the math, close to 93% of my husband's Social Security benefit that he received after Medicare was taken out. A second letter told me that my Social Security would be the \$103 a month I receive in my own right, not the amount of the first letter.

I learned that day that the amount of the GPO penalty was not the half

of my spouse's Social Security (as I had always thought), but that, as a survivor benefit, it translated to 93% of the amount. I went through all the information provided by Social Security on the GPO penalty and nowhere did they ever mention that.

Security and their full salary once they reached their full retirement age. Even so, they did not give him a greater percentage of Social Security upon his retirement because they were going to deny him the right to leave a survivor benefit. They forced this on him as

they force it on all of us who had no choice as to whether we would contribute to Social Security as well as to our pension.

I was angry at HR711, the law being proposed by Representative Brady of TX that would make an adjustment to those under the WEP penalty in the amount they receive and that completely ignores the GPO penalty. Maybe it is because well over half of those suffering from the GPO are women and men who will receive the greater benefit of the WEP adjustment.

Social Security is not an entitlement. It is an earned benefit that

the workers of America have earned for themselves and their spouses. I am tired of the little guy being shafted. I am tired of a government - be it local, state or Federal - not acting out of a sense of fairness and justice. I am tired with only being provided with half truths or being fed out right lies.

I intend to do something about this and ask you to join in the effort before you receive the same letter I did. ■

MRU Annual Meeting

October 13, 2016

Angelica's Restaurant
Rt. 114 Middleton, MA

Guest Speaker:

Attorney General Maura Healey

Registration
and Continental Breakfast 9:30
Lunch at 12:30

Members \$10 / Non-Members \$25

For information,
email: mardito@retireesunited.org
or call 781-365-0205

As I read and reread the letter, I was angry, not about the money I was losing, but because I had not been told the truth as to the full extent of it. Also, for the first time I saw I was not the only one under penalty but my husband as well. He had worked hard all his life, and did not start collecting Social Security until in his 70s because he retired at the time before they allowed someone to collect their Social

Weight Witch-ers

Salem "Losers" are big winners

With so much focus on all that public schools lose when charter school supporters throw their weight around and try to stuff a district with schools that really do not measure up, it is nice to hear of a district in which losing is actually a good thing!

This past year, nearly 50 teachers and other staff members in Salem participated in a school-based version of the popular weight-loss program "The Biggest Loser." Instead of feeling isolated (as people trying to change habits and lifestyles often do), the Salem staffers banded together, creating a good-natured and well-intended competition that ended with

hundreds of pounds lost and many years of better health gained.

According to program organizer Ruthann Hart, participants are asked to pay \$10 initially. At the end of the session, if a participant has not lost any weight in a given week, they are asked to put in another dollar, with a maximum expenditure of \$19.



"At the end of the competition," Hart explains, "the winner will get 70% of the pot, second place will get 20% and third place gets 10%."

As the pay-in is small and the benefits great and as participants are able to keep their respective gains and losses anonymous, the program proved so popular that it has already been

extended past its originally planned 12-week session. As each new round is started, more teachers and staff participate and more losses make for even larger benefits.

In addition to the participants gaining, the school nurses also gain by having their roles magnified and their importance to the schools and the community emphasized. In fact, as the weekly weight-ins are conducted in nurses' offices, they have become the centerpiece of the vital program.

"I joined Biggest Loser knowing that I would not be able to exercise much this semester," says new teacher Lauren Noyes, who notes how the demands of her first year in the classroom made it difficult to maintain healthy eating and sleeping practices. "I decided...to make better eating habits. Specifically, I ate healthier breakfasts, which I tried to prepare ahead of time. Some days, I had berries and cheese. Sometimes mini-omelets. While I didn't have much of a net loss on the scale, I feel healthier and more in control of my health." ■

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

Send their information to advocate@aftma.net

Thank you!





TALKING POINTS

Local Accountability:

- Charter schools are not accountable to the local taxpayers who have to pay for them or the communities they serve. That's wrong! Local communities should have the final say on what kind of schools they want.
- The state approves charter schools even when the communities where they will be located are opposed to them.

Funding Priorities:

- We need to fully fund our public school system before we consider taking more money away and spending it on charter schools.
- Studies show that early education is the most effective way to ensure a child's success later in life, and we have over 16,000 kids on waiting lists for pre-school. We should provide access to preschool and early learning programs for every child in Massachusetts instead of giving more money to more unaccountable charter schools.
- Our schools need to provide more opportunities for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education, and expand enrichment programs such as music, art, and athletics.
- A recent report by a school budget review commission found that MA is underfunding public education by at least \$1 billion a year.
- If some of our schools are falling short, particularly in our urban areas, we should be committed to fixing them — not keep taking money away and giving it to charters.

Other Key Messages:

- Boston has 27 charter schools, far more than any other city in the state. Mayor Walsh is a supporter of charter schools. But even he strongly opposes this ballot proposal, saying "it would make things dramatically worse, undermining our ability to support either new or existing schools in Boston."
- Charter schools accept fewer English-language learners and kids with significant special needs. Allowing more of these selective charter schools will just expand a two-track system of separate and unequal schools, where students with the most challenges remain in neighborhood public schools with fewer and fewer resources to address their needs.
- The out-of-state group behind this proposal is part of a national campaign backed by Wall Street interests whose agenda is more charters and more schools run by for-profit companies. We don't need Wall Street billionaires telling us how to run our schools.

Conclusions:

- This year alone, charter schools will siphon off more than \$400 million in funds that would otherwise stay in neighborhood public schools and be used to improve learning for all students. Too often the result for students is larger class sizes, fewer enrichment courses such as music, art, and athletics, and other cutbacks.
- In cities such as Boston, Holyoke, Randolph, New Bedford, Gardner, and Lynn, charter schools can already take as much as 18 percent of school budgets. That's really hurting our neighborhood public schools — and the ballot question will only make things worse.
- The ballot question will allow charters to expand into areas where they don't exist right now — anywhere in the state — taking millions away from successful neighborhood public schools and causing the elimination of music and art programs, increases in class sizes, and other damaging cuts in the schools that most families choose.
- The original mission of charter schools as laboratories of innovation has been corrupted by the charter school industry and its corporate backers. Today, charter schools are diverting limited resources from our communities and weakening the school systems that educate the vast majority of Massachusetts students.

GET INVOLVED

SaveOurPublicSchoolsMA.com @SOPublicSchools #KeepTheCap [FB.com/SaveOurPublicSchools](https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurPublicSchools)