

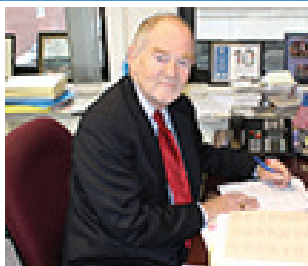


The Advocate



AFT Massachusetts
38 Chauncy Street
Suite 402
Boston, MA 02111

December 2014



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

2014 Melts Into 2015

I can remember when we all were talking about the twentieth century becoming the twenty-first century. Tempus fugit. Since the year 2000 the landscape for public education and all public services has changed in more ways than we would ever have imagined. Take a look at the items below.

Licensure

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education proposed that relicensing which is required every five years be linked to performance evaluations and student test scores.

Of course, AFT MA opposed this nefarious and unsound proposal. On this page see the letter which details the many reasons we opposed this unprofessional notion.

The Commissioner decided to withdraw his proposal. His letter is also in this edition of The Advocate.

However, I do believe that the issue of licensure renewal and of obtaining an initial license will stay current. Ideas are floating all over the country.

Collective Bargaining

The 2010 education law substantially reduced collective

bargaining for level four and five schools and districts. Some people call this an education reform law, but this is a false appellation. AFT MA plans to submit legislation restoring collective bargaining rights in the next session of the legislature.

We need to fight hard and smart because the opposition will be fierce and well organized. Consequently one part of our fighting hard and smart is a well informed and deeply committed membership.

The next legislature will begin in January 2015 and will end in July 2016. During that period we must organize and be outspoken. More to come.

Early Childhood Education

In the year 2000 the voices for early childhood education were small in number and at a low level. Now the voices are large in number and at a high level. However, to reach the goal of providing early childhood education for all who want it and need it is still a dream even though it is quite vibrant. The fact that scores of communities still do not provide full day kindergarten is a very loud message.

Even in our state where public education began and is widely

cherished, many communities provide full day kindergarten only if the parents pay tuition for half of the day. So much for the commitment to free public education.

The future of early childhood education is promising, but that future is still a bit of a distance. AFT MA will continue to work with those organizations championing this cause.

Elections – 2014

We were deeply involved in the elections and many of our recommended candidates prevailed. See the list in this issue of the newspaper. Their election does not end our involvement with them. I am now in the process of arranging meetings with many of them so that we can discuss the issues relevant to education and to libraries. Success in the legislature requires frequent communication. It is my hope that during this legislative session all of you will speak with your representative and senators.

The holiday season is with us. I wish all of you much joy and satisfaction. May 2015 be fulfilling.

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

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DESE Does About Face on Licensure Requirements

The following is a letter sent by AFT MA President Tom Gosnell to the members of the DESE Board regarding recent action that would have tied teacher licensure to student performance. Following this letter is the memo that was distributed by Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester in response to this and other communications he received regarding this proposal.

November 11, 2014

Dear Chair and Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education:

I am writing to express the strong opposition of AFT Massachusetts (AFT MA) to the licensure redesign work being conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). I urge you to direct DESE to change course immediately and to withdraw the flawed policy options that have already been developed and disseminated by DESE. These policies, if implemented, would undermine the teaching profession, drive good teach-

ers away from the students who need them most, and impose new unfunded mandates on already overburdened districts, schools, and educators.

As you know, the scope and nature of this work was first brought to your attention at the Oct. 21 Board meeting, when Associate Commissioner Heather Peske made a brief presentation on the initiative. On the previous day, DESE had released a document entitled Educator Licensure and License Renewal: Design Principles & Policy Options (hereafter, “policy options paper”) which would serve as the basis of upcoming, DESE-sponsored “stakeholder meetings.” Surprisingly, Board members were not provided with a copy of this paper at the Oct. 21 meeting. That paper can now be found here: https://keystone.org/images/keystone-center/spp-documents/Education_Policy/MA-Licensure/MALicensurePolicyOptionsPacket.pdf.

AFT Massachusetts is strongly opposed to both the process and substance of this work. This letter outlines some of our major criticisms but is

not intended to be exhaustive of the profound concerns we have with this misguided initiative.

Process

- To date, this work has been carried out in a non-transparent manner that has generally ignored the major stakeholder organizations—such as AFT MA and other organizations—that actually represent educators in the Commonwealth.

- Perhaps even more astonishing, this work—which dates back to last spring—has gone forward without the full knowledge or inclusion of Board members, even though you are responsible for promulgating regulations relating to educator licensure and license renewal.

- Instead of engaging stakeholder organizations or the Board to help develop new policy ideas, DESE has hired two outside vendors to lead and support the work: the Keystone Center (based in Colorado) and TNTP (based in New York, NY). The work of TNTP is particularly concerning given that

TNTP has a vested interest in teacher-preparation programs through its Teaching Fellows program: <http://tntpteachingfellows.org/>. Given that the policy options paper promotes alternative pathways to certification that could create new business opportunities in Massachusetts for teacher-training organizations, we urge you to ask DESE if TNTP could potentially benefit financially in any way from the policies being recommended to DESE by TNTP.

- The initiative purports to employ an open process designed to “catalyze dialogue” around a “spectrum of opinions” when, in fact, nearly all the “options” in the policy options paper are variations on the same theme: tying licensure advancement and renewal to educator evaluation ratings and/or various components of the educator evaluation system. Instead of fostering genuine dialogue in the spirit of collaborative inquiry, the paper advances a predetermined agenda, with “feedback” reduced to the very narrow question of how licensure will be tied

Continued on page 4

Policy Perspective: Licensure

By Cory O'Hayer

Current licensure requirements in Massachusetts are some of the most stringent in the nation, with the minimum qualification for an initial license requiring a rigorous teacher preparation program and the passage of an MTEL exam in addition to a subject-specific degree. The new standards proposed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) threaten to make teaching an unattractive and unprofessional career, as a double standard has been designed for those entering the profession that lacks the rigor and expectations of prior teacher training programs. It has been proposed that professional licensure and license renewal be modified to include standardized test scores and subjective evaluations. A poor review in either field may lead to not only termination, but to removal of a teacher's license.

According to the requirements of the Obama administration's Race to the Top initiative, Massachusetts is required to develop a teacher evaluation system that places accountability on a wide range of classroom activities, including tying teacher effectiveness to students' standardized test scores. Standardized testing became a key component of public education in the Commonwealth following the Education Reform Act of 1993, which had the intention of using standardized assessments so as to inform districts and guide instruction for underperforming schools. However, the DESE's increased emphasis on student testing has had a perverse effect, resulting in lower performing districts increasing standardized testing and reduc-

ing classroom instruction time. This has led to some districts devoting four weeks per school year to testing, removing students' classroom instruction. Under the DESE's new guidelines, these exam scores will now factor into teacher license renewal as Satisfactory Student Growth measured by Student Growth Percentile or other measures to be determined by districts. These standards, which do not take into account the student's prior record of academic achievement, learning ability nor other factors, serve only to act as a punitive measure that may lead to lower teacher recruitment and retention.

In order to address the issue of teacher recruitment, the DESE has planned a misguided program that will result in less qualified teachers entering the classroom. While under the current standards virtually all teachers must have completed a teacher training program, the proposal made by the DESE will create a double standard in which a teacher under a professional license will have either earned a master's or Ph.D. or have received a performance evaluation of "Exemplary" for two of the preceding three years, in addition to showing positive student MCAS scores. Under this new guideline, a subjective evaluation will be tantamount to have received an advanced subject specific or education degree, further disincentivizing the continued education and professional development of licensed teachers.

Those overseeing the Commonwealth's new evaluation measures may lack the training necessary to carry out a formative evaluation. Presently, teachers receive evaluations from

administrative staff in supervisory positions. The classroom observation and evaluation process is not optimal, as the individual conducting the evaluation may not be licensed nor familiar with the teacher's particular content area. Under the DESE's reform agenda additional factors such as peer evaluations, student feedback surveys and peer reviews will take president over teacher quality. Though a rubric has been put in place by the DESE, a subjective analysis of a teacher's performance is still subject to bias.

The DESE has created an evaluation system that contributes to the national drive to standardize education. Massachusetts' public schools are the envy of the nation, and its teachers among the most qualified. Should the DESE implement these new guidelines for licensure, new teachers will enter the profession less qualified than their predecessors. Current teachers will be more focused on test scores rather than enhancing their craft through progressive professional development. In order to maintain the quality of the teaching profession in the Commonwealth, the DESE's plans for licensure and renewal should reflect the current standard of initial and preliminary licensure, rather than enact punitive measures that discourage teacher training, higher education and advanced degrees. ■

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

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Please write to advocate@aftma.net.

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Thank you!



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Matt Robinson, Editor
38 Chauncy St., Suite 402
Boston, Mass. 02111
Tel. 617-423-3342 / 800-279-2523
Fax: 617-423-0174
www.aftma.net
advocate@aftma.net

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Happy Holidays and all the best in 2015 from AFT MA

Legislator Profile: Jennifer Flanagan

Growing up in a big family in Leominster, Jennifer Flanagan always had siblings and cousins to count on.

“I am one of nine grandchildren,” she explains. “I had an aunt two years ahead of me, a cousin a year ahead, and my sister and cousin a year behind me, so we were always in school together.”

According to Flanagan, this family support made a big difference in her life, especially in termn of her education.

“Some kids can be intimidated about school,” she observes, “but I had so many family members around.”

As a result, Flanagan always felt safe and was able to enjoy and really gain from her academic career.

“Especially in the younger years, education was always fun,” she says. “It never seemed like a big stretch to learn something.”

In addition to her family, Flanagan also credits her supportive teachers and counselors and the nurturing and interactive learning experiences she was privileged to have.

“I know some kids dread going to school,” she admits, “but I loved it! It was a great experience and I had a lot of great teachers.”

One teacher in particular that Flanagan recalls fondly is the third grade teacher who later became her fifth grade teacher after a reassignment.

“It was the first time she taught fifth grade,” Flanagan recalls. “She said it was going it be new for all of us. It was great to have her again and it was interesting to go through the process with her.”

With the support of such honest and caring teachers who were eager to learn along with her, Flanagan did all she could to get involved in her own education.

“When I got to junior high school, I ran for student council,” she says, admitting that, though she “did not get the greatest grades back then,” she always knew that “my teachers were there when I needed them.” In fact, Flanagan still keeps in touch with many of her early educators.

“I still see my old Algebra teacher from junior high,” she says, “and we still laugh about my time there!”

In high school, Flanagan became even more involved.

“I was in student council. I was on prom committee,” she recalls. “Whatever committee there was, I would do. I always wanted to get involved.”

Flanagan attributes this active engagement to her mother, an ER nurse who often helped out by serving as a medical supervisor at school football games.

“She was very involved in the community,” Flanagan says. “She was always doing something and we saw that.... To see her help the community had an effect. It was just part of what our family did.”

While some may assume that this desire to serve brought Flanagan to the Legislature, she says that this may not be the case.

“My current career was a fluke,” she admits, explaining that her original goal was to prosecute child abusers. One day, she asked her local representative, the late Mary Jane Simmons, if she could come to Boston to see how state government worked.

“When I got to her office,” Flanagan recalls, “she offered me a summer internship.”

After Flanagan returned for her junior year internship from UMass, she was offered a job.

“Nine years later, I ran for office,” she explains. “Ten years later, here I am!”

Flanagan explains that, when Simmons was diagnosed with Chron’s Disease, she asked Flanagan to run for her seat.

“That is how it happened,” she recalls, noting proudly that the first bill she had passed was a bill that amended the existing crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

“We wanted to go after those who harbored minors,” Flanagan explains. “People were taking in kids and turning them into prostitutes. I worked with DA Joe Earley so we could go

after the bad guys and not the kids.” Clearly, Flanagan’s desire to support children has not wavered. In addition to protecting children in general, she has also worked especially hard to help students.

“Education has always been a part of what I worked on,” she says, recalling a recent meeting with not-ofor-profit executives in which she encouraged taking in interns so that others might enjoy the opportunities she had.

“We talked about the best generation,” she recalls. “I told them they had to take interns and be patient with them let them make mistakes and support them.”

As a member of the SHINE Advisory Board and the Leominster Education Foundation, Flanagan also focuses on educating the community

about mental health (the focus of her Masters degree from Fitchburg State University) and supporting the community so that it can support students. As a long-time member of the Junior Achievement organization, Flanagan has also taught students from first grade through high school and taken many students into her office, just as she was taken in by Senator Simmons.

“Leominster High has an intern program where the

class goes out and does community service,” she says of her alma mater. “I have had the students be my interns for years. They come to me for two hours a day and that gave them insight into what happens in government.”

Looking at the current educational landscape, Flanagan bemoans the fact that few students have such opportunities to see how their government works.

“I took civics in high school,” she recalls, “and I wish kids had it today. There is alack of understanding of the level and functioning of government. I even have adults call me and get my

role confused!” Unfortunately, she suggests, focus on high-stakes testing has forced other useful programs to the sidelines, if not off the field.

“We didn’t have that,” she says of the tests that force many schools to focus on a few subjects at the risk of all others. “We could go out and learn and focus on school; not just a test.”

While she pledges to do all she can to support schools (Flanagan recently voted against lifting the cap on charter schools), she admits that the issues are largely out of her hands.

“It really comes down to the Education Committee and their seeing what is important for the curriculum as a whole,” she says, asking, “What can we take out that these kids don’t need?”

What Flanagan can do, she says, is to encourage her constituents and others to focus on what they can do to support their children and their communities.

“We need to bring out the skill sets our students have,” she suggests=, noting that college is not always the best choice for all students and that alternative options and programs need to be developed. “It is important to give kids opportunities and to see them as whole people.”

Flanagan also stresses the importance of making schools safe areas where all children can come and learn, regardless of their home life or other situations.

“That is asking a lot from teachers,” she realizes, “but that is what they need, so we need to pay attention to that.”

In order to make sure the teachers have what they need, Flanagan suggests adding support staff whenever possible.

“We need to make sure that...it does not all fall on the teacher,” she says. “We also need to make sure that there is communication between police and schools so schools know what is going on around them. When we have a child for eight hours a day and sometimes longer, we need to know what is going on there so we can help support the people who need it.”

And while such community involvement may not be “directly education-based,” Flanagan says, “it affects their educational experience and that is why it is so important.” ■



LEADER FROM LEOMINSTER
Senator Jennifer Flanagan

Benefit Bulletin: Holiday Help

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

Holidays should be a time for family and fun, not for overspending, so take advantage of AFT + holiday savings, and save yourself time and money.

Many travel by car during the holidays, and luckily for AFT members, renting a car through eight different car rental companies with savings up to 25 percent off is available. In addition, AFT + offers rebates through the Auto Buying Program for members who are looking to be buy a new car this holiday season. The program helps members find the best price from dealers near them. Additional savings can be found when a new car is purchased and the down payment is made with an AFT + Credit Card. Additional programs exist for AFT members looking for a used car. If you have plans to make a long car trip for the

holidays, consider joining the Union Plus Motor Club to gain access to a variety of roadside assistance services for a fee cheaper than AAA.

Even if you aren’t traveling this winter, there are a variety of ways to save on products. AFT members can save up to 30 percent on select Dell and HP products. Consider sending some flowers to friends and loved ones with a 20 percent discount on online flower purchases. Members also have access to a bulk gift certificate discounts through Working Advantage.

Buying gifts for a family with pets? Use the AFT + 10 percent discount of pet food, toys, and supplies. AT&T Wireless offers a 15 percent discount to AFT members, in addition to rebates worth up to \$250 for qualifying members. Think about purchasing union made clothing and save between 5 and 10 percent from select online stores.

In addition to great savings on potential gifts, AFT + offers entertainment discounts on theme parks, movies, concerts and more. The movie ticket discount helps union members

save up to 40 percent off of ticket purchases.

Union members save, and this holiday season, AFT members have access to a variety of discounts and services to help them on many occasions. AFT members interested in learning more about all of the holiday savings available to them should visit **www.UnionPlus.org/Holidays**. ■

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to evaluation, not whether such an approach is a good idea in the first place.

• The initiative purports to present policy options that are “based on the input [DESE] received from educators” during the first round of focus groups. Yet, our firsthand reports from the focus groups suggest that teachers overwhelmingly and intensely opposed the notion of tying licensure to evaluation in any manner. We have requested and are still waiting for DESE to provide hard evidence that a significant number of teachers endorsed a licensure-evaluation linkage during the focus groups. We urge you to ask for the same evidence.

• Based on the reports we have received, the ongoing “stakeholder meetings” are tightly controlled events that do not allow a full “spectrum of opinions” to be expressed. For example, what if an educator disagrees with all of the options in the policy options paper? Is “none of the above” a permissible viewpoint?

Substance

• The policy options paper is vague, confusing, and unclear. It uses jargon that is almost impossible to decipher. For example, it says that “demonstrable evidence of...grit” should be one of the criteria for entering a residency or educator preparation program. What does that mean? It uses numerous other terms that have no clear definition or meaning in the Massachusetts context. These include “transitional license,” “Interim Residency Assessment,” “Pre-Service Teacher Performance Assessment,” “associate teacher,” “master teacher,” “demonstrated classroom skills as measured by a Peer Review,” and “state PD Resource Bank.” Additionally, it is difficult to determine from the paper how a teacher would actually move through the licensure system, let alone the underlying rationale for the various licenses and models proposed.

• It is wrong to link licensure and evaluation. Licensure and evaluation reflect two entirely different relationships and serve two entirely different functions. Licensure is a relationship between the state and the educator, designed to ensure a baseline standard of qualifications for entry into and continuation in the profession. Evaluation is a relationship between the employer (a district) and the educator, designed to assess an individual’s performance for both professional growth purposes and personnel decisions. As a matter of basic fairness, it is critical to keep these functions separate and distinct. State licensure rules are currently designed to ensure a consistent, objective, and uniform process. In contrast, each district has its own local evaluation system with locally determined procedures, forms, norms, and expectations. There is an irreconcilable tension between the need for uniform state standards for licensure and local control and design of evaluation systems.

• Tying licensure to evaluation ratings would have a chilling effect on teaching and learning, further silencing teacher voices on key educational matters that affect students. For example, under one of the proposals, a single “needs improvement” rating could result in license non-renewal. Given those stakes, a teacher who advocates for her students in the face of administrative resistance would run

the risk of not just receiving a “needs improvement” rating but putting her very livelihood in jeopardy.

• Under another proposal in the policy options paper, even teachers who receive proficient and exemplary ratings on their evaluations could lose their licenses if they receive low “impact on student learning” ratings (which are based on student test outcomes). This same proposal also contains provisions that are in direct conflict with the state’s newly implemented evaluation regulations, which explicitly recognize the primacy of overall performance ratings (e.g., proficient and exemplary ratings) over student impact ratings.

• The policy options paper proposes tying licensure to components of the evaluation system that haven't even been implemented yet and that were never designed to have high-stakes consequences attached to them. The two most prominent examples are district-determined measures (DDMs), which include MCAS scores, and student survey feedback. The jury is still out on whether DDMs are even workable; to our knowledge, no district in Massachusetts has fully

implemented them. But even assuming they are workable, this component was designed to provide low-stakes feedback to educators to inform their professional growth and development. The same is true for student feedback—the results are intended to inform educational improvements, not make or break careers. Yet, under these proposals, student test scores could play a major role in whether a teacher can maintain her livelihood or not. Such a policy would only serve to discourage outstanding teachers from serving students with the greatest needs, such as special education students and English language learners.

• The many new mandates and requirements proposed in the policy options paper would impede educators in their core mission of helping students learn. Educators have stressed repeatedly their desire to see the state’s licensure system streamlined and simplified. Yet, the proposals in the policy options paper would do the very opposite, imposing countless new unfunded mandates and requirements on already overburdened districts, schools, and educators. As I’m sure you agree, the primary mission of DESE should be to support educators


in their core school and classroom duties, not hamper them.

In conclusion, licensure is a critically important topic and a key part of building a strong and stable teaching profession. There are good aspects to the existing licensure system but also much room for improvement, and we are happy to have a genuine dialogue about how to make regulatory and policy changes that will bolster the Commonwealth’s already strong teacher workforce.

Unfortunately, the work being conducted right now by DESE is not aimed at having that kind of meaningful dialogue, and the proposed policies would only have a destructive effect. We strongly urge you to direct DESE to take immediate action to halt the current misguided work and withdraw all existing proposals.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts



**Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education**

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4006

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: H.E.T. Relay 1-800-459-2370

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

To: Superintendents, Principals, Teachers
From: Mitchell D. Chester, Commissioner
Date: November 14, 2014
Re: Licensure Policy Proposals

We are writing to let you know that we are revamping the materials that are guiding the discussion on potential revisions to educator licensure. In short, we are rescinding the draft options that link licensure to educator evaluation. We received overwhelming testimony in opposition to linking licensure to evaluation. We appreciate the stakeholder feedback, and agree with it. While the draft options we presented were intended to be a catalyst for exploring potential design principles and policies, it is clear that the options are impeding rather than encouraging thoughtful discussion of refinements to our licensure system.

As you know, the Department has been soliciting stakeholder feedback about the educator licensure system. The Department has been conducting meetings with stakeholders to elicit feedback on draft design principles and draft policy options. While we are not interested in linking evaluation with licensure, we are interested in suggestions for refinements to licensure. To this end, we continue to look for input on current and potential requirements for licensure. Among the refinements we are seeking feedback on is the statutory requirement that "demonstration of successful performance" (G.L. c.71, s.38G) be a feature of licensure.

As we continue discussions with stakeholders, we are interested in feedback on the possibility of three categories of licensure: beginning licensure, re-licensure, and advanced licensure. Among the questions that we will be interested in are:

- What are the shortcomings of the existing licensure system?
- What are the "keepers" in the existing licensure system?
- Should Massachusetts pursue a three-tier licensure system (beginning licensure, re-licensure, and advanced licensure)?
- Should competence be a criterion for beginning licensure? For license renewal? For advanced licensure?
- If competence should be taken into consideration, how should competence be determined?
- Beside consideration of competence, what additional factors should be required for beginning licensure? For license renewal? For advanced licensure?

We appreciate the feedback you have provided to date. We look forward to continued discussion about opportunities and challenges in rethinking the Commonwealth's licensure system.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of this work.

An EPIC Undertaking

Wentworth to be “school of choice” by 2032

As a world-class school with a focus on technology, Wentworth Institute of Technology strives to prepare students for a wide range of careers through a diverse array of progressive programs.

“We are trying to educate great engineers, technologists, designers and managers that contribute to making the world a better place,” explains Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Russell F. Pinizzotto, Ph.D. “Their ability to achieve career success is our fundamental goal.”

As each discipline is inherently interconnected with others, both in and outside of the school, Wentworth is working on developing a campus-wide program that will allow and encourage collaborative learning that benefits both the faculty and students, as well as potential employers. The result is a new initiative called EPIC learning (<http://wit.edu/epic-learning/>), which is shorthand for Externally collaborative, Project-based, Interdisciplinary Curricula for Learning.

“We had trouble with the name and development,” Pinizzotto admits, noting that the program had been in a planning phase for nearly five years. “Now that we have a name, people jump all over it!”

With the name set, it is now time to look forward to all that the new program will offer and all it will demand. Fortunately, Pinizzotto suggests, Wentworth already has an edge.

“Other schools...are moving back towards what we’ve been doing all along,” he says, citing Wentworth’s strengths with experiential learning and the fact that Wentworth graduates are already “known everywhere for their ability to immediately contribute to their employers’ success.”

At a recent conference, colleagues from other schools approached Pinizzotto to ask how the EPIC initiative was proceeding and expressed amazement at how faculty members from across the curricula were being encouraged to collaborate and innovate.

“I have seen faculty working together that nobody would have predicted,” Pinizzotto comments, citing collaborations between civil engineering and social sciences on a project related to the Great Molasses Flood of 1919, and another class in which he is personally collaborating with the chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. “We are working together and learning a lot about what the other does.”

While there are already signs that EPIC will be a success and that it is actually an extension of current practices more than a reinvention, the goals for the initiative are bold, and it will take time to fully reach them. According to Pinizzotto, the “audacious goal in our strategic plan is to be nationally recognized as the university of choice” for this style of interactive and interdepartmental learning by the year 2032, which is 20 years after the start of the strategic plan.

“We will be sure that national recognition has been achieved,” Pinizzotto explains, “when colleagues from other schools do not just ask about EPIC at conferences, but actually come to Wentworth to experience EPIC and to see how well it works.”

While he admits that “20 years is a long time” and that “many things will change between now and then,” Piniz-

zotto suggests that one thing will remain constant throughout the process. “We’ll be learning along the way,” he says. “As we learn, the changes we make will make our students better and more successful.”

Already, the school has put together enough EPIC programs that there will be opportunities for nearly all students by the fall of 2015. There is also ongoing work to create an “EPI-Center.”

“This will serve as a one-stop clearing house for anyone who wants to undertake an EPIC initiative,” explains Associate Provost Charles M. Hotchkiss. “It will make sure that the projects are consistent with our mission, and it will also focus on providing resources and support and assistance to those who want to pursue projects.”



A NEW SECTOR FOR HANDS-ON LEARNING
Students in Wentworth’s EPIC program show off their latest creation

While it may still be “in its infancy,” many across the campus are already getting involved in EPIC. “We essentially refocused the Institute from industrial collaborations to the more expansive external collaborations,” explains Mechanical Engineering and Technology Assistant Professor Robert J. Lind. “Students seem to really enjoy course collaborations.... It is a change of pace from lectures and lab.”

Lind also adds that, as many collaborations take place among professors and departments, students and faculty members also get an opportunity to model how these relationships can work. “When they see the fun we are having, they see their work as more interesting,” Lind suggests. “As an instructor, I learn a lot from seeing other instructors teach.”

In addition to faculty engagement, the rollout of EPIC is also encouraging students to suggest ideas for partnerships and internships.

“One thing that is unique is that students are getting involved,” observes Associate Vice President of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Monique Fuchs, noting how, as Wentworth and its programs continue to grow, so too do the demands and expectations of its students. “Our students want to be successful, and going to classes is not enough anymore, so this can set them apart. If they already have a foot in the door and a partner, it will make them stronger candidates when they graduate.”

By working with students, faculty and the community, Pinizzotto and his colleagues hope to make EPIC a benefit for all involved.

“I think it is transformational for the school if we can out all these pieces together,” Pinozzotto suggests, noting

how the development of EPIC will not only benefit people on the Wentworth campus but outside as well. “For the community, there is a lot we can do in terms of service-learning. Bringing all these pieces together is really good.... I think it will strengthen our co-op program even more [and] as we continue to build stronger relationships with partners, that will make it better.”

“They also get first dibs on talent,” Fuchs notes, “which is really important. They see our students in action and that helps give a leg up.”

Already, EPIC partners range from General Electric (GE) to the YMCA to an NGO based in Uganda, with new ones coming on daily. One of the more popular programs involved the historic Curley House in Jamaica Plain.

“The company that did work on the Curley House got to work with a whole

group of students,” Pinizzotto recalls, noting that, as is true of many EPIC programs, the preservation and restoration of the home of former Boston Mayor James M. Curley came about when a part-time faculty member expressed interest. “A lot of them have been our faculty getting together and dreaming up projects.”

Though GE has long sent their engineers to work with Wentworth students on campus, the EPIC program has expanded and enriched their relationship and made it easier for Wentworth students to find work with the international company after graduation.

“We have a lot of co-ops at GE in Lynn, and they have been very happy with the our students,” Pinizzotto says, proudly. “They seem to understand the student culture here.”

Another project that has strengthened ties between Wentworth and the community has been the creation of a board game called Sector Vector that was designed collaboratively by members of the Industrial Design and Physics departments. “It was just an idea that we presented at a conference,” Hotchkiss recalls. “The next thing we know, we are taking orders and rushing to get the game manufactured!”

As Wentworth’s culture is intended to empower, inspire and innovate through experiential learning with the greater goal of career success for all graduates, EPIC will work well with and build upon Wentworth’s already impressive strengths and strengthen both the student and faculty bodies through an even greater focus on collaboration and cooperation.

“Their ability to achieve career success is our fundamental goal,” says Pinizzotto, noting that, in addition to

Wentworth’s proven success, 60 years of academic and practical research further support the advantages of experiential learning. “We know that to succeed, you must learn, and that to truly learn, you must do.”

As the principles and practices engendered by the new program mirror what goes on in the workplaces that Wentworth graduates typically enter, and as the administration and faculty at Wentworth are fully aware that success requires collaboration outside of one’s field of expertise, EPIC will also help students gain valuable experience and insight into the nature of their future careers and will thereby also help prepare them even more effectively.

“What the students get out of it is remarkable,” Fuchs adds. “Instead of being theoretical, they are having an impact and also learning about...the world.”

By engaging in hands-on projects with people from a wide array of backgrounds and industries, EPIC students will not only learn about how to have success in school, but also in life.

“We have always wanted to do more hands-on education,” Pinizzotto says. “It is one of the things we are known for and have been. It is why our placement is so strong.”

“College should be more of a play space,” Fuchs says, “where we do not take ourselves too seriously and where we let students be resilient and try again.” And while she suggests that this is “what the world looks like,” Fuchs has noticed that such is not often the way in the academic realm.

“Education usually suggests it is either right or wrong,” she observes, “but that is not the way the world works, so to see there is an opportunity to contribute to changing this is remarkable!”

In an effort to support his colleagues in their efforts to make the changes necessary to achieve their full EPIC potential, Pinizzotto has rearranged the school schedule to give his colleagues a half day each week to coordinate and collaborate, so that the 20-year plan need not always feel so far off.

“A half day a week can make sure that our student schedules allow us the time needed to make EPIC Learning a reality,” he suggests, noting that “we can’t just magically change everything at once.”

“When we launched,” Fuchs admits, “faculty were skeptical, but they saw the excitement and realized that the students are great marketing supports so the faculty got involved and now everyone is excited and are following their own passions as well.”

“We are getting push from the students and that is helping the faculty get going on it,” Pinizzotto observes.

As Wentworth’s students are being allowed and encouraged to experiment and get their hands dirty, so too are the faculty being given more license to try new things and find new ways to achieve the newly-enhanced goals of the school.

“If nobody says you can’t,” Fuchs suggests, “it opens the gates.”

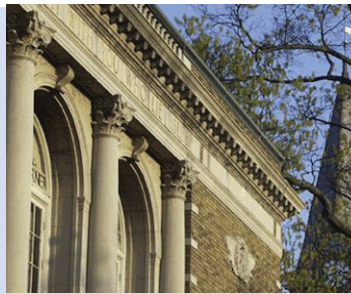
“Russ has laid out where we want to go,” Hotchkiss observes, “and is allowing a lot of room for people to get there.”

“We should use our imagination and innovation to produce superior results for our students,” Pinizzotto suggests. “We [have] already taken our first steps....The sooner we start moving, the more time we’ll have to get it right.” ■



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Backing (Away from) the President

Since 1968, almost all Democrats running for President who are not incumbents and most Democrats running for Congress have run away from or ignored the previous or current Democratic President.

In the recent election, most Democrats ran against President Obama. They followed the Republican line that the economy is broken, Obamacare doesn't work, and Ebola is the major problem in the U.S.

Many Democrats ignored the successes from President Obama's stimulus plan. Unemployment has fallen to 5.8% from its peak of 10% four years ago, interest rates have remained low, and the federal deficit has declined.

Democrats have also shunned President Obama's national health care act. Democratic strategy for the election ignored their member's overwhelming support for access to health insurance. According to Reuter's news service, the Harvard School of Public Health review of 27 public opinion polls by 14 organizations showed that 74 percent of Democrats support Obamacare with most of them wanting to expand it.

Most Democrats running for Congress also ignored policies that give tax cuts to the rich. By any measure, the share of the U.S. total income that the richest households receive is higher than in any other economically advanced country.

Most Democrats have not made

income inequality an election issue because they shrink from Republican labeling this issue as class warfare, and they don't want to offend their wealthy supporters. Most voters, however, want action to reduce income inequality. Voters in five states that voted Republican in 2014 passed minimum wage increases.

As usual, most Democrats running for national office also succumbed to the scare tactics of Ebola. The Republican line was not to cure Ebola or send help to Africa, where Ebola is a wanton killer, but to show that immigration is a major health threat to the U.S.

The Democratic strategy of running against President Obama didn't work, however. Republicans now hold a majority in the U.S. House and Senate, and 2/3rds of the states now have Republican governors. These are roughly the same results from the 1994 election, when Democrats ran against or away from President Clinton.

Other factors contributed to the defeat of Democrats. Turnout was low, especially for voters who usually vote Democrat. Also, more money flowed into this election than in any previous mid-term election, mostly from super PACs, which are unlimited and no longer have to disclose their donors.

Super PAC money has doubled in the last two elections and will continue to dominate U.S. elections. These funds both help win elections and

secure the loyalty of elected officials to their donors.

And now for more bad news: the effect of the 2014 election on public education?

For Pre k-to 12 public education, the 2014 election will drive more testing, more charter schools, and more attacks on teachers. The Time Magazine cover story, published just before the election, says it all, "Rotten Apples: it's nearly impossible to fire a bad teacher, some tech millionaires have found a way to change that."

The article reported the recent ruling by a Los Angeles judge that California's tenure law violates the state's Constitution. The case was financed by a Silicone Valley billionaire, who follows Bill Gates and other high-tech multi-billionaires in financing laws to promote student testing, charter schools, and other business approaches to education.

Dozens of studies have shown that education is the path to higher income and a better life. This connection between education and higher income has generally implied that equal access to high-quality education would lead to more equitable income, or at least income based on one's ability, initiative and hard work.

Josh Boak, an Associated Press reporter, showed the circularity of that argument by exposing the obvious flaw that higher income families can buy better education.

Over more than 100 years, academic studies have shown that children of higher income families with their family and business connections have better access to the best private colleges and universities with exceptions made for highly talented children from less wealthy families.

Quoting more recent academic studies, Boak shows that spending by higher income families for this goal begins almost at birth. During the recent recession, average spending per child by families in the nation's top 10% of income increased by 35% to \$5,210 a year. Spending went for private schools including day-care, tutors, living in better school districts, and other private benefits. The remaining 90% of the nation's families averaged less than \$1,000 per year per child.

Boak reports that, "Affluent parents tend to get what they pay for: Their children score 125 points higher on SATs than those from the poorest homes."

This is a long way from the vision of high-quality public education creating equal access to a better life.

The 2014 election results were bad for public education, but history has shown that this is not necessarily the end of the story. The 1994 election results were equally bad, bringing in Newt Gingrich and his Republican Revolution.

President Clinton turned this around. Perhaps President Obama can do the same. ■

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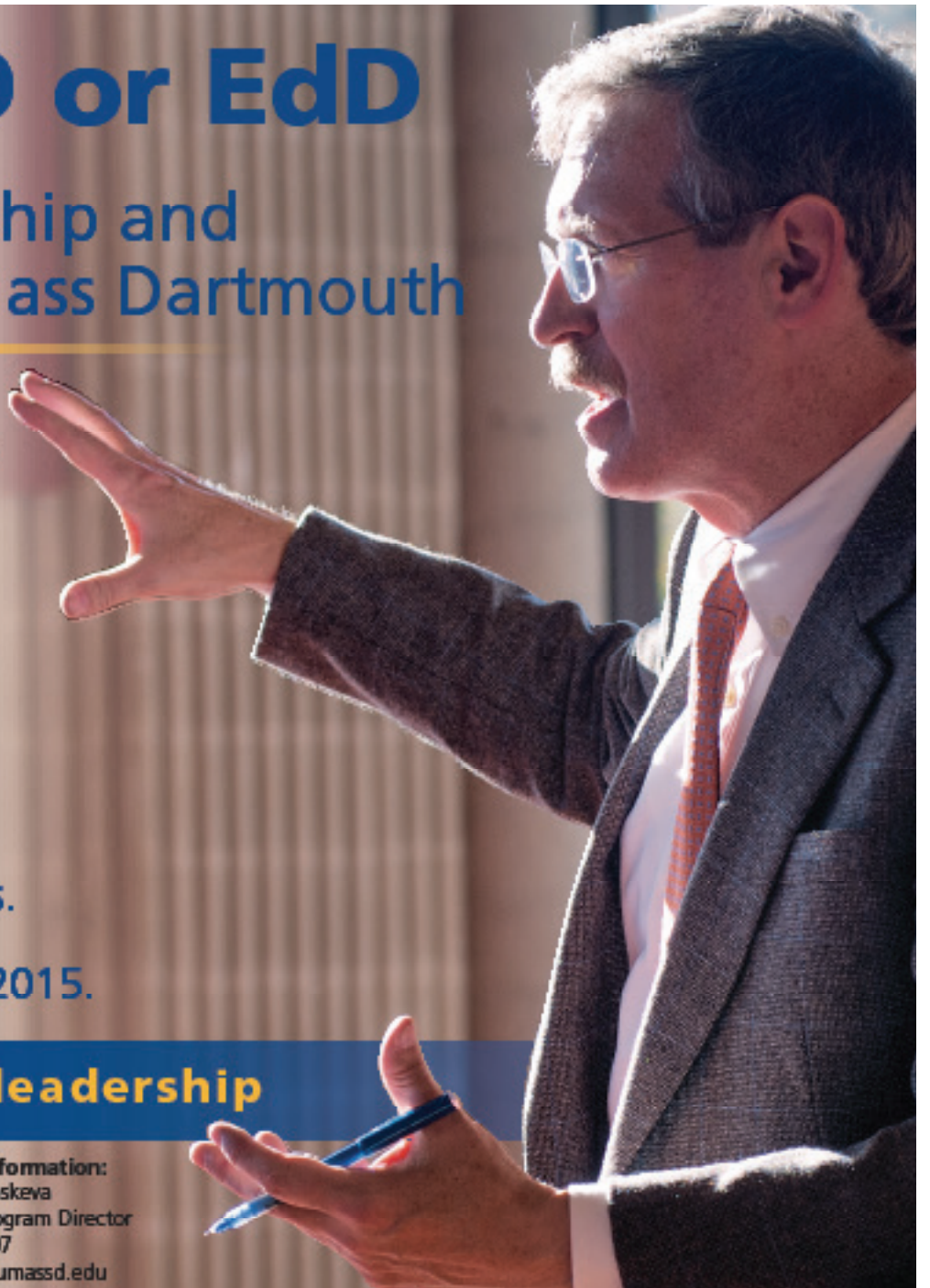
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Retiree Corner

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

Check out the Retirees' section and other EXCLUSIVE content at www.aftma.org

Proposed Legislation

At both the State and Federal level, our elected officials are starting a new legislative session. Massachusetts Retirees United will also be very busy in the next month having bills to benefit retirees filed and re-filed. We ask all of you to get involved in passing one or more of our bills.

Our top priority at the State level will be the bill that acknowledges those who served our country. This includes all veterans who retired prior to July 24, 1996. When passed they will have their pensions recalculated and be able to add up to four years of military service providing it does not exceed the 80% allowed as a maximum. Presently, there are in the vicinity of 600 retired teachers and an undetermined number who may qualify from the State Retirement System. Once we receive the list from the State Retirement System, the exact number can be determined. This bill will have both a Senate and House Version. These veterans fulfilled their duty to America and this Commonwealth and it is about time that we recognize their commitment.

Our second priority is to correct the injustice for those who retired prior to July 2004. They pay a higher penalty on the Option B/Option C or C Survivor choice; their pensions range anywhere from 1/2 to the pensions of those retiring after this date, yet they pay a penalty three times to as high as 20 % more than those with the larger pensions. In the last session we moved from recalculating over 9,000 teacher pensions who would be affected by this bill's passage to increasing their

pension by a flat amount. We have always had this bill filed as a House Bill but will hopefully add a Senate Version to this year's filing.

MRU is the only organization that worked for and got passed a bill that would increase by \$15,000 the amount a person may earn if they return to a public sector job after they retire. This became law on April 2, 2012. Now we are having filed legislation that will increase to 1500 hours from 960 hours the amount of time one may work in a calendar year in the public sector.

We will also be supporting legislation that will increase the COLA Base to \$16,000. At this time all Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA's) are based on the first \$13,000 of one's pension. So, the maximum raise is \$390 a year. Raising it to \$16,000 would increase it to \$480 yearly.

A few years back MRU filed a Retirement Security Bill to increase the pensions for long time retirees. We are in the process of looking for someone to file the bill that would affect all those teachers who retired prior to January of 2000. We are investigating who should be asked to file the legislation, or if it should be broken down into a three year payout covering those who retired before January 1980 in year one; prior to January 1990 in year two and prior to January in 2000 in year three. It will be a flat rate amount the higher amount going to Group One.

MRU is working with members of the Vermont, Maine and Rhode Island Legislatures to correct the double taxes that those living in these states

pay in state taxes on money that was already state taxed by Massachusetts. We have successfully put into place, with the help of Charles Butters, a Boston Retired Teacher, the benefit for the State of South Carolina. As this benefit is extended to other states we hope that more retirees will step up to the plate and help us implement this in the state in which they live and are paying a state tax.

At the Federal level, we will continue working for the complete repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset that affects the amount of Social Security one can collect for public employees in some 15 states. In addition we are meeting with some members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation to file bills for us that would eliminate double and triple penalties for these same people. We are asking that they exclude the Medicare B penalty if one has a plan as good as or better than Medicare B, and have an amendment made to the Hold Harmless Provision of Social Security that would prevent those who are excluded from a spousal or survivor benefit under Social Security because of the GPO from paying more in Medicare costs when there is no COLA under Social Security.

As you can see our agenda is ambitious and wide spread. We feel that every issue we address is a justice and fairness one. We believe government can work and should work to correct these. MRU is an organization that believes change can happen if people work together to make it happen. We made history with the Maternity

Benefit that became law on April 2, 2012. MRU is the only organization that consistently asked to have it filed and worked to have it passed. We feel success should be repeated and thus we are rolling up our sleeves again to make some good things happen for those who spent their lives in public service. ■

SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

This two-hour free seminar by Marie Ardito deals with all you should know in taking that next step to retire. It is geared to all retiring from a public sector job in Massachusetts.

Wednesday, January 14, 3:30-5:30
(Snow date Wednesday January 21)
Billerica Memorial High School
35 River Street, Billerica

Saturday, January 31, 10-noon
(Snow date Saturday, February 7)
Presidential Park
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

Thursday, March 26, 3:30-5:30
Methuen Education Association Office
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen.

Wednesday, April 8, 3:30-5:30
Sky View Middle School
500 Kennedy Way, Leominster, MA

Monday, April 13, 3-5
Lynn Teacher's Union Hall
679 Western Avenue, Lynn, MA

How to Protect Your Nest Egg

Saturday, April 18, 10-noon
Saturday, June 27, 10-noon
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

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

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

After the Bell: Junia Yearwood

In this column, we celebrate our members and their "further lives" after retiring from teaching. Should you wish to participate or suggest someone, please write to advocate@aftma.net.

What got you into teaching?

Teaching is my passion. The kindle fueling this fire ignited way back when I was around nine or ten years old. It was then when I learned of the taking of Africans as slaves to the New World—the African diaspora. The news that these new arrivals were denied the opportunity to learn to read and write stunned and angered me. It was then when I truly understood the importance of literacy and the value of a teacher, for I reasoned that if such great pains were taken to ensure my ancestors remained illiterate...then learning to read and write that language was associated in some way to freedom. I knew I had to be a teacher.

How long did you teach? What grade(s) and subject(s)?

After thirty-two years teaching high school and English reading in the Boston Public Schools, I retired in 2010. I also designed and taught several elective courses, including personal growth, law and justice, and African and Latino studies.

What is the greatest lesson you learned as a teacher?

From the onset, it was apparent that many of my students and the system charged with educating them shared neither my definition nor my appreciation of literacy. I learned that walking across the stage and acquiring a high school diploma equated to being literate. As a result, many of my students graduated without those tools of literacy I believed necessary for negotiating society independently and for acquiring social, political and economic equality. The learning of this lesson drove my persistence in creating curricula and structuring classroom activities that involved regular practice of functional and powerful literacy skills.

What are you doing now and how does it relate to your life in education?

The revelations that unfolded and the lessons learned over several decades ignited an equally raging passion: the desire to speak out for my students,

speak out for more emphasis placed on powerful literacy as defined by Paulo Friere, the renowned Brazilian educator and researcher. Consequently, since my retirement, I have concentrated my efforts in pursuing means of communicating—spreading the word from a teacher's point of view—of the reality of life of a public school teacher and her students. The *Boston Globe* published seven articles (2010-2011) based on my journal of the last six years of my tenure. I am presently restructuring my story for possible publication.

I also continue to facilitate a teachers' reading and writing group started in 1997. Our main purpose is to emphasize the importance of teachers taking responsibility for their own professional development by supporting one another in the maintenance and continued reading, writing and thinking skills development. We practice what we teach. Learn more about who we are and what we do on our website: bostonteachersoffscript.com.

What is your advice to current teachers?

I implore all active public school teachers to consider the ability to read closely with understanding, to



LITERARY LEADER
Junia Yearwood

think incisively and critically, to write clearly and effectively as all being human and civil rights. I urge them to resist the forces that seek to redefine and reduce the profession of teaching to a trade—a mere act of manual labor—involving mainly the ability to follow a script, a script designed for producing products fit for society's economic and political needs. Our students are not things. They are dynamic human beings whose bodies, minds and spirits all need to be developed, nurtured, and sustained. Provide our students with the educational environment saturated with the belief and the expectation that they are capable of learning and with the rigor that supports them in becoming all they were designed to be personally, economically, and socially. ■

Check it out!



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