



December 2015/January 2016

High Stakes 2.0

“Hybrid” assessment proceeds despite opposition

After a long and passionate debate, both in public forums and at their November 17 meeting, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted 8-3 to move forward with Commissioner Mitchell Chester’s plans to transform the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) into a new test called “MCAS 2.0.”

The “next-generation MCAS,” which will be administered first in spring 2017, will combine elements of the current MCAS as well as pieces from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and items developed specifically for the Massachusetts tests.

In spring 2016, districts that administered PARCC in spring 2015 will do so again. Other districts will be allowed to continue with MCAS unless they affirmatively choose to administer PARCC. The MCAS tests will include a limited number of PARCC items in order to help make comparisons easier.

With Commissioner Chester serving as the Chair of the Governing Board of PARCC, it was assumed that he would not entirely abandon this new PARCC test that many MA

districts have been piloting. However, as the “MCAS 2.0” test is yet to be designed and developed, it is too soon to tell to what extent elements of PARCC will be included.

At the last public forum on November 16, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell joined a many other leaders in recommending a moratorium on high-stakes testing generally, during which time more accurate data could be collected and assessed. Gosnell also urged the Board to consider allowing more educators to inform the Board’s decisions on testing going forward.

“Since it is widely asserted that the classroom teacher is the most important in-school factor affecting students’ achievement,” Gosnell said, “I would recommend that any committee to develop a new assessment be composed primarily of classroom teachers.”

Acknowledging the many organizations and individuals who raised concerns about the impact of the proposed transition on schools and students, the Board, as part of its final vote, extended the “hold harmless” policy regarding school accountability ratings through 2017. This means, for example, that Level 3 schools that administer PARCC in 2016 or the new

test in 2017 cannot be moved to Level 4 based upon assessment performance during the transition.

Another element of the transition will have to do with the media through which the test is administered. For the next three years, paper versions of both tests will be available. However, Chester explained that he expects the state to fully move to a digital edition by 2019. This poses a potential challenge, as many schools literally do not have the bandwidth or devices to handle such technological demands.

Through the class of 2019, high school students will continue to be required to pass the grade 10 MCAS English language arts, mathematics and science tests as a condition of graduation.

Testifying the night before the vote, Gosnell mentioned how, at the most recent AFT MA Convention, members voted unanimously to oppose the implementation of PARCC.

“I also find it notable,” Gosnell added, “that the number of states administering PARCC has gone from 20 to six...and that even the federal Department of Education has raised concerns about the amount of high-stakes testing in schools.” ■

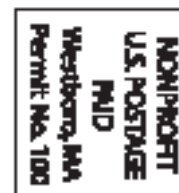
showed lackluster results.

The Commissioner has proposed “MCAS 2.0” as PARCC’s replacement with a rather interesting caveat - that the test does not exist. The proposed test, designed to take the “best” attributes from both MCAS and PARCC, is guaranteed to do nothing but share both exams’ flaws.

This test will be computer based but brings no promises of improved technological infrastructure. Since the deadline for the finalized proposed exam is more than a year away, school districts will still administer MCAS or PARCC as an assessment this spring, despite the Commonwealth’s acknowledgement that the existing tests are not an effective measurement of college and career readiness.

The national narrative has begun to turn against high-stakes testing, and the over-testing of students has begun to receive political recognition. The Federal Government has recommended no more than 2% of class time be spent on assessments-based testing. Teaching to the test has also gained attention as voters have become dissatisfied with an increasingly exam-defined public education system. More than 20 years of education reform based on flawed data collection has, it appears, begun to show wear.

Last summer, educators, students and their families descended upon Beacon Hill in order to advocate for the Commonwealth to curtail its use of standardized tests in education policy. Though high-stakes tests remain an unfair and insurmountable hurdle for many students, and while teachers still spend an inordinate amount of time in test preparation, the widely known fact that tests are an inadequate



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Policy Perspective:

Stuck in PARCC

By Cory O’Hayer

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recently voted to propose a new assessment that will be administered instead of PARCC.

Widely attributed to MA Education Commissioner Chester, PARCC was proposed in 2009 as a more advanced test to examine true college readiness. This despite the fact that Pearson hired many non-teachers as graders. In October, 2015, a study by Mathematica Policy Research found that, despite millions of dollars spent on its design and implementation, PARCC was no more accurate a predictor of college success than MCAS or the SAT.

During its brief existence, PARCC has been on a precipitous decline. Designed as a metric to accurately assess student performance and teacher efficacy, the Common Core-aligned exam has seen the number of participating states drop from 20 to six. With so few states taking part, the test is no longer seen as an accurate assessment, and many supporters can no longer justify the added expense and complexity of administering the exam. Many schools lack the technology needed to administer the test, and many districts felt forced to choose PARCC, not because it was a more accurate assessment, but out of fear of losing funding. It is no wonder, then, that many districts

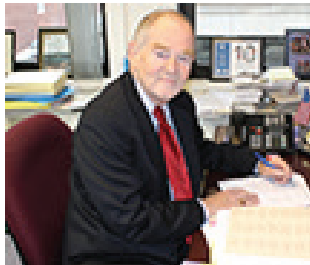


SHOW OF RESPECT

Lawrence High School ROTC Instructor Major Kathleen Romano, Guilmette Elementary Principal Lori Butterfield, Guilmette Middle School Principal Melissa Splash and LTU President Frank McLaughlin dedicate a flag in memory of Vietnam Veteran and Lawrence High School graduate James Vittorioso at a Veterans Day program

measurement of student achievement has gained increasing acceptance. In order to boost positive educational outcomes, we must give more time to instruction and adequately fund - not punish - our struggling districts. If educators and their allies maintain a commitment to rooting out institutionalized inequality in our public schools, real gains can be made as ineffective policy measurements continue to be invalidated. ■

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



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Every Student Success Act

The No Child Left Behind Act is no more. Every student succeeds Act is its successor. No Child Left Behind caused much harm and was detrimental to public education. The new law, while far from perfect, is and improvement.

Included in this article is a document released by the American Federation of Teachers, our national organization, to explain the bill. It includes many but not all items in the bill.

I shall highlight a few of them and

AFT Statement Regarding ESSA

The reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, formerly known as No Child Left Behind and now officially known as the Every Student Succeeds Act, is a long overdue reset of the federal role in education policy.

Back in January, our union laid out four very clear goals for the reauthorization of ESEA:

- Maintain the fiscal equity provisions of the original ESEA.
- Get the federal government out of the business of teacher evaluation.
- Ensure that paraprofessional requirements remain intact.
- End the test-and-punish accountability system, creating instead one that will be more aligned with student learning and needs, and will give schools and educators the latitude to teach rather than simply require them to test.

The final version of ESEA meets these goals and paves the way for a public education system that's much more focused on teaching and learning, and that gives states and educators more latitude while maintaining federal funds for the students who need it most. While not perfect, there

is a lot to like in this overhaul. The ESSA bill:

- Protects ESEA's original intent of mitigating poverty and targeting resources to students in need, and it adds an early childhood investment.
- Prohibits the federal government from mandating or prescribing the terms of teacher evaluation. The receipt of federal funds can no longer be conditioned on using test scores in teacher evaluation.
- Maintains paraprofessional certification requirements.
- Resets testing and accountability by improving tests and creating an accountability system that is less test-based, allowing joy to return to teaching and learning.

This is an opportunity for states to reshape their education systems. It will not happen overnight, but without federal prescriptions on exactly what accountability, interventions for struggling schools, and teacher evaluation must look like, there is a path forward for states to reset these systems.

- The state will be in control of its teacher evaluation system. Federal funds will not be tied to federal teach-

what they mean:

1. Although some in Congress wished to divert Title I money from the northeastern states, it is maintained. This funding is critical for many schools in this state.
2. The federal government will not issue any mandates on teacher evaluation, such as tying student test scores to teacher evaluations. However, the issue of teacher evaluation will still be a huge issue on the state and local levels.
3. The federal government will still require tests in grades 3 through 8 and one on the high school level. It is unfortunate that this requirement

remains.

4. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has frequently used as an excuse for doing various obnoxious things that the federal No Child Left Behind Act required it to do so. The Department will be able to do that only on a very limited basis.

5. I point out that a reduction in the federal government's emphasis on test and punish is desirable, but nonetheless many of these issues will be front and center at the state and local levels.

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

er evaluation requirements.

- Within parameters, the state will set its own accountability system that does not have to follow a rigid "adequate yearly progress" construct. States will still have to disaggregate results by subgroup.
- The accountability systems can include non-test measures like working conditions, school climate and safety, and educator engagement.

- English language learners can have up to three years to take the language arts assessments in their native language before taking such tests in English. States can appropriately delay inclusion of English learners' test scores in accountability systems while they are first learning English, and can include former English learners for four years as part of English learner subgroup.

- The state will set its own interventions for struggling schools. The federal government won't specify sanctions (school closings, teacher firings, forced transfers, etc.) in return for money.
- The state will set its own content standards and aligned assessments, and the federal government cannot

require the Common Core, or PARCC or Smarter Balanced tests.

- Several states will be allowed to develop and implement of a performance assessment system, such as the New York Performance Standards Consortium has done.

• States will be provided funds to audit their testing policies to decrease unnecessary tests.

- Collective bargaining protections are expanded to include both school improvement initiatives and teacher quality provisions.
- Class-size reduction remains an allowable use of funds, and community schools will receive their own funding. ■

BOLD PRINT

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

The direct line is 781-381-6600.

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The Epicurean Restaurant at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School has reopened.

For information and reservations, please call 508-485-9430 x1119.

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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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"MCAS 2.0" - What We All Need to Know

Educator Opinion
By Shirley Jones-Luke

Technology's ever-morphing transformation creates new demands for more precise skills. CDs have given way to downloads. DVDs have gone digital. The same has happened with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester is preparing to roll out what he calls "MCAS 2.0." As he is Chair of the Governing Board for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC), the assumption is the new test will look much like the Common Core-based assessment. In any case, certain skills will be vital for success, both on the test and then in any college or career thereafter.

In the time of MCAS 1.0, teachers could rely on an abundance of strategies to help students perform well on the test. Students could rule out two answers, examine context clues and identify author's purpose. In math, they could look at graphics and determine differences. Teachers could assign foundational text readings in both fiction and nonfiction that students could use as references. Teach-

ers could also assign practice word problems and review basic multiplication and division tables.

The apparent goal of the new test is to encourage students to make deeper connections. Surface inspection will not work and each response will determine later choices. Like an algebraic problem, what you do on one side impacts the other side.

Another key difference regards the way in which the test is delivered. While MCAS was a paper and pencil test, MCAS 2.0 will be delivered and scored electronically. Therefore, in addition finding deeper meaning with texts and equations, synthesize information, and develop conclusions that they can explain in writing, students will also need to develop appropriate technological skills. As many students do not have technology at home, these skills must be taught before students tackle the new test so that all students can achieve success in the ever-evolving testing environment.

Keyboarding

While students do not need to be touch typists or even use all fingers, they will be required to have enough of an understanding of where all the keys are. In order to better prepare, teachers should ask students to type for 15 minutes a week in class and 45

minutes a week outside of the classroom.

Basic Computer Skills

Being comfortable with technology takes time and practice. In order to succeed in testing and in life, technology needs to be part of a student's educational landscape.

Skills such as drag-and-drop, keyboarding with speed and accuracy, and playing videos are not easy for students if they have not had formal instruction. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers make sure students are technologically proficient. This means students should have an understanding of what defines a digital device, how it operates, what type of programs are used on various types (for example, applications are for iPads and software is for laptops), and the best way to scaffold them for learning.

Students also need to be savvy consumers of the Internet. Students should understand how to maneuver through a website without distraction and should have some sense of which websites are useful and which potentially harmful.

As with any new language, it is important to use technological vocabulary appropriately. If students do not understand what you are saying, help them decode with context or an online

dictionary. Develop a vocabulary list that is authentic and specific to your needs.

Stamina

Common Core State Standards insist that a fourth grader type one page uninterrupted and that the skill increase from there. Most assessments expect students to have that sort of stamina. Make sure your students have practiced working at computers for extended periods. Have students take some online assessments prior to any summative one. These can be created by using Google Forms or those that follow BrainPop videos.

Problem Solving

Students should be able to handle problems such as an apparent failure of their headphones, a broken key or a frozen screen. Have students take responsibility for solving their own problems, with the teacher acting as a resource.

MCAS 2.0 is ostensibly intended to test knowledge, but if students cannot access the test, they cannot succeed. It is therefore imperative that teachers work technology into their lessons at every possible opportunity.

Shirley Jones-Luke is an educator in the Boston Public Schools.

Testing, Testing, and MORE Testing

Educator Opinion
By John Lancaster

America tests public school students more often than any other industrialized nation. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the school year is allocated to some form of standardized testing either administered at the state, local or federal levels.

Historically, public school standardized testing started with the New York Regent's exam in the mid-1800s. Up to that point, teachers taught and designed exams to suit individual needs. Even admissions to Harvard University before the Civil War were based upon a candidate's response to writing prompts and not their performance on a standardized exam. It was not until the 1930s that the SAT appeared on the academic landscape. Today, prospective homeowners seek real estate in communities with high SAT and MCAS data because high standardized test scores are associated with success in the academic arena and elsewhere. District superintendents, principals, and teachers are hired and fired based upon standardized test data.

Political and business communities initiated the contemporary appetite for standardized testing. In 2001, No Child Left Behind demanded accountability of America's schools. Knowledge competency, as assessed through standardized testing, confirmed that curricula were valid and that students were learning. At least that was the contention. Because of slumping national tests scores, numerous states adopted high-stakes exams to address what were seen as problematic academic areas.

Initially, standardized tests measured the quality of teaching materials, content mastery and effectiveness

of teaching methodologies. However, many states promptly required students to pass imposed high-stakes exams in order to earn a high school diploma.

In the 1990s, an opportunity to serve on the English Language Arts creation and implementation committee arose and, with the encouragement of my department chair, I applied. At

the time, MA had decided to abandon the MI Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) exam and chose to create and pilot a new test to measure academic competency of students K-12 in mathematics and language arts.

The Education Commissioner supported standardized testing because, he felt, it demonstrated

that he was trying to improve academic standards. He appointed educators from various school districts to brainstorm and develop an assessment instrument that involved higher-order and inferential thinking skills. It came to be known as the MA Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

At first, I assumed the exam would measure basic skills and literacy competencies for average the high school graduate, but I soon discovered that was not the committee's mission. MCAS was to be a rigorous exam. The multi-million dollar investment forced schools to abandon many aspects of ELA curriculum and promote a "teach to the test" culture. School districts created committees to analyze MCAS test questions in order to more effectively prepare students for future tests. Districts purchased test preparation materials to assist at-risk students and scheduled testing classes both during and after school.

Despite extensive preparation, ELA

writing prompts were long, cryptic, and frustrating for many students, especially those who in tracks not labeled advanced, accelerated or honors. Many prompts contained literary jargon that overwhelmed students and demanded a sophisticated knowledge of literary criticism. I can recall a staff member saying, "These writing prompts remind me of the prompts that were on my MA comprehensive exam."

Standardized tests have a short shelf life. Major publishing companies promote the latest test instrument to school districts. When school districts adopt a new test, the initial scores are low, and it takes about three to five years of teaching to the test for the scores to rise. However, test companies revise most tests after five years and, while their sales rise, the scores plummet again.

MA has recently been considering a change to a new exam called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Many question whether another standardized test will be worth the investment of millions of dollars.

A solution to more standardized testing is to create a paradigm shift in our educational philosophy. MA should contemplate creating comprehensive high

schools that provide not only a feeder system to higher education, but career training with rigorous academics that leads to employment upon high school graduation. Students should have the option of selecting career clusters such as telecommunications, technology, health, welding, and CAD (to mention a few) that would lead to immediate employment.

Testing, testing and testing year in and year out reveals schools consist of two types of students- those who are good at taking tests and those who need guidance and a meaningful education. ■

John Lancaster is a former AFT MA member from Billerica who now lives in Austin, TX.

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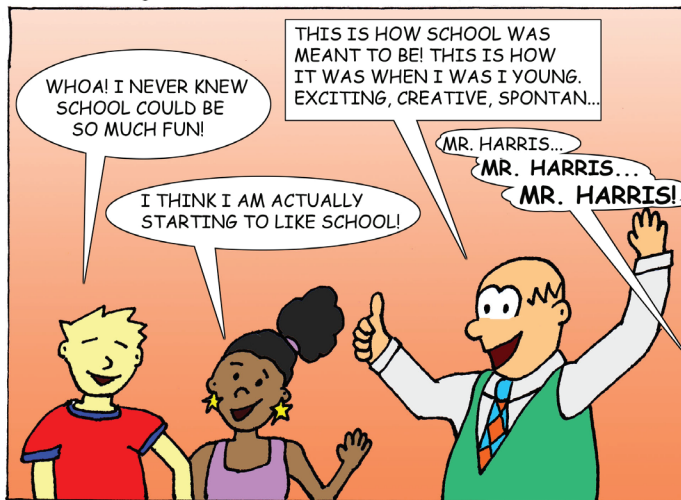
Proposals for
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are due to the AFT MA office by
January 29, 2016

Certified lists of delegates
are due to the AFT MA office by
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By Scott Hubeny



A “NFTE” Way to Start a Career

Entrepreneurial training program takes hold in MA

With the ever-increasing focus on math and technology skills, students are being better prepared for the “real world” than ever before. And yet, even with new high-stakes tests that are nominally intended to prepare them for college and career, many emerge from school with no real idea of what they want to do and where they want to apply their skills.

As a result, at least 74 million youth are unemployed globally and, in the next 20 years, there will be at least 600 million more young people looking for work. At the same time, at least one in three employers in the U.S. is looking for new hires with some sort of entrepreneurial experience. In nationwide polls, most students say they want to run their own businesses and define their own success.

Since 1987, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (www.nfte.com) has been engaging high school students across the country, (and now the world), and encouraging them to put their academic skills to practical use while developing an entrepreneurial mindset. NFTE teaches students how to come up with an idea and start their own business. In this way, the program fosters job creators instead of just job consumers.

“NFTE’s call to action is to equip youth with an entrepreneurial mindset,” explains NFTE New England Manager of Programs Jennifer Green, citing “the skills and behaviors needed to approach the world with an innovator’s eye and a founder’s grit.” Among these, she suggests, are comfort with risk, innovation, collaboration, and future orientation, all of which are integral to the NFTE curriculum.

In addition to working with individual students, schools, and districts, NFTE also offers programs regionally, nationally, and globally, through classrooms, summer camps, and online. On Wednesday, March 16th, NFTE will host its 10th annual NFTE New England Youth Entrepreneurship Conference at Babson College in Wellesley. At this flagship event, over 500 NFTE students and alumni will gather to discuss and build upon their ideas and receive coaching from the hundreds of corporate and entrepreneurial volunteers. They will also hear from NFTE graduates who have found success and, to use a term from the NFTE curriculum, are “owning” their futures. For the 10th anniversary Conference, NFTE has asked Tracy and Dani Noonan – co-founders of a local company Wicked Good Cupcakes – to speak. After being featured on the hit entrepreneurial TV show “Shark Tank,” the mother and daughter found funding and has been a sweet smash ever since. It is hoped that the Noonan’s inspiring story will encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

“NFTE continues to prove that teaching entrepreneurial skills is life-changing for youth,” Green observes, “and the key to a peaceful, profitable, and advancing global future.”

NFTE was founded by successful

entrepreneur Steve Mariotti after a career change that took him from working with CEOs of businesses to working with special education students in New York City. In an effort to motivate his students, Mariotti began to share

growth and adaptability.”

Another MA district where NFTE has had a great deal of positive impact is Lowell. In fact, according to a letter from Lowell High School Discipline and Operations Specialist Roxanne

Howe (who acts as a liaison between the school and NFTE), Lowell was the only NFTE program to produce a regional winner for the NFTE entrepreneurial competition in its first year! This was thanks to Iraqi immigrant Rafal Thaher, a Lowell student who came up with an idea for a henna tattooing company that eventually became a successful business called RfullaHenna. Her business plan rose to the top of the region out of a field of over 800. In 2014, Rafal competed for NFTE’s national prize of \$25,000 as part of the NFTE Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge in Silicon Valley, CA.

As NFTE’s partnership with the Lowell public schools has already borne such impressive fruit, Rowe also mentions that she hopes to expand the program so that more students can be engaged and encouraged to pursue their dreams and use their skills. The program has more than doubled in size in just three years.

“We couldn’t be more grateful for their support,” Rowe says of NFTE, recalling how her students went on a NFTE-sponsored trip to New York where they learned about economics by being given actual money to buy and sell items in the historic Wholesale District. “Many of the students made their very first profit during this class activity, inspiring in them a sense of self-generated revenue and self-sufficiency.”

Nationally, NFTE students enjoy a higher college enrolment rate (90% compared to the national average of 60%) and post-graduate employment rate (88% versus 69%) and earn an additional 58% more in average base salary. They are also twice as likely as the general population to start their own businesses.

In addition to developing entrepreneurial skills, NFTE students work on employability and general financial skills that will help them even if they end up working for other people. By thinking like a CEO, students can

better assess what a potential employer might want from them and how to compete and promote themselves in what is an ever-more-competitive job market. They also learn how to read and design a financial statement, how to deal with fixed and variable costs and analysis and how to handle financial ratios.

“By activating the entrepreneurial mindset in young people,” Green suggests, “we can literally change the landscape of the future...putting young people in control of their futures and equipping them to create new jobs, for themselves and others, and to make the world a better place.” ■

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We put the



in



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MAINTAINING TIES WITH LAWRENCE
Lawrence Teachers Union Exectuive Board Members Tricia Wolley (second from left) and Kim Barry (right) maintain the promise with AFT MA’s Field Representative Andrew Powell (left) and AFT President Randi Weingarten (second from left) at the AFT Leadership Conference in Philadelphia

Rising to Teach

BU partnership program brings new ideas to Boston schools

According to a recent report by the US Department of Education, Massachusetts had teacher shortages in 23 content areas in 2013-14 and 2015-16. In addition to these teacher shortages, the compositional diversity of teachers working in most urban districts, including Boston, does not reflect the diversity of the students in the classroom. Pre-college programs designed to encourage young people to enter professions like STEM or business have existed for decades. Among the most notable of these is Educators Rising (EdRising), a national organization that has partnered locally with Boston University to bring new people and new ideas to the field of education.

“We’re a national network all about helping communities start early and

grow their own highly skilled, well-prepared teachers,” explains Dan Brown, co-director of EdRising (www.edrising.org). “Currently, 11,600 students and teacher leaders across the country are members and we have 11 state and 2 regional affiliates, including BU.

“Aligning higher education with local schools in partnership with a national organization dedicated to cultivating great educators creates the opportunity to systemically encourage and prepare the next generation of great teachers,” suggests Mike Dennehy, director of College Access and Completion for the Boston University School of Education (SED). “I have been inspired by my involvement in the program to date, especially by the experiences and thoughtfulness of the high schoolers participating in the program”.

Beginning in 2012, SED partnered with EdRising in a joint effort to bring new people and new ideas to the education field. Prior to this, EdRising did not have any partnerships with institutions of higher education and no partnerships with any schools in New England.

“It was suggested that in order to attract a diverse teacher corps we had to fundamentally change some of the perceptions surrounding the education profession,” suggests Walter Balser, SED doctoral fellow and Coordinator of Pre-College Teacher Education. According to SED senior and partnership EdRising undergraduate chapter co-founder Griffin Monahan, the idea for the group developed out of what he terms “a perceived need.”

“We believed that the education realm was changing and we should have an outlet to learn, hear, and discuss new topics in education,” Griffin explains, noting that EdRising’s focus involves improving the diversity of the teacher population, learning about

alternative careers in education, a d changing negative perceptions surrounding the profession of teaching. “

As the teaching profession is often erroneously perceived as not being the arena for the best and brightest, and also not one for those who wish to make a living, the program strives to put teaching in an appropriately positive light and to attract people who have the proper credentials and passion to teaching.

“Put simply, the teaching profession was (and is) not something that the most talented and motivated high school students seek to enter,” Balser observes, noting that this is especially true of students of color and students in poverty. “Whether it is due to outside pressures or perhaps perceived low pay and status, this is a fact that

the entire profession deals with on a daily basis—and one we must confront.”

Brown notes that nearly half of all EdRising participants are students of color and that “almost all are high school students exploring teaching n courses that include student teaching internships.”

In the EdRising program, teachers lead curricular courses with

high school juniors and seniors, for which the students receive high school credit and participate in field placement experiences at nearby elementary schools. In turn, the high school teachers take an SED graduate course called Preparing Future Educators with Professor Phil Tate. Dennehy and Balser serve as the campus coordinators for the program.

When asked why she became involved in EdRising, educator Julie Wright recalls hearing about the program from the headmaster at the private school in NH at which she used to teach before coming to Boston.

“I’ve been teaching for 26 years,” Wright recalls, “and I feel very strongly that as a profession we need to do rework our approach to and the public’s perception of teaching. There have been so many students with which I’ve worked over the years who would be truly amazing teachers; yet, they tend to see teaching as a profession that offers few rewards. Also, having worked in a variety of school settings...I continue to be dismayed by the great number of colleagues who leave the profession after a few years or who see teaching as merely a resume builder on the way to their ‘real’ career.”

Before entering education, Wright had worked in advertising and still recalls the day when she informed her parents of her desire to change fields.

“My place as the black sheep of the family was definitely cemented on that day,” she admits. “They did not see

teaching as an intellectually challenging endeavor, nor did they view it as a ‘real’ profession.”

After they saw all their daughter was doing in the classroom, however, Wright’s parents began to see her and her profession in a new light.

“My parents actually acknowledged that I probably worked harder than my siblings on a day-to-day basis,” she smiles, “and that maybe I needed to take more time off because all I was doing was taking courses over those long summer breaks.”

Though her parents came to appreciate what teachers do on a daily basis (even during their summer “break”), Wright realizes that many other parents and colleagues still do not take such a strong view of teaching.

“Exploring ways in which to alter these negative views of the profession of teaching is just one of the reasons EdRising appealed to me,” she says.

Admitting that the transition to an urban district was challenging, Wright says that she immediately found the work “rewarding” and herself “reinvigorated.”

“I found myself learning so much about issues in education that I hadn’t really had to consider in my previous settings,” she recalls, noting how she was also able and encouraged to form new and meaningful relationships with her new colleagues in Boston, many of whom were ostensibly very different from herself.

“Our experiences, ages, and backgrounds dramatically differed,” she observes, “but it is exactly these factors that helped each of us grow in our practice and in our work with students.”

Among the programs that Griffin and his cohort have helped organize for students are undergraduate meetings, guest speaker and panel presentations, and a Fall Visit Day during which BPS scholars came to BU to see what college was truly like.

“Our goal in these meetings is to expose as many college students as possible to the variety of careers and pathways that are emerging in education,” Griffin explains, noting how student responses were “overwhelmingly positive as they now recognized education as a potential career that they may pursue.”

In addition to bringing new people to the profession, EdRising and SED hope to bring new types of people to teaching. That is why they reach out and reach into so many schools in Boston, trying to find not only the best and the brightest, but also the most representative so that future teachers will be better able to relate to their students and their communities. Among the first schools to be involved in the program were East Boston High School and New Mission High School.

“Approximately 35 students are participating this year,” Dennehy explains. “The goal is to have 10 schools participate next year.”

“I was extremely excited when they let us know...that we would be piloting a program that would help our

students in the Boston Public Schools system to consider...a career in education,” says New Mission teacher René Reyes, noting that her EdRising colleagues have gained real-world experience teaching fourth and fifth grade at the Henry Grew Elementary School.

Another ambitious goal that SED looks forward to achieving is hosting the 2016 ER National Conference.

“This will mark the first conference under the EdRising brand,” Brown observes, looking forward to the June 24-7 event, “and it is the first time the conference has been held on a college campus.”

“We’re excited to hold the 2016 EdRising National Conference on the campus of BU,” Brown says. “We expect 1,000 rising educators from across the country to attend.”

With the rapid growth of the program already well underway, the team at SED is already looking for ways to scale it and share it with other schools and communities.

“BU is also seeking to collaborate with other organizations working in the education space,” Balser adds, noting how a degree in education can lead to the classroom or to such other exciting venues as nonprofit work, entrepreneurship, finance, or myriad other options. “At the most basic level SED seeks to build a network of organizations willing to connect with high school students through class presentations, shadowing experiences, or perhaps brief internships. On a deeper level, SED wants these partnerships to inform our own practice as a school of education.”

As EdRising helps infuse new ideas into the field of education and also change perspectives of it, those who participate continue to see the benefits of the program and what it is bringing to their challenging field.

“I know that I am fortunate to be a teacher and to have the opportunity to continually reflect upon my work with others,” Wright says. “I would love to work with young people to help them see that teaching is an amazing profession!” ■



STANDING TOGETHER
Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals President Catherine Mastronardi stands with Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno in support of public education at a legislative “meet and greet” that also hosted City Councilors Kateri Walsh, Justin Hurst, Kenneth Shea, and Bud Williams, and other policy makers

Summa Cum Laude: Bruce Gertz

The world of Jazz has been illuminated by such legendary locally-sourced lights as Gary Burton, Joe Lovano, Kurt Rosenwinkel, and Marlena Shaw. No matter how brightly they shine, however, all stars need a darker background on which to sparkle. For all of these artists and many more, that bass relief has been provided by award-winning bassist, composer, producer, and Berklee professor Bruce Gertz.

Growing up in a family of piano players and a whistler who knew the melodies of many of the Great American songbook tunes that would enter his early repertoire, Gertz began playing the piano at age six, but soon lost interest.

“I saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show...and decided I wanted to play guitar like George Harrison,” Gertz recalls. After a few years on the six-string, Gertz’s guitar teacher helped him transition to the bass.

“I had been focusing on the bottom four strings of my guitar as it was anyway,” he laughs.

During his teen years, Gertz played in a variety of bands, performing various genres from blues and rock to jazz.

“I began playing Jimi Hendrix and Cream,” Gertz replies when asked about early influences. Among his earliest gigs was a show at Brown University with a blues band that featured a horn section.

“I got turned onto jazz by the horn players,” Gertz recalls.” That’s what eventually led me to Berklee.”

While a student at Berklee, Gertz studied composition and arranging while developing his bass work and composition under John Neves.

“John taught me how to practice and learn,” Gertz recalls. “[He] would take his bow in hand while I took

mine and he’d put something on the music stand and count it off. We’d saw through this until the 30 minutes was up and he’d say, ‘Okay- Now go home...and do the same thing over and over until it sounds good!’”



BUILDING UPON THE BASS-ICS
Berklee Professor Bruce Gertz

This “practice makes perfect” protocol has stuck with Gertz through the decades and he continues to espouse it to his own students today.

“I try to pass on that tradition which I believe is the best way to get results,” he explains. “If you don’t teach the students how to practice then some of them will not know where to start and never get going.

When asked how he transitioned from student to teacher, Gertz recalls his Berklee roommate landing a gig teaching at the school and Gertz asking if he could do the same.

“The school was growing fast and they needed teachers,” suggests Gertz, who has been teaching at his alma ma-

ter for 40 years. “I love teaching and continuing to learn myself!”

While Gertz has honed his ability to instill lessons, he has also developed his ability to gain from them.

“As a teacher for 40 years I’ve also needed to be a student,” he observes, suggesting that the best teachers are those that help you find ways to teach yourself. “In the process of teaching others I’ve grown tremendously as a player, writer and arranger. Each year new students show up with their own little (or big) toolbox of musical ideas and techniques they’ve picked up watching others and then putting their own spin on things. This keeps me on my toes.”

Gertz’s passion for learning has apparently worn off, as many of his students have also gone on to teach.

“I have brought an army of teachers to the world since 1976,” he smiles, noting that many of his colleagues at Berklee were once his pupils and that they now serve in a wide range of departments, including bass, ear training, ensemble, harmony, and arranging. “High school kids start studying with me and I see them grow.... Then they go to college and many of them come back to study with me again. I love it!”

Gertz’s diversity of musical interests, genres, and skills has also served Gertz well as a freelance performer. Over his decades-long career, he has recorded over 50 albums and also toured the world with the likes of Jerry Bergonzi, Bill Frisell, George Garzone, John Scofield, Gray Sargent, Mile Stern, and Kenny Werner. As the founder of Open Mind Jazz (www.openmindjazz.com), Gertz is able to perform and record his own ideas and encourage others to share as well.

“Starting your own label is fairly

simple,” Gertz suggests, noting the explosion of do it yourself musicians that have arrived since the advent of the Internet and other technologies. “Find a name that is not already taken [and] trademark that with a logo.”

Before he started his own label, Gertz says that his music “stretched across seven different labels,” including some in Europe from which it was difficult even for him to get his music. As the royalty streams were difficult to follow and police, Gertz realized that going his own way was the way to go.

“It was actually more practical to produce your own product and sell it at gigs and clinics or to various online distributors like iTunes,” he observes, noting that the Berklee bookstore recently began to sell his albums and books as well.

In addition to a raft of Boston Music Awards, Gertz has also garnered a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Performance Grant, a composition award from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and recognition from the music rights organization ASCAP, Billboard magazine and other organizations. As an instructor, he was recognized by the Jazz Education Network for clinician expertise and jazz performance. When asked to describe his own “legacy,” Gertz muse that, after more than 40 years of effort, he has come to be known for his performance and teaching talent. Despite his many books and myriad recordings, however, Gertz hopes to be remembered now and later as a “good person”

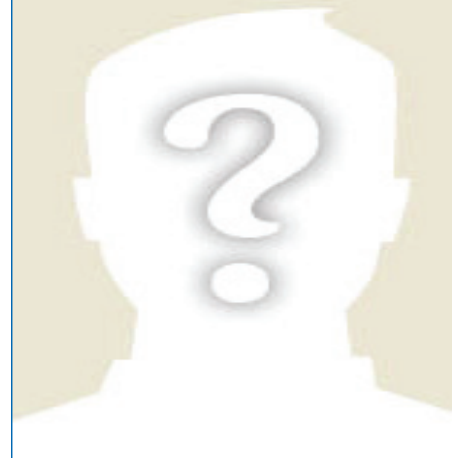
“I have two great daughters and a great wife and dog,” he says, noting that his four-legged friend is named after bass legend Charles Mingus. “All I can hope is that people continue to play my music.” ■

“We are happy to be serving in this capacity on what we think is a very ambitious project and one that we support,” Simpson states. “We want to be as helpful as we can!” ■

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

Send their information to advocate@aftma.net

Thank you!



The Power of Music

Josiah Quincy Orchestra offers more than just notes

Though the academic and overall benefits of studying and even listening to music are undisputed, music can do more for those who perform and appreciate it than help them learn a new skill or stay calm in stressful times. That is why programs like the Josiah Quincy Orchestra Program (JQOP) are so important to students and to the community.

“Many of our families and partners see us as just a music program,” admits JQOP Executive Director Graciela Briceno. Even so, she and her colleagues have been trying to encourage participants, parents, and others to appreciate the larger benefits of the JQOP and of music education in general.

The JQOP’s mission is to ensure both musical and social success for students in Boston public schools. And while the group strives for (and attains) high performance quality, the “primary goal” is the social success of students and their families. In fact, instead of seeing it just as a music program, Briceno perceives and promotes the JQOP (which she helped develop in 2011) as a “social program that uses music.” It is this additional element that helps set JQOP apart from other performance programs.

“Helping children develop team-

work, leadership, and self-efficacy from a young age is a core concept of what makes [our program] different from traditional orchestra programs,”



MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE
Members of the Josiah Quincy Orchestra celebrate community

she suggests. As JQOP students work on these and other skills for many hours every week, all of the benefits can be encouraged and engaged more effectively and profoundly.

“Because our teachers work with these kids for up to two hours every day,” Briceno observes, “they have the time to make a significant musical and social impact.”

Briceno goes so far as to liken the intensity of the JQOP to community orchestras and private lessons.

“Of course there is a great deal of excellent music teaching happening

on a daily basis,” Briceno says, “but in addition to that, the students are learning a lot about working as a team and creating a community.”

In addition to teaching notes and scales, the JQOP also engenders and encourages patience, turn-taking, collaboration and other aspects involved with self-regulation and executive function.

“Although it is still being studied,” Briceno hypothesizes, “I believe that learning a musical instrument can improve a child’s executive functions because you have to use both hands and learn ho to read the music and coordinate a lot in the brain.”

While the JQOP offers many public programs (including their annual Winter Concert in December, a Chinese New Year celebration at the end of January and seasonal concerts in March and June March), they also celebrate themselves at monthly Community Days that help build morale and a sense of community among the

130 performers. “These days typically include informal performances from some of the ensembles,” Breicno explains, “which give students a chance to show off their musical works in progress to their peers, and also gives the students in the audience a chance to hear what some of the other kids are learning.” Community Days also include some sort of celebration that is linked to a monthly theme, such as a costume party in October, as well as teambuilding activities in which the students can put down their instruments and pick up other ways to make friends and learn together.

“All of these activities...have been helping our students become a part of a community of learners,” Briceno observes, “with one unifying thread that brought us all together- music.”

As she is a lifelong music student as well, Briceno can look back on what has worked best and had the greatest impact on her life and career and bring it to her students in the JQOP.

“I personally have experienced the feeling of being in a musical community at many points in my life, throughout elementary and secondary school, college, and professionally,” she says. “and it is one of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences: to meet new friends and strengthen those friendships by performing and understanding music together.” ■

Students from “the Source”

Berklee supports new music school in Africa

As music is such a universal language, it may not be so surprising to learn that, in addition to launching the careers of some of the most successful artists, producers, and other music industry movers and shakers, Berklee College of Music also counts among its graduates many world leaders as well. Among these is Frederik Gassita, a Gabonese musician who also serves as an advisor to His Excellency Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic.

When the Gabonese government began to devise plans for a music school, Gassita suggested that they reach out to his *alma mater* for advice and support. The result is the African Music Institute (AMI).

Scheduled to open in 2017, AMI will offer classes in music performance and production, and also in technology and songwriting. While there will also be a traditional African music and dance element, the core of the curriculum will be very similar to that offered at Berklee in Boston and at their satellite campus in Valencia, Spain., the core of the curriculum will be very similar to that offered at Berklee in Boston and at their satellite campus in Valencia, Spain.

“We are supporting the creation of a new school for contemporary music in Africa...that will be a source of students who will come to Berklee to

enrich not only their experiences, but those of our students, as well,” said Berklee President Roger Brown, noting how Berklee’s mission statement acknowledges the vital role African cultures have played in the creation and development of music. “With this new school and more students coming to Boston from Africa, we’ll have a direct line right to the source.”



Music from the Motherland
Berklee President Roger B. Brown (left) and His Excellency Ali Bongo Ondimba, president of the Gabonese Republic (center) tour the Berklee campus, accompanied by students from Africa.

While the Berklee influence will be prevalent at AMI, Berklee’s Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost Larry Simpson is keen to maintain that the new school will not be an official Berklee campus.

“We are serving as consultants,” explains Simpson, who has himself travelled to Gabon many times to help move the project forward.

While Berklee already enjoys the talented contributions of many African students, Simpson admits that there are currently none from Gabon.

“We have attempted to establish significant relationships with the continent as we have with other parts of the world,” he explains.

AMI will join Berklee’s network of 19 international partners in 18 coun-

tries that identify and prepare students for Berklee. In fact, the proposed plan is for AMI to offer 300 students from across the continent a curriculum that is synchronized to the first two years of the Berklee course load so that students will be able to transfer to Berklee and complete their studies in a traditional four-year timeframe. As all credits will be transferable, students from AMI will be able to more easily afford a Berklee education and Berklee will attract more African students.

In order to keep the connection to AMI strong, Berklee has been sending administrators and faculty to visit the site to consult on such aspects as classroom and studio design.

“Our faculty will do clinics and workshops and guest lectures,” Simpson predicts. “We also expect that this will happen by way of technology through Internet connections. There will also be faculty from our Valencia campus going as well.”

Summer Night
By Michalene Hague

Windows down, speed 40 in a 35 zone, silk wind threading through my hair, navy sky an axis of street lights and star lights –

their pinpoints plotting arcs of deep breathing, I’m sixteen; I’m sixty, mind full of youth; I am my hands on the wheel steering Grand Prix curves parallel to the compass of friends’ words riding in dinner’s breezes – my passengers for body and soul. I am our laughter, our conversation extrapolating sincerities to the stars. Weave with the road. Speed and slow at signs. Square the turns. Sway with the rhythm home, ears angled to thrumming solstice voices. I am my shoulders balancing this sphere. Let the satin air ruffle curls, fill drinking mouth, fan steamy skin, flourish its scents – whiffs of water and sand, slant sniffs of skunk, drifts of fresh-cut grass, riffs of evening streets cooling. I am! We are! We ride the winds we create, x’d and y’d exclaiming hearts drafting warm lanes to wisdom’s limits of light and dark, inhaling the flow of night, exhaling the grids of day, embracing the constellations of a June night like the partners we hug on earth. I am home.

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Legislator Profile: Eric P. Lesser

Raised by working-class parents, Senator Eric P. Lesser knows well the value of hard work. “My sisters and I were raised to value family, hard work, and helping others,” Lesser recalls, noting that these are the same value she tries to instill in his own children.

A life-long public school student, Lesser has firm memories of his educational track.

“I remember playing on the jungle gym in Blueberry Hill School in Longmeadow and then going to Williams Middle and then Longmeadow High School,” he says “It was incredible and I got a great education.”

In addition to his academics, Lesser recalls life lessons and connections garnered in the public school system.

“I was lucky to have great teachers and classmates who I still keep in touch with,” he says, noting that the current Superintendent of the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District was a former teacher of his. “It’s a community that really supports its school system and its teachers.”

One of the greatest lessons Lesser learned in the public system was that “individuals who care deeply about

their community can improve it.” That is why, when a recession threatened the system that had taught him so much, Lesser led a coalition to pass a budget override to protect schools. While the first vote failed, Lesser and his team stuck with the fight and, after reaching out to every parent in the district, they prevailed.

“It was an early lesson that people who care for their community

can change it and work to improve it,” Lesser maintains, “and how important it is for a community to invest in and feel close to their school system and vice versa. You have to have community support or schools need to support the needs of their community.”

Lesser has also learned that the support is not unidirectional. In fact, many of the teachers whose jobs he helped protect have voted for and supported him in his various campaigns.

“Mark Bail was my debate coach and he is also a selectman in Granby,” Lesser says. “My fourth grade teacher, Marie Pratt, is now principal of my

old school and was recently named a principal of the year!”

While working for Congressman Richard Neal and Senator Ted Kennedy, Lesser saw even more evidence of the power of people to change policies and practices. After studying government at Harvard and graduating from Harvard Law School, Lesser became a campaign staffer for President Obama.

“My job was to...keep track of his luggage,” Lesser laughs, noting that he eventually landed a seat on Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers.

Among the political priorities Lesser holds dear are improving education and infrastructure in order to open opportunities for all.

“I was always motivated by the idea that, as messy and frustrating as the political process might be, it is ultimately the only system we have for collectively solving our challenges,” Lesser explains. “We need good people to be involved, and, as difficult as it can be, you cannot give up on it.”

When asked how younger people can be encouraged to become involved, Lesser observes that the “testing regime” has “diminished...the ability for students to get that holistic education on subjects that are not considered foundational,” such as civics. “I think there is something lost when we do not teach those things.”

And while testing remains a major issue, Lesser remains optimistic about

today’s students because he sees them as “more engaged in the world around them” than any prior generation.

“I saw that on my campaign,” he recalls. “We had huge numbers of young people who volunteered and who were very knowledgeable and enthusiastic to learn more.”

In fact, Lesser says, “getting the chance to meet all of those students and to learn from them was one of the best parts of my campaign!”

As he is so impressed by today’s students and as he remains such an ardent supporter of public education, Lesser hopes to find more ways to keep our nation-leading intellectual property in the Commonwealth.

“We suffer from a bit of a brain drain,” he observes. “We have tremendous institutions here, but many people leave here after being educated here and that has hurt our economic opportunities.”

That is why, for Lesser, education lies at the center of every strategy to improve quality of life.

“We know the jobs of the future will require top-notch education,” he suggests, “just as jobs do today. Someone graduating...today is expected to know more about the world and how it works, so we need to focus on and invest in education in order to stay competitive and continue to grow....

There is no institution that has the transformative power and the ability to provide upward mobility for everybody the way public schools do!” ■

that they are tired of having half-filled buses tie up the roadways, George hopes to arrange for a “transportation audit” to gauge just how many students are being served by each route.

“People see the waste that is occurring,” she suggests. “We need to look at how we are spending our money and our resources.” When not running to her family’s or her constituents’ activities, George likes to relax with her needles at her store on Dorchester Avenue. While she is the owner, she has been able to assemble a strong support staff that takes ownership of and pride in her small business.

“I am proud of the work they do,” George beams. As she was a long-time Main Streets Manager, George is also happy to see small businesses like hers thriving and hopes to support them as well.

“Creating and supporting small businesses in the neighborhoods is very important to me,” she says. “The small business district is the backbone of the city.” And even though Boston may be known for its medical and technological complexes, George says that none of them could function without stores like hers and the people that make the communities work.

“Individually, those small businesses do not provide large numbers of jobs,” she admits, “but collectively, they are important employers.”

In addition to providing goods and services the small businesses also offer jobs to students and others in the community and help keep intellectual and other capital here.

“We need to help them grow and stabilize,” George insists. “That is what will keep Boston strong!” ■

Reach Out and Touch

Keith P. Jones engages those on the perimeter

While Massachusetts may be touted as a leader in education, medicine, technology, and many other fields, there is still a large put of the Commonwealth’s population that is greatly excluded from those accolades. In fact, across the United States, 20 percent of all people are living with some form of identified disability and most of them are unemployed or underemployed and often greatly abandoned.

As President and CEO of Soul-Touchin’ Experiences (www.da-soultoucha.com), Keith P. Jones has dedicated his life and his art to supporting people who, like him, have been inappropriately and unfairly left behind and left out and who deserve to be included and lauded for their efforts and achievements. In addition to advocating for the large “minority” of people with special needs, Jones also works to support people who are marginalized for other reasons, including race and cultural background.

“Keith Jones’s humor and positive outlook on life is an example for all of us to emulate,” says Jay Ruderman, President of the Ruderman Family Foundation (www.rudermanfoundation.org), which is focused on supporting programs that promote inclusion in all areas, especially education. “He is proof that the inclusion of people with disabilities in our society benefits all of us.”

As everyone has a soul (which is his organization’s tagline), Jones figures that everyone has an equal chance to “make it” and so has dedicated his life to helping himself and others do just that. This idea, Jones suggests, is fundamental and, once pointed out, second nature.

“I tell people I’m a man,” he says humbly. “I’m not an inspiration.” When asked how, when and why he started touchin’ (sic) souls, Jones explains that his organization was “a crystallization of my work in the independent living sector.” As an experienced consultant to people who wanted to live independently despite challenges that led others to consider them unable to do so, Jones (who has also co-founded Black Kripple and worked for years with YouthBuild Boston, Boston Art Reach, and other organizations that support underprivileged children and students), Jones was faced on a daily basis with people in situations that were patently unfair.

“In all of those jobs, I saw the gap between access and opportunity,” he recalls.

When he approached the people who, as he puts it, “made decisions” and made his case on behalf of himself and people like him, Jones says he often heard a lot of, “That’s nice, but....” Unsatisfied with what the people who were allegedly in power were actually able to do, Jones took it upon himself to do it himself, just as so many others with disabilities can and do.

“It was really about bringing the voices that were not being heard to life,” he explains. “I figured that, if nobody else was going to do it, I was going to go do it!”

As for the name, Jones laughs when he recalls his younger days as a socially-conscious rap artist and admits that “Soultoucha” was one of his monikers in the music biz.

“The name is an evolution from my poetry and hip hop and the politics in my life,” he explains. “As a rapper, I had many iterations and this was the one that came with me through college.”

Jones also explains that this iteration was inspired by the Kevin Spacey character in the award-winning film “The Usual Suspects.”

“He played a person with Cerebral Palsy,” Jones notes, “and he turned out to be the mastermind.” Whether he is rapping or speaking, the multi-talented Jones keeps audiences rapt and changes minds on a daily basis. And while people with disabilities are found in all sectors of life, Jones has a special affinity for students.

“I realized that people were not looking at policy from a humanistic standpoint,” he replies when asked who he most wants to “touch.” “They were looking at the student without seeing them as a child with values.”

Though Boston and other districts spend a great deal on wraparound services and other supports for students with disabilities, Jones still maintains that basic access is a major issue.

“The city spends a lot on busing,” the West Roxbury High graduate observes, “but the school I graduated from was just closed, so there is not the same access there used to be.”

Even if they are allowed access to education, many students face discrimination from their “normative” counterparts.

“We need to figure out how to make all students the most ready to enter adulthood,” Jones urges, “without

making them a basket-case with all the labels people use.” Despite their many challenges (which are piled on top of the “regular” student issues such as peer pressure and high-stakes testing), Jones says that his student supporters are among his most ardent and effective.

“Students are constantly optimistic,” he says, “particularly students with disabilities.... When I meet these kids, it reminds me why I am doing this and they also give me inspiration for ways to do it better.”

The largest concern regarding students, Jones says, is how little people know about students with disabilities.

“I have traveled through 48 states and given I don’t know how many speeches,” Jones recalls. “Inevitably, people say that they did not know their children with disabilities could graduate from high school and go to college or have a family until they heard me speak....

People have been socialized to believe that people with disabilities cannot do anything. That does not have to be the reality!”

Though he admits that dealing with the challenges facing people with disabilities is like sowing the mythical dragon’s teeth, in that, for each one that is pulled out, more rise in its place, Jones also admits that his efforts and those of the hundreds he has touched through his words, humor, and music are paying off.

“I think it’s worked,” he smiles, noting that people still call him to speak and “do not throw tomatoes at me, so I must be doing something right!”

Though he is in many ways a one-man operation, the more souls Jones touches, the more allies he attracts and the larger the movement becomes.

“It is really grassroots,” he observes. “‘Boots on the ground,’ to use a phrase.”

As he engages more people, Jones finds more people like himself.

“For every Keith Jones,” he suggests, “there are a thousand other who do not get a platform. So I am using my platform to motivate others. And they motivate me.”

morning. He was supposed to be in the cafeteria eating breakfast or outside with the other students until 7:30. But there he was, hand outstretched, his cellphone facing me as he walked

across my classroom floor towards me. His father had just sent him an alarming text and decided that life had become too difficult. I walked the boy to the main office, tried to collect myself, and wondered about what had really happened. About an hour later, the boy – “student number

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Working with individuals like Boston City Councilor Tito Jackson and organizations like Boston Votes, Jones has been able to get people of all walks of life interested in the processes through which real change can come about.

“They are all very active in multicultural projects dedicated to stopping violence and things like that,” he says of his many friends in the fight.

One of the most notable obstacles to his work, Jones suggests, is the lack of a true disability component in the social justice movement.

“There is a disability rights movement,” he observes, “but no component of the Civil Rights action.”

One recent scenario that has brought this issue to light is the “Black lives matter” movement.

“When people say black lives matter, there are protests,” Jones observes, “but when people say disabled lives matter, there is nothing.... We need to bring the people together to make these issues matter and to fight the battles that keep coming up.”

Perhaps as a result of this lack of larger support or larger

frameworks, unemployment among people with disabilities is still at 80 percent.

“We are still the poorest socio-economic group in the country,” Jones says. “I see progress, but there is a lot more to do. [Also] there is still this real dichotomy between the progress that we have made and what is left to do.”

Despite all the obstacles and a general lack of support from the highest echelons, Jones and his Soultouchin’ team keep up the good fight.

“I keep dedicated to the cause,” he says, “hoping to crack that nugget to get these issues on par with...other issues.”

Ever the self-described “optimist,” Jones still believes that change is possible and that it is a goal worth pursuing.

“We can change what it means to be a person of a certain type in America,” he says. “We need to figure out a way to integrate 20 percent of the population into the rest of society. Hopefully, we can do those things and I can put myself out of work because people will not continue to do the status quo.” ■

I noted the many adults surrounding him, adults who were simply looking on. I walked to the boy and hugged him closely, “It’s a bad day, kiddo, a bad day.” I kissed his forehead as his relatives looked on. I attended the service. We talk often.

Looking back on that day, it seems to me that nothing happens by mistake. I was there, reaching through my own years to be with him in a way that was not possible in 1974 – a different world, I guess. It was a gift he gave me, imbuing my life with purpose and contextualizing the data meetings, the insipid, uninspired constant testing, and the general drama that attends middle schools. I couldn’t be more grateful to be a teacher – especially on that day. It is a great calling! ■

Bradford Green teaches English at the Pickering Middle School in Lynn.



PUBLIC (SCHOOL) DEFENDER
Representative Eric P. Lesser



LOCAL LEADER
Annissa Essaibi George



NOT JUST A NUMBER
Bradford Green



On Campus

Dr. Chandra Orrill

Chair & Associate Professor - STEM Education & Teacher Development and Interim Administrative Director - Kaput Center for Research & Innovation in STEM Education at UMass Dartmouth

Teaching the Teachers

Teacher education is changing dramatically. As a field, teacher education has taken a critical look at itself and created mechanisms for change that have influenced most teacher preparation programs. In Massachusetts, our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released a new set of Professional Standards for Teachers last year that describe what teachers should know and be able to do starting on their first day of practice. Similarly, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) has created a rigorous review process based on the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards, which is a national set of standards for teacher preparation. All of these standards carry with them the message that teachers currently in preparation programs must be ready to lead a classroom on their first day of teaching. They also provide some insight into the complex world of teaching as they highlight teacher competencies related to instruction, planning, assessment, working with peers and families, legal requirements, and pursuing a pathway of lifelong learning for themselves. The stakes are high, as are the expectations.

In response to this changing landscape, teacher preparation programs have to critically evaluate their own values and goals as they align to these new standards. For programs like ours at UMass Dartmouth, this includes thinking about the needs of our local districts, standards outlined by both the state and InTASC, and reflecting on our own strengths. Defining our program also relies on our ability to articulate the goals we have for our graduates – what kinds of teachers do we want our program to prepared?

Over the past two years, the faculty at UMass Dartmouth has been engaged in a change process that began with answering the question of what kind of teachers we want our students to become. The first step in this process was the creation of a new vision for teacher education. At the center of our vision is the development of reflective practitioners. Above all else, we want our graduates to be able to look at their practice, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make changes to improve so they can serve their students more effectively.

To support our teachers in becoming reflective practitioners, we have identified five areas in which we focus our efforts: integrating and applying knowledge; bridging theory to practice; practicing as a professional; democratizing access for all; and responding to diversity. Integrating and applying knowledge refers to a teachers' ability to use the knowledge they have developed and information to which they have access to make instructional decisions that support student learning. To this end, our courses now regularly feature discussions in which students draw on experiences from their other courses and from their prepracticum experiences. They are making connections between all of their preparation experiences and creating a stronger vision for who they

want to be as teachers.

As a research-active teacher preparation program, UMass Dartmouth is proud to bring our students reports of cutting edge research and to invite them to participate in research. However, we know that this research focus only supports classroom teaching if our students are able to translate the research findings to actions that benefit their classrooms. To this end, we include opportunities for students to read and participate in research, then to apply it to practical classroom-based activities like writing lesson plans or assessments.

UMass Dartmouth has a long history in trying to democratize access

for all. We build from the vision that learning is possible for anyone, but that it is the teachers' job to find an entry point that is appropriate for each student. We also work from a perspective that diversity is a strength, not a weakness. Our coursework has a strong focus on critical theory and invites our teacher candidates to build from the diverse knowledge of the students in their classrooms. We focus on how to engage students who are struggling, how to build cultural relevance into all academic areas, how to engage with families from a wide array of backgrounds, and how to maintain the professionalism to ensure that all learners are given the opportunity to grow.

Finally, we included practicing as a professional in our vision because we fundamentally see teaching as a

profession, not just a job. We want to support our students in building the dispositions that matter for successful teachers. These range from the mundane, such as how to dress for the workplace, to the epistemic, such as the belief that all students can learn and the belief that being a teacher means being a lifelong learner. This is built into our coursework across the program in a variety of forms. Most recently, we developed a survey for our partner schools to complete for every prepracticum placement that gauges how well students are doing at engaging as professionals in the workplace.

While all of this development has involved a great deal of effort, we have found that developing the strong vision first has helped us in developing our program. The faculty is all committed to this vision, so it provides the common language for us as we develop courses and make programmatic changes. ■



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Retiree Corner

Marie Ardito, Co-founder
Massachusetts Retirees United
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Check out the Retirees' section and other EXCLUSIVE content at www.aftma.org

Attack! Attack! Attack!

Attack, Attack, Attack. Attack the other guy. Attack different groups. Attack different philosophies. Attack anything and anyone and you will probably get away with it.

Politics is not the only arena in which this takes place, but it seems to be the one that specializes in it. No one party has a monopoly on attacking and there seems to be enough blame to go around. In all too many instances, today's attacks are nothing but destructive lies based on people's fears, prejudices, and ignorance.

This has to stop!

I remember a fifth grade class I taught in which the topic of international customs arose. An Indian student was asked by other students about some of the customs that she observed and she very maturely explained what they meant. I watched the expression on the youngster's face change as they came to understand some of the things they had originally thought were strange and different. I asked the student about the red dot I had seen on foreheads of women from India. She told me it meant that the women were married. I remember telling the kids I never stare at the left hand of a woman that has a wedding

band or wondering about it, but I did at the red dot because of being ignorant of what it meant. That was my day to learn more than I taught!

Recently, my granddaughter, who is a sophomore in high school, asked to interview me for a paper she had to do. During the long interview, I realized that one of the lasting lessons of my lifetime concerned the destructiveness of prejudice. Living in a small town in which my family was in the cultural, religious and political minority, I remember all too well the way in which we were exposed to prejudice. The tragedy is that, all too often, instead of seeing prejudice for what it is and eradicating it in our lives, we pass it on to the next group that is the target of it.

When I consider bigotry and bigoted people, the words that are written at the entrance to the Holocaust Memorial in Boston often come to mind:

When the Nazis came for the communists,
I did not speak out;
As I was not a communist.
When they locked up the social democrats,
I did not speak out;
I was not a social democrat.

ATTENTION TEACHERS:

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

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

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

Benefit Bulletin: The Heat is On!

You probably have warm memories hanging out with your union friends, but did you know that special discounts from AFT + can keep your home warm all winter long? With the winter chill blowing your way soon; it's never too early to start looking into winterizing your home to beat the freeze. Check out these discounts that are sure to keep your holiday spirits warm and your home even warmer:

1. Discounted Home Heating Oil. With just a little know-how, you can be slick about getting the best deals on home heating oil. As the largest dealer network of any home heating oil cooperative, HEAT USA is able to offer outstanding savings to AFT + members like you—the average annual savings range between \$200 and \$300. You've got nothing to lose because there's no long-term contract, the first year membership is reduced from \$25 to \$15 for participants who also receive a \$50 certificate for free heating oil, and HEAT USA will search for savings for you—even if there's no participating dealer in your area! A free or discounted service contract is also available, which covers 24-hour emergency service, annual cleaning, and routine tune-ups. To top it off, if you purchase a new energy-efficient

home heating system, you'll get a \$100 rebate from Union Plus!

2. Home Energy Service Rebate. Proper maintenance of your HVAC system is the key to keeping your holiday spirits humming. You'll save bundles on your heating costs by increasing energy efficiency, preventing critical repairs down the road, and adding years to the equipment life of your HVAC system. In addition, by supporting unionized HVAC contractors like Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART), you'll be eligible for a one-time \$50 Home Energy Service Rebate from Union Plus when you use your Union Plus Credit Card to purchase an annual HVAC maintenance agreement. Now that's a smart decision—especially since this rebate doesn't require much energy on your part to redeem!

3. Discounted Propane. Propane-Pro allows you to buy propane like a pro by gathering information about how you use your propane, sending this data to up to four top-rated propane suppliers in your area, and letting you watch your savings pile up quicker than snowfall as the suppliers compete for your business. For AFT + members, there are additional year-round gifts to make your holidays even

merrier, including \$50 of propane when you sign up with a Propane-Pro supplier, a \$100 certificate good toward the purchase of a new propane tank, and a 40% discount off your first-year registration fee for Propane-Pro Premium—which provides even deeper discounts with pre-negotiated rates on propane and equipment.

4. Discounted Consumer Reports Online Subscription. Did you know that there are several home improvements that that could cut your heating bills? For starters, a programmable thermostat can cut your energy bill by about 15% just by lowering your thermostat 10 to 15 degrees while you're at work or asleep. Likewise, finding the best windows for your home will not only prevent drafts, but will also keep money from literally flying out your window. With a Discounted Consumer Reports Online Subscription, AFT + members can get a 27% discount on exclusive, unbiased ratings on thousands of products and services for your home and much more. Needless to say, it pays to do your research!

For more information about these discounts and many more, visit UnionPlus.org. ■

ATTENTION TEACHERS:

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

If you have a retirement group in your district, please email contact@retireesunited.org to schedule a free two-hour seminar.

SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

Wednesday, January 13, 2016
3:30-5:30 PM
Billerica Memorial High School
35 River Street, Billerica, MA

Tuesday, February 9, 2016
3:15-5:15 PM
Natick High School
15 West Street, Natick, MA

Wednesday, March 16, 2016
3:15-5:15 PM
Salem High School Library
77 Wilson Street, Salem, MA

Thursday, March 31, 2016
3:30-5:30 PM
Methuen Educational Association
Union 184 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen, MA

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

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

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

How to Protect Your Nest Egg

Saturday April 16, 2016, 10 to noon
Saturday June 25, 2016, 10 to noon
314 Main Street, Wilmington, MA

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

The following seminar is especially important for those who entered public sector work later in life.

Understanding Social Security and Medicare.

Saturday, April 9, 2016, 10 to noon
314 Main Street, Wilmington, MA

Learn how Social Security is factored, how the penalties affect you because you are collecting a MA Pension, Eligibility for Medicare, Penalties and Surcharges attached to Medicare B. If Not already Vested Does it Pay for You to Take the SS Penalty, and More.

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

ATTENTION NEW 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?

Do you want to support your colleagues and community?

Contact advocate@aftma.net

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Talking About Food

Writer and restaurateur Louisa Kasdon gets folks talking

As the obesity issue in America continues to (er-) grow, people are starting to realize that the answer cannot be found in limiting options or forcing compliance to dietary guidelines but most instead come from the inside out. Where better to begin, then, than in schools? Such is the philosophy of award-winning food writer and savvy businesswoman Louisa Kasdon, founder of Let's Talk About Food (www.letstalk-aboutfood.com).

With her MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and a background that includes work in the artistic, financial and marketing sectors, as well as in award-winning restaurants, the proud BPS alum combines a love of food with a strong business sense and also a sense of morality that has encouraged her to take her broad background and focus it on this latest venture.

Supported by the EOS Foundation (which is dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty by investing in initiatives that support children), as well as by students, parents, and other stakeholders, Kasdon has put together a statewide task force of School Nutrition Directors with offices in Boston and other large urban centers across the Commonwealth. Proposed by Kasdon and her culinary colleague Jody Adams (award-winning chef of Rialto in Cambridge and Trade in Boston) in 2012, the new team will help establish appropriate plans for regional commissaries that serve students and schools. As many schools only have the capacity to reheat and serve food, the new commissaries will allow and encourage the use of fresher, more nutritious foods and more creative cooking processes and will also make it possible to forego the use of out-of-region foods and foods that have been overly processed. At the same time, these new in-state centers will also create local jobs and even offer opportunities to the students themselves.

"Boston Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services and Let's Talk About Food (LTAF) have been community partners for the past few years," explains Boston's Deputy Director of Food and Nutrition Services Deborah Ventricelli, noting that Kasdon is a participant in the Boston Food Advisory Council and also provided input for the Food and Nutrition Services Department Strategic Plan. "It is beneficial to Food and Nutrition Services and to LTAF to learn from each other about overlapping activi-

ties, share expertise, and determine ongoing ways to collaborate."

According to Boston parent Steph Shapiro Berkson (who is also an adjunct professor the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health), the majority of children in the Boston Public Schools qualify for free and reduced lunch and over 3,000 of them are homeless. "It is well known," she points out, "that over 99% of children attend schools. As such, schools are an ideal place to model healthy eating and provide access to healthy food."

Berkson credits Kasdon and LTAF with heightening awareness among key stakeholders, of "the necessity of feeding our children in Boston well" and of confirming that, despite some skeptics, "feeding children the fresh food that they deserve is attainable."

When asked what first interested her in food and nutrition, Kasdon admits that she was born to "the only Jewish family in the universe that wasn't into food," but also recalls seeing Julia Child on television and getting "hooked" on cooking.

"By the time I was in college my then boyfriend, now husband, was part of a group of friends who were building and opening a rustic French restaurant in Cambridge," she recalls, citing the first of her many professional forays into the world of food.

Though she had long had an interest in food, Kasdon also admits to not being so aware of what went into her daily meals and those of her customers.

"Once I came into the kitchen and the chef/owner was pouring all sorts of things in a five-gallon glass jug.... He explained that he was making salad dressing," she recalls. "I was floored. I didn't know you could make salad dressing. I thought it was born in little wishbone-shaped jars!"

As many of today's students may have similar perspectives on food, Kasdon hopes to be able to educate them and, in so doing to inspire them to learn more about what they eat and what they can do to help others eat better as well.

"The restaurant business is hard work," she says, recalling her many failed attempts at being an owner.

From failure, however, came later success and also many important lessons.

"I wanted to make sure people understood and respected how hard it is for chefs and owners to succeed in business," Kasdon explains. "So I started writing about the business."

Since then, Kasdon has written internationally about food and the food industry. Currently, she hosts



FEEDING THE CONVERSATION
Louisa Kasdon

an annual Let's Talk About Food Festival in Copley Square, as well as Friday lunch-time talks at the Boston Public Market, many of which have to do with the same ideas she is hoping to bring to the local school community as well.

Speaking of school, Kasdon expresses great gratitude for the teachers who helped her garner the skills and curiosities that have led her to her deliciously explored life.

"I think that school...gave me the ability to be disciplined and focused, be analytic, and also to think systematically," she says. "I think I got very good at imagining what could change in the world and to think through the tasks required to make those changes, step-by-step, aware of the details yet keeping the bigger vision in play. And to imagine what things could look like if we were successful."

Though "the food things came much later," Kasdon credits her academic preparation with allowing her to eventually succeed and also with inspiring her to effectively share her ideas with others.

From farm to compost, Kasdon examines the entire realm of the food world and the food business, looking for new and better ways to connect people to the information and products they need to live better, more fulfilled lives. Though the path from farm to table may not be that simple, Kasdon suggests that "it all matters."

"It matters who makes our food, where it is grown, how we buy it, how we cook it," she says. "I think that, for the past four or five decades, we just accepted food as it came to us. We lost the thread of the relationship between food and family and the planet we live on."

Though we may have fallen off track as a culture, Kasdon is confident that, with education and honesty, "we can get it back!" In fact, she says, that is what prompted her to create LTAF in 2010.

"I convinced the Museum of Science...that a regular set of presentations...about food had a place at the museum," Kasdon recalls. "I decided to call it Let's Talk About Food because it was the broadest, most inviting name I could come up with."

Since then, she observes, the program has "become very successful as a way to bring people in to the conversation about food." And while her passion is surely behind the success, Kasdon also credits partners like Adams, as well as organizations like Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) and Boston Public Schools (BPS).

"We believe that all youth deserve access to high quality de-

licious food," says Boston Superintendent Dr. Tommy Chang, noting how quality food and healthy eating habits impact all people throughout their lifetimes and can make a significant difference in academic and overall performance. Chang is also keen to mention how he is spearheading a national search to bring a strategic and innovative director to lead the Food Services Department at BPS.

"This work is not just about food," Dr. Chang observes, "but about the entire food and learning experience for youth in Boston Public Schools."

As for the partnership between LTAF and GBFB, GBFB Public and Government Relations Coordinator Catherine Drennan sees it as a "mutually beneficial co-branding relationship" in which LTAF can make use of the Food Bank's 501 c(3) status and the Food Bank can collaborate and develop content for LTAF..

"It's a new partnership that we are navigating," Drennan notes, "but it has been a great opportunity for GBFB to position themselves as thought leaders in the food community and expose us to new audiences, as well as expose Louisa to new content as she develops her program." ■

We put the



in



www.twitter.com/AFTMass



TAKING EDUCATION HIGHER

The UMass Faculty Federation Local 1895 recently presented their the Teacher of the Year Award to Nancy O'Connor, Ph.D., the Bruce A. Sparfven ESU Service Award to Verena Lisinski, and the Scholar of the Year Award to David Kagan, Ph.D.,

Deirdre Confar



GIFTS OF THE SEASON

Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan with LTU Director of Holiday Cheer Kris Kringle at LTU's Open House