

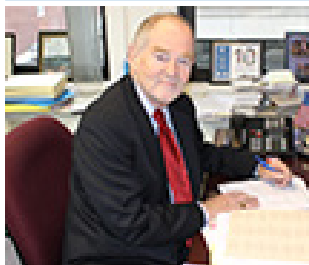


# The Advocate

February/March 2017

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## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

## 2017: A Year of Opportunities and Challenges

**T**he defeat of Question 2, an attempt to raise forever the cap on charter schools, was a great challenge that ended in a splendid victory in 2016. Now 2017 will present us with another set of challenges as well as opportunities.

### FAIR SHARE TAX – CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Labor unions and other groups have been working to get this issue on the ballot in 2018.

The fair share tax, also known as the millionaires' tax, would increase by 4% the income tax on income, not net worth, over \$1,000,000. For example, if someone's income, not net worth, is \$1,200,000, that individual would pay 4% more in income tax on \$200,000. That amount would be \$8,000.

In order to get on the ballot in 2018, 101 legislators need to vote twice to put the constitutional amendment on the ballot. They have already done so in 2016. A second vote is expected in 2017.

It is anticipated that the constitutional amendment, if passed, will raise between \$1.5 and 2 billion dollars. The money raised will go to public education from pre-K to higher education and to roads, bridges, and public transportation.

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) is part of the broad coalition that will work strenuously to persuade the voters of Massachusetts to support the fair share tax on election day, Tuesday, November 6, 2018.

### DISTRICT DETERMINED MEASURERS (DDMS)

The Commissioner of Education, Chester Mitchell, and a majority of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education seem determined to implement a program in which student test scores will be a factor in the evaluation

**Look for our  
NEW  
website at  
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of teachers. Both AFT MA and the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) have been working very closely in an attempt to persuade the Commissioner of the educational folly of this approach. See the letters on pages 6 and 7 of this newspaper.

Edward Doherty, my assistant, and a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, has been an articulate and outspoken advocate of the view that students test scores should not be part of teacher evaluations because they are a misleading indicator of teacher effectiveness.

### BETSY DeVOS – U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have been outspoken in their opposition to the nomination and confirmation of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

In Michigan, her home state, she has been hostile to public education. She has been a strong supporter of unaccountable charter schools which have drained millions upon millions of dollars from the Detroit Public Schools. In addition, she is a strong supporter of vouchers which is the use of public money to send students to private schools.

The *New York Times* in an editorial entitled "Cabinet Choices Without Answers" stated, "three of the most controversial and quite possibly the least qualified of these nominees paraded across the screen in a cavalcade of misstatements, lapses of judgment,

conflicts of interest and from time to time spectacular displays of ignorance and sensitivity."

The editorial continued. "Where to begin? Our pick is Betsy DeVos whose energies....have been devoted to promoting privately run charter schools at the expense of traditional public schools .... She seemed unaware of the basic functions of the education department."

Both U.S. Senators from Massachusetts, Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren, voted against her nomination and confirmation. AFT MA thanks them both for their continued support.

Massachusetts voters last November gave the public schools a huge vote of confidence. Certainly we recognize that improvements are needed. They always are. However, remember that in national tests Massachusetts students are number one in the USA and in the international science and math test they are number one in the western world. Cheers for them.

Also, cheers for the teachers, the paraprofessionals, and all who work in the public schools. Their dazzling presence and hard work are a mighty factor in the achievement of the students.

2017 will be a year of challenges



### GRIN AND BEAR IT

AFT MA Director of Education Policy Dan Murphy and Lawrence teacher Trish Woolley pledge to protect public schools and students (Please see story on page 2 and more photos on page 3)

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which we shall meet head on and of opportunities which we shall seize.

Happy New Year! ■

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

## ROGER THAT!



## Congrats, Pats!

# A Great Day of Action

## Supporters unite nationwide to protect public education

With the nomination of charter school proponent Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, the Trump administration signaled its opinions regarding public schools loud and clear.

On January 19, the day before President Trump was sworn in, thousands of educators and others came together as part of a national Day of Action that was co-lead by AFT and Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) to show their solidarity and to ensure that their voices were also heard loud and clear.

Perhaps best known for their national “walk-ins” such as those that were held in schools across MA in October of 2016, AROS ([www.reclaimourschools.org](http://www.reclaimourschools.org)) is a national alliance of parent, youth, community and labor organizations (including AFT, NEA, and the SEIU) representing over 7 million people. Their main goal is to reclaim the promise of public education as a gateway to a strong democracy and racial and economic justice.

According to their website, AROS believes that “the best way to ensure each and every child has the opportunity to pursue a rich and productive life is through a system of publicly funded, equitable and democratically controlled public schools.” After what they see as “years of division,” AROS is working to unite parents, youth, teachers and unions to “drive the transformation of public education, shift the public debate and build

a national movement for equity and opportunity for all.”

In addition to standing up against the DeVos agenda, the event was intended as an opportunity for educators, parents, and other stakeholders to stand up for fully-funded public schools and for the support students need to succeed in the education system that served as a foundation for this nation and that continues to serve and strengthen today. Among the other vital causes that were incorporated into the event were dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and ensuring all students safe and supportive schools.

Across the country, educators and others rallied, met with legislators, and hosted “walk-ins” (much like those that had proven so successful in October and at other times) to do what they could to raise awareness of the issues educators and students face and how the new administration may exacerbate them.

According to the AROS Day of Action Toolkit, the Day of Action in MA was particularly intended as an opportunity to “dialogue with parents and communities about our vision of great public schools that truly embody our Commonwealth’s constitutional obli-

gation to ‘cherish’ education and our public schools.” AROS also suggested that the Day be used to build upon the victory over Question 2, the passage of which would have greatly expanded

the number of charter schools in MA.

“While defeating [Question] 2 by a decisive margin proves that the vast majority of MA resident want strong public schools,” the AROS materials suggest, “we need to build on this success to ensure strong education budgets at the state level and in our cities and towns.”

Among the AFT MA-related actions that took place on January 19 were events in Boston, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Salem and

Springfield. At many schools, teachers and students stood outside their buildings holding signs that welcomed all students in multiple languages. In Lawrence, students and teachers gathered at the Oliver Partnership School to demonstrate the high standards that can be achieved when teachers have a say in how their school is run. At a community town hall meeting held at Madison Park High School in Boston, students, teachers, parents, and community members discussed the state of public education, the impact of the defeat of Question 2, and how they could all work together to protect and improve public education

and to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to learn in safe and supportive schools.

“We began supporting our Day of Action with a presentation by Central High School students at our Membership Meeting on January 11th,” explains Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals President Cathy Mastronardi. On the Day itself, Mastronardi and her colleagues wore stickers proclaiming their love for all students; an idea, she says, was gratefully adopted from colleagues in Lynn. “About 25 schools took part in the event and we used the pictures they submitted to promote #WeLoveAllOurStudents and #ReclaimOurSchools on Facebook and Twitter.”

After all the marches, walk-ins, and other demonstrations, AFT MA Director of Operations Brian LaPierre looked back on a successful and meaningful day.

“We concluded yet another day of activism, resistance, and engagement with our members and community allies,” LaPierre says, “AFT Massachusetts and our Locals will remain plugged in, vigilant, and ready for the battles that will, no doubt, confront us.” ■



**UNION STRONG**  
Salem teacher Abby Sherwood flexes her AFT MA muscle to protect public education

### The Advocate

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## BOLD PRINT

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

□ □ □ □

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**ALL IN**  
Students at the Higginson Inclusion School rally for open access to public education

# AFT MA and AFT Members Take Action January 19



# Playing “Favorites”

**Paraprofessional Perspective**  
**By Marcy Winer**

**F**avorite students. Everyone has them, but we often don't admit it. We act as if they are all the same and we love each one equally.

I have had my share over the years, and they do not have as many similarities as one might think. I have had favorite girls who were rough and tough who needed extra love, and girls who are as sweet as pie. I have had little boys who toss blocks at my head and boys who want to hug me on a daily basis.

My most memorable “favorites” were boy and girl siblings. Raised by grandparents due to a sad family situation, they were definitely a daily challenge. The little boy came to us first and was as cute as ever, but he was so tough and fresh that it bordered on comical. He used the words of an old soul and had a capacity to reason with adults that was beyond belief. At age five, he was a smart little guy, but he was a holy terror. His control in the class was so short lived that within the first half hour of school, he and I had to go sit outside while he tried to calm down.



**TAKING SPECIAL CARE**  
**Marcy Winer**

Most days, he would crawl under the table in the hall or continually kick the wall until he was eventually carried away by the principal and assistant principal.

Yes, he caused problems and was disruptive on a daily basis, but he had an adorable personality hidden behind his aggression. At times when he

was calm and happy, he would talk to me about his weekend and where “Bapa” would take him.

Years later, his sister came to our class. She was an emotional mess and it broke my heart when she couldn't regain control of herself after a tantrum. I swore I would not love this child as I did her brother, but one day on a field trip coming back from the zoo, it happened. She fell asleep

on my shoulder. I knew I would end up caring for her too.

The children moved out of state the following year, but I have a photo to remember my time with them. I think of them often.

I once had a little girl in class who was a gem. She was a regular teacher's helper, bright and sweet but somewhat emotional. One day, her father came in to give us some gifts for the class. He was always so concerned about his daughter and I found his

attentiveness and support admirable. I told him his daughter is wonderful and that she was a great little girl who was always helping me in class. I told him I nicknamed her my “little para.” Within seconds, he burst into tears. I was taken aback since it was not a response I expected, but I listened as he explained how rough his school years were and how he wanted a different experience for his daughter. I understood his emotions and that they were deeply rooted in his love and concern for her. Clearly, he wanted her to succeed at something he had trouble with in his own past.

In my daily life, I am all about balance. I like order and structure and things that are certain. An unruly child is the antithesis of my innate nature. I guess you can't always tell your heart what to feel.

In education, we gravitate with our compassion and care for children in a way that does not happen in other professions. While we are used to dealing with struggles in class, heart-breaking stories of neglect & mistreatment of children should always bother our souls. We can love the ones who have love from their families just as much as the ones who do not. I know I will always love those children a little bit more. ■

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

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## Meet Your Colleague: Sheila O'Neil

**T**here is an old rhyme about the City of Lynn that proposes that those who live there do not improve their lot. As any public school educator can tell you, however, hard work and dedication can take anyone as far as they want to go.

This truth is made evident by Lynn educator and AFT MA Executive Board member Sheila O'Neil.

O'Neil began her professional life in education as a volunteer at Ingalls Elementary where her daughter was a student. Wirth the support of such talented colleagues as Priscilla Roberts, Vivian Gaines, and Kathleen Moulison (who would eventually reconnect with O'Neil as the principal of Brickett Elementary), O'Neil began to spend more and more time in the school and eventually decided to make a life in education her goal.

“The educators at Ingalls were supportive of my endeavor to become a teacher,” O'Neil says gratefully.

Despite the additional challenges posed by being a single mother, O'Neil's devotion to others and her desire to improve herself and those in her community drove her to North Shore Community College and then on to Salem State University as she forged a path back to the classrooms that had nurtured and taught her so much. Even when she was taking classes, O'Neil served as a substitute teacher in Lynn so she could get to know the students and teachers who continue to make this historic city so strong.

Though she finds inspiration from her students and colleagues on a daily basis, when asked who first motivated her to pursue a career in education,

O'Neil cites her paternal grandmother.

“[She] graduated from the Bridgewater Normal School in 1914 and taught school in a one-room schoolhouse in Rockland, MA until she married,” O'Neil explains. “I have always been inspired by her journey in a time when most women did not pursue higher education.”

In addition to doing all she could to support students, O'Neil felt a need to support her colleagues as well.

“My profession is so important to me that I wanted to become an advocate for all teachers,” she says. “I knew becoming involved in the union would allow me to have a voice.”

When asked who in particular most encouraged her to take the additional step into Union life, O'Neil speaks of her father, who was secretary of his union at the Domino Sugar Company.

“He was a proud union member,” she recalls, “and we were a proud union family!”

O'Neil's connection to the LTU was inspired most directly by Alice Gunning, who had taught her daughter in first grade and in whose classroom at Ingalls O'Neil had observed while pursuing her own credentials.

“She encouraged me to pursue my degree,” O'Neil explains, “and was an incredible role model as a union

leader.”

Speaking of leadership, O'Neil decided to take her latest step into a board role so that she could do even more to help and inspire her others as so many had helped and inspire her.

“I wanted to learn more and become an advocate for teachers in our union,” she explains, recalling how she again started as a volunteer but soon began to pursue official paths to leadership. “I requested more responsibilities during my first year as a representative and decided to pursue an officer's position on the executive board in my second year.”

Asked to represent LTU by President Brant Duncan, O'Neil joined the AFT E-Board in September of 2015 and was re-elected in April of 2016.

“I have become more active in the union due to my participation at AFTMA,” she maintains. “I hope to inspire teachers to work together to support the union and to fight the injustices in education.”

Though the specter of Question 2 is now behind us, O'Neil knows there are far more battles to be waged and won and is steadfast in her dedication to her cause, her colleagues, and her students.

“The state of education is on the precipice,” she suggests. Among the major concerns she sees are a lack of respect for teachers, a lack of focus on student needs, and the fact that, even without the further budget cuts that Question 2 would have introduced, teachers are asked to do more with less every day.

“Many exemplary teachers are leaving our profession due to unrealistic demands,” she observes. “Things need to change and union involvement

will help precipitate these necessary changes.”

While the academic and professional challenges she faces on a daily basis continue to push O'Neil forward and to motivate her to encourage others, she also cites the personal benefits that have come from her life in education and in the union.

“My profession has allowed me to build relationships with colleagues that have turned into life long friendships,” she says. “We have the common goal of working hard and setting good examples for our students so they will be successful students and good citizens.” ■

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



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and expand upon our web-  
site, we also continue to  
encourage  
members to make use of it  
and, in the process,  
to save paper.**

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# Another Presidential Term Ends

## BTU head Richard Stutman looks back on 14 years at helm

After 34 years in the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) office, the last 14 of which serving as president. I have decided not to seek re-election. Following is the announcement sent to the BTU membership in mid-December:

I have a bittersweet announcement this morning: I will not be seeking re-election in June. Some of you may have already suspected this, as I've been told I have been dropping hints. I'm sure I have. Except for four years in college, I have been in the BPS in one capacity or another since 1955 when I entered kindergarten at the Lyndon School with Miss Clifford and left homeroom 135 at BLS with Dr. Desmond. I'll be retiring in June for one simple reason: It's time.

I began as a substitute teacher in 1972, then got hired in the BPS in 1973 as a 7th grade math teacher at the Theodore Roosevelt Middle School. Mathematics was a passion of mine and still is, and I began my professional career teaching what I love. Now, 45 years later, it's time to retire.

Don't let anyone tell you a decision as to when to retire is easy; it's not. I have been blessed for 45 years to have enjoyed my work in BPS and BTU every day, and it's not easy to leave something that's been such an integral part of your existence.

In my first 11 years, I was challenged – and rewarded – by my students. By the way, the reward was not measured by my students' success on a standardized test. The looks on my students' faces when they mastered a concept was my reward. Each June I asked students to write in their own words answers to two questions: 1) Did they like math? and 2) Did they learn much? They answered with candor. I welcomed their feedback, took it to heart, and learned from it. I didn't

need anything else – MCAS test scores or drive-by evaluation visits – to motivate me to do my best. Neither do you.

For the last 34 years I have been honored by you to be elected to represent you, the last 14 as your president, and I have been humbled by the responsibility you have placed on my shoulders. I have worked to uphold your trust.

Being president comes with major responsibilities, all of which are complicated and interrelated, and many of which are beyond one's immediate control and influence. Regardless of any difficulty and without any excuse, the BTU has an obligation to do its best by representing its members well, joining coalitions as we

did on Question 2 and working nationally to push back on the omnipresent anti-public education agenda. I worked to fulfill these responsibilities, and my successor will assuredly push forward in these same directions. Like you, I am not happy with the demonization of teachers and their unions for all things allegedly bad with public schools. Actually, our public schools are quite good. The voters just said so. And the newest PISA results, which ranked Mass Schools virtually as tops in the world, affirmed this. Those who have helped create the privatization movement of our public schools (e.g., Betsy DeVos) and those who wish to exploit it (e.g., Charlie Baker) have an interest in bringing the public schools down. We won't let

them.

One thing I had hoped to accomplish with your help is the settling of our current contract. I had hopes of settling quickly, as did our negotiating team, in late summer when we scheduled six full days of negotiations in a 10-day period. But it was not to be. The school district does not want

to settle the contract quickly, and the two days of negotiations we scheduled at the end of November have done nothing to change that opinion. There could still be a contract settlement in the short term – and we are ready and willing – but we're not particularly optimistic. There are a few difficult issues remaining on the table, and while we have made some progress, it hasn't been enough. Our goal is simple: We want to obtain a contract that is good for schools and students and fair to our membership.

There's an internal BTU matter we had hoped to settle – a streamlining of the BTU election process – and we have. This year in June we will have a mail-in ballot sent out directly to everyone eligible. No one will have to fill out an application for a ballot; all members will automatically receive one. We have a new Election Committee working hard to get all of this done, and things are on track. We will make sure that whatever problems happened last time will not happen again.

As I leave in June, the BTU is well prepared for challenges ahead. We have enthusiastic, skilled and thoughtful



**LOYAL LEADER**  
**Richard Stutman**



**LITERACY IN LYNN**  
AFSCME Local 1736 President Joseph Martin, Connery Elementary teacher Colleen Bacon, Sisson Elementary teacher Malenda Veiga, AFT MA Executive Board Member Sheila O'Neil, AFT Executive VP Mary Cathryn Ricker, Lynn Superintendent Dr. Catherine Latham, Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan, Harrington Elementary teacher Stacy Welch, Lynn Vocational Technical Institute teacher Marta Akim, AFT MA Director of Organization Brian LaPierre, and Assistant to the Mayor Patrick Cogan joined Lynn High School students for the most recent FirstBook distribution

ful people in our ranks and on our various and active committees. We have committed, deliberative leaders on our Executive Board and in our office. We have healthy finances, improved communications, and a good sense internally of our strengths and weaknesses. Our classrooms represent the very best in urban education. We'll do just fine, and our work will continue to improve.

I do have to thank many people for the help and encouragement I have received over the last three and half decades, but that'd be impossible in this space, and you'd never get to read the rest of the eBulletin. So let me thank just a few.

Thank you to the membership, who makes me proud every day. To give but one example: I spent a few hours at Mildred Ave. last week with the US Secretary of Education. Mildred Ave., once teetering near Turnaround/ Takeover status, has developed its own teacher-driven plan for improvement without any outside mandate or state interference. The result has been remarkable and is a tribute to the staff who work there. Mildred's turnaround shows what our members are capable of.

Thank you to our 3,500 retirees, who helped build our organization.

Thank you to my fellow officers, staff and Executive Board. I appreciate your help and guidance.

Thank you, BTU secretaries. You are wonderful.

Thank you to my wife, Nancy, who taught in the BPS for over 30 years, for being supportive and much more, and for letting me know every day the pulse of the membership. And thank you, Sarah, a BPS graduate, for being a wonderful daughter, and letting me experience the BPS through the eyes of a student and a family. ■

### ATTENTION NEW(ER) TEACHERS

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# Joint AFT MA/MTA Letter to the MA Board of Education

The following letter is in opposition to the use of students’ test scores to evaluate teachers.

November 23, 2016

Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education:

We are writing to communicate that MTA and AFT MA do not support the proposed regulations that Commissioner Chester is recommending you approve for public comment at the November 29 Board meeting. Our disagreement with these regulations involves both the substance of the changes and the process that produced them.

### Description of Commissioner’s Proposal

Under the commissioner’s proposal, a new indicator, called the Student Learning Indicator, is created in Standard 2 (for teachers) of the evaluation framework. The Student Learning Indicator would become one of five indicators used by an evaluator to inform the rating assigned to an educator on Standard 2. As has been the case since the regulations were revised in 2011, an educator must receive a proficient or better rating on Standard 2 in order to receive an overall rating of proficient or better.

The proposed Student Learning Indicator reads as follows: [The teacher] “consistently demonstrates expected impact on student learning based on multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement. For teachers who are responsible for direct instruction, these measures must include student progress on common assessments and, where available, statewide student growth measures.”

Furthermore, “expected impact” is defined as follows: “Expected Impact shall mean the educator meets or exceeds anticipated student learning gains on multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement. The evaluator shall use professional judgment to determine whether the educator is having expected impact on student learning, based on student learning gains on common assessments and, where available, statewide student growth measures.”

In addition to informing the rating on Standard 2, the Student Learning Indicator would have other consequences. Educators rated exemplary or proficient overall whose impact on student learning is “less than expected” must be placed on one-year (versus two-year) self-directed growth plans, which must include “one or more goals related to student learning developed on the basis of an analysis of the educator’s professional practice.” Also, educators rated exemplary or proficient overall whose impact on student learning is “at least expected” would “be eligible for additional roles, responsibilities and compensation, as determined by the district and through collective bargaining, where applicable.”

### Substance

After soliciting extensive feedback from MTA and AFT local leaders and members — educators who are directly and deeply engaged in the implementation of the educator evaluation system at the district and school levels — we have concluded that the commissioner’s proposal is irreparably flawed. Based on the feedback we received and our own analysis, the four biggest flaws with the proposal are as follows:

- The problematic components of the current regulations are simply carried over to the proposed revisions — with new names. Under the current system, educators are supposed to receive separate impact ratings of low, moderate or high, based on student learning measures such as MCAS Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) and District-Determined Measures (DDMs). Under the proposed revisions, the same problematic components persist, but with different terminology — MCAS SGP remains as is; DDMs become “common assessments”; the student impact rating becomes the Student Learning Indicator; and low, moderate or high become “less than expected” or “at least expected.”

The proposal does not appear to require a separate rating on the Student Learning Indicator, but it does demand a determination of a teacher’s impact for three purposes: 1) as a factor in the Standard 2 rating, with the Student Learning Indicator presumably incorporated into a revised rubric (see third bullet below); 2) in determining the length and focus of self-directed growth plans; and 3) in determining which educators are eligible for leadership roles, additional responsibilities and compensation, etc.

This scheme begs the question: How will evaluators determine whether an educator has demonstrated “less than expected” or “at least expected” impact? Based on our discussions with DESE staff, there is no clear answer to this question, all but guaranteeing that ambiguity and strife will ripple into the field during implementation.

The proposal, then, simply replicates the core implementation problem associated with the current impact rating system, which requires the conversion of MCAS and DDM scores into teacher ratings of low, moderate or high. You heard extensive testimony last spring that, after five years of good-faith effort, this methodological challenge has proven to be an insurmountable hurdle in the field; there is no simple or agreed-upon way to convert student scores into teacher impact ratings or, in this case, determinations of expected or less-than-expected impact. The last five years of noncompliance or meaningless compliance with this component of the evaluation framework should have been a clear warning sign to avoid making the same mistake again, yet the warning sign went unheeded by DESE for reasons that are difficult to discern.

- The proposal creates even higher stakes around student learning outcomes by allowing invalid and unreliable student learning measures

to count even more than they do now. As explained above, the same methodological problems around converting student outcomes to teacher impact ratings/determinations persist in the proposed revisions. Yet the proposal actually magnifies the problems by putting student learning measures directly into Standard 2 (for teachers), where they can have a disproportionate impact on the educator’s overall summative rating.

For example, under the proposal, there appears to be nothing that would stop an evaluator from citing students’ MCAS or other test scores as the sole or primary basis for a less-than-proficient rating on Standard 2, which would automatically trigger a less-than-proficient overall rating on the summative evaluation.

We’ve made the argument repeatedly — and DESE has in most cases agreed with us — that it’s methodologically unsound and educationally harmful to use student test scores as the basis for such high-stakes decisions. Yet this proposal does just that by putting student learning measures directly into Standard 2 with no protections or safeguards around their high-stakes use.

- The proposal does not explain how the new Student Learning Indicator would fit into the rubrics used for the summative rating judgments; time-consuming and unproductive collective-bargaining strife is a likely result. Under the current system, most school districts use one of the model educator-practice rubrics developed by DESE as the basis for rating educators on the four standards and overall. The Classroom Teacher Rubric and others approved by DESE build on the “Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice” that are specified in regulations. The rubrics expand the indicators into elements with descriptors that delineate the educator practices that signal either exemplary, proficient, needs improvement or unsatisfactory performance.

The Student Learning Indicator does not lend itself to this kind of descriptive “unpacking,” as the indicator is about test scores and other student learning measures, not practices or behaviors that can be characterized at various performance levels. Putting a Student Learning Indicator in an educator-practice rubric, therefore, is akin to fitting a square peg into a round hole; it just doesn’t work.

Moreover, adding a Student Learning Indicator to rubrics will re-open collective bargaining around rubrics, with significant turmoil likely to result from negotiations around what is unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient or exemplary performance on the Student Learning Indicator. The indicator itself is likely to encompass hundreds, if not thousands, of individual student learning measures, including measures related to subjects such as art, physical education, music, and foreign languages. What is the assurance that these measures will be used fairly and consistently in making judgments about educators and their impact? To the extent this question can be answered at all, it will happen through bargaining. Reigniting collective-bargaining strife over something

that has already proven unworkable over the last five years strikes us as a very poor policy choice. Bargaining over the Student Learning Indicator will simply divert more time and attention away from what our schools and students really need.

- The proposal does not explain how the Student Learning Indicator relates to the existing student learning goal, an ambiguity that will lead to confusion and implementation headaches in the field. Under the existing system, all educators must include in their educator plans at least one student learning goal that is approved by the evaluator. Progress toward that goal can then be considered as a factor in the summative evaluation, although no separate rating is given. Since the student learning goal remains under the commissioner’s proposal, the creation of a new Student Learning Indicator begs the following questions: How is the existing student learning goal different than the Student Learning Indicator? What is each trying to accomplish, and what is their intended relationship to each other? The rationale here is not clear at all, suggesting an incoherent and ill-conceived policy. This ambiguity and possible redundancy will create bureaucratic headaches and red tape for already overburdened administrators and educators charged with implementing DESE policy.

### Process

Last June, we had the opportunity to explain the concerns of educators (including representatives of AFT MA, MTA, MASS and MASC) with the current Student Impact Rating requirements. We appreciated the chance to provide feedback to BESE members about a policy that educators believe to be counterproductive to the work they are doing with students, and we were hopeful that there would be meaningful dialogue focused on getting the evaluation policy details right to support this work. However, the anticipated constructive dialogue did not occur. After the June meeting, the next action on this issue happened when we received the proposed regulatory changes on September 8 and were asked to provide comments by September 20, later extended to September 30 at our request. The proposal we received in September is essentially the same as the one being recommended by the commissioner at this month’s meeting.

In light of the proposal’s problems outlined above, the MTA and AFT MA immediately began to develop a policy that would actually address the issues we raised in June.

In short order, we developed a comprehensive counterproposal that we believe could meet the needs of all parties while avoiding the major problems associated with the commissioner’s proposal, including the high-stakes use of student test scores to inform a rating. This alternative incorporates student learning evidence in the evaluation system in a central and educationally meaningful way designed to improve student learning and professional practice. It avoids the methodologically and educationally unsound task of identi-

fyng each teacher’s impact on student learning. We presented that proposal in September to DESE staff, MASS (superintendents), MESPA (elementary principals) and MSSAA (secondary principals), and it received an enthusiastic initial response from all parties.

Unfortunately, when the proposal made its way to the commissioner, it was rejected, and all serious discussion around alternatives ceased. Subsequently, MassPartners has continued to try to find common ground, but has struggled to do so because of the constraints on alternatives imposed by the commissioner, who has insisted that impact on student learning be a component of a rating. This is unfortunate because the management associations and other members of MassPartners — i.e., the parties representing the educators and others who are directly involved in the implementation of this policy — have indicated a sincere willingness to explore alternatives that are acceptable to all parties.

**Our Ask**

The commissioner is correct that MTA and AFT MA do not object to evidence of student learning being part of the evaluation process. However, we do object to the specific approach embedded in the commissioner’s proposal. For the reasons stated above, we believe that this particular approach will either replicate old problems or create new ones.

We ask now that you give serious consideration to our critique of the commissioner’s proposal and to our counterproposal. You can do this in any of multiple ways:

- You can schedule an extended session on this topic at an upcoming Monday night or Tuesday BESE meeting, at which MTA and AFT MA leaders and staff will present our ideas and alternatives.
- You can urge the commissioner to consider other ways to bring student learning evidence into this process and encourage further work with members of MassPartners with no DESE-imposed constraints inhibiting the discussion. If members of MassPartners can reach consensus on an alternative approach to incorporating student learning evidence, the commissioner and BESE should accept it.
- You can meet with MTA and AFT MA leaders/staff individually or in small groups to hear our concerns and ideas in depth.

The bottom line is that we are quite willing to explore a range of alternatives that satisfy the primary policy goal that has been stated by the commissioner and members of MassPartners on numerous occasions — making student learning a central part of teacher growth and development. But we cannot accept an approach that simply replicates and exacerbates old problems while creating new ones. The last thing educators need is another ill-conceived, top--down mandate imposed on them against their will.

Thank you for taking our concerns seriously, and we look forward to further discussion with you on this topic.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Madeloni, MTA President  
Thomas J. Gosnell, AFT MA President

# Joint AFT MA/MTA Letter to DESE

The following letter is also in opposition to the use of students’ test scores to evaluate teachers.

January 27, 2017

Craig Waterman  
Department of Elementary  
and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148

RE: Public Comment on Proposed  
Amendments to 603 CMR 35.00

Dear Mr. Waterman:  
The Massachusetts Teachers Association and the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts have reviewed the proposed amendments to 603 CMR 35.00 and wish to make the following public comment and observations.

First, with the demise of No Child Left Behind and the expiration of Race to the Top, the legal, political and funding justifications for the Board’s or the Department’s regulatory control over district evaluation systems have come to an end. The Massachusetts General Laws themselves do not grant authority to the Board or the Department to enact the proposed regulations. Quite to the contrary, Massachusetts law identifies the school district as the locus of decision-making. More specifically, the Board’s own enabling statute provides that it “shall establish guidelines for establishing systems of personnel evaluation...” G.L. c. 69, § 1B, para. 13 (emphasis supplied). While the Board establishes the guidelines, or principles, for local use, the establishment of evaluation systems themselves clearly occurs in the school districts, and it should not be the subject of the extensive state regulations found in 603 CMR 35.00. Under G.L. c. 71, § 38, school superintendents must “cause the performance of all teachers ... to be evaluated” using the Board’s guidelines. However, § 38 explicitly reserves the establishment of any “procedures for conducting such evaluations” to G.L. c. 150E and to collective bargaining at the local level. Likewise, G.L. c. 71, § 38 explicitly leaves to local determination the performance standards that are the measures used in the evaluation process. The law could not be more explicit: “Where teachers are represented for collective bargaining purposes, all teacher performance standards shall be determined” as set forth in § 38, which provides for a unique interest-arbitration process. (Emphasis supplied.)

The proposed regulations ignore these state education laws entirely. The complex teacher evaluation system that DESE has devised through regulatory process and in sub-regulatory materials far exceeds the statutory authorization found in G.L. c. 69, § 1B and infringes on the statutory mandates and obligations in G.L. c. 71 and c. 150E. It would require a lengthy exposition to identify the manifest and multiple entrenchments that DESE’s regulations visit upon a local system of negotiated evaluation procedures and established performance standards, and the MTA and AFT MA decline to do so in these comments. Far from

providing state “guidelines” or “principles” that inform school districts and teachers in the establishment of local performance evaluation systems, DESE has usurped the power of school committees and the rights of teachers through detailed and overreaching state control.

This degree of control was countenanced by all parties during the period when substantial amounts of federal funding were tied to the existence of systems of evaluation that included many of the measures found in DESE’s existing regulations and that are perpetuated in the proposed revisions. With the end of NCLB and the expiration of the RTTT money, the Commonwealth no longer owes any obligation of compliance with those federal laws and programs. It is time for DESE and the Board to return the entire performance evaluation process back to the school districts, which is exactly what the Legislature intended in no uncertain terms through its enactments.

Second, MTA and AFT MA communicated with the members of the Board on November 23, 2016, regarding our deep concerns with the commissioner’s regulatory proposals and the vision of teacher development and evaluation expressed in these proposals. Our prior comments are attached, and they remain germane. In fact, from early September 2016, when we first saw a draft of the proposed revisions, until today, we have clearly and consistently expressed our deeply held concerns to the commissioner and the department, and we proposed alternative approaches that integrated our differing perspectives on a teacher evaluation system. Our alternatives were rejected. The commissioner chose not to incorporate our points of view in any meaningful way, although we quite frankly are the stakeholders most deeply and directly engaged in the pursuit of excellence in our public schools. As the state agency with the public duty to advance educational excellence, DESE should carefully consider the broad arguments and specific points advanced here and in our prior letter. We also ask DESE to reconsider the alternative proposals that we previously advanced.

The pressing need for a revised teacher evaluation system that is workable, productive and acceptable to teachers and administrators alike should not be the occasion for government legerdemain. Nonetheless, the commissioner’s proposals are not simply the same as the existing unsuccessful program, they are in fact more of the same and arguably worse than the existing regulations. When a revision simply slaps new names on old concepts, it is safe to suggest that no meaningful revision was intended. For example, and as previously pointed out, when a reform idea is to change the terminology for a teacher’s impact on student test outcomes from “low, moderate or high” to “less than expected” or “at least expected,” no genuine change is afoot. When “Student Impact Rating” becomes “Student Learning Indicator,” nothing has changed.

A meaningful and implementable teacher evaluation system is one that

focuses on improving professional practice because improving professional practice is the best way to improve student learning. The appropriate way to incorporate student learning into an evaluation system is to require review and reflection on student learning at each step of the evaluation cycle so that evidence of learning informs practice. A system that treats student learning as a quantifiable and supposedly objective teacher performance standard makes it less likely that the educators — both the evaluators and the evaluated alike — can engage in an open and authentic discussion of how the evidence of student learning can be used most effectively. When evidence of student learning is assigned such high stakes and when a system introduces evaluation penalties that could prove to be unfair, inaccurate and demoralizing, the system fails.

The best approach to address the problems of the current system is to eliminate the use of student test results to inform any rating of a teacher’s performance. The “Student Impact Rating” has been in the works for six years and has proven itself to be a failed concept. Neither state standardized test results nor District-Determined Measures have ever provided a true measure of a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. The commissioner’s proposed “Student Learning Indicator” is the same concept — with the same negative consequences — under a different banner.

For the foregoing reasons, the MTA and AFT MA offer the following responses to the commissioner’s proposed revisions of 603 CMR 35.00 and suggest an alternative set of revisions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Madeloni , MTA President  
Thomas J. Gosnell, AFT MA President

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# Silencing the Guns

## Educator Opinion

By Robert Cho

**O**n the afternoon of January 4th, my students and I crammed into the corner of my classroom. The door was locked and the room was dark and silent except for the sound of a helicopter outside and a few nervous giggles coming from the students. We were in “lockdown” and it was not a drill! A couple of staff members had seen a man running and firing a gun only yards from our school’s back door, the same door I would have been taking my students through only 15 minutes after the lockdown was initiated. Fortunately, nobody was hurt, and about 20 minutes later, we were given the all clear and allowed to begin our dismissal procedure.

So, why am I writing this now? Because multiple gunshots were fired adjacent to school property and not a single news site covered the incident.

Think about that. Multiple shots were fired, separated from elementary and middle school students by only a dozen yards and about as many minutes... and nothing. Yet, I would bet a year’s salary that if the same incident had taken place in one of the suburbs only a few miles away, it would have been a leading story that evening.

Why is that? Could it be that gunfire in our school community is a common enough occurrence that it isn’t “newsworthy”? Let’s assume - for the sake of argument - that is true. Now, consider the larger implications: that gunfire near a school in the mid-afternoon is just one of the harsh realities our students and their families face and that it is, to some degree, within the realm of what

is considered “normal” to them.

In the days following the lockdown, my students were okay, or at least appeared to be on the outside. Sadly, it is true that gunfire is nothing new to them. Nearly all of them have heard gunfire in their neighborhoods, some have actually seen it, and far, far too many have lost loved ones to a bullet. The trauma is not novel or raw for them, but it is there. Always. They will go home to it, they will hear and see it, and apparently there is no safe place they can go to escape it - not even their schools.

What does that normalization of guns and violence within a community, and the resulting trauma, do to children’s emotional health? How

does this pervasive stress and anxiety affect how these children define the concepts of “hope” and “future”? How does all of this affect their learning?



**DEDICATED DEFENDER**  
Robert Cho

The next time you hear a politician make promises about closing the so-called “achievement gap” and being tough on “failing” schools and “bad” teachers, ask whether or not s/he is also fighting with equal conviction to address the very deep and complex issues that come into play in the lives of students like ours. Many of these challenges cannot be solved simply by changing a school’s designation or turning over the majority of the staff or implementing a new multi-year plan. Yes, those of us in the education sphere can make changes and see some results, but let us not fool ourselves into believing that all of the vast social and economic differences will be erased solely by what happens in our schools seven hours a day, 180 days a year. The question is are we, as a society, willing and able to take all of the steps necessary to effect the changes we say we want to see? ■

Robert Cho is a Middle School Science teacher at the Joseph Lee K-8 School in Dorchester. ■

## An Insight-full English Department Quartet of Peabody teachers wins MIE award

**W**hile Peabody was recently fortunate enough to find itself the home of three AP statistics teachers who each won the annual award from Mass Insight Education (MIE), the Tanners have outdone themselves again this year with the entire quartet of AP Language and Composition teachers scheduled to receive the honor at a special gathering at the Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel on April 4.

“Four in one subject is unusual for most systems in the grant cohorts,” explains Peabody Veterans Memorial High School (PVMHS) English Department Chair Michalene Hague, lauding by name Shawn DeHart, Daniel Harris, Nathan Leland, and Robert Sullivan.

In addition to teaching at PVMHS for 11 years, Harris also serves as a track coach. In both capacities, he strives to inspire his students just as he was inspired. When asked who inspired him to enter education, Harris mentions his mother, explaining that it was she who suggested he teach after he graduated Stonehill College with a degree in English. “She thought I would make an excellent teacher,” he recalls. “In hindsight, it was a great decision. I guess mothers do know best!”

Harris notes that his parents had not graduated college themselves and credits their lessons regarding the importance of education and “the doors that it opens” as leading the way for both himself and his brother (who is also a teacher).

“They never pressured me to be a straight-A student,” Harris recalls, “but to try my best and learn from any failure or obstacles in my path. I owe much if not everything to that mindset in life and try to impart that to my students.”

As his parents inspired him to achieve things that they had not, Harris strives to impart to his own students a love of learning and a desire to reach ever further in their own lives.

“My greatest challenge as an educator is simply fighting apathy,” he suggests. “I think schools have programmed students to think one of two ways - I can do it, or I can’t. I want to show them that...they can”

While the recent recognition demonstrates Harris’ achievements, when asked what he is proudest of, he mentions his independent reading program.

“I have a fairly large library in the back of my room where I allow students to take out books they want to read and simply read,” he explains, noting that many students take

an A on the test,” Harris observes. “We just read for the love of reading, and I think it helps develop critical and thoughtful thinkers.”

Sullivan also found his first teaching gig at PVMHS, where he has served for 10 years. He also says that he was inspired by his family (in his case, his wife) to enter education after years as an academic adviser at Boston University and UMass Boston.

Though he was a relatively new member of the English department at the time, Sullivan was part of the team that crafted the AP program at PVMHS.



**AWARD-WINNING ACADEMICS**  
PVMHS English teachers Shawn DeHart, Nathan Leland, Robert Sullivan, and Dan Harris

advantage of the library even though participation makes up only 10% of their grade (as opposed to high-stakes tests or other “incentives”). “Students often are hesitant at first, but I simply tell them, ‘It’s not that you don’t like reading. You just don’t know what you like yet.’”

While Harris admits that some students take time to get their reading habit going, by the end of the calendar year, most have read at least four books on their own

“They find it liberating to not have to worry about being right or scoring

“Eight years later,” he observes, “we have a robust program.”

Robust enough, apparently, to not only catch the attention of MIE - a 20-year-old state-wide organization dedicated to “transform[ing] public schools

into high-performing organizations” - but to garner their highest honor.

DeHart also came from another career to teaching. Before entering the IT field, he had taken courses in education as an undergraduate and even acquired his teaching license. It was not until eight years later, however, that he put it to use.

“I wanted to have a job where it felt like my work actually made some kind of change in the world,” DeHart explains. “I wanted how I spent my time to matter.”

When asked who set him on his

road to the classroom, DeHart credits his own high school teachers but also notes that his wife is also an educator and seeing her serve students is inspiring every day.

“Every year I see what she gives to her students,” he explains, “and how patient and committed she is with them, and that pushes me to try and live up to her example.”

While DeHart is very proud of how the AP program has grown at PVMHS, he also takes pride in the individual successes he has been able to achieve with students who might not have started the school year with much motivation.

“Motivating my...students continues to be a daily challenge,” he admits, crediting the AP program with providing incentive for many students. “I am extremely proud of both how much we have grown our AP Language program, and of how many students tell me how much it has helped them achieve their goals.”

Another goal that has been achieved is that Peabody schools are being recognized for their continued excellence.

“We are proud of our collective faculty members and thrilled that four members of our English Department are being duly awarded recognition for their hard work, high standards, and consistent AP scores,” says Lead AP English teacher Lawrie Bertram, citing the many hours her colleagues spend attending seminars and honing their own skills and practices. “We are thankful for the services and funds provided by the personnel at MIE and to Principal Buckley and Superintendent Levine for their ongoing support of the AP program at PVMHS.” ■

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# A Good Time to be Bad

## BATs fly to the forefront of education debate

Though Question 2 went down in flames, the fires set burning by charter schools continue to threaten and the new administration is filled with educational arsonists. While many educators seem satisfied to canvass and call friends and colleagues, some have decided to take a more active stance that may fly in the face of convention.

The Badass Teachers Association (which has a caucus in the AFT called the AFT BAT Caucus) is a group of teachers and administrators that has come together to offer and promote an alternative and perhaps more aggressive means of standing up for teacher rights and against those who would threaten them.

According to Joseph Lee School teacher and BTU Executive Board member Colum Whyte, BAT started “unofficially” on social media before becoming a fully-realized caucus.

“The talking points had to do with not being blamed for the problems that exist in education,” he recalls, “and that appealed to me and to other teachers who were fed up with high stakes testing and other punitive measures that were being put across by the so-called ‘education deformation’ movement.”

What brought BATs to national attention was the national study they conducted concerning school staff workplace health.

“They found a lot of stress (which is

to be expected),” Whyte explains, “but also suicide ideation, and that got a lot of attention from Randi Weingarten, who promoted the study at the last AFT convention so the teachers and school nurses could get the support that they need.”

Among the current demands of the BATs (all of which can be viewed at [www.badassteacher.org](http://www.badassteacher.org)) are equitably-funded student-driven policies and systems that meet the actual needs of students and schools (as opposed to those which outside entities claim them to be), the elimination of profit-driven education reform and all forms of high-stakes testing, and the use instead of evaluations that are designed to expand upon and improve professional practice instead of potentially punishing it. According to BAT members, these changes will also involve such additional benefits as the inclusion and expansion of physical activity, art, career guidance, and other vital but often overlooked and underfunded curricular elements and the development and use of authentic best practices that support and benefit all students, including those with language or developmental challenges and needs. Through these, the BAT aims for an

overarching goal of excellent public education for all students.

According to Executive Director Marla Kilfoyle, BATs was created on Facebook on June 14, 2013 by Oklahoma activist Priscilla Sanstead



“She formed it because she wanted teachers to start speaking up,” Kilfoyle explains, noting that this remains the group’s main goal.

While BATs has played a major role in education-related events and efforts across the country, the group is perhaps now united more than ever in the face of changes in administration.

“The focus now is to...continue to work in coalition with other grassroots groups,” Kilfoyle maintains. “We intend to fight against...privatization agenda...and we intend to continue to fight for racial and social justice.”

As a union-related organization, BATs also demands the maintenance and expansion of collective bargaining rights and due process, administered and overseen by democratically-elected Board of Education who actively include and elicit the input of the entire community. Perhaps that is why BATs membership appealed to AFT Executive Board member Michael Maguire.

“I joined the BATs because I liked

its mantra,” Maguire explains, suggesting the motto of the organization is “giving voice to every teacher who refuses to be blamed for the failure of our society to erase poverty and inequity through education.”

In fact, Maguire adds, he was an “early joiner” because he admired how BATs members acted upon their principles.

“I loved that the group was not just a place to complain,” he says. “It is a place to work together, to ask questions, to learn about conditions across the country, and to push back.”

As a member, Maguire hears from the organization often and has been made aware of many issues and activities that he might not otherwise have engaged through BATs.

“The call to action posts generate results,” he observes, noting that when BATs calls for what it calls a “swarm,” hundreds or thousands of fellow members and colleagues get involved, calling and emailing elected officials or gathering for rallies or other events. “BATs brings much needed action to worn-out rhetoric.”

Even in so-called “right-to-work” states where union involvement is not as strong, BATs’ nationwide chapters help struggling teachers know that they are not alone.

“BATs has over 50,000 members,” Maguire explains, citing support from AFT, NEA, and other organizations. “We invite all teachers to come check us out and join us if you are tired of being blamed and are ready to push back against the establishment.” ■

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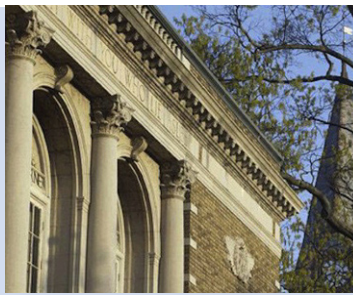
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# On Campus

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



## Funding Higher Education

In one of the oddities of MA budget politics, it is customary for the Governor to establish the financial perimeters of raises for public employees before negotiations. Word in the wind is that it will be close to zero.

MA has had six years of economic growth, and it appears that 2017 will be more of the same. However, we have all seen the way numbers can be “managed” when necessary. The Governor has announced a modest increase in local aid to public schools, but there has been no news yet about funding higher education.

In general, the more college-educated individuals a state has, the stronger their economy is. Also, graduates of public institutions in MA are more likely to remain in the state after graduation than their counterparts attending private institutions. According to a recent report by the MA Budget and Policy Center, MA has cut overall spending on higher education by 14% from 2001 to 2017. Even more striking, per-student funding during that same period was reduced by 31%. During this time, there was a slight increase in capital spending on higher education, peaking in 2013, but much of that was spent on facility renovation. In fact, MA ranks 30th in capital spending per student.

There are a number of ways to look

at overall state spending. As a share of the overall state income we rank 43rd; per capita we rank 31st; and on a per-student basis we rank 12th. This difference is apparently because we have a smaller percentage of students attending public rather than private schools than most other states.

At the same time, MA student debt has increased, as has the number of student loans. That’s not surprising given the reported fact that, as state higher education funding went down, tuition and fees increased. At community colleges, state funding decreased \$2,300 per student over the past 16 years, while tuition and fees rose \$2500. At state universities, where support decreased by \$2700, tuition and fees increased by \$4700. At UMass, where support decreased by \$4200, tuition and fees increased by \$5400. It is notable that during the same period (FY01 through FY17) state scholarship funding also went down by 31%.

Where does that leave us? It seems unlikely that either students or the state can expect any relief from the federal government for the foreseeable future. But there is hope on the horizon. There are already signs that, for those states with the highest per capita incomes, as the federal taxes are reduced for high-income individ-

uals, the states might consider ways to capture some of those savings. Indeed, MA already has a proposed constitutional amendment that, if enacted, will tax annual income in excess of \$1 million by 4%. This measure still needs another affirmative vote in the state legislature (it was supported by a

135 to 57 vote in the previous session) and it will then be put on the ballot in 2018. If passed, the Department of Revenue estimates it could raise an additional \$1.9 billion in tax revenue in 2019. And the legislation calls for this money to be spent on infrastructure and education.

So perhaps there is cause for some optimism in these uncertain times. ■



### A HIGHER LEVEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**The UMass Faculty Federation recently presented the Teacher of the Year Award to Kristen Sethares, Ph.D., Adult Nursing and Chad McGuire, Ph.D., Public Policy, the Bruce A. Sparfven ESU Service Award to Richard Legault, Senior Technical & Training Specialist, Computer and Information Technology Services, and the Scholar of the Year Award to Honggang Wang, Ph.D., Electrical and Computer Engineering.**

## Do Justice, Love Mercy... Springfield Para wins award

As many educators know, there are days when you just have to give it up to a higher being to get you through. With all the demands from administrations, colleagues, students, parents, and others, it can feel as if there is often nobody else to turn to.

Fortunately, there are ways in which the powers that be give back. Among these is the annual MICA Award from the Pioneer Valley Project (PVP), a gathering of over 25 religious and labor groups that support the historic Pioneer Valley community.

The MICA Award is both an acronym (standing for Micah In Community Action Honoree) and a reference to the prophet Micah who famously espoused doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with one’s spiritual guide. On February 4, the 2017 Award was presented to Linda Dixon, a Springfield paraprofessional and community leader who truly exemplifies all of these elements.

“I feel deeply honored for this recognition,” Dixon says, noting that the award is especially timely, as she had frankly been questioning whether her efforts were making an impact. “As I see the progress of individuals on a daily basis, I questioned myself as to whether I was making a difference in their lives. By acknowledging my work, PVP has shown me that others

outside of my support system and workplace are starting to see the need to put money back into our public schools and not take it away.... [They] have given me hope, and helped renew my spirit to be able to continue with confidence to educate the children of this world.... and to serve my community as an active concerned citizen looking out for the well-being of all the citizens of Springfield.”

And her community is surely grateful!

“Linda has been a great asset to the members of the Local,” says Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals (SFP) President Cathy Mastronardi.

“I first became associated with the organization thru my Para union in October 2011,” Dixon recalls, “when they were advocating for the Home Visit program. I attended the rally at City Hall in May of 2012, it gave me the opportunity to represent the teachers and students of Springfield, of a much needed program to improve academics, behavior, communication and encourage a respectful relationship between students, teachers and parents.”

Having been an SFP member since

2008, Dixon has served as a building representative and vice president and is currently the chairperson of the Public Relations Committee. She also holds a position on the Executive Board. In addition, Dixon is active in the community as a cheerleading coach, and as volunteer for such organizations as Awanna Youth Games Christian



**PREPARED PARA**  
**Linda Dixon (right) gathers signatures for SOPS**

Education program, Friends of the Homeless, Kingdom Kids Nursery, the Robert F. Kennedy Rodman Ride for Kids, Relay for Life, and Team Raincoat (in memory of her Brother-law William Gray). She has also participated in a number of support missions to New Orleans and Haiti and helps coordinate Springfield’s annual MLK Celebration on Dr. King’s birthday and the Springfield Public Day Elementary Schools’ Family Carnival and Field Day.

“I am awed by the time that Linda puts into community service work,” Mastronardi says. “I really don’t know where she finds the time to sleep!”

According to AFT National Field

Representative Nick DiPardo, who worked with Linda on the recent Save Our Public Schools (SOPS) campaign, “Linda was a real leader.... Her abilities to motivate her colleagues, think creatively about different ways of reaching out to voters, and her determination to move the efforts forward were crucial. I have no doubt that the skills that she’s developed over the last few months will be invaluable to the Springfield local moving forward as she continues to develop as a leader and activist within the union.”

While her colleagues are effusive in their adulation of Dixon, perhaps her daughter - fellow para-educator Antonia Dixon – says it best when she offers another acronym related to her mother. “PARA,” Antonia says. “Passionate. Able. Resourceful. Awesome. These are four traits that every para should possess. I wouldn’t be a para if Linda Dixon hadn’t introduced me to this wonderful career. She has always been passionate about her love of working with children [and] always willing to do whatever it takes to get any job done.”

Antonia goes on to note how, even when the resources are meager at best, her mother always finds a way to serve her students and to have fun doing it.

“She is dedicated through and through to enriching the lives of children,” Antonia continues. “Having worked as a para for the past eight years within the alternative schools, she is an excellent example of what a Para is and I’m very proud to call her ‘Mom.’ ■



## Retiree Corner

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



## “Way Back in the Dark Ages...”

**W**hen I was a kid, I hated history. To me, it was a boring set of facts that had to be committed to memory and that had no importance in my everyday life. It was not until college that the professor made history come to life. It took on such vitality that I eventually minored in the subject!

Years later, during my teaching career, I remember discussing a proposal to eliminate history as a subject. I remember thinking how unfair it was for those of us who had benefited from the subject to be the ones deciding if it should be eliminated. I thought of how various cultures and peoples had fought to have their histories included. Fortunately, it was never eliminated.

In the latter years of my teaching, when we were discussing something that related to something I remembered as a child, I would say, “Way back in the dark ages when I was a kid...” I noticed that, when I introduced a topic in this way, the students sat up straighter and I had their undivided attention. Apparently, they enjoyed hearing about life back then.

One of the projects I completed in retirement was to write a book for my grandkids in which all the stories started with these same words. It was fun not only writing the stories but coming up with pictures that went with each story. It made for a historical treasure hunt that added to the enjoyment of the project. History made it all come alive!

A friend of mine asked me to do a presentation of the book at her sister’s Alzheimer’s unit and it was amazing the discussion that evolved around the old-fashioned double-feature movies with the news reels and previews of coming attractions and what it cost to go the movies back then. The residents all tried to outdo each other with what was the cheapest price they paid for an afternoon of entertainment.

I have also shared the book with friends that have been a part of my life from the time I was a child, as well as family members who can’t believe my memories. Recently, one family member expressed a wish that my husband had also done something similar so we would have his memo-

ries as well.

This is what prompted me to write this article. I encourage all of you to give thought to doing something like this. It will help make the snowy cold days go a little faster. It will also leave an important part of you behind. It will not only be stories about you, but your parents and grandparents. You may even be able to go back further. Many become interested and explore genealogy in retirement. This also is a way to tell your story and leave your history for generations to come.

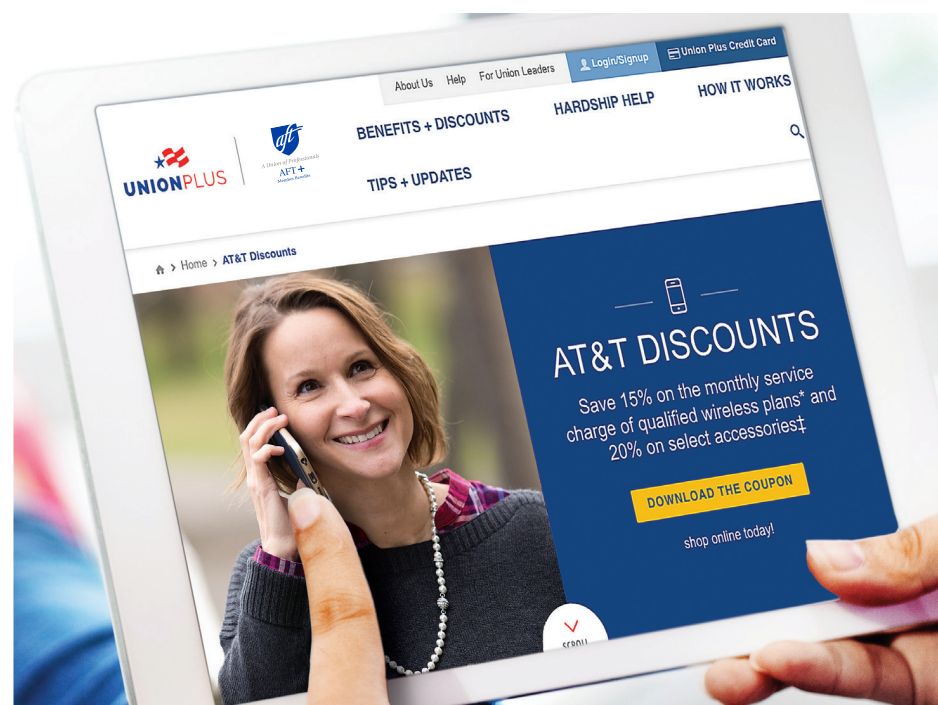
History is not something boring and irrelevant. History is as alive as the people who lived it. History is what makes us who and what we are and, in many instances, formed us into the people we became. In the words of our outgoing First Lady, Michelle Obama, “You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.” ■

## Benefit Bulletin: New Year; New Savings

**L**ooking to ring in your new year with savings. Then the AFT + benefits might be able to help. Whether you’re looking to save on your wireless bill, a new car or an upcoming trip, your AFT membership can help you save.

### Wireless Savings With AT&T

With the AT&T wireless discounts through Union Plus, AFT members can save 15% on the monthly service charge of qualified wireless plans and 20% off select accessories from AT&T.



Save with Union Plus programs like AT&T Wireless discounts\*, car buying services, scholarships, travel & entertainment deals, three credit card choices\*\*, and much more!

**Visit [unionplus.org](http://unionplus.org)**

Ring in the New Year with a new phone from AT&T, and save big on wireless with the only nationwide unionized wireless carrier.

Plus, when you switch to AT&T, you’ll get up to \$650 in bill credits when you trade in your current smartphone and a buy new one on AT&T Next — which, remember, you can do for \$0 down.

### Car Buying Savings

Use the AFT + Auto Buying Service, administered by TrueCar, a leading auto purchasing provider, to help you find the right new or used car or truck for you and your family.

With the Autobuyng Service your family will save an average of \$3,279 off MSRP3 on new cars, as well as:

- Up to \$1,000 in member discounts on used cars
- A free CarFax Reports on most vehicles
- \$100 rebate when you buy a new union-made car
- \$200 on a new union-made, EPA Green Car

### Travel Discounts

Planning a spring or summer getaway? Save up to 20 percent off the “best available rate” at more than 7,700 participating hotels in locations worldwide. And, AFT members and their families save up to 25 percent with car rental discounts.

Learn about all the savings available to AFT members at [aft.org/benefits](http://aft.org/benefits).

### IMPORTANT UPDATE

In the last edition of the *Advocate*, I wrote about the Veterans’ Death Benefit. After I received a refusal regarding my late husband’s benefits, I visited the Veteran Agent and was told he would re-file as the refusal was apparently a mistake. He told me that to re-file would be a better route than to appeal. I have heard from those who say that their Veteran’s Agent says the Vet has to die in a VA Hospital in order to qualify for benefits. This is NOT correct! Tell your Agent to file an Application for Burial Benefits (Under 38 U.S.C. Chapter 23) and to send with it a copy of the deceased’s birth and death certificates, discharge papers, and a copy of the bill issued by the funeral home. Please remember that all this must be done within two years and that it does not need to be a spouse who files.

### SEMINARS

#### Preparing for Retirement

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

Wednesday February 15, 2017  
3:30-5:30 PM (Snow date March 1)  
Billerica Memorial High School  
35 River Street, Billerica, MA

Monday February 27, 2017  
3:30-5:00 PM  
Amesbury High School Room 129/131,  
5 Highland Street, Amesbury, MA

Thursday March 30, 2017  
3:30-5:30 PM  
Methuen Educational Association  
Union Office  
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Suite 1-204  
Methuen, MA

Thursday April 6, 2017  
4-6 PM  
Lawrence Teacher’s Union Office  
1 Market Street, Lawrence, MA

Wednesday May 10, 2017  
2:30-4:30 PM  
Blackstone Valley Vocational  
Regional School  
5 Pleasant Street, Upton, MA

Monday May 15, 2017  
3:30-5:30 PM  
Lynn Teachers’ Union Hall  
679 Western Avenue, Lynn, MA

There is also a seminar being scheduled for April in Holliston. Details will appear in the next *Advocate* and on MRU website.

To request or register for seminars, call MRU at 781-365-0205 or email [seminar.registration@gmail.com](mailto:seminar.registration@gmail.com). Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number of people who will be attending.

### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

**Look for our  
NEW  
website at  
[www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)**

# Late Night Lessons

## East Boston High School students connect at Midnight

For NCAA schools, Midnight Madness means the annual kickoff of the basketball season. In retail, the term is often tied to special sales. At East Boston High School (EBHS), however, Midnight Madness has come to take on a different and much more productive tone.

For the past seven years, male students at EBHS have gathered annually for an overnight event that offers everything from food and sports to programs and workshops to opportunities to win raffle prizes from area businesses and also to hang out and engage with fellow students, faculty, and some very special guests. Past events have included late-night bowling and video game tournaments as well as a wrestling night that was refereed by Headmaster Phillip R. Brangiforte.

“We have fun activities and guest speakers who lead workshops that range from how to tie a tie to how to treat young women in relationships,” Brangiforte says, noting that he and about a dozen other EBHS educators help out each year to ensure that all the volunteer participants are engaged and have fun.

Midnight Madness was first proposed by EBHS administrator and athletic director Michael Smith. When asked how he came up with the idea, Smith recalls watching a reality television show about a Chicago principal who required all freshman to attend an overnight orientation.

“A lightbulb went off in my head,” Smith says. “I rushed in on Monday morning and pitched it to then Headmaster Michael Rubin who looked at my like I was crazy but backed me 100%.”

This support for Smith’s idea quickly spread and more colleagues got on board every day. And when then administrator Brangiforte was named principal, the program continued to grow.

“He understood the value of the program and made it a priority to keep,” Smith says of his supervisor.

“When the Midnight Madness was first proposed years ago,” says Jacob Dylengoski, who administers the BPS program known as Supported Transitions to Reach Independence through Vocational Experiences (STRIVE) at EBHS. “Mike Smith had a vision of mentoring our male students in an unconventional manner. The idea was one of an exceptional 24-hour experience involving sports, food, speakers, food, competition, [and] food [that] encouraged camaraderie.”

While the fun and food may be among the main draws, Dylengoski maintains that the camaraderie is the real key to the program’s popularity and success.

“The students get to see the male staff in a different light,” Dylengoski says, “and are well aware that the men there to implement this event do it on a volunteer basis.”

While it reminds those who had the privilege of attending summer camp, for many EBHS students, this is the only opportunity they may have to spend time and bond with friends and mentors in this way.

“It offers some of the essence of

those wonderful experiences,” Dylengoski observes.”

While the program enlists one EBHS educator to elicit gifts from community businesses to distribute to the students, Smith maintains that the focus is not on corporate sponsorship but rather on student engagement and support.

“This event is homegrown with passionate male teacher role models who spend an overnight with 80 male students with the hopes of mentoring, inspiring, and motivating them to new heights,” Smith says. “The bonds and special connections that are formed during the event last a lifetime.”

Looking back on Midnights past, Smith recalls sessions lead by such notable guests as a famed juvenile judge who is also the father of an EBHS teacher, Super Bowl champion (and EBHS alumnus) Jermaine Wiggins, and local business entrepreneurs who discussed ways in which the students could take their ideas and turn them into real-life successes.

“When I first experienced Midnight Madness, I did not know what to expect,” admits EBHS history teacher Garcia Dalzon. “I was curious...how we were going to get 80-100 teenage boys entertained for an entire day. Moreover, how would we make sure that they went to sleep at a decent hour and wake up with the school intact? What I didn’t realize is that we had the best combination of headmaster, administrators, teachers, community members and other individuals that attribute to making the night a profound success.”

As a recipient of the Entrepreneurship Student Distinction Award, MGH Partnership Initiative, and Verizon Hispanic Heritage Award, East Boston High School is among the jewels of the district. With this latest iteration of their popular Midnight Madness program, the school has again taken a giant leap forward that others can hopefully imitate and replicate.

“It is truly a group effort and the students are the one’s who really benefit from it,” Dalzon says, citing the strong connections he and his colleagues have been able to forge with the students as among the many highlights.

While every Midnight Madness cohort has sung the program’s praises, this year’s group received an extra special treat when they were invited to tour and play at historic Fenway Park and to meet and hear a presentation from team President Sam Kennedy.

“It was a pleasure to meet with the students of East Boston High,” Kennedy said. “Part of our goal is to ensure children are engaged with the game of baseball and have opportunities to experience Fenway Park. We hope this visit will be one of many in the years to come.”

According to Brangiforte, the meeting was arranged by LaShawn Streater, an EBHS graduate and employee who has forged strong connections with the team.

“He has been working for the Red Sox for a while,” Brangiforte explains, “so we talked with him and he thought it was a great idea to reach out to the team.”

In the same ways as he has been able to positively impact students at EBHS, Streater has apparently made quite a positive impression on the team’s administration, especially President/CEO Emeritus Larry Lucchino.

“Larry loves LaShawn,” Brangiforte observes, “so we were able to work it out!”

With help from the school department (who procured a bus), 80 students were able to take tours of Fenway, to eat at Max & Leo’s Pizza and even to use the team’s official batting cages at Game On! When not enjoying the exclusive benefits of the specially-arranged evening, students engaged in video game tournaments and discussions about what it means to be a mentor, the power of forgiveness, consequences of positive and negative actions, and the critical need for positive relationships.

“The Red Sox came up big for us,” Brangiforte says, “and we hope to do more with them.”

During a meeting at East Boston’s world-famous pizza palace Santarpio’s, Brangiforte and EBHS hockey coach Bob Anthony (who represented the East Boston Athletic Board) proposed to the Red Sox organization having the EBHS students also come to Fenway as part of their annual hockey tournament

“When we came back for the hockey meeting,” Brangiforte recalls, “a lot of people at Fenway remembered our students and said how mature and friendly they were.”

Though an equally engaging event is offered each spring for EBHS’s bright young women, Midnight Madness has become an event that students and staff look forward to year after year.

“The feeling that I got from Midnight Madness,” says history teacher Rich LaCara, “is the feeling of appre-

ciation that I saw from the...students who attended the event. It is a special night and I really do get the feeling that the students sense of the hard work done...in pulling off such an extravaganza.”

While the games and meals are a great draw, LaCara also cites the discussions and presentations as key elements of the Madness program.

“The students felt that they were cared for when [teachers] held 25-minute presentations on life skills... on making responsible decisions, and other needed topics for our students,” LaCara suggests. “They may have not jumped up and down when leaving these sessions, but I do feel that they appreciated what we had to say to them in the sessions.”

Staff Assistant Ricardo Perez also touts the relationship-building that happens during the course of the night.

“Relationships between students and educators is a key component to a successful student,” he maintains. “The fact that Midnight Madness fosters these relationships is priceless.”

Perez notes that many of the students maintain their EBHS relationships (and especially the bonds built during Midnight Madness) for many years after graduation and that these relationships can positively affect their entire lives.

“This has the potential to be a life-long bond,” he observes, suggesting that the event also helps model “positive male interactions,” and “shows the boys that men are encouraged to support and love each other without any judgment.”

Dalzon also cites the importance of the personal and potentially professional connections the students and staff make at Midnight Madness.

“Some of our students are in need of a male mentor in their lives,” Dalzon observes, “and if they have one, they get an opportunity to build camaraderie amongst each other. These opportunities would not be present if it were not for Midnight Madness.”

EBHS Math Program Director Charles E. Cauley concurs, saying that, “no matter what workshops we plan, speakers we include or special attractions we orchestrate, there is one thing that remains a constant component...the male bonding. It creates lasting relationships...that transcend student, adult, socioeconomic, ethnic, [and] racial boundaries that might not normally be made. I believe this is the core of the event and the reason we continue to do it each year.”

“The combination of mentorship, food, sports, video gaming, guest speakers...and many other aspects,” Dalzon concludes, “make Midnight Madness second to none!” ■



**HAPPY “MADNESS”**  
**Boston Red Sox President Sam Kennedy (center) with students from East Boston High School**

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website at  
[www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)