



# The Advocate



February / March 2016

## “Our job is to connect”

### Friedrichs sends labor movement back to its roots

**O**n January 11, The Supreme Court heard testimony regarding Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association. Though the decision is not due until June, the repercussions of the case are already being felt across the Labor movement.

The case asks the court to decide whether public sector unions may continue to charge nonmembers a fee (known as “agency fee”) that covers the cost of representing them to their employer. While the Supreme Court case would make this change nationwide, there are already states in which agency fee is already gone and unions in those states must spend a great deal more resources attracting and signing up members every year.

Once a group of public workers choose union representation, the union becomes their representative. In fact, at the point of unionization, the union becomes the only organization permitted to represent member interests to an employer and is, in fact, required by law to represent those interests, even if a worker chooses not to join and pay dues. Therein lies the challenge: The union is required to represent even those who do not wish to participate. Agency fee is the union’s way of making sure that the union can fund its representative work, even for those who are not full members. After all, it is only fair that employees who reap the benefits of a union contract pay their fair share of the cost of negotiating it. For this reason, agency fee is often also known as “fair share.”

Agency fee equals only the amount of money needed to represent a member in collective bargaining and is all that fair share payers pay. Other expenses, such as costs for political activity, are not charged to them.

In the 1970s, teachers in Detroit who did not want to join the Detroit Federation of Teachers brought a lawsuit that is known as Abood v. Detroit Board of Education. They argued that having to pay the fee violated their First Amendment right to associate with whoever they wanted to. The Supreme Court upheld the agency fee, saying it did not violate the First Amendment. Since then, however subsequent cases have chipped away at this security and have eventually led to Friedrichs.

The main questions of the new case are whether public sector agency fee arrangements do in fact conflict

with the rights protected by the First Amendment and whether requiring public employees to opt out of paying full dues (as they must do now) rather than having to opt in, similarly violate the Constitution. If the opt out system were changed to opt in, unions would have to actively register members every year, greatly diminishing their resources and their ability to focus on other pressing labor matters.

According to the official American Federation of Teachers (AFT) guide to the case ([www.aft.org/news/what-aft-members-need-know-about-frie-](http://www.aft.org/news/what-aft-members-need-know-about-frie-)

In the amicus brief filed by AFT on November 13, 2015, it was suggested that “the case threatens to make it harder for working people to join together and speak out together.” The brief also observes that, “when educators come together in a union, they are able to advocate not just for better pay and benefits but for a higher-quality public education for their students.... When working people can speak up together, our children are better off.”

Through their union, the brief maintains, educators receive not just better working conditions and more

equitable compensation, but also such vital gifts as professional development, health and safety support for themselves and their students.

“If the court overturns 40 years of precedent,” the brief concludes, “it will be much harder for unions to do this vital work.”

Supporting the position of the AFT are the AFL-CIO, many Attorneys General, the Solicitor General of the United States, the National Education Association, and many other organizations. Clearly, the case has national implications.

While many consider the case to be open and shut, especially considering the Justices who agreed to hear it, there is still a great deal of hope that the simple doctrine of stare decisis – which advises that

the Court should not overturn prior rulings unless there is a “particularly compelling reason to do so” – may save the day for labor unions. As the Abood ruling has held sway for so long and as the Court typically considers its own legacy when making decisions (especially under the leadership of chief Justice John Roberts), it is hoped that the Court will refuse to change the law simply because Abood has served the nation so well (coming as it did on the heels of a large spate of labor unrest in the 1960s) and because the Justices consider change to be detrimental to judicial history.

On the day of the hearing, members of Aft and other unions protested on the steps of the Supreme Court, asking the Court to continue to protect them by allowing their unions to do the same. Especially as the Court is sensitive to public opinion, such active engagement must continue all the way through June...and beyond. ■

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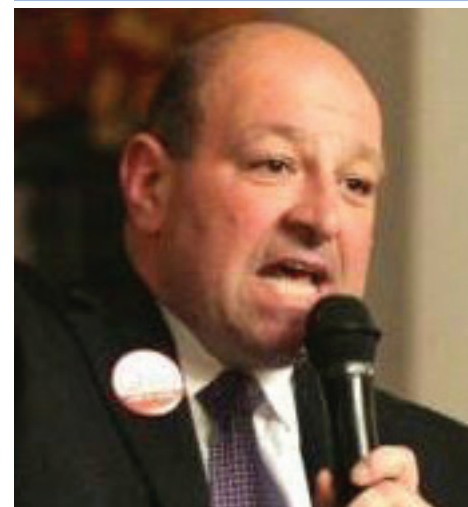
driehs-case), Friedrichs can be taken as “a national challenge [or] a tremendous opportunity.” The difference, according to our national leadership, hinges upon how we as a part of the larger Labor movement respond. In its continuing efforts to reclaim the promise of public education, AFT suggests that we can agonize or we can organize.

“Our job,” observes AFT President Randi Weingarten (herself an attorney who not only was admitted to the Supreme Court but co-wrote an amicus brief concerning Friedrichs), “is to connect with other members.” As we go forward, Weingarten suggests, we also need to go back to the days of the birth of the labor movement and make it a true movement again. Weingarten goes on to suggest that union power is important because it brings more resources for public services, better opportunities for students, safer hospitals and other public facilities, and a stronger infrastructure to help our nation thrive in a global economy.

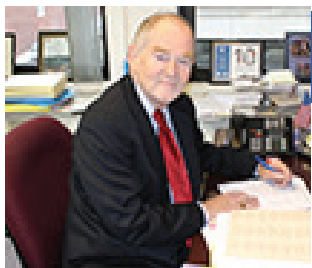
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**ANOTHER POLITICAL VICTORY**  
AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre was recently elected Councillor-At-Large in the City of Lynn (Please see story on page 12)



## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

# Your Union Needs YOU

**F**ighting to keep the cap on charter schools, increasing resources for public education and public libraries, involving our members in Union activity, and electing candidates who care about public education and public libraries are only some of the issues and activities which will be at the forefront for AFT MA in 2016. For a poignant example, one need look no further than the front page story about the Friedrichs Supreme Court case which is a frontal assault on unions.

The issues may seem different, but they are all connected.

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) has been an active opponent of the expansion of charter schools. We spoke out forcefully against their expansion in the 2010 education bill. We were a key component of the coalition in 2014 when the Massachusetts State Senate resoundingly said no to any further expansion of charter schools.

This year, Governor Baker and the proponents of charter school expansion are trying legislatively to expand the cap on charter schools. If unsuccessful there, they are prepared to present a proposal to the voters in November, 2016.

We are part of a coalition to defeat such a proposal in the legislature and at the ballot box.

AFT MA is also part of coalition which seeks to amend the state

constitution so that public education - pre-k through higher ed - will get more resources by requiring those whose income - not net worth - is more than one million dollars to pay 4% more in taxes on the portion of their income over one million dollars.

To accomplish this the voters need to approve the constitutional change in the 2018 election.

Elections matter. Unfortunately some of our endorsed candidates have disappointed us. The previous governor and various representatives and senators have taken some positions inimical to public education. The education bill, adopted in 2010, is one such example. Significant parts of that bill blame teachers for the lack of achievement by some students. Keep in mind that this approach of blame the teacher was adopted even though public school students in Massachusetts are number one in the nation.

What we need to do is build on our success in 2014 when the State Senate refused to raise the charter school cap by electing men and women who will vote in a likeminded way. Elections matter.

Teacher unions have done wonderful things for their members, the students, and public education. Unions have increased salary and benefits for their members, have decreased class size for their students, and have been articulate and vigorous advocates for the view that the strength of public education is

intimately connected to the strength of American democracy.

Of course, unions have done much more, but these are a few examples.

Getting more membership involvement in our unions is a priority.

At a leadership conference last fall many suggested ways unions can educate their membership about the value of a union and get more membership involvement. Here are five of them:

1. Form coalitions with community organizations so that members can connect their communities with their union and public schools and libraries.
2. Have members develop testimonials about the work unions have done for public schools and libraries and about contract benefits.
3. Host a reception for new members.
4. Organize retirees.
5. Survey the membership to determine in what ways they would like to be involved in their unions.

AFT MA will continue to advocate for quality public education and libraries, for connection with the communities in which we work, for better working conditions and benefits for those we represent, and for greater membership involvement.

Our opponents are strong. We must be stronger.

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

# 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](http://www.longy.edu).

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

## The Advocate

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Thomas J. Gosnell, President  
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Gale Thomas

Matt Robinson, Editor  
38 Chauncy St., Suite 402  
Boston, Mass. 02111  
Tel. 617-423-3342 /800-279-2523  
Fax: 617-423-0174  
[www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net) / [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)  
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## Keep the cap on charter schools

Go to

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

and write to your legislators.

**Together, we can WIN!**

## The 2016 AFT MA Convention will be held

**April 29-30, 2016**

**Certified lists of delegates  
are due to the AFT MA office  
postmarked by March 30, 2016**

**It's YOUR Union-  
GET INVOLVED!**



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

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

### Check it out!



[www.aftma.org](http://www.aftma.org)

# In the Shadow of Students

## Educator Opinion

By Riana Good

I have been a teacher in the Boston Public Schools for nine years and am often caught up in a teacher-centric world, despite knowing that the student perspective is key to a successful educational environment.

To better understand the student experience at Boston Latin Academy, I shadowed a student for a day, completed all of the classwork (with the exception of the science test, for which I hadn't studied or brought my notecard with formulas) and most of the homework. My observations were strikingly similar to those of a veteran teacher who wrote about her shadowing experience, and though I only shadowed a student for a day, this student and others report that the experience was quite typical. I tried to keep a low profile, though acknowledge that in cultural anthropology, the observer may influence the environment. Ultimately, my own perspective as a white, female, adult teacher also influences what I observe and what I see to be relevant and important. In italics I reflect on changes I would like to make to my teaching as a result of my observations.

1) The work felt like a good level of challenge, neither too easy nor too hard. There was a broad range in the extent to which and how teachers checked for understanding. For the most part, there was a lot more presentation of material than there was grappling with and making meaning from it.

*Changes to my teaching: Setting a timer to limit my own talking, providing more opportunity for students to make-meaning on their own.*

2) There was a lot of sitting and being quiet. With the exception of standing up to sing two songs in Latin and walking to the next class, students sat all day. Though there were some short opportunities to turn&talk in math and Latin, the student never actually said anything, which she said was because she wasn't sitting near anyone who turned toward her. She neither volunteered nor was she called upon in any class. The student spoke up a bit during group work in English and read aloud in her group, though didn't have opportunities to speak to anyone in World Language, History (substitute work), or Science (test).

*Changes to my teaching: Increasing opportunities to interact with peers about real-life events and their reflections; asking to hear from students who haven't spoken yet; tracking the gender and race of those who speak and seeking more balance and equity; cold-calling in a warm and supportive way; giving more wait-time, especially when asking for questions. As an ambivert who tends towards extrovert and as a language teacher who values oral participation in the classroom, my emphasis on talking in-class is understandable, though I also want to offer more time for individual reflection. Sitting and being quiet is*

*not inherently less good than moving and interacting, but striking a closer balance between the two would reach more learners.*

3) Teachers were patient in all of the interactions that I observed, though there was a degree of distance and anonymity. The student had no personal interactions with teachers, and the only time that she engaged directly with a teacher was to give her name to a substitute and for her homework/classwork to be checked in one class. On a larger-scale, more meaningful changes may only be possible through advisories or with longer block scheduling to allow for more time for student contributions, more movement and interactive activities in classes, teaching fewer total students, and more opportunities to engage with students in a more personal and meaningful way.

*Changes to my teaching: Offering more hallway greetings to students; choosing a different student or two to check-in with during homeroom each day; spreading our homeroom "Friday Funday" mingle activities to Mondays and/or Wednesdays; continuing to increase personalized feedback and check-ins with my students and all students.*



**UNDERCOVER EDUCATOR**  
Riana Good

## Picking Up the Pieces

### Mosaic artist Cheryl Cohen got her start in OT

The relationship between art and therapy has long been established and is one of the primary reasons why the arts are so vital to a well-rounded education (and a well-rounded person). Unfortunately, all students do not get this type of support in their regular school day and so they must seek out wraparound services outside of the classroom.

After providing such services in the Hopkinton and Maynard schools for decades, occupational therapist Cheryl Cohen decided to find a new way to share her art and its healing powers. These days, she continues to work with students, but in her Holliston art studio – Cheryl Cohen Mosaics ([www.cherylcohenmosaic.com](http://www.cherylcohenmosaic.com)) Art Center.

Knowing she wanted to support students from an early age, Cohen studied recreational therapy at Northeastern before changing to the Occupational therapy program at Boston University

"I wanted something more medically based," Cohen recalls.

In 2006, Cohen also felt the desire to learn more about the educational process and behavior management, and so went back to school herself to complete a Masters in Special Education.

"Working with children with special needs is always interesting and quite unpredictable," Cohen observes,

"At this point in my life with years of experience under my belt very little surprises me!"

After graduating, Cohen began to practice OT in a hospital for adolescents with "behavior issues." She then did work in the realm of early intervention.



**SUPPORTING STUDENTS ONE BIT AT A TIME**  
Educator and mosaic artist Cheryl Cohen

"I ended up in the public schools when my two daughters entered the public school system," she recalls, "and realized it not only had convenient hours, but was a great fit for me!"

Energized by the "bustle" of the public school and the smiling faces of the students, Cohen worked with colleagues who, she says, continue to inspire her today.

"Teachers are the most creative,

talented, giving people I have ever met," she says. "I loved going from one classroom to the next as each one is a different universe with a different, but special feel."

In addition to developing her creativity, Cohen also developed her mindfulness.

"I learned to be in the moment," she says. "I love children's sense of wonder about even the smallest thing. It reminded me that curiosity is so refreshing no matter what age you are. Also, I learned a lot about patience, how to make people laugh and the importance of that in a tough situation."

As mosaics involves creativity and fine-motor skills, Cohen says that it was a natural link from and a perfect fit for OT.

"I've always been an artist on the side my entire life," she explains, "and always dreamed of having an art center."

She had offered her first classes in her home while still serving the schools as an OT, Cohen soon found her home overwhelmed with art.

"My art room was so full with supplies," she says, "and students we could no longer fit!"

When one of her students informed her of some available real estate in Holliston, Cohen jumped at the chance.

4) The physical environment also played a role in the experience. The building was generally clean, hallways were only crowded in a few spots, and the cafeteria atmosphere was reasonably pleasant and the food line was fast, though more food was thrown away than was consumed. Though the 23mn lunch block was rushed, there was time to hang out with friends who we otherwise barely saw in-class or between classes. The bathroom, however, was unappealing, with Ramen noodles in one sink and large wads of toilet paper in another. Students report that this is typical, and somewhat tame in terms of how bad it can get. Some students report not drinking water so as to avoid having to use the unpleasant bathrooms, which may have an adverse affect on their overall well-being and ability to learn.

*Changes to my teaching: Supporting the Student Government to check-in with the student body about their ideas, and publicizing how a student can report concerns.*

More meaningful changes may only be possible by establishing advisories or longer block scheduling to allow for more time for student contributions, movement, and interactive activities in classes. Still, there are many opportunities to engage with students in a more personal and meaningful way, which I challenge myself to take on in the coming year. ■

Riana Good teaches Spanish at Boston Latin Academy, where she also serves as the faculty advisor to the Student Government and the Gay/Straight Alliance, and organizes with Boston's Teacher Activist Group.

"It was across the street from an elementary school and a middle school," she said, noting how this location made the space "perfect" for after-school offerings. "I put my deposit down...and never looked back!"

As the business began to take off, Cohen realized that she had to choose between the classroom and studio. So after 26 years at an occupational therapist, she decided to give the art studio a try. However, it was important to her that she also incorporate working with the special needs population in the art studio.

"There is nothing from my education background that I don't use every day," she asserts enthusiastically, citing such vital educational elements as differentiated instruction, diverse teaching styles and patience to be among her most important work habits and habits of mind. "My educational background had been invaluable!"

Now Cohen works mostly with typically developing children and adults, however, she has some special needs students. Though she admits that mosaics may not be for everyone (noting that some of her students find it difficult to work with "messy" grout and other materials, Cohen encourages people to try it. The glass is so beautiful, mosaics is a very success oriented type of art for all ages and abilities.

"I have one ten year old child with autism who has been taking mosaics with me for a year and a half," she explains. "Mosaics is his passion and he now has a full mosaic studio in his home..... It is a true joy to see his skills improve week to week!" ■

# Labor of Love

## Paraprofessional Perspective

### By Marcy Winer

I interviewed several of my paraprofessional friends and asked them what they love most about their jobs.

The answer is clear. We work with children because we love them. We want to see them grow into responsible, caring, respectful and educated adults and we feel that we can give them an early foundation of structure and support to help them succeed.

No child wants to feel alone, and it is often the paraprofessional rather than the classroom teacher who can take the time to get to know the child and help them while the teacher focuses on the necessary curriculum and explicit teaching that is required. I have always found this personal element to be very rewarding. If I can help a child calm down during a difficult time and let them know that there is someone who cares, that allows the teacher to continue with the lesson at hand. That is a valuable contribution!

Many paraprofessionals have college credits or completed a college degree and some continue with advanced degrees to become teachers. Many others stay as paraprofessionals, however, not because they do not want to become teachers, but because they love their role. Most of us lead instructional literacy and math groups on a daily basis and supervise the students when teachers are out of the room. We all love seeing the children progress academically, socially and emotionally. Most of the paraprofessionals I interviewed have over ten years

experience and some have previously worked in such diverse fields as business, health care and private child care before transitioning to public education.

The teacher/paraprofessional relationship is often a subtle dance of give



**POSITIVE PARA**  
Marcy Winer

and take and positive collaboration. I feel lucky that I have worked with some exceptional teachers in my years of education and have learned from many of them. Many paraprofessionals have worked with the same teachers for multiple years. That engagement will not only provide a warm classroom experience for the children, but will promote a happy working environment overall.

A school community is comprised of a variety of staff members. The paraprofessionals who feel the most valued have administrators who recognize their importance, appreciate and support their work and promote a fun, yet educational learning environment. At my school, we work hard and still

have fun. We are kept informed regarding school events and are always included in what is going on. There is no evidence of a teacher/paraprofessional segregation. We all work together and focus on the children. We have themed luncheons, a variety of contests, dress up for the holidays and generally enjoy each others company at work events and social gatherings. Most of the paraprofessionals I interviewed would like to have more work infused fun at their schools!

Paraprofessionals are some of the hardest working educators in schools today. We work side by side with classroom teachers, instruct small groups, and often interact with the children more than the teachers do. Many times paraprofessionals assist during lunch and recess time and only have their lunch break away from the children. We work hard for lower salaries and want to feel valued as educators. We wear many "hats" during the school day- nurturing children, acting as recess referees, psychologists, and competent educators. Every paraprofessional can add value to the classroom and enrich a child's life.

We work with children because we love them and care about their future successes. The positive interactions we share with children may never be measured by the amount of salary we receive, but rather in the care and education we bestow upon our students. That is why we love our job! ■

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).

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

**We put the**

  
**in**  


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## Benefit Bulletin: Drive Away Happy

Winter is a wonderful time to look into some great deals from car dealerships that are trying to clear last year's inventory. Although you might be busy digging-out of yet another snowfall during this winter season, don't let that stop you from digging-in to some great auto discounts from AFT +:

### Consumer Reports Discount

When you're doing your research for the perfect new or used vehicle, there's nothing that will make you hit the brakes quicker than knowing that you could have received expert, unbiased reviews and recommendations on many car models. Fortunately, AFT + is here to steer you in the right direction by giving you annual discounted access to Consumer Reports for just \$22 a year. With 27% off the

regular price, it really pays to do your research! Additionally, Consumer Reports is union-organized, with tes-



**CAR CARE**  
AFT keeps you moving

ters and writers represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA). It's a perfect partnership with Union Plus benefits.

### TrueCar® Auto Buying Service

Walking up to a dealership without doing your research is a lot like driving in

the dark without your car's headlights on. Luckily, AFT + offers a discount with TrueCar® that allows you to

sidestep any haggling detours toward your dream car by showing you how much others in your area paid for the same vehicle model. On average, union members and their families save \$3,279 off MSRP! In addition, you could be eligible for additional rebates of up to \$200 on a new union-made car or a new union-made EPA Green Car.

### Goodyear® Car Services Discounts

The beginning of the new year is a good time to put your best foot forward — and so is giving your car a new set of wheels to get you dashing through the snow. In addition to saving 10% on car service and 5% on preventative service from Goodyear®, you can pick out a set of snow tires at a 10% discount — and even 5% off already-discounted tires!

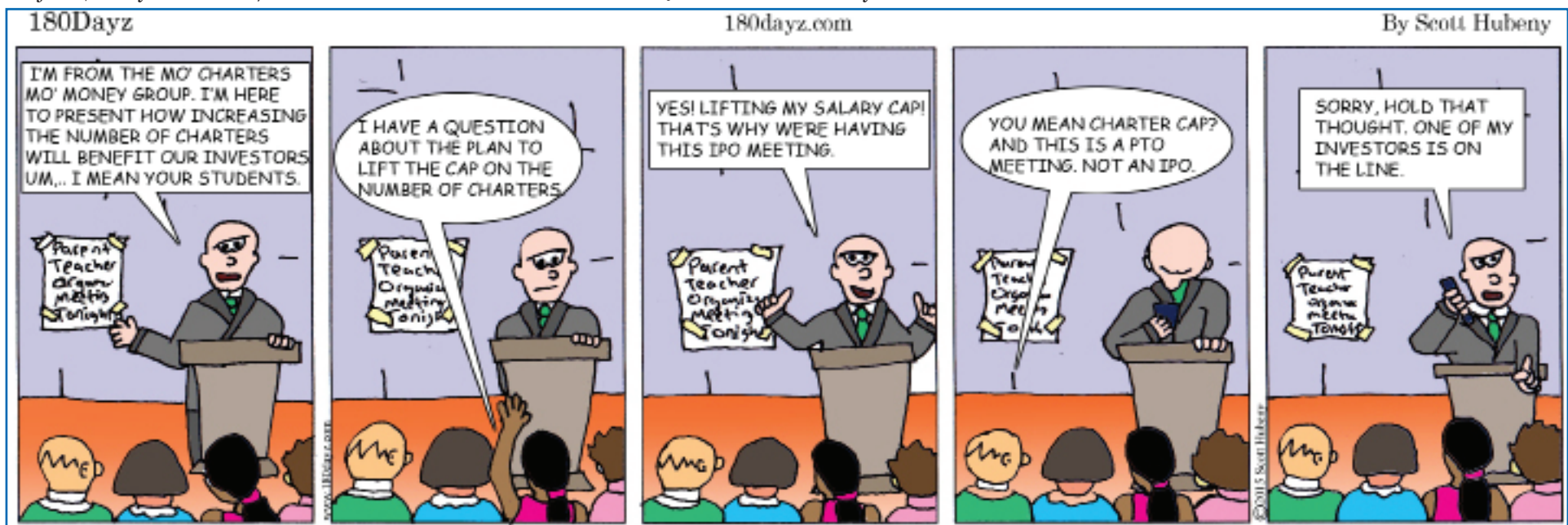
### Union Plus Motor Club

In this club, you don't have to worry about common vehicle issues that will deflate your winter spirit, such as flat tires, lockouts, dead batteries and much more. At just \$6.90 per month or \$69 for the year, your family's cars and light-duty trucks will be driving smoothly in no time. And don't forget if you sign up for an initial one year of service, you'll receive \$40 in gas rebate vouchers!

### Car Rental Discounts

The winter season is a perfect time to visit relatives or to just hop in the car for a weekend getaway. Whatever route you take, AFT + will get your motor running with car rental discounts from Alamo, Avis, National, Budget, Enterprise, Dollar, Hertz and Thrifty. Enjoy up to 25% in savings!

For more information about these discounts and many more, visit [UnionPlus.org/Auto](http://UnionPlus.org/Auto). ■



See how charters are affecting YOUR district at [http://masteacher.org/issues\\_and\\_action/charter\\_schools/money\\_districts\\_pay\\_charters.aspx](http://masteacher.org/issues_and_action/charter_schools/money_districts_pay_charters.aspx)

(Thanks to our friends at MTA)

# Legislator Profile: Maura Healey

As the eldest of five, Attorney General Maura Healey has decades of experience taking care of people. Raised by a school nurse, a military captain and civil engineer and an educator, Healey also knows the importance of honest work and of doing all you can to serve others. These lessons and skills have served her well throughout her legal career.

When asked about her earliest educational memory, Healey recalls her first day of school when she was six years old.

"I was dressed in a plaid jumper, red ribbon in my hair," she says, revealing the profound impact this day had on her, "waiting outside my house for the school bus and I remember how excited I was to go to school."

Growing up in the small town of Hampton Falls, NH, Healey attended a school that had only 120 students from first through eighth grade.

"I remember learning to write in cursive with penmanship books using big, fat red pencils," she says. I remember sitting in reading circles and playing outside for recess. I remember teachers who were kind who taught us reading, writing, and math, but who also put Band-Aids on our scratched knees and comforted us when we were sad. I remember feeling safe and secure and excited about new friends I was making and new things I was learning."

Healey's appreciation for her teach-

ers was so profound that Healey often found herself standing in front of her younger siblings, chalk table in hand, having them listen to her "teach".

"I especially loved my fourth grade teacher – Ms. Finnegan," Healey mentions. "We kept diaries in her class and she taught us that it's good to have your own thoughts and to write

them down.... Another favorite teacher was my science teacher and principal, Mr. Sanborn, who would take us to the marsh to wade and collect samples of nature.... He was a wonderful teacher who let us experiment.

Healey also fondly recalls a Spanish teacher named Mrs. Robinson who, she

says, "was especially kind to students who may have been feeling marginalized and needed a friend or a boost."

Though she benefitted greatly from the attention and support she received in school, Healey is aware that few students have such privileges today and realizes (as Mrs. Robinson did) that school can be especially challenging for students who do not see themselves as fitting in. That is why, as a civil rights attorney and now as the head of what she calls "the People's Law Firm," Healey has stood up especially for underprivileged and often ostracized students, including LGBTQ students. In the larger com-

munity she has also been a devoted champion of equal rights for women and the LGBTQ community, as evidenced by her tireless support for marriage equality and gender equity in the workplace and elsewhere.

Healey attended Harvard College, where she captained the women's basketball team. Her talents on the court led her to a career in professional basketball in Europe, after which she returned home to study law at Northeastern University School of Law. In addition to being named to the New England Basketball Hall of Fame, Healey has also been awarded the American Constitution Society's Award for Public Service, the Massachusetts LGBTQ Bar Association's Kevin Larkin Memorial Award for Public Service, and the Equal Justice Coalition's Award for Legal Aid.

When asked how she made the transition into politics, Healey responds that, as a student, she loved learning about history and civics.

"I learned about the importance of being involved in your own community," she explains. "We were encouraged in school to think locally and take an interest in your community."

Healey particularly recalls the opportunity she had in fourth grade to shadow a community lawyer.

"I knew right away I wanted to become one," she says.

And while her political aspirations may have taken shape later, Healey notes that she was elected class president more than once.

"Looking back now on what I learned in school," she muses, "I'm not surprised that I ended up in public service or in office because I was al-

employees to outside providers, who would then rehire paraprofessionals as independent contractors, has also been taken into consideration by Superintendent Tommy Chang. With the upcoming collective bargaining agreement for the Boston Teachers Union to be negotiated, reneging on promises made regarding pensions to the de-professionalization of the career will be on the table.

Boston Public Schools does not need to cut itself into oblivion. Politicians need to face tough education reform opposition and challenge the loss of \$121 million (which amounts to roughly \$1 million per school in the city) to charter schools while a high-needs population continues to see cut-backs in essential services. The city's budget remains choked by an outdated Chapter 70 funding formula that has not been adjusted to aid low-income

ways taught to keep an open mind and be open to opportunities that might present themselves."

In college, Healey majored in government and now makes every effort to engage other students and get them interested in the ways in which the "system" works so they can engage with it and make sure it works for them.

"Young people are our future," she observes, "and helping them is a top priority of our office. I am concerned that students aren't learning enough about government and civics. We need to support resources, so they can learn about the power of democracy and the importance of voting and civic engagement."

Healey still has a large place in her heart for educators and those who work so hard to support students.

"My mother was a school nurse and my stepfather was a history and social studies teacher in high school," she explains. "He was also president of our local teachers union. Around the kitchen table, we spent a lot of time talking about the challenges facing educators. And I grew up with a very strong belief that nothing was more important for our democracy than to support a vibrant public education system (and those who do the work)."

As life seems "more complicated" today than it was when she was growing up, Healey realizes that the challenges facing students and teachers have increased and that legislators need to do more to support them all.

"The best way to support our students and our future is by supporting our educators and our public schools," she suggests. "I am committed to doing just that!" ■

areas and gateway cities.

The most upsetting issue of the proposed cuts is the revised formula through which students receiving special education services are funded. Those who can least advocate for themselves have become the target of bureaucratic budget balancing.

Teachers lead by example, and by holding our public officials accountable to maintain the dignity of our chosen careers, perhaps eventually the erosion of our schools can be stopped and a free and public education can be guaranteed for all. ■

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

Have a comment?  
Please write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).



**TEAM PLAYER**  
**Atty. Gen. Maura Healey**

## Policy Perspective: Cutting away at education

By Cory O'Hayer

The Boston Public Schools are currently facing a budget shortfall of \$50 million. Nearly half of the expected cuts are to come from a new appropriation of the per-pupil expenditure allocated to district schools. These cuts target high school students, students with social emotional learning challenges as well as those on the autism spectrum. Schools that have invested in comprehensive programs to educate different style learners have found themselves especially hard-hit. Boston Community Leadership Academy, a high school where nearly a quarter of the student body receives special education services, is one such school. Schools like BCLA will receive \$1,300 less each school year per student diagnosed with autism, and nearly \$1,000 less for each student diagnosed with social emotional behavioral difficulties.

The extent of the cuts defies logic,

and continues to erode the limited services provided to our high-needs student population. Snowden International High School, an International Baccalaureate (IB) school whose mission it is to provide a global education and foreign language instruction, risks losing its Japanese program. Losing its school librarian will risk the school's accreditation, a complaint not exclusive to Snowden. With the anticipated elimination of a key position at Another Course to College, the school's entire student body will now depend on one guidance counselor.

Cutting from BPS has been a trend over the short tenure of the Walsh administration. Superintendent John McDonough faced a roughly \$50 million shortfall in early 2015 and proposed the closure of five schools in the district, ultimately settling on two in Hyde Park. Claims arose in September of 2015 that the Mayor intended to reduce the number of school buildings from 120 to 90. Those in the Bolling Building dismissed the plan, but the ten-year facilities master plan set to be released at the end of this year will likely seek a significant reduction in public schools.

City Hall will typically attribute much of the rising cost of educating students in Boston to inflated personnel costs. The overworked, underpaid mantra of the charter organizations can be an attractive narrative for the city bureaucracy. Already, an audit report has suggested the city target non-instructional paraprofessional staff. Outsourcing paraprofessional



**SALEM STUDENTS PROM-OTE COMMUNITY VALUES**  
Salem High School students display some of the dresses donated for student use by The Ultimate in Peabody. The students also organize and operate a free food pantry for the community.

# AFT's Frequently Asked Questions Re: the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

## STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**Q:** What does ESSA mean for a classroom teacher?

**A:** ESSA will end the obsession with testing in schools that began with its predecessor, No Child Left Behind, and was expanded through Race to the Top and waivers. These laws and regulations forced states to change their laws to compete for much-needed funds at a steep cost: a high-stakes, one-size-fits-all accountability system that ignored the reality of schools and required improvement strategies that did not work.

The provisions of ESSA show that the voices of educators have been heard. It will provide at the state and local levels the opportunity to create systems in which:

- Factors such as resources, working conditions and teacher voice must be considered.
- Teacher evaluation will be used to grow and strengthen the profession, not sort and punish.
- Assessments will be used to help improve schools and inform instruction, not arbitrarily measure them.
- Reasonable goals and objectives can be collaboratively established that align with the needs of students.

**Q:** What will happen at the state level?

**A:** Under the new framework, the states will take the lead on issues of accountability, resources, interventions and teacher evaluation systems. Undoubtedly, some states will mess up. Many, hopefully most, will learn from the failures of NCLB and give teachers the latitude and resources to deeply engage students and to focus on the whole child, instead of on tests above all else.

ESSA has the potential—if we get accountability right in the states—to give teachers the latitude to meet the needs of kids rather than simply focus on tests. We will just have to work to be sure it happens.

**Q:** What are the requirements for testing in ESSA?

**A:** ESSA testing requirements are the same as under NCLB, but the sanctions and consequences are very different and hugely diminished. States are required to test students in reading or language arts and math annually in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12, and in science once in each of the following grade spans: 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12.

**Q:** What happens with the data?

**A:** Data is still required to be disaggregated by race, income, English language proficiency and other specified categories.

**Q:** What, if anything, does ESSA do to lessen testing requirements?

**A:** The new law does include some flexibility and provisions to improve testing policies. For example:

- States and school districts can use funds to conduct audits of state and local assessment systems to eliminate unnecessary tests and improve assessments.
- ESSA also will allow for the development and dissemination of high-quality performance-based assessments through a seven-state pilot program. Under this program, states can develop and implement innovative assessments.
- While assessments for elementary schools must be the same for all public school students statewide, states may also choose to offer a nationally recognized local assessment at the high school level (SAT or ACT, for example) as long as assessments are reliable, valid and comparable.
- ESSA allows states to set a target limit on the aggregate amount of time that students spend taking assessments for each grade.

**Q:** How will the accountability system work?

**A:** States will be responsible for establishing their own accountability systems that must be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. Plans will be peer-reviewed, with the reviewers being made public, and states could have a hearing if their plan is turned down.

**Q:** How will accountability differ from what is there now? Is there still adequate yearly progress?

**A:** For states without waivers, the rigid system of AYP (the requirement that assessments be given to ensure that states increase student achievement in increments until all students in the state reach 100 percent proficiency) is gone. For states with waivers, the list of goals required as a condition of waiver is also gone. Instead, states will set their own goals. Goals will have to address proficiency, including for English language learners, and graduation rates.

**Q:** What are the required elements of an accountability system?

**A:** State-developed accountability systems must include each of these indicators:

1. Proficiency in reading and math;
2. Graduation rates for high schools;
3. English language proficiency;
4. For elementary and middle schools, student growth or another indicator that is valid, reliable and statewide; and
5. At least one other indicator of school quality or success, such as measures of safety, student engagement or educator engagement.

The accountability system must have substantial weights on indicators 1-4 above. In aggregate, indicators 1-4 must weigh more than indicator 5.

**Q:** What indicators other than test scores will states be able to use? Are there multiple measures?

**A:** There is no doubt that ESSA requires less emphasis on standardized tests. ESSA requires states to use other indicators of student achievement and school quality. These include student and educator engagement, school climate, access to and completion of advanced coursework, and postsecondary readiness. Other possibilities include other measures that can be replicated statewide.

**Q:** What schools are states required to identify?

**A:** States will use the results from the accountability system to identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of the schools in the state that receive Title I funding, all public high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students, as well as schools where any subgroup of students consistently underperforms.

**Q:** What must states do in/for those schools?

**A:** The prescriptive school closings, personnel requirements and punitive sanctions of NCLB, Race to the Top and waivers are gone. States, working collaboratively with local stakeholders (including teachers and their organizations), have a lot of latitude as they just have to provide:

- Targeted support and improvement: Schools with significantly underperforming subgroups (as defined by the state) must develop plans with stakeholders, based on all indicators; must include evidence-based strategies; and must be approved and monitored by the district.
- Comprehensive support and improvement: Districts with identified schools must develop plans with stakeholders, based on all indicators; must include evidence-based strategies and a resource equity component; must be approved by the district and the state; and must be monitored and reviewed by the state. Students at such schools are eligible for public school choice.

If, after four years of comprehensive support and improvement, schools don't meet state-defined criteria for exit, the state will take more rigorous action, which can include changes to school-level operations.

**Q:** Are there resources for school improvement?

**A:** Yes. ESSA requires each state to reserve 7 percent of its Title I-A allocation to serve schools implementing comprehensive and targeted support and improvement plans. Improvement plans are required to identify and address resource gaps and also require state monitoring of local spending.

**Q:** Do the collective bargaining protections under NCLB remain?

**A:** Yes. There is language saying that no policy a state pursues can overturn existing collective bargaining agreements or memoranda of understanding.

**Q:** Are parents allowed to opt their students out of assessments?

**A:** Parents can opt their students out of any required assessments for any reasons. Every year, school districts are required to notify parents of the state's testing policies. In addition, if requested, school districts must provide parents information regarding student participation in mandated assessments and the parents' right to opt their children out of the tests.

There will also be less pressure, as states will determine what weight they give student performance in the accountability system. So while 95 percent of students are required to participate in assessments, the stakes will not necessarily be as high.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

**Q:** What provisions are there for English language learners?

**A:** ESSA maintains Title III as a separate title with a separate funding stream dedicated to the education of English learners. It recognizes the large increase in the number and percentage of English learners in this country, and increases the Title III authorization levels.

**Q:** How are ELLs counted in accountability systems?

**A:** For the first time, English language proficiency for English learners is integrated into the system by which all schools and districts are held accountable. Furthermore, the academic achievement of English learners is more fully integrated into that accountability system. ESSA gives states two options for delaying English learners' inclusion in accountability systems while they are learning English:

- For one year, exclude the student from taking the reading/English language arts test and from counting results of either or both the math and English language arts tests; OR
- For the first year of the student's enrollment in a U.S. school, report on but exclude from the accountability system the results on these tests; for the second year of enrollment, include a measure of student growth on both tests; and for the third year of enrollment, include proficiency on both tests in the accountability system.
- English learners who have successfully exited the English learner subgroup by attaining English proficiency can be included in that subgroup for accountability purposes for four years. This extra year is something that educators have long argued is an appropriate and fair way to consider the unique needs of such students.

## TEACHERS

**Q:** What changes are there for teachers? Is there mandatory teacher evaluation?

**A:** ESSA ends the federal mandate on teacher evaluations. States will be allowed to develop and implement systems, as long as they cooperate with stakeholders, including teachers, paraprofessionals and their unions. But whether and how they do it is no longer a condition of getting funding, as it was with Race to the Top and waivers. So, there are no more federally-mandated test-based teacher evaluations.

**Q:** What provisions are there to ensure teacher voice and to ensure that working conditions are considered?

**A:** Local educational agencies can use funds to develop feedback mechanisms to improve school working conditions, including through periodically and publicly reporting results of educator support and working conditions feedback.

**Q:** Is there funding for professional development? Mentorship programs? Career ladders?

**A:** Yes. Resources will be provided to states and school districts to implement activities to support teachers, paraprofessionals, principals and other educators. The bill maintains a broad focus on making funds available for professional development, professional growth and leadership opportunities. Specific language provides that a state can use funds for centers on induction, class-size reduction, mentoring, career pathways and recruiting a diverse teacher workforce.

**Q:** Are there any teacher evaluation plans authorized?

**A:** There are programs that are allowable; nothing is mandated. States can apply for a grant for the Teacher and School Leader Incentives (formally TIF) program for teachers who raise test scores and close the achievement gap. While test scores are mandated to be included in this grant program, states have a lot of latitude in developing the system. In addition, there is a new collective bargaining clause stating that no programs funded through Title II can overturn existing collective bargaining agreements or memoranda of understanding.

**Q:** Does ESSA provide any resources to evaluate teachers' working conditions and stress levels?

**A:** Yes. ESSA allows states and districts to use Title II funds to conduct and publicly report on an assessment of educator support and working conditions that would be developed with teachers, leaders, parents, students and the community. It also encourages stakeholder involvement by requiring consultation with stakeholders to update and improve state activities.

**Q:** What are the Teacher Academies? Are they problematic?

**A:** ESSA authorizes an optional program of academies, which are public or other nonprofit entities (and may include an institution of higher education) to prepare teachers, principals or other school leaders to serve in high-needs schools. These may be separate from the traditional teacher preparation programs and traditional alternative certification programs.

ESSA provides a lot of latitude as to who can establish an academy, and the program requirements are mixed. These academies will need to be closely monitored at the state level and during implementation.

## PARAPROFESSIONALS

**Q:** How are paraprofessionals handled in ESSA? Are certification requirements maintained? Are there professional development opportunities?

**A:** Paraprofessional certification requirements, which help prevent school districts from hiring paraprofessionals with little educational experience or professional training, are maintained under ESSA.

ESSA ensures that paraprofessionals are included in the list of stakeholders who must be consulted in the development of the state and local plans in Title II, and the local plans under Title I, including the operation of a targeted assistance school program. There is also language that expands professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals, including how a state can establish, expand or improve pathways for paraprofessionals to earn a teacher certification.

## CHARTERS

**Q:** How are charters treated?

**A:** Charter schools have been part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act since 1994. The Every Student Succeeds Act expands current law by improving accountability in the authorization of the charter schools program. ESSA requires that charters educate the same populations as traditional public schools. It strengthens the standards that charters need to meet before being authorized, with a focus on fiscal oversight, and increases requirements that large charter school chains have appropriate parental involvement.

## EQUITY AND FUNDING

**Q:** How is the funding? Is the money still targeted?

**A:** ESSA increases funding to key formula grant programs. It rejects the current budget agreement in 2017 and increases authorization levels for ESEA overall by 2 percent each year in 2018-2020. There are no changes to the current Title I formula. There are some changes to the Title II formula that will provide resources to rural areas. ESSA also keeps the maintenance-of-effort provision that requires states to keep up their own spending at a particular level. And it increases authorizations for Title III, support for English language learners. Other programs and allowable uses of funds that will help level the playing field for disadvantaged students include class-size reduction, community schools and new early childhood programs.

## TIMELINES

**Q:** When does the law take effect? When do provisions go into place?

**A:** There are different timelines for different programs.

ESSA specifies that statewide ESEA waivers will be null and void on or after Aug. 1, 2016. Current adequate yearly progress requirements are effective through Aug. 1, 2016. ESSA has an 18-month transition period for states to align their accountability systems to the new requirements and begin identifying schools in need of interventions.

The new accountability system will take effect at the beginning of the 2017–2018 school year. Initially, schools and local educational agencies that have been identified for school improvement, corrective action or restructuring under current law, or as priority or focus schools under ESEA waivers, must continue to implement any interventions required under those authorities either until their state has a new Title I plan approved or the accountability provisions of the new law go into effect.

State assessment requirements and other requirements became effective on Dec. 10, 2015. ■

# FEATURE FOCUS: Social and Emotional Learning

## Sound Mind in Sound Body

### BPS appoints pioneering position to support student well-being

As hard as teachers work to engage support students, many need more than reading and writing skills. Whether it is due to divorce, death, illness, or myriad other causes, many students have social and emotional needs that not every teacher is fully qualified to deal with.

Fortunately, many districts are seeing the value in encouraging teachers to develop the skills necessary to help their students deal more effectively and successfully with life both inside and outside of the classroom.

In Boston, this campaign is being led by long-time social and emotional learning (SEL) expert Amalio Nieves, who was recently appointed by Superintendent Tommy Chang as the Assistant Superintendent of Social Emotional Learning and Wellness, “SEL is key to a student’s academic success,” Superintendent Chang observes, “and it needs to be incorporated into a child’s learning at a young age.”

Nieves has over 15 years of experience working in the field of prevention and social emotional learning and comes to Boston from the school departments in Broward County, FL and Chicago, where he served the public school system for many years.

“Amalio Nieves has a track record of building powerful partnerships and putting into place best practices that have demonstrated tangible results,” Chang adds. “We are excited he will be bringing his experience to Boston to help our youth succeed.”

Nieves’ appointment was also applauded by Boston School Committee Chair Michael O’Neill and Mayor Martin J. Walsh.

“The Boston School Committee’s strategic vision for the district calls for targeted interventions and support to meet the needs of all learners,” O’Neill said. “The hiring of Mr. Nieves is a great step forward as we work creatively to improve student outcomes.”

“I welcome Amalio Nieves to BPS,” Mayor Walsh said, “and thank Superintendent Chang and the Boston School Committee for their leadership and support on this important initiative.”

When asked to define SEL and to gauge its importance, especially in urban districts, Nieves says, “Many children...who grow up in poverty also experience chaotic environments, instability, and stressful relationships with adults. This impacts their brain development. This affects how they learn and how they respond to other stressful situations later in life.... SEL is a focus for BPS because we understand that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and

meaningful. BPS believes that school communities serve as a network of support for its diverse students, families, and staff. We believe that providing instruction, supports and services for SEL and Wellness is essential for the educational success of students.”

Nieves goes on to suggest that SEL support is especially important as Common Core standards and new high-stakes testing scenarios are introduced, as the unfamiliarity with these new protocols can increase student stress.

When asked to list elements of his new role, Nieves mentions such aspects as promoting positive school climate and youth development, preventing violence and bullying, and engaging students. “This office is also responsible for addressing compliance related mandates and coordination of student support services during crisis and trauma related needs,” he adds.

Growing up in Chicago, Nieves recalls how important it was to develop his own social and emotional competencies in order to “overcome the various challenges and struggles I had in my own life.” According to Nieves, “it is the social emotional competencies that I possess that have helped me

succeed academically and in life.” He therefore believes that any student can develop these skills and that teachers can help them most by developing the skills in themselves.

In Broward County, Nieves “witnessed the tremendous power of social emotional learning” while developing a multi-tiered system of supports involved positive behavior intervention, anti-bullying, substance abuse prevention, diversity, violence prevention, and sexual health initiatives. By combining these diverse disciplines, Nieves and his colleagues were able to support students behaviorally, socially, emotionally and academically.

“I also believe that the best work happens when we can marshal and harness the power of community to do this important work,” he says, recalling a number of “strong collaborations” that he has built among various stakeholder groups. “It has been these efforts that have led to the success of initiatives we have put into place.”

Though he is apparently the first cabinet-level public school district post in the nation related to SEL, Nieves hopes to work with colleagues in other districts and states in order to share best practices and support all student most effectively.

“My hope is to reach out to them and work collaboratively to establish a national model for SEL and Wellness,” he says. “Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker.” ■



CARING FOR THE WHOLE STUDENT  
Amalio Nieves

## Wrapping All the Way Around

### Open Circle provides support services to all involved in education

As more and more research proves, students need to be supported not only academically but also emotionally and socially. As families disintegrate and pressures mount, many students can find it ever-more-difficult to cope, let alone succeed.

Fortunately, many districts (including Billerica, Boston, Chelsea, Lowell, Medway, and North Reading) see the value in more comprehensive student support and are providing services to help students deal with life both in and outside of the classroom.

One of the most practiced and effective support systems is Open Circle ([www.open-circle.org](http://www.open-circle.org)), an organization that has been supporting students and academic staff for almost 30 years. Created by dedicated educator Pamela Seigle at the Stone Center at Wellesley College in 1987, Open Circle has supported over 2 million students and 15,000 educators in grades K-5 through its evidence-based curricula and professional development for social and emotional learning.

According to Co-Director Nova Biro, Open Circle’s “whole-school approach” helps the entire school community support students in proactively developing and emotional skills, including recognizing and managing emotions, empathy, positive relationships and problem solving. “Open Circle unites schools with a common vocabulary, strategies and expectations for student behavior,” Biro explains, noting that organizational research shows that Open Circle improves vital social skills such as cooperation, assertion, empathy,

and self-control and reduces problem behaviors like fighting. “Open Circle also helps schools build communities where students feel safe, cared for and engaged in learning,” Biro says, noting that the program promotes valuing diversity, safety, self-advocacy and collaboration. “When educators can proactively address problem behaviors, they have more time to focus on academics.”

In 2010, Tynan Elementary teacher Deborah Arlauskas was introduced to Open Circle by her then principal Eileen

Morales. Since then, she says, “my kindergartners have the chance to

speak candidly about any issues that they may be having at home or school during Open Circle.”

As Open Circle is part of the Tynan’s daily ritual, students and staff can count on it to provide a safe space for engagement and discussions.

“We have created our simple class rules,” Arlauskas explains, citing such vital guides as respect and kindness. “We act out situations that we need to address and come up with all kinds of solutions as a class family.”

Overall, Arlauskas is very pleased with the results. “I believe that the Open Circle Curriculum...helps my students to be the wonderful stars that they are today,” she says.

Though she is now at Lee Academy, Kindergarten inclusion teacher Colleen Labbe was at the Dever when she first encountered Open Circle.

“It was a meaningful experience,” she says of the Open Circle graduate coursework she completed at Framingham State University, “especially having the extra time to work one-

on-one with a coach from Open Circle.” As Labbe has moved from school to school, Open Circle comes with her, as have its benefits.

“As a kindergarten teacher in a low-income urban school,” Labbe says, “I strive to build a safe and supportive community.... The Open Circle Curriculum has promoted this, and more, in my classroom.”

When she first began using Open Circle, Labbe hoped to establish a “safe and supportive environment for all of my learners, including those who have been affected by trauma.” In doing so, she says, she is able to offer her students “ready to learn skills and strategies, including self-regulating, talking about feelings, problem solving, and building positive, respectful

relationships.”

As these relationships have deepened, so too have Labbe’s (and her students’) appreciation of Open Circle.

“My students would tell you that it’s their favorite time of day,” she says. “I have seen tremendous social and emotional growth with all of my students, including those that have special needs and students who are English language learners.”

When the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston introduced Open Circle four years ago, kindergarten teacher Tracy Coutts recalls that “the hope was to provide a time and space for kids to talk about social [and] emotional topics that come up.” She says that the program has provided all of that and also notes that it “provides a space for learning how to deal with problems you may face,” and also provides with skills and strategies to handle problematic situations.

“It’s a time where they get to talk about different things that we may not get to during the school day,” Coutts observes. “Through implementing Open Circle, students...have more opportunities to discuss things that come up for them and learn how to handle various situations that they may find themselves in.”

While some studies have demonstrated increased impact in urban schools, Biro suggests that the main determinant of success is the level of commitment to implementation. “There needs to be a whole-school effort to implement, assess and continuously improve social and emotional learning,” she observes. ■



A CIRCLE OF SUPPORT  
Boston students participate in an Open Circle session



# Once a Teacher...

## Educator Opinion

By Maurine McDermott

As a child, my favorite toy was a doll whose name was Suzy Smart. She came in a large box that included a desk, a blackboard and a pointer for her “teacher.” That teacher was me - a first grader from the Phineas Bates School in Boston, Massachusetts.

As a child, my favorite toy was a doll whose name was Suzy Smart. She came in a large box that included a desk, a blackboard and a pointer for her “teacher.” That teacher was me - a first grader from the Phineas Bates School in Boston, Massachusetts.

In second grade, all I ever wanted was to sit at the Miss Campbell’s desk. One day, Miss Campbell, announced she had to leave the room and chose me to sit at her desk and be in charge of the classroom. She asked me to write down the names of any students who misbehaved. After the teacher left, I gave the students a warning that I would write their names down if they didn’t stay in their seats, but they did not take me seriously and so I dutifully wrote their names down. When Miss Campbell returned, she thanked me and said, “Some day you will be a great teacher!” I felt like I was flying!

After I was accepted into Girls’ Latin School for grades 7-12, the memories of elementary school faded among the translations of Ovid, Virgil and Homer. Studying history and English, learning to speak German, and preparing for college became my goals. During this time, I also witnessed the Boston Busing crisis and was a victim of violence when bricks were thrown at our bus going through Dorchester. I recall coming home crying and asking my parents, “Why are people throwing rocks at our bus?” I couldn’t understand what had happened because I was a native Bostonian who had been taking the same bus on the same route from West Roxbury to Dorchester for five years without any incidence of violence. Fortunately, the crisis ended, schools were integrated.

While attending Suffolk University, I visited the law school and became interested in law. I applied for a part-time secretarial job in a small firm and was hired. This was to be the beginning of a long legal career. I moved on to a job in a large Boston firm that paid for me to attend Northeastern University where I obtained a Certificate in Paralegal Studies. The thoughts of Suzy Smart and Miss

Campbell’s class by now had disappeared from my memory, but when I lost my job at the firm after 9/11, I had to reconsider my career path.

One night as I was home filled with uncertainty and fear, wondering what I should do, First Lady Barbara Bush spoke on television asking people to consider a career in teaching. Though I initially convinced myself that, at 43, I was too old to go back to my childhood dream, I realized this was only because I was afraid of the challenges I might face. The more I thought about Mrs. Bush’s words, not only did it seem to be the perfect time to make a change, but also I thought that this might be my last chance.

In January 2003, I was accepted into University of Massachusetts School Master’s of Education Program with a concentration in Special Education. My UMAss adviser told me that it would take at least two years for me to obtain certification and a Master’s Degree, never mind finding a job, which may take longer. Determined to achieve my goals sooner, I attended a Boston Public Schools Job Fair in February of 2004 and was hired that day to begin teaching in September. BPS Hiring personnel sent a Letter of Reasonable Assurance that meant I was eligible for a position because I had been successful in their testing and interviews. Over the summer of 2004, I became a licensed Special Educator and received my Master’s Degree in Special Education. That September, I began teaching. Today I am also certified as a Special Education Administrator, a Teacher of English as a Second Language, and a Teacher of English.

My career path has been filled with potholes and detours, much like the City itself. I have often found myself working before and after school, nights and weekends. The only friends I had were the teachers in my school and I thanked God for them!

After a brief time teaching in Medfield, I was rehired by BPS as a special education humanities teacher in the Hyde Park Education Complex. This was the best position I had ever had as a teacher! My colleagues were

my friends and my friends were my colleagues. I was voted “Miss Congeniality” by the staff. As the school was close to my home, I even had time for outside interests. Most importantly, my students made progress on MCAS and my principal, Mr. Cox, made me feel as if everything I touched turned to gold. One day, he gave me chocolates with a note saying how happy he was that I had joined the community. I had never been thanked or acknowledged like that by a principal or staff before. I had taken on a leadership role that I loved!

In December of 2010, the Boston School Committee voted to close Hyde Park. Mr. Cox resigned and I ended up in the infamous “excess pool” where teachers who became unassigned through school closure are placed on a seniority list and provided with positions to bid for (most of which

are not matched with their qualifications and experience). As I did not get my first choice of placement, I ended up in mismatched position that almost led to the end of my teaching career, had it not been for the Boston Teachers Union. I was informed by Executive Vice President Pat Connolly and Field Representative, Caren Carew that The Collective Bargaining Agreement provided me the opportunity to excess

myself. In 2012, I excessed myself from Dorchester Academy, a school that closed last year. The move saved my career and my dreams of teaching and I owe the BTU a world of thanks. Had it not been for them, I may have left teaching permanently and not by own choice.

While waiting for the excess list choices to be provided, I applied for a transfer position at the Community Academy of Science and Health and was called for an interview by the Headmaster Tanya Freeman Wisdom. Four years later, I am still a teacher at CASH. Ms. Wisdom’s faith in me and her guidance have made me a better teacher and brought me back to the little girl whose favorite doll was Suzy Smart.

I am who I was always meant to be - A great teacher! ■

Maurine “Mo” McDermott is a Special Educator and ESL Teacher in Boston.



INSPIRED BY SUZY SMART  
Mo McDermott

# Berklee and Conservatory Merge

On January 19, Berklee College of Music and The Boston Conservatory agreed to merge, following a six-month exploration which culminated in unanimous approval by each institution’s board of trustees. After a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in June of 2015, input was gathered from faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and other stakeholders.

The combined institution, will be known as “Berklee,” with the Conservatory becoming “The Boston Conservatory at Berklee.” An ongoing regulatory and accreditation review and approval process is expected to be completed by early summer. The schools will also be combining boards and endowment campaigns, with Berklee’s \$100 million Soundbreaking: campaign being joined with the Conservatory’s 150th Anniversary Campaign, creating a combined goal of \$121 million.

As the realm of the arts and the means of artistic expression continue to expand, the schools hope to share their world-leading strengths to help the artists of the future take full advantage of new technologies and techniques. The combined institution is poised to become the leader in exploring and developing art forms, dissolving boundaries between and among genres, and unleashing tremendous creative potential around the world. The merger will also allow both schools to leverage strengths in co-designing new courses and hybrid programs, as well summer and study abroad programs that are not available elsewhere. In addition, Boston Conservatory faculty will have the opportunity to develop courses for Berklee Online, the largest nonprofit online music school in the world. Both schools are committed to expanding online education as a component of addressing college affordability.

“From our first discussions with the Conservatory leadership” said Jeff Shames, Berklee Board of Trustees chair, “we have felt a kinship around shared responsibility to our students and the future of the performing arts.... We see tremendous opportunities for all of our students to benefit from our combined resources, in a powerful new model of 21st-century performing arts training.” ■

## 180Dayz

180dayz.com

By Scott Hubeny

FOR MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION I'M GOING TO LOSE 50 POUNDS, GROW A FULL HEAD OF HAIR, AND CLIMB MT. EVEREST!

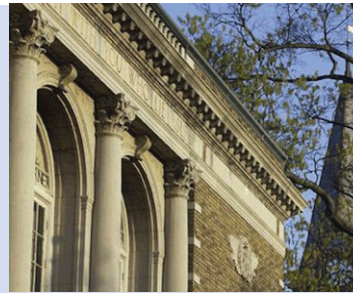
THIS YEAR I'M GOING TO GET A PH.D., WRITE A NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER, AND START A COLONY ON THE MOON!

MY GOAL IS JUST TO SURVIVE TEACHING UNTIL JUNE!



# On Campus

**Dan Georgianna, Political Director**  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## One More Swing

**A**fter writing *On Campus* for over 20 years, not writing the column was easy. I'm a slow writer and was having trouble meeting deadlines. I also thought that my column had become preachy and stale.

My replacement, Susan Krumholz, the current President of the UMass Faculty Federation, is in touch with the campus and is also an excellent writer who is willing to take on difficult topics. I applaud her work and recommend it to everyone.

Like most professors, however, I find it difficult to give up the floor. So, when I was invited to write about *Life after Writing* (the sequel to *Life after Retirement*), I took it!

I continue to spend a few hours a day reading Op-Ed articles. They have become the raw material for more of my columns than I would like to admit. As is the case with many Op-Ed writers, I often ended up taking my ideas from theirs.

While entertaining, most Op-Ed

columns on the 2016 election have little to offer beyond exposing the ridiculous claims by Presidential candidates or their supporters that are unfortunately all-too-common fare in U.S. Presidential elections. Such stories go back centuries. John Kennedy was reported to have made a deal with the Pope in 1960, and John Adams's supporters spread the rumor that Thomas Jefferson had died during the 1800 Presidential election. The more things change...

Most Op-Ed writers can't resist Donald Trump, whom E. J. Dionne of *The Washington Post* calls, "the GOP's working-class hero." Trump benefits from falling wages, high unemployment, and the rising rates of early death and bad health that drove many white working-class men and women to vote Republican for President and Congress. They buy Trump's tough anti-immigrant, anti-China, and anti-trade pacts because, according to Dionne, the Republican establish-

ment "[has] delivered next to nothing to their loyal white, working-class supporters."

Nor have Democratic programs to equalize income been much help to workers. George Will wrote in *The Washington Post* that transfer programs mostly shift wealth from the working-age population to the elderly and that regulatory government serves "those sufficiently educated, affluent, articulate and confident to influence the administrative state's myriad redistributive actions." Low interest rates shift "liquidity into equities in search of high yields, thereby enriching the 10 percent of Americans who own approximately 80 percent of the directly-owned stocks."

Maintaining the Republican capture of the white working class (similar to the capture of evangelical religious groups) which drives the Republican candidates, depends on emotions: fear and anger directed at terrorists, non-believers, and many non-whites. which finds easy targets in immigrants and President Obama.

which finds easy targets in immigrants and President Obama. The white working class and evangelical groups have nothing to gain from the rich reaping wealth through tax breaks, inaccessible health care, bellicose posturing, and education through testing.

The list of public policy beneficial to the nation seems simple to me: a minimum wage above the poverty line, sensible health care policies, effective and fair policing, effective policies that weaken terrorism, better schooling for pre-K through grade 12, and access to higher education for all who qualify. President Obama with the support from teacher's and other unions has lately had some success in advancing these policies.

While Hillary Clinton has wisely avoided the circus provided by the Republican candidates, it's time for her to move from collecting endorsements and raising money to clearly state her proposals to further these policies. ■

### AN IMPORTANT SURVEY FOR SENIORS AND THOSE WITHIN 20 YEARS OF RETIREMENT

MRU is conducting a survey regarding debt among seniors. Nearly 50 percent of all seniors are currently in debt and something must be done!

The purpose of this survey is to share information with the State Treasurer's Office so they can devise programs to help seniors eradicate debt and, more importantly, to help them avoid going into debt.

The answers need not reflect your personal situation, but can be just your thoughts on the subject or what you know from other seniors who are in debt.

Please send your responses by email [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org) or by mail to the answers to Massachusetts Retirees United, 314 Main Street, Unit 105 Wilmington, MA 01887.

Feel free to share this survey (and your thoughts and ideas) with others.

Thank you!

1. What do you feel is the cause of debt among seniors?
2. Is there some education that Massachusetts can provide seniors to help prevent them from going into debt?
3. What do you feel people can do in the years leading up to retirement to prevent going into debt?
4. What recommendations should be provided to seniors in debt?
5. List any other thoughts you would like to share on the topic.



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## Retiree Corner

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



## Here's to You, MRU!

The December issue of *The Advocate* marked the 10th year of the "Retiree Corner." For the most part, the column has focused on giving advice and information to retirees, or occasionally just giving us all something to think about. As Massachusetts Retirees United (MRU) does not have any paid positions, the best reward for all of us who give of our services through MRU is to know that we help others get the information and support they need in order to bring about positive change.

As I begin my 11th year writing, it is fitting to compliment this organization of over 3,000 fantastic members, all of whom roll up their sleeves to work for what they believe in and what may benefit them, but also what will benefit other retirees. MRU is the only retirement group in the state that consistently filed for, worked for, and was instrumental in getting the Maternity Bill passed. This bill increased pensions for over 1,200 women who retired prior to September 2000. No other retirement group in the state even testified favorably on this bill during the last seven years of hearings. When we learned that they had never been told, MRU also notified retired teachers from the Boston Retirement System about this benefit. Clearly, it is important to read articles written by and to open mail from MRU!

From the start, MRU has been

working to get those who served our country and were retired prior to July 24, 1996 to be able to count up to four years of their military service, as long as they do not exceed the 80% cap, to their creditable service. Again, no other retirement group is working for this benefit.

MRU is the only retirement group in the state that consistently filed for, worked for, and was instrumental in getting the \$15,000 increase one can earn when returning to a public sector job in the Commonwealth. No other retirement group testified on that bill either. Presently, we are working to increase the hours one can work in a public sector job in the Commonwealth from 960 hours a year to 1,500 hours.

**ARE YOU RETIRED  
OR SOON TO BE?  
PLEASE RESPOND TO THE  
MRU SURVEY ON PAGE 10**

We are also the only retirement organization in MA that is working to correct injustices for those living in other states that have an income tax. Currently, retirees pay a tax on the contribution they made to their pensions while working. This amounts to a second tax on contributions already taxed. Charles Butters, a retired Boston teacher, helped us to get this corrected in South Carolina. Still, there

are people who are not making use of this tax break because they do not know about it. Again, read this paper and your MRU mail!

When Kathy Kelley envisioned forming MRU, she knew that many locals had groups who looked at issues that pertained to their local areas. She wanted more and felt retired teachers would need more. She not only wanted an organization that could think outside the box, but would live and work as if no box existed. That is what we do and what MRU is all about.

So many times members tell me that the \$20 they spend (\$35 for two years) on membership is the best money they spend all year. They tell me they get it back through the many things they learn and through the money they save from what they learn. All member dues go back into member benefits. We offer dual membership to two people living at the same address at no additional cost. The second person need not even have been an educator or even retired at the time of joining.

If this sounds like a sales pitch to join MRU now or when you retire, it is more than that. It is an appeal to help you realize the importance of continuing education. Not knowing something in retirement and making uninformed decisions can be and is very expensive. That is what MRU is about- informing our members so that they can make educated choices and live their best lives. Unlike most retirement groups, we do not solicit membership to meet our payroll because we have none. We reach out to people to become members to help them and for them to help us correct injustices. Join MRU through this article and receive additional months of membership - one-year members will not need to renew until January, 2018 and two-year members until January, 2019. To get a form, email me at [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org) or call 1-781-365-0205. Here's to you, MRU! ■

### ATTENTION TEACHERS:

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

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

### ALSO

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

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

**Contact the Representative at [Timothy.Toomey@mahouse.gov](mailto: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.**

### SENIOR SEMINARS

#### Preparing for Retirement

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

Thursday March 10, 2016  
3:50-5:50 PM  
Chelmsford High School  
200 Richardson Road.  
N. Chelmsford, MA

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

Wednesday March 23, 2016  
3:30-5:30 PM  
Lawrence Teachers' Union Office  
1 Market Street, Lawrence, 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 and how penalties may affect you. Eligibility for Medicare will also be discussed.

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

## 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](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)**

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



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

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# Local Boy Makes GREAT

## In victory, Lynn native Brian LaPierre helps those who help him

Growing up in Lynn, Brian LaPierre had first-hand experience of the unique gifts and challenges of the largest city in Essex County. From Lynn Beach to Route 1A (a.k.a., “the Lynnway”), the gateway to the North Shore has much to offer and many cultures and voices asking for support. It is this mixture of issues that make the city so vibrant and that has kept LaPierre involved.

Late last year, this long-time public school educator and now public school parent who served as a vice president of the Lynn Teachers Union (LTU) and now also serves his union brothers and sisters as the Political Organizer for AFT MA took on a new role in his continuing quest to find more ways to help his friends and neighbors. On November 3, 2015, LaPierre topped the ballot in the race for a Councilor-at-Large seat in Lynn. Even before his January 4 inauguration, however, he was hard at work doing all he could for his beloved city.

“I am a local Lynnner and not a politician,” LaPierre suggests. “I have the city’s best interests at heart and always try to help.”

When asked how he first got into politics, the political science major at Salem State University recalls running for Ward Councilor in 1995. Even before this city-wide campaign, however, LaPierre was part of the process in Lynn, serving as president of Lynn Shore Little League when he was only 19.

In 1991, LaPierre worked on what he considers the “most influential campaign of my career” – supporting Salvy Migliaccio’s successful run for the same position LaPierre now holds.

“I had volunteered before for a mayor and local state representative,” LaPierre recalls, “but that was the first campaign that I was in charge of and that was the catalyst for my interest in politics.”

While at Salem State, LaPierre began to serve as a substitute teacher in Lynn.

“Politics prompted my career,” he suggests. “I was very active in my community and teaching seemed like a good way to support others.”

His undergraduate background in political science “lended itself” to LaPierre’s pursuing social studies as his particular field of educational expertise. After garnering a Masters in Middle School Education, LaPierre began to teach at the Marshall Middle School. Even as he helped students learn about government, LaPierre kept a hand in the process itself.

“I tried to remain active in politics when I was teaching,” he recalls, “especially at the local level.”

While teaching, LaPierre also began to rise among the LTU ranks, eventually landing the role of Vice President under Alice Gunning from 2002-2008.

“She put me in charge of all the local political activities,” LaPierre recalls. “This allowed me to form and build relationships with many of the elected officials in Lynn.”

As LaPierre worked so hard for

his fellow members, when a position became available at AFT MA, he was considered and, when his next school year ended, he was hired.

“The opportunity came up to serve as a field representative when Jay Porter passed away in the fall of 2007,” LaPierre recalls, noting that, as he was teaching at the time, he was willing to wait for another chance to serve statewide. “When Carrol Pacheco gave her notice to retire, Tom, Anne Marie Dubois, and the committee asked if I were still interested to start in the spring and I said it would be perfect!”

Though he was imminently qualified, LaPierre says that he was still surprised when he was named Political Organizer for AFT MA. Even so,



### STANDING UP FOR HIS CITY

**AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre (back row, third from right) stands with his colleagues on Lynn City Council after being sworn in to his new position on January 4, 2016**

he says, having had “successful run” in 2012, LaPierre “got the bug,” and when the position was offered, he jumped at it.

“I was not thinking that I would be a candidate myself,” he mentions, “but it was always work I liked to do-I liked doing campaign work and I liked working with people, especially our members.”

As more and more AFT MA members were “getting excited about participating in the political process,” LaPierre was able to find many kindred souls and both feed and feed off of their energy.

“The ball got rolling from there,” he recalls, “and it got contagious!”

As the energy built, LaPierre also noticed other vital changes among his political peers.

“The labor movement shifted from being sign holders to ‘get out the vote’ ambassadors,” he observes. “Teachers saw their profession under attack and they also saw the impact of their work on the ground. They knew that, by being political, they could effect change.”

When asked what they key difference that he sees among his brothers and sisters in Labor, LaPierre replies, “we do a higher-level ask now and it is engaging people more.”

The more his colleagues got into politics, the more the “bug” began to gnaw at LaPierre himself. As much as he had done for his fellow teachers and labor members, he wanted to do even more for his friends and neighbors in Lynn. So when an open seat emerged for the position of Councilor-at-Large in 2014, LaPierre again answered the call.

LaPierre saw the open seat not only as a great opportunity for a self-de-

scribed “outsider” to make his mark, but also for an educator to bring the voice of the teachers and students back to the Council after a decade without.

“It has been 10 years since the City had an educator on the Council,” he recalls. “The schools are underfunded and there is a charter school stripping away \$10-12 million per school year. I wanted to highlight these issues and get our members active. I felt our members were not feeling fully represented from an educational standpoint, so I felt that to have someone with an educational background whose wife is a teacher and whose kids are in the public schools would be good.”

As he was loathe to back down on any other duties, LaPierre had to call on his family and many of his friends for support. Fortunately, they were all more than willing to help the man who had always done all he could to help them.

“I had to balance all my other duties for AFT MA and for my family with a heavy campaign,” he recalls. “It was tough.”

Going door to door on every street and cul-de-sac in Lynn, LaPierre and his team reconnected with old friends and introduced himself to hundreds of new ones.

“We started very early and got out and introduced ourselves as a new choice who was an educator and a local who knows Lynn and who was hands-on and willing to serve the community,” he says, thanking his wife, parents, and in-laws, among his many supporters. “It was a new type of campaign that fit with the times and it really started to take off!”

In addition to the support of his family, friends, and colleagues, LaPierre received significant aid from teachers and paraprofessionals in Lynn and in other cities and even from representatives of other unions.

“We had support from letter carriers and MLSA and the teachers unions in Lynn, Lowell and Lawrence and the North Shore Labor Council,” he says.

“There was a tremendous amount of support from all sectors of labor. Even MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman and Treasurer Deb Goldberg came out for me and endorsed me at a big event we had with Jimmy Tingle. And I would be remiss if I did not single out LTU President Brant Duncan for being an intricate part of our successful campaign. He is a terrific friend and colleague!”

LaPierre is also quick to thank AFT MA President Tom Gosnell for allowing and encouraging him to run such a successful campaign.

“He came to all my events and was very helpful in terms of communicating with our members across the state and especially in Lynn,” LaPierre says. “He let me do my full-time job in a way that I could also do this.”

When the campaigning was all done, LaPierre had not only won the seat, but lead the field, winning 21 of 28 precincts with 5,661 votes, which was 960 more than the second-place candidate.

“We gave the full effort and full campaign,” LaPierre recalls, noting that he often wrote down what people mentioned in their conversations and replied to every request as soon as possible (as is his way). “I had my personal phone number on each piece of literature...[and] we had a huge social media campaign and an active website ([www.lapierreforlynn.com](http://www.lapierreforlynn.com)).

“I want to pay attention to the little things,” he says when asked what his plans are now that he is on the Council. “There is a lot of attention to 1-A and the Lynn Auditorium and other big-picture items, but the people I talked to wanted retuned phone calls and trees planted and pruned. They wanted city services and help getting them. Those are the nitty-gritty things I like to pay attention to.”

Among LaPierre’s top priorities are keeping a full-service medical facility in Lynn, making the City attractive to businesses and families, and, of course, improving the City’s public schools.

“I plan to be very active to open a new Pickering Middle School,” he says, noting that his wife teaches there and that his sons will soon be students there as well. “We hope to get a shovel in the ground to get that going this year.... I also look forward to working with my colleagues and fellow union members to make sure we can deliver a school our students deserve.”

Though he has so many good memories and so much to say about the campaign, perhaps LaPierre’s political slogan says the most. On every poster and pin were the words “High Hopes.”

“The song is a throwback,” he suggests, “and I think I am a throwback candidate.... The job has not changed- If people are in need, I try to help them in any way I can.” ■

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

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

**Thank you!**

