



# The Advocate



AFT Massachusetts  
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February 2014

## Establishing a Firmer Foundation

### Teachers and legislators unite to support ECE

As Massachusetts schools prepare to “test drive” and perhaps eventually adopt the new Common Core-based PARCC assessment, considerable attention continues to be focused on what can and should be done to better prepare our students for success in these tests and in life. In Massachusetts and across the country, a growing number of studies points to the importance of early childhood education (ECE).

For this reason, a large number of state legislators have come together with the support of the Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Union - a joint campaign of AFT-MA and MTA - to put forth and support a pair of bills that would establish a new group through which ECE workers could discuss and seek to improve the conditions in ECE centers so that they could focus more time and energy on serving their students and communities. House Bill 477 and Senate Bill 223 would enable teachers and directors working at about 500 resource-needy independent centers to form a certified organization empowered to negotiate with the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC) over a range of issues that are currently regulated by DEEC.

On February 6, educators, legislators, concerned parents and students packed a private room in the House lobby at the Massachusetts State House to learn more about pending legislation (House Bill 477/Senate Bill 223) that would allow and encourage many early childhood educators to speak on their own behalf in an effort to improve their working conditions and the learning conditions of their thousands of students.

“We are all here today because it has been shown that investments in early education lay the foundation for the rest of a child’s educational career,” said AFT MA President Tom Gosnell. “It is essential that we continue to invest in their future.”

In addition to legislative sponsors Sen. Sal DiDomenico and Rep. Jeffrey Sanchez and co-sponsor Rep. Stephen DiNatale, the event was also attended by Rep. Jon Zlotnik, Rep. Tackey Chan, Rep. Claire Cronin, Rep. Jay Livingstone, and other legislators and community leaders.

In his remarks, Rep. Sanchez discussed the difficult and challenging conditions under which many ECE workers care for and educate the Commonwealth’s youngest citizens. While he mentioned a recent bond bill intended to raise funds for physical plant improvements, Sanchez emphasized how, “in addition to fixing

buildings, we also need to support the workforce.” He also suggested that the increasing emphasis put on testing makes it necessary to support the earliest educators because, “as we impose increased standards, we must be sure the children are prepared.”

As the father of a five-year-old daughter, Sanchez is especially at-

“Go back to your offices,” he suggested, “and please tell your legislators that this is an important bill to put through this session.”

In addition to being important for parents and legislators, this issue is also foremost in mind for many of our brothers and sisters in Labor. In fact, MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman was keen to comment on it.

“Early child care educators are critical to the lives of many Massachusetts working families,” Tolman said. “We need to ensure that these professionals have a voice in setting general and basic standards for early education. Their professional experience and their own education is too closely aligned to the improvement of our state’s early education system to keep them out of the deliberations about how best to strengthen early education for all children in Massachusetts.”

In addition to the legislators and union administrators, many teachers had taken time off to participate in the event and support the legislation. Among them was Susan Rogers, a teacher and assistant director at Commonwealth Children’s Center.

“This legislation is important because it is the only way for teachers and directors to unite across the state of Massachusetts in order to have an effective impact on the direction of early education,” Rogers claimed, urging the assembled and everyone to reach out to their colleagues and local representatives to help push this important bill forward. “We should be the people ensuring that the state assists us in upholding our oath, which is to provide children with a quality education from birth. Every child should have access to childcare that is safe, engaging, professionally staffed and of the highest quality.”

Before people can fully get behind the bill, however, they need to understand it. That is why Atty. Ira Fader also participated in the event. During his talk, the MTA counsel who had a hand in drafting the bill carefully explained each section and point so that everyone could be clear on what is and is not being asked in the proposed legislation.

Citing ECE as a “hot button issue” across the country, Fader pointed out how “most agree about the importance of early child education in preparing kids for their eventual educational careers” and cited evidence that demonstrates that “kids who have been through some sort of program before kindergarten fare much better.”

Noting that Chapter 15D of MA General Law created a Department of Early Childhood and Development and that this agency is “already dealing with many of these issues,” Fader

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**GIVING CHILDREN A BETTER START** Commonwealth Children’s Center Assistant Director Susan Rogers, Chicopee Child Development Center Director Alissa Papuzynski, and Pittsfield Kidzone Director Tracy Sheerin unite to support their fellow Early Childhood Education workers in turning House Bill 477/Senate Bill 223 into law

tuned to the needs of parents with young children. “I want to make sure she is ready to learn,” he said, noting, “That is what this bill is about- investing in our educators and allowing them to talk about the conditions they are working under.”

Senator Sal DiDomenico, the lead sponsor of the Senate version of the legislation, explained his motivation in offering the bill that now enjoys over 50 supporting sponsors in the House and Senate.

“We filed this bill...[because] the teachers are who makes things happen,” he said, “so keeping good teachers is important!”

Citing ECE as “the foundation of education” (a fact that is backed up by copious and convincing data), the senator said, “We must provide the necessary resources to keep people in this field.... Keep good people in the field, and we will all be happy!”

As so many ECE workers make so little (the average wage is just \$25,000 a year), few are able to afford to stay in the field, especially after they garner any advanced degrees. As a result, teacher turnover is high, which is a factor in diminished quality.

“It is about quality,” DiDomenico observed. “There is no doubt about that!”

As a parent, DiDomenico has seen first-hand the benefits of quality ECE teaching and teachers.

“My children have benefitted from early childhood education,” he said, “and I know it is a big issue in this state.”

That is why DiDomenico closed with a call to action for those in the room and those outside.

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## BOSTON STRONG

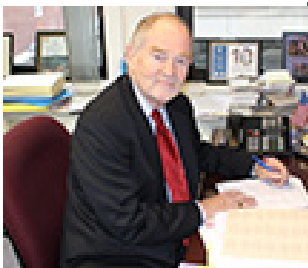
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**CHECKING ON THE CHARTERS**  
Citizens for Public Schools’ Vice President Norma Shapiro with AFT MA’s Assistant to the President Ed Doherty at the CPS forum at Madison Park High School, on January 25. For story, see page 3.





## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

# A Potpourri of Issues

**E**vents in 2014 have met my expectations. Many issues are gushing forth and will continue to do so. This article will refer to a number of them.

### MCAS AND THE COMMON CORE

AFT MA has consistently opposed the use of MCAS for high stakes testing. One of our concerns is that this emphasis meant that an excessive amount of time has been and is being devoted to test preparation and the students' taking of tests.

Another concern has been that students' results on the tests would be used to evaluate teachers even though MCAS was not created for that purpose. Although a number of states have been using students' scores on standardized tests to evaluate teachers, such use has been extremely limited here. We want that to continue.

Another concern is that this fixation on high stakes standardized testing would lead to a constriction of the curriculum. This has happened. For example, the offerings in art and music, necessary components of the education of the whole child, have suffered greatly. Since much time is used for high stakes testing, time is frequently lacking to incorporate the arts into the curriculum.

Now along comes the Common

Core Curriculum. Massachusetts is one of the many states adopting it. Whatever its merits or deficiencies may be, one thing is certain. If the assessment is done in a slip shod and superficial manner, the assessments will be suspect. Implementation of the assessments in one state was so unprofessionally done that students' scores dropped so precipitously that the scores have no credibility.

AFT MA will continue to express its objections to excessive testing, high stakes testing, its uses, and the implementation of assessments that promote harm rather than benefit to the education of our students.

### DISTRICT DETERMINED MEASURES (DDM's)

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is requiring that all communities include some measure of student academic progress in their teacher evaluation instruments for pre-K to 12. Obviously this can be a thorny issue, but whatever will be implemented is subject to collective bargaining. We shall be working with the locals to negotiate the most professional and protective language possible. Much more information will follow.

After all, AFT MA wants what is best for the students, fair to educators, and collaboratively done.

### HEALTH INSURANCE FOR FUTURE RETIREES

Last year the Governor submitted legislation which would significantly alter the health insurance benefits for future retirees. Cost would be tied to length of service. For example, those who worked in public employment for twenty years would pay higher premiums than those who worked thirty years. This type of proposal would not affect current retirees but would affect current public employees who eventually retire.

A hearing was held in 2013 at which many public sector unions voiced their displeasure with the bill. AFT MA was among them. So far the legislature has not crafted its own bill nor has it taken any action on the Governor's bill. We shall keep you informed.

### REFERENDA ISSUES

In Massachusetts, referenda are known as initiative petitions. Within the last few years, AFT MA, in alliance with many other groups, opposed two petitions which would have devastated public services by sharply reducing revenue. Fortunately, the voters wisely rejected both.

Now, the labor movement is vigorously pursuing two petitions which would increase the minimum wage and guarantee five sick days for a larger number of workers.

The Executive Board of AFT MA has voted to support both of these referenda and will be sending information to all of you.

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



### ANNUAL AWARDS

2013 recipients of the UMass-Dartmouth AFT Local 1895 Faculty Federation Annual Awards (front row, from left) Dr. Kevin Stokesbury, Dr. Tracie Ferreira and Barbara Cunha, RN, stand with Faculty Federation President Dr. James Griffith and ESU Chair Bruce Sparfven (photo by Justin Maucione)

## The Advocate

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c. 2013 AFT MA, ARR

## Make Sure Your Voice Is Heard: Take the TELL MASS Survey

**T**he statewide "TELL Massachusetts" survey officially launched on January 21, and will remain live until March 3, 2014.

Last administered in 2012, TELL MASS is an anonymous, online survey of licensed, school-based educators that assesses school climate, teaching and learning conditions, and supports for teaching. The survey is being administered by the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in conjunction with the New Teacher Center. AFT Massachusetts is a member of the TELL MASS 2014 Advisory Council and strongly encourages all eligible educators to complete the survey.

"This is an invaluable opportunity to ensure that educators' voices are heard in matters that affect teaching and learning," said Dan Murphy, AFT MA's director of educational policy and programs. "Ideally, the results can be used by teachers and administrators to engage in collaborative school improvement planning. Strengths can be celebrated and areas needing more work can be tackled jointly."

The following are some key facts relating to this year's survey administration:

- The online, anonymous survey runs from January 21 to March 3, 2014
- School-based educators in licensed positions are eligible to take the survey (e.g., teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, and others in jobs that require a DESE license).
- Eligible educators can access and take the survey at [www.tellmass.org](http://www.tellmass.org) via any Internet location, at any time, using an individual, anonymous access code.
- Educators should receive letters of instruction and access codes from their building principals. The codes should be distributed randomly to ensure anonymity.
- Educators who do not receive an access code can request a single code via the TELL MASS Help Desk at any time. Also, if needed, multiple codes for educators at a school can be obtained by any school representative (e.g., any teacher) one week after the launch of the survey (after Jan. 28). The school representative should call the Help Desk at 1-800-310-2964 and provide an email address to receive "batch codes" to be printed and disseminated to colleagues in his/her school.
- A school must achieve a 50% or higher survey participation rate in order to receive building-level results.
- During the survey window, anyone can view the real-time response rate tracker at [www.tellmass.org](http://www.tellmass.org) to make sure schools are on track to reach the minimum 50% participation threshold.
- Survey results will be made available five weeks after the survey window closes. Once posted, the data will be passcode-protected for a two-week courtesy review period.
- Extensive information regarding the survey, including 2012 results, can be found at the TELL MASS website, [www.tellmass.org](http://www.tellmass.org). Questions or concerns regarding taking the survey may be directed to the TELL Mass Help Desk by calling 1-800-310-2964 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. EST.

### ATTENTION PARAPROFESSIONALS

**THE 2014 BTU—AFT-MA  
PARAPROFESSIONAL  
STATEWIDE  
CONFERENCE is COMING  
APRIL 5, 2014**

**at BTU HALL  
(80 Mount Vernon Street,  
Dorchester, MA 02125)**

**Registration Deadline is  
Friday, March 28.**

**To register or for more  
information, contact  
Pat O'Donnell at  
the Boston Teachers Union  
(617-288-2000)**

### Want more information?

**Want to get more  
involved?**

**Go to our website for  
exclusive information  
and access.**

**[www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)**





# Checking on the Charters

## Citizens for Public Schools hosts forum

With a new administration in Boston and more applications for charters being presented across the Commonwealth, the issue of charter schools remains one of the primary concerns for supporters of public education.

On January 25, Citizens for Public Schools ([www.citizensforpublicschools.org](http://www.citizensforpublicschools.org)) hosted a public forum at Madison Park High School in Boston to discuss the state of the charter school movement and what it means for public schools.

“We are here to examine an experiment that began in 1993 with the Education Reform Act,” explained Citizens for Public Schools (CPS) Vice President Norma Shapiro, noting that, as we are all tax payers in addition to concerned citizens, we have the right to know if charter schools represent the “best way to spend the money that we budget for our children.”

In addition to over 100 students, teachers, parents, community members and education and community leaders in attendance, the event featured a pair of panels that included both local and national experts on education and education policy. Among the speakers were AFT MA’s Special Assistant to the President Ed Doherty, Mass Advocates for Children’s Jerry Mogul, Roger Rice from the Multicultural Education and Training Association (META), Medford Superintendent Roy Belson, Lawrence School Committee member James Blatchford, Lynn School Committee member Charlie Gallo, and Dr. Daniella Ann Cook, a professor in the Department of Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of South Carolina.

In his remarks, Doherty cited the “similar views” that are shared by AFT MA and CPS. “Too much money is being drained from our public school systems to pay for charter schools,” Doherty said, noting that, this year alone, the City of Boston has had \$87.5 million taken from its School Department budget on account of the growing charter school presence. “The state has to find a way to reimburse our cities for these crippling losses.”

Doherty also noted how charter school enrollments rarely reflect the communities in which they are established, especially in terms of students with special needs or students who need extra support learning English. “They are very quick to send back to public schools students who do not perform well or who cause any problems,” Doherty observed.

Doherty also noted how AFT MA and CPS share in their disappointment regarding how many charter school teachers are not as fully qualified or certified as public school teachers are and, in fact, must be. “We believe teachers in charter schools should be held to same high standards...and certified under the same terms and also receive professional teacher status as we do,” he proposed.

In closing, Doherty strongly urged all those who are interested in the state of public education (which should include all of us) to read Diane Ravitch’s new book, *Reign of Error*, a book that was recently presented by AFT MA to every state legislator. “We hope that [you and] they will take the time to read that book,” Doherty said, “and if you see your state representative, please ask them if they have.”

Speaking of state representatives, Frank Smizik from Brookline, Pat Jehlen from Somerville and Liz Malia from Jamaica Plain were all in attendance at the event and all received appreciative ovations when introduced.

In her remarks, Professor Cook quoted famous education expert John Dewey in proposing that, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children.” In saying this, Cook echoed Doherty in suggesting that one of the main problems with the charter school movement is its lack of equality in terms of the students it serves.

“We have to hold charters schools – and all schools – accountable for equity,” she said, noting that the “danger” inherent in surrendering public education to a market system is that “someone has to be a winner and someone has to be a loser.” Cook also noted how many elements of the market have crashed and suggested that, as students are not “widgets,” such a system is inappropriate and unfair.

Cook also emphasized Doherty’s points in discussing the lack of training many charter school teachers have. “You want the best surgeon working on a tumor,” she suggested, using a medical reference as a tribute to her Boston hosts. “We want the best teachers with students who need the most help.”

While she realizes that “the reality is that charters are here,” and admits that some charter schools have developed useful ideas, Cook complained that most charters are unwilling to share their ideas (as they were originally intended to). “People say they care about kids,” Cook observed. “We have to look at who is giving what information and how independent it is.” After all, she noted, “Choice is an illusion without better communication and accountability.”

As noted by CPS Executive Board member Alain Jehlen, many students are not given a choice at all when it comes to whether or not they can benefit from the alleged advantages of charter schools. “The central promise of charters is to take the same kids and do a better job,” he suggested. Unfortunately, Jehlen noted, “they do not serve many students with substantial disabilities” or ELL students.

“Charters are not taking ELL students,” Jehlen observed, “and when they do, they take those with the highest level of English proficiency, not those who need more help.”

According to M.G.L.A. Chapter 71, Section 89(i)(3), the Board of Education is only to approve a new charter school if the organization behind it “has a record of operating at least 1 school or similar program that demonstrates academic success and organizational viability and serves student

populations similar to those the proposed school seeks to serve,” including students of, “limited English...proficiency.” Even so, many recent charter applications have been approved even though they make no mention of such qualifications.

“They are being allowed to grow without proof of promise,” Mogul suggested.

“If the schools were proven providers,” Jehlen added, “this wouldn’t be a problem.”

Another problem Jehlen discussed was particularly pertinent to the venue at which the CPS event was being held.

“At one time,” he recalled, “Madison Park had programs for [immigrant] kids with interrupted education programs to help them get the kind of trade training they wanted if they wanted it.” Unfortunately, about eight years ago, such programs disappeared. “Why?” Jehlen asked. “MCAS.”

Mogul went on to discuss a similar situation for students with disabilities, noting that while Boston Public School (BPS) rosters include 11.5% students with emotional issues and 6.9% with Autism, charters only include 7.5% and 2%, respectively (the latter number amounting to just 17 students in 16 schools). Using “no tolerance” and other punitive policies, charter schools make it more difficult for such

students to enter and far easier for them to leave. “In fact,” Mogul noted, “only two of the 18 websites for charter schools mentioned special education.”

“Proud” BPS parent and advocate Karen Kast-McBride told her personal story having a child with a learning disability being discouraged from applying for admission to a charter school. “They suggested I not apply,” she recalls, noting how many students who are granted admission are suspended before MCAS season in order to avoid damaging the charter school’s scores and reputations.

Despite her frustration, Kast-McBride also said that charter

schools have “a place in the ecosystem that is our education world,” but emphasized how our elected officials must “make it a point to hold them accountable.” She discussed painstaking personal research that revealed the per-pupil funding allocation for charter schools is more than twice that for public schools and noted that, when charter school students are expelled (as they all-too-often are) the public school system does not get the money back.

“We should not be paying for them out of our budgets,” Kast-McBride said, noting how cuts to public school budgets have threatened or ended such vital programs as art, physical education and even the STEM programs that Race to the Top and other programs were meant to promote.

Another speaker who described negative experiences with charters was former MATCH Corps Member Barrett Smith. In addition to recalling 60-70-hour weeks of serving as a teacher,

janitor, and anything else he was asked to do (all for a 40-hour minimum wage salary), Smith described the demoralizing “demerit” system and other programs that, he said, “do not work for a lot of students.”

While charter schools may have been intended as a means to close the achievement gap, Belson suggested that they are not the best way. Offering the example of Medford’s highly-touted Mystic Valley Regional Charter School, Belson pointed out how, as they do not have one single ELL student, it is difficult to see what value or solutions they can be providing. “If the reason for charter schools is to close the achievement gap,” Belson asked, “shouldn’t they take kids who *are* the achievement gap?”

Belson then offered a more effective alternative.

“The achievement gap will never be closed unless we deal with preparation gap,” he said, emphasizing the importance of early childhood education.

Belson also suggested that, in addition to working with the entire community of students, we need to work with the “whole child” instead of just the part that can fill in bubbles. “MCAS is being used in areas where there are much more complicated problems than academic performance,” he observed. “We do not educate kids to pass MCAS; we educate kids to go out into the real world...and make an impact.”

Continuing the commentary on the importance of diversity in schools, Gallo admitted that the 54% ELL and 82% low-income populations in Lynn’s public schools pose challenges, but also offer strengths in making the community “a rich educational and social experience.” He also noted how the once-threatened academic community in Lynn is now thriving.

“We are opening and reopening schools and hiring teachers,” he said of the schools that were recently taken off the infamous “Level IV” list. Gallo also proudly mentioned how, last December, his colleagues unanimously passed a resolution opposing the establishment or expansion of charter schools in Lynn.

“Communities from all over the state have pushed back against plans for more and more charter schools,” noted CPS President Ann O’Halloran.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Gallo suggested, “and I wish other districts would do the same.”

Another “gleaming ray of hope” that was discussed at the event was the Oliver Partnership School in Lawrence. Again likening the world of education to that of medicine, Blatchford observed how “doctors become heads of departments” and noted how, at this pioneering program (which is being closely watched both locally and nationally as a possible blueprint for other districts) “we have teachers who now run the school,” proving that “teachers know what they are doing if given the opportunity.”

In the end, this event seemed to be most about that- opportunity. Students want the opportunity to get the best education they can and teachers want the opportunity to give it to them. The question is, therefore, can we raise our voices loud enough to be heard over the din of the corporate agenda? At the end of the day, CPS Executive Director Lisa Guisbond seemed to think so.

“I feel so empowered and encouraged by the number and quality of people we have involved,” said Guisbond, “and I invite everyone to get more involved!” ■



**CHARTING A BETTER COURSE**  
Lawrence School Committee member James Blatchford tells of the positive steps being taken by public schools in Lawrence and elsewhere at the CPS forum at Madison Park High School



# Diary

## of a New Teacher

**Lisa Janco**

1st grade Special Education Teacher  
Guilmette Elementary School, Lawrence

I began working at the Guilmette Elementary School in September of 2010. As a life-long resident of the Merrimack Valley, I was well aware of the many stereotypes that had been connected to the teachers and students of Lawrence. However, my first impression of the students and staff at the Guilmette was the opposite of all that I had heard. I was immediately struck by the warmth I felt walking through the front door. I quickly realized how lucky I was to work with such a dedicated, hard-working and helpful staff. That coupled with students that were excited to learn and be in school; I

knew that I had made a great decision.

As a new teacher, I was anxious, but most of all excited. The school year seemed to be off to a relatively smooth start, until a fateful day in October when we were told that we would be leaving the school due to unsafe mold levels. What started as a long weekend, turned into a months long journey that includes some of my fondest moments of my tenure in Lawrence.

I saw teachers step up to the plate and create warm, inviting classrooms from just about nothing; bringing in books and supplies from home, procuring donations and enlisting friends and family members to help. It was wonderful! As a new teacher, I was impressed and grateful to be surrounded by such wonderful, dedicated colleagues.

Our “temporary” home quickly



**NEWVIEW**  
**Special Education teacher Lisa Janco is helping to change public perspectives about Lawrence schools**

became what school should be all about. Our students arrived that first Monday a bit confused, but willing and excited to see their

“new” classrooms and get back to work. The resilience and adaptability of these children will forever amaze me. These classrooms were stripped down, bare and basic, we had no computers, specials were held in a cafeteria that did triple duty as the auditorium and gymnasium, students walked uphill in the snow during one of the worst winters we had seen but

teachers and students alike made it work. A camaraderie that is not common was formed amongst the staff and I feel privileged to have been a part of it.

We all spent about six months in this temporary school and ultimately returned back to the Guilmette, thankful and appreciative of the modern conveniences and technology it had. I know that I was wistful about the time spent at our “temporary” home, but what I learned was that when you have students that want to learn and are able to adapt to change and teachers that are dedicated, hard-working and also flexible, anything is possible even within the most seemingly impossible situation. I believe this time in the Guilmette School history could change mindsets about education in Lawrence. Just when some might say the deck is stacked against us, the students and teachers are able to rise above. Our students learned and made great gains during this transitional time academically, socially, and emotionally. And that is priceless! ■

## Feature Focus: Snow Days

### Educator’s Opinion By Ken Craft

Thanks to the polar vortex and a string of weekday snowstorms, this has been the winter of our discontent.

The reason is a familiar one: The venerable snow day.

For students, the two words are magical, conjuring images of hot chocolate, snow angels, and snowball fights (or, to update matters a bit, of marathon video games, Netflix movies, and social networking sites).

Though teachers may take secret pleasure in the unexpected gift of a day off, too, they also realize that it’s a Trojan horse of sorts. Unlike Cracker Jacks, the “surprise inside” is no treat. Every day lost in January, February, or March becomes a day tacked on in the furnace of June.

Fair exchange? Not if student learning is the gold standard. As students will happily acknowledge, make-up days in June count in the state’s eyes but not theirs. They know it’s all over but the shouting by then. Most grades have already been checked in, and most minds have already been checked out.

There’s also the matter of climate. By late June, the words “polar vortex” don’t look so bad, not with students and teachers melting over their desks like so many Salvador Dali clocks.

Heat and humidity can become unbearable when snow days push the school calendar into early summer. The bottom line of all this is that 180 school days – the amount prescribed by law for students – become legitimate on paper only. On blazing June makeup days, sweaty students are going through the motions, and not very convincingly, either.

It doesn’t have to be this way. For inspiration, we need only look to Ohio, which is working on sending the “snow day” the way of the Edsel. That’s right. Retiring the term for good by making it all but obsolete.

Under a law that went into effect this year, schools can use up to three “e-learning days,” which amount to school days in snow days’ clothing. To meet obligations under the law, school districts must forward plans to the Ohio Department of Education detailing preparations for “e-learning days.”

This might involve a series of assignments and pre-taped videos posted online for students to access from home should the weather turn inclement. It also could include a web-based learning management system (LMS) such as Edmodo or Schoology where students and teachers can interact online.

In consideration of those students who lack computer access, teachers must also provide hard copies in what Ohio calls a “blizzard bag” for students to take home. The law grants students up to two weeks to hand in this work. In consideration of parents who might be spending the day at home with their children, the work tasks created by teachers must be ones that can be done independently by their students.

By now, electronic classes are old hat at colleges and universities. Flipped classes, made famous by Salman Khan and his Khan Academy, are also mak-

ing inroads into teacher planning and preparation in the brave new world of technology partnered with education. It was only a matter of time, then, before some-

one came up with the idea of melding electronic tools with online learning to counter Old Man Winter and his hoary old sidekick, the snow day.

Snow may stop school buses in their tracks, but it seldom freezes computers. Ohio teachers have warmed to the idea of turning snow days into virtual school days that count toward school districts’ legal obligations and end the school year on schedule.

Massachusetts, host to many a “Nor’easter” in the winter months, would do well to take notice. “E-learning days” might truly be a case of teachers and learners having their cake and eating it too! ■

Ken Craft is an eighth grade English teacher in Holliston.

### Educator’s Opinion By Michael Maguire

Second only to “summer vacation,” a student’s two favorite words are “snow day.”

Those of us over 40 recall the epic blizzards of 1978. Over 21 inches fell from January 20-21 and 27 inches fell from February 6-7. I was in the first grade when the blizzards hit and I can count on one hand how many days of school I attended from the first storm until February break.

In the past 36 years, meteorology has improved so much that we now occasionally cancel school a day or two in advance of an approaching storm. It is hard to fault mayors and superintendents for calling off school early when every media outlet warns of the impending snowfall. In our 24-hour news cycle, parents want to know now what the plan will be for tomorrow (or

even the day after). Who can blame them when so many parents have to scramble to find alternate placement for their children?

In 1948 Boston was

experiencing such epic snowfalls that then Mayor James Michael Curley sent a letter to the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology asking for his help in finding ways to remove snow. Mayor Curley’s fear was that flooding would occur if all the snow melted at once. Curley even asked MIT about the feasibility of using flamethrowers on the snowbanks! MIT president Dr. Karl Compton replied rather playfully that a better approach is to use salt.

It is now standard practice not only to sand and salt the roads as they are being plowed, but often to pre-salt the road so that the first snow melts quickly and easily.

Traffic nightmares often occur when the snow starts falling during the school day. In a district such as

Boston, it is virtually impossible to close schools early since busses cannot be easily rerouted.

On December 13, 2007 snow started falling at noon. By school dismissal, the traffic was nearly gridlocked. A colleague of mine said it took her over five “atrocious” hours to complete what was usually a 45-minute commute! Schools that dismissed late did not have busses show up for hours, if they showed up at all. Many teachers and principals sacrificed their own family concerns to wait with and comfort stranded children. This one storm made it clear that contingency plans are a must!

Since the blizzards of ‘78, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has invested countless millions of dollars in snow removal equipment. Today, roads can be cleared much more quickly and efficiently, provided of course that the equipment is gassed up and ready for use. Sometimes, however, we are still caught off guard.

From March 31 to April 1, 1997, Boston was hit with a greatly unexpected 25.4 inches of snow that was part of a huge late-season storm. From Maine to Maryland, people were house bound for days since many shovels, plows and sanders were already stored away for the year. More recently, the entire country was affected by a storm in January of this year. While northern cities recovered relatively quickly, places that were not used to such weather took far longer to dig out. In fact, as many of these areas had absolutely no equipment to handle snow removal, even less than two inches was enough to cripple them!

No matter how many storms we weather, it is worth remembering that, in many ways, our high school students are as new to snow as southerners are when it comes to driving. I become a driving instructor-cum-physics teacher each time the first flakes fall. I consider it good practice for when my own children become teenage drivers, but that’s not for at least four of five more blizzards. ■

Michael Maguire is a Latin and Classics teacher at Boston Latin Academy.



**A WELCOME SIGN?**

**Snow days wreak havoc on traffic and schedules**



# FEATURE FOCUS: New Paths to Success

## Putting Partnership on the MAPP

While the focus on such subjects as science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) remains prevalent in academic circles, it seems that more people are talking about them than are actually doing something with them. Recently, however, a pioneering partnership was formed between Roxbury Community College (RCC) and Madison Park Vocational Technical High School that will not only help students in both institutions develop their skills and abilities in these important areas but will also help prepare them for further studies and eventual careers.

Launched in June of 2013, The Massachusetts Academic Polytech Pathway-Roxbury program (a.k.a., “RoxMAPP”) is intended to prepare the educators, engineers, health care professionals and scientists of the future by offering them mentorships and support today. By exposing students at Madison and RCC to opportunities sooner than they might have been previously, it is hoped that the students will have the time and interest to engage possible paths in the sciences and to be better prepared for the challenges of school and jobs.

“Madison Park Technical High School is the only career and technical program in the city of Boston,” explains Opal Hines-Fisher, Madison’s coordinator for the RoxMAPP program. As Madison is also nearby to RCC, it was the perfect place to launch

this program. Hines-Fisher goes on to explain that participants in RoxMAPP are encouraged to enroll in one college-level course at RCC while still matriculating at Madison. “Classes are held at RCC and are taught by college faculty,” Hines-Fisher says, noting that a goal of the program is “to ensure students have work-related training that can lead to successful careers in high-demand fields.”

After graduating from Madison, RoxMAPP participants have the option of attending RCC or transferring their credits to other schools. “Madison and RCC faculty are working collaboratively to align curriculum, and addressing common core standards as the current phase of the pathway,” Hines-Fisher says.

According to program organizers, RoxMAPP is intended to implement new academic and career development programs, expose students to career options early in their high school careers, and provide them with greater access to work-based learning opportunities. The program also creates effective and efficient pathways to employment in industries such as health care, information technology, and the life sciences. Among the specific goals cited by program administrators are providing more responsive support to students, increasing retention and graduation rates, supporting college and career readiness, and closing

achievement gaps by improving academic and career programs.

In addition to partnering students at the two institutions, RoxMAPP is also engaging area business administrators to encourage and support the development of skills and interests that are engendered in the program. Many of these community members have been organized into a Joint Industry Advisory Board (JIAB) that is charged with not only supporting students but also supporting each other and their community by creating new opportunities in and around Roxbury. Among the members of the JIAB are RCC President Valerie Roberson, RCC Board Member and Year Up Administrator Gerald Chertavian, Partners HealthCare CEO Gary Gottlieb, Neil Sullivan from the Boston Private Industry Council, advertising executive Jack Connors, City Year Boston’s Sandra Lopez-Burke, Suffolk Construction’s John Fish, Boston School Committee Member Claudio Martinez, and Boston City Councilman Tito Jackson.

“To meet our ambitious long-term goals, we need to ensure our young people are prepared to compete for the jobs of the future by aligning education with career opportunities and establishing partnerships among our local educational institutions and businesses,” Fish suggests. “The RoxMAPP partnership is a major step toward increasing collaboration

and coordination between the Commonwealth and the City of Boston, and Roxbury Community College and Madison Park High School.”

Citing RoxMAPP as a “bold commitment” on behalf of all partners and participants, Gottlieb goes on to suggest that the program should help not only the schools grow but should also help grow the local economy.

“Their synergies can create a powerhouse pipeline to ensure that graduates have the skills that tomorrow’s workplace will demand,” Gottlieb says.

In order to continue to ensure that the program and the students involved in it do all they can for themselves and their community, Hines-Fisher explains that the JIAB is always looking for new partners to approach and new companies and fields to incorporate and involve.

“Currently the JIAB...[is] determining the career programs to include in the next pathway,” Hines-Fisher explains, noting that recent suggestions have included information technology, clean energy and life sciences.

Already, RoxMAPP has made clear and measurable gains, both for the students at Madison Park and RCC and for the community at large.

“This first-of-its-kind collaborative effort will offer young people greater access to educational opportunities and resources, exciting work-based learning programs, and employment options after college,” Fish says. ■

## YMSS Helps Young Men Say “Yes!”

With academic, occupational, and social pressures bearing down on them, it can be difficult for young men of color to plot a plan or even find a direction for their lives. Every day, more young men fall through the cracks and more research details the need for change.

Fortunately, there is a growing organization that is intended to provide not only training but support and direction to young men. Since 2010, the Young Men’s Success Series (YMSS) has been providing young men of color with life skills designed to maximize their chances for success.

According to Founding Director Percy Hayles, YMSS was born from “the frustration of low performance schools and the well known issues that face young men [of color].” As many of these young men are raised in what Hayles calls “fragmented” families and in low-income communities, opportunities and guidance are often in short supply. YMSS strives to fill those gaps so young men can be more fulfilled.

In order to attract potential participants, Hayles calls on community leaders to speak at YMSS’s bi-monthly workshops (including a meeting with City Councilman Tito Jackson on February 22 and BASE baseball league founder Robert Lewis on March 8) and field trips (including a visit to Google on February 19) and also engages mentors and tutors to work with participants on such important academic issues as science and math.

“We meet every second and fourth Saturday from 9:30 to 12:30,” Hayles explains (for information, go to [www.ymssboston.com](http://www.ymssboston.com)), noting the strong relationships that have already developed with schools such as Timility Middle, Madison Park, and Higginson

and Lewis Middle. “It’s a great way for our youth to invest their energy,” says UMass-Boston sophomore and YMSS participant Ted Hilaire. “It’s very beneficial to your life...[and] what the community of YMSS offers is something you can’t find in any school.”

“Educating the public is the most powerful thing that we can do,” says Winchester High student and YMSS participant Erik Shing. “That is what Mr. Hayles aims to do every day!”

Posing YMSS as “a window that more individuals will soon want to look through” to escape stereotypes “skewed perceptions,” Shing observes that, while it may be “an uphill battle... with the assets that YMSS is rapidly acquiring, we will be able to move mountains!”

Though nominally intended for men, YMSS also offers benefits to young women as well. Jahlissa Jackson is an 11th grader at Wellesley High School. “I wanted to join YMSS to make a difference,” she says, noting how many of the leadership skills can be “taken in” by young girls or by anyone.

“I see YMSS growing every time I go,” Jackson observes, “but the only way we can gain more people is if young [people] want to learn how to

become successful leaders.”

Once young men (or women) come to YMSS, they are offered a partnership with an adult mentor with whom they develop an individualized “life curriculum” that promotes personal change as the main means of changing their life circumstances and garnering a chance at a meaningful and successful life. While financial wealth is considered as a potential goal, YMSS also defines success in terms of character and relationships. “Our thinking is that one cannot lift others from poverty and destructive thinking if they...have little to give,” Hayles observes. “Individual success is of little consequence unless it open doors and engenders success for others.”

While YMSS helps individuals, its larger focus is on the community as a

whole. “We... promote community leadership” Hayles notes, also mentioning education, integrity, leadership and professional-

ficed before me is a principle I take seriously,” Hayles explains, observing how this understanding has “evolved into a passion to work and mold future generations.”

A long-time educator who has also provided student services at the elementary, secondary and college levels, Hayles also has an intimate understanding of how to work effectively with students, especially those who are having difficulty finding success in school and in life. “I have managed programs for students with a focus on completing college and career development,” he recalls. “In all my professional positions, the mission has been the same: To expand educational opportunities for disadvantaged students by improving academic pathways.”

While an academic advisor at Northeastern University, Hayles created a program for boys without fathers called Simba (which means “young lion”) in which he connected elementary students with mentors. As the participants in YMSS are older and further along in their lives, Hayles suggests that “the stakes are higher and the task more difficult,” citing the myriad opportunities men of this age have to “make wrong decisions.” That is why he works so tirelessly to develop and grow his program and its community outreach.

“I see my professional and community service as instruments to make a difference in the lives of those who have been relegated to the margins of society,” says Hayles, who also directed the STRIVE program that trained and placed chronically-unemployed workers. “My...focus is to build YMSS into a safe haven for young men who need the support to succeed and be full participants in society.” ■



**BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL YOUNG MAN...**  
**YMSS Director Percy Hayles (right) with marketing executive and YMSS mentor Dedric Polite**

ism among YMSS’s core values.

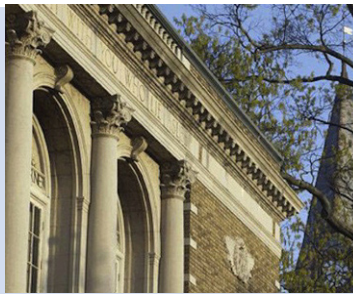
A native of Cleveland with a Masters degree in history from the University of Akron, Hayles came to Boston 22 years ago with a deep understanding of the importance of community service. “The idea of giving back to others as a debt to those who sacri-





## On Campus

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



# The Costs of College: Men v. Women

Rising costs and falling benefits have made college a bad investment for many students. While the percentage increases in costs have slowed a bit, especially at UMass and other public universities, four (now more likely six) years of college for a child costs more than their parents' home for most families. College loans now total more than \$1 trillion in the U.S. and loan payments look more and more like mortgages.

Research has shown that the average college graduate in his early 20s who has borrowed \$100,000 and finds a job after graduation will break even from his investment in college loans when he is 34. However, finding a job far from guaranteed. High unemployment for college graduates is more than a statistic. We all know graduates who can't find jobs, take jobs that used to go to high school graduates or work as unpaid interns.

While college graduates still have lower unemployment rates than high school graduates, once unemployed, college graduates have the same chance of remaining unemployed long-term as high school graduates. College students

also face the risk of not graduating, which puts them in about the same income level as high school graduates. In this case, the ungraduated student will never break even on their loan. As John Belushi says in "Animal House" after his character, future Senator John "Bluto" Blutarski, is expelled, "Seven years of college down the drain"

Today's students are hopefully more likely to spend seven years in college because they are working several jobs rather than because they spend too much time partying. In either case, however, ending up without a degree costs far more now.

As a result of the high costs and low assurance of return, many students are opting out. According to gender studies, more men than women have made the choice that college isn't worth it. About 60% of current college students are women. This is a reversal of the numbers seen just a generation before! The same percentages hold for graduates, including associate, bachelor, and masters degrees. More women than men also receive doctorates, but the percentage difference is less than for other degrees.

What happened to the men?

The economic argument is that men who do not go to college have higher paying alternatives than women. Construction, building trades, and manufacturing, which are typically posed as men's jobs that do not require college degrees, pay more than clerical and service work, which are more typically jobs held by women. In other words, women have more to lose from not attending college or from dropping out.

Economic class also plays a role in men refusing college. Boys from higher-income families do not choose working-class jobs over college. In Ivy League and other expensive schools, ratios of men to women are much closer to 50%, and some of these schools actually enroll more men than women, especially in computer science and engineering programs.

Cultural differences also seem to be important aspects to consider when discussing gender differences in college enrollment. In many cultures, school is not considered "cool" for boys. Also, many K-12 schools favor girls over boys because they typically work better together, act out less, ask for help more,

and study more, behavior that leads teachers to favor girls over boys.

There are plenty of other areas in American life where women face discrimination. The glass ceiling for women executives remains firmly in place. Thirty years ago, a friend of mine looking for this kind of work told me that most executive positions for women start with A, as in Assistant (now upgraded to Associate).

The discrimination and inequality are not just one-sided, however. In fact, the other bad news concerning men is that the labor force participation rate is dropping for men at about the same rate as their college enrollment and graduation.

These are problems that need fixing, and educators have the experience and knowledge to solve them.

When responding to the debate "Resolved: Men are Obsolete," famed gender scholar Camille Paglia had it exactly right. "When an educated culture routinely denigrates masculinity and manhood," she said, "then women will be perpetually stuck with boys." ■

# Reclaiming Takes Collaborative Effort

**Educator's Opinion**  
**By Sarah McIsaac**  
**and Alyson Serwak**

Reclaiming the promise of public education requires everyone to work towards a common goal. At the Center For School Improvement Leadership Institute, we learned that collaboration is the key cornerstone for reclaiming the promise.

How do we create safe, engaging schools that parents and children want to attend? How do we develop and deliver engaging lessons to help raise student achievement? We need to form trusting relationships between students, teachers, administrators, parents, unions and local business and community leaders. If all stakeholders unite, not only will it benefit the students we educate, but it will also help build stronger relationships and strengthen the climate and culture of our communities.

With the help of the Lynn Business Education Foundation (LBEF), the Lynn Teachers Union (LTU), and the City of Lynn, Cobbet Elementary school was offered the opportunity to attend AFT's 16th annual Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute in New York City from Jan. 23-26. Cobbet's leadership team was chosen to attend because it is currently designated as a Level 3 school, with the vision of raising student achievement.

The Lynn leadership team that attended was comprised of a variety of stakeholders: classroom teachers Anthony Frye and Alyson Serwak; curriculum instructional teachers Geoffrey King, Peter Viselli and Sarah McIsaac; Cobbet Principal Susanne Garrity; Harrington School Principal Deborah Ruggiero; Eva O'Malley, assistant director of educator quality;

LTU President Brant Duncan; Gale Thomas of the LBEF; and Lynn School Committee member John Ford.

The conference began with AFT President Randi Weingarten articulating the unifying concept of Reclaiming the Promise of Public School Education. She spoke passionately about education representing our "collective obligation to help all children succeed" and that "economic and societal factors" cannot be ignored when promoting and cultivating growth in all of our children. Reclaiming the promise is taking a holistic educational approach to provide a safe and welcoming environment that promotes teaching and learning in our schools. Most importantly, reclaiming the promise is about uniting students, parents, teachers and communities.

There were five principles and practices upon which the School Improvement Leadership Institute focused: Effective Communication, Team Building, Data-Informed Decision-Making, Professional Development, and Team Action Planning. Throughout the four-day institute, we attended group work sessions with teachers from all over our country,

including teachers from Lawrence. We were able to collaborate as a leadership team and make decisions about what actions we were going to take in order to make improvements at Cobbet Elementary School and elsewhere.

"The Cobbet leadership team is eager to continue to work together on all facets of the principles and practices that were discussed at the conference," said Viselli, "so that they are not only sustained but will eventually become

woven into our core values here."

We are excited to say that we have developed an action plan that will be focusing on team building to help create trusting relationships within the Cobbet community. We feel that continuing to develop a strong collaborative climate and culture will have a profound impact on student achievement and will also help strengthen our core values.

Another area we are focusing on is data-informed decision-making. "Our team learned how to

analyze and interpret data to consider appropriate interventions to raise student achievement," Garrity said, citing a data analysis protocol we learned to use in order to identify and assess school community needs by using multiple data sources as a collaborative mechanism for decision making. "We now hope to train our teachers in using this protocol to enhance student achievement." Garrity also noted what

a powerful resource it is and how it helps teachers to know where student strengths and weaknesses are and to reflect on their own practice so they can adjust appropriately.

Creating collaborative partnerships among our schools is also important to us. We feel that working together to strengthen best practices and student achievement will help benefit our students and teachers.

"This was a great opportunity for the community, district, union and schools to collaborate as a team," Ruggiero said. "Being part of that process gave me a sense of pride that the work we are doing in Lynn is at the cutting edge of what is happening nationally. I am looking forward to watching the leadership team at the Cobbet School develop a plan to collaborate with teachers, parents, community, district and other schools. This work will bring our schools and district to the next level of education."

The recurring message that we got from President Weingarten was that building trusting, lasting partnerships that involve all stakeholders will greatly impact student achievement and help reclaim the promise of public education. Looking around our group, we realized that we had a representative from the district, union, administration, teachers, school committee and a business partner, which reinforced that the city of Lynn is heading in the right direction. ■

Sarah McIsaac is a Curriculum and Instruction teacher (CIT) at the Cobbet School in Lynn.

Alyson Serwak is a third grade teacher at the Cobett.



**READY TO RECLAIM**  
**Alyson Serwak and Sarah McIsaac**





## Retiree Corner

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

Check out the Retirees' section and other EXCLUSIVE content at [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)

# MA State Tax Issues for Seniors

If you were 65 or older by December 31, 2013, and a resident of Massachusetts, you may qualify for the Circuit Breaker Credit. For 2013 the maximum credit allowed for both renters and homeowners is \$1,030. This benefit does not apply to those who receive a federal or state rent subsidy; those who claim married filing separately status; those who rent from a landlord who is not required to pay real estate taxes; or if you are dependent on another taxpayer.

Further the assessed valuation of your home as of January 1, 2013, before residential exemptions but after abatements cannot exceed \$700,000. The taxpayer's total income cannot exceed \$55,000 for a single filer who is not the head of a household, \$69,000 for a head of household, or \$82,000 for taxpayers filing jointly. Even though you do not pay a state income tax on your state or federal pension in Massachusetts, for the purpose of getting this benefit that pension amount is considered part of your total income for qualification purposes. If you normally pay no state income tax you may still qualify for this benefit but you will have to file a state tax form CB Worksheet.

If a homeowner, if the combined amount of the real estate tax paid plus 50% of water and sewage charges

exceeds 10% of your total income, then you are eligible for the \$1,030 amount. Most senior centers have someone who helps seniors with taxes. Even if you are not eligible for the full \$1030 you may be eligible for a good portion of it.

For renters, if 25% of your annual rental payment is more than 10% of your total income then you qualify for this benefit. Your actual annual rent is the amount you paid during a certain calendar year. So if you paid January 2014 rent in December 2013 that counts for your 2013 tax credit. If one resides in a private independent living facility or assisted living facility the part of their monthly payments that constitutes rent may be used for this benefit and is calculated the same way rent is calculated.

In 2008, when MRU did a survey of the 5100 of the lowest teacher pensions, we were amazed at how few were making use of this benefit. Remember even if you do not normally file a state tax you can receive this benefit by filing the CB worksheet that is part of the state income tax packet. The money received from this Circuit Breaker Benefit is not considered income for the purpose of obtaining eligibility under means-tested assistance programs including food, medical, housing, energy and

intent of the legislation, Fader went on to emphasize how the main thrust of the bill is to "call for a dialogue" and to assure them that "it does not mandate an outcome or create any policy change."

Turning toward the issue of money, Fader observed that, "Dialogue doesn't cost a cent." However, he noted, as so many ECE centers and teachers are facing more difficult financial chal-



**STANDING UP FOR CHILDREN**  
**Rep. Jeffrey Sanchez speaks at MECEU event at the State House in support of House Bill 47, which he is co-sponsoring along with Sen. Sal DiDomenico**

lenges, finances should be involved in the dialogue.

"A lot of this bill is about bringing money into these centers so they can hire quality teachers and those teachers wanting to stay," he explained, noting how the "big turnover problem"

educational assistance programs. This benefit became law in January 2001 and the maximum benefit at that time was \$385.

All those filing a Massachusetts state income tax form that are age 65 or over before January 1, 2014 are entitled to a \$700 exemption. This also applies to your spouse if he/she meets the age requirement before the date stated. This is in addition to your personal exemption of \$4,400 if single, \$6800 if head of household and \$8,800 if married filing a joint return.

IRA, Keogh, Tax sheltered Annuities and 403b's distributions are not taxable until all of your contributions that were subject to Massachusetts's taxes are recovered.

If you did not make use of any of the above tax breaks in the past and you qualified you can do up to three years of amended forms now, two years if you wait until after the April tax deadline in 2014.

If you have specific questions about your tax account, please call the DOR's customer service call center 617-887-6367 or toll-free in MA 800-392-6089 between the hours of 9 am- 5 pm, Monday through Friday. ■

in many ECE centers is causing a "disruption" in how ECE centers are run and how young children are taught.

"Teachers who work year to year with the same population are going to be your best teachers," Fader suggested, offering a conclusive reason why this legislation is so important, both to ECE teachers and administrators and also to students and their families.

Among the other issues dealt with in the bill are the quality rating system known as QRIS, dispute resolution and career development pathways that will encourage ECE teachers to take classes themselves without having to worry if they will have to leave their centers when they are done. All of these things are vital to the future of ECE and all are to be discussed as part of this new dialogue.

"This conversation...can only be a good thing for the pre-K teachers," Fader observed, "and for the field in general."

A long-time supporter of this legislation and an MECEU leader, Chicopee Child Development Center Director Alissa Papuzynski also commented on the legislation. "I feel that this bill would put early educators in MA on the path to having a strong voice to work with the state to get better resources," she suggested. "It would be the incentive that teachers need in order to stay in ECE." While she sees many improvements in terms of the respect and regard that ECE teachers and administrators receive, Papuzynski concluded that the passage of this legislation would still be of great benefit. "It would also empower the workforce," she suggested, "and even add more of a sense of professionalism." ■

### SENIOR SEMINARS

#### Preparing for Retirement

Marie Ardito's presentation is directed to people retiring in the next 10 years from public sector jobs in Massachusetts, whether they are retiring under the teacher's state, Social Security, or public pension. It provides participants with an understanding of the retirement system and options from which they can select, as well as a legal checklist, tips for protecting major assets, advice about understanding Medicare, its penalties and surcharge and much more.

Methuen - Thursday, March 20, 3:30-5:30, Methuen Education Assoc. Office (184 Pleasant Street, Suite 1-204 )

Westport - Thursday March 27, 2:30-4:30, Westport Middle School Media Center (400 Old County Road)

Lawrence - Wednesday April 2, 5:30-7:30, Relief's In (1 Market Street)

'Lynn - Monday, April 7, 3:15-5:15, Lynn Teachers' Union Office (679 Western Avenue)

#### Understanding Social Security and Medicare

This two-hour seminar discusses how Social Security is factored and how penalties affect you because you are collecting a MA pension. It also covers eligibility for Medicare, and more.

Saturday, April 26, 10-noon

#### How to Protect Your Nest Egg and Plan for Your Family

This seminar, presented by Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie, discusses wills and trusts, gifting, Medicaid Qualifying Trusts, probate, joint tenancy, direct transfers upon death, and much more. Howie is a member of both the MA and NH Bar Association, National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, NH Conflict Resolution Association and the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys.

Saturday March 8, 10-noon

Saturday April 12, 10-noon

Saturday June 21, 10-noon

These seminars are offered at 314 Main Street, Wilmington, MA, Unit 105, on Saturday, March 8, Saturday April 12, and Saturday June 21, 2014, from 10-noon

To register for any seminar, email [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org) or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number attending. Do not expect a call back unless you have questions or need directions.

**Are YOU a librarian with a story or observation to share?**

**Please contribute to State of the Stacks.**

**Send ideas and suggestions to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).**

**Thank you!**



# Summa Cum Laude: Carolyn Wilkins

With the myriad artists competing for what is still limited venue, shelf, bandwidth, and ear space, the music business can be one of the most challenging industries in which to make one's living. Being a woman can make it even more difficult! In addition to talent, it takes drive, determination, and even inspiration to make it in music.

Carolyn Wilkins is one of the many talented women who had these gifts. Currently she serves as a professor of ensembles at Berklee College of Music. She is also an accomplished composer, vocalist, pianist and percussionist who has performed with such legends as Andre Previn and Nancy Wilson.

Life for Wilkins was not always so rosy, however. Stuck in Seattle in an unhappy marriage in the 1980s, Wilkins gathered her belongings, her hopes, and her inspirations and headed east. In her latest book, [They Raised Me Up](#) (which she will present at Porter Square Books in Cambridge on February 27 at 7 p.m.), Wilkins tells her story as she tells those of the women who came before and supported her, whether they knew it or not.

"I cannot remember a time in my life when I didn't make music," the music teacher's daughter explains. "I played the piano from the age I could toddle up and reach the keys."

While her mother was one inspiration, Wilkins also pays tribute in her book and in her life to an array of other impressive women, including her great-aunt Marjory Jackson and her great-grandmother Lilly Pruett. Looking outside of her family, Wilkins opens her circle of influence to Philippa Schuyler and Ruth Avery Lipscomb, both of whom mirrored Wilkins herself in facing great obstacles en route to becoming concert

pianists. In addition to a difficult marriage, Wilkins was held back for a time by other barriers, including her gender and her race.

"When I was a college student back in the early '70s," she recalls, "I hoped to become an orchestral percussionist. But time and again I was told either that girls don't play drums or that black people cannot play European music."

Even in the musically diverse community of Boston, Wilkins found herself isolated and alone in many situations. "I was frequently the only female instrumentalist on the bandstand," she recalls, noting that such situations inspired her to tell her story in the new book, which weaves the story of her first year in Boston as a single mother and aspiring jazz musician with the stories of five African American women struggling to realize their own musical ambitions at the turn of the last century.

For Women, as for all of these women, the pressures and problems of being a woman were exacerbated by those of being from racial minority cultures.

"I have been aware of my race as long as I can remember," Wilkins says, recalling how, growing up in an all-black Chicago neighborhood in the 1950s, segregation was "a fact of life."

"My parents and grandparents were denied many opportunities because they were African American," she recalls. "They made enormous sacrifices to make sure my life would

be different." Wilkins' gratitude for this support also inspired her book. "I have been blessed to live a life less burdened by overt racism," she observes. "However, I'd be lying if I didn't say that race and gender inequities remain an ugly reality even in the twenty-first century."

Though music has served as Wilkins' "salvation and life-long addiction," it too has not been free from difficulty. "Since race impacts all aspects of American life," Wilkins suggests, "it should surprise no one that a musician's race and gender play a role in how they are treated by audiences, critics and record companies."

Perhaps this is why Wilkins continues to take strength and solace from the stories of her predecessors and why she felt it so important to reflect upon and share them, even as she continues to find success in the music world. Another of the women in her book, Alberta Sweeney, survived personal tragedy by relying on her musical talent. As a musician and as an educator, Wilkins hopes that these stories will inspire others as they have her and help them make it through difficult times in their own lives. Her main goal, however, is to enlighten and entertain, as well as to inspire.

"Although its subject matter is sometimes serious," she admits, "my book contains a great deal of humor....



**RAISING IMPORTANT ISSUES**  
Carolyn Wilkins

# Summa Cum Laude: Kerry Gordon Winer

The Merrimack Valley has given us many great and important things From the Industrial Revolution to the Labor Movement itself, the great cities on the water have pushed us forward in industry, education, and countless other ways.

While she may not be run by a paddle wheel, Lowell native Kerry Gordon Winer is still able to get a great deal of power from her roots and to use it to help others move forward in their lives as well.

In addition to being raised in Lowell, Winer started her teaching career there as well. Since her early days as a substitute, Winer has worked her way up through the ranks to the point where she is now qualified to serve as a principal. Even so, she spends most of her time among her beloved students in the classroom, forging direct and meaningful connections that inspire others as she was inspired by her own teachers.

After graduating from the University of Hartford in 1985 with a major in English, Winer spent a few years working in her family's real estate business. As a liberal arts major, however, she soon realized that teaching represented "a natural progression."

Garnering her first Masters degree in education in 1991, Winer began teaching at the middle school level in Lowell. "That was where my love for teaching really began," Winer says of her hometown.

After working in Lowell, Winer moved downriver to Lawrence, where she served at the Brown Middle School. These days, she and her husband can most often be found in

Framingham. However, Winer will be returning to Lawrence this month as a recipient of the Sontag Prize in Urban Education. In addition to participating in professional development in Lawrence, this award will also give Winer and other excellent teachers from across the country the opportunity to study at Harvard.

While she is clearly an excellent teacher, Winer remains an eternal student. That is why she is so excited to participate in the Lawrence pro-



**MERRIMACK VALLEY MAVEN**  
Kerry Gordon Winer

gram. Even though she has oft been recognized for her educational excellence, Winer's focus is always on her students. When asked about the many times she has had work published in education journals, Winer mentions how "my students have [also] been published numerous times for their poems, essays and short stories."

As Winer is so dedicated to her

students, she also spends a good deal of time and energy trying to develop new programs to support them. In recent years, Winer has helped redesign extra learning time programs and has also served as a curriculum resource specialist and a leader of a writing initiative task force in her new hometown. Outside of her classroom, Winer co-founded a professional development committee and also serves as a faculty representative for the PTO district. On an even larger scale, Winer has also helped colleagues across the Commonwealth deal with the complicated issues related to testing as a member of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's MCAS Assessment Development Committee and even acted as a facilitator at the 2007 World Leadership Forum in Washington, DC. She also participated in the National Conference for Educators at the National Holocaust Museum as well.

When not teaching in Framingham or Lawrence, Winer continues to share her knowledge and skills with others as a member of the teaching staff at Cambridge College, Lesley University and Framingham State University. While working at these esteemed institutions of higher learning Winer continues to raise her own knowledge level by taking courses, including a recent FSU offering that focused on the role Labor has played in New England. "It traced the history of labor from the sweatshops of the industrial period through Great Depression to [today]," Winer recalls, noting how her native Lowell was a major focus of the curriculum. "The course also focused

I wrote my book to inspire readers to challenge their preconceived ideas about the limits of possibility. If my book inspires people to dig into their own family stories and pursue their own artistic dreams, I will be very happy!" ■

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

**Want to recognize a teacher, student, staff member or graduate?**

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

**Thank you!**

on immigration and why different cultures such as the Irish, Italian, etc. came to the U.S."

Such multicultural understandings have proven valuable for Winer as she continues to teach hundreds of diverse students each year.

"I have also created a lot of curriculum over the years," Winer admits, noting that she leaves much of it off her resume as she prefers to focus on what she has learned and how she has helped students and colleagues in other ways. Among the programs of which she is proudest, however, was one she developed for Framingham on character education.

"It was piloted in the middle schools," she recalls, explaining that the program involved creating community partnerships to provide resources and funding for enrichment programs related to character building and citizenship, both of which are vital to all students in today's world.

With all that she has done and continues to do to support her students and her colleagues, it is rather impressive that Winer remains so humble about her accomplishments.

"I wish I could say that I started teaching to make a difference in the world," she says, explaining that, if one or two of the thousands of students she has worked with come back to thank her for teaching them something (especially something as important and beneficial as writing and self-expression), "that is worth it to me." ■