



# The Advocate

January 2013

## Un-Common Core: Praise of program not completely universal

In 2009, 48 states and the District of Columbia signed a memorandum of agreement with the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) committing to a state-led program intended to streamline the way classes were planned, materials were prepared and students were evaluated. It came to be known as the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI).

Today, CCSI is being introduced in schools across the Commonwealth and across the country as part of a pilot program that will lead to full administration in the 2014-15 school year. While many praise the changes it engenders and encourages, some wonder just how we got to this point and what they are expected to do now. Despite the fact that a stated goal of the new system is to “support educators in the classroom,” as with so many other top-down recommendations, many teachers feel under-supported and overwhelmed with what they are being asked to do, especially given the proposed schedule.

### Common Goals

According to its supporters, the primary goal of CCSI is to provide teachers a “common understanding” of what students are “expected to learn.” Among the terms used to describe the new system are “clear,” “consistent,” “realistic,” “research-

based,” and “aligned” with expectations for college and career success. When asked to put CCSI in their own words, however, many Massachusetts educators use different terms.

The planned transition includes new standards and a new system of assessments and other “tools” that are being developed by a multi-state consortium called the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Among the many

Ph.D., Executive Director of the Northeast Regional Readiness Center, which is supporting teachers with their transition to CCSI.

### Common Support

In addition to organizations like NGA and CCSSO, the effort to create and enforce CCSI also involved parents, teachers and other educational experts, as well as representatives from advocacy groups from across the country.

From the world of education, CCSI cites support from both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), as well as members of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), The College Board and the National Association of State Boards of Education. Over and above the educators themselves, CCSI was also supported by The Alliance for Excellent Education, the National Parent Teacher Association, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, and the American Association of School Administrators. Early drafts of CCSI were also vetted and received broad feedback that included over 10,000 public responses. Though the creators are still considering further feedback (and suggest the possibility of ongoing review and potential updates), the plan has developed far enough that rollout is proceeding.

In an effort to support teachers, PARCC has also offered seminars, such as one that was recently hosted at Bunker Hill

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**NOTHING “COMMON” ABOUT THESE KIDS!**  
Dr. Katie Novak and her students in Chelmsford

goals for the new system are to make expectations clear to all involved, to encourage development of materials that are aligned with the new standards, and to develop comprehensive assessment systems that will improve upon current models that CCSI supporters say are “inconsistent, burdensome and confusing.” They also hope to introduce policy changes that will support students and educators in their efforts to meet the new standards. “[This] shifts our way of thinking about standards,” suggested Christine Shaw,

## MEP Brings Labor and Management Together: New partnership seeks active collaboration

On December 3, representatives from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the U.S. Department of Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the AFT MA and other local, regional, and national unions and organizations gathered in Marlborough to launch a new collaborative effort called the Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP). According to its creators, MEP is intended to bring various education-related entities together in collaborative efforts.

Under the title Leading Change, the conference convened to discuss such matters as how to effectively evaluate educators, how to improve and even extend learning time and innovate schools, and how to bargain based upon shared interests as opposed to potentially confrontational bases.

“As the title indicates, its purpose was to encourage attendees to recog-

nize that if the education community does not lead change, others who are far less well informed will,” explained MEP Executive Director Nancy Peace.

The MEP ([www.masspartnership.org](http://www.masspartnership.org)) was established through a cooperative effort among UMass Boston, MIT and Northeastern Uni-



**STANDING TOGETHER:** Rennie Center Executive Director Chad d'Entremont,, Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Executive Director Tom Scott, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, MIT Sloan Institute for Work and Employment Research Co-Director Tom Kochan, MTA President Paul Toner, and MA Association of School Committees Executive Director Glenn Koocher at the inaugural MEP conference

versity. Among the board members of the MEP are many of the Commonwealth's most powerful and dedicated education leaders and supporters, including MIT Sloan Institute for Work and Employment Research Co-Director Tom Kochan, Tom Scott from the MASC, MTA President Paul Toner and AFT MA President Thomas Gosnell.

“Massachusetts is committed to ensuring that all students are prepared for success,” said Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner Mitchell Chester. “Achieving our objectives will require a collaborative effort supported by educators, school committee officials, and union leadership.”

When asked what will be needed in order to make this new effort work, Gosnell replied, “Collaboration is built on trust. Collaboration requires that everyone value everyone's opinion.”

In addition to Gosnell, speakers at the conference included Commission-

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## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

# Newtown: A personal reflection

I am writing this article between Christmas and New Year. The shattering events in Newtown are still fresh in my mind. All of us once thought that school was a refuge from the outer world, a safe and secure place. No more. The school violence of the twenty-first century has taught us a different lesson.

Traditionally and perhaps ideally, teachers were in the classroom to help their students learn to read, to write, and to do arithmetic. Of course, this has always been an over simplification, but it captured much of the reality.

Now Columbine and Newtown have taught us another lesson. Teachers and other school personnel have become physical protectors.

The courage of the adults who protected the children is inspirational. The courage shown by those who lost their lives while sheltering the boys and girls is particularly inspirational. Newtown's grief is America's grief. The loss of innocent life is so overwhelming that any explanation for its occurrence seems to fall short. Nonetheless, all life does have purpose. Each person who died

brought to loved ones, friends, and even acquaintances something special. In the midst of agony, that will always be remembered.

\* \* \*

The events at Newtown overwhelm us because of the scale of the tragedy. However, throughout the United States many children are shot. Whatever the particulars may be, certainly we Americans, who are known to be skillful at finding solutions, can find some ways to protect our children. Many countries with effective gun control laws have far fewer children killed by guns.

The notion that arming teachers is a positive step in reducing school violence is counterproductive. Schools need not become armed camps.

All the mass shootings of the twenty-first century have not led to any effective action to prevent others. Given the particular horror of having children being murdered, one hopes that Americans will unite to prevent such horrific events.

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



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# BOLD PRINT

The administration of UMass Boston has decided to discontinue the Labor Studies undergraduate degree program. Union members are encouraged to e-mail Chancellor Keith Motley at [keith.motley@umb.edu](mailto:keith.motley@umb.edu) and Provost Winston Langley at [winston.langley@umb.edu](mailto:winston.langley@umb.edu) to express their disapproval of this sudden and greatly unjustified move.

□□□□

Joe Quigley (former BPS teacher and current political cartoonist for the *Advocate*) received the Angie Debo award from the Oklahoma ACLU in recognition of his work on behalf of GLBT rights. Congratulations, Joe!

□□□□

In the spirit of the holidays, students at Chelsea High School used *The Boston Globe's* Globe Santa to support their writing efforts. After noting how few of her students read newspapers, English teacher Amy Mondello began using the *Globe* as a teaching tool in her freshman composition course. In the process, her students raised over \$200 for needy children.

□□□□

Final applications have been submitted for a eleven new charter schools in Massachusetts. Originally, a dozen schools had been invited to participate in the process, but one, Match Next Charter School in Boston, chose not to submit a final application. (See chart on page 3).

Also, the charter for the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School has been revoked. The President of the school's Board of Trustees had hinted at possible litigation intended to keep the school going. However, the charter was eventually surrendered after the state offered to assist the school with advances to their payment allowances, contingent on their agreement to yield the charter and forego any legal challenges to revocation.

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

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## The ABC of

Whether you are new to teaching or new to a union, there are certain terms that are helpful to know. In fact, there are many! In the educational spirit, we at *The Advocate* present this collection of definitions and explanations that we hope will make your life in AFT as easy as ABC.

### American Federation of Teachers (n.) –

**An organization founded in 1916 that represents 1.5 million educators, health care professionals, librarians and public employees in 3,000 local affiliates nationwide. The second-largest education labor union in the United States, the AFT is affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and is currently headed by President Randi Weingarten, who was elected in 2008.**

**The AFT counts among its membership Nobel Prize-winning educator and writer Elie Wiesel, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and educator Frank McCourt, education pioneer John Dewey, and scientific pioneer Albert Einstein. In addition to being one of the first American unions to extend full membership to minorities, the AFT also filed an *amicus* brief in the 1954 case of Brown v. Board of Education. Many AFT members also participated in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic march on Washington. The union was also one of the first organizations of its kind to divest in Apartheid-era South Africa. When the United States Congress amended the National Labor Relation Act in 1974 to expand the rights of health care workers, the AFT also amended its constitution to permit health care workers and public employees to join the union, eventually forming what is today known as AFT Healthcare, a division of the AFT that includes nearly 80,000 nurses and health care workers. In 1985, public employees were given their own division, which is now called AFT Public Employees. Today, AFT represents over 100,000 public employees.**

**Among the AFT's most prominent issues are education reform and innovation. In recent years, the union has had to face vocal opponents who champion such concepts as those of charter schools and school voucher programs. With its strong base of educators and other vital service providers, the AFT looks forward to facing the future in strength and security.**

Have a question? Want a term defined? Write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).



# Science School Under Microscope:

## Possible charter in Lynn area raises concerns

As the charter war rages nationally, a local battle is brewing in Lynn.

Everett-based Pioneer Charter School of Science (PCSS) is hoping to expand their programs through the establishment of a second school in Saugus that would potentially affect students and schools in Saugus, Lynn, Peabody, Danvers, Salem, Woburn, Stoneham, Medford, Melrose and Wakefield. While PCSS claims that their systems are proven to improve upon any that are already established in the area, not all are convinced that the potential effects will all be positive.

In order to give students, parents, educators, and others a chance to voice their opinions, a public hearing was held on December 10 at the Saugus Library.

In a set of prepared statements that he delivered at the hearing, Lynn Teacher Union President Brant Duncan explained that, despite the fact that the founders of PCSS “tout the success of their school in Everett as the justification for creating another school here in the greater Lynn community,” he “respectfully disagree[s]” that PCSS has “demonstrated its ability to serve all students.” Duncan even cited statistics from PCSS application, claiming that they “conflict...with DESE data.”

“The Pioneer Charter School of Science does not serve the population of its community,” Duncan concluded. “To grant a charter under these circumstances would be a disservice to our neediest students.”

In addition to the Saugus school, there are also plans for PCSS to expand further into the communities of Medford, Melrose, Stoneham, Wakefield and Woburn. On their official expansion proposal documentation, PCSS claims that their mission is “to prepare students for today’s competitive world” by helping students develop the “academic and social skills necessary to become successful professionals and exemplary members of the community.” They intend to do this through an extended school year and extended day curriculum that has a strong emphasis on math and science, a “strong foundation” in the humanities and a “career-oriented college preparation” program. Among the special elements that PCSS offers are a visiting scholar program that has hosted researchers from area universities and frequent presentations by representatives from the worlds of business and politics.

While some see the incursion of the PCSS schools as detrimental and claim that it will rob area schools of resources and students, PCSS touts itself as having already become “one of the highest performing schools” in the Commonwealth, citing top MCAS scores and a high ranking by Boston Magazine as evidence. Despite these claims, however, Saugus School Committee Chairman Wendy Reed sees PCSS as simply “another option” and advises parents to “shop around.” She went so far as to suggest that, after doing so, many parents have come back

to the public school system. “A lot of parents have come back to Saugus,” she observed in an interview in the *Lynn Daily Item*, “and they’ll tell you, [charter schools] just don’t offer [what public schools do].”

Reed does admit, however, that due to the science-focused nature of PCSS, it may draw students who are interested in science and other STEM subjects away from public schools. “That kind of concerned me,” Reed said, noting that her public high school does not have the latest materials and facilities that PCSS claims to offer. “That may attract kids going into that field if they have state-of-the-art science labs.”



**BUDDING SCIENTISTS** Lynn students show their smarts participating in the KnowAtom program

Regardless of her own opinions, however, as charter schools are overseen and supervised directly by the DESE, Reed will have little sway in the final decision. Despite this lack of control, other members of the Saugus education community also expressed concern. School Committee member Arthur Grabowski shared his fear that a new charter could “take away from” other schools. “They seem to do real well,” Grabowski told the *Item*, “but at the expense of the regular public schools that have to maintain state and federal mandates that these people do not have to deal with.”

Grabowski also suggested that the biggest difference between public and charter schools is that charter school teachers are not unionized, which saves their schools a great deal of money.

Despite the challenges, some school districts are forging ahead. Lynn Public Schools has been strategically developing a long-term STEM plan. An integral part of this plan is adoption of lab-based curricula and teacher professional development at the elementary and middle school levels. The district has partnered with KnowAtom ([www.knowatom.com](http://www.knowatom.com)), a STEM curriculum development and consulting company based nearby in Salem. KnowAtom trains educators across the state to teach applied scientific and engineering processes exclusively through hands-on, student-led labs.

KnowAtom was founded by former Lynn Classical math teacher Francis Vigeant, who also spoke at the hearing. In his remarks, Vigeant posited that, compared to the “pioneering programs” teachers are now deliver-

ing in Lynn, the PCSS STEM offerings “settle for less.”

“After review of the PCSS science program,” Vigeant observed, “one is hard pressed to find an innovation.” He believes STEM schools focused on providing field trips, wrap-around services, and competitions are commonplace and cater to those who already identify with STEM. On the other hand, Lynn has been working with KnowAtom since 2007 to guarantee all students are given experience as scientists and engineers.

Vigeant noted that this collaboration is also supported and contributed to by The GE Volunteers Foundation, The Lynn Business Education Foundation, Dominion Energy, and the Gelfand Family Charitable Trust. “The collective effort,” he said, “is to ensure Lynn’s students are trained to analyze and think critically, equipping them with the science and engineering skills that will allow them to compete in tomorrow’s workforce.”

When asked for evidence of the benefits of his innovative efforts, Vigeant cited the fact that, in the last year alone, participating Lynn schools increased proficiency by an average 18 percentage points. “Lincoln-Thomson alone has improved over 50 points in the last three years,” Vigeant noted, mentioning one of Lynn’s elementary schools, “and is now 28th in the state” (up from 603rd in 2009), with 87% of students achieving a mark of “advanced” or “proficient.”

Despite these impressive statistics, Vigeant pledged that Lynn was just beginning to realize its potential and that, if given the time to do so, the positive numbers would continue to increase. “While these early gains are promising,” he said, “we anticipate that all schools, including the middle school, will continue to show dramatic gains.”

The issue, therefore, is time. If PCSS is allowed to open nearby and take students and potentially even faculty away from Lynn, the momentum

## Prime Time for TIMMS: Mass tops world charts

As further evidence of our incredible educators, Massachusetts bested the nation, and most of the world, in math and science on the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which is the largest international study of student performance in those subjects. The Commonwealth’s 4th graders ranked second worldwide in science and tied for third in mathematics. Our 8th graders tied for first in science and ranked sixth in mathematics.

“This achievement is the result of the commitment to high standards of teachers and students in classrooms across the Commonwealth,” suggested Governor Deval Patrick. “We cannot and will not let up until all students are performing at their very best.”

The 2007 results also demonstrated significant improvements over the 1999 results. In math, 8th graders

### POSSIBLE CHARTER EXPANSIONS

The following is a list of communities in which applications have been filed for new charter schools. Public comments may be submitted to [charterschools@doe.mass.edu](mailto:charterschools@doe.mass.edu).

- Boston - Brooke 4 Charter School** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Boston - City on a Hill Charter Public School II** (Scheduled launch 2013)
- Boston - UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Brockton - International Charter School of Brockton** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Fall River - Argosy Collegiate Charter School** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Lawrence - YouthBuild Academy Charter School** (Scheduled launch 2013)
- New Bedford - City on a Hill Public School New Bedford** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Saugus, Peabody, Lynn, Danvers, Salem - Pioneer Charter School of Science II** (Scheduled launch 2013)
- Springfield - Springfield Collegiate Charter School** (Scheduled launch 2014)
- Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee - Phoenix Charter Academy Springfield** (Scheduled launch 2013)
- Woburn, Stoneham, Medford, Melrose, Wakefield, Saugus - Pioneer Charter School of Science IV** (Scheduled launch 2014)

may well be lost and the district will surely suffer.

“Lynn public schools is pioneering proof [that] we can do a lot for all students instead of a little for a few,” Vigeant concluded. “I’d ask the committee to reexamine the PCSS... articulation of STEM instruction in comparison to what is being rolled out in...Lynn.” ■



# Diary

## of a New Teacher

By **Karina Dise**  
Paraprofessional  
Zanetti Montessori School  
Springfield, MA

### Meet the 2012-2013 New Teacher Diarists

The following new teachers will be contributing to the New Teacher Diary during the 2012-2013 school year. The *Advocate* thanks all of these fine teachers for sharing their experiences.

#### Bradford Green

English Language Arts teacher,  
Pickering Middle School, Lynn

#### Chaya Harris

Fifth grade teacher,  
Mather School, Boston

#### Himilcon Inciarte

Fourth grade Spanish teacher,  
Dever-McCormack, Elementary, Boston

#### Karina Dise

Paraprofessional,  
Zanetti Montessori School, Springfield

#### Bill Madden-Fuoco

Humanities teacher,  
Urban Science Academy, West Roxbury,

#### Eliana Martinez

Social studies teacher,  
Lawrence High School, Lawrence

#### Amanda Perez

Middle school teacher,  
Sarah Greenwood School, Dorchester.

#### Robert Tobio

Math and special education teacher,  
Mary Lyon Pilot School, Brighton.

## “One hand does not nurse a child”

### -African proverb

The upbringing of a child is a communal effort. In many cultures, a child’s education starts with parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and extends to close friends and neighbors. Many teachers also participate in this important role. In our society, and in many others, different people come together to help a child succeed.

Though I have a Bachelor’s degree in business, supporting children is very satisfying to me. I have been working at Zanetti Montessori School in Springfield since 2003. I started working part time as a lunch assistant when I was pregnant with my son. I immediately noticed how engaging with the children changed my life. My job as a paraprofessional started a few years later.

I am proud to say that I work in an environment where everyone collaborates to improve the education of children. At Zanetti, administrators, kitchen staff, accountants, specialists, maintenance personnel, teachers and paraprofessionals all work together as a team.

I am also happy that I work with preschool and kindergarten students because we get to see children when they first come to our school. We are the first faces they see; the first hands that help teach and comfort them. We play an essential role in their lives and the results show when school is over. I recently saw a young girl who had graduated from Zanetti working at a pizza shop. I did not recognize her immediately, but she made sure I remembered her. “You’re that teacher who smiles all the time,” she said. What a statement! Another three-year-old girl I had worked with at Zanetti saw me at a store. It had been two years since we had been together, but she remembered my name and shouted out: “You used to give us snacks every day!”

Words can’t describe the impact



#### ARTFUL HANDS

Karina Dise is a Paraprofessional at Zanetti Montessori School and the founder of Afri(K)que, which specializes in hand-made jewelry, clothing and accessories from West Africa. Check them out at [www.afrikque.com](http://www.afrikque.com).

we can have on children. Children remember both positive and negative things about us. When you think they are not paying attention, that is when they surprise you! It is up to you to choose if you will have a negative impact or a positive impact and how you will be remembered.

Working in a school setting can be a challenge. Over the past years, paraprofessionals have had their share of obstacles to deal with. Some of our assignments have introduced longer hours and more demands due to MCAS testing and attendance issues. A lot of work also remains to be done concerning lack of compensation during vacations. Even so, I still have hope that the necessary adjustments will be made so my colleagues and I can continue to support our children.

As a mother, wife, sister, and daughter, I have many responsibilities. Even so, when I am with my students, I am able to look past all that and focus on them, taking the time to watch and nurture the development and growth of each and every child I work with. My colleagues and I are there every morning to welcome the children in our class and that is a gift. We are a gift to the child and

each child is a gift to us. Nothing can replace the feeling you have after you have helped a child succeed!

So to my fellow teachers and especially my fellow paraprofessionals I say just keep in mind that you are not alone and that you can always go home happy knowing that you are making a difference in a child’s life. When they grow up, they will have you - and all of us - to thank.

It is so gratifying when a child thanks me for something I do to help them. What about you? ■



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## AFT Remembers Newtown

The recent events in Newtown, CT have shaken the nation; but especially the education community. Even though gun violence is unfortunately not a new phenomenon, this particular example seemed to change people in ways that others had not. Even many politicians who had appeared to be staunch gun lobbyists began to change their minds and their actions. It gives many hope, but that hope is more than tinged with despair and a profound sense of loss.

In her official statement regarding the tragedy, AFT President Randi Weingarten noted how the timing of the tragedy made it all the more upsetting. “In this season that usually fills [everyone] with joy and hope,” Weingarten said, “the entire AFT family is shaken and deeply saddened by the senseless, unspeakable loss of so many lives.”

After offering her own condolences to the friends and families of those who died in the shooting, and to the entire district, Weingarten went on to praise those who demonstrated bravery in the face of death. “In moments of great tragedy,” she observed, “so many perform acts of overwhelming heroism.” While it may be expected for police and fire fighters to rush toward a dangerous scene, Weingarten made

a point to praise the educators who sacrificed for their students. “First responders did what they always do,” Weingarten noted, adding that, in this case, “the school...staff did what educators instinctively do: protect their students.”

As the community of Newtown continues to mourn and as a shaken nation mourns with them, Weingarten suggests that this tragedy be taken as an opportunity to examine what makes a school truly safe and what more can be done in the future so that no more incidents like this happen.

“This tragedy reminds us of the need to do whatever it takes to ensure schools are safe sanctuaries for all students and staff,” Weingarten said, “and provide environments focused on teaching and learning.”

While she admits that “there is much work to be done,” and that this work will be difficult, especially “in the midst of such sadness and grief,” Weingarten emphasized the need to move forward on the road to recovery.

“That road for students, educators and the community will be a long one,” she said, “but I am confident that the AFT family will do what our union does best: come together to support one another.” ■



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# Summa Cum Laude: Lance Houston

Among the many things that students need these days are increased arts education and, on occasion, legal advice. Despite the fact that Massachusetts is known internationally as a center for both fields, fewer and fewer students are getting the support they need.

Fortunately, there are people like Lance Houston.

A 1992 graduate of the B.M.C. Durfee High School in Fall River, Houston went on to Harvard before earning a degree from Suffolk University Law School in 2005. With his credentials firmly established, Houston took his talents to the realm of human resources.

An expert on human capital management, Houston has helped many schools and other institutions find innovative ways to enhance and support their personnel. He has served as Director of Human Resources and Affirmative Action at Roxbury Community College, Assistant Vice-President for Legal Affairs and a Human Resources/EEO officer at Delaware State University, and as a compliance officer for the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). In 2007, Houston was selected to the State of Massachusetts Community College Leadership Academy. He has also earned a certificate in Advanced Mediation and Negotiations Skills from Harvard Law School .

When the noise of the boardroom, the courtroom or the classroom gets to be too much, Houston has a second avocation



**TOOTING HIS OWN HORN...FOR OTHERS** Lance Houston hits the right notes for students and others in need.

that also serves him and others quite well. As an internationally-acclaimed flugelhorn player, Houston has been able to calm his own nerves and those of others with his music. As a professional musician, Houston also knows full well the benefits that can come of music lessons and arts education in general.

“I was not a music student in high school,” Houston admits. “I had a deep interest in music...but I could not afford to rent an instrument and I also did not have the training.” These early obstacles made Houston sensitive to the challenges that today’s students face as arts programs continue to be cut. “Think of all the musical talent out there that is not harnessed due to these administrative fees,” he muses.

Despite the challenges involved, Houston’s love of music “remained intact” and he found the fortitude to teach himself trumpet. His talent proved so profound that Houston was eventually accepted to study at the prestigious Berklee College of Music.

“Music education is important because it teaches so much more than

just notes,” Houston suggests. “It teaches perseverance, learning how to keep going if you miss a beat and, most importantly, that your voice is unique but it can only be effective when it’s used.”

By speaking out and “tooting your own horn,” Houston says, students and teachers can get what they want out of both school and life. “Let your voice be heard,” he encourages. “That’s a powerful message whether you are a musician...a teacher, a business professional or...anyone!”

Despite the fact that he was unable to study music at Durfee, Houston still thanks his teachers for inspiring him. “The lessons I learned from music are with me for a lifetime,” he recalls, “but they are made more powerful by the great teachers I had in high school who inspired me to follow my dreams despite the obstacles in front of me.”

With his music education and his law degree, Houston is a passionate advocate for arts education. “Whether it’s supporting programs that help to waive instrument rental fees...or volunteering my time to teach Jazz

at local high schools,” he says, “my passion for the arts is rooted in the desire to help those who believe in the arts and want to help promote them.”

Houston recently took an opportunity to show his appreciation and support for those who helped him by participating in the Fall River school department’s annual Educator Conference. “Going back to Durfee is my way to give back to the community,” he explains. “I now want to be the spark that inspires a student’s flame!”

In his comments at the Conference, Houston reflected on the work ethic he developed while at Durfee.

“This is a [place] where you have to go out and get it,” Houston remarked. “You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves and create opportunities for yourself.”

While much of Houston’s success is due to his work ethic and his devotion to his causes, he also credits his teachers with sparking his intellectual and artistic fires. “They encouraged me to follow my dream,” Houston said, noting how important such a message can be to students who are just starting their own journeys. He also suggests that more people should volunteer their time and talents to support those who follow them. “Teachers are in a unique position to inspire, volunteer and mentor students,” he says. “With volunteering and mentorship, the sky would be the limit to revealing each student’s potential whether musical, academic, scientific, or anything!”

**Do you know a student or teacher who deserves to be honored? Send their name and e-mail to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).**

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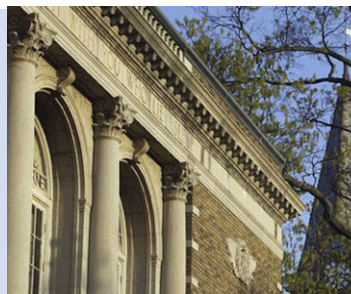






# On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## In Defense of the “Takers”

According to the cynics who lost the 2012 election, the so-called “takers” won because there are more of them than the so-called “makers.” According to this argument, some people take from the government while others work and pay taxes to pay for services for them to take.

In finding blame for his loss, Governor Romney returned to his theme of takers receiving gifts from President Obama. “Forgiveness of college loan interest was a big gift,” Romney said. “Free contraceptives were very big with young, college-aged women.”

While Governor Romney has lost his claim, his central theme that the federal government and the states can no longer afford entitlements has become the accepted paradigm of cutting government spending for Republicans and at least some Democrats in exchange for reducing tax breaks for the rich.

As usual in this Orwellian world of Newspeak, the word “entitlement” has been transposed from a “legal right or a just claim to receive or do something” (Oxford American Dictionary) to a socialist plot to weaken America.

George Will, the *Washington Post* columnist, calls his version of a so-

cialist plot “statism - expanding the entitlement state at the expense of economic growth.”

The central question here is what causes economic growth?

Certainly not finance. The system of unregulated financial practice clearly caused the financial meltdown that led to the current world-wide recession.

Most economists and economic historians agree that increasing graduation rates for high school and college, funded by local, state, and federal governments, caused the long-term economic growth that began after WWII. The GI Bill that gave WWII, Korean War, and Viet Nam War veterans grants to attend school, combined with the expansion of high quality, low-cost state colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s fueled the economic boom of the last half of the 20th Century. Increases in graduation rates were matched by increasing income for college graduates.

Even Mr. Will, when not chattering about the benefits of unfettered capitalism, called the GI Bill “the most successful federal program of the 20th century.”

This system worked well until sharp cuts in state and federal funding for

higher education over the last 20 years forced tuition above affordable levels for many students. Public colleges and universities now reserve places for high-income students who can pay the higher tuition, excluding competent lower income students from enrolling and pressuring low-income students to drop out. The result is that educational attainment is dropping in the US relative to other countries. According to the National Commission on Adult Literacy, “The U.S. is the only country among 30 OECD free-market countries where the current generation is less well educated than the previous one.”

An environment of declining educational attainment cannot sustain long-term economic growth.

Those students who stay in school to graduate face expensive debt that causes economic problems for graduates and the rest of the country. Current debt averages almost \$30,000 per graduate; a kind of mini-mortgage without a house. Current college graduates cannot afford to buy a houses or start families, which were the bedrock signs of post-WWII economic growth.

It is time to renew public investment in quality low-cost education that created the greatest economic boom in

history. Increases in federal and state grants for financial aid, lower or no interest loans for college students, and increases in loan forgiveness programs for public service make sense.

But these improvements aim at effects rather than their cause: the high cost of college.

The Occupy Student Debt Campaign calls for tuition-free public higher education for students who merit admission. Other student organizations have also proposed free tuition for students who maintain a certain grade point average or perform public service, and a surcharge for high-income students. Katrina vanden Heuvel in the *Washington Post* estimates this would cost about \$30 billion per year, which is less than states pay for prisons.

I think this a reasonable government investment for renewed economic and social growth. This only sounds radical because we have forgotten that state college and university tuition was almost free before 1980. I paid \$100 tuition per semester at UMass Amherst in the mid 1970s. The time is right to turn back the clock and give more to the “takers.” ■

## UMass-Dartmouth Fetes Favorite Faculty: Annual banquet honors science and service

On Wednesday, December 5, the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth community gathered at Rachel’s Lakeside to honor their own in what has become one of the school’s longest and proudest traditions.

For over 30 years, the UMD faculty and students have been nominating and supporting various faculty members for recognition for their service to the student body and the community as a whole.

This year, the Leo M. Sullivan Teacher of the Year Award was presented to Associate Professor of Medical Laboratory Science Dr. Frank Scarano. The Service Award from the Education Services Unit (ESU) was given to Jose Soler, director of the Labor Education Center (LEC).

The Teacher of the Year Award has been given every year since 1970. It is named in honor of esteemed Psychology Professor Leo M. Sullivan, who was also one of the founders of the Faculty Federation.

Dr. Scarano received a PhD in Microbiology from Albany Medical College in 1993. His nomina-

tion was supported by numerous letters from colleagues and students



**Favorite Faculty: Dr. Frank Scarano**

past and present.

In her letter of support for Dr. Scarano, Associate Professor of Medical Laboratory Science Dorothy A. Bergeron held Dr. Scarano up as a “recognized expert on campus” and suggested that his sparkling annual evaluations prove that he has “consistently maintained his status as one of the best and most effective teachers within the department.”

“I count myself lucky to have such a supportive, humane, and wonderful colleague,” she said.

Professor Bergeron also praised

Dr. Scarano’s “effectiveness as a teacher to a growingly diverse body of students,” many of whom “recognize [Dr. Scarano] as someone who cares about their academic success.”

Many of these students also expressed their own admiration and appreciation for Dr. Scarano in separate letters to the nomination committee.

“I seek Dr. Scarano’s advice as my career continues to take shape,” said 1999 graduate Ian Lemieux, who now works at The Fenway Institute. “Before as his student and now as his peer, Dr. Scarano challenges me to see things from diverse points of view.”

Dr. Caterina Miraglia credited Dr. Scarano with furthering her interest and passion for microbiology.

“his efforts motivate students to embrace and pursue knowledge,” added student Jetta Schifone.

As Director of the LEC for over 20 years, Soler has supported thousands of students with training and education. As a specialist in labor-related issues and topics (including role of people of color in the labor movement and the role of unions in social and economic justice movement), Soler has also taught

courses in the field to many UMD students. After receiving his bachelor’s degree from the University of New Mexico, Soler received an MA in labor studies from Rutgers University

“He leads by example in all of his work,” wrote colleague Jim Mullins in his nomination letter for Soler, “and has been a friend and mentor to many a new member of the ESU.”



**Cited for Service: Jose Soler**

Mullins went on to cite Soler’s “national reputation” as a labor leader. “He helped organize one of the first conferences in the U.S. in support of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa,” Mullins noted. ■





# Retiree Corner

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

## Seniors Beware!

We have all heard the saying, “Buyer Beware” applied to offers or deals that sound too good to be true. In that spirit, I shout, “Seniors Beware!” Beware of people who come into your life and try to befriend you, advise you financially, and, most importantly, try to make you and your money or possessions part company. They are not to be trusted.

We have all heard of seniors who have lost their life savings because of someone who told them they should have their money invested in a certain stock or company. They are told they are too cautious and that they need to take some risks to have their money really “work” for them. The Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards estimates that seniors who are victims of financial abuse lose on average \$140,500 as a result of deceptive sales practices, bad advice and outright fraud.

What makes the situation even more difficult to deal with is that these people are not always strangers; they can even be family members! So often, older Americans will say they trust their children and put their homes, investments or bank accounts in their childrens’ names. The sad truth is that,

even if you can trust your child, you may not always be able to trust their spouses or the people with whom they associate. We have all heard the story of people who have put their home in the name of a child or niece or nephew only to have the home sold out from under them. Also consider the fact that the person named may divorce, file bankruptcy, or acquire huge credit card debt and that your home or investments could become part of any settlement.

Reverse mortgage is another area in which seniors may become involved without realizing some of the negative and costly aspects of it. Next year, MRU hopes to run a series of seminars around the state entitled “Buyer Beware-Avoiding and Understanding the Pitfalls of Reverse Mortgages.” In the meantime, we advise caution.

So many times as teachers we would tell a youngster who made a mistake to think more beforehand and to ask the right questions in the future. We also need to take that advice to heart at all times, but especially as seniors. There is so much information out there. There are so many aspects of the law and so many issues to consider. Before you do anything, ask yourself, “What is the

worst that can happen if I do this?” If the answer is that you do not know, or the answer is something you would find very difficult to live with, get advice before you act.

Most people have primary care doctors and specialists to help us deal with medical issues. In the same way, we should all have a lawyer that we can call if a legal issue arises. They may charge you for the advice, but it will be a lot less expensive than acting without it, and making a costly mistake.

When we were teaching, we often sought the advice of the person in the classroom next to us, or looked for a consensus in teacher’s room to respond to a troubling question. Many of the important decisions that we make as seniors should not be based simply on a show of hands or what is the most popular answer, however. They should be based on facts and research regarding the best way to handle a given situation. All too often we ask the question after the fact when it is too late to do anything about it.

Seniors beware and be smart. Ask the questions up front and, if in doubt, err on the side of caution. We are never too old to learn!

## The Golden Apple

**Michael Regan  
History Teacher and Coach,  
Medway Public Schools  
Medway, MA**

I can say, without hesitation, that I have had entirely too many outstanding and influential teachers to narrow it down to just one. That being said, I will concentrate on four, each from a different “area” of my life. There is a common thread which runs through each of them. They were teachers who were concerned with the child, adolescent, or young adult first. Each of them was also, in my eyes, an outstanding person and they all played a part in the path which I chose to follow. As a teacher and a coach, I have often thought of their lessons or how they would handle a certain situation in the classroom, on the field, or in my own life.

The first, along with my mother, is one of the two most influential people in my life- my father. He was a teacher for 34 years, 33 in the Dover-Sherborn school district. The lessons he has taught me and continues to teach me I carry daily. The ideas of basic respect for all people, for hard work, and for those who have less than I remain strong. In his role as an educator and coach, I always knew that he cared deeply for his students in the classroom and his players on the field. The stories he shared with my

sister (a paraprofessional in the Franklin school district) and me were rarely about grades but about kids, some lighthearted and some serious, but each had a feeling for who the person was. I grew up knowing students and athletes who I had never met yet who played a role in my upbringing and my teaching.

Kevin Clark was a physical education and health teacher and, more importantly to me, my first football coach at Medway High School. Again, the lessons I learned from him I carry to this day. Not only did he teach me the game of football, he also taught it the right way, with concern for his players first. He treated each player with respect. He was tough and demanding but never mean. When we won it was with class and when we lost it was with dignity. When I became the head football coach at Medway, he was still a teacher there. I will never forget the first thing he said to me. He said, “Kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” I was lucky enough to get to coach with Kevin for six years and I am grateful for that. Though he has retired from teaching, he is still an assistant football coach at Medway and a trusted colleague and friend.

John Kennedy was a history teacher at Medway High School. I was in his class as a sophomore and again as a senior. He fostered in me a



love for history and also modeled the essence of what it was to be a great teacher. Again, his care for students came through in everything he did. He always made me feel that, though grades were important, learning was more important. He commanded his classroom with respect. I don’t think I ever heard him raise his voice and yet he was voted by the students as the most respected teacher in the school. When I became a history teacher at Medway, he was my department head. He told me that when I was in high school I had told him that I wanted to be a history teacher. He played a large part in that.

The final person I want to mention was the best classroom teacher I ever had. Jack McKay was my sixth grade teacher at North Elementary (now McGovern Elementary) in Medway. At that time, the school was K-6. That meant I was one of the oldest

## SENIOR SEMINARS

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### ATTENTION TEACHERS:

April, 2013 is just around the corner. This is a reminder if you have any service you can buy back you should begin the process immediately. If you do not get your forms in to purchase the time by April, 2013, you will pay double the amount in interest that is currently charged.

This affects everyone currently working for the Commonwealth in any capacity.

### CARRYING THE BALL

Before becoming an AFT representative, Michael Regan taught history for 14 years in the Medway Public Schools and served as a football and hockey coach for many years as well. Throughout it all, he has carried on the lessons his father and other great mentors instilled in him.

students in the school. To this day, that was best school year of my life and Jack had a lot to do with that. He made every single student in his class feel genuinely important. As a teacher, I always tried to do the same. I hope that I have been half as good at it as he was. As a student I remember watching how he treated students. It was rare that a student would get out of line in his class, but on those rare occasions, Jack handled it with a calm firmness. As an 11 or 12 year old, I was impressed by that. It made a difference when I became a teacher.

Each of these people had a tremendous impact on me and made me not just a better teacher, which they most certainly did, but a better person. I remember them every day and am grateful to each one of them for all they did for me and for so many other students. ■



# Common Core

Continued from page 1

Community College (BHCC), at which teachers could learn about the impending adjustments and start to grapple with how they will deal with them. According to Susan Lane, Senior Director of Alignment and Engagement at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, these teacher education programs will prepare educators for what she calls “pedagogy shifts.” While informative and comprehensive, some CCSI seminars left teachers with more questions than answers. At the end of the PARCC presentation at BHCC, teachers from around the region asked about such issues as how our current competencies match with those of CCSI and how teachers who are just being informed now and who are still dealing with the latest rounds of directives and suggestions can make the appropriate adjustments in time for implementation in the coming school year. Though such issues are significant, they are not the only concerns teachers have.

## Common Careers

Another major concern is the focus of CCSI. While many educators and education organizations support CCSI, the new plan also proudly claims support from many business organizations, including the Business Roundtable and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), who recently drafted a letter supporting CCSI. In fact, while CCSI is claimed to be intended to support student success in college, it also (and very often in the same breaths) mentions business success as a goal as well. Though some are encouraged by this sense of professional preparation, others worry that the goals of CCSI are too work-focused and overlook the important growth and development students encounter while in school. That PARCC materials suggest college to be “just one option” only supports such suspicions.

According to Lesley University Professor Emerita Nancy Carlsson Paige, another problem with pressuring students to focus on career and insisting upon what high school and elementary students need to know is that this pressured curricula will eventually “push down” to kindergarten, robbing even more children of the creativity and freedom that many early childhood programs promote. “This new mandate has nothing to do with what is known about how young children learn best,” Carlsson-Paige suggests.

# MEP fosters collaboration

Continued from page 1

er Chester, MASC Executive Director Glenn Koocher, and Jo Anderson, Jr., a senior advisor to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “Presenters came primarily from Massachusetts,” Peace observed, noting that the conference hosted nearly 350 attendees, “but also from Washington and Maryland. We had a few attendees from other states, including Maine, Rhode Island and even Arizona.”

According to their introductory materials, the goals of the MEP (which is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as the Massachusetts DESE and the National Education Association Foundation) are to accelerate student achievement and improve student success, to increase teacher engagement and leadership, to improve bargaining productivity and to institute structures that support collaboration and reform. Among the MEP’s inaugural programs is the District Capacity Project which is intended to raise student achieve-

## Common Limits

Some educators also asked about how non-traditional students will be served. In an effort to be inclusive, CCSI is suggested to support students with learning disabilities and ESL/ELL students as well. “We hope to get all students,” Shaw says. “We know not everyone progresses the same.” While the expressed intentions may be in the right place, however, some teachers see possible holes through which some students may still fall.

“I saw the gaps right away,” claims Chelmsford ELA teacher Dr. Katie Novak, who assessed the new standards as soon as they were presented. While some teachers may be able to deal with these gaps by adjusting their curricula, other gaps may be more difficult to fill, including the achievement gap between different racial and socio-economic groups. “A lot of my students do not have computers,” says Kate McLaughlin, a former elementary mathematics coach and current content literacy teacher who is also the Executive VP of United Teachers of Lowell. Therefore, she suggests, using computer-based assessments may represent a “cultural bias” that will not allow all students to engage the Common Core in a common way. “Those who have will have an advantage over those who have not,” McLaughlin predicts. “This worries me.”

Lowell elementary teacher Jan Flynn is also concerned about the new assessment systems. “If we do not know where the breakdown for students is,” she says, speaking of the great diversity among students in many schools and districts, “we will have a difficult time teaching them what they need to know next.” While Flynn notes that some assessment questions have already been released, allowing and encouraging teachers to prepare their students for the new assessments, this apparent act of generosity on behalf of those behind CCSI troubles many who see it as little more than a slight change to the oft-criticized “teach to the test” mentality of recent reforms.

Furthermore, while students may be able to get advanced support in preparing for their new assessments, CCSI does not explicitly support subjects other than English and math. Even within these subjects, CCSI offers further limits. In English, for example, it suggests only classic myths, America’s Founding Documents and Shakespeare as necessary inclusions (or, to use its terms, “critical content”) in its aligned curricula. PARCC

ment and close achievement gaps by making use of expert facilitation and innovation by leaders of education, labor, management and the community. Another key aspect of the MEP is the Interest-Based Bargaining Institute which will foster negotiations based on common interests instead of adversarial positioning.

While some at the conference may have been suspicious of the premise that traditionally-opposed parties could negotiate effectively, even the most ardent union supporters admitted that, if the interests of all parties are sufficiently investigated and explained, common ground can be found and used as a means of coming together rather than pushing apart. In fact, according to a report that was recently prepared by The Boston Foundation, while the fiscal crisis has lead many to attack public sector unions, they may be the key to progress going forward. The report claimed that the crisis could actually act as incentive to reconfigure how negotiations and

materials purport this “shift away from literature-focused standards to a balance of literature and informational texts” to be one of the “major advances” of their program. Though it encourages individual states and individual teachers to make their own decisions regarding what else to include, CCSI offers no guidelines or support for other forms of literature or means of instruction, suggesting only that students “systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening.”

“I think the...standards are more cohesive than the previous standards,” McLaughlin suggests. However, even McLaughlin cites potential problems with implementation. For example, even though CCSI is aligned within itself, many materials are not. “Instead of creating curriculum from scratch,” McLaughlin observes, “textbook companies are trying to retrofit existing products.” This creates what McLaughlin calls “a mess for teachers, especially elementary teachers...dealing with multiple content areas.”

Though it appears somewhat limited in its scope of possible topics and subject matter, CCSI’s creators and supporters insist that the new system does not tell teachers what to teach but rather only how. “These standards are not everything we need to teach,” Shaw explains. “They are what we *must* teach.”

## Common Core Commonwealth

To hear CCSI’s creators tell it, the new plan was voluntarily chosen by the participating states and will help ensure comparability and consistency across all of them. “The district formed Common Core committees for math and literacy,” McLaughlin explains. “They invited teachers from around the district to apply and they selected teachers to have representation from all grade levels and schools.” Despite the voluntary nature of teacher involvement, questions may arise, especially in relatively successful states such as Massachusetts. As Massachusetts has long been a national leader in education (thanks in great part to our educators), some educators and administrators here wonder how our state can benefit by participating. If we are encouraged to work with the same standards as sub-standard states do, they contend, our education system can only suffer. Also, even if incorporating Massachusetts in the system helps other states and standards, what will it do for us? According to Lane, Massachusetts is “ahead of the game” as our administrators have been aware of

collaborations are handled. The study cited in the report found that most superintendents and union leaders are in agreement regarding the lack of true discourse about such vital issues as shared responsibility, problem solving and strategic planning. Therefore, it suggests, by encouraging both sides to discuss these issues, they can come together based on common beliefs and interests while dealing effectively with these and other critical issues.

According to the report, “interest-based collective bargaining...focuses on underlying problems and interests...and generates options that serve each of the parties’ needs.” In this way, the report claims, interest-based negotiations can lead to a “win-win-win” outcome for teachers, students, and taxpayers. As there is clearly a “dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs,” the report suggests, new and true innovation is the answer, and organizations like the MEP are demonstrating how new ways of thinking and working can, in fact, work.

By the end of the day, new understandings had been forged, new ideas suggested and the levels of interest

these proposed changes for some time and also as Mitchell Chester, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, is Chair of the PARCC Governing Board. “The commissioners have an adamant commitment to moving Massachusetts forward,” Lane says. “If it does not work for Massachusetts, it is not happening!”

While CCSI supporters stress the benefits for Massachusetts, others are not so certain. “I foresee obstacles with state-wide adoption,” Novak suggests, noting that a lack of time to adapt may be the most pressing issue. In addition to the matter of how long teachers have to develop new curricula and prepare for new assessments, many also foresee challenges in terms of deciding how much time to dedicate to which parts of their curricula. “In our district, we are fortunate because this work has been taking place for...years now,” Flynn says, admitting that this gift of time is apparently rare. Even with that extra time to prepare, Flynn concludes. “Many challenges are in front of us.”

## No Common Conclusion

While it is clear that the discussions about standards and assessment and college and professional preparedness are important (BHCC Vice President of Academic Affairs James Canniff recently posited that “there is probably not a more important discussion in education” ), not everyone feels that they have been included in the conversation. Some think that CCSI will only amount to another top-down imposition that they are neither prepared nor interested to take on. While the people behind the new system see it as a step forward, many teachers are apparently still stepping around what they see as potential landmines and holes in the system. From too little breadth to too much to do in too little time, the Common Core has not yet received common acceptance. Even those who were early adopters are still a bit wary. “My biggest concern is that it is still being developed,” McLaughlin says, “and thus is relatively unknown.”

What teachers need to do, Flynn suggests, is to become familiar with all CCSI standards so they can teach with them most effectively. Unfortunately, she says, as the standards are still somewhat in flux, this is a difficult task.

As with so many elements of education reform, time will ultimately tell how successful CCSI is. Hopefully, our educators and administrators have enough time to make this work as it should. ■

and participation among the attendees and their organizations had increased. “The program evaluations were very positive,” Peace said, suggesting that another conference may be convened as early as this coming Spring.

In the meantime, a number of participating research centers, including UMass’s Collins Center for Public Management, the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research, Northeastern University’s Dukakis Center, and the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, will all undertake efforts to support and direct future efforts. The MEP will use their findings to support teachers, students, and other stakeholders in the future of education and education policy.

“I am encouraged that the leaders of the MEP stand united in collaborating on the important work,” Commissioner Chester said.

“The MEP is off to a good start,” Kochan agreed, “but time is of the essence. We [need to] demonstrate that we can accelerate the pace of innovation by working together...Let’s show the nation that Massachusetts has a better idea!” ■