



The Advocate

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January 2015

Rising in Support

AFT MA's Ed Doherty appointed to MA Board of Education

On December 23, 2014, Governor Deval Patrick appointed Edward J. Doherty to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Doherty has served as the Special Assistant to the President of AFT Massachusetts since 2003. He will be replacing Harneen Chernow of SEIU local 1199, whose term is expiring this month.

AFT MA President Tom Gosnell is very pleased with Doherty's appointment. "It is an excellent appointment," Tom said, "AFT Massachusetts is very proud." Gosnell also praised the work of Harneen Chernow and thanked her for her many years of service, "She was an excellent advocate for both the educators and the students of Massachusetts."

Doherty's name was submitted to the Governor by Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman, who has known Doherty for over thirty years. "There is no individual better suited to serve on the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education," Tolman said, "and through that role to help ensure the continued success of Massachusetts students."

Doherty's involvement in public schools actually began sixty-four years ago when he entered the first grade at the Patrick F. Lyndon School in West Roxbury. He graduated from Boston Latin School in 1963, and then went on to Boston College. In 1967, Doherty began his career in education as an English teacher at Boston Technical High School. While teaching he earned his Master's Degree in Education at Boston State College, and later a Master of Arts in English at UMass Boston.

Doherty's family is also heavily involved in public education. His wife Bea is a former ESL teacher in Boston; both their daughters attended the Boston Public Schools (his daughter Allison is now a Special Education teacher at West Roxbury High School) and now his grandchildren attend the Franklin D. Roosevelt Elementary School in Hyde Park.

When Ed and Bea's children attended the Boston schools, they both became very active in the Parent Councils, and in the 1970s and 1980s, Doherty served on the Executive Board of the City-Wide Education Coalition (CWEC). The CWEC was a group of educators, parents, and community leaders dedicated to building and preserving a quality, integrated

public school system in Boston.

In 1975 Doherty left the classroom to work full time for the Boston Teachers Union. In 1983 he was elected President of the BTU, a position which he held for twenty years. While serving as BTU President he attended Harvard University on a part time basis and earned his Doctorate's Degree in Education.

Over the years, Doherty has served on a number of Boards including, the Executive Board of the American



AN EDUCATED CHOICE
Edward J. Doherty

Federation of Teachers, the AFT Massachusetts Executive Board, the Executive Council of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, and MassPartners for Public Education.

Doherty believes that his new role serving on

the Board of Education will be among the most exciting and most challenging of his career. Commenting on the appointment, Doherty said, "I am honored to be asked to serve on the Board, and I am very much aware of the responsibility I am assuming to advocate for the best interests of the educators and the students of Massachusetts."

Asked about his priorities for improving public education, Doherty listed four issues: early childhood education; outreach to parents; improved order and discipline in the schools, and an extended school day, especially for students who need academic remediation or additional help learning English. Asked to elaborate on these issues, Doherty gave the following statement:

"We are all well aware that the data show that a major gap exists in academic achievement among various categories of our students. These gaps are usually defined by income level, race, and proficiency in the English language.

"I cannot tell you that as a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I will have the solution to closing the achievement gap. The solution to this problem involves public policy strategies that go far beyond simply educational initiatives.

"However, having said that, I do believe that there are steps that can be taken to improve the situation and to narrow the gap.

"I believe that we have to place far more attention on impacting the lives of children before they enter grade one. Of course this means expanding

KI and KII opportunities for children, but I would go further. I think we must initiate programs to reach out to parents of very young children; to engage them, to educate them about the importance of reading to their children, to provide home visits, and workshops, and educational materials, and to convince parents of the importance of sending their children to both years of kindergarten. I am not talking about any kind of compulsory program for parent; but I am talking about a very aggressive program to contact parents before their children are school age and to help them in any way that we can to prepare their children for success in school.

"In grades 1, 2, and 3 we must focus on keeping children at or above grade level in reading. For those children who fall below grade level in reading there must be quick and intensive intervention to bring them back up.

"I think one of the most important goals that we can have in our state is having all children reading at grade level by the end of grade three. Once children move into the upper elementary grades remediation becomes more and more difficult.

"The two other important steps in narrowing the achievement gap are an extended school day and better discipline. These are two issues that we must address if we are to retain more children in our urban school districts and not lose them to private and charter schools. Obviously, with my union history, I would advocate for fair compensation for people who work additional hours. I would also like to stress that additional time for students should not be just more test-prep time, but instead should include art, music, physical education, and important wrap-around services that many of our students need."

Many of Doherty's colleagues are aware of and agree with his views on public education, and they have congratulated him and expressed their strong approval of his appointment. Coley Walsh, AFT Massachusetts' senior staff member called Ed "a competent, dedicated, and professional educator," and said that this is a "terrific appointment." And United Teachers of Lowell's President Paul Georges commented, "I hoped we'd get someone who knew education issues, but this is the best . . . it is great news for all of us and for every educator in the State." ■

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THE GIFT OF READING
Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan serves as Santa's helper distributing new books to students and families that were donated by First Book (Story, p. 7)

Photo by Maria Lang

Summa Cum Laude: Becca Loebe

Many musicians reach a point in their careers where most people know their names. A select few reach a point where they can be referred to and recognized by their first name only. Others are so friendly and approachable that their first name is all you need.

Such is the case with Berklee student Rebecca Loebe.

Though many have come to know her from her appearance on the acclaimed NBC talent show "The Voice," Loebe insists on being a "regular" girl and insists on people calling her "Becca."

"Hi! I'm Rebecca Loebe," she says in a "note from me" on her website, www.rebeccaloebe.com. "If you've read that first sentence, then you know me well enough to call me Becca."

In addition to being so personable and down to earth, Becca appears to differ from other rising and established stars in other ways as well. Unlike other artists for whom songwriting is a chore that they often farm out to others, Becca says that "I write songs because I have to, because if I didn't I would go absolutely crazy!" The results of such dedicated songcraft are evident in Becca's many originals, some of which she has already released on a series of studio and live albums. Even though her catalog of songs is already larger than many artists who have been around much longer, Becca says she is "proud of every one." This too makes her different from other artists who seem content to pump out new material in order to please others instead of themselves.

That is not to say, however, that Becca does not think of her fans. Far from it! In fact, she is keenly aware

of the importance that her fans have for her as an artist and a professional singer. "I'm a professional independent musician," she says proudly, "and word of mouth is the only external force keeping my boat afloat." In her friendly way, she even goes so far as to invite listeners to become her "pen pal" and to write to her through her website on an address that, she claims, goes right to her phone and is always answered.

While Becca has spent a great deal of time honing her writing, performing and fan relations skills, and also touring (she has played 150-200 shows each year consistently since 2009), all of her efforts were surely helped by her appearance on "The Voice," where she was first noticed by judge Adam Levine for her stirring rendition of Nirvana's "Come As You Are."

"Funny enough, I always swore I would never be on a show like that," Becca laughs, explaining that she received an email from a casting director who invited her to a private audition in her hometown of Austin, TX. Despite her trepidations about being a self-described "roots-y singer/songwriter" on a show that seemed to be geared towards "the R&B diva type that they're usually looking for on shows like that," Becca decided that it would be better to take the chance and let the casting team reject her than to reject herself. Going in with no expectations, Becca says that she was "relaxed enough...to represent myself authentically." The next thing she knew, she was on episode one, singing for 12 million people!

"The experience was interesting and overwhelming," Becca says, recalling being "sequestered in a hotel in LA for six weeks," so she would not reveal the results of the voting until the season had aired. "My main goal as a contestant on the show was to use the exposure to bring more people into the fold of the career I was already building."

While she admits that her appearance on the show helped her career in terms of building her fan base and selling CDs and iTunes downloads, she says the greatest benefit was far more intangible. "Performing on the show

was so terrifying," she says, "that it had made every gig since then feel like a total love fest."

It also helped her realize that, unlike those first auditioners and the judges on the show, "people who buy tickets to come see a songwriter perform original music are not there to judge or criticize, they are there to share love, creativity and joy and have fun!"



A "VOICE" TO REMEMBER
Becca Loebe

From the beginning, fun has been an important part of Becca's music. From her earliest days of singing Disney tunes and other preschool favorites with her father accompanying her on guitar to her first foray into violin when the sound that emanated from the strings "sounded like a dying cat," to her picking up the guitar at the age of 11 to studying classical voice techniques in high school and then coming to Berklee

to perfect her craft, Becca says she has always loved singing and (except for that first violin bowing) playing music. She credits a good deal of her enjoyment to her teachers.

"I have had some amazing music teachers," Becca says, recalling an early violin teacher advising her that it was "ok to feel the music and even sway along if it moves you." She also recalls another teacher who always made sure to have an abundance of instruments available so that everyone could explore. "She also turned her office across the hall into a writing room," Becca explains, "and would let students leave class and go write songs if they were inspired."

Such inspiration has clearly stayed with Becca and now she hopes to inspire others through her happy work ethic and love of music.

"The funny thing about writing songs," Becca suggests, "is that once you've released them into the world, they're not about what you wrote them about anymore; they become about the listener."

By keeping her listeners firmly in mind, Becca is sure to go further as she continues to share and spread her friendly and open-hearted song skills to others. "I hope that the songs I write help people gain perspective on experiences they have had, work through difficult times or revisit happy memories." ■

BOLD PRINT

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

The direct line is 781-381-6600.

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For the fourth year in a row, alumni of the Berklee College of Music have been nominated in the top three categories for Grammy Awards: Record of the Year, Album of the Year, and Song of the Year. In total, 17 Berklee alumni were nominated for 19 Grammy Awards. In addition to performers like Mindi Abair, Annie Clark (a.k.a., St. Vincent), Laila Hathaway, Chuck Loeb, Jeff Lorber, Joe Lovano, Nicky Sanders, and Tierney Sutton, many Berklee alumni also worked as engineers, producers, or mixers for such nominated albums as *Beyoncé* (Beyoncé), *Girl* (Pharrell Williams), *Morning Phase* (Beck), and *X* (Ed Sheeran).

The 57th Annual Grammy Awards will be held on Sunday, February 8, and will be broadcast on CBS at 8:00 p.m.

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Wentworth Institute of Technology has appointed Charles Hotchkiss as Dean of Architecture, Design and Construction Management.

Hotchkiss had been working as the interim dean of the College of Architecture, Design and Construction Management, in addition to serving as associate provost of the Institute. This year, he had also served as the interim chair of the Department of Computer Science and Networking. While associate provost, Hotchkiss oversaw the development of graduate programs and worked extensively on making EPIC Learning (see previous issue) a reality.

"I'm honored to be selected as dean, and excited about the prospect of leading the College at this exciting moment in the Institute's history," Hotchkiss said. "I look forward to...helping realize Wentworth's vision of becoming nationally recognized as a center of EPIC Learning."

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The Advocate

The official publication of
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From the Stacks

For many people, books hold a special allure. From bedtime stories to adult fiction and information to escape, books provide a great deal of support and comfort throughout life. Perhaps that is why so many people still cling to their books, even in this age of digitized literature and online everything.

Marta M. Estrada and Carmencita Estrada-Carráu grew up literally surrounded by books! As the granddaughters of the proprietors of the first bookstore in San Juan, PR, they were captivated by the allure of literature from as far back as they can remember. It may be no wonder, then, that both sisters now serve as librarians.

"I think in our case is in the blood this thing of been around books," Estrada-Carráu suggests.

Though she graduated college in 1997 with a B.A. in psychology, Estrada recalls that, during her senior year, she realized that she did not want to pursue a career in the field.

"I was not planning on going to graduate school to get a Master's in psychology," she explains. "It just wasn't for me."

Similarly, Estrada-Carráu spent some time away from the classroom before coming back.

"When I was in my first year of college," she recalls, "I told my mother that I was dropping out to study cooking."

When her mother insisted that she finish her degree before making any career plans, Estrada-Carráu dutifully returned to school. Upon graduation, Estrada-Carráu came to Boston where she began to work for the United States Census.

"My job was part education, part public relations," she explains. "My job was educating people about the importance of filling out the Census."

This role led Estrada-Carráu to consider education in other forms. Recalling her past pursuit, she began

to study cooking and soon found herself catering for friends.

"I never planned a business," she says. "It just happened!"

After her father passed and her mother fell ill, Estrada-Carráu decided to go back to education so that she could have a more regular schedule and more time to care for her mother.

"When I was cooking I used to work between 12 to 16 hours a day," she says, admitting that teaching is often a long-hour role as well. These days, Estrada-Carráu also serves as a Notary Public and Justice of the Peace as well as a translator for many publishing companies. Even so, education remains her primary passion and in it she finds challenges enough for multiple jobs.

"I think the main challenge librarian faces today is the lack of funds assigned to the schools," Estrada-Carráu reasons. "We do not have a budget to work with and we have to do fundraising in order to purchase books and other materials. We need new books every year, because new books are published constantly, but the district does not assign a budget to schools every year."

As a bilingual librarian, Estrada-Carráu is also attuned to the needs of and challenges faced by her bilingual and ESL students.

"Bilingual students tend to look for books related to their culture when they have to read for pleasure," she explains. "For that reason, it is good to have books in the library that represent the diversity of cultures [and] ethnic groups in the school."

In addition to helping guide her students, Estrada-Carráu was also able to guide her younger sister as well.

"I was the first to enter the field of education," explains Estrada-Carráu, who recalls working as a teenager with autistic children in summer camps. "That open[ed] my interest to become a teacher."

The education bug is so strong in the Estrada family that the sisters' older brother is also a teacher in Puerto Rico.

"He is an artist/graphic designer,"

Estrada-Carráu explains, "and also works as a teacher in residency...in a school for at-risk students."

When the younger Estrada sister graduated college, BPS was looking for bilingual teachers and offered her a job.

"She decided to take the job," the elder sister explains, "and her interest in education started."

Starting as a parent coordinator and then moving on to work as a paraprofessional and long-term substitute, Estrada was also able to do a great deal for the children and families in her community, but she wanted to serve in a different way. When her older sister introduced her to a Masters program in library media, Estrada

jumped at it!

"When I decided to do my MA in Library Science," Estrada-Carráu says, "my sister decided to follow my steps and do the Masters with me." Though the elder sister had found the program first, it was actually the younger who entered the field first. In fact, Estrada-Carráu did not become a librarian until recently, choosing instead to work directly with her students in the classroom. On the other hand, Estrada began her library work right away, serving at the Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School. From there, she went on to the Agassiz Elementary School and then to Boston Latin Academy.

"I love being a librarian," she says. "I get to interact with all the students...not just the students in my class!"

In addition to working in the library, Estrada also teaches classes in research skills classes. "Being a librarian and working in a school library is very rewarding," she suggests. "I enjoy being a resource to my students when they need help. A smile on their faces when they get what they need to complete their work is priceless!" ■



"SHH"-INTERACT
Librarian siblings Marta M. Estrada and Carmencita Estrada-Carráu

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

If you would like to receive an electronic version of the *Advocate*, send an email to advocate@aftma.org.

Benefit Bulletin: Health Care Help

In this series, we hope to inform our members about the many benefits of belonging to and participating in AFT. Should you have any questions or comments, send them to advocate@aftma.net.

It is a story that has become all too familiar in recent years: a hard-working American family driven almost to the brink of bankruptcy by skyrocketing medical bills. Daniel Vance, an American Federation of Teachers (AFT) member, says he and his family could have lost everything as their hospital bills mounted. But today, things are finally looking up, and Vance is thankful for a Union Plus Hospital Grant.

"We worked hard, we always played by the rules, and we even had health insurance," Vance says, in describing the challenging circumstances he and his family endured. "But our out-of-pocket medical expenses were more than we could afford."

First, there was a foul ball at a minor league baseball game that broke Vance's nose and cracked his skull. Then, their daughter, Guadalupe, needed multiple eye surgeries to preserve her vision. Additionally, their son, Anthony Santiago, required additional hospitalization after he was born.

"We kept dipping into savings to pay the bills," Vance says. "We were

just weeks away from having to declare bankruptcy."

Medical bills are the number one cause of personal bankruptcy filings in America. According to one study, last year, nearly two million American families were forced to file for bankruptcy protection due to the high cost of hospitalization and medical care.

That's one reason unions have

always fought to achieve affordable health insurance for their members. And it's also one reason that Union Plus, which provides valuable consumer benefits

to union members and their families, offers a one-time \$1,200 Hospital Grant to eligible Union Plus Credit Card holders.

"I've carried the AFT + Credit Card

for about three years," Vance says.

"I had already used it to consolidate some other bills by taking advantage of a balance transfer offer. That had been a real help. Then, as we continued to cope with our medical expenses, I did some research online and I discovered Union Plus Hospital Grants."

Hospital Grants are one of many

unique benefits that are available only to eligible Union Plus Credit Card holders. Hospital Grants provide a one-time

grant of up to \$1,200 to AFT members who have had the Union Plus Credit Card for at least three consecutive months, and who have qualifying hospitalization expenses equal to



MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES
AFT member Daniel Vance

10% or more of their annual income. Additional details, qualifications, and an online application are available at UnionPlus.org/HospitalGrant.

"It's been an ordeal, but we're really hoping the worst is behind us at this point," Vance says. "We really appreciate Union Plus for helping us get through a tough time."

Do you carry an AFT + Credit Card? They feature Disability Grants, Job Loss Assistance, and Hospital Grants for eligible cardholders, plus, a competitive rate and all customer service calls are answered in the U.S. You can learn more by visiting AFT-Card.com.

Also available to eligible AFT members is the Union Plus Mortgage Program, which provides a range of assistance programs, including interest-free loans and grants to help you make mortgage payments when you're disabled or unemployed. Over the life of the Union Plus mortgage assistance program, more than \$10.1 million in assistance has been provided to union members.

At UnionPlus.org, you can learn more about these programs, as well as the Union Plus benefits and services that are available to union members and retirees. These include legal services, credit counseling, health savings programs, and the Save My Home Hotline, available at 1-866-490-5361. ■

Training Tomorrow's Leaders

UMass Dartmouth program continues to prepare educators

By Joao Paraskeva

Founded in 2011, UMass Dartmouth's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) has grown to four cohorts of leaders and educators. Currently, we are recruiting for the fifth cohort and are expecting the first group in 2015. This is remarkable achievement for a public institution!

This transformative program understands the imperative of struggling for social and cognitive justice. The students are from various leadership positions throughout New England from K-12 teachers and administrators to vice presidents of colleges to social workers. This program is infused with a diversity of people from around the world, which enables a plurality of voices and knowledges.

The connection between theory and practice as well as that between the community and the university is not merely rhetoric but a lived momentum that helps guide the revolutionary praxis of the ELPS program. Through ELPS, students have been exposed to major influential and renowned intellectuals of the world, such as Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Richard Quantz, Antônia Darder, Angela Valenzuela, Sonia Nieto, Pauline Lipman, Donaldo Macedo, and Barbara Madeloni, among others. The program creates academic opportunities both within and outside of the classroom that have challenged the students to think beyond their own professional practice and beyond the theory within

our studies to continue to work within the cracks of educational reform to continue to fight for democracy and equality that is so lacking in public education today as corporate forces continue to assault the democratic possibilities for public schools and dictate the movements of educators, administrators, and youth.

To continue engaging in critical dialogues and forming alliances, and with the support of the program, the students have presented at regional, national, and international conferences as well as having sponsored an annual leadership conference at UMass Dartmouth. This annual student-sponsored conference has attracted both student and faculty presenters from national and international universities.

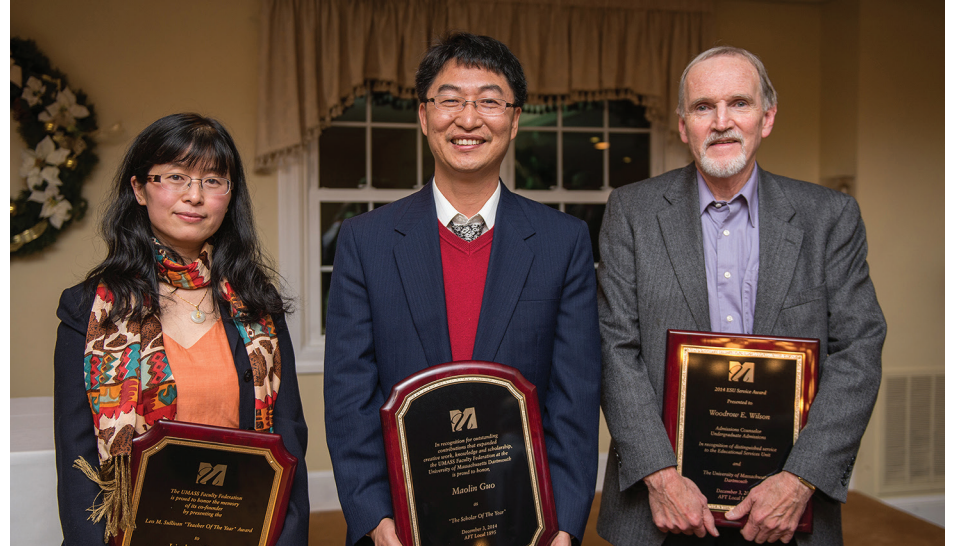
ELPS students recently hosted their third annual Transformative Researchers and Educators for Democracy (TRED) conference. The event included over 30 universities and colleges represented by more than 150 people. TRED was first formed in response to a vision from students and professors to work for social justice and democracy through transformative action and dialogue with schools, communities, and families. The program is an emblem of the enormous commitment and solidarity amongst the faculty and cohort members.

The passion, ethics, and dedication embodied by the faculty, students and community has driven our students to continue with doctoral studies while

also helping to work on community dialogues, film-screenings, and other events organized by the Department to engage the community, students, parents, and others in the struggle towards a vision for critical transformative change. From forums on opting out of high-stakes tests to the school-to-prison pipeline to ecojustice, we continue to fight for social justice and strengthening allies with people around the world.

In an effort to sustain our commitment to expanding theoretical possibilities that affect our local community, faculty and students has developed close relationships with powerful community organizations

and schools, including the Elizabeth Brooks Elementary School in New Bedford, *Radio Voz de Emigrante* in Fall River, and 3rd EyE Youth Empowerment. Dr. Ricardo Rosa and I have been with the program since its beginning and continually exemplify the leadership and vision that critical transformative leaders need in order to combat the oppressive corporate and neoliberal forces that we are encountering as educators, administrators, social workers, etc. Our students continue to try to raise their voices with the educators, administrators, parents, and youth to fight against the market encroachment on public education. We believe that we cannot have a global impact if we cannot make a difference locally. ■



HONORING THEIR OWN

The UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895 presents the Scholar of the Year Award to Maolin Guo, Ph.D., Chemistry and Biochemistry; the Teacher of the Year Award to Liudong Xing, Ph.D., Electrical and Computer Engineering; and the ESU Service Award to Woodrow E. Wilson, Admissions

Diary of a New Teacher

Jenny Garrity

Second Grade
Harrington Elementary School, Lynn

My education career started this past September when I began as a second grade teacher at Harrington Elementary in Lynn. So far, it has been such an amazing experience! I know that I am doing what I was meant to do. My passion for education has grown and I am so lucky to do what I love every day.

I graduated from Emmanuel College in May, 2014. While attending Emmanuel, I student taught at Harrington with Jacqui Gallo. I learned so much from watching her teach her first grade inclusion classroom and collaborating with her on how I can improve my teaching. It is so amazing to now be the second grade inclusion teacher and have many of those same students in my own classroom.

Something that I have learned as a first-year teacher is how big collaboration is. Being the inclusion teacher, I have support staff that comes in to co-teach with me and take small groups. I work with the special education resource teacher, reading specialist, ESL teacher, math specialist, and the school social worker. We work together as a team to meet the students' needs through intense differentiated instruction. This teamwork ensures student growth and, as I reflect on this practice, it provides me with tremendous professional growth as well because we learn from each other. Be-



INCLUSION FOR ALL

Lynn teacher Jenny Garrity collaborates with colleagues and families in order to give her students all they need.

yond the collaboration in my classroom, I also collaborate with second

the other three grade teachers. As a first-year teacher, it is so comforting to be able to plan lessons as a team, rather than having the burden all to myself. I feel that I'm in a good place because of the support and collaboration. I know that the students are getting what they need.

Due to all of the support staff that I have in my classroom, the school day looks much different than it did when I was growing up. Small group instruction has become so critical in meeting the students' needs. My classroom has an hour of guided reading groups and an hour of guided math groups every day. This is so beneficial in a classroom that has students on different levels of learning. It also ensures me that all students are being challenged. The classrooms at Harrington each have five computers and five iPads which are so beneficial to have during small group instruction along with the support staff that takes small groups. The groups consist of five-six students each.

Being at Harrington elementary, I have learned about student growth. Principal Deb Ruggiero puts a focus not on where the students are when they come into the classroom but the

growth that the student makes. This growth is constantly being measured in the classroom. In second grade, we do cold/hot reads every week, which is a one-minute timed fluency test. On Monday, the student gets a reading passage and they have one minute to read as much as they can fluently. Then they practice that passage at home every night. On Friday, the teacher does a hot read with the student and they read the passage again in one minute. The graph that goes along with the reading passages shows the growth being made over several weeks. We also progress monitor every other week to track student growth. In order to progress monitor, we use DIBELS which tests the student's oral reading fluency. The students also take pre-tests and post-tests to show the amount of growth being made across all content areas.

As a first-year teacher, something that I was unsure of was how to involve families in student learning. Fortunately, this summer the second grade team went to a workshop together for Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). This was an initiative that began in the kindergarten and first grade last year at Harrington. This year, the second grade team is taking it on as well. APTT puts a focus on student growth. It also gives the families an opportunity to set academic goals for their students. Instead of traditional open houses, there are three APTT meetings that happen throughout the school year. We had our first one at the end of September. Before the meeting, we tested the students to see where their math and reading fluency skills were by giving

timed tests. Then each student was given a number and the teachers made classroom graphs that showed where each student was in comparison to the rest of the class. The Harrington staff put a lot of work into making sure the parents were aware of these meetings. There was a sign in the front of the school, multiple invitations were sent home, and phone calls were made. There were also translators that attended the meeting to accommodate for all families. I had five translators in my classroom at the first meeting. The parents felt so welcomed and I felt that the meeting was a great way to talk to parents as teammates in working towards student growth. I also saw that parents appreciated seeing the graphs and understanding where their students were academically. During the meeting, I introduced games that can be played at home to help develop fluency. The second grade team played math bingo and sight word bingo. The families were able to take each game home so that they could play with their students. It was a great way to set up a relationship with the families and it is awesome to be working as a team with families!. I look forward to our second meeting in December where we will take a look at the students' growth and how they did on reaching the goals that the families made.

There are so many questions that a first-year teacher has and at times it is overwhelming. Sometimes, all I want is some more hours in the day. I have been so fortunate to be a Lynn Public School teacher at Harrington elementary school. I have received so much support. I feel that I have everything I need to be a successful teacher and I am able to be the best teacher I can be. I am so excited to watch my students' continue to grow throughout the school year! ■

Legislator Profile: Niki Tsongas

Historically speaking, the City of Lowell is known for its industry and for being a birthplace for new ideas and progressive practices.

Though the city has changed a great deal over the centuries, those traditions remain at the forefront of the people and places that make this revolutionary city so strong today.

Among these people is Congresswoman Niki Tsongas.

Representing the Third Congressional District of Massachusetts (which also includes such industrial and industrious cities and towns as Lawrence and Fitchburg, where Tsongas also has offices, and Haverhill and Marlborough, where she keeps generous office hours) since 2007, Tsongas remains a popular leader and legislator and a champion of her constituents. As she was the first Massachusetts woman to serve in Congress in 25 years (the first being Edith Nourse Rogers, who was from the same district), Tsongas also represents that aspect of her constituency with pride and purpose as well. In fact, as the only Massachusetts member of the House Armed Services Committee, Tsongas carries on the legacy of Rogers, who was instrumental in the creation of the GI Bill that helped many soldiers return not only to their homes but to their lives through education and support.

Speaking of education, this is another of Tsongas' passions. When asked what her earliest memories of education are, Tsongas quickly and smilingly replies, "I remember it very early on," and recalls in vivid detail her days in a California preschool that was one of the first to offer early intervention.

"I had trouble learning to read," Tsongas admits, revealing her personal nature and desire to connect with others. "My parents were very concerned."

Fortunately, while traveling the world with her military family, Tsongas was able to find a school that, as she puts it "unlocked" her abilities.

"My memories are all very positive," she says of her academic life. "Even the memory of having difficulty learning to read. My teacher and my parents worked together to help me meet that challenge. I feel a sense of accomplishment that I was able to make my way through it. And once I learned to read, I never stopped reading!"

Though all of her memories of her education experience are clear and profound, Tsongas has especially strong and fond memories of the teachers who "drew something out of me."

"I had a fifth grade teacher who was really tough," she recalls, "but I felt proud that I was able to meet her standards."

She also expresses special gratitude for the teachers who "encouraged me to think."

Of all of these supportive educators, however, one rises to the top.

"I had a French teacher in high school," she says of Harold Rogers, who taught at a Defense Department school in Tokyo, Japan. "He was responsible for introducing me not only to the language, but to French culture and to art and music history. I have never forgotten all that!"

In addition to teaching her all of these eye-opening things, Rogers also showed Tsongas what it meant to have a passion for what you did.

"He loved the teaching profession," she says, "so he also made a point of taking us out into Tokyo and doing whatever he thought would challenge us to think and introduce us to new cultures."

Such openness to new ideas and new people has served Tsongas well in her multi-cultural constituency and has encouraged her to support everyone with the same drive and passion.

Of course, Tsongas would not have met Rogers (or so many other people who helped make her life what it was) had it not been for her father. A survivor of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Tsongas' father became an officer in the United States Air Force and travelled the world, taking his family with him.

"There was a family dynamic of serving your country," Tsongas explains. "We always had to find community while maintaining a commitment to service."

This core value helped lead her to her current role and to her vocational love of politics.

"As a student, I always enjoyed

politics," Tsongas recalls. "I always ran for officer and always succeeded!"

Another political pioneer who pushed her to the polls was President John F. Kennedy. "I also remember his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention," Tsongas says. "We were on a ship traveling to Tokyo and I remember hearing it on the loud-speaker."

Speaking of conventions, Tsongas' first involvement with a political campaign was with Eugene McCarthy. "I was a student at Smith," Tsongas recalls, "and I went to New Hampshire to help and was asked to travel with him all over the state! That experience introduced me to the nuts and bolts of political office and I found it very meaningful."

Tsongas hopes that today's students have the passion to get involved as she did.

"I think students can get involved in a lot of ways," she suggests. "There are volunteer opportunities and there is nothing like hands-on learning."

By taking advantage of such opportunities, students can not only develop a deeper and more marketable resume, but can also develop a deeper appreciation for our political system and how it will affect them in school and afterwards.

"There is also no denying that we need to understand our particular form of government," she observes, "and that can only be done in the classroom."

Another vital area that students (and others) need to learn about and appreciate that makes the United States special is education itself.

"Students need to understand... how important education is," she suggests. "That is true whether you go to a vocational technical school that can help you get skills that can help you get a job or another higher education school."

Tsongas is especially interested in and supportive of recent developments in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

"I see so many companies where people have background in STEM and it reminds me over and over how

important those skills are and how you need higher education in order to be proficient in them," says Tsongas, who previously served as a dean at Middlesex Community College. "I see it as critically important to see how important education is."

In addition to higher education, Tsongas is also a strong supporter of early education.

"I see what happens when people have insufficient access to early education," she says. "Children who have had that privilege have a much more positive outcome. So, as a country, we need to find a way to bring that to more people." One of the major obstacles to education these days is the cost, so Tsongas is also keen on finding ways to afford and pay for education from pre-K to post-doctorate.

"Student loans...is one place where the federal government does have a strong role to play in terms of affording access to affordable loans," she suggests. And while she is already working on developing ways by which people could "revisit" their student loans (as many do their mortgages, etc.), Tsongas realizes that, "there are many things we need to contribute to education because we realize what education can contribute to our economy and society."

In her desire to connect with and support her community, Tsongas not only has offices in Lowell, Lawrence and Fitchburg, and hosts office hours in Haverhill and Marlborough, she also makes every effort to be a regular presence not only in the legislature but in the schools.

"I try to visit schools as much as possible," she says. "I just enjoy it!"

One of the things that Tsongas has enjoyed recently has been seeing the positive changes in Lowell and Lawrence.

"I have really been impressed with what is going on there," she smiles, citing the new superintendent in Lowell and the development of new partnerships in Lawrence, in particular. "I have seen some extraordinary teaching and energized students and some new schools that would be the envy of any school system. Even in the older school buildings, there is a new energy and that has come from the kind of teaching people have been exposed to. I think it is a testament to the community, the long-term future of which is built upon teaching the young people. Seeing the type of teaching going on there, I am very hopeful that will be the case!" ■

When budgets need to be cut, education spending is often first item trimmed so as to make ends meet. From a numbers standpoint, a balanced budget may reflect effective management and a progressive allocation of resources. Lost in the process is the voice of the young people most affected by top-down decision making, who cannot lobby legislators who can be easily swayed by business interests seeking tax breaks. Student activist groups provide a valuable outlet for students to become engaged in the direction of their education, and help inspire a generation of civically minded young people take part in the democratic process. ■

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

Have a comment?
Please write to advocate@aftma.net.



DEDICATED TO SERVICE
Congresswoman Niki Tsongas

Policy Perspective: Student Activism

By Cory O'Hayer

As the Commonwealth prepares for PARCC and MCAS testing, public school students will once again be used as a metric by which policy initiatives are assessed and measured. These exams will produce more numbers, furthering the narrative that teachers are a variable and students an outcome, following a formula dictated by whatever new instruction method has been adopted by administration. Though they may be the most important factor in the education policy process, and the center of every educator's career, students have been largely excluded from decision making and left without a voice.

Student resistance to standardized testing has taken a foothold in large school districts nationwide. The Baltimore Algebra Project has created a peer tutoring network and has also challenged school closure while creating a student Bill of Rights. In

Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Student Union has been voicing student concerns since 1995.

In Rhode Island, the Providence Student Union (PSU) has joined students in opposition to budget cuts. They also helped organize a school walkout and march to City Hall that helped get their proposed changes realized. After seeing that their actions had created positive change, students decided to challenge Rhode Island's high stakes standardized exam, the NECAP, as well as other issues facing Providence's public schools. They led protest marches, including one in which students dressed as zombies to emphasize the "mindless" exam-based curriculum, and another where students dressed as guinea pigs to symbolize how policymakers were using them to experiment with the education agenda. In another campaign, students marched for free fare on the city's public transit by taking

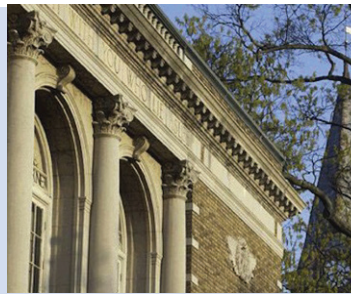
community leaders along with them as they walked to school. Now, bus passes are accessible for thousands more students. In March, 2013, the PSU convinced policymakers, politicians and other community leaders to take a high-stakes test. Sixty percent received a passing score, and the state later shelved its plan to use the exam as a graduation requirement.

Part of the PSU's success lies in its relying on students for leadership. At a time when civics and social studies are often overlooked in favor of quantifiable subjects, PSU members leave high school having already negotiated policy strategies with figures ranging from school administrators to members of the state legislature. Including students in the policy making process not only adds an additional voice to furthering social justice in public education, but also provides students with the knowledge of a democratic process they can carry into adulthood.



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



UMass Contracts Caught in Political Web

Massachusetts law for funding collective bargaining contracts makes funding completely political, which defeats the purpose of collective bargaining.

By law, the funding process starts when the Governor's office gives salary specifications to UMass and other higher education employers for negotiations with campus unions. After negotiators come to agreement, which usually takes a year or more, the unions present the agreement to their members for ratification. If ratified, the contract goes back to the Governor, who presents the funding bill to the Legislature or rejects the negotiated agreement, sending it back to the parties for re-negotiation.

Contract funding bills presented by the Governor become part of the Legislative agenda, usually taking months before passage. Funding appropriations passed by the Legislature goes back to the Governor, who can sign or veto the funding bill.

This process has broken down over the years at every step. The Governor's office has delayed giving funding guidelines to UMass and state college negotiators, Governors have refused to present funding bills to the Legislature, the Legislature has delayed or not funded appropriations bills, and Governors have vetoed contract funding bills passed by the Legislature.

In one case, a Republican Governor vetoed a bill that she had submitted to the Legislature.

The usual complex politics of state government is made worse in Massachusetts by the voters' tendency to elect a Republican Governor and a Democratic State Legislature, the current status of state government. Rather than make state government more accountable to the voters, this arrangement creates a political circus. Contrary to this arrangement, the past eight years under Democratic Governor Patrick have been the most productive in state government over 40 years, even with the arrests and convictions of several House Speakers.

This odd process for funding collective bargaining, unique in the U.S., also weakens collective bargaining. Negotiations work best when the negotiating partners have something to trade. UMass negotiators have little to trade because UMass administrations usually takes a walk on contract funding except to make special, secret deals with political leaders.

This is not the first time around for Governor Baker in higher education contract funding. As Governor Weld's Secretary of Administration and Finance in 1995, he rejected the negotiated agreement to fund UMass faculty and staff raises in a letter to UMass President Hooker, reported in the

Boston Globe, stating that UMass Faculty were "overpaid and underworked" To his credit, Secretary Baker spent a day at UMass Dartmouth after this public statement with mostly younger faculty, where he softened his position and agreed to help in the next round of contract funding, which he did.

Earlier, he had worked with Governor Weld to furlough UMass faculty and staff, i.e., force to work without pay. The courts ruled against the furlough, forcing the state to pay us.

This time around, it's déjà vu with a twist.

Some faculty and staff bargaining units for UMass and state and community colleges and universities have signed collective bargaining agreements that Governor Patrick submitted to Legislature without a funding request because he included funding for contracts as amendments in the 2015 state appropriations bill.

Glen Shore, Governor Patrick's Secretary for Administration and Finance, who submitted ratified agreements to the Legislature, wrote that "funds already appropriated are sufficient to pay these costs."

UMass President Caret, who has resigned to become Chancellor of University of Maryland on July 1, 2015, has not paid contractual raises, implicitly arguing that the additional funds in state funding for UMass were

for the general funds rather than for collective bargaining payments.

UMass Dartmouth faculty union reached agreement with the UMass Board of Trustees, which is scheduled for ratification in a few weeks. UMass Dartmouth Professional Staff union (ESU) and UMass Boston non faculty employees continue to negotiate, with agreement in most areas except for increase in merit pay.

Newly elected Governor Baker will not likely ask the Legislature for additional funding for UMass collective bargaining agreements given the Massachusetts state budget deficit, which he inherited from Governor Patrick.

Everybody can blame somebody else for not funding the contracts without anyone doing anything to fund the contracts.

This looks like bait and switch from UMass President Caret: ask for collective bargaining funds in the state budget for increased "flexibility" and then not pay out the funds for faculty and staff raises.

UMass Dartmouth faculty, librarians, technicians, and research associates will meet on January 29 in Library 206 at 3:30 for ratification on the negotiated collective bargaining agreement.

Low attendance for contract ratification is the best evidence for not funding the contract. ■

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Retiree Corner

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



SENIOR SEMINARS

How to Protect Your Nest Egg
Saturday April 18, 2015
Saturday June 27, 2015
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

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

Preparing for Retirement
Wednesday, January 14, 3:30-5:30
Billerica Memorial High School
35 River Street, Billerica
(Snow date- Wednesday January 21)

Saturday January 31, 10-noon
Presidential Park 314 Main St.,
Unit 105, Wilmington
(Snow date- Saturday February 7)

Thursday March 26, 3:30-5:30
Methuen Education Association
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen

Wednesday April 1, 5:30-7:30
Relief's Inn
One Market Street, Lawrence

Wednesday April 8, 3:30-5:30
Pocket Theatre
at Sky View Middle School
500 Kennedy Way, Leominster

Monday April 13, 3-5
Lynn Teacher's Union Hall
679 Western Avenue, Lynn

Marie Ardito's presentation is directed to people retiring in the next 10 years from public sector jobs. It provides an understanding of the retirement system and options, as well as a legal checklist, tips for protecting assets, advice about understanding Medicare, and much more.

To register for any seminar, email mardito@retireesunited.org or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number attending.

The "Boomerang" Generation

Prior to the 1960's the most common reason most kids left the nest was to get married, join the military or to move when the distance between their parents' home and their job was an issue. After the '60's it was unusual for young people in their mid or late twenties to be living at home. Many left for college and loved the independence that living on one's own provided and had no desire to return to the nest.

The "empty nest" syndrome was real, but today what is better known is the "boomerang syndrome," as these young people boomerang back to their place of origin after completing college when they are not able to find employment, or cannot make ends meet once they have started working. Then there are those who move back due to divorce.

In the latter case they may also bring children home with them. This presents its own set of problems and you must remind yourself that these youngsters are their children and they are the ones that have the control over raising them. So, even if you do not agree with what they do or how they do it you have to warn yourself against interfering.

No matter the cause of the "boomerang," it is the parents whose lives

are greatly disrupted. Once one makes the adjustment to the "empty nest," it becomes more difficult to have your offspring home again. They have had the taste of freedom and resent being "treated as kids." Family tension can ensue for a number of reasons including financial, so it is imperative to have a frank discussion at the outset.

It is important that everyone understand the why of the return home. A time frame should be established by all parties at the outset as to the length of the stay. There will be a financial burden on you as a parent for food, water, electricity, etc so this also should be discussed. The young people should contribute financially if possible, or if finance is an issue then in lieu of this, they should help with things around the house.

Let them know you have not missed worrying about them when they are out later than they said they would be. With cell phones there is no excuse for not calling home when they are going to be late and make it clearly understood at the outset that you wish to be notified if they are not coming home for a meal, or are going to be later than you were told.

This is your home and you should not be made to feel uncomfortable in it. Establish rules regarding issues that

may concern you such as overnight guests, use of alcohol, etc. Establishing the ground rules up front makes it easier and prevents arguments.

There are some young people who will want to "boomerang" more than once, maybe even several times. Let them know that they may not need stability in their lives but you need it in yours. It is fine to help once, but we should not become a crutch that they feel free to pick up or discard on a whim. Remember, there is a fine line between helping and enabling. Enabling is doing for others what they are capable of doing for themselves.

Each "boomerang" is individual, so there are no clear-cut dos and don'ts. The purpose of this article is to help you realize that problems can arise and setting down ground rules at the outset can make the experience easier. Of all the species on earth, humans take the longest time to assume responsibility for their lives and be truly independent. Sometimes, like the mother bird, one must use one's beak and push gently from the nest when it is for the good of all concerned. ■

Lynn Opens Up First Book for All

On December 13, 2014, representatives from FirstBook (www.firstbook.org) returned to Lynn to distribute over 40,000 books to students and families at the Harrington Elementary School.

"Distributing 43,000 books to the Lynn community was an extraordinary and rewarding experience for our members and students," said Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan, "one that we will all remember for years to come. To celebrate the importance of reading and to give the gift of books to our students during the holiday season was simply spectacular!"

According to Duncan, First Book salvages books that would otherwise be destroyed by distributors and redirects them to students and communities in need.

"Our students, in the aggregate, are 80% free and reduced lunch," he explains, "so that percentage enabled us to qualify for the Challenge."

Duncan explains that the Challenge was months in the planning and that sorting the books by reading level and then by title and distributing them took the greater part of two full days to complete, even with the hundreds of volunteers who participated. "We have been planning this since last summer," he says. "The first piece was getting the 2,000 people registered. The second was the logistics of the distribution. Both were a lot of fun but

both were a lot of work!"

The main team of teachers and colleagues came to be known as the First Book Committee. It included current teachers as well as retirees and others who spent weeks preparing for and helping with the Challenge.



SHARING THE POWER OF READING
Harrington School Librarian Carol Shutzer, AFT First Book Representative Tom Moran, Drewitz School Teacher Pam Laramie and Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan help at First Book's December distribution

Photo by Maria Lang

"They are a bunch of teachers who were released by the District to work on this project," Duncan explains. "It was a ton of work, but it was a great organizing event that allowed our members to work together on a positive project!"

In addition to teachers, retirees, and other members of the LTU, the distribution was supported by members

of the Lynn's academic administration, parents and the students themselves. "The national union was great in helping us organize this," Duncan says, reiterating his gratitude to all who contributed to and supported the effort.

There were also face painters, a DJ and visits from Clifford the Big Red Dog and Santa Claus.

"We tried to make it a festive celebration," Duncan says.

Having sent 15,000 invitations to Lynn students, the event also attracted many parents, each of whom was given up to five books to take home. Needless to say, both the students and parents were very excited about their gifts!

"It was a remarkable experience to witness first hand the excitement of our students, their families, and our teachers as they had the amazing opportunity to pick out books for home and classroom libraries," added Harrington School Librarian Carol Shutzer. "Literacy truly lives in Lynn!"

"What a joy to see the faces of both young and old experience the love for literacy," said AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre, who is running for an at-large council seat in Lynn. "We hope to partner with AFT and First Book again to bring this experience to other locals across the state in 2015." ■

Check it out!



www.aftma.org

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Do you want to share why you entered education?

Do you have life lessons to impart?

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Checking On Charters

State Auditor Bump Issues Official Report

On December 18, 2014, State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump issued an Official Audit Report regarding the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Oversight of Charter Schools for the period July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2013. The Executive Summary reads as follows:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, charter schools, which operate under the oversight of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), have become a key component of the Commonwealth's education reform efforts. This is particularly true of Commonwealth charter schools, the category of charter schools that are fully independent of local school districts. Taxpayer funding, including tuition payments and other funding, associated with Commonwealth charter schools is expected to exceed \$516 million for fiscal year 2014. Cumulative state funding since the first charter schools opened in 1996 will then total approximately \$4.3 billion. The role and success of these charter schools in fulfilling legislatively established educational purposes have been the subject of extensive public debate since provisions for the establishment of charter schools were first included in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993.

This audit examines aspects of DESE's oversight of the charter school system and certain matters relevant to the fulfillment of statutory purposes and requirements, including those related to student waitlists, student and educator data, development and dissemination of replicable innovative best practices, and attainment of academic and demographic profiles comparable to those of the school districts from which charter schools draw their students.

Summary of Findings

- Charter school waitlist information maintained by DESE is not accurate. A lack of accurate waitlist information may result in ineffective planning and oversight, as well as policymaking consequences such as an inaccurate assessment of demand when charter school approval, renewal, or expansion applications are considered and when the Legislature makes decisions on changes to existing limitations on the number of charter schools.
- As a condition of charter renewal, charter schools are required to document that they have provided innovative programs, best practices, and models for replication in public schools to DESE and sending districts. DESE is required to facilitate dissemination of this type of information and provide technical assistance in replicating successful programs. However, documentation of the development, dissemination, and replication of innovative practices is limited, and DESE has not adequately documented that it has facilitated these practices, nor has it taken action to broadly disseminate charter school innovative best practice information itself since 2009. As a result, charter schools may not be fulfilling their statutory purpose of stimulating the development of innovative public education programs and providing models for replication in other public schools. Further, DESE may be inappropri-

ately renewing the charters of schools where these programs, practices, and models for replication have not been developed.

- DESE does not ensure the reliability of data submitted to it by schools and districts. Without sufficient oversight and monitoring by DESE of the accuracy of schools' reported data, there is an increased risk that unreliable or inaccurate data will be used by DESE, other state agencies, the Legislature, researchers, parents, and others in their decision-making.

- DESE and the Executive Office of Education have inadequate controls over data security in DESE's Student Information Management System (SIMS) and Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS) data collection systems. Specifically, controls are not adequate with regard

to password settings, session locks, detection of inappropriate use, policy documentation related to information security, system configuration changes, security training for system users, and auditing of access security control. These deficiencies impair DESE's ability to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data collected and maintained in SIMS and EPIMS and heighten the risk of data loss, alteration, or unauthorized use.

- During our audit period, DESE was inconsistent in its decisions regarding whether to impose conditions for some school charter renewals. Inconsistency in charter renewal decisions can cause multiple problems: charter schools may not clearly understand expectations, schools may be missing the opportunity to receive important feedback, parents may be misinformed about schools' performance, and children may receive substandard academic programs. Recommendations

- DESE should gather all waitlist information required by law, including student addresses, telephone numbers, and birthdates, in order to develop and maintain accurate consolidated waitlists. If DESE determines that privacy/child protection considerations warrant special security measures to protect statutorily mandated information, it should enhance its data privacy protection measures.

- DESE should take the measures necessary to ensure that charter schools notify it within 30 days when vacancies are filled and that it uses this information to update its waitlists.

- DESE and BESE should consider modifying the recently amended 603 Code of Massachusetts Regulations 1.05 to fully prohibit the use of rolling waitlists and require that each student reconfirm prior applications to maintain a spot on the waitlist.

- DESE should develop options for

more efficient and accurate waitlist processing. These might include the use of a single consolidated waitlist at DESE with a standardized software system developed and distributed by DESE for use in processing online applications for families wishing to enroll a child in school.

- DESE should consider routinely conducting some type of verification of waitlist information.

- In collaboration with charter and district schools, DESE should establish detailed guidance regarding standards and expectations for the development, dissemination, and



REPORTING ON CHARTERS
State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump

- During the charter renewal process, DESE should ensure that charter schools meet all the requirements for the development of innovative programs and best practices and should establish corrective action requirements for charter schools that do not effectively fulfill this statutory purpose.

- DESE should develop policies and procedures for the verification of

charter schools' reported data. Such procedures could include a program of on-site data verification similar to the one it has already piloted, as well as a system to ensure that corrective action is taken when problems are identified. DESE should continually adjust its data verification and data quality programs to reflect common data issues that are uncovered. Other recommendations related to data reliability are presented in the Detailed Audit Results and Findings section of this report.

- DESE should consistently apply its performance criteria in the charter renewal process, including requiring schools to meet the measures of success shown in their Accountability Plans. If DESE feels that other important factors not reflected in charter schools' Accountability Plans influence the renewal status of a charter, these factors should be formally identified and explained in guidelines so schools better understand DESE's expectations. Other Matters Unaudited DESE data (which our audit found to be of undetermined reliability) on student demographics and educator qualifications indicate the following:

- In 2010, the Legislature amended Chapter 71, Section 89(e), of the Massachusetts General Laws to ensure equal opportunity and promote academic and demographic comparability of charter schools to sending districts. Under this statute, a charter school must have a plan to recruit and retain high-needs students who are limited English proficient (also called English-language learners, or ELLs), those who are classified as needing special education, those who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, those who are at risk of dropping out of school or have dropped out of school, or other at-risk students who should be targeted to eliminate academic achievement gaps between socioeconomic groups. DESE data indicate that some Commonwealth charter schools appear to

have made some progress in attaining academic and demographic profiles comparable to those of sending districts. However, profiles for many charter schools remain less than comparable to those of sending districts for student population groups such as ELLs, students with disabilities, and students from families with incomes below 130% of the poverty level.

- The lack of comparability between charter schools and sending districts presents significant barriers to any attempt to determine whether the higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System performance at certain charter schools is attributable to demographic differences or whether innovative practices have produced positive outcomes.

- Operating under different statutory requirements, charter schools have lower percentages of licensed teachers than traditional public schools. Additionally, charter school teacher salary levels average 75% of those at sending districts.

- Based on data on charter school enrollment levels, payment arrangements and trends, operating results, and financial position, charter schools generally appear to be in sound financial condition.

Conclusions

For the most part, DESE has implemented effective internal controls over the monitoring of Commonwealth charter schools in the areas tested. In addition, DESE has addressed all the findings in our prior audit that were followed up on during this audit. However, our audit identified issues with certain aspects of DESE's administration of charter schools, including the following:

- The reliability and accuracy of charter school information in DESE's data systems are questionable.

- The extent to which the charter school system has provided a successful mechanism for developing and disseminating replicable innovation models is not determinable.

- DESE was inconsistent in its decisions regarding whether to impose conditions for school charter renewal. Further, based on unaudited information we were able to obtain and analyze during our audit, we noted that improvement might still be needed in addressing concerns regarding inadequate representation of high-needs student populations. ■

ATTENTION NEW TEACHERS

Have you been teaching for fewer than five years?

Do you want to share why you entered education?

Do you have life lessons to impart?

Do you want to support your colleagues and community?

Write to advocate@aftma.net

Check it out!
www.aftma.org