



The Advocate



July 2013

Tightening the Cap

Students, teachers, and parents rally to limit charter schools

On Tuesday, June 4, students, teachers, AFT MA representatives and other concerned citizens gathered at the State House for a special press conference. At this event, which was moderated by Boston Public Schools graduate Carlos Rojas, the main issue was the whether or not the cap on charter schools should be raised. As such a development would involve the redistribution and depletion of public education funds and budgets that are already overstretched, the response was a resounding “No.”

“There are insufficient resources to go around,” observed Boston Teachers Union

President Richard Stutman. “Every dollar spent on expanding charter schools...is a dollar less for...our public schools.”

As cities such as Lynn and Lawrence continue to feel the pain that results from expansion of charter schools in their already fiscally-challenged communities, these words rang out particularly loudly. Among the most painful cuts that have resulted from charter school expansion are those of important electives such as art and programs related to the vital career-oriented fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as programs for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with special needs. It is such programs that are of prime importance for panel member and parent of two public school students Karen Kast-McBride, who recalled stories of her children being recruited by charter schools until they discovered they had what she termed “minor” special needs, at which point the schools changed their tune.

“They were asked not to apply,” recalled the long-time public school advocate, noting how many charter schools “siphon off [some] students” and “exclude others.”

Public schools, on the other hand, are not only obligated by law to take all students and to find ways to provide for their needs, but also do this happily.

“Our schools - I am proud to say - welcome all students,” assured Stutman. “We want it no other way. Our schools have welcome mats in their front halls, not a revolving door.”

“We open doors to all students,” suggested veteran Boston teacher Erik Berg, “and level the playing field.”

The panel for the press conference was taken from a coalition of students, teachers, administrators, and parents. “[We are] the real representatives and

actual users of the Boston school system,” suggested Stutman, who was front and center on the panel, as he is in the fight against charter school expansion.

“Charter schools are not the silver bullet solution,” Rojas observed, contradicting studies often cited by charter proponents that allegedly suggest charter schools offer service and success public

from another meeting to participate in the conference. “I support...public schools!”

As a BPS graduate who went on to Tufts and Harvard and who now serves as the parent of four BPS students, Yancey has particular reason to be aware of the situation facing public education. “I notice that whenever we are in a fiscal crisis, the first to take the hit is the school department,” Yancey observed, citing the loss of “significant money” since the advent of charter schools. “To the extent that the cap is lifted,” the 30-year public servant suggested, “that is the extent to which public schools suffer.”

After the press conference concluded, cap supporters gathered outside the State House to rally. As students chanted union slogans such as “What do we want? Education! When do we want it? Now!” passing cars honked to show their approval and tourists stopped along the

Freedom Trail to engage people benefitting from that freedom.

“We stand for collaboration and cooperation,” Berg reiterated in remarks made outside. “Not competition.”

This sense of collaboration was demonstrated by the diversity of participants in the rally. At various points during the day, many AFT MA representatives appeared to offer their support. Among these were United Teachers of Lowell President Paul Georges and Peabody Federation of Teachers President Bruce Nelson. There were also representatives from such organizations as The Boston Parent Teacher Alliance, Citizens for Public Schools, Coalition for Community Change, Jobs with Justice and Save Our Schools. Some representatives had come from Chicago and other fiscally-troubled cities and towns to share stories of the disastrous results that have come from the infiltration of charter schools into their . The largest constituent, however, was far and away that from the Boston Teachers Union, whose members showed up on droves to emphasize the importance of this situation.

When asked what he thought of charter schools and their stance on equal education for all, Boston’s union president did not equivocate. “Charter schools do not educate all students,” Stutman said flatly, citing common practices among these for-profit institutions that involve false lotteries and favoritism for students that will fit their various quotas and test score expectations. “They do not provide equal access.”

In addition to discriminating against SPED and ELL students, Stutman observed that many charters also rearrange their rosters later in the school year in order to maintain their coveted testing records.



PRESSING FOR SUPPORT At the recent State House press conference regarding maintaining the cap on charter schools in Massachusetts, the panel included (from l to r) student moderator Carlos Rojas, BPS student Alex Roman, BTU President Richard Stutman, BPS graduate, parent and advocate Karen Kast-McBride and BPS teacher Erik Berg

schools cannot. “Students need a choice.”

When it came his turn to talk, former charter school student Alex Roman plainly stated the perspective of the panel. “We are opposed to this legislation,” he explained, referring to Senate Bill 235 and House Bills 425 and 529, which would involve lifting the cap on charter schools in Massachusetts.

When asked why he left a charter school to attend Snowden International, Roman explained, “I chose to go to a public school because [they] give me a message that all are welcome.” He went on to suggest that “public schools prepare [students] better.”

“We do have one of the best districts,” Kast-McBride assured, “despite what you may have read in other papers.”

Instead of focusing on what many are against, Berg chose instead to focus on what he and his colleagues stand for. “We stand for equity,” the 22-year veteran educator and parent of two public school students said. “We believe that every child has the capacity to learn with proper support.”

“We stand for the professionalism of teachers,” Berg continued. “We stand for schools in which skilled professionals can build a career.” Berg also suggested that it is the teachers who should make decisions in their schools; not for-profit organizations, many of which focus on testing and have little if any actual classroom experience.

During a question and answer session, participants ranging from award-winning filmmaker Robert Lamothe to City Councilor Charles Yancey and State Representative Carlos Henriquez discussed how to move process forward and how our students could fare best.

“Let me be clear, short and sweet,” said Yancey, who had taken time away

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HISTORY REPEATING Snowden International teacher Richard Kiley puts the policies of charter schools in perspective



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Oppose Lifting the Cap on Charter Schools

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) has been actively campaigning to defeat a bill to raise the cap on charter schools. Just three years ago the legislature raised the cap which led to a further diminution of resources for the long established public schools.

The level of poverty in our urban areas is incredible. Governor Patrick's education report stated that "poverty is pernicious." True, true, and true again. Unfortunately neither the federal nor the state government has yet to provide the very significant amount of money needed to overwhelm poverty.

Instead some seem to be of the view that an emphasis on teacher quality and standardize test scores will provide all that our poverty stricken students need. What rubbish.

AFT MA strongly supports high standards for the teaching profession. Of course, in Massachusetts standards are already very high because our students' achievement is very high. We want no reduction in standards for the teaching profession. However, more professional and high quality support is desirable.

To assume that an emphasis on teaching standards is a substitute for giving poverty stricken students the resources they need to jump out of poverty is mistaken. They need medical and dental care, proper housing, safe and secure neighborhoods, and well-funded schools.

To raise the cap on charter schools will take funds from the long established public schools who educate the overwhelming percentage of poor students. Doesn't it defy logic

to reduce their supports?

We need all our members who vote in Massachusetts to contact their state representatives and senators to urge them to reject raising the cap on charter schools because the long established public schools, educating very many students living in poverty, English language learners, and those with substantial special needs, cannot afford to lose even more resources.

ACT NOW! ACT NOW! ACT NOW!

Send a prepared email by going to <http://aftma.net>. Then click on send a letter to your legislator. Sending the email is very easy.

If you prefer, call your senator or representative, the telephone number is on the website. Thank you.

If you have any questions or comments, you can e-mail me at tgosnell@aftma.net. ■

CONGRATULATIONS TO SENATOR ED MARKEY!



We at AFT Massachusetts look forward to continuing to support and stand with you as we work together to make the school system and life in the Commonwealth even better!

Congratulations to Senator Edward Markey!

Throughout his career in the U.S. House of Representatives, Edward Markey has supported public education. He stood for programs that enhanced public education and opposed attempts to reduce or dismantle such programs. In recent times the struggle has been tough. We admire his toughness,

his persistence, his skill and his commitment.

AFT MA has endorsed Markey many, many times. This year, we endorsed him in the primary and the general election. Thank you for all your work to help elect him. He'll be a fine senator!

Summer is splendid. May it provide all of you with sustained pleasure.

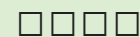
- Thomas J. Gosnell
President

BOLD PRINT

From July 22-24, AFT members and other education leaders from around the country will gather in Washington, DC, for the 2013 AFT TEACH conference.

AFT TEACH 2013 will bring together educators, union leaders, administrators, activists, and civic and community leaders for high-quality workshops. It will also offer overviews of innovative work, exciting demonstrations of the latest educational technology, thought-provoking keynote speakers and much more.

Registration is now open. For more information, go to www.aft.org/teach2013.



Got good news to share? Send it to advocate@aftma.net

Editorial Apology

I wanted to apologize to the members of the Boston Teachers Union for including comments in my story on the AFT Conference that were apparently considered to be gratuitous and misleading. I can see where the misunderstanding arose and take responsibility for mishandling this situation. I meant no harm, of course, and hope that we can all move forward as one united body.

Thank you to all involved for understanding.

- Matt Robinson, Editor

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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.

Labor union (n.) - Representative of workers. Activity centers on collective bargaining over wages, benefits, and working conditions for members, and on representing members in disputes with management over violations of contract provisions. Larger unions also typically engage in lobbying activities at the state and federal level.

Union employees earn up to 33% more than their nonunion counterparts (in 2012, the median weekly income for union workers was \$943, compared with \$742 for nonunion workers), as well as enjoying more job security, safer and higher-quality work conditions, and additional benefits. Even so, in 2010, the percentage of workers belonging to unions in the United States was only 11.4%. This is especially low when compared to countries such as Germany (18.4%), Canada (27.5%) and Finland (70%).

Unions began forming in the mid-19th century in response to the social and economic impact of the Industrial Revolution. In 1886, the American Federation of Labor (see previous issue) helped coordinate the efforts of various unions, eventually becoming a major player in national politics.

The power and success of labor unions continued to grow after World War II, but faced resistance from free market business interests. The percentage of workers belonging to unions peaked in 1954 at 35% and the total number of union members peaked in 1979 at an estimated 21 million.

Unions remain a prominent political factor. To fight potential anti-union programs, many unions advocate "card check" legislation that would require employers to bargain with a union if more than 50% of workers signed forms stating they wish to be represented.

To join a traditional labor union, workers must either be given recognition from their employer or have a majority of workers in a bargaining unit vote for representation.

Public sector worker unions are governed by labor laws and labor boards in each of the 50 states.

Have a question? Want a term defined? Write to advocate@aftma.net.

A View from the Top

An interview with BU SED Dean Hardin Coleman

With the rapid growth of online degree-granting education centers and the rise in popularity of mentor-based training and certification programs, it has become more challenging for a “traditional” school of education to compete and produce graduates who can, in turn, compete for jobs and opportunities in today’s difficult economy.

Few realize and appreciate this challenge more profoundly than Dr. Hardin Coleman, who serves as Dean of Boston University’s School of Education (SED). A former high school teacher himself, Dr. Coleman has both a Masters and doctorate in counseling and brings that attention to the well-being of his students (and their students) to everything he does. Lately, Dr. Coleman has turned his caring focus towards helping his graduates find work so they can avoid the additional stresses that can come of dedicating one’s life to a noble career and then finding little opportunity to practice.

In an effort to see how SED and other schools of education might better support students and the teaching profession at large, we spoke with Dr. Coleman about where he things stand today and where he hopes to see them tomorrow.

AFT MA: How are schools of education faring these days?

Dr. Coleman: I don’t think that schools of education in general are doing poorly. The challenge that we are all trying to identify and work on - and many schools do this quite well, especially if they are connected to the community - is building a strong relationship between the universities and the hiring people at different schools. This is because every district does it differently and has its own relationships. So one of the challenges is for districts and schools of ed to have deeper partnerships so that, well before July and August, there is more of a discussion of what districts need and what schools can provide.

An example of this is the Teach for America model that recruits to the needs of the district. That is a model that we would like to replicate with various districts - especially local school districts - so that we can align what we are producing with what they need.

AFT MA: What, in your mind, is the main responsibility of an education school?

Dr. Coleman: I actually think we have a tripartite mission and the parts are deeply connected: One is preparing pre-professional teachers to understand what it means to be an educator, That includes an understanding of the profession and of their content area and the pedagogical skills - methods are very important! For example, we have a course on how to teach algebra which is different from our course on how to teach geometry. They are different concepts and have different needs, especially when it comes to teaching English language learners and gifted students. We have to give a lot of clinical training. Another part is to give them the pedagogical methods that have been proven to be effective. That is another part of the mission. We also have to work with people in the field and do outreach and make sure that what we teach fits with current practice. Good people, good practice and good connections. I think we have all three responsibilities.

AFT MA: What should the balance between theory and practice in education courses and curricula be?

Dr. Coleman: In our shop, we go 20 percent toward theory and 40 to 45 percent toward content and the balance toward clinical practice. We think that all pieces are very important and they should be well integrated. They should not be seen as separate. Our students experience them as working together. We see them as virtually inseparable. I agree that we should not overwhelm them with Plato and policy issues. They need to know about that. But they also need to be able to understand what that means and to handle the acquisition of skills and supervised practice.

AFT MA: How has the role of the education school changed and how do you see it changing in the future?

Dr. Coleman: There are 1500 schools of education and they are very diverse. So to talk about them as a homogenous group is difficult. We are not like medical schools or law schools where the difference is about the quality of teaching. We have more variation. Plus, you have the advent of alternative educa-



LEADING THE WAY
Dr. Hardin Coleman

tion programs, so there are multiple paths and no single role. An important role is deeply grounded in practice and research. The best schools will be the ones that focus on clinical preparation and have faculty that are experts in understanding the process of teaching, but they should also be deeply grounded in the research and evidence.

Some people think that we may become irrelevant because we spend too much time on theory and should just let people go into the classroom and provide modeling and professional development and a more apprentice-based model. Some alternative programs are more focused on practice. The schools that are all theory have their role, but I think there needs to be more integration. Without that, things won’t get better. If schools are too practice-oriented they will become irrelevant because they will not be able to respond to new demands. If they are too theory-oriented, they can’t get a feel for the classroom.

I have talked to colleagues all over the world and they are all trying to find that integration and to find new solutions to problems of practice. It is just like medicine- You go into the field and identify a problem and then find ways to deal with that. I think schools of education do that, but we have to do more of it and do it better.

AFT MA: What can be done now to better prepare education students for what may be ahead, both after graduation and beyond?

Dr. Coleman: Preparing students and attracting students are two very different problems. I can speak to the first. If

to participate in the rally), pointed out how little of the charter argument is actually rooted in pedagogy. “It is all about money,” she suggested. “It is union busting!”

Pointing at the State House, Rojas asked the assembled, “Whose house is that?” and suggested that everyone call, e-mail and tweet their representatives in the legislature to voice their frustration about this matter and to suggest the cap be kept on. “Let them know we control our schools,” he shouted. “We want quality, equity and creativity. We don’t want high-stakes testing and a system that treats students like a factory product.”

As the words of their classmates and teachers rang in their ears, students encouraged each other to participate.

“We need to get students involved,” suggested Roman. “We need to be our own voice!”

“It is not equal,” suggested Boston Latin Academy teacher Michael Maguire (who had once been Roman’s teacher), “and until it is we have to keep up the fight.” ■

Charter cap rally

Continued from page 1

“They evict students at critical times during their career,” Stutman said, citing large enrollment cuts before 10th grade MCAS exams and also before graduation. “They propagate a dual system of schools,” Stutman concluded. “This is bad public policy. It’s bad social policy. It’s bad educational policy - and we should neither allow it, expand it, nor pay for it.”

In fact, Stutman suggested, the only way we can achieve “good and equitable public policy” is to keep the charter cap on to “stop the growth of a separate and unequal school system.

Despite the fact that opposition to

the cap being lifted was clearly broad and wide-ranging, the issue of who allegedly comprises and conducts such opposition had to be raised. “We hear only unions oppose charter schools,” Rojas read from a written testimony by Worcester School

Committee member and former educator Tracy O’Connell Novick, who was unable to attend in person but wanted to share her voice and her support, “but we are also hearing from school committee members and parents.”

“This is an expensive experiment,” the testimony concluded, “that has failed.”

Speaking again to the union issue and that of expenses, Save Our Schools’ Ruth Rodriguez (who had flown in from Washington that morning



FEELING TRAPPED A local student demonstrates how he feels about charter schools and high-stakes testing

you have answers to the second, I’d be delighted to hear them!

As far as the first, the answer is, if you are going to increase anything, you increase the time your people spend doing practice, being in supervised practice and putting the concepts to work in different situations. We like to get our students doing a lot of clinical work early and often.

How to make it attractive is a bigger problem. It is easy to suggest programs like the internship programs and that, if you can add status to the role of being a teacher, people will look at you. We need to raise the profile of what it means to be an educator and how exciting and meaningful it is.

The programs that are getting lots of applications are those that are offering jobs right away. With them, not only do you get the status of being selected but you get a job. It’s like getting into a training program at Chase Manhattan- You get the skills that will stick with you and also experience. Most schools of ed don’t have that panache, so our challenge is to find a better way to communicate to people the value of being a teacher and get better resources so they can spend that year studying and leave pretty much debt free...and with a job!

AFT MA: What can students who are interested in education do to prepare themselves and to support each other?

Dr. Coleman: The students we see have spent time with kids in schools. Go tutor. Go visit schools. Volunteer. Join a literacy program. Be a camp counselor. Find out how much you like or don’t like being with kids. If you do, being a professional educator is an exciting role. Some people may like the idea of being a teacher but may not want to do it for 30 years. They need to realize there are lots of different opportunities in education- from administration to policy. Many lawyers I know say that the best training they had was teaching. If you have to teach Mark Twain to an eighth grade class, there are few juries in the world more difficult!

AFT MA: How does your school relate to the teachers’ unions?

Dr. Coleman: We produce most of the union members, so we need to nurture our relationships with the unions. There should be a systematic and cooperative relationship and, if we can work on that, it will be a great benefit to the field of education. ■



Go to www.aftma.net and send a letter to your representatives to tell them you want the charter school cap kept on in Massachusetts

**PROTECT our SCHOOLS
PROTECT your JOBS
PROTECT our STUDENTS**

Diary of a New Teacher

Caroline Corcoran

Fourth grade SEI teacher

Thomas J. Kenny School, Dorchester

When I first began teaching, I severely underestimated the amount of sleep I would need to feel functional during the school day. I understood that a rule that I had developed in college about being non-functional before 8:30 was no longer going to fit with my chosen profession. What I didn't understand was that my other college rule about requiring 9-10 hours of sleep in any 24-hour cycle would need to make a serious comeback.

Fresh out of graduate school, I was handed my first classroom – a room full of bright-eyed, eager fourth graders, excited for another year. Out of determination

to deliver the best education possible to my students, I worked as many hours each day as I could, shunning many a happy hour to stay late and grade and prep and plan and do all the myriad things we teachers need

to do each day. However, as grading and planning began to pile up, sleep became a distant hope. The longer this went on, the more expensive my naps became. There was one time, for example, that I fell asleep at the movies during the previews, wasting

my \$11 movie ticket!

My teaching suffered as well. My sleep-deprived mind had a hard time focusing during the day, and it became harder for me to remember the huge number of small details teachers must pay attention to throughout the day. To save my career and my sanity, I made a rule for myself that I would get 8 hours of sleep each night no matter what. This meant I had to bow out of many nights out with friends much earlier than anybody else, and I began to take naps that would rival that of even the sleepest of house cats. All of it was necessary, however, to keep me focused on my job.

My friends constantly asked me why I was so tired all the time. They all held down full-time jobs too, so they wondered why it was that they could stay awake for a movie or go out for dinner during the week while I apparently could not.

I struggled with this for a long time until I realized that the main difference was the huge strain teaching puts on a person. There is the emotional strain put on your system when your students won't sit still long enough for you to tell them the directions, or when a student starts acting out because of issues at home. There's the physical strain, from standing all day,



TAKE CARE

Caroline Corcoran realizes the importance of taking care of yourself so you can take care of your students



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

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

Send their information to advocate@aftma.net

Thank you!



Do YOU have a story to tell or a lesson to share?

We are looking for "new" teachers (i.e., educators with 1-5 years of experience) who want to join our team for the 2013-14 year.

Please send your name and ideas to advocate@aftma.net.

Thank you!

then chasing down stray students and running between floors to the only functional photocopier. Finally, there's the intellectual strain of writing lesson plans, and constantly readjusting your own thinking process to get inside the mind of each and every student. All of this causes a major strain on one's system; one that no amount of caffeine can catch up to.

This fact is something that I do not think many people recognize or appreciate. Even though the actual teaching day is relatively short, it is still extremely taxing. Furthermore, when the official school day has ended, the teacher's day is really just beginning, as that is the time when we get all the things done that we could not even try while the students were with us.

I have been teaching for a few years now and have finally built up enough stamina (and learned to protect my sleep time enough) that I can usually make it through a movie without falling asleep. What I still feel, and what I am reminded of every September when school starts again, is the extraordinary amount of energy it takes to get through each day. ■

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Summa Cum Laude: Will Calhoun

The drum.

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Almost everyone can play it, but only a few can use it to speak the international language that is music.

Will Calhoun is one such translator.

Growing up in The Bronx, Calhoun recalls his “fabulous neighbors,” many of whom were also musical. “We had amazing musicians on almost every block,” he says.

Speaking of amazing musicians, Calhoun is not only the drummer for the Grammy-winning rock band Living Colour, he has also played with the legendary likes B.B. King, Mick Jagger, Harry Belafonte, Paul Simon, Lou Reed, Dr. John, Carly Simon, Herb Alpert, Wayne Shorter, and Run-DMC. Such diverse duties have kept Calhoun learning and exploring. Many of his diverse musical lessons are evident on his latest album, “Life in This World” which will bring him to Jazz at Lincoln Center on August 4 and Hartford, CT on August 5.

“I was prompted to get into music by the brilliant exposure to music and arts...via my parents and neighbors,” says the proficient and popular player and producer, crediting especially his “prodigy” older brother who also “played with many bands and a plethora of musical styles.”

As his childhood basement often became the neighborhood rehearsal space, Calhoun was always exposed to music. “I was able to hear and see the guys practice,” he recalls, noting

some of his neighbors were gigging on television before they were 18 years old. “That set the best example of what can be achieved with hard work, support, focus... and confidence,” Calhoun says.

In addition to his brother and his mother (his “first and most powerful teacher”), Calhoun’s list of influences ranges from Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Jimi Hendrix. “I was exposed to these giants at a very early age,” Calhoun recalls.

While family and neighbors sparked and supported his musical interests, Calhoun is also grateful for his school music classes.

“My school had an amazing music program,” says the winner of the sixth grade choir group award for outstanding performance on drums who went on to garner a Buddy Rich Jazz Masters Award and who was also named Best New Drummer and three-time Number One Progressive Drummer by *Modern Drummer* Magazine’s Readers Poll and also Best Drummer by *Rolling Stone* Magazine’s Critics Poll.



HEART OF THE MUSIC Will Calhoun tracks the rhythms of life and around the world

to be his best. “If you didn’t give him 100% at all times,” Calhoun says, “you were not an artist.”

In addition to developing his performance skills, Calhoun says that music class also helped him develop patience and focus. “Music made me a more open minded and intelligent student,” he suggests.

This discipline and its rewards continued when Calhoun was accepted to Berklee College of Music. “The Berklee environment forced me to become an individual,” Calhoun explains. “As a student, I had to work hard to stick to my goals, [and] as a musician it prepared me for what I’m doing now- writing music, touring, producing, performing, and keeping my artistic vision personal.”

When asked how he came to the drum, Calhoun suggests that “It chose me!” Apparently, the drum was not alone, as Calhoun also plays a number of other instruments, including piano, guitar, bass, and flute.

Though he remembers his teacher as a “strict” bandleader, Calhoun is grateful for the fact that he was pushed

“What attracts me to these instruments are the sounds,” he says, “and the space they provide in music. All of them help me with my composition and performance.”

While he is also a sought-after teacher himself these days, Calhoun remains an eternal student. A devoted fan of Jazz (which he calls “one of one America’s greatest artistic creations and contributions to the world”), Calhoun also studies music around the world. “I’m interested in the ancestral and spiritual rhythms and music dating back over 50,000 years,” he explains.

When he wants to come back to the 21st century, Calhoun has a wide range of options, including reuniting with Living Colour, who are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their landmark album “Vivid.”

“Living Colour is an amazing rock band with many influences,” Calhoun says. “My solo projects allow me to...immerse myself in many other musical genres.” Each musical project, Calhoun adds, influences every other, and the success of Living Colour [also] brings another audience to my solo projects.”

Cross pollinating and cross-referencing, Calhoun has made a career for himself and has helped launch many others. No matter what he is playing or with whom, however, one thing remains constant for Calhoun. “The main result is to create the best artistic, true, and honest statement with freedom and intelligence.” ■

Hats Off: Legendary “Para” Jenna Fitzgerald retires

In today’s education communities, it is often the teachers who get the credit for any positive developments in the classroom. As they are often out in front of the room and the parents and administrators, teachers are often the most visible. That does not always mean, however, that they are the most effective.

While they often work in the so-called background, paraprofessionals are often front and center at the critical moments when a student truly grows. As they often have more direct contact with students, “paras” may know the students and understand their individual needs better than even the students’ family members. It is on such relationships that true learning is built.

When it comes to paraprofessionals and relationships, one name that tops the list for thousands of educators and students who have benefitted from her tireless efforts is Jenna Fitzgerald. Having joined the Boston Teachers Union in 1971, Fitzgerald has led the charge for paraprofessional development and support for decades!

A member of BTU’s Collective Bargaining team since 1977, Fitzgerald has also served as a long-time delegate to both state and national AFT conventions, a Cope Committee member and is even vice president of the AFT MA! For her efforts, she has received numerous awards and accolades, including the 2002 AFT/AFL-CIO Women’s Rights Committee Living the Legacy Award and the Albert Shanker AFT-PSRP Pioneer Award in 2006.

“I am the only one in Boston to receive that,” Fitzgerald notes.

Throughout it all, she has been known for her drive, her compassion and her famous collections of hats.

“I buy them whenever I see a hat

shop,” she explains when asked how she has assembled her millineric masterpieces, “no matter what state I’m in!”

After 34 years of dedicated service, Fitzgerald decided to hang her hat for the last time. On June 13, her illustrious career was celebrated by family, friends and many of the hundreds she has helped.

“We will miss her presence and her energy,” said BTU President Richard



A PARAPROFESSIONAL PIONEER Jenna Fitzgerald

Stutman. “She has been a tireless advocate for all things BTU, and has provided quality service to thousands, if not tens of thousands, of our members. She has been blessed with wonderful friends and family, and we wish her the best of health and joy in her retirement. Speaking for all who work at the BTU and all who reside as members of the BTU family, we will miss her terribly.”

Though she admits to missing out on the opportunity of a college education, this self-described “Depression child” made sure that nobody else ever felt left out while she was on duty.

As the mother of six children (all of whom, she is proud to say, are college graduates and three of whom currently work in the Boston school system), Fitzgerald always had a special sense of what young people needed and shared this special connection not only with her children but with those of the thousands of parents who are grateful to have had her in their students’ lives.

In addition to supporting students, Fitzgerald made it her goal to support her fellow paraprofessionals.

“Paras are perceived as less important,” Fitzgerald observes, quoting the oft-stated but always loathed phrase “She’s just a para.” The truth, Fitzgerald suggests, is that paraprofessionals are just as much a part of the education team as anyone else.

When she started, Fitzgerald and her colleagues were known as “aides.” “We were 1400 strong,” Fitzgerald recalls, “with no representation.” In May of 1972, however, the BTU collectively took it upon itself to right this injustice by taking on the role of the exclusive bargaining agent for all aides.

Though they now had rights, aides were still lacking in training and other forms of support. “Quite frankly,” Fitzgerald suggests, “teachers were as inexperienced as we aides were as to what role we were to play.”

After a few years of “floundering” with her fellow aides, Fitzgerald says that she then began to become more personally involved, organizing weekend meetings at which it was eventually decided that an aide should run for a position on the Executive Board of the BTU. “After many weeks of deliberation,” she recalls, “it was decided that I would be the one to run.”

Coming in second in large and competitive field to her friend Jean Carr Walsh, Fitzgerald decided to serve as

the Field Representative for her community. “After all,” she reasons, “1400 aides deserved their own representative.”

In December of 1979, Fitzgerald was finally granted the position she has held ever since. “It was a banner day for aides,” she says humbly, “with many more to come!”

Among the more profound memories Fitzgerald has of her tenure as representative is the day she was called out of a staff meeting to take a phone call from AFT’s national office in Washington, D.C.

“The staffer wanted to know if I was the person in charge of 1400 aides in Boston,” she recalls. When she replied in the affirmative (thus affirming her role on a national level), Fitzgerald was then asked how she ever “got a handle on 1400 people with AIDS.”

“Needless to say,” Fitzgerald explains, “that was the day we changed our name from ‘aides’ to ‘paraprofessionals.’”

While it took a bit longer for others to catch on to the new nomenclature (so long, in fact, that many paras missed a paycheck on account of confusion at the payroll office!), Fitzgerald has few regrets.

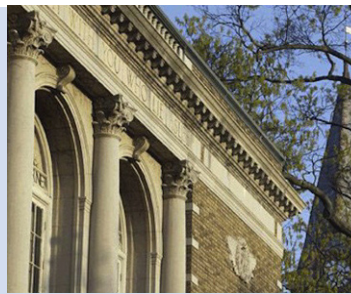
“It’s been a long road,” she says, “but it has its rewards.”

Noting how some of her colleagues have gone on to become principals and headmasters, Fitzgerald says that, as she moves on to the next chapter in her “wonderful” life, she has one hope for her colleagues. “We have come a long way,” she observes, “but we must continue to move forward. All I want to see is the day one of my paraprofessionals is named Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools!” ■



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Keeping Tabs on College Loan Changes

The interest rate on new Stafford Loans, the main Federal government student-loan program, will double from 3.4% to 6.8% on July 1 unless Congress acts. In 2007, Congress passed and President Bush signed a bill to halve the rate on government loans for college to 3.4% for four years. When four years expired in 2012, Congress and President Obama extended the rate for one year.

Then-Senator Brown said in May, 2012, "It's time to stop playing politics and get to work on a real bipartisan compromise to preserve current student loan rates.... We should be working together on a solution that prevents these rates from skyrocketing in July."

Senator Warren's bill to reduce the rate on government college loans to 0.75% - the same rate that the Federal Reserve charges for loans to banks - was defeated in committee a few weeks ago in the House of Representatives. Another bill sponsored by Democrats in the Senate to maintain the current

lower rate failed to carry the 60% majority required by Senate rules.

Republicans in the House of Representatives passed a bill that would charge a flexible rate tied to interest rates that the Federal government pays for funds. Under this Bill, the current rate would be 4.4% and is expected to climb above 8% within three or four years. President Obama's budget proposal, which he released this week, also connects flexible Federal rates for college loans to U.S. Treasury rates. He proposed decreasing the rates for subsidized loans below the House Bill and increasing the rates for unsubsidized loans above the House Bill. Neither the House Bill nor President Obama's proposal sets caps on interest rates.

Senate Democrats favor a low fixed rate that will increase subsidies in college loans. Republicans want a flexible higher rate that will keep college loans profitable for the Federal government.

As legislative rules require a 60% majority to pass a Bill, it appears that,

for the foreseeable future at least, student loan rates will end up staying as they are. As a result, students will pay more for their education and will end up with more debt.

The Republican position appeals to the ideology that the Federal government deficit does not allow additional spending for higher education and that government should not subsidize college education. Apparently, the ideology of massive government deficits has not caught up with the facts. The ideology that the government should not subsidize education runs counter to U.S. and world history. Long-term economic growth and improvements in quality of life depend on public investment in education, from the College Land-Grant Act in 1863, through the GI Bill following WWII, to President Johnson's Higher Education Act of 1965.

The recent shift from Federal grants and state funding for higher education to student loans runs counter to this history. The Pell Grant maximum payment per student increased by \$95 in 2013, President Obama proposes an increase of \$140 for next year, hardly enough to cover increases in the cost of lunch at college cafeterias. Pell Grants that were created during the Nixon

President Obama and Congress can do better than arguing over interest rates on college loans.

presidency now cover the smallest portion of college costs in history - less than one-third of tuition and fees for four

years at a public university.

Lower, stable interest rates on college loans are better than higher, variable rates, but loan financing take the U.S. further away from providing equal opportunity for college education. President Obama and Congress can do better than arguing over interest rates on college loans. ■

Apples for the (Best) Teachers

Lawrence Rotary presents 2013 Teacher of the Year awards

Few teachers have been working harder to keep students learning and schools progressing than those in Lawrence. Facing significant challenges, these devoted educators show up every day with smiles on their faces and lessons in their hands, ready to support and serve their students however they can.

It is something special, therefore, to be considered among the elite of this group of educators.

For the past 15 years, Lawrence Rotary has been seeking and supporting those teachers who rise a bit further above and beyond the call of duty and recognizing them with their annual Teacher of the Year awards.

"I think it's great that the Lawrence Rotary Club supports the community by hosting the Teacher of the Year Award," said Lawrence Teachers' Union President Frank McLaughlin. "The Rotary Club is a true friend of the Lawrence Teachers' Union and I look forward to working with them."

This year's recipients of the coveted Crystal Apple were Susan Mustapha of the Leahy Elementary School and Victoria Hernandez-Bailey of the A.B. Bruce School. Rotary also rewards teachers with fewer than five years of experience with their Rising Star award. This year's recipients were Jennifer Perry of the Emily G. Wetherbee School and Kayla Pomponi of South Lawrence East Middle School.

"Being awarded the...Teacher of the Year was a tremendous honor and memorable experience for me," Hernandez-Bailey said. "Winning just reaffirmed why I do what I do!"

"Winning Teacher of the Year resonated with me on so many levels," echoed Mustapha, who has taught in Lawrence for 16 years. "I recognize firsthand the level of commitment and

dedication that my peers have to their students and classrooms."

According to former Rotary President and current Teacher of the Year Committee Member David Dreyfus, the awards were created "to recognize all Lawrence teachers and to make a special recognition of the top teachers." Dreyfus explained that winners are chosen based on nominations from

peers, parents, and principals. "The nominating papers answer a broad set of questions about the teacher," he said, noting that judges are not affiliated with either Rotary or the Lawrence school system. "The judges independently score each paper.... The winners are the teachers with the highest aggregate scores."



SHINING APPLES Award-winning Lawrence teachers (foreground, from left) Susan Mustapha, Victoria Hernandez-Bailey, Jennifer Perry and Kayla Pomponi celebrate with (background, from left) School Committeeman Francisco Surillo, Superintendent Jeffrey Riley and Assistant Superintendents Mary Lou Bergeron and Dale Lipkin at the 2013 Teacher of the Year awards

Dreyfus added that many teachers are nominated and that the differences in scores are often razor-thin. "The ranking is quite competi-

tive," he observed. "All the nominees are worthy of recognition.... After all, excellence is a function of doing many things well, not just one thing." The nominees tend to agree. "Just being nominated by my peers was enough," Hernandez-Bailey said, "but receiving the award was amazing considering that each of the nominees...are quintessential educators. I

was honored to be among them...[and] I accepted that award on behalf of every teacher." "I was in awe of the level of teaching talent that surrounded me in the room the evening of the event," Mustapha recalled. "I truly appreciated that the Rotary Club members took the time and effort needed to go through the entire list of nominees and recognized each finalist's individual achievements and contributions." Though they were clearly thrilled

to be honored with the award, the winners also wished to pay tribute and show their gratitude to their dedicated colleagues, all of whom help them to be the teachers they are.

"In my short tenure in the Lawrence Public Schools, I have learned so much from my colleagues," Perry said. "The work I do in and out of the classroom mirrors the best practices I've learned from the many caring teachers with whom I've had the privilege to work. I could not be successful in my job without the support of my teammates."

"The support and excitement I have received from my school and students are indescribable," Mustapha added.

Of course there would be no teaching without students, for whom all of the winners also expressed gratitude.

"The students are my inspiration to be a better teacher each day," Perry explained. "During the course of 180 days, we nurture a relationship...and in so doing, I feel the children develop a deep sense of respect and empathy toward one another. We have become a family and I truly love each child as one of my own."

Many winners also expressed appreciation for their field and for the unique experiences it allows and encourages them to have.

"It takes a special individual to teach," Hernandez-Bailey suggested. "One must wear many hats, juggle, be flexible, believe, and most importantly, be able to see the light bulbs turn on inside children's minds and keep those bulbs lit. That is when the magic happens and that is why I teach."

"I believe the profession of teaching is truly a calling," Perry said. "We teach for a cause, not for applause. Therefore, to be recognized as one who makes a difference in the lives of others is a very touching experience. I am proud to be a Lawrence Public School teacher!" ■



Retiree Corner

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



GPO and WEP are BAD

Once again, the bills calling for the repeal of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) have been re-filed.

GPO deals with spousal benefits. In a partnership where one works under Social Security and the other for a state or federal pension, the government penalizes the partner who works for a pension. Automatically, that person's eligibility to receive full spousal Social Security benefits is eliminated.

WEP deals with what is earned under Social Security. Many teachers supplement their pay by working nights, weekends, and summers. Since part-time work is calculated at a lower rate than full-time work, full-time higher earners have no penalty. Instead, the penalty is applied to those who work full time for a pension and part time for Social Security. These part-time workers paid into Social Security believing that in retirement they would collect what

they put into the fund. Instead, they do not receive what they paid into the fund, but, in most instances, only half of it.

By law, anyone who is married is entitled to one-half of their spouse's Social Security, or all of their own, whichever is greater. According to GPO, however, a pension is offset by two-thirds if you are collecting a state pension from certain states or one of certain federal pensions. For example, if your spouse collects \$1800 a month in Social Security benefits, you are eligible for \$900 a month (half of the spouse's amount) or you can collect your own full amount, whichever is greater. If your pension is \$1500 a month, that amount would be offset by two-thirds; or \$1000. In this example, you were eligible to receive at least \$900, which was half your spouse's Social Security. However, since \$900 cannot be subtracted by \$1000, you can collect nothing as a spouse or a survivor. Using the same example, if your pension is \$900 a

month, your offset amount is \$600; so, you would receive \$300 from your spouse's Social Security.

Since many who receive a state or federal pension also work other jobs under Social Security, WEP involves earnings related to Social Security. Social Security averages earnings up to 35 years of work. The system calculates the average in a three-tier method. The penalty involved in WEP affects only the first tier of calculation, which is where most have their earnings from working part-time jobs. Those who have earnings that extend into the second and third tiers have no penalties in those tiers. The biggest penalty you can receive under WEP is 50%, meaning that you will lose 50% of your Social Security amount. In 2013, no one can lose more than \$395, but this amount changes each year.

The federal legislation is called the Social Security Fairness Act of 2013. If Washington knows that these penalties

are unfair, why do they still exist? After all, none of us had a choice to contribute to Social Security in our teaching jobs. We were told that we could contribute only to the pension system.

In 2005, a law was passed requiring notification be given to those facing penalties. Up until that time, no one knew that they would lose any benefits until they applied to collect. In fact, if people went to Social Security periodically to find out what their benefits would be in retirement, they often cited you the amount without the penalty, which is incorrect.

Current workers and retirees must work together to get bills passed that will correct these injustices. Not only should we work to get members of Congress and the Senate on board, but we must also reach out to relatives, friends, and colleagues living in other states. Social Security is going to be a major topic in Washington for the foreseeable future. By working now we can make sure the repeal bills are part of the discussion. Go to the MRU site to see if your representatives have signed on to cosponsor bills H1795 or S896. If they have not, call or e-mail them and ask that they do so. Also, read up on the penalties at the Social Security Fairness Group site <http://www.ssfairness.com/>

We can work to get this done now, or regret it when we are of age to start collecting Social Security. ■

Insuring Your Future

Professional retirement advice for educators and others

With the economy still in the doldrums and unemployment still high, there are even fewer guarantees for those who may be considering retiring. Also, as people live longer, what once might have been sufficient for a post-work life may now not last long enough. What is worse is the number of employers and organizations that continue to attack retirees and to take away their hard-earned privileges. In many ways, the life of a retiree is becoming less about sailing into the sunset and more about pumping the bilge of the boat!

As a former educator, Marsha Olsen understands what employees in the education field need and has developed plans and supports for them as a professional Long Term Care insurance specialist who serves AFT members throughout Massachusetts and much of New England.

The *Advocate* recently asked Olsen (who works for Advanced Resources Marketing, Inc.) what advice she could offer to members and their colleagues in other fields. The following are excerpts from our interview, the entire text of which is available at www.aftma.net.

AFT MA: What are the primary concerns for educators and other professionals today in terms of end-of-career preparation?

Olsen: The primary concern for most individuals who are planning for retirement is that they have enough income to last throughout their retirement years in the lifestyle in which they have become accustomed.

AFT MA: What are the biggest threats to having enough income throughout retirement?

Olsen: First, it is important to have the correct assets that will produce enough

retirement income without the risk of market fluctuations. Second is to protect retirement income from the costs of extended care, otherwise known as long term care.

AFT MA: What should educators be doing to prepare for extended care costs?

Olsen: While some people focus on the risk of needing extended care services, it's perhaps more important to look at the consequences of needing care.

Since extended care costs are paid from income, the questions to ask yourself are 'What would be the consequences of using my income to pay for care?' 'What would be the impact to the financial commitments I have made?' 'What would be the impact on my family?'

Once you have contemplated those questions and have a plan in place, you now need to fund the plan. One of the least expensive ways of funding a plan for extended care is to purchase insurance. Long Term Care Insurance [LTCi] provides the dollars to pay for care that you would otherwise pay with your income.

AFT MA: What does LTCi pay for?

Olsen: LTCi pays for all levels of extended care; home health care, adult day care, assisted living facilities, and nursing home care.

AFT MA: How far in advance of their proposed retirement should people be looking into LTCi?

Olsen: The best answer has always been to look into LTCi the first day you become concerned with the consequences of needing extended care because every year the insurance will become more expensive. Many individuals are now considering purchasing LTCi in their 40's. However, the majority of individu-

als purchase LTCi in their 50's and some into their early 60's.

AFT MA: If someone waits until they are in their 50s, doesn't that mean they have paid less years into the coverage and therefore less overall?

Olsen: No. Insurance is never priced to give you an incentive to wait years before buying. A 40 year old that pays premiums for 40 years will pay significantly less money over that time for coverage than a 50 year old that pays for 30 years.

AFT MA: LTCi has a reputation of being expensive.

Olsen: All insurance is priced on your likelihood of using the coverage you purchased. LTCi can be expensive because the chances are that someday you will use the policy you purchased.

The good news is that today's LTCi policies can be purchased in ways that significantly reduce the cost by providing discounts to associations and unions and by creative features that handle future increases in the cost of care.

AFT MA: How have costs increased for extended care in recent years?

Olsen: The cost of nursing home and assisted living care has increased an average of 4% annually...over the past 10 years. Home care cost has remained relatively flat.

AFT MA: What can people do to prepare for unforeseen circumstances, such as medical situations or sudden unemployment?

Olsen: Working individuals can protect their income if they have a medical condition or disability which prevents them from working by having disability insurance. Working individuals who have a

medical condition or disability which requires extended care services can also protect their home, assets, and income by having LTCi. Once individuals retire, they are no longer eligible for disability insurance but maintain their LTCi to protect their home, assets, and income.

AFT MA: Which recent legislative changes have had the most profound impact on people planning to retire and how do you suggest they deal with the changes?

Olsen: Current Massachusetts retired teachers receive a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) on a retirement base of \$13,000. Therefore, teachers should have alternative sources of income during retirement such as IRAs, annuities, [and] savings in order to maintain their current lifestyles. Since the risk for needing care is compelling - 1 in 2 individuals over the age of 65 will need some type of services - individuals must protect their assets and home by considering LTCi.

AFT MA: What does the AFT MA offer its Members for LTCi?

Olsen: The AFT MA has an endorsed and discounted LTCi program for its members and their families offered by Transamerica Life Insurance Company and marketed by Advanced Resources Marketing, Inc.

AFT MA: What is the most important piece of advice you can offer?

Olsen: Individuals should plan ahead by seeking advice from an estate planner and a financial advisor on financial matters such as investing and income planning. ■

If anyone wishes to discuss these and other matters with Marsha, she can be reached at molsen@armltc.com.

FEATURE FOCUS: Summer Opportunities

Sun and Scholarship: How to “Summer” wisely

By Shirley Jones-Luke

Over the years, there has been an increased focus on summer learning for students. Many educational researchers and organizations have concluded that, when students are not actively engaged in learning during the summer, the loss causes students to enter the new school year at a significant disadvantage.

While there has been a significant increase in summer learning programs for students, there is also a need for teachers to engage in summer learning. Why? The reasons are numerous. For starters, teachers need to update their content area knowledge. Whether it's Science or History, Math or English, teachers need to stay current on the changes in their various subjects. This is especially true with the adoption of the Common Core Standards and the upcoming transition from the MCAS to the PARCC assessment.

Another reason is that summer learning gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from across the state and around the country. When teachers work together, amazing things happen.

The time spent can be used to share resources, discuss best practices, and acquire new classroom strategies. At the end of a learning session, teachers have added new information to their teacher toolkit. Summertime sessions can also be social and a lot of fun!

One of the best reasons to engage in summer learning is the availability of many free and low-cost options for materials and resources. The best place to start is MyLearningplan.com. On this site, teachers can find an abundance of courses to advance their content knowledge. Courses are offered through the summer, but enrollment is limited for some courses and teachers should review the site for openings and schedules.

Share My Lesson (www.sharemylesson.com) is a free online community of educators in which teachers provide and benefit from successful lessons that their colleagues have prepared and found useful. Developed by AFT,

SML currently offers of 260,000 lessons that are conveniently categorized for grades K-12 and for special learning populations, including English Language Learners (ELLs), students with learning disabilities, and gifted



and talented students. There are also calendar-based categories that make finding a timely lesson for a holiday or other event fun and easy! Not only are the lessons aligned with Common Core, but the site even offers advice on how to integrate the standards into the classroom when it

is time to back to school again. For teachers who want to pursue personal interests, adult education programs such as those offered by the Boston Center for Adult Education (www.BCAE.org) can provide many unique learning options. Adult education classes appeal to every interest and include such summertime specialties as barbecuing, making ice cream, and wine tasting. Most classes have a fee,

but it is usually low. Like summer study sessions, these classes can also help teachers learn and meet people in a relaxed and fun atmosphere.

Another effective way to spend a summer is by attending conferences. You can visit another city, meet other teachers and administrators, and engage in discussions on issues impacting education. AFT offers the TEACH conference July 22-24 in Washington, DC. At this annual event, teachers, civic and union leaders, and educational experts and activists come together to assess the current state of education and to look forward to new advances and better ways of engaging and educating our students.

Summer is a time to relax, reflect, and reignite our passion for teaching. Teachers and students should have summer learning opportunities that are fun, relevant, and engaging. Learning loss affects everyone. Summer is a time to stop the loss and even to learn new things. When the new school year begins, teachers should be ready to meet the joys and challenges of serving our students and, when it comes time to write about what we did on our summer vacation, we should all have a lot to say! ■

Around the World in (roughly) 80 Days:

GEEO encourages American teachers to learn internationally

After months of staying inside and filling out bubbles, there is nothing better for the mind and spirit than getting out.

WAY out!

“Travel is an important life experience that changes how you see the world,” suggests Jesse Weisz, founder and executive director of Global Exploration for Educators Organization (GEEO).

Since 2007, GEEO has been helping teachers and students explore and engage their world.

“I founded GEEO because understanding the world today has never been more important to America's future,” says Weisz. “Students look to their teachers for knowledge about a world

that is not yet part of their own lived experience. By spending time abroad, teachers gain fresh perspectives that deeply enrich their students' learning and global awareness.”

Intended to encourage teachers to travel as a means to equip and enrich students with the knowledge needed to ensure that they can not only be more informed and engaged citizens of their own countries but of the world as well, GEEO gives teachers with the desire to travel the means to pursue their passions in an educationally-appropriate environment. The not-for-profit organization currently offers

over 20 international programs in countries as diverse as China, Italy, Morocco and Peru.

“Travel creates a stronger connection to world around you,” suggests Weisz, who had travelled the world for years as a business consultant before founding GEEO. “If more Americans traveled, we would become a more outward looking, benevolent country. Unfortunately, most Americans lack the means, time or desire to travel abroad.”



That is where GEEO comes in.

“Teachers have the time,” Weisz observes, “and if done inexpensively, the means to travel.”

As GEEO programs are supported with prepared educational materials and each trip can earn teachers graduate school and professional development credits, they offer educators the support and incentive to explore and educate themselves so they can educate others more effectively.

“Teachers have the opportunity to reach at least 100 students a year, on average,” Weisz says. “A trip taken by one teacher has the potential to impact many young minds.”

Unlike many other packaged tours that push participants through a predetermined parade of programs, GEEO programs strive to offer what Weisz calls “structure without hassle.” While they may not offer four-star lodging and first-class flights, GEEO trips are safe, clean and comfortable and allow for maximal engagement with the region being visited. From

home stays to using local transportation, GEEO excursions give teachers and students an authentic feel for a foreign culture without making them feel out of place.

“On a typical day on our trips you will arrive to a location, be checked into the hotel and have an orientation from your tour leader,” Weisz explains. “The group will then break up into smaller groups doing the things they want to do.”

Another difference Weisz points out is the nature of the guide-guided relationship. “Your tour leader...[is] not the traditional guide you may be expecting,” he cautions. “We want you to learn through exploring and much of your experience will be based on how active you choose to be in acquiring knowledge and interacting with locals.”

Among the 800 educators from 45 states who have participated in GEEO trips is Susan Brown, a teacher at the Saltonstall School in Salem who travelled to India.

“I loved my trip,” she says, “and I really hope more teachers find their way to GEEO!”

Among the elements of the excursion that attracted Brown were the choice of locations, the focus on education and the fact that her fellow travelers were also fellow educators.

“It was also affordable,” Brown notes, “and the scheduled and dates of

the trips matched my availability.”

As most trips consist of 8-15 travelers some of whom have been to the region before, many members of the group are often able to teach each other and serve as supplemental guides.

In addition to curricular materials and other supports, GEEO also arranges visits to schools (when available) and even provides a book club that suggests appropriate related readings to further enhance each participant's experience, engagement and enjoyment.

“Our Pinterest page is an ever growing source of lesson plans, travel tips and interesting articles,” Weisz adds, noting how his organization uses the latest in social media as well as cutting-edge mapping technology to help travelers navigate and connect with the many regions they visit.

For these and many other reasons, GEEO continues to grow and expand.

“Every year we have had 30-50% growth in terms of the number of teachers who travel with us,” says Weisz. “It has been an exciting process

getting to know so many teachers and see how they share their experiences with their students when they return to their classrooms!”

“Opening up the world to my students is

much easier when I open myself to the world,” Brown observes. “Traveling allows me to be in the place of the learner and to experience the wonder of things for the first time.” ■



INTREPID EDUCATORS
A GEEO group in front of the Taj Mahal



BETTER THAN A BOOK
GEEO explorers hanging out in Zimbabwe