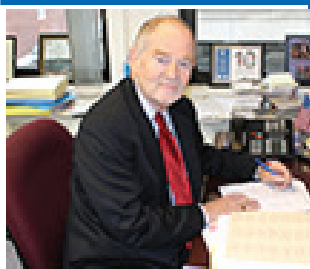




# The Advocate

July 2014



## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

## Senate Votes to Keep Cap on Charter Schools

**O**n Wednesday, July 16, the senate by a 26-13 vote rejected an attempt to raise the current cap on charter schools. This vote was a tremendous victory for the children, many of whom are poverty stricken, attending the regular public schools, and for the teachers and all education personnel.

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) offered many arguments against raising the cap on charter schools, but our number one argument was that raising the cap on charter schools would take additional resources away from the students in the regular public schools.

The State House News Service quoted me as follows:

We congratulate the Senate for taking a stand for public schools and public school students, many of whom live in poverty and who need all the resources they can get. The vote against raising the cap keeps resources in our locally controlled public schools where they are most needed.

The following is the list of senators who voted against raising the cap on charter schools. If your senator is among them, please send a thank you. (Please note that Senate President Murray traditionally does not vote.)

Stephen Brewer (Barre)  
Gale Candaras (Wilbraham)  
Harriette Chandler (Worcester)  
Cynthia Stone Creem (Newton)  
Sal DiDomenico (Everett)  
Kenneth Donnelly (Arlington)  
Eileen Donoghue (Lowell)  
James Eldridge (Acton)  
Jennifer Flanagan (Leominster)  
Patricia Jehlen (Somerville)  
John Keenan (Quincy)  
Thomas Kennedy (Brockton)  
Jason Lewis (Winchester)  
Joan Lovely (Salem)  
Thomas McGee (Lynn)  
Mark Montigny (New Bedford)  
Michael Moore (Millbury)  
Richard Moore (Uxbridge)  
Kathleen O'Connor Ives (Newburyport)  
Marc Pacheco (Taunton)  
Stanley Rosenberg (Amherst)  
Michael Rush (West Roxbury)  
Karen Spilka (Ashland)  
James Timilty (Walpole)  
James Welch (West Springfield)  
Daniel Wolf (Harwich)

AFT MA also pointed out that teachers in charter schools need not be certified, that these schools have far fewer special needs and English language learner students, and that the attrition rate is very substantial.

Members contacting their senators was a mighty element in our success. AFT members speaking up and speaking out in unison can be a potent force in advancing issues beneficial to public education. We did so this time and we need to do it again and again and again.

AFT MA and its constituent locals also worked with groups committed to public education. Joining with like minded groups adds much strength to the viewpoint that public schools are one of the cornerstones of our nation, of our democratic society.

I thank everyone who contributed to the Senate's vote refusing to raise the cap on charter schools.

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

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Senator Elizabeth Warren (right) stands united with AFT MA, represented by retired Peabody Federation of Teachers member Mary Condon

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# Charter Cap Hangs On

## AFT MA-supported coalition defeats Bill

After months of debate and a letter-writing campaign that involved members of AFT MA, the bill that would have raised the cap for charter schools that passed the House was defeated in the Senate.

Leading up to the vote, AFT MA had engaged in an extensive email campaign and had placed advertisements on the Internet. Additionally, the Boston Teachers Union had placed ads in the Boston Globe and Metro.

The supporters of Bill S2262 claimed that thousands of students were on waiting lists for charter schools and that charter schools had proven their value and should be allowed to expand and take over what they deemed to be struggling schools and districts in order to at least give parents and students a “better choice.” Despite these claims, the Bill was defeated on Wednesday, July 16.

In their convincing arguments, the opponents of the Bill asked whether charters had truly proven their worth in the 20 years since they were first introduced. They also pointed out how charters were originally intended to find new best practices and then share them with other schools, but had thus far greatly failed to achieve this founding goal.

“The victory in the Senate on the charter school cap bill was the result of a well-planned and executed strategy by the AFT,” claimed AFT MA Field Representative for Legislation J. Coley Walsh. “Initiated by AFT President Tom Gosnell and the Executive Board and chaired by Brant Duncan of Lynn Teachers Union, the Charter School Committee met monthly for about six months identifying issues and strategies for outreach to members, parents,

other supporters, and the Senate.”

Walsh went on to thank fellow legislative Field Representative Mike Canavan and also AFT MA’s Political Organizer Brian LaPierre and BTU Political Director Angela Cristiani, who helped coordinate local meetings with Senators and their constituents in their home districts (see story, page 3). He also expressed appreciation for support from such groups as Citizens for Public Schools and various Boston parents’ groups who, Walsh says, “brought new insight to address that this was not a union issue, but an education issue that deeply affected the community.”

One of the most vocal proponents of the Bill was Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, who serves as a co-chair for

the Commonwealth’s Joint Committee on Education. In response to concerns that raising the charter school cap would remove vitally-needed funds from public schools (many of which are already struggling with deficits), the Jamaica Plain Democrat had proposed what she saw as a “potential compromise” to ensure that local school districts would not be financially hurt by increased charter enrollment. She suggested that districts could be reimbursed for any further losses incurred by increasing charter enrollment.

“There were other issues,” says Gosnell, “but, had the bill passed, it would have meant the decimation of public school budgets and, far and away, that was the one that carried the day and convinced people to vote

against this.”

Even though her proposal allegedly addressed funding issues while allowing “strong-performing” charters to grow, according to the News Service, even her colleague, House Education Committee Chair Rep. Alice Peisch, and other charter advocates deemed it a “non-starter.” As a result, the version of the bill that had passed the House by a May vote of 114-35 did not speak to such reimbursements.

One of the greatest opponents of the Bill was Senator Patricia Jehlen of Somerville. “She took the lead in the

Senate in opposition to raising the cap on charter schools,” Gosnell says, crediting the Senator with playing a “key role in developing the coalition that eventually came together to defeat the raising of

the cap.”

After rejecting Chang-Diaz’s amendment proposal by a two-to-one vote (26-13), the Senate defeated the underlying bill by a vote of 30-9.

Even Senator Barry Finegold, who had been a staunch supporter of the charter movement in his district of Lawrence and elsewhere admitted, “I don’t think there will be any more discussion of charter schools this session.”

After their months of letter writing and demonstrating, members of AFT MA celebrated the fruits of their dedicated labors.

“We congratulate the Senate for taking a stand for public schools and for public school students,” said Gosnell, “many of whom live in poverty and who need all the resources they

can get. The vote against raising the cap keeps resources in our locally controlled public schools where they are most needed.”

As she had voted against the 1993 education reform bill that established charter schools, Senate President Therese Murray, emphasized that she had no role in directing the 2014 vote. In fact, as is traditional for the president, she abstained from participating in the vote.

“This was the democratic process,” she told the News Service. “It was not a leadership vote. It was a conscience vote.”

When asked what she had come away with, President Murray said that “the suburban districts feel very much that money is coming out of their school districts and that the charter schools are not giving them what the promise was.”

Other Senators, including Kenneth Donnelly of Arlington and Jason Lewis of Winchester, suggested that the action that needs to be taken now is to investigate why the best practices that have allegedly been developed in charter schools are not being shared and replicated, as had originally been proposed when charters came into being. They also asked what the education landscape would look like if charter schools had been allowed to expand and questioned whether they would lead to a system in which there were competing school systems. Many also suggested that the funds that had been proposed to be used to expand the charters could be better used to support and expand early education.

“While I’m certainly very disappointed in the outcome,” Chang-Diaz concluded, “I think what you saw in the Senate...was an incredibly open, robust, honest, passionate debate.”

“It was a combined effort that all parties can be justifiably proud of,” Walsh concluded. ■

### The Advocate

The official publication of  
AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO

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## BOLD PRINT

In accordance with state law, Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School will be destroying all records related to Special Education students who were no longer receiving services as of the end of the 2005-2006 school year unless the parent/guardian or eligible (adult) student notifies the school district otherwise.

The administration realizes that, while after seven years, the records are no longer useful to the district, but they may still be useful to the parent/guardian or former student in applying for Social Security benefits, rehabilitation services, college entrance, etc. Copies of all records may be requested in writing or in person at the following address:

Assabet Valley Regional  
Technical High School  
215 Fitchburg Street  
Marlborough, MA 01752



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



# Sitting Down with Legislators

## AFT MA members talk directly to lawmakers in new roundtable series

As the Commonwealth prepares for what may be a monumental shift in governance (with the offices of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General and Treasurer up for grabs, as well as many House and Senate seats), it is more important than ever to know where our elected officials stand on important issues like for example, lifting the charter school cap or maintaining retiree health insurance benefits at the current level, and how their decisions impact our members and working families across the Commonwealth.

With this in mind, AFT Massachusetts organized a series of roundtable discussions with legislators so that AFT MA members could have direct access in-district as constituents speak directly with teachers, paraprofessionals, librarians and support staff, where their voices and concerns could be heard.

"We have been hosting these educational round tables across the state so our representatives and senators can hear directly from our members who are on the ground and give the classroom perspective that is sorely needed in proposed legislation," explained AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre, who worked with union leaders to arrange these meetings. "It is always a great opportunity to have our teachers, paraprofession-

als, and librarians meet and engage with their elected legislators."

LaPierre notes that the meetings were based on AFT's Activists for Congressional Education (ACE) programs that have congressional leaders meet with union leaders about the pressing issues of the day.

"This was set up initially due to the charter cap," he explains. "We started with the House Education Committee and went on from there."

As Lawrence is such a hotbed of educational issues, a special session was put together in that district that included members of the Lawrence State Legislative Delegation, including State Representatives Marcos Devers,

Diana DiZoglio, Barry Finegold and Frank Moran.

"Our goal was to give our members and our representatives information about the charter issue," LaPierre says. "We spent the entire month of June and most of July talking about it and giving them the information they needed to hopefully vote to keep the cap on charter schools."

When the charter cap bill passed the House on May 21, the focus of the meetings shifted to the Senate and

also added the issue of Early Childhood Education as well.

"I sent an email out to the senators," LaPierre recalls, "and we worked with those who responded, setting up district meetings, especially in districts where we had a lot of members."

Among the participants were State Senators Will Brownsberger, Sonia Chang-Diaz, Sal DiDomenico, Jamie Eldridge, Jennifer Flangan, Linda Dorcena Forry, Jason Lewis, Joan Lovely, Tommy McGee, and Karen Spilka.

"It always means a lot to me to hear directly from students and parents and to understand from their perspective how the system is working," Senator Brownsberger said.

When asked how she perceived the state of public education in the Commonwealth, Senator Spilka touted our nation-leading system and emphasized her own efforts to "give districts, students and teachers the varied resources they need so that all children in all cities and towns have opportunities to succeed." Despite the fact that Massachusetts "leads the country in education," however, the Senator also admitted that "we can always do better. We can always do more to ensure that all of our children are prepared to compete and lead in the 21st century workforce."

That is why Senator Spilka was so enthused to participate in this program. "It's important to have discussions and engage with teachers and school administrators about the challenges and opportunities our schools face and the resources they need to continue to support our students," she observed, noting how "pleased" she was to "have the opportunity to

discuss a range of pressing issues in the legislature related to education."

At the end of what turned out to be a lively and provocative discussion, Senator Spilka said that she was happy to participate in what she termed a "terrific event that touched on many important issues that impact our schools, our teachers, our towns and our children." As

for future opportunities to engage with educators, Senator Spilka said that she is "definitely" interested.

"Our teachers are the experts," Duncan said, noting that Lynn teachers met with both State and Federal legislators. "Roundtables serve as a way for educators to advise their elected officials on what resources and conditions they need for every student to be successful." ■



Senator Will Brownsberger



Senator Karen Spilka

## Meet Your Colleague: Jonathan Staveley

As the son of a 30-year teacher, Jonathan Staveley had a great deal of experience with what a teacher's life is like and how it can affect the family and the community. He also got to see first-hand the wonderful life teachers enjoy.

"My dad was someone who genuinely loved his job," Staveley recalls, "and someone who made a difference in the lives of so many your people."

So after his own explorations into the world of business proved unsatisfying, Staveley fell back on the family business and entered education.

"I began to search for a career where I could make a difference in society," he explains. "I didn't have to look far."

After completing his student teaching at Chelmsford High School, Staveley was offered a job there as a social studies teacher. "I've been part of the CHS family ever since," he smiles. "I couldn't imagine doing much else!"

Now that he has a good number of years in the field, Staveley has the perspective to look back. Unfortunately, among the biggest issues he sees is what he calls "the constant erosion of educator rights and benefits." As many politicians "vilify" teachers, portraying them as "overpaid and underachieving" and blaming them for everything from bloated budgets to high levels of poverty and crime in their communities, it can be difficult for a teacher to focus on what they entered the field to do- help children learn. "Society at large has begun to accept these fallacies as fact," Staveley observes. And while he admits that teachers need to address these issues so that they can focus more attention on their primary directive, he also points out that they

cannot do it alone.

Perhaps this is why Staveley became active in union life, eventually becoming a member of the Executive Board of AFT MA.

"I also see inequality in all its forms as a monumental problem," he says. "Our political leaders have failed miserably in addressing these issues with new and creative approaches. I believe organizations like AFT MA can offer a great deal to level the playing field for all students and our communities in general."

Before joining the E-Board, Staveley served for many years as executive VP for the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers (CFT). "In that role, and as a classroom teacher, I have seen the impact that many shortsighted state mandates have had on students and public employees throughout the Commonwealth," he explains. "I felt that I could better serve my students and colleagues as a member of the AFT MA board."

As Chelmsford is a "relatively small" district, Staveley also felt that his presence on the Board could help Chelmsford and districts like it have a larger voice in union matters.

"We face many of the same issues larger districts face and some which may be unique to small suburban and rural districts," he observes. "I want to be a strong voice for those districts whose issues don't make national news but are no less important while

doing what is best for our large urban districts." After all, he emphasizes, "We are all in this together!"

When asked how he came to run for the Board position, Staveley explains that, at the end of the 2013 school year, he had a conversation with CFT president and AFT MA Board member Kathryn Chamberlain. "She told me that she was planning on retiring in June of 2014," he recalls. "I decided to run for her seat to make

sure that the dedicated educators and deserving students of the Chelmsford School District continue to be well represented on the Board."

Now that he has succeeded in taking over for Chamberlain and maintaining representation for Chelmsford, Staveley looks forward to pursuing other goals in his new position. However, he notes,

his first order of business is to learn more about AFT MA so that he can be an effective contributor and supporter of all its issues and concerns.

"The AFT MA deals with many more issues than I dealt with as a local leader," he admits. "Learning who the players are and how they shape educational policy will be a learning experience."

Fortunately, Staveley says appreciatively, many of his fellow Board members have already proven "immensely helpful" in this regard.

While his primary focus will be on



MEMBER OF THE BOARD  
Jonathan Staveley

the issues that directly and profoundly affect Chelmsford and other smaller districts, Staveley looks forward to learning more about and being more involved with the issues that affect all districts, all teachers and all students.

"I also hope to be a strong voice for the educators and children of all school districts in Massachusetts," he says, "to help create an educational system that respects the rights of students and their teachers."

Looking forward, he sees education in the Commonwealth continuing on its path of "continued greatness." While he is aware of a real achievement gap (as opposed to the trumped-up one that is so often used to belittle teachers), Staveley is sure that he and his colleagues have the expertise and dedication to serve each student as best they can, if they are given the time, resources and support necessary to do so.

"I don't intend to let those who want to scapegoat teachers and other public employees as the cause for society's problems to win," Staveley assures. "I understand we have a long road ahead of us and that it will be fraught with challenges. However, we are on the right side of this struggle and if we continue to fight, we will eventually be victorious!" ■

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**AFT MA Leadership Training**

**September 13, 2014**

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# Teaching the Teachers

## AFT unites region in teacher-led professional development

Even though New England boasts some of the best schools and educators in the world, our teachers are never satisfied to rest on their laurels. That is why so many of them gathered over the days of June 26-28 at the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) Hall in Dorchester to engage each other around research-based teaching practices and to develop their skills for engaging other colleagues as well.

At this special three-day regional institute (a version of which will be repeated in Providence, from August 13-15), AFT-affiliated teachers from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island came together to focus on four vital skill areas: standards-based lesson design, differentiated instruction, effective student engagement, and inquiry-based teaching and learning. Participants chose one of these four skill areas as a focus, preparing themselves to not only better understand the ideas and issues of the particular module, but to then go back to their districts and help others learn and grow as well.

"This program demonstrates the AFT's commitment to high-quality teaching and teacher-led professional development in our schools," said AFT MA Educational Policy and Programs Director Dan Murphy. "Teachers often have PD done to them instead of with them. The relevance and effectiveness of this PD is highly questionable. The AFT program puts forward a different vision of PD. It is based on the premise that the expertise and skill needed to promote strong teaching and learning already exists among our members. The key is to build capacity within our local unions and school districts, so that teachers have the opportunity to grow professionally by learning from each other."

Local unions had been encouraged to send strong educators to the institute who could effectively disseminate the information and techniques they acquired. Upon their return home, participants will work with their local unions and school districts to find appropriate times and locations to share their newly-developed knowledge with their colleagues.

"The Lawrence Teachers Union was eager to participate," explained LTU President Frank McLaughlin, who was accompanied by teachers and staff from the AFT Oliver Partnership School, Arlington Elementary, and South Lawrence East Middle (SparkAcademy). "While these schools operate under different turnaround models, teacher voice in instructional decision-making is the essential component for success in any turnaround effort. This professional development helped that voice emerge."

"We were recommended by our principal," explained Sarah McIsaac, one member of the large contingent representing the Lynn Teachers Union.

"I saw the schedule and the offerings and figured it would be a good thing to go to," noted Ben Feeney from the recently-expanded Essex Agricultural and Technical High School (see story on page 1).

"The AFT trainings are always very good and received well," added Carolyn Melillo, who had come with a cadre of colleagues from the recently-revived district of Central Falls, RI.

Each of the four modules was designed to align with both the MA teacher evaluation rubric and the Common Core standards. As each

module was presented by national AFT facilitators, a common theme that surfaced was

how to treat colleagues with the appropriate level of respect and collaborative spirit. This theme was also emphasized during the first day of the institute, when a special group presentation on how to teach adult learners and how to help them teach others was delivered by Colleen Callahan, Director of Professional Issues for the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals. Before the program officially began, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell went from table to table introducing himself to teachers and congratulating them on another "spectacular" year of service to our students and communities.

After a casual lunch during which teachers met and caught up with each other, Murphy called the room to attention and started off the official proceedings.

Murphy offered his personal thanks to the participants who had given up their well-deserved vacation time to continue to work and learn. "That shows your dedication to your students, your schools and our union," he observed.

As the host of the event, BTU President Richard Stutman also welcomed the participants and thanked them for taking time away from their summer break to work on further improving

their skills.

"This is a privilege for us to be able to host," he said. "I think it is a marvelous thing and we thank you all for coming."

In his introductory comments, Gosnell said that from the moment he entered to room, he knew something special was going on.

"When I heard all this bubbly conversation, I knew this was a wonderful start to this great program," he said.

After sharing his famous "Red Sox joke" (which garnered laughs even from the Connecticut contingent), Gosnell finished his introduction by establishing who he is as a leader.

"I am a union president," he explained, "and I believe in the traditional stuff, like getting the best salaries for the best teachers. And I also believe in providing the best professional development and support possible for our members."

When asked what they wanted in professional development, the teachers came back with definite answers.

"We want something to take away immediately and implement," suggested Rhode Island teacher Jennifer London, to which AFT's Educational Issues Department Associate Director Rosalind LaRoque responded by suggesting that this workshop would feature "rigor without rigor mortis" and that, perhaps unlike some other professional development sessions, this one would offer "things you can use right away."

"We talked about having a hands-on activity where we can try out the idea and get feedback before we take it into the classroom," added Paula Sexton from Lawrence.

"We need to see how it connects to our own success as well as the success of the students," added Lynn Cristino from Pawtucket.

After distributing the AFT-provided T-type notebooks in which the participants could not only take notes but reflect upon them, Callahan asked each table to recall memorable, effective and ineffective learning experiences and to try to assess what made them such. While many of the teachers came from different schools in different districts, many of the responses

were similar. Among the common positive traits were modeling, patience, humor, personal connection, flexibility and willingness to adapt to learners, and of course, professional demeanor and evident capability in the task or subject.

"The first thing we need to do is recognize what is important to us as adults," Callahan suggested, "so we can use those things with other adults."

Throughout the course of the institute, Callahan and her colleagues employed teaching techniques of various modes and modalities, including visual, aural, and kinesthetic, in an effort to reach each participant in some way and, in the process, model how they might do the same with their students, both younger and older.

"It is important to know your audience and get a sense of who is in the room," Callahan observed, adding the importance of establishing norms so that participants feel comfortable participating.

While adult learners may differ in some ways from younger students, the group soon discovered commonalities between the two groups.

"In many ways, succeeding with adult learners is the same as succeeding with younger students," Callahan explained. "They have had life experiences and have developed expectations and, like our students, they learn in different ways."

Combining participant experience with research from the likes of Abraham Maslow and Harvey J. Brightman, the institute demonstrated how adults and students learn best and how to be more effective teachers, regardless of the subject or audience.

As the three-day session wrapped up and participants prepared to go back to their districts and colleagues to share what they had learned, participants and organizers took some time to reflect on what had transpired and what they hoped to see going forward.

"The sessions provided high-quality professional development and the opportunity to build capacity within our local union and school district," McLaughlin noted.

LaRoque called the institute "well-organized and received" and noted that participants were "enthusiastic, energetic and engaged. The quality of their practice presentations is testimony to their commitment to return to their locals and share with their colleagues. We were very impressed with their willingness to learn, collaborate and reflect on ways to successfully implement the strategies."

Fellow facilitator B.J. Voges also complimented the "very receptive group" and predicted that "they will carry the ball forward and collaborate with folks at their school to hone their crafts using research-based strategies." ■



**A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS**  
AFT members from MA, RI and CT gathered at the BTU to learn how to teach and support colleagues more effectively

# Stemming Illiteracy One Book at a Time

## First Book puts reading in students' hands

More than 30 million children in America live in low-income households where they must face every day at a disadvantage. Lacking proper nutrition, supervision and education, these children are behind their peers before the race even begins. One of the most notable detriments many of these children face is a lack of rich and varied literary content. They simply do not have books.

Fortunately, a program is growing across the country that is dedicated to getting books into the hands of these underprivileged youth. Since 1992, First Book ([www.firstbook.org](http://www.firstbook.org)) has been collecting and distributing books and other educational materials to millions of students across the United

States and Canada. In the process, they are helping to supplement dwindling budgets and stave off learning loss in many communities. First Book is picking up the tab and picking up the slack, especially in districts where schools and programs cannot afford expensive textbooks or even retail storybooks,

In a recent longitudinal study of over 2,500 students, First Book was found to improve interest in reading as well as ability and also foster and support a student's desire and willingness to learn. The program has also been shown to increase educational oppor-

tunities for schools, including opportunities to engage parents and other community members.

So far, nearly 100,000 classrooms and local nonprofits have signed up with First Book, with new programs joining every day. As the program expands, so does its offerings, with recent additions including programs related to preparing for higher education and taking care of one's health, as well as many topics related to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Many First Book titles are also available in multiple languages.

Among the earliest adopters in AFT



MA was Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin.

"We did order 1000 books in September of 2012 and gave them out during the 100th anniversary of the Lawrence Bread and Roses Strike celebrated on Labor Day," he recalls. In addition to distributing over 500 books in one day to any child who requested one, McLaughlin and his colleagues also handed out AFT literature that promoted and encouraged reading in school and in the home. "The remaining books that were not distributed were given to the local Girl Scouts to distribute to Lawrence Public schoolchildren who are part of their after-school program," he added, noting that some of the remaining books are now in the collection of the pioneering Oliver Partnership School. "It is a great program and I hope to be able to do more with them in the future!" ■



# The Philosophy of Education

## Educator's Opinion

By Dena Capano

Teacher evaluations, Common Core, and school size are just a handful of stressors faced by modern teachers. Teachers' schedules are nothing to balk at. With mounting requirements and expectations, the reasons why we teach can sometimes get lost in the shuffle.

Dr. Peter Gibbon, Senior Research Scholar at the Boston University School of Education will be facilitating a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Teaching Institute for K-12 teachers this summer. The Institute, called Philosophers of Education: Major Thinkers from the Enlightenment to the Post-Modern Era, addresses the issues of modern educators while taking a look to the past. "The national debate on education is currently dominated by discussions of tenure, unions, choice, Common Core, teacher evaluation, school size, and safety," Gibbon notes. The study of pedagogy has replaced the philosophy of education as a required course in most schools.

A major goal of the Institute is to connect the major theories philosophers of such as Locke, Rousseau and Dewey to twenty-first century educational ideology. "My argument for

reading the philosophy of education is I believe teachers should be intellectuals," Gibbon explains. "I believe teachers should comment on public policy. They shouldn't turn everything over to union leaders or public policy people or professors." Reading philosophers can confirm practices and give new ideas. For instance, on the philosophy of nature versus nurture, Gibbon begs the questions, "Do students come with certain temperaments and can we change them? Locke talks about individual differences. Is society corrupt or can teachers change society?" Attending the Institute will encourage NEH scholars to explore debates among significant philosophers of education.

The Institute will not only address Enlightenment thinkers but contemporary writers on education. Modern educational thinkers such as social activist and educator Geoffrey Canada, founder of Harlem's Children Zone, reflects a philosophy in favor of more

social services and a full school day, such as those a Charter School provides. Some believe charter schools are the answer to close the achievement gap between lower and higher income communities. Historian of Education Diane Ravitch on the other hand, doesn't feel Charter Schools are the answer. Charter schools are not only publicly funded, but also receive foundation money. The publicly funded money charter schools receive is not beneficial for public schools that need more money and resources. Gibbon attests, "I believe in capitalism, competition, and entrepreneurship. But Charter schools are not the answer to America's problems."

Many contemporary educational thinkers believe the Common Core is the answer. Defenders of the Common Core feel it will lift everybody up. Critics say that it may be pitched too high. Gibbon asserts that the Common Core is aimed at sending everyone to college which may be unrealistic. He states, "Personally I don't believe it's going to be a revolution, just because you distribute standards



RE-THINKING EDUCATION

Dena Capano

## AFT MA Grows on the North Shore

### Newly-united district to join AFL-CIO-affiliated union

For 100 years, Essex Agricultural and Technical High School (lovingly referred to as "Essex Aggie") has provided students on the North Shore with the latest knowledge and technology having to do with animal, plant and environmental science. Recently, it was decided that this historic school would merge with North Shore Regional Vocational High School and Peabody Vocational High School in order to combine resources and better serve students. Among the issues involved in the merger was the fact that, while Essex Aggie and Peabody were affiliated with AFT MA, the North Shore staff was comprised of MTA members. As such, the MA Department of Labor Relations determined that the staff of all three schools had to decide on one representative body to serve them all going forward.

On May 22, members of the staffs at Essex, North Shore and Peabody came together to form a new educational entity that will be known henceforth as Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School District. In the process, the combined workforce also voted to unite as members of AFT MA.

"The election for union representa-

tion gave us an opportunity to mobilize our own members and educate and persuade members from the MTA about the intrinsic values and benefits of becoming a member of AFT Massachusetts," says AFT MA Political Di-

rector Brian LaPierre. "It also served as a wonderful opportunity to engage with so many fine vocational, agricultural and academic teachers."

rector Brian LaPierre. "It also served as a wonderful opportunity to engage with so many fine vocational, agricultural and academic teachers."

As the source schools had a nearly equal number of AFT MA and MTA and as both unions had many elements that spoke well for their respective organizations, the vote was very close.

"My take on the whole thing is that we knew it would be close," explains, AFT MA Field Representative Walter Armstrong, "and in the end it was."

While many who participated in the vote may have had widely divergent reasons for voting the way they did, according to history teacher Jason M. Stark, primary among the "main issues" was the drafting a new contract that "accentuates the best terms" from both schools and from both the AFT

and MTA. "The uncertainty of not having a unified contract at Essex Tech is something that the faculty certainly does not need when we're trying to best serve our students," Stark points out.

Now that the vote has been tallied, the AFT MA is working hard to engage and involve former MTA members in their new union.

"Now it is important that our local union officials and other member leaders embrace our new members," LaPierre advises, noting "how much work lies ahead, including obtaining a new contract agreement and making sure our members have all the resources and materials they need as they enter the new building so students can continue to achieve at high levels and our teachers have what they need to get the job done."

When asked why she believes that the vote went the way it did, Joyce Kimani, president of AFT MA-affiliated Hathorne Teachers Federation, suggested that it was AFT MA's "strong commitment to serving the

to teachers. A lot of it will depend on the assessment. We will have to see if testing and standards really make a difference. The only thing we know in America that has made a difference is social economic class. Social economic class and educational achievement are linked." Gibbon goes on to say, "If you look at MCAS testing, Weston and Wellesley are always at the top, and let's say Lawrence, for example, is always near the bottom. Not just in America, but world-wide."

The Institute will act as a forum for teachers around the nation to meet and discuss these issues at length. Gibbon says, "I think teachers should contribute to the national discussion much more than they have in the past. I think it would help if principals taught a course. I believe administrators should teach." Gibbon is also hopeful for the future of education, stating he is optimistic about the nation's concern for the achievement gap. He believes, "If we want to cure the achievement gap, we can't rely on inspired teaching. We also have to do more to eliminate poverty."

The Institute will run from July 14th-August 1st at Boston University. For more information on teaching Institutes from the National Endowment for the Humanities for next summer, visit [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov). ■

Dena Capano is a Social Studies Teacher at Lynn Classical High School.

needs of the people they represent" that made the difference. She also cited the ease of access and personability of AFT MA's field representatives. "They listen and don't make decisions without our consent," she said. "They also fight for our rights in a respectful way."

Armstrong agrees, suggesting that it was the way AFT MA treats its members that made the difference.

"Our members at Essex Aggie are like a family," he observes, "and that is how I have tried to deliver service to them, like they are my family."

Though many former MTA members argued valiantly on behalf of their organization, the new group is already coming together under their new leadership, ready to go forth in service of their students and their community. According to Kimani, such unification is very much in keeping with the union philosophy and so will work to smooth out any remaining differences so that the new combined workforce can focus on what they have in common and use

their shared resources to strengthen the new school.

"Unions help establish a community of mutual understanding and solidarity," Kimani suggested. "They protect our rights, and they ensure that we are being treated fairly and equally."

Such benefits will be pivotal as non- and anti-union forces continue to try to threaten public schools and public school workers.

"Former members of the MTA will come on board and realize that AFT has their best interests in mind and will work very hard at the negotiating table and through any issues during the year," Stark predicts. "When this happens, I unequivocally believe that a united front will allow the teachers to do their jobs well and serve our students in the best ways possible." ■



A NEW DAY FOR A NEW SCHOOL

An artists' rendering of the proposed new building for Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical High School, where staff voted in May to form a new union that will be part of AFT MA

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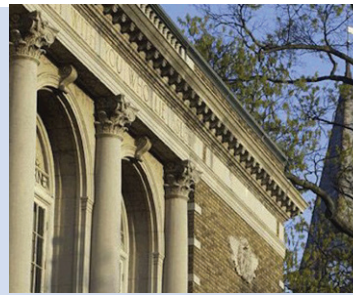
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## On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



# Mass Murders on College Campuses

Young men commit almost all mass murders, usually shooting other young people. In recent years, many victims have been students at schools ranging from Sandy Hook Elementary School to the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB).

Alienation, including hatred of women, is usually cited as the cause. Most killings are also accompanied by written warnings in journals or email or other electronic messages explaining the shooter's need to kill people. While alienation is easy to detect in young men, alienation leading to murder is much harder to predict. In post-shooting interviews, neighbors and friends almost always say how quiet the young man was, but no one really seems to have known him.

Most schools have taken protective measures. Many school doors are now guarded and locked. Many school districts now use metal detectors and have hired armed security guards or policemen. Sadly, metal detectors do not work very well, guards have often been shot, and locked doors do not prevent a student intent on killing. Carefully planned programs to gain information from other students about potential killers probably works best to prevent

these killings.

Few colleges and universities have taken even minimal steps to prevent mass shootings. Metal detectors and locked doors won't work on college campuses. My son, a student at UMass, was given a list of instructions in case of an attack that reminded me of classroom instructions to survive nuclear attacks in the 1950s: lock the door, hide, and keep quiet.

Some college campuses are trying to make campuses safer by offering trigger warnings. These are not warnings that someone is preparing to shoot a gun but that certain class readings or lectures may trigger bad feelings by setting off a kind of post-traumatic-stress related to recalling negative experiences. The leading program for trigger warnings comes from UCSB where students voted in February to have faculty warn students about assignments that may contain "rape, sexual assault, abuse, self-injurious behavior, suicide, graphic violence, pornography, kidnapping, and graphic descriptions of gore." The intention of the resolution, according to its author, Bailey Loverin, a sophomore at UCSB, was to make students feel safer in their classrooms. The *New York Times* reported her saying

in an interview (5/17/2014), "People suddenly feel a very real threat to their safety — even if it is perceived. They are stuck in a classroom where they can't get out, or if they do try to leave, it is suddenly going to be very public."

Most writers on the subject showed little sympathy for trigger warnings, casting them as restricted academic freedom from a misguided attempt to dilute literature. A few months after the student resolution, a gunman opened fire with an automatic handgun at UCSB, killing six students and then himself after posting a video on YouTube saying that he would kill women as revenge for rejecting him.

The resolution for trigger warnings in class assignments probably didn't contribute to the killer's incentive to murder women "and the men they embraced" but trigger warnings didn't make the campus safer either. Only outlawing the possession of handguns, automatic weapons and ammunition for these weapons will make classrooms safer.

Fear of the gun lobby has eliminated the political will to renew the ban on automatic weapons and handguns. President Obama and Congress backed down on even mild restrictions on

these weapons after the murders of 20 school children at Sandy Hook and have done little more since to try to change things.

Proposals for laws to restrict weapons have become apologetic, similar to the political fear of the label "liberal." These are perceptions, imposed by ourselves on ourselves, "the mind-forged manacles" that William Blake recognized in the late 1700s.

The gun lobby relies on its extension of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution to stop all laws restricting access to guns: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

"The people" is a collective noun not meaning "all people," and "militia" fits campus policy departments as a precaution in making college campuses safe.

I had opposed campus police carrying firearms when the issue was considered 10 years ago. Wiser heads prevailed when the union's executive board, faculty senate, and student government favored arming campus police. Campus police should have handguns' students should not. ■

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## Retiree Corner

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



### ATTENTION RETIREES:

Massachusetts Retirees United is committed to getting recognition for our veterans who retired prior to July 24, 1996 and were left behind by the Veteran's Bill that allowed those who served and were working in the public sector to count up to four years of military service toward creditable service.

Our bill - H2296 - is presently in the House Ways and Means Committee. Please contact Committee Chair Brian Dempsey at 617-722-2990 / Brian.Dempsey@mahouse.gov and ask him to recognize the service of these veterans by voting on H2296. They served this country honorably and this service should be recognized!

We also encourage you to contact-Minority Leader Brad Jones at 617-722-2100 / Bradley.Jones@mahouse.gov and ask him to intercede on behalf of veterans with Rep. Dempsey. Please make calls and send emails and get others to do so as well. The cost of this bill for those who are retired is less than \$1M and we are sure that the same is true of those in the State Retirement System. Show you appreciate what these brave veterans did for you by standing up for them.

While you are speaking to your representatives, ask them to consider voting on Ways and Means Committee Bill H2354. This bill will enable those who retired prior to July, 2004 and took an Option B or Option C or who are Option C Survivors to receive a flat rate increase to their pensions. Their pensions are 1/3 to 3/4 less than the pensions of those retiring now and yet their penalty under these options is two or three times as great! Please show you care about correcting injustice and make the calls to address these two bills.

Thank you!

# MRU to Honor Kathy Kelley

All of us had things we wished to accomplish prior to retiring. Kathleen Kelley, former lobbyist and president of the AFT MA, wanted to establish a statewide organization for retirees. She knew that a number of districts had retirement groups, but they were largely social in nature. She felt retirees needed more.

In late 2005 and early 2006, Kelley brought together a group of people who had been involved with retirement groups and issues. Many discussions took place regarding what this organization would look like and what it would do. It was decided that the group would not be limited to members of one union, nor to those retiring from one profession. Its primary function was to inform and educate those in retirement on issues that pertained to them in this new chapter in their lives. Thus, the Massachusetts Retirees United (MRU) was born.

Today, MRU proudly serves over 2,300 members and has exceeded even Kelley's expectations! In addition to providing this column in the *Advocate*, MRU also produces its own quarterly newsletter, *Matters*, and offer a number of free seminars on topics that are important to retirees and those about to retire. It has made history in being the first organization to get a creditable service bill passed

that affected those who were already retired. The Maternity Benefit Bill that became law on April 2, 2012 was the work of this great organization's membership. In the same year, MRU also got another landmark bill passed that increased by \$15,000 the amount a person can make who retires from and returns to a public sector job in Massachusetts. MRU continues working for justice for retirees.

But that is not what this article is about, however. It is not about an organization, but a person. It is about a woman of vision and commitment. It is about a person who possesses a sense of humor and a greater sense of justice. That person is Kathy Kelley.

Whenever it was Kelley's turn to testify at a hearing at the State House, the members of whatever committee she was testifying in front of sat a little straighter. They knew Kelley would give them both a laugh and also valuable information to justify the bill she wanted passed. Her lesson to those testifying on a bill is, "Don't whine. They hear enough of that. Do your homework and give them facts!"

Kelley has spent a lifetime giving and doing for others. She is a teacher to the core. Her classroom was the world and her pupils were anyone who had something to learn. She took a group of beginners who did not have

the slightest idea of how to get a bill filed and showed them how to do it not once but many times. She walked with people who held high elective office but made the average person feel important and they knew they had her undivided attention.

Kathy Kelley is one in a million. She is truly a giant among us and MRU is privileged to have had her help and guidance in founding our organization.

MRU is giving its third annual Appreciation Award to Kelley at its State Annual Meeting. The meeting this year will take place at Angelicas on RT.114 in Middleton on Thursday October 2, 2014. Registration will begin at 9:45, followed by a continental breakfast. This year's guest speaker will be newly-retired investigative reporter Susan Wornick. A luncheon will be served at 12:30. The cost will be \$15 for members and \$25 for non-members. Registrations and meal selection will take place through the August MRU newsletter or by calling (781) 365-0205 and requesting a form. You may also email me at mardito@retireesunited.org to request a form be emailed to you. We look forward to seeing you all there and to honoring our great colleague and friend Kathy Kelley! ■

## After the Bell: Kathryn Portle

In this new series, we will profile and celebrate our members and their "further lives" after retiring from teaching. Should you wish to participate or suggest someone, please write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).

### What got you into teaching?

I think there were a lot of reasons, but surely the opportunity to combine my love for the French language with trying to convince young people that an appreciation of another language and culture is very important to our lives.

### How long did you teach? What grade(s) and subject(s)?

I taught secondary school for 33 years in the Boston Public Schools, and also taught on the university level in Paris for more than four years. In Boston, I taught French, Spanish, Latin and English as a Second Language to Vietnamese students. In Paris, I taught English as a Foreign Language



### What is the greatest lesson you learned as a teacher?

There are many, but learning to be patient can not be overestimated. Patience brings with it lots of benefits, but it is not easy to achieve.

### What are you doing now and how does it relate to your life in education?

I do a lot of traveling and I am a member of three boards: The Massachusetts Fulbright Board, The Worcester State University

Alumni Association Advisory Board, and I am Vice President of the Boston Strasbourg Sister City Association. All of them relate directly to education. I suppose that I have a desire to keep involved somehow in my former profession, and by doing so, enrich the education of others.

### What is your advice to current teachers?

It is a very hard job, but if you truly love what you are doing, try your best to ignore the negative stuff. ■

## Benefit Bulletin: See More of the World for Less

In this new 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](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).

While AFT + Member Benefits are known for the AFT + Credit Card program, AT&T discounts, and mortgage program, it also provides travel discounts as well.

Through AFT +, AFT families can save up to 25 percent on car rentals from six different car rental companies: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, and National. AFT + also offers a travel center website that allows members to search for the lowest air fares and hotels and discounts on condominium rentals. AFT members can also access the Union Plus Worldwide Vacation Tours, which allow AFT members to save on 70 escorted

vacation tours around the world. This program was created in partnership with Go Ahead Tours, a leading global travel company with more than 100 offices in 43 countries. Free trips are offered to members who organize excursions with 12 or more participants. With three-day risk free deposits, why not go on an adventure and save?

In addition to the travel discounts, theme park discounts are also great for AFT members who want to have some fun with the family. AFT members can save up to \$41 per ticket at Six Flags Theme Parks, up to \$22.64 at a variety of water parks throughout the U.S., and \$16.05 at LEGOLAND. In addition, Disney offers discounts through the AFT + Member Benefits site. Other theme parks who offer discounts include Busch Gardens, Canobie Lake Park, Cedar Point, and Universal Studios.

Everyday entertainment purchases

can become discounted up to 48 percent. The AFT + Movie Ticket Discount allows union members to buy cheaper movie tickets at chains like AMC, Regal, National Amusements, Cinemark and Rave. AMC Gold E-tickets can be purchased and printed online at any time, and do not expire. The Gold E-tickets are great for purchasing in bulk because they cost less than regular box office tickets at only \$8.45 per ticket.

AFT members work hard, which is why the AFT + Member Benefits make it easier for members to relax and have fun. For more information on the Travel and Entertainment discounts offered to AFT members, visit [AFT.org/Benefits](http://AFT.org/Benefits). ■



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# AFT MA Supports Postal Workers

## Teachers union calls for boycott of classroom supply store

The Executive Board of the American Federation of Teachers of Massachusetts (AFT MA) is supporting the boycott of Staples which the American Postal Workers Union is sponsoring. The U.S. Postal Service wants to put postal counters in Staples stores that will employ personnel at far lower wages and experience than current postal workers. AFT MA enthusiastically supports our colleagues in the American Postal Workers Union.

### Resolution: Support U.S. Postal Workers; Boycott Staples

#### American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts

**Whereas**, the U.S. Postal Service has a no-bid, sweetheart deal with the big-box chain Staples to operate postal counters in more than 80 stores in 4 states, including Massachusetts;

**Whereas**, the U.S. Postal Service has plans to expand this operation to more than 1,500 Staples store across the United States;

**Whereas**, these postal counters are staffed by low-wage, high-turnover employees with little training and no credentials to handle U.S. mail;

**Whereas**, the U.S. Postal Service and Staples are refusing to staff the postal counters with unionized, uniformed U.S. Postal Service employees who have the training and experience to properly handle U.S. mail, and who have sworn an oath to uphold the highest standards of public service;

**Whereas**, non-union “postal” jobs at Staples will inevitably replace living-wage, union jobs of U.S. Postal Service employees;

**Whereas**, current legislation easier to close U.S. Post offices;

**Whereas**, consumers are in-theft at large retail chains and jeopardize the sanctity and security

**Whereas**, instead of offering public assets, the U.S. Postal Service nationwide network of people and with expanded hours and new which could aid millions of low-

**Whereas**, Massachusetts protecting good-paying jobs and mail services for the U.S. public;

**Whereas**, the American Federation proposes privatization of public services and other public institutions;

**Whereas**, the American Federation postal employees are fighting a com-

**Whereas**, many Massachusetts frequently purchase school supplies, sold at Staples Stores;



in the U.S. Congress would make it

creasingly concerned about identity tizing the handling of U.S. mail will of the mail;

lower quality service and selling off can and should use its unmatched facilities to better serve the public services, such as low-cost banking, income consumers;

teachers care about public service, maintaining universal, affordable

tion of Teachers Massachusetts op- in schools, colleges and universities

tion of Teachers Massachusetts and mon battle against privatization, and teachers and other school employees office supplies, and other products

#### Therefore be it resolved that:

- The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts supports the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) in its efforts to protect good-paying jobs and its insistence on the highest possible standards of customer service;
- Be it further resolved that the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts opposes efforts by the U.S. Postal Service to privatize operations and to sell off valuable public assets;
- Be it further resolved that members of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, along with friends, colleagues and family members, are urged to no longer shop at Staples stores until further notice;
- Be it further resolved that the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts will submit and advocate at the upcoming national American Federation of Teachers convention to be held this July in Los Angeles, California for a boycott of Staples to begin during the back- to-school period this summer;
- Be it finally resolved that this call to boycott Staples will be communicated immediately to members of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, to our local unions, and to our sister unions and to the news media. ■

## Vergara v. California

### Dangerous decision damages public education

Called “the most dangerous lawsuit you probably haven’t heard of” (Daily Kos, March 16, 2014), Vergara v. California is set to have significant ramifications for educators across the country.

Supported by the Silicon Valley-based organization Students Matter, along with a public relations firm and a full army of attorneys, nine California public school children filed a statewide lawsuit in May of 2012 to overturn a set of five state statutes that they claimed prevented schools from

doing what was, in their eyes, best for students. These statutes related to teacher employment and tenure. According to the plaintiffs, the systems that were in place were rewarding teachers with employment and benefits even if the teachers were not deserving of the reward. The plaintiffs’ attorneys further argued that statutes governing dismissal of “ineffective” teachers burden the districts and often prevent them from dismissing such teachers, thereby lowering the performance of the schools and their

students.

In May of 2013, the California Teachers Association and the California Federation of Teachers joined forces in an effort to defend these statutes. During the trial, the superintendent of the plaintiffs’ district (along with colleagues from neighboring districts) struck down many of the plaintiffs’ claims with solid evidence from his own and other schools. After a two-month trial, however, the statutes were struck down, opening the door to a much more liberal hiring and firing

process and threatening the jobs and livelihoods of millions of teachers.

Looking at the case, however, many issues still remain. For example, despite their best efforts to prove that “ineffective” teachers are harmful and need to be removed more efficiently, the plaintiffs were unable to prove harm. Furthermore, the superintendents all agreed that the cost of assessing and removing teachers as appropriate was not significant and not a deterrent to such removals. As the statutes were intended to protect teachers by offering them due process in cases of termination and other rights, their overturning will surely echo dissonantly throughout the teaching profession. ■

### Statement from AFT President Randi Weingarten regarding Vergara v. California

“Today, as the Vergara decision was rendered, thousands of California classrooms were brimming with teachers teaching and students learning. They see themselves as a team, but sadly, this case now stoops to pitting students against their teachers. The other side wanted a headline that reads: “Students win, teachers lose.” This is a sad day for public education.

“While this decision is not unexpected, the rhetoric and lack of a thorough, reasoned opinion is disturbing. For example, the judge believes that due process is essential, but his objection boils down to his feeling that two years is not long enough for probation. He argues, as we do, that no one should tolerate bad teachers in the classroom. He is right on that. But in focusing on these teachers who make up a fraction of the workforce, he strips the hundreds of thousands of teachers who are doing a good job of any right to a voice. In focusing on who should be laid off in times of budget crises, he omits the larger problem at play: full and fair funding of our schools so all kids have access to the classes—like music, art and physical education—and opportunities they need.

“It’s surprising that the court, which used its bully pulpit when it came to criticizing teacher protections, did not spend one second discussing funding inequities, school segregation, high poverty or any other out-of-school or in-school factors that are proven to affect student achievement and our children. We must lift up solutions that speak to these factors—solutions like wraparound services, early childhood education and project-based learning.

“Sadly, there is nothing in this opinion that suggests a thoughtful analysis of how these statutes should work. There is very little that lays groundwork for a path forward. Other states have determined better ways—ways that don’t pit teachers against students, but lift up entire communities. Every child is entitled to a high-quality education regardless of his or her ZIP code. And no parent should have to rely on a lottery system to get his or her child into a good school.

“This will not be the last word. As this case makes it through an appeal, we will continue to do what we’ve done in state after state. We will continue to work with parents and communities to fight for safe and welcoming neighborhood public schools that value both kids and the women and men who work with them. No wealthy benefactor with an extreme agenda will detour us from our path to reclaim the promise of public education.” ■