



The Advocate

June 2013



Looking Back and Forth

Convention pays tribute and prepares for future

Though the smoke from the Marathon bombings and the cries of anguish from Newtown still hung in the air, nearly 200 delegates from across the Commonwealth gathered at the Marriott in Newton on April 3 and 4 for the 45th annual convention of AFT MA, both to pay tribute to our colleagues and friends and to prepare for the future.

On Friday night, as the delegates arrived, representatives from various insurance and benefits organizations discussed the many options AFT members have to prepare for their personal futures. Before the assembled members enjoyed a plated



MUTUAL SUPPORT
Senate candidate Ed Markey speaks at the 2013 AFT MA Convention

supper, Rabbi Van Lanckton of Temple B'nai Shalom in Braintree offered a moving pre-Sabbath invocation (see page 5) in which he invoked the recent tragedies as impetus for teachers (who he held up as "moral educators") to band together as a united force for good. "Which matters more, the Rabbi queried, "English or ethics; mathematics or morality; geography or goodness?" He then responded, "All of you know the important role you play and see that role as your most important. You teach those values and that is our hope."

As a jazz combo from Berklee played, members from 21 locals enjoyed their meals while discussing their various issues. Chief among these were the continuing debate regarding revenues in the Commonwealth, the emergence of RETELL, charter schools (see page 5), high-stakes testing and the dire situation in Lawrence.

After dinner, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell presented the 2013 Distinguished Service Awards to a group of excellent educators, including New Bedford paraprofessional Barbara Jerome (whose award was accepted by New Bedford Federation of Paraprofessionals President Connie Motta), Medway's Lesley Kelly, retiring Medway teacher Joyce Cooper, retired Lynn teacher Gale Thomas, and Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, who received the longest standing ovation of the group in appreciation for his dedicated support of his troubled teachers and colleagues.

After thanking his wife and children (all of whom are involved in education) and his colleagues, McLaughlin thanked his union. "AFT MA has provided a level of assistance I can only describe as phenomenal," he said. "They could have thrown up their hands, but they embraced us...to ensure we can succeed."

McLaughlin then went on to explain

why he does what he does day in and day out. "I love my job and I love my city," he said, "and I love the children. The kids are the best part of my job."

Recognition of students was another theme that ran through the Convention, as delegates and administrators tried to keep the focus on why we all work so hard in the face of overwhelming odds and pressures.

"The best part of our job...is the children," Cooper agreed in her acceptance speech. "Despite all we face everyday, we put them first. People don't always understand that, but we do it."

Looking back on her long career in Lynn, the still-active Thomas thanked her colleagues as well. "None of this can happen without the teachers," she suggested, exhorting her colleagues to "keep up the good work and be proud of what you do!"

During his presentation, Gosnell again recalled the "horrific events" that had recently shaken Boston, the entire teaching community and the world. Looking at the recipients and around the room, he suggested, we still could find "reasons to be joyful" (not the least of which was that his beloved Red Sox were doing "surprisingly well").

As the delegates dispersed for the evening, the mood was up and encouraged, but there were still many issues left to discuss.

On Saturday morning, newer delegates gathered in a separate room for a presentation by AFT Delegate Carol Pacheco. "There are so many things available through AFT," Pacheco advised, mentioning such items as the annual TEACH conference and the new website ShareMyLesson.com which allows teachers to support each other and their students by exchanging ideas and materials electronically.

To officially open the day's proceedings, Fr. Francis Cloherty offered an invocation in which he recalled how one teacher made all the difference in his brother's life. Pacheco then joined Mass Library Staff Association VP Dan Haacker in a rendition of "God Bless America" that had the entire room singing along in what Haacker termed the delegates' "Boston Strong voices."

As last-minute edits were made to the morning credentials report, Gosnell ad-libbed about Boston sports, taking a bit of comfort in the fact that, though his beloved Sox had lost, so too did the Yankees.

Once the credentials had been read and the standing rules adopted,

it was time for the traditional address by MTA President Paul Toner, during which he suggested that "we the teachers should lead the change."

"I fully expect that AFT and MTA will continue to work together," Toner said. "I've learned a lot from working with AFT and I look forward to continuing to work with them."

The next speaker was Mass AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman, who whipped the crowd into near frenzy with what Gosnell termed his "zest, zip and zing."

"The AFL-CIO stands for everything that is right with America," Tolman emphatically suggested. Most importantly, he added, with a particular tip to his brothers and sisters in AFT, "we serve children and that is what we should be proud of."

Turning his attention to the "war" in Lawrence, Tolman encouraged everyone to get involved no matter what district they came from. "It's gonna' be you next," he warned. "There's only on thing that's gonna' change it, and that's sticking together. If we're together, there's no stopping us!"

Tolman went so far as to offer the phone number for the State House switchboard (617 722 2000). "You can do it," he said. "You can make the difference!"

The wild applause that marked Tolman's exit continued throughout the speeches by 2013 Teacher of the Year finalists Scott Balicki and John Scopelleti, both of whom offered keen observations and poignant advice.

"A lot of pundits say it is easy to teach," said Balicki, a member of the Boston Teachers Union. "I'd like to see them try!"

Balicki went on to suggest that high-stakes testing promotes a "lack of respect for teachers' unique expertise" and that the union could and should be used as a platform to educate the community about what teachers do and what they are being asked to do.

Using a "geeked-out" baseball analogy, South Shore Regional Vocational Teachers Federation member Scopelleti expressed a fear that we had entered an era of "edometrics," by which he meant a data-driven system that ignores and discourages the human elements that make each of our students unique and powerful.

"The purpose of our job is to take a child to a better place," Scopelleti

observed. "Data will not do that."

As the job of the teacher is about developing personal relationships, as opposed to creating statistics, Scopelleti suggested that we need to "be honest about what data can tell



WELL-DESERVED RECOGNITION Distinguished Service Award recipients (from left) Lesley Kelly, Joyce Cooper, Frank McLaughlin, Gale Thomas and Connie Motta (who accepted on behalf of Barbara Jerome) with AFT MA President Tom Gosnell

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In This Issue

- 2** President's Column
ABCs of AFT:
Employee Benefits
- 3** FEATURE FOCUS:
Award-winning educators
- 4** Diary of a New Teacher:
The rewards of a long run
- 5** Charting the future of
charter schools
- 6** Education v. Indoctrination
Summa cum laude:
Sagit Zilberman
- 7** Retiree Corner

Educator Opinion:
Theory v. Content

us" and to realize that "students are not data points."

"Data can only account for past performance," he said, returning to the baseball analogy. "It cannot predict a hit."

In between the finalists' speeches, Senate candidate Ed Markey offered his views on the state of education and what he plans to do to improve it.

"I see myself as a partner with the teachers in their efforts to make this a better country and to make sure every child has a first-rate education," he said, recalling his own Lawrence roots and the fact that both he and his mother had wanted to be educators before life took them both in other directions. "The Lawrence system educated my father," Markey explained. "Now we must stand with Lawrence teachers."

In addition to supporting colleagues in Lawrence, Markey encouraged every delegate to do all they could to help themselves and each other. "Education has transformed the lives of every person in this room," he observed. "I'm going to

Continued on page 5



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Keep the Current Cap on Charter Schools

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) is opposing the attempt to raise the cap on charter schools because the lifting of the cap will drain resources from the long established public schools.

The first item below is a letter to the editor I wrote to the *Boston Globe*. The *Globe* printed it on May 13. The second piece is my May 7 testimony before the Joint Committee on Education.

Early education would do more for kids in poverty

The opinion article entitled "Lift the charter school cap" (Opinion, April 30) acknowledges that persistent poverty-based achievement gaps exist among students in Massachusetts. One of Governor Patrick's reports acknowledged that poverty is pernicious.

When poverty may cause students to have inadequate dental and medical care, live in sub-standard housing, have nutritional deficiencies, or be exposed to violence in the neighborhood, their education suffers. Imagine the impact a murder in the neighborhood has on young children.

We can never use poverty as an

excuse for any achievement gap, but refusal to acknowledge its effect on students means that society will not work strenuously to eliminate poverty. We need many programs to assist families in their attempts to advance economically and to get the best education for their children.

Research indicates that early education has a powerfully positive impact on the achievement of all students whatever the income level of their families. However, many students living in poverty receive incredible supports that poverty denies them.

Of course, we need to support many programs that will attack poverty, but a sustained commitment to early childhood education will do far more to better the education of children living in poverty than lifting the charter school cap.

Thomas J. Gosnell

President, American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts

* * * * *

Chairwoman Chang-Diaz, Chairwoman Peisch, and Members of the Joint Committee on Education.

I am Tom Gosnell, President of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts.

Last week, the *Boston Globe* printed an opinion piece entitled "Lift the charter school cap" which acknowledged that persistent poverty-based achievement gaps exist among students in Massachusetts. One of Governor Patrick's reports acknowledged that poverty is pernicious.

When students have inadequate dental and medical care, live in sub-standard housing, or have nutritional deficiencies, their education suffers.

In urban areas, in particular, poverty abounds. We can never use poverty as an excuse for any achievement gap, but refusal to acknowledge its effect on students means that society will not try to remedy its effect on the education of our students.

The Commonwealth's long established public schools need all the resources they currently have. Indeed, they need more. These public schools welcome all students including those who are English language learners, and may even be deficient in their native language, and those who have very substantial special needs.

Removing the cap on charter schools will drain money from the very schools that serve all these children from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year.

In addition, the long established public schools do not have the option, and they don't want the option, to remove students who are having academic difficulty. What they do want are the resources to help these students achieve.

Removing the cap on charter schools will diminish their resources even more.

The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts asks that in the interest of educating all the Commonwealth's students you not remove the current cap on charter schools.

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

For more information on the charter school cap, please see story on page 5.

BOLD PRINT

On May 11, Berklee College of Music added to their list of legendary alumni by bestowing honorary degrees upon Grammy-winning artists Carol King, Annie Lennox and Willie Nelson at their 2013 commencement exercises.

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An international labor poster exhibit from the collection of Stephen Lewis will be on display May 1-29 at the Somerville Public Library (79 Highland Avenue, Somerville) and June 1-28 at the Codman Square Branch of the Boston Public Library (690 Washington Street, Boston). The exhibit is free and open to the public.

For more information, call 617 436 8214.

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Get ready to Imagine, Innovate, Advocate at the 2013 Summer Institute at Boston Arts Academy. From June 26-28, teachers from all grades are invited to participate in a special program that is being hosted by BAA's Center for Arts in Education. From school culture to literacy to community partnerships, all aspects of education will be explored and engaged through this creative and inspiring event. There is also a special pre-institute intensive program available on June 24 and 25.

For more information, contact Ali Gross at agross@bostonartsacademy.org.

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

The Advocate

The official publication of
AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO

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The ABC's of aft

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.

Employee benefits (n.) - Compensations other than wages that are offered to employees in addition to their salaries or wages in an effort to increase their economic security and thereby improve worker retention and morale.

Typical benefit packages may include such items as provided or paid housing, insurance (e.g., health, dental, life, etc.), disability income protection, retirement benefits, tuition reimbursement, sick leave, vacation time, social security, and profit sharing. In addition to these more formal, standardized benefits, employers may see fit to offer what are often known colloquially as "perks." These more discretionary benefits are often offered as a means of reward or recognition for extraordinary work or service and may include such things as vehicles, refreshments, additional leisure time, and preferred scheduling for vacation and assignments.

Many employers also offer benefit packages that include relocation assistance, medical, prescription, vision and dental plans, flexible spending accounts for health and dependent care, retirement benefit plans (e.g., pension, 401(k), 403(b)), group-term life and long-term care insurance, and benefits related to child care and transportation. Benefits may also include discount programs that offer special access and prices for various items and activities, such as discounted movie or theme park passes, preferred hotel reservation status, etc.

As some of these benefits are not considered part of the employee's gross income, they are not subject to federal income tax in the United States. In fact, some benefits act as tax shelters. As they are not part of an employee's salary, benefits also allow employers to attract employees without significantly raising their costs. As many employer-provided benefits are tax-deductible to the employer and non-taxable to the employee, both benefit from their inclusion in a compensation package.

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

FEATURE FOCUS: Award-winning Educators

Up, Up, and Away!

Teacher honored by CAP for STEM

It has been suggested by some that women do not belong in the sciences. Putting aside contributions of the likes of Marie Curie, Sally Ride, and Jane Goodall, they claim that females cannot handle scientific thought.

Fortunately, there is a growing wave of women rising to prove these ill-advised pundits wrong. In fact, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) is becoming a very female-focused field.

Samidha Sane is an eighth grade science teacher at the Locke Middle School in Billerica. A favorite among students, parents, and colleagues, Sane was recently recognized as “Aerospace Teacher of the Year.” by the Massachusetts Civil Air Patrol (CAP). An auxiliary wing of the United States Air Force that is mandated by Congress with operating search and rescue missions and promoting aerospace education, the CAP found Sane through Maj. Shelley Lipman, a CAP officer who is also a Locke parent.

“Ms. Sane has gone over and above by engaging her students outside the classroom,” says Maj. Lipman, adding that she also “works well with teachers, administrators and parents.”

Noting that Sane was also awarded a prize from the Gelfand Family Charitable Trust, Lipman mentions how Sane promotes collaborative learning and other techniques that are vital in today’s tech-heavy businesses.

“She really brings science to life,” Lipman observes, “[and] she is a great candidate for the Aerospace Education

Teacher of the Year award.”

Sane’s principal, Anthony Garas, added that, “Ms. Sane is an exemplary science educator with a passion for teaching and learning that is unmatched. Her enthusiastic, nurturing demeanor brings the best out of her students and enables them to achieve academic and social growth.” In addition to calling her a “team player” and a “true leader,” Garas says Sane is “truly a valuable asset to our school community...and is a talented, dedicated educator committed to STEM education for all students.”

When asked how she feels about receiving the award, Sane says, “I try to do my job really well, whether someone is watching or not.” She admits, however, that, when she sees her students engaged and excited about science, “It makes my day!” Having wanted to be a teacher since she was a young girl in India, Sane now sees her role not only as educator but also as inspiration.

“Several parents have told me...I am a good role model for their daughters,” she smiles, adding that she hopes to arrange a STEM-related career day to expose students of both genders to the “cool” jobs in the STEM fields.

“I am hoping...years later my students would come back telling me how they have gone to fields of STEM and succeeded in their careers,” she says.

In addition to teaching a number of popular STEM-related classes, Sane also reinstated the science fair at the Locke and coaches the teams for other science competitions as well.



A TIP OF THE CAP Billerica teacher Samidha Sane (center) receives a CAP award from Col. William Meskill (left) and Col. Christopher Hayden

“I think it is cool to investigate something you like and present a product,” says Sane, who has taught at Locke for seven years, before which she taught in Lowell, Tyngsboro, and her native India, “so I encourage my students to participate.”

While her first fair entry in 2005 was not so successful, Sane says that, as any good scientist does, she learned a lot from the experiment and made the changes that have allowed the Locke fair to become so popular and productive. “I started the first science fair... with about 10 projects,” she recalls. “The next year...we started participating at the regional fair at UMASS Lowell. Every year that went by, I learned more about the process.”

As a result of her own continued learning, Sane has been able to teach her students enough about science that they have since won at both the regional and state levels.

Eager to offer as much exposure to science as she can, Sane often stays guest but as an award recipient.

“I was delighted,” she says.

In addition to teaching AP Literature classes at Peabody Veterans Memorial High School, Bertram also coordinates about a dozen other AP English Literature and Composition teachers in different schools in Peabody, Danvers and Salem. “We work together to offer rigorous curricula to AP students,” she explains, noting her talented team’s regular meetings and Saturday study sessions, which are always well attended and greatly beneficial to the students who participate.

While she is being recognized, Bertram is eager to share the credit with her colleagues. “I am especially keen on letting folks know that many people are integral to the work I do and on recognizing their work as well,” she says. “The excellent teachers in each of the schools are the finest professionals I have had the privilege to work with. It is fitting and proper to honor each of them as well.”

Bertram also offers praise and a generous share of the glory to the students themselves. “The students have been the foundation of our success,” she suggests, “in that they are extremely dedicated and eager to participate.”

As the Saturday sessions are often hosted by area colleges and universities, including UMass Lowell, Merrimack College, Salem State University, and Endicott College, they are not only able to offer area students a place to focus and study on the weekends but also a taste of what may come after they pass their AP exams and continue

after school to support an aviation club and design workshop that gives students opportunities to engage science in a hands-on way.

“In science, many times we learn by doing,” Sane explains when asked how and why she first became interested in the field. “Science is about things around us and involves being more aware of how things around us work.... I find every possible chance to do hands-on-activities with my students to get them to be involved in learning rather than being passive learners.”

Though she is often cited as an exemplary teacher, Sane credits her students with the learning as well. “Many times I facilitate their learning rather than teaching them,” she suggests.

As a woman in the sciences, Sane sees herself more as a scientist than as a champion or pioneer.

“Luckily people have already recognized the need to have women in STEM fields,” she observes, “so we have a lot of programs that encourage women getting into the fields of science.” While she has “heard” that it may be difficult for women to break into the sciences, Sane says that she has been fortunate to find people in her field who are “quite forward thinking in that regard.” Sane goes on to say that it has been the field of science itself that has encouraged her to persevere, regardless of any real or alleged obstacles.

“My love for teaching and science gave me the determination to work hard to get certified here and get a job as a science teacher,” she says. “Now, I am fortunate to work with colleagues who recognize me for who I am—passionate in my work, hardworking and wanting to do good for the society.” ■

their educations. “Students get a flavor for real classes in a college setting,” Bertram says, “and the colleges get to pitch their school to eager potential freshmen.”

Bertram also notes that part of her program involves a “mock exam” that is hosted each January. “The exam is an actual College Board AP,” she explains, noting how this experience also enhances the students’ pre-college preparation. “The exams are shipped out, read by professional table readers and sent back before our last study session. In this manner, students and teachers get composite scores for each section of the exam, and can thus focus on weaknesses in the weeks before the exam.”

Such dedication to detail and devotion to her students and her colleagues are among the attributes that made Bertram a natural choice for this new award.

“Being an AP lead teacher for the MMSI program is a very demanding position that requires organizational skills, a head for tracking multiple aspects of the program, and an ability to nag in a nice way,” says Department Head Michalene Hague. “Lawrie possesses all of those qualities and still manages to provide outstanding instruction in her own AP Literature class.”

“Not only is she a great teacher,” said Orlov of Bertram, “she is a great leader and that is one of the keys to our success.” ■

ReAPing the Rewards

English teacher feted by MMSI

Lawrie Bertram came to teaching later in life, but has since more than made up for lost time!

On May 14, Bertram was recognized by the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative (MMSI) for her work as an Advanced Placement teacher. While some may question how an English teacher deserves to be recognized by an organization that mentions math and science in its title, there are two reasons for this: One is that MMSI also deals with English Language Arts education; the other is that Bertram is just that good!

According to MMSI, the award is a new initiative that is being funded by the philanthropic group Partners in Excellence (PiE). It is intended to further their commitment to teacher excellence.

“At the core of all of our educations were great teachers,” explained PiE Co-Chair Joshua Boger at the awards event.

While the focus of the award (and of MMSI) is the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education, English teachers were also considered as long as they had demonstrated what MMSI calls “outstanding contributions to students and teachers.”

“It all begins with English,” observed William H. Guenther, CEO of Mass Insight, the group that helped launched the Initiative.

Though she had prior experience with MMSI, when Bertram was notified of her honor, she was admittedly caught off guard.

“I received an email communication that MMSI would be hosting an event to honor the...AP teachers represented across the state,” she recalls. “I reserved a ticket thinking it would be a great opportunity to see colleagues and reconnect with friends I have made during my tenure with MMSI.”

It was not until MMSI President Morton Orlov, II personally congratulated her that Bertram understood that she was not being invited as a



ADVANCED PRACTICE Peabody teacher Lawrie Bertram (left) with Salem Mayor Kimberley Driscoll at the MMSI awards event

Diary of a New Teacher

Robert Tobio

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

Thanks to the 2012-2013 New Teacher Diarists

The *Advocate* wishes to thank these excellent educators for sharing their ideas and experiences during the 2012-13 school year. We look forward to working with them and to hearing from their talented colleagues in the future.

Enjoy the summer!

Eliana Martinez

Social studies teacher,
Lawrence High School, Lawrence

Bradford Green

English Teacher
Pickering Middle School, Lynn, MA

Himilcon Inciarte

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

Amanda Perez

Middle school teacher,
Sarah Greenwood School, Dorchester.

Karina Dise

Paraprofessional,
Zanetti Montessori School, Springfield

Kirk Ahrens

Ninth grade ELA teacher
Mary Lyon Pilot School, Brighton

Bill Madden-Fuoco

Humanities teacher,
Urban Science Academy, West Roxbury,

Chaya Harris

Fifth grade teacher
Mather School, Boston

At the beginning of the school year, I started training for the Boston Marathon. I put in long days at school and long miles after school. While I usually enjoy unwinding with coworkers on Friday afternoon, eventually I had to stop so I could instead go to bed early to prepare for the long runs I did on Saturday mornings.

I told myself it was only for a few months; I would finish my first marathon and be done with the craziness and preparation.

As the year wore on, the miles didn't get any easier, but they did become part of my routine. It never felt right to skip out on a run.

April 15 finally arrived, and my wife and I boarded the bus that would take us to Hopkinton. In our shorts and race tanks, we stood shivering in the cool morning temps at the starting line, ready to tackle our latest challenge.

The sun came up, and the marathon began. It started out as one of the best experiences of my life. Thousands of people lined the road cheering us on as we ran toward Boston. We chipped away at the miles, and I soon forgot about how bad my knees and toes felt as I realized, "I'm about to do this." I had set what seemed like a crazy goal, consistently worked hard, and was actually about to finish. It felt great!

Then things got confusing. First, we were told that the course was diverted. It seemed strange for the oldest marathon in the world to alter its course mid-race, but after 23 miles, exhaustion wasn't allowing me to piece things together. We ran on, and were then told that there had been an explosion, but that we should keep running. After nearly a dozen police cars sped by, I started to understand something was really wrong.

During my training, I fought hard to suppress any doubts about my

ability to finish a marathon. I assumed that I was the only one who could stop me from reaching the finish line. I resolved to finish, no matter what. This notion came crashing down when a row of National Guardsmen blocked the road and told us, "The race is over. Go home."

After a few more hours of confusion and wandering around in our running gear and iconic tin foil blankets, we made it back to our belongings and our cell phones. This was one of the moments in my life where I felt truly lucky to be a teacher. My phone was loaded with text messages and missed calls from friends, family and coworkers, but also from students. I care deeply about the lives of my students, and the simple act of texting me showed me that they also cared. The kids may never know how much those texts meant to me, exactly at a time when I needed them. Strangely, that is the nature of our relationship with our students. We care about each other, but only express it through little acts here and there.

The weeks after the marathon were filled with reflection. I realized that running a marathon is a lot like teaching. It takes hard work, dedication and commitment. There is no worse feeling than being unprepared, because you can't run or teach well if you haven't put in the work.

I want to believe teaching is straightforward. If I work hard, I can accomplish my goals. If I prepare



TRAINING FOR EXCELLENCE
Robert Tobio worked hard to prepare for both the Boston Marathon and the school year

properly, I will succeed. But like this year's marathon, teaching is not that simple, and not everything goes as planned. Still, we keep on teaching, just as I kept on running. When it gets confusing, we keep on pushing. Without knowing what will happen tomorrow or next year. We just keep on trying.

There will be amazing moments, getting over the "heartbreak hill" of our year, and horrible moments, like the tragic events at the finish line. Focusing on the positives will help us through the negatives. With so much sadness surrounding the marathon this year, it is the kindness of my students that will stick with me.

Today, if you ask me about teaching or running the Boston Marathon, I can give you a short concise answer that sums up my feelings on both: It was tough, but I'll be back next year! ■



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2013 Convention

Continued from page 1

stand with you in order to make sure that you have the tools to do your job.”

Markey also asked the assembled to help him go to Washington. “This election is about investing in our future,” he said. “It is about [the] kids.”

With the idea of helping children firmly in their minds, delegates then participated in a somber tribute to the children and teachers who were lost in Newtown and



FRESHMAN FRIEND
Congressman Joseph Kennedy, III

to their friends and neighbors affected by the Marathon bombing. As a quartet from the Longy School of Music played, delegates wiped their eyes as images of smiling faces

and flowered graves were put up as part of a presentation created by AFT MA’s Andrew Powell. “Everyone needs to join together in this effort,” said AFT Deputy Director Barbara Palazzo, who had been directly involved in Newtown. “We are all members of the Sandy Hook Promise.”

After official memorial proclamations had been read to the delegates, BTU President Richard Stutman rose to present a motion to donate \$20,000 to the One Fund to support the victims. It passed unanimously. Stutman’s later proposal to discuss a possible joining of AFT MA and MTA did not fare so well, however. After an extended debate, in which proponents for both sides offered observations and exhortations regarding what they saw as the benefits and risks of a union of unions, the proposal went down in a second ballot hand count vote.

Before this heated exchange could take place, however, Ed Kelly, president of the Professional Firefighters of MA, addressed the Convention, describing what it was like to be in Boston on the day of the Marathon bombings. “We’re gonna’ mourn,” he said, “but we’re gonna’ get through it and we’re not gonna’ cower.” Thanking Gosnell (who he called his “rabbi”) for years of support and guidance, Kelly also encouraged his fellow union members to support and guide each other. “The future is in your hands,” he said. “As long as you teach love, this experiment of the United States will always prevail.”

In his annual address, AFT MA Secretary Treasurer Mark Allred jokingly took credit for all the good parts of the Convention before thanking Jennifer Daniel and the rest of the AFT MA staff who worked so tirelessly to put it all together. “The challenges this union faces are very great,” he said, presenting a dramatic change in tone. “We cannot

blame the teachers who do the work every day, yet they are the ones being punished.” Allred went on to suggest that “the future of public education may depend on what happens in Lawrence, so it is imperative that we restore collective bargaining rights.” Allred also suggested that, especially with another election

coming up, “We have to ask what our friends in the legislature are doing for us.”

Speaking of friends in the legislature, freshman Congressman Joseph Kennedy, III offered encouraging words to the delegates in the very same room where he had celebrated his recent victory.

“Our country is based on the idea that we each get a fair shot,” Kennedy said, “and nothing is more important to that than teaching.” Recalling his own attempt at teaching in the Peace Corps, Kennedy admitted how difficult it was and promised to “stand by” teachers so they could to their job. Kennedy then turned his attention to the topic of testing and suggested that “shackling a teacher to a test ultimately hurts the people it was meant to help- the children.”

During his official address, Gosnell echoed Allred in admitting that the challenges facing the union and its members “continue to be very, very substantial.” Still, Gosnell assured the delegates that he was able to take some encouragement from the dedication and devotion shown by the delegates and their colleagues. “Massachusetts is number one,” he said, citing recent studies that place the Commonwealth on par with some of the best-educated nations in the world. “That is due to all of you- Teachers, paraprofessionals [and] librarians.”

Calling high-stakes testing a “debasement of the profession,” Gosnell echoed many other speakers when he encouraged the delegates to do all they could to help each other and their students. “We must take nothing for granted,” he said, specifically mentioning House Bill 2227, which will restore collective bargaining to all schools. “We must work very, very hard. We have to fight for our kids, ourselves and the society we live in.”

Ending the Convention on an up note, Gosnell invited the 2013 recipients of the Albert Shanker, Sandra Feldman and Jay Porter scholarships to accept their awards during the closing luncheon. Among the selected students were Mansfield twins Allison and Craig Smith, Xaverian Brothers High School’s Geoffrey Martello and Matthew Tallent, Waltham Sr. High School’s Benjamin Humbert, North Quincy High School’s Jeremy Mele, and Boston College High School’s Liam Walsh. Haverhill’s Sean Wrenn was awarded the AFT MA Professional Staff Union Jay Porter Scholarship. Among the future plans for the winners were attendance at schools ranging from Brandeis and Emerson to Harvard and Dartmouth, as well as athletic and artistic pursuits.

When the awards had been handed out and the winners’ hands shaken and the parents and teachers and union members thanked, Gosnell closed the 2013 Convention with a point with which all could agree.

“Go Sox!” ■



WHY WE DO IT Among the 2013 AFT MA scholarship winners were (from left) Craig and Allison Smith, Lindsay Maher, Jeremy Mele, Liam Walsh and Benjamin Humbert (not pictured are Geoffrey Martello, Matthew Tallent and Sean Wrenn)

Excerpts from Rabbi Van Lanckton’s Invocation at the 2013 Convention of AFT MA - May 3, 2013

O Lord,

Those who worship You cherish the value of peace.

In Judaism, we say, “*Shalom Aleichem*, peace be with you.”

In Christianity, we say, “Peace be with you, and also with you.”

In Islam, we say, “*Salaam Alaikum*, peace be with you.”

Who will assure that in our future we will know peace?

How can we even think about making this world a peaceful world after the bombs in Boston ripped apart the peace of a sunny April day, causing death and destruction, incalculable losses of life and limbs?

What solace can we find after a man uses his mother’s deadly arsenal of weapons to murder her and then takes those weapons to an elementary school and slaughters twenty children and six of the adults who devoted their lives to the noble profession of teaching?

The answer is right here in this room.

Yours is a civilizing mission. Conflict resolution. Respect for each other and for diversity. Alternatives to fighting. Prohibition on bullying. Finding ways to get along.

You in this room teach all those values every day, both expressly in what you say and implicitly by your example.

That is the hope we hold for a future of peace. The hope that arises from knowing that America is blessed with having more than seven million teachers. More than seven million men and women who are dedicating their lives to helping children grow up to be adults who will honor the values of our society and help to make this world a world of greater peace.

May God bless and strengthen and continue to inspire everyone who has chosen to join with parents in raising the next generation of Americans, and the next.

When our determination falters, when our breath is taken away by the agony of Newtown or the Marathon Bombings, we turn for inspiration to You, O Lord, the divine force that underlies all reality. We turn to You to draw renewed strength to go back to school the next day, to help children make sense of what has happened, and to help set them on a path of peace.

Dear God, You are known as Oseh Shalom, the Maker of Peace. We pray that You renew our dedication to our calling and bless the work of our hands and the service of our hearts and minds.

Amen.

Caps off to Charters? Limits may be lifted further

In 2010, legislation raised the cap on the number of charter schools allowed in Massachusetts. Supporters claim charters encourage creativity and freedom. Opponents, on the other hand, continue to cite the overwhelming data that suggest the only thing charters do is take resources and students away from schools that already may be struggling. They also note that most charters employ non-union teachers, many of whom work longer hours for less pay and fewer benefits than unionized teachers enjoy.

Ironically, many charters are being considered in the very communities that are doing best without them. Though it has a long history of challenges, Lowell

has taken great strides in turning itself around. During her visit to the Charlotte M. Murkland School last November, AFT President Randi Weingarten commented on how the “Level 4” school should be held up as an example, not just to struggling schools, but to all schools (see December, 2012 issue). The Murkland had also been praised by Governor Deval Patrick, who visited to mark the school’s remarkable rise in MCAS scores. Patrick suggested that the Murkland demonstrated how schools can “rise to the challenge” when provided with the appropriate resources. Even so, Patrick more recently supported the opening of a for-profit charter in Lowell.

“We produced amazing results at our two turnaround schools,” observed United Teachers of Lowell President Paul Georges, noting that his district could stand to lose millions if more charters open, “and our reward is a charter school that’s being run for

profit? Explain to me the logic in that.”

“The contrast between the Governor’s recognition of the Murkland’s achievements...followed by the award of a charter in Lowell...highlights the for-profit management of charters as well as the schizophrenic nature of state school policy,” suggests AFT MA’s Field Representative for Legislation Michael Canavan, noting that the recently-proposed House Bill 345 (which AFT members are encouraged to support) would ban for-profit management of charter schools.

Another related bill is House 398 which requires all public school teachers to be licensed. “Charter school teachers are not required to be licensed,” Canavan points out. “The only requirement they must meet is passing the MTEL.”

“Would you go to a lawyer or a doctor without a license?” queried Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan, who recently testified in favor of H398 (which members are also encouraged to support). “It does not make sense!”

As public schools accept all students, regardless of background or ability, they cannot always be expected to match the select students charters accept. However, the fact that schools like the Murkland and many others are achieving so much on their own demonstrates how public education can work and how it should be allowed and encouraged to work.

“Removing the cap on charter schools will drain money from the very schools that serve these children,” said AFT MA President Tom Gosnell. “It will diminish their resources even more.” ■

Please go to www.aftma.net and contact your legislators to encourage them to keep the charter cap on!



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Education v. Indoctrination

There is little evidence that their education at UMass Dartmouth led one student to set bombs at the Boston Marathon and two of his classmates to hide evidence for him. By all accounts, none of the students were engaged in their studies at UMass Dartmouth. According to the *New York Times*, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had failed seven courses over two semesters. The others had dropped out or been dismissed. None had declared majors.

Two and a half years ago, following an assignment from his teacher at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School to investigate ethnic background, Tsarnaev emailed Brian Williams, a UMass Dartmouth Professor, for information on the war in Chechnya, the country he had left as a child. Professor Williams sent him the syllabus for his class on Chechen history to study on his own but never heard from him again.

When asked by the *Standard-Times* (Steve Urbon, April 19), Professor Williams said, "I hope I didn't contribute to it. That kid and his brother identified with the Chechen struggle."

Professor Williams is an excellent teacher who needs not worry that he led this student to choose to bomb the Boston Marathon. As an educator, he offered a path of learning to a student asking questions about his homeland.

The question remains, can education lead to terrorism?

I think not.

The most common definition of

education these days (and the most sensible) is that education is a process that leads students to learn skills of critical thinking; a reflective method of inquiry to analyze choices using evidence. Education is process, as in seeking answers, not product, as in teaching correct answers to a test. The purpose of teaching critical thinking is to increase the competence of students as learners through carefully considered questions and open dialogue.

Like military training, teaching terrorism is indoctrination rather than education. Indoctrination does not begin with open inquiry by students but with pronouncements from its leaders on ideology and the justification and principles of alienation from those who do not believe in the ideology. Indoctrination into terrorism leads to learning practical skills, such as, how to make bombs and plan attacks.

Education teaches us to ask why. Indoctrination teaches us that we should not ask why.

It may be possible to use critical thinking to arrive at the decision to bomb the Boston Marathon, but evidence shows that these young men rejected critical thought. Like Hannah Arendt's assessment of Adolf Eichmann at his trial for transporting millions of Jews to their deaths, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, as remembered by those who knew him in high school and at UMass Dartmouth, seems frightfully normal not a monster. His part in the bombing seems more a college prank driven

by ideology with terrible consequences than an evil act.

This does not mean that he is any less guilty of killing and maiming dozens of runners and their supporters with a bomb specifically constructed to inflict the most harm and placed next to an eight-year-old boy. His normalcy only makes his actions scarier.

Attacks on bystanders by otherwise normal people make the war on terror impossible to win. It is a war against thousands of individuals from dozens of countries on hundreds of fronts. Anyone can be a terrorist, and any place can be a target.

A defense against terrorism makes more sense. The police, military, and other enforcers of the law who captured the suspects in a few days defend us against terrorism. The medical personnel and others who saved lives by rushing to help the wounded aid us. The runners, wounded and not, who are recovering and planning their next race give us hope.

There are practical ways to defend against terrorism. My wife, a Brit (actually Welsh) reports all unattended parcels to airport officials. This is a common practice in Europe that saves lives and provides a costly lesson to those who, whether inadvertently or not, leave luggage behind.

Teaching and learning critical thinking is the long-term defense against terrorism. Educators are the front line of defense. ■



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!



Summa Cum Laude: Sagit Zilberman

International Jazz saxophonist/composer/recording artist Sagit Zilberman has toured, recorded and shared the stage with some of the finest musicians in contemporary music. She has also done what she can to teach others about music and about other soul-supporting arts.

Born in Israel, Zilberman came to the United States to attend the prestigious Berklee College of Music. "I heard of Berklee through friends at the jazz program," Zilberman explains, recalling her previous training in Israel's famed Jerusalem Academy of Music and Rimon College, where she also studied contemporary music. "They were conducting auditions at the school for a scholarship and I wanted to check it out."

Though she was admittedly nervous at the audition, Zilberman was a hit and received a significant scholarship that encouraged her to leave her spiritual homeland and come to Boston.

"I love challenges," she says, "and I wanted to check out life and Jazz in the United States."

While at Berklee, Zilberman (who also credits fellow *Sabra* Anat Cohen as a musical influence) studied with such greats as George Garzone, Joe Lovano, Tiger Okoshi, and the man she calls her "role model and men-



SOUL-FUL JAZZ Sagit Zilberman (left) brings Israeli innovation and international flair to her music and her life

tor," Greg Osby.

"Greg was my favorite person around," she smiles. "He is a very devoted teacher [who] stayed after school hours with groups of students who wanted to learn more and shared information about the music, the business, and the right attitude to have towards music."

With Osby's guidance and support, Zilberman formed her own perspectives about the art and industry of music that continue to serve her very well. "My understanding of Jazz and how to be a professional musician was established on the grounds of [Greg's] willingness to share," she says. "I am very grateful to have that

opportunity thanks to Berklee!"

Among the lessons Zilberman took from her time at Berklee were to always respect every individual and to never underestimate people's ability to improve and get better. "In one year a person can become very proficient at their craft," Zilberman advises, revealing her own teacherly ways, "if they put their mind to it."

While she learned from others, Zilberman also taught. In addition to music students, she also hosts yoga classes on the Berklee campus for classmates, colleagues, and neighbors to enjoy. The ancient art has such an influence of Zilberman that she dedicated her website ([man.com\) to her yoga instructor Maria Mani. "She taught me everything I know about my body through yoga," Zilberman explains, noting how yoga can not only help with stress but also with creativity and self expression and therefore works as a wonderful ally for both music and teaching.](http://www.sagitzilber-</p></div>
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"Yoga helps me a lot in my life to balance the hardships of being a musician and to reconnect with my body and soul," she says, noting that her classes have been incorporated into Berklee's Live Well program.

After leaving Boston, Zilberman travelled the world, recording in Israel, Brazil, Poland, and many other exotic locales. Recently, however, she returned to Boston with her new band called JEZZVE.

"It means 'Jazz' in Hebrew," she explains, "and since two members are Turkish, it means 'coffee pot' in Turkish."

Such international flavor continues to inspire and influence Zilberman even as she makes more of a home for herself in the Boston scene. As she works on her latest album, Zilberman also looks forward to upcoming gigs in the area and to sharing her lessons and lifestyle with more people in Boston and beyond.

"This is my love," she says. ■



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ALERT

The WEP/GPO repeal bills have been re-filed. H.R.1795 is the House version. S.896 is the Senate version. Please spend time this summer contacting friends and colleagues (especially in other states) asking that they contact members of Congress to sign on as co-sponsors of these bills. Social Security will be discussed soon in Washington and it is up to you to make the repeal is part of the discussion!

Go to the MRU website www.retireesunited.org for a link to our updated tally as to who is signed on.

Go to <http://www.ssfairness.com/> for valuable information you can use when contacting your member of Congress.

Overcoming Evil with Good

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

These words of Edmund Burke, who lived in the 18th century, are just as true today as when they were first spoken.

In the past few months, we have had two tragedies hit New England that have rocked our very being. Neither of them were brought about by hundreds of people. A total of three men brought about these evils. Three who, for whatever reason, wanted to spread their hatred of mankind. We call them sick and no doubt they are. Be that as it may, three individuals changed so many lives.

When preparing for the 117th running of the Marathon, the organizers observed 26 seconds of silence before each wave left the starting gate in memory of the 26 victims of Newtown. It inspired the runners as they hit Heartbreak Hill to forge ahead knowing the pain they would feel was nothing

like the pain felt by the Newtown victims' families. None of the runners knew that evil would strike again and many more would suffer.

Evil wears many faces and uses many forms. It can be in the form of a gun, a bomb, a fist, words, abuse of power and money, and multiple other shapes and incarnations. We have all met evil in our lives and suffered at its hand. But I am sure that all of us have met more good people than evil ones. We just may not hear of them as much and maybe we do not stop to recognize the influence and happiness their goodness sprinkles on us.

Let us start today by performing one kind deed for someone who crosses our path and then repeat it in successive days. The other people need not be anyone we know and the action does not have to be anything big. Just do something consciously to be kind. Also, let us all take time this summer

to think of one thing we would like to do to better our community. We can all lament how horrible things are, but what are we willing to do to change them? Society as it is today is not the world my grandparents left to me and it is not the world I want to leave to my grandchildren. Therefore, it is up to me (and all of us) to act!

In the words of Edward Everett Hale: "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything; but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do".

Those who perpetrate evil are not afraid to act alone. Why do we feel we need an army to do good? We have to stop the madness that is all too often present in our society. We are Boston Strong and we can make a difference one person at a time and one good deed at a time. The choice is ours. ■



Theory v. Content

Educator's Opinion By Bradford Green

I write today as a student and not a teacher because it is my experience as a student that informs my opinion. I finished high school in 1981, around the time that education theory took hold of our schools. While educator-theorists have been around since the early 1900's, it is much more recently that they have truly controlled the direction of curriculum, policy, and culture within the public school system. Is this a good thing? It is my belief that students do not read and write as well as they did a mere thirty years ago. Why is this?

A teacher once suggested to me that, when you stand before the students, it is important to have something to say. I was also told that, no matter how many education courses I might take, it would take me a good five years to be any good at teaching. I do have a lot to say, but I also have a lot to learn. I humbly suggest, however, that it is not my lack of knowledge of acronyms or the best use of the Venn diagram that is slowing my growth. It is, in fact, something quite different.

The Department of Education constantly changes the standards and what they say constitutes "best practices." I wonder why. If they feel they truly understand how best to instruct students, should they not embrace their own beliefs beyond the space of one or two years? How can something that is said to be a great idea be dismissed as outdated only a few years later? The general conversation about why teaching design needs to change is built upon the false premise that our audience has changed. A quick look at history will show anyone how little humanity has truly changed since the beginning of time. But only a true historian – and not an educator-theorist might appreciate this. President

Obama, Bill Gates, T.S Eliot and even Shakespeare all had the same general education as I did and we turned out okay. Yet educators are very enamored of their ideas and of seeing how often they can improve upon them.

Only a few years ago, my Alma Mater, Salem State University, changed the curriculum for a degree in education, forcing students to get some content background. I had the pleasure of sitting in classrooms with students for whom writing a twenty page paper was not as pleasant as providing a portfolio of work already submitted. It is these folks who are provoking the direction of our schools.

It may be no accident that Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has become sanitized and that the 217 mentions of that unfortunate but necessary word have been removed. Even so, people who care little about English

curriculum should not be deciding what informs said curriculum. But there you have it. It is not that Education as a field has nothing to add to our school system; it is that Education, at this point, has far too much to say.

The only hope for those of us that feel as if we would rather have our right arm cut off than to teach something different – those of us that love our area of expertise – is the knowledge (or at least the hope) that the pendulum will swing back the other way. Understanding Shakespeare allows you to understand many things that understanding *The Hunger Games* does not. And all that conversation about differentiated instruction? Those of us that care do not need a lesson – we embrace it naturally. ■

Bradford Green is an English teacher at the Pickering Middle School in Lynn.



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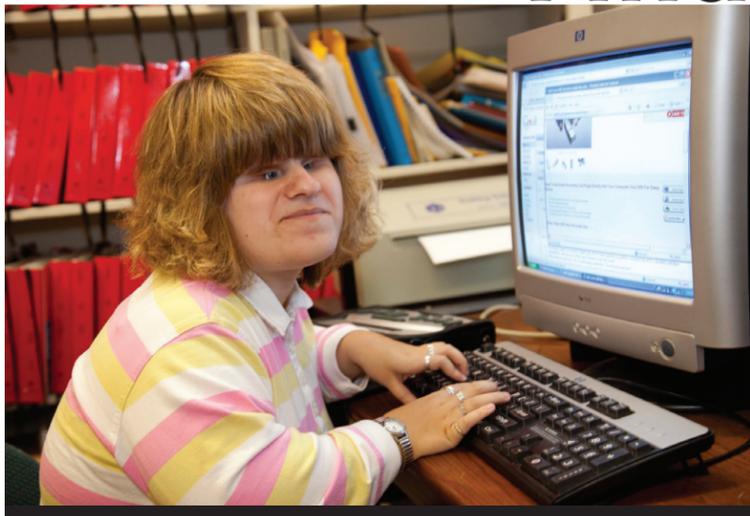
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