



# The Advocate

May 2014

## Annual AFT MA Convention a Successful Show of Strength

Just weeks after Massachusetts celebrated the triumphant return of the Boston Marathon, hundreds of educators and allies from across the Commonwealth gathered in Quincy to prepare for the triumphant return of public education.

While issues like high-stakes testing, charter school expansion and disparagement of teachers and other educational professionals continue to weigh heavily on the hearts and minds of teachers, students and others across our state and across the country, AFT MA members united to continue to produce the best prepared students in the nation and to show the world that they would not give up without a fight.

"We know what the challenges are," said AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, "and we'll meet them, I assure you!"

In order to begin the event and set the tone positively, the first item on the two-day agenda was the presentation of awards for exceptional educators. Among this year's winners were two teachers from Lawrence, two from Holliston, one from Lowell and a retired member from New Bedford. As these are among the most vulnerable districts, it was encouraging to see that great teaching can happen even amidst overwhelming challenges.

"They are a daily example of professionalism and enthusiasm," said Gosnell in one of his many rousing introductions of the evening's recipients.

To start the second day off with a bang, Sen. Elizabeth Warren addressed the assembly via videotape, encouraging her fellow educators to keep doing what they do so well- educating our children.

"AFT of MA is out on the front lines fighting for stronger investments in public education to guarantee that our children have access to a well rounded public education that prepares them for success," Sen. Warren noted. "This is about more than just policies in the classroom. We must give our students and the teachers who work with them the resources to succeed." After all, she suggested, "A teacher's success is a child's success and a child's success is America's success!"

Massachusetts AFL-CIO head Steve Tolman then took the energy up another notch with his famously fiery speaking style.

"I cannot figure out why you are under attack," he spouted, observing how, "everybody is touched by a teacher."

As the attack is real and undeniable, Tolman encouraged his fellow workers to work even harder.

"We need to get the workforce more involved," Tolman said, noting that the main number for the State House is (617) 722-2000 and advising everyone to use it liberally. "You can't just pay dues anymore.... We need all hands on deck!....You've got great leadership, but you need to act yourselves!"



STANDING UP FOR TEACHERS

U.S. Congressman Ed Markey prepares to address nearly 200 representatives of the AFT MA at the 2014 Convdenition

Realizing he had a difficult task in following Tolman, Representative John Tierney began his own speech by echoing his powerful predecessor.

"Steve is right," Tierney suggested. "This is a discussion we should be taking to the streets. We understand that the teacher plays an important role [and] people talk about it, but they do not put anything behind that talk."

Recalling the voices he heard when visiting with teachers in Lynn (see April issue), Tierney said, "We can move in a better direction."

In the final analysis, Tierney said, "You are the experts in education and your voice needs to be heard.... There is going to be no real progress in education until the people who are involved have a voice in it."

In introducing Senator Ed Markey, Gosnell noted his "99-100 % voting record" and praised his "pioneering" legislation.

Thanking Gosnell and other AFT MA leaders by name, Markey then thanked the entire audience for "training the next generation."

"That is what we do," he observed, "and you do it more and better than any other sector of our society."

Noting how teachers touch so many student lives in such profound ways, Markey credited educators with making Massachusetts the best educated state in the union.

"We are not the Bay State," he suggested, riffing on the Commonwealth's moniker. "We are the Brain State!"

Asking what teachers get for their efforts and sacrifices, Markey suggested that the only return teachers get comes in the form of attacks from others who do not understand their

situation; many of whom have never taught themselves.

"Teachers safeguard our kids and our free society," Markey suggested. "We position the gaze of young people to the constellation of possibilities for their lives.... You are responsible for making sure they make the most of their opportunities, and for that, I thank you very much!"

After Executive Board Member Deb Blinder delivered the final credentials report, Annemarie Dubois rose to nominate "honorary" AFT MA members Dallas Doherty and Leah Rivers (grandchildren of AFT MA administrator Ed Doherty) and Marley Laflamme (daughter of AFT MA Representative Caryn Laflamme). The motion passed unanimously!

To start off the official election proceedings, Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin nominated

Tom Gosnell to serve as President.

"I do this because I know what we all know," McLaughlin began. "He is a rock. Tom has been there for us.... His support has been nothing short of overwhelming!"

During his speech, Boston Teachers Union President Richard Stutman spoke of such issues as PARCC, and the unwelcome growth of charter schools and mandatory fingerprinting. "These are issues we should be discussing," he suggested.

McLaughlin challenged every member present to bring at least one new member to future AFT MA events and urged everyone to "step it up."

"We have a voice and we have a good voice," McLaughlin observed. "This is a damn good union...[and] we are the highest performing state in the country, but we need to do better!"

Among the special orders of business were motions to support BTU's appeal of final turnaround plans, to intervene with the movement of a New Bedford school to "Level 5" status, to prevent the premature takeover of a school in Salem, and to urge the rebalancing of focus on testing and growth in determining teacher and school success. Pointing specifically at such corporate entities as Blue-Print School Network (some of which are being touted as "trusted experts" despite only having been around fewer than four years), those who raised the motions noted how many of the terms these entities use to describe themselves are the same that AFT MA educators have been using for decades.

"The Blueprint plan includes 'a high quality, caring and supportive adult,'" noted Dubois in reading the

BOSTON  
STRONG

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motion. "What a novel idea!"

In all of these cases, external forces were trying to wrestle control and rights from the teachers who knew and served students best.

"Nobody knows the kids in your classroom better than you," United Teachers of Lowell President Paul Georges suggested, "so you should be the ones who put the plans together!"

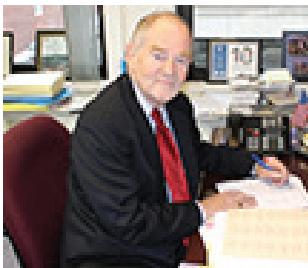
In a further show of union solidarity and strength, an additional motion was devised to recommend that AFT members attend a Salem School Committee meeting on Monday, May 5 to show their support for their embattled colleagues.

"They are insulting the people who are working there every day," said Salem President Joyce Harrington, choking back tears as she described the situation in her city. "I do not want to get vulgar...but it is a mess...[and] this school is just the first domino in the row."

"This is only the first stage," McLaughlin agreed, asking members to

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## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

# Keep the Cap on Charter Schools

The Massachusetts House of Representatives voted to increase the cap on charter schools. The vote was extremely disappointing. The bill now goes to the Senate where we shall continue to work very hard to keep the cap on charter schools.

AFT MA appreciates the calls and emails sent by many of our members, but we shall have to do far more while member activism does not guarantee success, without it we have no chance of success. During the next few weeks you will continue to hear from AFT MA about the need to contact your senators to support our attempt to prevent a raising of the charter school cap.

Raising the cap will divert even more money from the regular schools which accept all students, unlike the charter schools.

On the back page of this newspaper is a carefully-developed document which explains the problems of charter schools and the solutions AFT MA proposes. Please read it carefully.

Also, printed below is the letter which the Massachusetts AFT-CIO sent to all the representatives. We are grateful for that organization's continuing support of public education.

May 20, 2014

Dear Representative,

Tomorrow the House will consider legislation which would increase the spending cap for charter schools from 18 percent of a school district's budget to 23 percent in certain communities. Public school systems in Boston, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn and other communities are already losing millions of dollars to charter schools, and this legislation would further strain the funding of traditional public schools that educate the majority of students, and a disproportionate number of the most disadvantaged students, in those districts.

Many of the problems associated with charter schools that contribute to an inequity in the delivery of public education have yet to be addressed by the legislature. Charter schools enroll a far smaller percentage of English language learners, students with moderate or severe disabilities, and the poorest students (those eligible for free and reduced lunch), than traditional public schools. The students who are most disadvantaged and most costly to educate remain in traditional public schools while scarce resources are being drained from their budgets.

For these reasons I urge you to

oppose raising the cap on charter schools. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. All votes pertaining to this matter may be considered labor votes.

Sincerely,

Steven A. Tolman  
President

While the vote in the House was a defeat for our position, we need to move forward in our campaign to persuade the senators to keep the cap on charter schools.

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

## BOLD PRINT

Come stand up for public education at the Boston Truth Coalition general meeting, Thursday, May 29 at 5:30 at Madison Park High School (75 Malcolm X Boulevard, Roxbury Crossing). For more information, go to <http://bostonedtruth.org>.

□ □ □ □

The Boston School Committee recently eliminated buses for seventh and eighth graders as part of a \$975 million spending plan. The Committee proposes that these students take public transportation, despite the expenses and potential dangers such a plan engenders. For more information, visit Coalition for Equal Quality Education at <http://equalqualityeducation.org>.

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

## The Advocate

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AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO  
Thomas J. Gosnell, President  
Mark Allred, Sr., Secretary-Treasurer

### VICE PRESIDENTS

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Francis McLaughlin  
Bruce Nelson  
James Philip  
Joe Poli  
Robert Salois  
Bruce Sparfven  
Richard Stutman  
Gale Thomas

Matt Robinson, Editor  
38 Chauncy St., Suite 402  
Boston, Mass. 02111  
Tel. 617-423-3342 / 800-279-2523  
Fax: 617-423-0174  
[www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)  
[advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)

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A few minutes of your time  
could save jobs and students  
for a lifetime!

**THANK YOU!**



**HAPPY TO HELP**  
AFT MA's Mike Canavan holds a sign at the Reclaim the Promise Rally on May 17. See the full story at [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net).

## ATTENTION NEW TEACHERS

Have you been teaching for fewer than five years?

Do you want to share why you entered education?

Do you have life lessons to impart?

Do you want to support your colleagues and community?

Write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)



# Ready to Run

## AFT MA delegates prepare for Democratic convention

As the Massachusetts Democratic Convention is an endorsing convention, candidates are preparing to gather at the DCU Center in Worcester on June 13 and 14 with added vigor and excitement. Many have been keeping track of and supporting their preferred candidates for months, if not years, and have a strong sense of who stands where on such key issues as charter schools, teacher assessment, health care and retirement benefits. In fact, many of the delegates who will be in attendance this year have also attended many previous conventions as well and look forward to returning to the event and to catching up with colleagues and friends who share their views and their passion for politics.

“I’ve been interested in politics since I became a union member in the late 70’s,” recalls AFT MA Executive Board member Pat Driscoll, “but I did not have much time to devote to political activity until I retired in 2007.”

Since then, Driscoll has worked with other AFT MA retirees on several campaigns. She has also joined the Haverhill Democratic City Committee. “I was elected treasurer of my Ward Committee and was asked to run as a delegate to the Democratic State Convention in 2012,” she explains.

After being elected, Driscoll attended the convention in Springfield, as well as several candidates’ pre-convention gatherings and the AFL-CIO breakfast rally. “I had a chance to meet candidates and other delegates,” she recalls.

Though she was unable to attend last year’s convention, Driscoll was elected as a delegate in the February, 2014 caucus.

“I think it is important to be part of the political process and to know what candidates are favorable to the issues that educators and union members support,” Driscoll suggests.

AFT MA Field Representative Dianne Heeley has been participating in conventions since the days when former Vice President Walter Mondale was running for the Oval Office.

“That was the first time I considered being a delegate,” Heeley recalls, noting how the AFL-CIO was encouraging union members to “get involved” at the time.

Though she was originally elected as an alternate, Heeley received a fateful phone call the night before the convention during which she was informed that another delegate would be unable to attend and that she had gotten the gig. While such fortuitous happenstances do occur, Heeley notes how becoming a delegate can be more difficult for many.

“It was hard to break in,” Heeley says, recalling how, even after making the cut, she was not elected every time. Some years, she felt like a candidate herself!

“You had to kind of work it at the campaign,” she suggests, “and make sure your friends showed up to vote for you.”

Currently Heeley serves as the co-chair of the Democratic Town Committee in North Reading. Whenever the convention comes up, however, her political involvement also goes up a notch or two.

“One of the reasons that I like being involved is that you are on the ground level,” she observes. “The vote that you cast at the convention will determine who will be on the ballot.”

As there are so many open offices to be filled this year (including Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Treasurer

and Attorney General), Heeley is more excited than she has been in recent memory to participate and push the party and the democratic process forward.

“Every other year is the issues convention,” she explains. “It may not be as exciting, but it is important to be there to help determine what the platform will be for the Democrats.”

Another AFT MA administrator who will be participating this year is Executive Board Member Dan Haacker.

“I first became aware of the importance of being a union delegate to the State Democratic Convention from serving on the Executive Board and more specifically on the Committee on Political Education (COPE),” Haacker explains.

Before he became an official delegate, Haacker volunteered at conventions in order to meet people and to see how the event and the process worked. “At one of them,” he recalls, “I signed in and registered all of the state, local and county officials that attended.”

His volunteering experience at the state level made Haacker an ideal candidate to help out when the national convention came to Boston in 2007. “One of my tasks was assisting delegates at the hotel where the Illinois and Vermont delegations were staying,” he says. “It was there that I met both then Senator Barack Obama and Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago.”

Though he lives in Quincy, Haacker spends a good deal of time in Milton, where he has worked at the Milton Public Library for over three decades.



## Benefit Bulletin: Card-carrying Members

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).

It’s no surprise to AFT members that being union is a benefit in the workforce. Now, AFT + offers another way to add value to your AFT membership.

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If you carry a credit card, consider carrying an AFT-endorsed, worker-friendly credit card that puts union solidarity in your back pocket. Learn more at [AFTcard.com](http://AFTcard.com).

Additional information and eligibil-



When he first wanted to become a delegate, he admits that he did not know many people in Quincy nor much about the process. “I didn’t even know that you have to have someone nominate you at the caucus,” he recalls. “Once I became known as a serious delegate that attended the convention...it became easier to get elected.”

Like Heeley, Haacker’s experience with town government encouraged him to become more involved there as well. Currently, he serves as a member of the Quincy Democratic City Committee. “Further,” he notes, “my experience with AFT MA COPE has also led me to now be on the Norfolk County Central Labor Council COPE.”

As this year’s convention will help deal with so many issues and determine so many offices, Haacker notes that competition for delegate slots was more competitive. “Many potential gubernatorial candidates asked their supporters to go to the caucuses and run as their committed delegates,” he explains. As a result, Haacker was only allowed to participate as an alternate. And while he may be able to copy Heeley and get bumped up, Haacker says that he is happy to do what he can, no matter what it may be.

“I have found this a very rewarding experience,” Haacker says, noting how AFT MA has supported him every time he participates. “I have had expert guidance along the way, particularly from former Boston Teachers Union Political Director Patricia Armstrong and former AFT MA Political Director Cathy Dwyer.”

For others who wish to follow Haacker on this political path, he recommends talking with AFT MA Political Director Brian LaPierre. “It is a great way to enhance your union activism,” he advises. “By my involvement, I know that my union has a voice at the State Democratic Convention.... By being a delegate, I can help candidates that are sympathetic to the values that not only I believe in, but also those of my union brothers and sisters.” ■

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# We're Not Finnish Yet

## Experienced education expert offers astute observations

Though he may not be as well known (at least not around these parts) as his goaltending countryman who was also performing in front of a packed room in Boston at the same time, Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg is definitely an all star when it comes to icing the debate about high-stakes testing and other puck-ish problems.

On Wednesday, May 14, Sahlberg (who is currently teaching at Harvard's School of Education) took some time to share his views and ideas with educators and others at the First Parish Church in Cambridge in an event that was sponsored by Citizens for Public Schools.

"Massachusetts has reason to be proud of our public schools, teachers and students," suggested Citizens Executive Director Lisa Guisbond. "Still, we can learn a lot from Finland's reforms, which have put a priority on public school equity and achieved excellent results."

Proudly showing his "Keep the cap on charter schools" button to the crowd of nearly 200, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell introduced Sahlberg by promising, "We will all learn much this evening."

Noting that, unlike many other so-called "experts," Sahlberg's background is "rooted right in the classroom" Gosnell said, "occasionally, we get some ideas that are not so wonderful, so I am glad [Sahlberg] is around to share his ideas."

In introducing himself, Sahlberg said, "I hope to leave you with ideas of what is possible, not just what is bad."

Remembering how his grandfather came to the U.S. 100 years ago, Sahlberg noted how he, like so many others, came here with the belief that, "America has great education" and that this was "where mass education was born."

Considering the idea that Finland has "the best education," Sahlberg said that such claims are misleading and unproductive, especially as each nation is different and has its own needs and abilities. "Education reforms are bad travelers," he observed. "If you take them away from where they were born, they do not do well."

As far as what matters to his fellow Finns, Sahlberg suggested two things:

"All we care is that we are better than Sweden," he laughed "and that we have a public school system that you can trust and rely on."

While many in the U.S. may not be as trusting of their education systems as Sahlberg's countrymen are (Finland reports over 90% trust in their system), he revealed that "most of our models and inspiration come from the US."

Based on the American models, Sahlberg suggested, Finland has developed three unique attributes. First, the education system is built upon nine years of compulsory school that is the same for all children. "No other nation has that," Sahlberg pointed out, noting that each child attends a school in their neighborhood. Second, all teachers – from kindergarten to college - must graduate from a rigorous and selective Masters program. "No other nation in the world has this high requirement," he added, suggesting that Finnish teachers are considered as much as trained professionals as doctors and lawyers. Third, all education is publicly funded, including higher education. "We see education as a right," Sahlberg explained, noting that education is free even for those who visit from other nations.

After mentioning that 96 percent of Finnish teachers volunteer to belong to the national teachers' union, Sahlberg mentioned what he sees as three paradoxes of Finnish education. "First," he said, "we teach less and learn more." As with the famous systems in Singapore and Japan, Finnish students have fewer official class hours and fewer total days in school.

"In Finland, children start formal learning at the age of seven," he explained. "By the time they are 15, they have had three years less teaching hours than U.S. children."

As teachers are not in the classroom for as many hours, they have more time to plan and collaborate so that the hours they do have are put to most effective use.

"Unless you give time for teachers to plan and work with other teachers," Sahlberg suggested, "they will never be like lawyers and doctors. We think teachers are professionals and they need time to talk about things if they are to be successful."

Sahlberg next discussed how, in addition to teaching less, Finns also test less.

"Finland is like a standardized testing-free zone," he observed. When asked how his colleagues know

their students are learning, Sahlberg suggested that they use the "American systems" of portfolio assessments and daily informal assessments.

"We think the teachers are the best people to tell whether students are learning or not," he suggested. "It is absurd to have tests that have low stakes for children but high stakes for teachers."

The third paradox is that, unlike in the US, Finnish teachers are among the best college students and have to graduate from a six-year program before they teach.

"The better the college graduate in Finland," he noted, "the more likely they will become a teacher."

As they spend so long preparing and as they are all so dedicated to the field and to their students, Sahlberg added that most Finnish teachers are teachers for life.



**A CONSIDERED RESPONSE**  
Finnish education expert and visiting Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Pasi Sahlberg thinks about a response to one of the many questions asked during his presentation on May 14.

## Summa Cum Laude: Panos Liaropoulos

From Apollo on his Lyre to Yanni, the allure of Greek music has captivated millions around the world and throughout time.

It is no wonder, then, that a native-born musician would find the appeal so strong that, thousands of miles away from home, he continues to perform and promote it.

Panos Liaropoulos is a composer and pianist who teaches at Berklee College of Music. In addition to serving his muse as a composer and educator, Liaropoulos is also the founder and music director of the Greek Music Ensemble. While the focus of this group is, as the name implies, music, the Ensemble also celebrates other elements of Greece's proud and historic culture.

Liaropoulos started studying and playing music at the age of seven. "My first instrument was the violin and a couple of years later I also started studying piano," he recalls. Though there were no professional musicians

in his family, Liaropoulos' father was "an amateur mandolin player and a cantor" who had a proclivity for Byzantine music; one that his son apparently adopted.

"Traditional Greek music derives to an extent from the Byzantine musical tradition," Liaropoulos explains, "and has had a huge impact on modern Greek art music as well as Classical Greek music."

Drawn to its "rich, highly sophisticated musical vocabulary" and also what he sees as "limitless melodic and

harmonic resources," Liaropoulos continues to base much of his work in these ancient forms, but now combines them with contemporary themes and technologies.

On May 31 at 7.00 pm, Liaropoulos will present the fruits of his multicultural mixings in a concert at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church of Brockton.

"The theme of our musical odyssey this year is *Nostos*," Liaropoulos explains, using the Greek term for the unappeased yearning to return to one's home country (as exemplified by the legendary Greek hero Odysseus). "It is dedi-



**HELLENISTIC HARMONIES** Panos Liaropoulos and his Greek Music Ensemble will perform May 31 in Brockton

"Most American teachers leave after one year," he observed. "You need a long time to practice to become great."

Whereas in America, students must prepare for school, Sahlberg suggested that, in Finland, the opposite is true.

"In Finland, school readiness means the school is ready for the different children and to receive them all as they are and to help them move forward," he explained.

While such ideas have allowed Finland to succeed in many ways, Sahlberg also admitted that it took a long time for his nation to come to this new system.

"We had to decide whether it was okay to educate just some people," he recalled. "At some point, we decided that we needed to educate every single person in the country because that is the best guarantee that we will be free and prosperous."

In addition to changing how teachers are prepared and perceived here, Sahlberg also suggested restoring the perceived value of physical education, the arts and unstructured time.

"If you take the creativity of arts and music and apply them to the ways we educate," he suggested, "and I am sure you will be on top of the world!"

As Massachusetts is particularly known for its creativity, Sahlberg sees the Commonwealth as the perfect place to start the revolution.

"Many people say Massachusetts is like Finland," Sahlberg noted, mentioning how he had recently met with Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester. "I say the test scores may be, but the equity of the system is not."

By "putting equity in the driver's seat," Sahlberg suggested that many of the problems related to the so-called "achievement gap" would go away and that, especially if combined with the millions of dollars that are currently wasted on testing, school systems would save enough money to fund more productive programs.

"All the other successful systems let equity drive things," he observed. "Testing is expensive and has too many costs."

Furthermore, Sahlberg suggested, testing does not change anything.

"We say in Finland the more you weigh the thing does not make it any fatter," he quipped, mentioning hockey again when he shared another Finnish truism- "Good hockey players play where the puck is. Great players play where the puck is going." ■

cated to the music that has accompanied the lives of the immigrant Greeks around the world."

From traditional folk, urban songs, and contemporary art songs, the concert will trace the history of Greek music while narrating nostalgia, joys and sorrows of life in a foreign land, and the emotional ingredients that contribute to the immigrant psyche.

"Through critical interpretation of the unique stylistic and technical aspects of the music," Liaropoulos suggests, "and through its elaborate and skillful performance, the Greek Music Ensemble aspires to redefine the performance standards of Greek music in the U.S. and adequately represent its true spirit and stylistic nuances."

As the talented members of this ensemble share the same feelings and passions as their conductor, Liaropoulos lauds them for their ability to share and communicate their heritage across time and space.

"It is an extremely inspiring tradition," Liaropoulos says, "both for performers and for composers." ■



# AFT MA Convention

Continued from page 1

“engage Salem State where they train...teachers” (McLaughlin himself is a graduate) and asking Gosnell and AFT Administrator Barbara Pallazzo for support from both the local and national levels.

“We need Randi,” McLaughlin urged, referring to AFT President Randi Weingarten, who has done so much in Lawrence and other districts. “The battleground is here and we have to step to the plate!”



**AFT MA: THE NEXT GENERATION - Part 1**  
**AFT MA Representative Caryn Laflamme's daughter Marley Joan LaFlamme and AFT MA Assistant to the President Ed Doherty's grandchildren Leah Rivers and Dallas Doherty were named honorary members at the 2014 AFT MA Convention.**

After all motions had been passed, delegates gathered at the podium for a panel discussion of pressing issues such as the Common Core, the state of our public libraries, and the role and challenges of higher education and paraprofessionals.

Representing the public librarians AFT MA represents in MLSA, Lynnfield librarian Pat Kelly spoke of the difficulties she and her colleagues face as a result of lack of funding and appreciation.

“We do much more than check out books,” Kelly explained. “We serve cradle to grave and all educational and socio-economic levels.”

In speaking about what appears to be the inevitable arrival of PARCC (the new testing system based on the still controversial Common Core), Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan pointed out that DESE Commissioner Mitchell Chester is also the Chairman of PARCC, despite the conflicts such dual roles engender.

“There will be many problems,”

he suggested, citing the costs of the necessary technology and training and the emphasis on testing that is sure to increase.

Admitting that his school is “public in name only,” UMass Faculty Federation President Jim Griffith added that higher education schools will also be affected because many of the students

who take these tests ultimately end up in such schools whether they are appropriately prepared or not.

“These systems do not allow teachers to do what they are inspired to do,” Griffith observed, suggesting that tests like PARCC (and MCAS)

limit learning instead of supporting it.

“We cannot send our kids to college without basic science, English grammar, and math,” he said. “We need kids sent to college with a responsibility to know stuff; not just to jump through the next hoop. That comes from teachers inspiring them and a school system that supports them.”

As Massachusetts is 48th in the nation in terms of per capita support for higher education, Griffith expressed appreciation for the support he and his colleagues get from AFT MA.

“Our relation with AFT MA is the single most important thing that allows us to conduct our mission with the products of your programs,” he said to his fellow educators and administrators, “and we thank you for sending them to us. We do the very best we can to mentor them and we are happy to be part of you!”

As much difficulty as many teachers are facing, many paraprofessionals face more because, like the librarians, their roles are often misunderstood

and underappreciated.

“Para numbers are down,” admitted New Bedford Federation of Paraprofessionals President Lisa Poulos, “but our needs are not.” She noted how, in many districts, one-to-one aide positions are being eliminated even when it is clearly not in the best interests of the students who were formerly being served, and even when it goes against the aide’s contract.

“It’s just not an enjoyable situation,” Poulos said, echoing the thoughts of many in the room.

Georges then discussed the charter school cap, pointing out the “Broken Promises” pamphlet that AFT MA has recently created and distributed. Noting that charters were originally proposed to be “incubators for innovation,” Georges observed how few have passed on their learnings and how many have been taken over by for-profit corporate entities (such as the Lebanese-based SABIS organization that recently opened a school in Lowell) that care more about money than learning. He also noted how charter school teachers do not need to be certified and are not evaluated in the same way as public school teachers are.

“There is no local control,” he added. “We are accountable to a school committee. They are not accountable to anyone.” That is why, he suggested, charter schools need to be accountable to public school members and to the many students and parents they fail to serve.

“People are trying to make the public lose faith in public education,” Georges observed, noting how their focus on the so-called “achievement gap” is little more than a way for public officials to “expunge themselves from any responsibility.”

To wind up the Convention, Secretary-Treasurer Mark Allred delivered his report, in which he noted that there would be no dues increase and predicted a “small surplus” after our forthcoming audit. Gosnell then closed the presentations with his report, in which he reiterated the urgency of acting on such issues as the charter school cap, testing, and opportunities for members to make their voices heard.

“I anticipate the next two years are going to be a real challenge,” he repeated. “This is a battle, but we have a chance to win!” ■



**AFT MA: THE NEXT GENERATION - Part 2**  
**2014 recipients of the Albert Shanker, Sandra Feldman and Jay Porter Scholarship Awards included (from left) Alexander Martin Loughnane (son of BTU member William Loughnane), Jordan Chu (son of BTU member Vivian Chu), Emma Yates (son of Lawrence Teachers Union member Thomas Yates), Cole Edward Garvey (son of BTU member Julie McNulty Garvey), and Ethan Barkalow (son of Lynn Teachers Union member Kurt Barkalow). Not shown are Eric Brazell (son of Lynn Teachers Union member Colleen Brazell), Michael Green (son of BTU member Migdalia Hernandez-Green), and Liliana Zigo (daughter of Berklee Chapter member Julie Zigo).**

# Weingarten Rallies the Troops in Lynn

## AFT President visits to support public education

By Timothy Cullinane

On Monday, April 7th, AFT National President Randi Weingarten paid a visit to the Lynn Teacher’s Union Local 1037. In a well-attended town hall- style meeting, Weingarten addressed the concerns of all involved in public education; specifically how educators can work with members of the community to reclaim the promise of great public schools for all children. Many in attendance were curious as to how educators can be effective, and what steps can be taken to insure that children do in fact succeed.

Among those in attendance were FT MA president Tom Gosnell and educators from across the district. All of them wanted to be more effective and wondered what steps could be taken to insure that children receive a high quality education.

Weingarten opened with a rather droll observation, “If public schooling is an anchor of democracy, how did

the American teacher go from hero to villain?” she asked. “What happened? Why is there a deep frustration and demoralization with teachers now?”

Weingarten noted the long list reasons that teachers have been demonized and demoralized, paying special attention to the decline of organized labor. Roughly 11% of Americans are in a union,. This shrinking minority of workers is considered by most who are unaffil-



**READY TO FIGHT**  
**AFT President Randi Weingarten**

iated to enjoy a special status and to be out for their own self-interest. The facts are that unions raise wages and that everyone benefits by the strength of organized labor.

Whether you are union or not, your paycheck can fluctuate on the strength and weakness of the Labor movement.

Weingarten also discussed the austerity measures that are being hoisted upon public schools and questioned who will benefit if we continue to slash spending on our schools. How can spending less per student help the individual student, or the nation as a whole, she asked? How will this help them to meet society’s demands? She urged the assembled to think about the long-term impact of due budget cuts. Unfor-

tunately, she suggested, it is not a particularly comforting scenario.

The session lasted an hour, including a brief Q&A session. It was not all doom and gloom, however. In this informal group, Weingarten also discussed solutions, unity, and the importance of well-prepared teachers, wraparound services, standing your ground and winning elections.

“We need to do a few things,” she suggested. “Solve the problems; don’t win the arguments; remain solution driven and remain community engage.” Weingarten also reminded everyone that, “There will always be a need for neighborhood schools that are safe and welcoming.”

According to Weingarten, this multi-pronged strategy will benefit everyone connected to public education. It was apparent at the conclusion of her talk that Weingarten really does speak for the children of America, but more importantly that she will fight for these children and those who care for them as well. ■

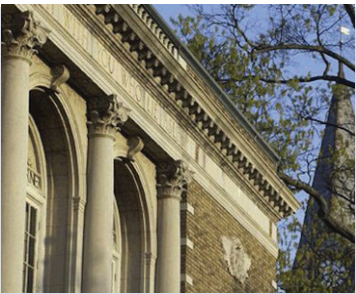
Timothy Cullinane is an ELA teacher at Lynn English High School.





# On Campus

**Dan Georgianna, Political Director**  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## Negative on Affirmative

As entertaining as watching Donald Sterling’s fall from grace was, the NBA banning him for life and the flight of corporate sponsors from the Los Angeles Clippers do not signal the end of racism or the end of bigotry in the U.S. The public reaction to his phone comments to his girl friend that she gave to the press merely shows that plain-language bigotry is not allowed these days in public conversation, at least not from professional sports team owners.

The increase in black and brown faces in professional sports does not mean much in terms of ending racism and bigotry, especially when almost all of the people who can pay to watch them play are white. The U.S. still has plenty of racism (defined as systematic discrimination) and plenty of bigotry, (defined as the belief that specific races, genders, or nationalities are inferior).

Less noticed than the Donald Sterling show over the last month, but probably more important in in terms of racism and bigotry, was the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Michigan could outlaw the use of affirmative action in admission to its public universities.

Michigan and six other states

(which account for more than one-quarter of U.S. high school students) outlaw affirmative action in college admissions. Based on an analysis of the results of banning affirmative action, the *New York Times* (4/22/14) reported that, “In states that have banned affirmative action in college admissions, prominent public universities have tended to enroll fewer black and Hispanic freshmen.”

Since Michigan outlawed affirmative action, its college-aged population of African-Americans has increased to 19% while its black population of public college students has declined to 5%.

The legal setbacks to affirmative action mirror the Court’s acceptance of segregation in suburban K-12 public education. In the first few decades after the Supreme Court’s decision to outlaw segregation in 1954, integration increased in most states. In *The Re-segregation of Suburban Schools*, Erica Frankenberg and Gary Orfield, professors at Penn State and UCLA respectively, conclude that segregation is now more prevalent than in was in the late 1960s due to increased population in suburbs with segregated patterns.

Some states, including Massachusetts, have tried to counter segregation

in public schools through additional state funding of school districts with low education attainment. The jury is still out on whether this strange return to “separate but equal” has reduced segregation or improved equal opportunity to quality education. State funding based on student testing has also led to blaming teachers with little regard for underlying problems causing unequal education.

Affirmative action in college admissions has never sat quietly with equal opportunity when white students with equal or better scores claimed discrimination when denied college admission. In the recent Supreme Court rulings, principles of equal opportunity trumped affirmative action. Chief Justice Roberts mocked affirmative action in a case before the Court in 2007, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.”

Earlier affirmative action programs were not based on race. In promoting quality public schools for all students in the Commonwealth, Horace Mann foresaw a diversity of students in public schools that would generate a republic built on individual merit rather than privilege. While an avid abolitionist, Mann’s vision of diversity was based on social class not on race; slavery was still legal in most states (including Con-

necticut) during his tenure from 1837-1848 as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

Recent evidence supports the general failure of Mann’s vision. The report “Research in Rewarding Strivers: Helping Low-Income Students Succeed in College” found that socioeconomic advantages cause much larger differences than race in SAT scores.

Some public universities, including those in the seven states that have outlawed affirmative action based on race, have instituted policies of affirmative action based on social and economic background. They have recruited more from schools in poor areas, placed more weight on class rank than on test scores, eliminated admission preferences for children of alumni, given preference to graduates from community colleges, and increased need based financial aid. Racial diversity generally increased from these policies because most black and Hispanic students are poor.

These policies to shift affirmative action from race to class make sense, but they don’t address bigotry toward skin color. I have been white for a long time. An unwelcomed voice, conditioned by years of indoctrination, tells me that a black face is inferior to a white one. Racial diversity in education would teach us to ignore that voice. ■

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## Retiree Corner

Marie Ardito, Co-founder  
Massachusetts Retirees United  
[www.retireesunited.org](http://www.retireesunited.org)



### SENIOR SEMINARS

**How to Protect Your Nest Egg and Plan for Your Family**  
Saturday, June 21, 2014, 10-noon

This seminar, presented by Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie, discusses wills and trusts, gifting, Medicaid Qualifying Trusts, probate, joint tenancy, direct transfers upon death, and much more. Howie is a member of both the MA and NH Bar Association, National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, NH Conflict Resolution Association and the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys.

**Preparing for Retirement**  
Saturday, June 28, 2014, 10-noon

This seminar by Marie Ardito is offered to those within 10 years of retiring. It is offered not only to teachers, but to paraprofessionals, secretaries, cafeteria workers and all support staff, whether they be retiring under the teacher's state, Social Security, or public pension. It provides an understanding of the retirement system, the options from which they can select, legal checklist, protecting major assets, understanding Medicare, its penalties and surcharge and much much more.

All MRU seminars are free and no products are sold.

Both of these seminars will both be offered at 314 Main Street, Wilmington, MA, Unit 105.

To register for any seminar, email [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org) or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number attending. This call registers you.

## The Kids Need YOU!

Recently, I read an article that saddened me. It was a letter that appeared in the *Washington Post* entitled "Heartbreaking Letter from Teacher." The author's words speak of dedication, but also of deeper frustration. She speaks about what brought her to education - the focus was on the kids - and what is driving her out - the almighty focus on testing, assessing, and academic demands. I could relate to her, as it was a contributing factor to my choice to retire fifteen years ago this June. I no longer could teach the kids in front of me because the test was more important.

I thought about my fourth grade granddaughter's jitters over another day of testing for MCAS. Kids today have enough pressures on their young lives. They do not need the schools compounding them! One out of every five students today, almost 22%, comes from a home that is at or below the poverty line. Nearly 10% percent of people over 65 have the same plight.

Today there is very little that our youth do for fun that does not have competition involved. Every kid that plays sports thinks they are going to make the pros and so do their parents. We seldom, if ever, see a pick-up game in which kids are playing a sport. They only play when it is supervised, official, and not just for fun.

The kids need us today more than ever. They need to know that someone

really cares about them even when they strike out, fail a test, or fall in the middle of a performance. They need to know that who they are as people is what is important - not necessarily what their academic or extra-curricular performance is.

So many of the homes these kids return to after their school day are sad places. It is frightening the role models or lack thereof that are in their young lives. Recently I read a true story of an eleven year-old panhandler and a busy sales executive entitled "An Invisible Thread." It was moving to see the difference one caring adult can make in the life of a child and how a cycle of drugs, poverty and lack of direction can be broken with the help of one person who cares.

One of the projects Massachusetts Retirees United became involved in is volunteering with the juvenile courts system. It began several years back when Judge Jay Blitzman was the guest speaker at our annual meeting. He spoke of the great need kids had for advocates acting between the courts and the schools and how we as retired teachers were naturals to help with this. Previously, this was a paid position and the person was called a *Guardian ad Litem* for the youngster to provide assistance to the child, family and school. Beginning in 2008, these positions were eliminated and once again kids became the victims of

the budget.

If you are eager to put more meaning into your retirement days, if you want to get back the true emphasis of why you went into teaching (i.e., the kids), if you still want to be the positive influence in some child's life, MRU encourages you to attend an informational meeting that will be held in September. Participating in this program will not require a large time commitment or travel. For the most part, you can control the time you want to give to the project and you can limit the number of students assigned to you. The informational session will help you to better understand and become involved with the program. The courts will provide you all the help and directions you need if you should decide to become involved.

In the meantime, you can contact Jomarie O'Mahony, an attorney who voluntarily oversees the program. She can be reached by email at [jomarie0525@yahoo.com](mailto:jomarie0525@yahoo.com) or by phone at 781-799-4077.

I hope that you will take the time to learn more about this program, as a small amount of time can create such a large amount of good. You have nothing to lose and some youngster has a world to gain by your decision to become involved. ■

## After the Bell: Stephen Gordon

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?

After graduating from CCNY in 1964, I worked as a social investigator for the NYC Department of Welfare, enacting my family's commitment to work for justice. After over a year, I felt depleted by the poverty and family unhappiness, and I wanted to do something more hopeful for children. There was a teacher shortage in NYC, and I found a job teaching English at a Manhattan junior high school. Knowing how hard growing up can be, I wanted adolescents to feel they were not alone and I wanted them to feel accomplished, engaged and valued through education. From this experience, I realized I liked to teach and help students learn, and I felt teaching was a job I could perhaps master.

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

In Boston, I taught for 34 years, almost all as an English teacher in two high schools: Four years at Dorchester High and 30 at Copley Square High

School/Snowden International School. I also worked as a Literacy Coach and assisted teachers interested in doing teacher inquiry to grow their teacher identities and practices. My major interest was in how students learn to write.

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

I have no single "greatest lesson" I learned as a teacher. No words can summarize who I was as a teacher; only my former students might describe the teacher I was for them, how I lived out my beliefs and expectations for them, always trying to do justice to their minds and hearts. I did develop over time a philosophy of teaching and learning. Prompted by this question, I can think of five goals I hope I lived out in my career: 1) Help students find the spoken and written words and sentences that most powerfully and truthfully capture their experiences and insights; 2) Find ways for student to take more ownership of their learning by assessing what is happening in the classroom, including the intent and process of their teacher's instruction; 3) Encourage uncertainty and perplexity by insisting that students express both their confusions and understandings; silence will not produce learning; 4) A classroom is a unique place where teachers and stu-

dents should have special experiences of achievement, love and laughter; 5) Give respect and hope to students so that if and when you meet them after they graduate both you and they are happy to see one another. Teaching was a privilege and joy for me.

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

I continue to work with teachers and students. Through the Boston Writing Project, the National Writing Project and other foundations I continue to work with current and would-be teachers helping them take an inquiry stance on their instruction, seeking to



### READY TO RECLAIM

**AFT Vice President Francine Lawrence speaks at the Reclaim the Promise Rally on May 17. See the full story at [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net).**



# Charter Schools: Know the truth and keep up the fight!

On Wednesday, May 21, the House of Representatives voted to raise the charter school cap. If this same result should occur in the Senate, it would mean that more of these schools will be allowed to open or expand and more funds will be taken from public schools.

As the Senate vote is yet to come, AFT MA is dedicated to doing all it can to make sure the Senate votes differently and to protect our teachers, our students, and our communities. We therefore present the following information regarding charter schools so that we can all be better informed and better prepared for what may lay ahead.

**DEFINITION:**

In Massachusetts, a charter school is a publicly funded but privately managed school that operates independently of any local school committee under a five-year charter granted by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Currently, there are more than 80 charter schools in Massachusetts, enrolling more than 35,000 students. Charter schools were conceived originally as teacher-led laboratories of reform that would experiment with and share new instructional practices, with a primary focus on at-risk students and in close collaboration with the public school system. Unfortunately, Massachusetts charter schools have strayed far from this vision, and are falling short in three significant areas:

- serving all students equitably
- upholding high professional teacher standards
- ensuring accountability for local communities.

**PROBLEMS and SOLUTIONS:**  
**1. Massachusetts charter schools are leaving many children behind. The result is a discriminatory, two-tiered educational system; separate and unequal.**

**PROBLEM**

In general, Massachusetts charter schools enroll a far smaller percentage of English language learners, students with disabilities, and the poorest students (those eligible for free lunch) than their host/sending districts. A report by the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) found that a group of Boston charter schools — touted in the media as “high-performing” — enrolled virtually no English language learners; virtually no students with moderate or severe learning disabilities; and significantly lower percentages of the poorest students.

**SOLUTION**

Require charter schools to serve high-need students, including English language learners and students with moderate and severe disabilities, in the same proportion as their host/sending districts.

**PROBLEM**

Charter schools nationally employ a variety of exclusionary practices to influence their student enrollment, including lengthy application forms, mandatory family interviews, mandatory “parent contracts,” and the use of rigid discipline codes. The MTA report found that several Massachusetts charter schools put up similar barriers

to enrollment — creating, in essence, a “lottery with hurdles.”

**SOLUTION**

Hold charter schools to the same acceptance and enrollment standards as district schools. The Massachusetts Legislature should authorize and fund a comprehensive study of charter school admission and enrollment practices, with the goal of instituting practices that will maximize transparency and equal access.

**PROBLEM**

Many Massachusetts charter schools suffer from extremely high attrition rates. The MTA report called a group of Boston charter schools “drop-out factories,” noting that about 50 percent of students initially enrolled in these charter schools leave before completing the school’s academic program.

**SOLUTION**

Deny renewal of a charter to schools where student attrition rates exceed the rates in host/sending districts. Furthermore, when students drop out of a charter school, require the school to “backfill” the empty seats with students on the waiting list, regardless of grade level or time of year (i.e., the charter school must accept mid- and late-year transfers, just as district schools do).

**2. Charter school policies are failing to uphold high professional standards for teachers, with a lower bar set for licensure, evaluation and teacher rights on the job.**

**PROBLEM**

The state has developed demanding licensure requirements for teachers and other educators in district schools. These include passing rigorous exams, completing extensive and ongoing coursework in content and pedagogy, and earning a master’s degree. Yet, charter school educators are exempt from all requirements except the need to pass the exams.

**SOLUTION**

The Legislature should establish the same licensure requirements for charter school educators as district-school educators.

**PROBLEM**

The state has developed a rigorous new evaluation system for all licensed educators in district schools. According to Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester, “The new educator evaluation system is one of the most important reform initiatives we are undertaking, with the potential to drive improvements in both educator development and student learning.” Yet, charter schools are not required to use the system.

**SOLUTION**

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education should

require charter schools to participate in the new evaluation system on the same basis as district schools.

**PROBLEM**

After three years of successful employment, district-school teachers have the right to earn “professional teacher status,” which safeguards against arbitrary and capricious dismissals. This status strengthens teachers’ voice on the job and their ability to advocate for their students. Yet, charter school teachers (and their students) are denied this fundamental protection.

**SOLUTION**

The Legislature should grant “professional teacher status” rights to charter school teachers on the same basis as teachers in district schools.

**3. Charter schools are unaccountable to local communities, even as charters drain scarce resources from neighborhood public schools.**

**PROBLEM**

Local school committees and communities have no control over the design, approval, operation or renewal of charter schools.

Rather, charter schools are approved and overseen by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Board). The schools themselves are managed by independent boards of trustees and must answer only to the Board.

**SOLUTION**

The creation, expansion and renewal of charter schools should require the approval of local school committees and communities, who should share oversight authority with the Board.

**PROBLEM**

While local communities have no say in the approval or operation of charters, the financial impact of charters on local public schools is profound. The state estimates that charter schools will divert more than \$330 million (net amount) from district schools across Massachusetts in school year 2013-14. This means that students in district schools — which enroll about 97 percent of Massachusetts public school students vs. three percent in charters — will be left with larger classes, fewer support services and less classroom resources.

**SOLUTION**

A district should only shoulder the costs of charter school tuition if the charter school is approved by the local community. If a charter school is approved by the Board over objections from the host community, the school should be entirely funded by the state, with no local financial obligation or penalty.

**PROBLEM**

The state’s funding system compounds the inequities between district and charter schools. Most glaringly,

the “foundation budgets” for district and charter schools are calculated on the assumption that they serve the same number of special education students: a fixed 3.75 percent of enrollment. This is a false assumption. In general, charter schools serve fewer students with disabilities than their host/sending districts, and far fewer students with (more costly) moderate and severe disabilities.

**SOLUTION**

Calculate foundation budgets based on the actual number of special education students in district and charter schools, not an assumed percentage.

**PROBLEM**

While a charter school must technically be a nonprofit organization, individual charter schools can contract with for-profit service providers and management companies, funneling Massachusetts tax dollars to out-of-state, profit-seeking corporations.

**SOLUTION**

Prohibit the outsourcing of school management and other services to for-profit companies.

**PROBLEM**

Under Massachusetts law, one of the stated purposes of charter schools is to “provide models for replication in other public schools.” In fact, charter renewals are conditioned upon the school documenting that it “has provided models for replication and best practices to the commissioner and to other public schools in the district where the charter is located.” Yet, it appears this sharing of practices is not happening to the extent envisioned by law. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) maintains a website with charter school “best practices.” Of the 81 charter schools in the state, less than a third are represented on the site.

**SOLUTION**

Require charter schools to disseminate their “best practices” — including curriculum, assessments and other instructional materials — upon renewal and at the request of any public school or school district.

**PROBLEM**

A national study shows that charter schools spend, as a percentage of total expenditures, more on administration (16.4 percent vs. 9.1 percent) and less on instruction (54.8 percent vs. 60.3 percent) than district schools, including less on teacher salaries. This imbalance raises the question of whether a fair share of charter dollars is going to students in the classroom.

**SOLUTION**

The Legislature should authorize a study to investigate charter school spending patterns in Massachusetts. Furthermore, salaries of all charter school employees should be made easily accessible to the public, including salaries of charter school administrators and employees at charter school parent companies.

The information presented here can be found on the AFT MA brochure “Broken Promises: The Truth about charter schools.” ■















