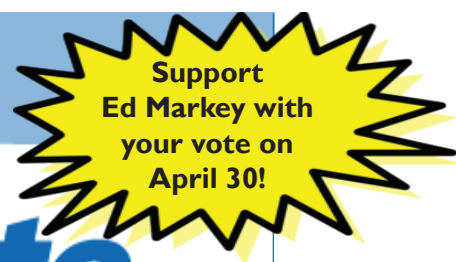




# The Advocate



May 2013

## Truth to Power Conference offers honest discourse and hope

By Michael Maguire

On Saturday, April 6, more than 80 AFT MA members gathered at the Boston Teachers Union Hall to discuss the state of education and related legal matters at the 2013 AFT MA Education and Legislative Conference.

AFT MA President Tom Gosnell opened the event by saying that, although these are challenging times, there is opportunity for improvement. He urged that the union's approach be based upon a simple but important mantra: "We want what's best for kids, good for teachers, and collaboratively done," Gosnell said.

Gosnell also proudly reminded the guests at the Conference that Massachusetts is first educationally in the nation based upon the NAEP exam. Additionally, Massachusetts is first in the western world in math and science.

After Gosnell spoke, newly-appointed Secretary of Education Matt Malone took the microphone to introduce himself and to address the educators assembled in the hall. After thanking Boston's Secondary Field Representative Caren Carew for her guidance when he was her paraprofessional, Malone recounted his career in education which included many years spent as a para, teacher, headmaster, and as a superintendent.



**PLEDGING COOPERATION**  
MA Secretary of Education Matt Malone

In a frank admission, Malone said his early leadership style was both top-down and often adversarial. He said that, while his approach did get people's attention and earned him promotions, it eventually led to his receiving a vote of no confidence from the teachers in Swampscott. "I took it personally," Malone confessed. As a result of this experience, when Malone was given a chance to be a superintendent in Brockton, he made sure to sit down with the union in a spirit of cooperation. He stressed his belief that collaboration is not the same as making a decision and then forcing the union to accept it.

Noting that Brockton is now the model of collaboration that is held up by the

MTA, Malone expressed his hope that, in a similar way, Lowell will become the model for the AFT MA.

"The work is in the classroom," Malone suggested. He also observed that there are "two kinds" of statewide educational leaders: those who fancy themselves financial gurus or politicians; and those who have worked in a classroom, who are known by their first names, and who do not require a driver to get them from town to town. Malone stated that he does not want to sit atop a hierarchy but wants to form "one cross-functional team."

"As Secretary of Education, I am not a politician," he assured. "I came aboard for one thing: the kids." He added that he and the unions may not always agree, but he stressed that he would always listen.

"Keeping up with education reform lately has been like drinking water from a fire hose," quipped Malone. "I get it. Things have been forced upon you."

Malone then went on to explain his list of current priorities, at the top of which are EDFS and RETELL. "Let's get a couple of things done well before adding more," he said. When speaking of the rollout of Common Core standards, Malone suggested that we "do it slowly so we get it right." Though he is often asked where the "bad schools [and] teachers are," Malone confirmed that we have "good teachers."

Even so, Malone admitted that all is not perfect. For example, although recent data suggest that 67% of third graders read at grade level, only 37% of African-Americans and 36% of Latinos do.

"Call your reps to support the Governor's [education] package," he urged. "After eight years of cuts, the Governor's plan restores what was cut."

After his speech, Malone asked for questions from the audience. Several people, including union leaders Timo Philip of Boston, Paul Georges of Lowell, and Patty Nizwantowski of Peabody, asked some pointed questions. Malone did not shy away from criticism. Indeed, he was at times sympathetic and apologetic. He even encouraged veteran teachers to respectfully challenge younger, inexperienced principals. "If you won't guide them," he warned, "nothing will change."

AFT Vice President Fran Lawrence next addressed the conference. A fifteen-year president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, Lawrence stressed high quality and teacher-driven professional development.

"Let's face our challenges," Lawrence urged. "Let's help Matt Malone succeed."

Lawrence extolled the collaborative approach between the Lawrence teachers and administration at the Henry K. Oliver School. "Our members will have a say in how the school runs," she assured.

Lawrence even quoted Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin who

said, "we can turn around a school when there is trust and shared responsibility."



**URGING COLLABORATION**  
AFT Vice President Fran Lawrence

Calling for systematic change, Lawrence stated, "We need to change the law that says for a teacher to lead, she needs an administrative certificate." She then suggested that, if president Obama and his staff expect different results, they have to change the credential-bound culture of education.

Citing the model of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) used in Toledo, Lawrence declared that we need a systematic approach for preparing new teachers, especially in the area of classroom management. She pointed out that, unlike the United States which has a massive patchwork of disconnected requirements, top-performing countries spend more money to ensure that new teachers are prepared well and that all their preparation training is aligned.

"PAR teachers own the standards," Lawrence explained. "Teachers enforce them." Lawrence also expressed her belief that high quality teacher evaluations ought to support teaching instead of being used as a sorting tool to find "bad teachers." Whereas Asia views teachers as the answer, she observed, Washington seems to believe that the answer is found



**SHOWING SUPPORT** Candidate for US Senate Ed Markey (Center) meets with (from left to right) AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan, AFT-MA Vice President Gale Thomas, and former Lynn Teachers Union President Alice Gunning

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in competition instead of cooperation.

In closing, Lawrence reminded the audience the role collaboration has played in defeating limits on collective bargaining and supporting unions in myriad other ways. "Union leadership alone would not have defeated...anti-union legislation," she suggested. "We had allies in the community. We can turn our challenges into opportunities by uniting our members with the communities which we serve." ■





## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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

# The Crisis in Lawrence Continues

**O**ur teachers in Lawrence are facing a crisis. The American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA) supports what is good for students, fair for teachers, and done collaboratively. The Education Bill of 2010 is not good for students, is unfair to teachers, and gives hearty approval to top-down management.

In Massachusetts, our public school students achieve spectacularly well on national and international tests. All of our students are taught by teachers who work under collective bargaining agreements. Clearly, collective bargaining is not an impediment to student achievement. Yet this legislation has as one of its principles that collective bargaining and teachers in so-called underperforming schools stand in the way of student achievement. No data exists to support such an assumption.

The legislation does nothing to provide more resources to any so-called underperforming public school or to the students who attend them. The Education Bill of 2010 fails children who live in poverty, have inadequate medical and dental care, need better housing, have parents for whom no jobs are available, and feel threatened by random violence in the community. The legislation

permits the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to take over a public system, thus allowing the Commissioner of Education to have almost unlimited control over the professional lives of the teachers.

This legislation essentially creates a double standard. It says that if you are a teacher committed to taking on the greatest challenges, we are going to reduce your rights. It establishes two sets of rules: one for educators who work in so-called underperforming schools and another one for those who work in the neediest schools.

**The Lawrence school system needs an injection of trust in the capacities of its teachers to make wise educational decisions.**

The state has taken over the Lawrence Public Schools and is trying not only to reduce the rights of teachers there, but also to impose draconian working conditions on them. The length of the school year and the school day, staff schedules, teachers' preparation periods, the number of periods teachers must teach, school health and safety issues, professional development, and even teachers' salaries are all subjects

that can now be implemented and controlled by the school principal without teachers, represented by their union, having the right to collectively bargain about them.

Is this professionalism? Is this collaboration?

Noone knows better the educational needs of the children in the Lawrence schools than each teacher in the Lawrence schools. They are the professional who each day interact with the students and are quite knowledgeable about what they need to achieve. Unfortunately, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the current leaders in Lawrence prefer a top-down approach.

The Lawrence school system needs an injection of trust in the capacities of its teachers to make wise educational decisions. It also needs to collaborate with the Lawrence Teachers Union to obtain more resources to help deal with the dreadful poverty.

After all, the teachers of Lawrence want what is good for the students, fair to the teachers, and collaboratively done.

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

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On May 9, Jonathan Kozol will be honored by Citizens for Public Education with the Deborah W. Meier Award for Heroes in Education. The ceremony will be held from 6 – 8:30 PM at the Multicultural Arts Center in Cambridge. Please reserve tickets now by visiting [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).

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BUILD - a college preparation program that supports disengaged, low-income students through entrepreneurship - is seeking volunteers for their second annual Youth Business Plan Competition on Saturday, June 1, at Northeastern University.

Over 100 students on 20 teams will compete for a cash prize of \$1,500. Event organizers are expecting over 500 guests including students, families, mentors, business coaches, corporate partners, venture advisors, board members and friends. For more information, please email Hena Banerjee, at [hbanerjee@build.org](mailto:hbanerjee@build.org).

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

## The Advocate

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Whether you are new to teaching or new to a union, there are certain terms that are helpful to know. In fact, there are many! In the educational spirit, we at *The Advocate* present this collection of definitions and explanations that we hope will make your life in AFT as easy as ABC.

**D**irectly Affiliated Local Union (DALU) (n.) - A United States labor union that belongs to the AFL-CIO but is not a national union and is not entitled to the same rights and privileges within the Federation as national affiliates. At one time DALUs were called 'federal labor unions,' and some trade unionists still refer to them as such. Most DALUs have fewer than 1000 members and represent workers in only one workplace.

DALU status is usually indicated by the sign on a union office or the title of a webpage, e.g., 'DALU Local 2002, AFL-CIO.' The origin of the numbering system is obscure; that one DALU is called 'Local 2002' does not indicate the existence of 2001 other DALUs, either currently or historically.

Legally, the AFL-CIO is the parent union of the DALU, and is therefore responsible for filing appropriate forms and providing bargaining support.

Over time, the number of DALUs has diminished drastically, especially during the period before the merger of the AF of L and C of IO (see February, 2013 issue). During the mid-1930's, hundreds of DALUs were dissolved by the AFL and members were assigned to other unions. In the early 1970s, the AFL-CIO's official policy encouraged DALUs to merge with national affiliates. In 1995, the AFL-CIO executive council adopted a policy officially preventing the charter of new DALUs. However, on February 27, 2006, the AFL-CIO and the National Education Association (NEA) agreed to permit NEA local unions to join AFL-CIO state and local bodies as a 'directly affiliated NEA local' (DANL) and to have the same rights and obligations as any DALU. These rights include representation and voting, and coverage under the 'no-raid' provisions of the AFL-CIO constitution. On March 1, 2006, the AFL-CIO executive council adopted the Unity Partnership which allows independent unions that do not qualify for a national charter to directly affiliate as a 'direct local affiliate' (DLA) similar to a DALU.

Have a question? Want a term defined? Write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).

NOTE: All "ABCs of AFT" columns are now available on our website, [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net).

# BOLD PRINT

Boston Teacher Union (BTU) elections are coming. Members can vote by absentee ballots which are scheduled to be mailed the week of May 6. Ballots are due back to the BTU by June 4. On June 5, BTU will host in-person polling at their hall.

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# Expanding the “Circle”

## Lawrence theater troupe hoping to take their act “across the Pond”

Lawrence is a city and a school district in distress. Issues in the capitol and in the schools are mounting and, though teachers have proposed viable options, they continue to face obstacles and frustrations. While many teachers and students continue to feel trapped in their crumbling buildings, a group of Lawrence scholars has found a way out and also a way to potentially inspire others.

Once a city-defining site of academic achievement, Lawrence High School is now divided into six distinct schools. Among these is the Performing and Fine Arts High School (PFA). The fact that PFA is one of only two public performing arts schools in the state makes it special enough. This year, the level of “special” is being raised a notch.

Under the direction of theater teacher Mathew Evangelista, students at PFA have created a play about their city. “The Circle Game” (after the Joni Mitchell song about child development) focuses on stereotypes that many urban residents face and effective ways to deal with them. Having already made a positive stir in Lawrence, the play was recently accepted to the prestigious Fringe Festival in Scotland.

“This is a rarity for any city school,” observes Lawrence media specialist Chris Markuns.

While the August trip to Scotland would be a dream come true, Evangelista says that his real goal is to “help change the minds and views” of people outside of Lawrence. “We strive to help change the stereotypes and judgments

of urban youth in America, one person and community at a time,” he says.

As he has been involved in theater since he was eight, Evangelista is well aware of the challenges involved, but also touts the positive aspects that the arts can promote, especially for students in cities like Lawrence.

“I have been involved in Lawrence theater since the new LHS building opened in 2007,” Evangelista explains. “I knew I wanted to teach from a very young age and everything I have done since high school I have done to get more experience in theater education.”

In his efforts to serve his school and his community,

Evangelista and his wife came up with the premise for “Circle” two years ago, inspired, he says, by the very students he hoped to direct in it.

“When I first started working in Lawrence,” he recalls, “I came to know each of the students.... After a few years of working in the district, we decided we needed to have these students tell their stories.”

While many may see high school as a rite of passage that is generally similar for all students, Evangelista says

that LHS has its own “unique” challenges. “I never understood how much these students had to truly overcome to reach the same level or try out the same opportunities I had in high school,” he explains. “We wrote the show so we could help show others what kinds of situations these students had to face everyday in order to succeed in life.”

Fortunately, this opportunity to depict what they have to deal with in order to succeed is helping many of these

students succeed.

“By participating in theater, students tend to feel more comfortable sharing,” Evangelista suggests.

“The more we learned about the students and

the city, the more we wanted to share their stories.”

In addition to involving the students, the show also incorporated ideas from teachers, administrators, and even the school’s security officers. Evangelista also took his ideas to the streets in order to get more input. “We also did a lot of research outside of Lawrence,” he explains, “looking at gang culture and urban life.”

According to Evangelista, the response has been very positive. “The

piece was extremely well received in the school district,” he notes. “The staff and students considered it an honest interpretation of the life and issues our students face day to day.”

“Our students shined a light on their own experiences...growing up in the inner city,” said former Curriculum Director Eric Juli in an early review. “The students addressed...reality, and offered the viewer insight into their own experiences and identity.”

Having performed “Circle” as part of the Mass Drama Guild Festival and the Mass High School Collaborative Theater Festival (where it received multiple awards), Evangelista is now preparing to take the dramatic community snapshot to another country. Unfortunately, financial obstacles may still stand in the way.

“We have [about 60] days left to raise...the money to go on the trip,” Evangelista explains, noting that he has been spending as much time fundraising as he has rehearsing. In addition to asking around for help, Evangelista has put some footage on YouTube and even launched an online campaign (<http://fundly.com/pfa-high-school-goes-to-the-fringe-festival>). In a letter to potential funders, Evangelista says that, while his department is “dedicated to making this trip a reality...we need your help.”

“The work Matt and company have put in to put together the show, get this recognition and now make this trip happen is something to see,” Markuns says. “I hope they get there!” ■



**ON THE FRINGE** Members of Lawrence’s PFA theater community hope to go to Scotland to perform in a prestigious international festival

# Serving Each Other

## GBLC labor breakfast offers support and sustenance

On Wednesday, April 10, nearly 300 union leaders and activists gathered at the Omni Parker House Hotel for the 2013 Greater Boston Labor Council (GBLC) annual legislative breakfast.

“The breakfast provides us the opportunity to outline our collective concerns to a large group of lawmakers and legislative leaders,” explained GBLC Executive Secretary-Treasurer Richard Rogers.

As the local leaders found their seats, Rabbi Barbara Penzner of Temple Hillel B’nai Torah in West Roxbury set the tone for the event with a story about the difference between Heaven and Hell. In Hell, the story went, people sit at tables laden with delicious foods, but as they cannot bend their arms, they starve and are tortured for eternity. In Heaven, on the other hand, the situation is greatly the same, except that the people there have figured out that, even if they cannot serve themselves, they can feed and support their fellow men and women.

“We need to share the bounty that is sitting right in front of us,” Rabbi Penzner suggested as the guests began to enjoy their plated breakfasts. “We are living proof that when people help each other, we can all benefit!”

In his remarks, GBLC President Lou Mandarini commented on how busy the political scene has been of late. “It hasn’t stopped,” he suggested, looking at the nearly constant flow

of elections and other pressing matters (not the least of which is the state budget, which was being handed down only blocks away at the State House), “and it may not stop ‘til next year!”

Looking over the larger landscape of state politics, Mandarini went on to observe that “there are a lot of problems out there,” making a special point to note that “schools need money.”

In a pointed “message” to the many local and state representatives who had come to participate in and partake of the breakfast, Mandarini said, “You were elected to do a job, so start doing that job instead of working to get elected.”

Among the legislators who were in attendance were Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz and Representative Jeff Sanchez. While he was appreciative of their involvement and support, Mandarini suggested that, if any other legislators needed lessons on how to lead, all they had to do was look around the room. “We lead by example,” he said of his brothers and sisters in Labor, “and we worked awful hard to elect you.” He also hinted that, in future elections, Labor will continue to play an important role and that, if elected officials wanted to be able to continue to count on their help, they needed to help the unions in return.

In his comments, Rogers picked up the theme of challenges and ways to overcome them. “We live in troubling times,” he said, noting how so-called

“austerity budgets” have cut into funds for central services. As many are giving up looking for work, he said, it is “essential” that Massachusetts remain a leader to combat the “twin evils” of joblessness and income inequality.

Thanking the AFT for their support of early education and child-care workers, Rogers said that we need to provide “the same level playing field” for all low-wage workers. Citing GBLC’s support of education and infrastructure investment and the other elements that are championed by the advocacy efforts of Campaign for Our Communities (see previous issues for further coverage), Rogers echoed Rabbi Penzner when he suggested that we all need to continue to work together to serve each other and the Commonwealth.

“There’s too much at stake not to make the effort to find common ground,” Rogers said.

Mass Building Trades Council President Frank Callahan then echoed Rogers in his comments when he said, “There’s work that needs to be done and people who need work....Let’s put it together and help Massachusetts remain a leader.”

Secretary of Labor Joanne Goldstein then went back to the Rabbi’s words when she observed how important it was for us to “take care of each other.”

“I think that is what the Governor is trying to do,” Goldstein said, “In terms of support for education and

infrastructure.”

Goldstein also mentioned the availability of millions of dollars in training funds from her office. “I am probably the only state leader who will come before you today and offer you money,” she smiled.

Before the event could come to a close, Mass AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman offered a rousing speech that began with an excerpt from a letter from Abraham Lincoln decrying the way corporate malfeasance had been “destroying the Republic.”

“Sound familiar?” Tolman asked pointedly.

Arguing that Labor has been “under attack” and “made to feel guilty” for 30 years, Tolman picked up the theme of collaboration and cooperation that had run through the entire breakfast.

“We got to stick together,” he shouted, “and turn this thing around!”

Taking a special look at education, Tolman assured the audience that his colleagues had “no intention” of removing collective bargaining from Level 4 and 5 schools. “That is unacceptable,” he said of new proposals to make teachers give up salary in exchange for further employment. “That is not what Massachusetts is about.... We should not blame teachers who give their hearts and souls to help our children.”

Tolman then warned the union leaders that if the teachers are being punished now, “next, they will come for the building trades.” Therefore, Tolman concluded, “We have to remain vigilant and persistent in our fight.” ■



# Diary

## of a New Teacher

**Chaya Harris**  
Fifth grade teacher,  
Mather School, Boston

### Meet the 2012-2013 New Teacher Diarists

The following new teachers will be contributing to the New Teacher Diary during the 2012-2013 school year. The *Advocate* thanks all of these fine teachers for sharing their experiences.

**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

**Robert Tobio**  
Math and special education teacher,  
Mary Lyon Pilot School, Brighton

**Kirk Ahrens**  
Ninth grade ELA teacher  
Mary Lyon Pilot School, Brighton

**Bill Madden-Fuoco**  
Humanities teacher,  
Urban Science Academy, West Roxbury,

It is morning writing period in my fifth grade classroom, and 23 students are eagerly awaiting the resolution of my story.

“My mom tells me it’s time to say goodbye, and so she places her phone next to Spike’s ear. I’ve loved him for 18 years, and can hear his strained breathing. I’m laughing through my tears – how do you say farewell to a dying cat on a cell phone?”

My students react as if they were there with me. Then hands shoot into the air. Just about every child has an animal anecdote to share before they start their poems. But, of course, it is MCAS season, and there is not enough time to listen to 23 stories during our ever-accelerating school day.

This is my third MCAS season to muddle through as a classroom teacher. Previously, writing time was dedicated to extended multiple-choice practice or open response strategies or whatever was needed for the day’s MCAS lesson. Anyone who walked in would know we were in full MCAS mode, just like most of the diverse, low-income schools in Boston.

This year, however, I could actually feel students losing motivation. What could I do to engage, yet continue to prepare them? I decided to become a student myself, and engage poetry.

According to the standards, poetry should be incorporated into the curriculum throughout the year. With all the school-day demands, though, I never had time for students to craft their own poems. With a degree in journalism, I feel very skilled in teaching writing, but my comfort level with poetry is not as high. My personal interest in poetry ended when I had to memorize “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost in sixth grade. I knew I could not approach my students with that and expect wonderful results.

After reading *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, a Newbery Honor book in which a young girl uses

poetry and free verse to talk about fleeing war-torn Vietnam with her family, we wrote “Wish” poems. They ranged in topics from students meeting Justin Bieber and eating pizza everyday, to getting rid of the mice and roaches in their apartments and having their fathers released from prison in time for summer vacation. My students’ wishes not only moved me, but also motivated me to learn more in order to better teach them.

I had the students design and organize notebooks to help keep track of their progress, but also to allow them to share with me. I loved their honesty, and some of the students who seldom spoke up in class seemed almost desperate for me to read their writing. I stayed up, ardently working through my part-time job just so I could respond in their notebooks and plan poetry lessons. I found myself engrossed, turning page after page of poems, really impressed and amazed by my students and by several published poets, too.

So far, we have worked on concrete, animal, and sensory poems, along with figurative language and rhyme patterns. It has been a great balance and stress reliever for MCAS preparation, but one that still reinforces and teaches many literary skills. We have also learned about many noteworthy poets, such as Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams, Joyce Kilmer, Jack Prelutsky, and even local writer Ashley Bryan who recently visited our school.



**THE POWER OF POETRY**  
Fifth grade ELA teacher Chaya Harris uses verse to promote literacy for MCAS and for life

Students ask me at the end of almost every writing lesson if they can continue working on a poem or if we can do similar activities the next

day. Talk about being engaged!

Perhaps the biggest impact I have seen is in our classroom community. Since we began poetry writing, students seem to be kinder to each other, more productive working in groups, and more invested in their own learning. It makes me hopeful that I have succeeded in one my favorite colleague’s mantras: You have to meet your students where they are. As an inclusion teacher for the last two school years, I considered myself adept at differentiation, but I have discovered that meeting them means even more than that. It means understanding children’s individual needs to get them to be motivated learners, and doing whatever we can to get them there.

I am now excited to enter my classroom everyday and try new instructional methods, and students are also making progress and being true learners. Through just a few weeks of poetry writing, I have learned more about my students’ needs than tests or data or even conferences have shown me all year. And that, to quote Mr. Frost, has made all the difference! ■

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# Summa Cum Laude: Philip Amara

As has been seen in this column and throughout our publication, AFT members really know how to draw on their own life experiences to make the lives of others more productive and successful. Few do it as well (or as literally), however, as Josiah Quincy School (JQS) teacher Philip Amara.

A graduate of Boston Latin School, Emerson College and Salem State University, Amara clearly has close ties to the area and a clear passion for education. “The importance of education was emphasized at BLS,” says Amara, “but, as the son of educators, it was simmering even before that.”

Amara has taken this passion for the classroom from JQS to Japan and is a creator of the popular *Mighty Writer!* after-school literacy enrichment program. At JQS, Amara is also a member of in-school ILT and technology committees and a volunteer for the school’s annual Literacy Night.

When asked why he does so much to support his students and others around the world (Amara has his Boston students write to “pen-pals” in Japan and also sent support after the devastating earthquake there), Amara credits his parents and his many other talented and dedicated teachers with forming and supporting his life and career. “The highest compliment I can pay the teachers who taught me,” he suggests, “is that I don’t have a favorite. From grade school to graduate school...they all added to my success.”

In addition to being a “favorite” teacher to many, Amara is also an award-winning comic book artist.

In the guise of this alter-ego, Amara flies, superhero-style, all over the known (and unknown) universe sharing his talents with fans and friends at events like the Boston Comic Convention (Comic Con) on April 20-21. Amara’s latest book, *So You Want to be a Comic Book Artist?* (Aladdin) combines his talents and passions by helping him help other talented artists hone their skills. “Just as my teachers shaped me,” he says, “I hope I can recognize my students as individuals and take them a little further down a good path they’ve already chosen for themselves.”



**ANIMATED ACADEMIC** Philip Amara combines comics and the classroom to create super students

many of his teachers had to find ways to use this form of visual literature to engage and instruct him. “The most generous of my teachers found a way to harness that to inspire me further in my studies,” he recalls, noting how he has been able to take his own “lifelong interest in comics... to support a range of students in and out of the class.”

In addition to using his lifelike images to inspire and instruct, Amara also

brings learning to life by setting up his classroom as a talk show studio and inviting guests that range from the Japanese Consulate to a Harvard robotics professor to speak with and be interviewed by his students. Such real-life learning, he says, is what keeps his students and himself engaged. “By getting curious about life beyond school,” Amara says of his super students, “they never stop being students.”

Another element of his art that helps him appeal to students, Amara says, is its visual nature. “The visual language of comics is astounding for differentiation,” he observes, noting that differentiation expert Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson

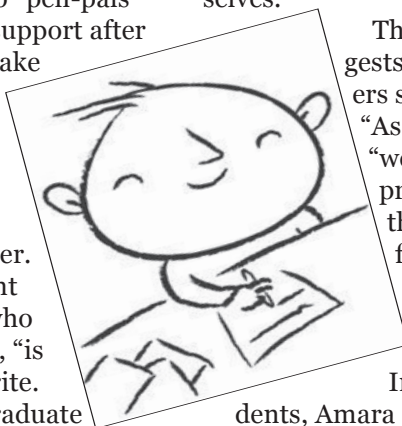
is a fan of his book and his work. “The art form supports all types of learners.”

Graphic novels can also serve as a great graphic organizer. “Students recently read the true story about Harry Randall Truman, the man who refused to leave his home when Mt. St. Helens erupted in 1980,” Amara recalls. “Instead of taking notes, they drew an image based on descriptive language in the text.” These images were then turned into comics on which the students wrote dialogue balloons and captions that were also taken from the text. “When we get to the actual writing assignment, the improvement is almost instantaneous,” Amara notes.

When not hosting a classroom talk show or drawing for and with his students, Amara uses other creative curricula such as the *Mighty Writer!* program to strengthen their ELA skills through creative writing. “For them,” he suggests, “it doesn’t even feel like school!”

As it is school, however, and as he realizes that his students will eventually have to draw their next panel and move on, Amara hopes that they can at least take some of the creative fun that they discovered and developed while in his class.

“My hope for my own students,” Amara says, “is that I can hone in on where they need the most support given their stage of development, and that their teachers after me will relish those next teachable moments just as I did.” ■



This, Amara suggests, is what all teachers should aim to do. “As teachers,” he says, “we are salt meant to preserve the valuable things taught by their families and cultures, to accent the things students find fascinating.”

In order to reach students, Amara observes, one must gain their trust. “I think once a student trusts your role as an educator, they more than meet you half way.”

As Amara claims to have been a fan of comics since the third grade,



## The Golden Apple



**Paul Properzio**  
Latin and Greek Teacher,  
Boston Latin Academy,  
Boston, MA

I grew up in a close-knit Italian family in Keene, NH. *Nona* (Italian for grandmother) spoke to me in Italian and I got used to hearing another language besides English. I had an ear for languages, but it was *Nona* who first inspired me to study them. Her brother was a brilliant man who could speak Italian, French, and Russian. I would spend Saturdays at his house which had a huge garden, grape arbors, and a victrola (record player). He played classic arias by Jenny Lind and Enrico Caruso which inspired my interest in classical music to this day.

As an altar boy at St. Bernard’s, I memorized a lot of Latin. I studied more of it both at Keene Junior High and Keene High School. I also studied French and completed high school with four years of Latin and French. As a junior, I won admission to the prestigious summer program in advanced studies at St. Paul’s School in Concord, NH. The program I chose was Russian which I continued in college.

I went on to the University of New Hampshire where I studied Latin and Russian and included Classical Greek in a double major with Latin. I also

took a minor in Italian and studied Sanskrit.

My Latin and Greek professor was Dr. John Rouman, a newly minted Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. As a doctoral student, he had gone to the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton and produced the definitive work on the Greek inscriptions from Thessaloniki (Salonica), Greece. He had also been a Fulbright Scholar in Germany. John and I have remained close friends and colleagues since I graduated from UNH. He is my most inspirational teacher. The John Rouman Classical Lecture Series at UNH was established in his honor in 1998 and will be having its 15th anniversary in October with many international guests celebrating the Classical World.

Before graduating from UNH, I myself won a Fulbright Scholarship to the University of Pavia, Italy. Dr. Rouman suggested that I apply to doctoral programs in Classics. Loyola University offered me a four-year fellowship which I gladly accepted. While at Loyola, I studied with Dr. Raymond Schoder, S.J., a Jesuit with an international reputation as an archaeologist and Greek scholar. He was my second-most inspirational teacher! Dr. Schoder made it possible for me to research my doctoral thesis on Greco-Roman Marseilles in Southern France. The main inspiration for my thesis topic, however, came from Loyola Professor Al Oikonimides who also ran a major publishing company in Chicago. We traveled to the South of France in the summer of 1974 and stayed in the beautiful sea-side town of Antibes on the Côte d’Azur.

From 1975-87, I was Chair and

Associate Professor of Classics at Drew University. While at Drew, I was a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton University in the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. From 1987-93 I taught Latin, Ancient History, and Classical Mythology at Reading High School in Reading, MA. From 1993-97 I was Associate Professor of Classics and Humanities at St. Anselm College in NH.

In 1997 I began teaching Latin, Greek, and The Myth Tradition at Boston Latin Academy and have never looked back. At BLA, I have excellent students who meet the challenges of the rigorous college preparatory curriculum, including four years of required Latin.

In 2008, Dr. Rouman nominated me for the American Philological Association Award for Excellence in the Pre-Collegiate Teaching of Classics, which I received. He also nominated me for an Ovatio Award by the Classical Association of the Atlantic States which will be presented to me at the University of Pennsylvania in 2013.

While I appreciate and am humbled by all of these awards and accolades, my greatest achievement



### MANY MENTORS

**Paul Properzio (right)** took advice and support from many, but credits **Dr. John Rouman** with helping him find his way in academia and in life.

has been teaching at BLA where I interact daily with students who truly inspire me. One BLA colleague stands out. She is Janet Fillion who has taught Latin at BLA for over 40 years. Janet is the dynamo behind the Classics Club and spearheads all of its programs. Her classroom is always filled with students planning club activities. She also involved me in Certamen (a jeopardy-like quiz game where students answer Latin and Greek trivia). I have coached the BLA intermediate Certamen team for 15 years. My students have won many trophies competing against the likes of Boston Latin School and Roxbury Latin School.

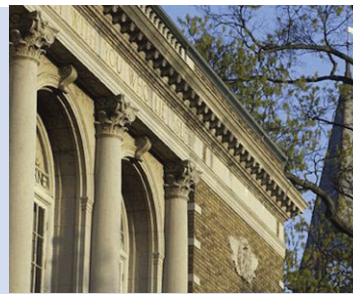
While colleagues like Dr. Rouman may stand out, I am fortunate to say that my personal and professional life has been filled with individuals who have inspired me to reach my potential and become the teacher that I am today. ■





## On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



# MA Higher Education: Separate but unequal

After 14th seeded Harvard defeated 3rd seeded New Mexico in the Western Bracket of the recent NCAA championships, the *Harvard Lampoon* tweeted, “America, we are sorry for messing up your brackets and also your financial system and everything else.”

The apology was more exuberant than sincere; the *Lampoon* is exactly that, and Harvard had just won its first NCAA tournament game in history.

The claim that graduates from Harvard and other so-called “elite” schools have “messed up your financial system and everything else” warrants consideration, however.

It’s commonly known that graduates from many prestigious schools have flocked to finance for decades. A recent article by a Princeton alumnus in the *Washington Post* suggests that finance and consulting were the top career choices over the last decade for Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Harvard and Yale have also supplied the last four U.S. Presidents, with the recent election more movie plot than reality.

These examples do not constitute proof that elite universities are to

blame for financial crises, global warming, poverty, terrorism, and high gas prices. Nor do they prove that secret societies like Skull and Bones at Yale rule the country (although both Bushes, Bill Clinton, and John Kerry were members). It is just that graduates of elite colleges have a lot to answer for.

You won’t read much criticism of elite schools in major newspapers, but you will read that low graduation rates at public colleges and universities are damaging the American economy and wasting taxpayers’ dollars.

A recent *Boston Globe* editorial (“Mass. public universities need aid, but also cost-saving reforms” 3/27/13) supported UMass’s request that the Commonwealth fund 50% of the University’s instructional cost but in exchange called for “limiting state aid to students who extend their undergraduate experience well beyond their normal four-year graduation path.” The *Globe* recommended increasing college costs to students who take more time to graduate.

The *Globe*’s call for sanctions against public universities with low graduation rates follows the string of

arguments in major newspapers, some citing UMass Boston’s graduation rate of 33%, and academic publications, especially *Crossing the Finish Line* by former Princeton University President William Bowen.

Based on data that tracked 200,000 students at 68 colleges, Bowen’s book (as the title implies) focuses on graduation as the objective of college and graduation rates as the measure of colleges’ success. Bowen and his co-authors show that high-income students most often choose colleges with high graduation rates while low-income students, including those with high GPAs in high school and high college-board scores, choose colleges with low graduation rates.

This is no mystery to anyone in public education. Low-income students can’t afford to attend elite schools with high graduation rates, and even with financial aid, most of the places at elite schools are reserved for high-income students, either specifically through alumni recommendations or through other admissions processes that favor high income students.

Money matters. Schools with low

graduation rates often have lots of students who can’t afford to continue school. Spending per student also matters. Have the *Globe* editors ever noticed the differences between UMass Boston and Harvard or MIT or Boston College or Boston University? Are they blind? Or do they simply accept that Massachusetts has two higher education systems: separate and unequal. Do students, faculty, administrators, and staff at public universities, especially in Massachusetts, also quietly accept second-rate status?

My colleague Bal Ram Singh, whose email messages to UMass Dartmouth faculty and staff inspired this article, recently told me, “Those who work and teach at public colleges and universities lack the self confidence to offer their own remedies for the problems societies are facing. We all get caught up with rankings and brandings of institutions, and give up on our own more innovative and relevant ideas. Of course, some of it is due to administration obsession with copying elite institutions for programs and policies, thus discouraging indigenous scholarship and ideas.” ■

## Take a Mental Health Day

### May 9 is MH Awareness Day

With everything from testing to texting taking up their time and attention, it is easy for children to become overwhelmed and stressed. While such stresses may be brushed off by some as part of life, they can take serious tolls, leading to such conditions as anxiety and eating disorders, Depression and even death.

For nearly 20 years, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)) has been advocating for the mental health of children. In recent years, AFT members have taken the lead in raising awareness of this important but often misunderstood issue.

On May 9, members are asked to participate in the National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day. This annual effort is designed to bring attention to the importance of positive mental health to a child’s social and emotional development.

“Positive mental health is essential to every child’s healthy development from birth,” suggests retired BTU teacher and dedicated child advocate Janey Frank, who is helping with the event.

In addition to being involved with AFT, Frank is also a member of the IDEA Partnership ([www.ideapartnership.org](http://www.ideapartnership.org)). Named for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Partnership is made up of more than 50 national organizations that include policy makers, administrators, practi-

tioners, families, and youth. “The AFT has been a major partner since 2001,” Frank notes.

As the issues surrounding mental health become more complicated and urgent, Frank urges others to educate themselves so they can educate and support others. “We need to...urge our school leaders to embrace an...agenda that meets the demands for school improvement, closes the achievement gap, addresses disparities, and lobby for and support legislation around Safe and Supportive schools,” she says. “We must acknowledge that these students are our students and we must continuously celebrate their achievements and strengths.”

When asked what people can do on May 9 (and on all other days) to support the mental and general health of their students and other children, Frank suggests “involving them in activities and events that emphasize their well-being and strengths [and] improve their resilience to negative situations.” From basketball contests to math-athons to poetry slams, any activity that promotes healthy use of one’s mind and body can make a difference. As green is the official color of mental health awareness, participants are also asked to wear the color on May 9.

“We believe healthier students learn and perform better,” Frank explains, “and that addressing psychosocial and medical and mental health concerns is essential to effective performance.” ■



## Time for Justice

### BESJ conference returns May 17-18

The AFT has always been a bastion of and champion for social justice. Every day, members and administrators stand up for and support each other and their communities in the name of doing what is right.

On May 17 and 18, members are encouraged to take their sense of justice one step further by participating in the third annual Boston-area Educators for Social Justice Conference (BESJ) which this year is being co-sponsored by the Teacher Activist Group (TAG) and the YOUNG Coalition.

“The theme of this year’s conference [is] Educate to Liberate: Creating the Schools we Deserve,” explains TAG founding member and former Boston teacher Jessica Tang, noting that if people want to participate, they can send e-mail to [besjinfo@gmail.com](mailto:besjinfo@gmail.com).

Originally intended as a “small curriculum sharing fair for teachers with social justice interests,” Tang says that BESJ, which will take place at English High School, has become the “signature event” for TAG and continues to grow and gain momentum. According to Tang, the first BESJ grew from 80 to over 200 participants in the days just preceding it. Despite this early success, however, Tang recalls the “two big lessons” that were learned from the initial attempt. “First, we realized that we needed to include youth voice and leadership in order to create an event which really pushed educators to think critically about our work,” she explains. “Second, we realized that we were all starving for more arts, youth and teachers alike.” With these lessons in mind, the second

BESJ explicitly included youth performances and arts-oriented workshops and events in order to appeal to and attract even more participants.

Today, the BESJ serves as an annual gathering place for Boston-area teachers (and others) to come together to discuss best practices and plan meaningful events and actions to support and promote justice. Through a series of workshops and activities (which this year will include a Friday-night panel and youth-led open mic event, as well as a series of participant-led dialogues and a community town meeting), this year’s BESJ is intended to entertain, educate and inspire participants to take the ideas and energy they gather back to their schools and communities.

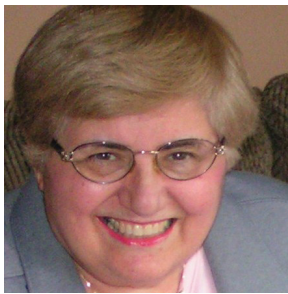
“Youth, parent, and teacher activists have been working together from the beginning to plan an event that is aimed at creating space for dialogue across the divisions which often separate us,” Tang says, noting that parental involvement has also come to the fore as a major goal. “We are reaching out to parent and community organizations to engage them in discussion around some core questions.”

In an effort to make the event even more appealing, BESJ is free of charge and offers free child care, food, and interpreting services.

“It’s going to be great,” Tang says. ■







## Retiree Corner

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

### Looping Around the "1%"

It was not too long ago that many retired seniors counted on the Certificate of Deposit (CD) to help supplement their pensions or Social Security. It was a safe, secure investment for their money that once generated over 17% in interest. Now, in most instances, the rate is less than 1%.

In the Senatorial debate for candidates seeking the seat vacated by Senator Kerry, journalist R.D. Sahl asked if they would like to see CDs improved. I was surprised to hear their negative response. Their reasoning was that this is not the time because the economy is just beginning an up-swing; to increase interest rates on savings now would delay this upward movement. If this is the case, then since 2008, older Americans have been making a tremendous contribution, as interest rates plunged from 4% to below 1%. So maybe the discussion of the nation's wealth is not only aimed at the working folks of this country but includes all of us.

There is approximately \$54 trillion

in wealth in this country that is enjoyed by predominately 1% of the people. Most Americans are living at or below the poverty line, and 40% do not have any wealth. In most instances, these are hard-working Americans, retirees, or people who have fallen on hard times for medical or other reasons. It is mind boggling to think of \$1 trillion never mind \$54 trillion and most of us think the wealth of this 1% and their loopholes do not affect us.

Their wealth and their loopholes, however, do affect us. I have no problem sacrificing for the good of our country. To offer such poor interest rates on CD's while keeping the loopholes for the top 1% in tact is criminal. If older Americans have to sacrifice in the name of improving the economy, then something must be done about the loopholes.

I do not believe in Socialism, but I do believe in fairness. I am not asking the rich to share their wealth with us, but that they stop being so privileged because they are wealthy. They are

recipients of benefits they do not need, and should not have.

I do not have a problem with newly-retired teachers getting pensions of \$60,000 or better. Does it make me a socialist to be concerned about the older retirees making less than 1/3 of those pensions? Is it socialism to want the Massachusetts legislature to decrease the penalties of the Option B/Option C people who retired prior to July 2004 so it is closer in keeping with those retired on much larger pension, or that our veterans retired before July 1996 be given the same benefits as those still working at the time?

We have heard a lot about saving the middle class. This is not rhetoric. Recently, I saw a chart that showed the top 1% having 40% of the nation's wealth. This mostly affects the middle class and, sadly, the middle class is being eliminated. Do you know it takes the average worker a month to make what many CEOs make in one hour? Do they work that much harder than the average worker?

Food pantries cannot keep pace with the increases in the numbers needing their services. Homelessness

### SENIOR SEMINARS

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by Marie Ardito

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in this country is growing in large numbers. This article is not advocating handouts, just looking seriously at the lopsidedness of how we protect the really wealthy while neglecting those who made our country great - the middle class.

People say life is not meant to be fair and we have all seen many examples of this. But let us put an end to the ridiculousness of protecting the top 1% who do not need our protection! ■

### Life-long Learning

#### Educator's Opinion

By John Lancaster

After teaching for three decades, in Billerica, I decided it was time for a change. I submitted my retirement papers and in June of 2005 my teaching career ended. Or so I thought.

As the school year wound down, colleagues would ask me about my future plans. During my career as a secondary teacher, I had taught part-time at Middlesex Community College and enjoyed teaching young adults, so that was a possibility. In the end, however, I sold my house and moved to Austin, Texas- the live music capital of the world!

Teaching was a wonderful profession. It was hard to believe that I was paid to read, write and share my ideas with students! Every day, I learned something new. Although I made numerous adjustments and refinements to my teaching craft, I never quite found the secret to perfect teaching.

When I arrived in the great state of Texas, I applied to teach part-time at the University of Texas (UT). However, I soon realized that my credentials were not quite up to UT standards. Next, I applied at the local community college only to be told that I needed a Master's degree in a discipline in order to be hired. My three decades of teaching and my terminal degree in education did not count. My self-esteem took a hit.

After taking some time to think about my next move, I decided to do some

subbing. When I went to the local school district to fill out the necessary paperwork, I was asked if I had attended "Sub University." As I had not, and as it was a requirement, I attended the next session and, upon graduation, started substituting at the elementary level in the town of Lakeway. I soon realized why elementary teachers were upbeat and happy. The students were energetic, smiling and thoroughly enjoyed the activities!

At the end of the year, I was ready for a new challenge. I decided to go back to college. Austin Community College had a unique program in Construction Technology. For the next two years, I became a student again.

One day, the director of the program asked if I would be interested in a teaching

position when I completed the degree requirements. Before I could think about it, I said yes. For the past few years, I've been teaching Management, Codes and Inspection, Project Scheduling, Blueprint Reading and Construction Business. My return to the classroom has been a rewarding and an enjoyable experience.

While learning and mastering a new discipline, I enrolled in a Master's program at Texas A&M. If I pass the comprehensive exam, I will complete the program this spring.

As Thomas Jefferson said, "Education should be a lifelong process." Being a sexagenarian, I have started to slow down, but I still have a passion for life-long learning! ■

John Lancaster is a former AFT MA member from Billerica who now teaches in Austin, TX.



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