



The Advocate



October/November 2015

Encouraging Engagement

Leadership Conference calls on member action

On September 26, AFT MA leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered in Westborough to support public education and to prepare for what is sure to be a challenging road ahead.

After opening with a short tribute to the late Yogi Berra and a promise to write to Red Sox ownership to ask for lower ticket prices so more AFT MA members can go to games, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell enthusiastically welcomed colleagues and prepared them for a day of progressive ideas and actions.

"It's wonderful having this terrific group here," Gosnell beamed, singling out the teachers, higher education representatives, librarians, custodians, psychologists, counselors, and others who had come together to discuss leadership and union life. "Some of these issues may be more relevant to one group or another...but most of them are relevant to

all of us...[as] we are all part of the union supporting one another."

Looking over the carefully-constructed agenda, Gosnell also noted how it contained only some of the many issues with which members are actively engaging, but encouraged all



LINING UP TO LEAD
AFT MA leaders prepare for a day of education and engagement at the 2015 Leadership Conference

participants to share any and all ideas as the day progresses. He also suggested that members send ideas for stories

to advocate@aftma.net.

"What we are trying to focus on today are the statewide and national issues and how they impact all of us," Gosnell explained. "We need to get ideas out there to involve members."

Issue one was charter schools.

While a show of hands revealed that a few of the AFT MA districts that were represented were not actively dealing with them, Gosnell noted the impact that an increase in these schools in any district will have on public education in general.

"This will be a major battle for us," Gosnell suggested, applauding his colleagues for their prevention of a raising of the charter school cap and looking forward to the State House hearing that was to take place on October 13

(see accompanying story).

"We won a huge victory last year,"
Continued on page 9

Coming Together Against Charter Cap

AFT MA comes out in force at State House hearing

Though the day before had been a national holiday, charter schools across the Commonwealth were closed again on October 13 so students and parents could descend upon the State House to offer their views of what constitutes public education. Many arrived wearing t-shirts proclaiming "I love my public charter school" as representatives from the Charter Parent Leadership Action Network (CPLAN) handed out materials.

United against this largely misinformed group were representatives from AFT MA and many locals, including Boston Teachers Union President Richard Stutman, Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, and Lynn Teachers Union President Brant Duncan, as well as most of the AFT MA staff. MTA President Barbara Madeloni and MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman also participated in a joint effort to demonstrate the broad and united base of support for public education.

After testifying in favor her bill (H464) which is designed to reduce the achievement gap, Joint Committee on Education Co-chair Representative Alice Peisch took up her gavel and began to hear hours of testimony. As statistics were bandied about by supporters and opponents of the charter school cap, passions flared on multiple occasions, requiring Peisch to repeatedly remind the hundreds assembled in Gardner Auditorium that displays of emotion were discouraged.

Fitchburg Representative Stephen DiNatale touted his district's ability to overcome the "turnaround" classification and who also suggested that opening a new charter school in his town would be a "burden."

Auditor Suzanne Bump testified

regarding a series of apparent "oversights" by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regarding the charter school system.

"We wanted to know if the student body of charters reflected those of districts," Bump explained, noting that these concerns had been part of the charter school discussion since the classification was created 20 years ago. "We could not answer those questions because the data was unreliable."

Asking if if the apparent "best practices" devised by charter schools were being shared (as had been their original intent), Bump put it to the panel as to whether they had enough evidence on which to base their decisions. She also tried to dissuade concerns about possible political motivation for her testimony by asserting her role of "speak[ing] up when I see millions of taxpayer dollars being used without evidence of its benefits."

In his testimony, Governor Charlie Baker offered "historical context" for the bill that originally established charter schools and suggested that the plan has "succeeded." Citing the Commonwealth's performance on national and international benchmark tests, he called MA schools "the envy of the nation." However, he admitted, "despite...progress, the achievement gap remains."

Offering charter schools as means of dealing with this issue, the Governor (who served on the board of the charter group known as Phoenix Academy) cited MA as "the birthplace of public education" and proposed charters as "a means of construing and improving that model."

During a questioning session, Representative Michael Day (see profile on page 8) echoed Auditor Bump by

pushing the Governor as to whether charters were sharing their best ideas, as they had been proposed to do, and suggested that the original model was "incongruous" with current models.

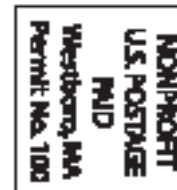
Senator Pat Jehlen then called attention to the fact that "lowest performing" schools is a misnomer as MCAS achievement is closely tied to income and many "underperforming" districts are also underfunded.

In a wide-ranging testimony, Senator Mark Pacheco spoke of Senate Bill 336, which would establish a "moratorium" on expanding charter schools until authentic data can be fully and effectively dealt with. He also mentioned a proposal that would insist all charter school teachers pass the same licensing requirements as traditional public school teachers, "so parents and taxpayers know there is a level of educational attainment and experience that the teacher has in the classroom."

Continued on page 12

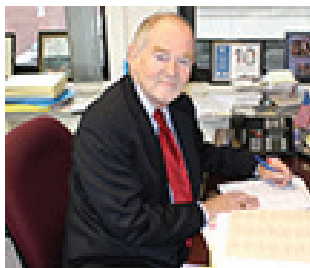


TEACHERS RALLY FOR RIGHTS
Hundreds of Lowell teachers and allies rally before the School Committee meeting to demand a better contract (Please see story on page 4)



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THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

National AFT Comments on Changes in Testing Policy

AFT MA has been working mightily to eliminate high stakes testing and to reduce the amount of standardized testing. The AFT, our national organization, has been working on the national level. I am enclosing the statements issued by the National AFT in response to the Obama Administration's decision to admit that there is too much testing. The administration's admission of problems is a good start, but we'll wait for the regulations to see how good it is.

AFT STATEMENT ON TESTING

Great news! The Administration has changed course on testing. It is a testament to the relentless advocacy we have done collectively - the AFT, the NEA, the BATs, Learning First Alliance, NPE, Schott, Advancement Project and literally thousands of America's public school educators, parents, administrators and school boards and students —on the overuse and misuse of testing.

President Obama (with whom I have had at least 3 direct conversations on testing misuse) and both the outgoing and incoming Secretaries have made public statements today on the damaging effects of high stakes testing and have issues an action plan. While the devil is always in the details, and more must be done to end the fixation

on testing in evaluation and school closure, this plan reflects the evidence, the experience and the calls of parents and educators across the country.

From the plan, a paragraph that could have been written by the AFT:

"In too many schools, there is unnecessary testing and not enough clarity of purpose applied to the task of assessing students, consuming too much instructional time and creating undue stress for educators and students. The Administration bears some of the responsibility for this, and we are committed to being part of the solution."

The Administration will highlight efforts to reduce the effects of high stakes testing including:

Principles for fewer and smarter tests (including competency based assessments) that include limiting time spent on assessments and the need to move away from kill-and-drill, and having testing be just one of the multiple measures used to assess students.

Moving away from assessments being used so heavily in teacher evaluations

Reducing the reliance on student test scores through guidance and executive action. This includes changes in regulations that are expected on teacher preparation programs that will provide states with greater flexibility in determine how to weigh the results of assessments in determining the quality of teacher education programs.

It is by no means perfect, and we will have to see the final regulations, but it is a start. It is important to see this Administration take responsibility. As Secretary Duncan said in his statement, "It's important that we're all honest with ourselves. At the federal, state and local level, we have all supported policies that have contributed to the problem in implementation. We can and will work with states, districts, and educators to help solve it."

PRESIDENT WEINGARTEN'S STATEMENT ON TESTING

"The president and the Department of Education have just proven that advocacy based on evidence works. The fixation on high-stakes testing hasn't moved the needle on student achievement. Testing should help inform instruction, not drive instruction. We need to get back to focusing on the whole child—teaching our kids how to build relationships, how to be resilient and how to think critically. We need to celebrate improvement and the joy of learning, not sanction based on high-stakes standardized tests. So it's a big deal that the president and the secretaries of education—both current and future—are saying that they get it and are pledging to address the fixation on testing in tangible ways. Yes, the devil is in the details, but today it's clear: Parents, students and educators, your voice matters and you were heard."

"This is common sense. It's why overwhelming numbers of Americans think there is too much testing, as seen in the recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, and it's why legislators on both sides of the aisle want to fix No Child Left Behind, a law that drove overtesting. The time to act is now."

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

BOLD PRINT

The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) is extending its Customer Service 'Hotline' hours to include 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. in addition to 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The direct line is 781-381-6600.

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On Saturday, October 24, Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School will celebrate its grand re-opening after a three-year, \$62 million renovation. The celebration will begin with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 AM that will be followed by tours of the new building, sporting events and other entertainment. For more information, visit www.assabet.org.

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In other Assabet news, the Epicurean Restaurant has reopened for public dining. For information and reservations, please call 508-485-9430 x1119.

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Longy School of Music of Bard College will mark their 100th year this year with a series of concerts and other special events. Part of the festivities includes a series of 100-second compositions, as well as honors from the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce & the Harvard Square Business Association, and nearly \$200,000 in grants for music library expansion, building renovations, and to support educational initiatives

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

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It's time to register to VOTE

To register, go to:
<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ovr/>

To check your voter registration status, go to:
<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/Voter-RegistrationSearch/MyVoterRegStatus.aspx>

Questions can be directed to the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth:
<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/seccon.htm>

Training to Win

Commonwealth Democrats unite in Springfield

Despite the fact that the next presidential election is over a year away, thousands of delegates from across the Commonwealth descended upon Springfield for the 2015 Democratic Convention. Festooned in t-shirts, hats, buttons and other regalia that touted support for myriad candidates and causes, the assembled were able to find their way into the Mass Mutual Center arena to hear some of their heroes speak and stump.

Among the labor-supporting organizations represented at the event were AFT MA, MTA, Citizens for Public Schools, More Than a Score and Raise Up Massachusetts. Throughout the day, members of AFT MA visited Political Director Brian LaPierre to sign petitions in favor of putting the so-called “fair share” tax on the Massachusetts ballot and to discuss ways to help public school teachers and other union members in challenging times.

As Massachusetts Democratic State Committee Chairman Thomas M. McGee introduced the platform, delegates found their seats (which were arranged by county) and prepared to participate in a priority-setting program that would last most of the day. Recalling the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (which, he suggested, was among the Democratic party’s many “crowning achievements”), McGee pointed his finger across the aisle, suggesting and emphasizing distinctions between his and other political parties. This is a theme that would be repeated often throughout the proceedings.

After an invocation by Rev. J. P. Morgan, Jr., Committee Treasurer Nicole LaChapelle introduced Springfield Senator Jim Welsh who led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance, which was followed by a sing-along with a Springfield-centered candidate for an official state song.

Calling the Democratic party the “party of empowerment,” Mayor Domenic Sarno thanked delegates for coming to his city and noted the remarkable return Springfield has made since the devastating hurricane two years ago.

House Speaker Robert De Leo

picked up on this theme by thanking the representatives of local law enforcement and the legislature who were in attendance and thanking all who had come for their support of people in need.

“Being a Democrat,” Speaker DeLeo suggested, “is all about helping people.”

Kicking off the list of national legislatures who had come to Springfield to speak was Senator Edward Markey, who bellowed encouragement for the party and the work it has done before engaging the crowd in a chant of “We have more work to do.” Recalling his story of rising from the son of a Malden milkman to a United States Senator, Markey suggested that anyone can achieve if they work hard and that Massachusetts is a leader in enacting such philosophies.

“Massachusetts does not get to sit on the sidelines,” Markey observed. “Massachusetts is the model.” Among the elements for which the Commonwealth is looked to as a guide, Markey noted, is public education, which he asked the delegates to fight for. He also touted the Commonwealth for

She also echoed Markey asking the delegates to fight for what they want.

“We know you get what you fight for,” she said.

After joking about his “cousin” Elizabeth, Newton Mayor Seti Warren suggested that, when the party leads with its values, “we give the best we have to offer,” and charged the delegates to do just that. Seeing the diversity of cultures and candidates represented in the crowd, Mayor Warren also observed that, “We are stronger when we work together.”

After a video celebrating the Voting Rights Act, Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin took the stage to discuss the importance of opening voting to even more people and to tout his office’s recent advances in that regard, including early voting and electronic voter registration (which can be found at www.sec.state.ma.us/ovr/).

“We must make sure that all of our citizens participate,” Secretary Galvin urged, pivoting to a promise to “protect public education and advance it.”

Echoing Senator Warren, Attorney General Maura Healy also thanked the delegates who had done so much to advance her campaign as well.

“I am motivated by the power and possibility of quality, liberty, and justice for all,” she pledged, citing as evidence a number of new community resources her office has helped establish. “We need to champion collective bargaining,” the proud daughter

and granddaughter of union workers said before encouraging a standing ovation for the many union workers in the hall. “We have seen what we can do if we work together.”

While Attorney General Healey spoke of ways to support and protect people, Treasurer Deb Goldberg spoke of investing in them.

“Income inequality has become the greatest challenge of our time” she observed, noting that her office recently launched a college savings program for kindergarten students.

Auditor Suzanne Bump combined her colleagues’ ideas, promising to not let advances made in the realms of wages, education and collective bargaining to be “turned back.”

“No way,” she called. “Not here in Massachusetts!”

After being introduced by McGee, who noted how unions are “under assault” and emphasized how important it is for all delegates to “stand up for our union brothers and sisters,” Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman fired up the crowd with a passionate rebuttal to those who continue to attack us.

Combining a survey of the nearly 1,000 union members in the crowd with the observation that, had it not been for collective bargaining, Tom Brady might not have won the first games of the season, Tolman had all of the delegates cheering along as he

urged them to even greater action.

Citing MA (where laborers enjoy the highest minimum wage and a domestic workers’ bill of rights) as “a national leader when it comes to union values,” Tolman maintained that, the labor movement is under a concerted attack,” citing such challenges as charter schools, receiverships, and other privatization ploys.

“I realize that people here see charters as the answer,” he noted, referring to those who participated in a breakfast meeting hosted by Democrats of Education Reform that morning, “but they take public funds...and are a threat and an anti-union scheme.”

Calling out the Pioneer Institute and other organizations who, Tolman suggested, disseminate misinformation as fact, the labor leader called on every delegate – whether they were unionized or not – to get involved in protecting the rights of all workers. He also encouraged them to sign petitions and otherwise support the fair share amendment (a key component of the campaign by Raise Up Massachusetts, which can be accessed at www.raiseupma.org).

“Get on the train and join us,” Tolman pleaded, to thunderous applause.

After stump speeches for Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Martin O’Malley, the delegates exited the hall to participate in a set of breakout sessions that ranged in topic from the Americans with Disabilities Act to the Voting Rights Act and from education to Social Security.

“We need to give all the children the best education they can get,” said BTU representative Carol Pacheco in a panel about education. “That takes money and that takes action.” Speaking of money, Pacheco pointed out how charters take public schools funds and get additional funds from “outside groups that don’t share our views.” Pacheco also suggested that, while testing is a normal and necessary part of teaching, it should not be used to compare students or to threaten teachers.

As part of a panel on labor and the Democratic party, Tolman was joined by MTA President Barbara Madeloni, who admitted to the “complications” she and other union representatives had faced when coming to terms with supporting their party’s candidates for various offices and also discussed the difficult position educators and other union workers often find themselves in when trying to be loyal to their constituents and their representatives.

“We need to move beyond using words to support unions and start using actions,” she suggested.

“We need to be involved,” Tolman reiterated. “We are all asleep thinking other people are going to do this.”

Citing the recent defeat of legislation that would have lifted the charter school cap in MA (a great deal of which was thanks to labor support), Madeloni concluded by suggesting what so many of her colleagues had suggested earlier in the day.

“We have the power,” she said. ■



THE LEFT IS RIGHT
AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, Senator Ken Donnelly, and MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman stand in solidarity at the 2015 MA Democratic Convention

its pioneering stances on such issues as gay marriage, health care and civil rights.

Recounting her last visit to Springfield, Senator Elizabeth Warren enthusiastically thanked the crowd that had helped her achieve her dream of political leadership and recounted the campaign promises she had tried to make good on, including protecting the right to organize.

“Democrats believe that unions built America’s middle class,” she reminded the crowd. “And they will rebuild it!” Echoing Markey, Warren said, “I tell everyone that, if they want to see the future, they need to come to MA.”



“CREAM OF THE CROP”
New Assabet Valley teachers Lauren Gonzalez, Julie Feeney, Michael Charron, Emily Blackwood, Pam Sheldon, Rachel Johnson, Mary Kate Gaide, and Colby Harvey.

**Keep up with
all of the
“Action” on
www.aftma.net**

Springfield Stands for Reading

Paraprofessionals help make FirstBook event a huge success

On August 29, scores of volunteers gathered at Springfield Central High School to distribute thousands of books that had been donated by FirstBook (www.FirstBook.org) to the students and families of New England's fourth-largest city.

While the program had critics, such as those who suggested that students could get all the books they needed at local libraries, AFT MA members and staff, including Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals President Catherine Mastronardi, emphasized the value of having books in the home and worked for months to ensure that the program could go forward.

"We persevered," Mastronardi said in a blog she prepared for the 413 Reads program. "We knew that statistically only one in 300 children living in a low-income environment owned a single book... [and] that 61% of low-income families

have no age-appropriate books in their homes."

According to research conducted

that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home.



BOOKS FOR ALL

Representative Carlos Gonzalez, Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals President Catherine Mastronardi and AFT MA Political Director Brian LaPierre help distribute books at the recent FirstBook event in Springfield

by Mastronardi and her caring colleagues, the only behavior measure

bring 40,000 free brand new books to the children of Springfield," Mastro-

With this in mind, Mastronardi and her colleagues at AFT MA, including Field Representative Caryn Laflamme and Political Director Brian LaPierre, looked for community partners to help push the program forward.

"Over 215 schools, civic groups, community organizations and faith groups answered our call and joined us in our mission to

nardi recalls, noting that FirstBook requires 2,000 local citizens to become members before the books are sent.

All their efforts paid off when, on August 17, 19 tons of books packed into 52 cartons arrived in Springfield.

"That's over 47,000 books for all age groups," Mastronardi marvels.

When the day for distribution arrived, hundreds of families streamed through the Central High School doors, eager to take possession of what was, for many, their first book.

"The line was so long at one time that it wrapped around the front of the school and the wait was over 45 minutes," Mastronardi recalls. "Many of the children were so excited with their brand new books that they started reading right there in the aisles!"

As the distribution continued, many students and families found a spot outside and continued to engage and enjoy their brand new books.

"The best part of the day materialized when you looked out at the tree lined lawn and saw everyone reading," Mastronardi suggests. "Now our homes are filled with books.... It was a fabulous day!" ■

Salem Encourages Engagement

NSLC training helps members get more involved

On September 21, representatives of the North Shore Labor Council (www.nslaborcouncil.org) came to Salem to support the members of Local 1258 with ways to support each other and their fellow Union members.

"We made new connections that we will utilize to spread information to our members," explains Salem Teachers Union (STU) President Beth Kontos. "We believe that a well-informed and connected Union can work to spread truth on important legislative action that affect our workers and our students."

Among the issues that Kontos hopes to inform and engage her colleagues about are the impact of high-stakes testing, lack of full funding for our public schools, and the goal of holding the cap on charter schools, all of which are also key elements of current campaigns for AFT MA and AFT national.

When asked how the event went, Kontos replied, "It was great!... [They]

got the...members...to identify ways they could individually be a voice for the Union...how could they reach out to those who are not involved... [and] how could they bring the news from the Union meetings back to the schools and spread the information."

Among the members who packed the hall were Bates Elementary School teacher and STU Vice President Ann Berman, who has been involved with STU for seven years, serving as both a building representative and member of the Negotiating Team before being elected to her current leadership role in May.

"As our new E-Board met," Berman explains, "we realized that many STU members were supportive of our Union, but didn't have a clear idea of what we did besides negotiate contracts and rep teachers. We thought this training would bring out some members who want to get involved but didn't quite know how."

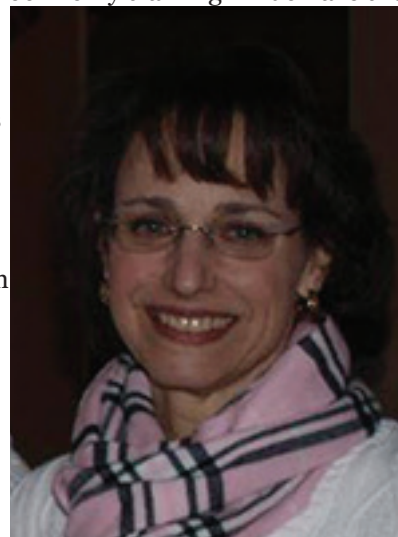
As was the case for many members,

Berman brought along a few colleagues, who then invited others, making for a standing-room-only training from which all benefitted.

"I loved the way the trainers had us role play recruiting," Berman notes. "I was able to really think about the approach and to play to the other person's strengths."

Berman also observed that, in general, the training also encouraged participants to feel more secure in their decisions to take leadership roles.

"We also spent time brainstorming how to engage members who say they don't have time for meetings," Kontos



SUPPORTING SALEM
STUVP Ann Berman

recalls, suggesting that such members volunteer to make phone calls, distribute flyers, or participate in other ways. "Connecting with them now when their time is limited will connect them to the larger group until the time they do have the time to attend more meetings or join a committee," Kontos suggested.

"I hope that STU continues to reach out to its membership in order to increase non-EBoard member participation," Berman added. "It is vital that we get all members to feel comfortable with STU so that, when the time comes to rally the troops, we have plenty of troops willing to step up!"

"Our goal was to empower every member to be the goodwill ambassador in their school," Kontos suggests. "Members left with more in their toolbox to use back at the lunch room and in the hallways of their school." ■

Teachers Take it to the Streets

Over 800 Lowell educators rally for rights

On September 16, nearly 1,000 Lowell teachers and administrators and allies from across the Merrimack Valley and beyond

(including AFT MA members from Billerica, Chelmsford, and Lawrence, and even some members of IBEW and other unions) marched and rallied before the School Committee meeting.

Having been without a contract for nearly 500 days, members

of the Lowell Teachers Union (LTU) showed up in force to support each other and to speak out against a city administration that has been openly against Union efforts.



LEADING LOWELL

Lowell Teachers Union President Paul Georges and AFT MA President Tom Gosnell

"Lowell is one of the best performing urban systems in the state," said LTU President Paul Georges in a statement that was distributed at the event,

"yet those in political power seem to be only concerned about their own political aspirations rather than offering concrete solutions toward a contract settlement."

During the time they have not had an official contract, LTU members have not been granted a cost of living

increase, but have been asked to contribute more to the community they serve.

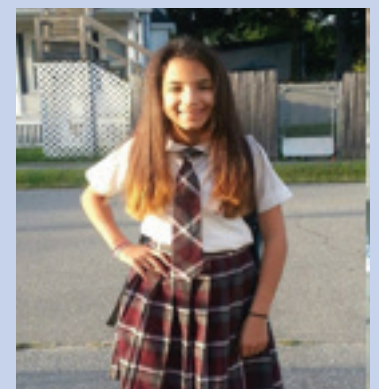
"The committee's last best offer was horrendous and equates to an actual cut in pay when you consider the increase in state GIC health insurance plans" Georges observes. "There is nothing respectful about demanding more from members while not offering even reasonable cost of living increases."

After tying up traffic and taking over much of the downtown area, LTU members and their supporters heard from Georges and also from AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, both of whom spoke encouragingly of all the good LTU members are doing and encouraged them to keep fighting for the rights they so richly deserved.

"The rally was hugely successful," Georges said later, "and we've all been rejuvenated by the response from our members." ■

Help Samira

Samira Sarkis has sickle cell disease and needs to find a bone marrow donor.



Her parents are Lawrence educators Angie and Tony Sarkis.

For information, contact Leigh Sullivan at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at 866-875-3324 or Leigh_sullivan@dfci.harvard.edu, or go to www.bethematch.org.

Please use code Samira2015.

It's Not Brain Surgery

Berklee teacher champions new approach to learning

While there is still great value in considering the whole student, a new focus on the brain itself is becoming more and more popular and encouraging educators to be more comprehensive in their approaches. After all, everything from fitness and nutrition to sleep and stress reduction impinge upon and can potentially improve the brain.

Leading this brain-based approach to education are thought leaders like Berklee professor Pratt Bennett, who has taught over 15,000 students and presented programs for teachers and administrators around the world.

When asked how he came up with his Training Transformational Teachers program (TTT), Bennett replies, that, with each new student he encountered and each new colleague he discussed them with, he began to notice patterns. "It became very clear what actually helps students learn and what doesn't," Bennett suggests. When asked how he brought his ideas to Berklee, Bennett recalls, that, when President Roger Brown heard of them, he embraced them enthusiastically.

"I presented a workshop on paths to Brain-Based Teaching in January of 2011 at a Berklee Teachers on Teaching Conference," Bennett explains. "The next day, [President Brown] announced to the entire faculty that everybody should get that training."

In addition to moving quickly to champion new ideas, Bennett credits President Brown with having a rare ability to make the most of such opportunities as well. His one-day presentation soon developed into a semester-long program that participants were invited and encouraged to take again and again.

"The program I co-designed with Diversity and Inclusiveness Director Kevin Johnson and that the college supported offered something that few if any other colleges did," Bennett observes. "I haven't seen any other college that has offered such a robust and intensive training model and the success of the teachers in it is largely because of this unusually-deep institutional commitment to every faculty

member's right to be supported as lifelong learners."

Having been a lifelong learner himself who has been involved in some sort of teaching since he was 13 years old, when he served as a tennis and ceramics instructor, Bennett (who has a B.A. with honors in Literature from Yale and who also studied Sculpture at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts* in Paris) began formal teaching and student engagement soon after college when he began teaching English to European executives.

"I've been teaching college students since 1990," Bennett recalls, noting that he added career coaching to his expansive list of skills a few years later. Since then, he has worked not only with hundreds of academic colleagues, but with other pioneering people at such international organizations as Coca Cola, Universal Music Group, the U.S. Army, U.S. Dept. of Justice, and the World Bank, training not only teachers, but also government officials, intelligence officers, and secret service agents from countries around the world in such skills as critical thinking, team-building, career-planning, conflict-resolution, and decision-making skills. All of these skills, Bennett says, are also useful and applicable in the classroom as well.

When asked why he has pursued so many educative endeavors, Bennett explains that, whether it be coaching or English or neuroscience, he teaches for the same reason.

"It's challenging and inspiring to help people reach beyond their easy answers and easy goals to identify and pursue the scary ones," he observes, "the ones that excite and terrify them. When the stakes are higher, everyone is much more motivated to learn, change, and take risks."

Not satisfied to teach just to the

point of understanding, Bennett strives to use his vast repertoire of experience and research to take his students and colleagues to the next level.

"I teach to help people redefine what they are capable of," he suggests. "Nothing is more satisfying or inspiring than seeing people astound themselves with their own progress and breakthroughs."

As music is known to have a strong impact on the brain and on learning, it seemed natural for Bennett to bring his artistic and academic proclivities together at the world-famous school.

"I came to Berklee through the advice of a master teacher and mentor Peter Gardner," Bennett recalls. "He made it clear that Berklee is a very special place filled with people who haven't fit into the regular...boxes because [of] their dreams."

As he had spent over three decades dedicated to his work in ceramics, sculpture, and fiction, Bennett understood how powerful an artistic inclination could be and wanted to work with like-minded people.

"Through years of teaching at Berklee, I've seen that the needs of the soul may not be practical," Bennett reflects, "but they change the world in many powerful ways."

With the help of Pro Arts Executive Director Ross Bresler, Bennett has been able to expand

the program to the other area schools in the consortium, which also includes Boston Architectural College (BAC), The Boston Conservatory, New England Conservatory (NEC), Emerson College, Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA).

"My love for this community has



BRAIN-Y EDUCATOR
Berklee Professor Pratt Bennett

North Shore Rallies for Rights

Education Consortium staff get support from far and near

On October 7, representatives from the North Shore Education Consortium Employee Federation, Local 4293, met with administrators from the Consortium (an education collaborative in Beverly, Massachusetts) to continue what has been over a year of negotiations.

Despite the fact that the administration and other non-union employees received significant raises during the 2014-2015 school year, including the Executive Director who received a 3.5% increase on her \$140,000 salary, members of the Federation have had to stretch 1 1/2% over the past three years. Teachers from the Consortium's 18 sending districts have received average increases of just over 2% per year during the most recent contract cycles.

Members of the Federation and several other North Shore unions came out in force to rally for support for Local 4293. Waving signs and encouraging passing cars to honk, the members were vociferous in their support and in expressing their needs "We teach your kids," they yelled at passing cars,

many of whom honked in approval. "We deserve a contract!"

Though the administration had seen fit to hire a large police detail, even the officers appeared empathetic, as did members of other unions, including representatives of National Grid, the United States Postal Service, and IUOE Local 4.

"These guys haven't had a raise for three years," observed North Shore Community College employee and Consortium neighbor Stephan Wilczek. "That's absurd!... What would the kids do

without this place?"

As negotiations began inside, the crowd outside grew, as did the volume level from their chants and whistles

and the horns of passing vehicles

"What do we want? A contract," chanted the group, led by AFT MA Political Director Brian LaPierre, who also took the

opportunity to register voters to support the "fair share" tax proposal by signing petitions. "When do we want it? Now!"

"Everybody gets a contract," said



SUPPORTING HARD-WORKING EDUCATORS
AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre (center) rallies with members of AFT MA Local 4293 in support of staff at North Shore Education Consortium

only grown since I started working with faculty from the other Pro Arts colleges," Bennett beams. "[They] have shown me incredible leaps their students can take through acting, painting, sculpture, public art, filmmaking, and other art forms. These are all amazing people who are trying to make the world a better place through their creativity."

Bennett also applauds the advances that he and his Pro Art colleagues have been able to come to together.

"We've discovered that faculty often get their biggest breakthrough ideas by listening and talking to colleagues from different disciplines," he notes, "possibly because that necessitates dropping jargon and rising up to a higher level of universal concerns about how to better engage, inspire, and educate students."

In addition to giving teachers the latest information about learning-based neuroscience, TTT also offers new techniques and inspiration for teachers and students and helps strengthen the bonds between and among them.

"It [also] puts the focus of teaching on the students' experience," Bennett maintains. "All the teachers I work with put their expertise, experience, and wisdom at the service of triggering students' transformations and breakthroughs."

Another breakthrough that TTT has engendered is a new paradigm of collaboration among the Pro Arts schools.

"With the support of Roger Brown at Berklee, Michael Whelan of Emerson, and Diana Ramirez-Jasso at the BAC, we're building an interdisciplinary community of hundreds of arts educators innovating and sharing so that their students can create bolder and more powerful work and own their place in the world as creative leaders," Bennett explains.

As TTT takes learning to new levels, Bennett says that he hopes that the program can also take the student experience to new levels.

"None of us want our students to look back at college as the greatest years of their lives," he says. "We all want them to see their education as the launching pad for explosive and transformative creative careers." ■

a Local 4 representative whose wife worked at the Consortium. "We have to fight to get ours, but we get it."

"I've never worked in a place that you did not get even a little raise," said paraprofessional Deb McArdle. "It's wrong. People are maxed out. They tell us that they can't do it without us, but we get nothing."

Rallying alongside their union brothers and sisters, colleagues and neighbors were Salem Teacher Union President Beth Kontos and North Shore Labor Council President Jeff Crosby.

"This is the hardest working group of people around...[and] this is a tough situation they are in," Kontos observed, noting how many other districts in the area (including Peabody and Salem) are also currently involved in negotiations. "We are here to support a fair contract, fair wages and fair treatment."

"I think the people of the North Shore appreciate the hard work these people do," added Crosby, promising to return for the next rally on October 27 and noting how his own daughter had received services at the consortium when she was young, "and I think it's a shame they are not paid commensurate to their skills." ■

Meet Your Local Leader: Aaron Snyder

Though many effective teachers come to the field from other disciplines, it is what they do once they have entered the world of education that matters most.

After graduating with a degree in Classics, newly-elected Holliston Federation of Teachers President Aaron Snyder realized that his avocation may not lead to a vocation, and so began to explore other passions to find his path.

"I have always loved working with children," Snyder maintains, "and I have two strong philosophies when it comes to education. The first is to try and make even the smallest of difference to every child that walks into my classroom. Secondly, these children are our future. I want to prepare them for the world around them."

While spending time with his siblings' children, Snyder began to reconnect with his desire to work with other people's children. After convincing his parents to let him move from Ottawa, Canada to the Boston area, he entered a post-baccalaureate program for education and began his career.

"The opportunities I had to work

with children only confirmed that teaching was where I was meant to be," Snyder recalls, noting that he was eventually hired by the school where he had performed his practicum.



CLASIC-ALLY TRAINED
Holliston Federation of Teachers President Aaron Snyder

Having taught since 2001, Snyder sights many of his own teachers as the main inspirations in his life. Among them are a fifth grade teacher who, Snyder says, "had a way of making learning someone that was meaningful." He also credits his student teaching mentor with encouraging a "love and dedication to every aspect of teaching" and for inspiring him to arrive early and stay late.

"She was meticulous in her organization and attention to detail both that have rubbed off on me," he suggests, noting his dedication to classroom organization. "Without organization there is chaos [and] I don't do chaos!"

When asked how and why he became involved in Union life, Snyder replies that he wanted to educate others about world of education.

"It is amazing how many people do not know what goes on in education,"

he observes, "and especially in the trenches of the classroom."

Admitting that he knew little of unions when he entered the teaching field, Snyder says he was pushed into union life by his desires to make a difference and to help others.

"I wanted to understand our contract," he explains when asked about his early career as a building representative, "and help answer questions."

As more colleagues began to seek his advice, Snyder became more encouraged and engaged in AFT MA affairs.

"I was asked to be a member of our contract negotiations team," he recalls. "This was a chance to use my voice and represent the needs of our members."

Though negotiations are not easy, Snyder says they are informative and educational. "I have learned [that] if you are able to please 80% of the people then you've done your job well," he suggests. "I have been happy with how hard we have all worked to best represent our members."

Snyder has already helped see two contracts through.

"Understanding how the other side thinks emphasizes how important the work that you do is for all your members," he observes. "So much happens in the background and others do not get a chance to see it. It has been quite eye opening as to how and what the union does for others."

In addition to his other roles, Sny-

der has also served on the committee for teacher evaluation in our district.

"As I look at what is ahead for me in the next two years, I cannot help but know that I have great support around me," Snyder says, thanking colleagues and fellow local leaders like Mary Beth Numbers, Matt McGuinness and Cathy Simpson for opening his eyes to "just how invaluable the union can be to teachers."

While the burden of leadership can be heavy, especially in today's world where so many public educators are under such enormous pressures to perform and produce, Snyder says that he is dedicated to making a difference and to getting "important messages out to our members."

As he looks forward to a possible administrative role, Snyder remains fully focused on his latest role. "First and foremost as President I want to ensure that all of our members are treated with respect," he assures. "I want to hear their voices and make sure that they're not ignored. I hope to be able to motivate others to take roles in our union, and look at leadership perhaps in the future."

As he continues to become more engaged and to engage more colleagues in union life, Snyder is ever more prepared to face what challenges may come and also to encourage even the smallest triumphs.

"I will celebrate our successes, I will learn from our challenges," he pledges, "and I will work to ensure that it's the students who come first." ■

Meet Your Local Leader: Joel Spruance

As the son of a youth counselor, new Hathorne Teachers Federation President Joel Spruance had long been steeped in the values of serving young people. Recalling his mother's stories about her "rewarding" job, Spruance says that he came to see his own path along similar lines early on.

"I knew I wanted to work with youth and had thought about working in a church," he explains, "but [my mother] encouraged me to explore education."

A lifelong fan of history, Spruance decided to become more involved in teaching it while in college.

"I wanted a way to pass on its valuable lessons," Spruance explains. "Going to school to become a teacher was an obvious career choice to match my passion."

Inspired by the teachers who taught him and also by those with whom he serves today, Spruance says that his own path is constantly shaped

by his colleagues.

"The passion, dedication and various methods that teachers use to impact lives has profoundly changed the way I approach my career," he observes, also citing such vital elements as humor and preparation among the most important parts of his educational philosophy.

When Essex Technical High School was created in 2014, Spruance decided to become more involved in staff life and began to move towards his current position as local leader.

"I have always maintained the belief that in any work setting, my goal is to just do my job well," he explains. "But, after we merged schools, some others and I saw an opportunity for leadership and a chance to work collaboratively with our administration for the betterment of our students. And for that reason I decided to become involved."

From day one, Spruance found himself involved in a contract ne-

gotiation and on the front lines of engagement with the administration.

"I have really been encouraged by the team effort it has taken to get to where we are now," Spruance says, reflecting on the lessons learned through the negotiation process. "I have enjoyed the relationships that have developed within the teacher-administration collaboration."

That relationship has helped Spruance and his colleagues make progress and make a difference in the lives of their students.

"I still believe that a cohesive team of union officers can set the tone for a

new school," he maintains.

When asked what he sees his role to be, Spruance replies, "The goal for our executive officers is to be able communicate with our fellow teachers and the administration."

With that goal as his guide, Spruance says that he and his colleagues have a much larger goal for their school.

"We want to help raise the standard for our school so that our students have access to the best education," he says. "We want Essex Tech to be the best technical high school in the state and we think our union can help

accomplish that goal." ■



STUDENT OF HISTORY
Hathorne Teachers Federation President Joel Spruance

Meet Your Local Leader: Nick Gulla

Despite all the benefits that union life has brought to millions over the past century, many members still think they can bring even more light to the subject of labor. Among these is the recently-elected president of the AFT MA Maintainers at UMass Dartmouth Nicholas Gulla.

Born in New Bedford, MA, the 35-year-old Gulla attended New Bedford vocational high school and is now a third-generation electrician. In addition to following in his father's footsteps professionally, Gulla was also recommended to his union position by his father and another colleague in the electrician's union.

Gulla began his tenure at UMass on February 8, 2004. In 2011, Gulla became involved with the union in an official capacity, becoming Stew-

ard of his Local. "For this country to succeed," Gulla observes, "unions must be strong again and I know we can fix what's going on in the job market today."

As he noticed some colleagues not being as committed to improving their own situations and those of others, Gulla pledged himself to increase engagement with and encouragement for the union. Eventually, that desire led him to his



MAINTAINING LEADERSHIP
Maintainers at UMass Dartmouth President Nick Gulla

current position.

"I want people to care about this local," he says.

Gulla's own caring stretches far beyond any professional capacity. A few years ago, he involved himself in an organ exchange in which he donated a kidney to a man in Atlanta in exchange for that man's wife giving her kidney to Gulla's stepson.

"I was saving two lives," says Gulla. "It was a dream!"

Whether or not Gulla has more passion and generosity in one kidney than others have in two, he is certainly doing all he can to move his local and the lives of his colleagues, friends, and family forward.

"I hope to bring all unions together in solidarity," he says, "and not only fix this union local but inspire more locals to stand up and fight for all of us." ■

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“High Hopes” for Health

Longy grad Dr. Hildy Grossman sings for those who can't

Facing mortality can bring out the best in many people. For lung cancer survivor and advocate Dr. Hildy Grossman, there was a lot of “best” to bring out.

In addition to being an accomplished therapist, Grossman is also an acclaimed singer and founder of the popular and long-running cabaret group known as the Follen Angels. After coming face to face with cancer, Grossman also became the founder of Upstage Lung Cancer (www.upstagelungcancer.org), an arts-based advocacy and awareness-raising group that strives to destigmatize and support research for early detection of lung cancer.

“When we started this organization,” recalls Grossman, who has been cancer free for almost nine years, “our first agreement was that we wanted to create events that used music and were fun for the entire population. ULC is the only cancer organization to exclusively use music and musical events to accomplish our mission.”

On Tuesday, November 10, ULC will present their seventh annual gala fundraising concert at the Lyric Stage (140 Clarendon Street) in Boston. In addition to the talented Grossman, the show will feature Emmy-winning arts and en-

tertainment critic Joyce Kulhawik, as well as celebrated singer-actors Leigh Barrett, Brian De Lorenzo, John King, Paula Markowicz, and popular newscaster-turned-actor Scott Wahle.

“We have the best of Boston’s music and musical theater performers,”

has “always been a singer” and recalls spending time in her father’s nightclub with such legends as Dina Shore, Lena Horne and Dean Martin (who, it turns out, also had lung cancer).

When asked where her musical troupe came up with its name, Grossman thinks back fondly to her days at Longy School of Music, the main building of which is located on Follen Street in Cambridge.

“Life at Longy in the early ‘90s was a magnificent experience for me,” Grossman muses, explaining that she was attracted by Longy’s intimate size, “outstanding faculty” and international flair. In fact, she notes, the original Angels consisted of singers from Japan, Germany, Romania and the US. “I made life-long relationships while there and learned so much about classical music.... I will always be grateful for the time I spent there and the memories that will

never fade.”

In addition to having the privilege of performing with such international stars as Rieko Tanaka from Japan, Janara Khasanova from Kazakhstan, and Sabrina DeCarlo from Italy, Grossman also recalls her many amazing professors and mentors.

“I can honestly say that each teacher touched me with their exper-

tise and efforts to bring out the very best in my work,” Grossman observes, singling out such special friends as pianist Brian Moll and cabaret mentor Dorothea Brinkmann. “He was so helpful in coaching new music...and always encouraging,” she says, adding of Brinkmann, “I love languages, so it was great fun and challenge to learn songs in French, German, Italian and even Russian!”

While most of the songs in the Sinatra show will be in English, Grossman is always happy to take requests and to do all she can to connect with her colleagues, her patients, and her audience, especially if it means educating about lung cancer.

“Lung cancer research and treatment is at the threshold of some major and hopeful directions,” the singing survivor suggests, noting that lung cancer is the number one cancer killer - more than breast, ovarian, uterine and colon cancer combined! “This is the first time there is excitement and hope for extending survival for people diagnosed with lung cancer.”

In past years, the ULC gala has featured music by such iconic lyricists, composers, and singers as Frank Loesser (*Guys and Dolls*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*), Alan J. Lerner (*My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*) and Lawrence-born maestro Leonard Bernstein (*West Side Story*, *On the Town*). As is true of all of them, this year’s gala is sure to be a great night of song, dance, and education.

“You couldn’t find a more entertaining show in all of Boston,” Grossman smiles. ■



SINGING FOR YOU
Dr. Hildy Grossman (third from left) performs at an Upstage Lung Cancer event with (from left) Joyce Kulhawik, Brian deLorenzo and Scott Wahle

Grossman maintains.

As has been true of ULC’s past galas, the show will pay tribute to a great singer or composer by featuring their music. As it is his centennial, this year’s show is a tribute to Frank Sinatra, appropriately entitled “High Hopes.”

When asked when she began singing, Grossman explains that she

DIY PD @ LTU

Lynn teachers take training into own hands

By Phil McQueen

Among the AFT Mantras, “By us not to us” is one that resonates most strongly to me. As a trainer at both the national and the local level, I have had countless opportunities to see how well this idea works when applied to teacher’s professional development. In fact, the AFT is so committed to quality professional development that it lists it as its second great reason to join a union of professionals, suggesting that, no matter how well prepared you may be, ongoing professional development is “vital for growth” as an educator.

Better trained teachers mean better schools. At the school level, this means that it is well-trained teachers who are leading school improvement, rather than outside independent consultants. And nowhere is this truer than in the City of Lynn.

Since 2003, The Lynn Teachers Union (LTU) has been offering professional development in the form of Beginning of the Year Classroom Management and an Introduction to English Language Learners, as well as training for Paraprofessionals. This training is a joint venture, which was initiated under the stewardship of Dr. Fred Cole of The Lynn Business Education Foundation, with the Lynn School Department and has proven to be very successful and popular. Site Coordinator Gale Thomas, along with myself, John Laubner and Sarah McIsaac, offer a number of training sessions throughout the

year. This year, LTU is launching an enterprising teacher-led training initiative called Strategies for Student Success (SSS).

Developed by Rosalind (Roz) LaRoque of the AFT’s Educational Issues Department, this research-based program is made up of modules that address learning for both new and veteran teachers. While most AFT training modules have traditionally been 12 hours in length, SSS modules are three-hour stand-alone units on topics ranging from activating learning in all disciplines, thinking beyond classroom management, bullying, creating coherent and cohesive training and learning and constructing learning groups to differentiating instruction, establishing essential structures for academic learning, engaging parents and guardians, engaging students’ long-term memory, and rethinking such v important academic elements as grades, homework, punishment, and more. The genesis of this new venture dates back to January, 2014, when a team of educators primarily from the Cobbet School attended the AFT’s 16th annual Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute overseen by Linda Stelly, of both the AFT and The United Federation of Teachers (UFT). The Lynn attendees to the institute were: classroom teachers Anthony Frye and Alyson Serwacki, curriculum instructional teachers Geoffrey King, Peter Viselli and Sarah McIsaac, Cobbet School Principal (and former AFT Trainer) Susanne Garrity, Harrington School Principal Deborah Ruggerio, Assistant Director of Educator Quali-

ty, Eva O’Malley, LTU President, Brant Duncan, LTU Training Site Coordinator, and member of the Lynn Business Ed Foundation Gale Thomas, and Lynn School Committee member John Ford. After attending sessions presented jointly by the AFT and UFT on the Five Principles of School Improvement (effective communication, team building, data-informed decision making, professional development and team action planning) and on reclaiming the promise of public education, members of the team returned to Lynn invigorated and determined to effect changes at their school and throughout the district.

Part of the Cobbet’s school’s strategy for school improvement was to hold school-wide summer retreats. After consulting with LaRoque, the Cobbet Leadership Team decided that they would first focus on Coherent Teaching, Differentiated Tasks, Student Engagement and Using Questions to Teach and Learn in 2014 and then the modules called Teach Them to Think and Making Parents Partners in 2015.

Part of the AFT’s philosophy behind their Summer Institute trainings is that it is a Train the Trainers program. Typically, participants travel to Baltimore to take part in a five- to ten-day training program. While the hope is that participants will take their learnings home and use them to become trainers at their Local (which is how I got started in all this). SSS flips the traditional model by having the trainers come to the participants, thereby making the program more convenient and, in many ways, more germane and action-oriented. No matter where the AFT trainings take place, however, the end goal remains the same: to train the trainers, and to create a cadre of teachers who can train their peers and lead school

improvement. Once again in Lynn this has worked.

A team of Cobbet educators have developed a series of SSS modules based on the training they received in the summer of 2014, and also on the follow-up training they had in Boston this past summer. In October, Geoff King, Sarah McIsaac, Alyson Serwacki, Peter Viselli, and Erin Zukowski began rolling out SSS sessions for all teachers in the district. I wish them, the teachers they train, and ultimately the students they serve every success in all their endeavors. ■

Phil McQueen is an English teacher at Lynn Classical High School.

We put the



in



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Legislator Profile: Michael Day

As the sixth of seven children, Representative Michael Day learned early when to speak up and be heard and when to remain quiet and listen.

“Dinners at our home were always lively events,” he recalls. “Everyone competed for time to relay a story to the rest of the family or to get in a good line during someone else’s story, so you tried to pick your spots.”

The son of a high school English teacher who became a lawyer and a nurse, Day was also raised with an understanding of the importance and literal vitality of these roles in society. He was also made to pay attention not just to what he said and when, but also how.

“The quickest way to get derailed and lose the floor was to foul up on grammar,” Day smiles, admitting that he still has “nightmares about the predicate nominative and dangling participles.”

This strong support helped Day become a success even after he moved out of the family home. It also helped him understand the value of hard work. This was what allowed and encouraged Day to attend and graduate from Georgetown University Law School while working fulltime in Washington, DC. In fact, he not only worked one job, but many, serving as the Director of Public Policy for the New England Council, as a Senior Account Executive for the government relations firm GPC/O’Neill, and as a law clerk for the United Mine Workers, International Union.

After moving back to Massachusetts in 2003, Day served for nearly

a decade as a trial attorney with the firm of Mintz Levin and as a Special Assistant District Attorney in Middlesex County. In 2012, Day (who was named to the 2014 and 2015 Massachusetts Super Lawyers list in the field of Business Litigation after being recognized as a Rising Star from 2010-2013) opened his own firm, Torres, Scammon & Day, LLP.

When asked how his education and vocation relate, Day says that he cannot think of any particular course or lesson that led him into politics. However, he credits his strong academic background and passionate educators with encouraging him to get involved.

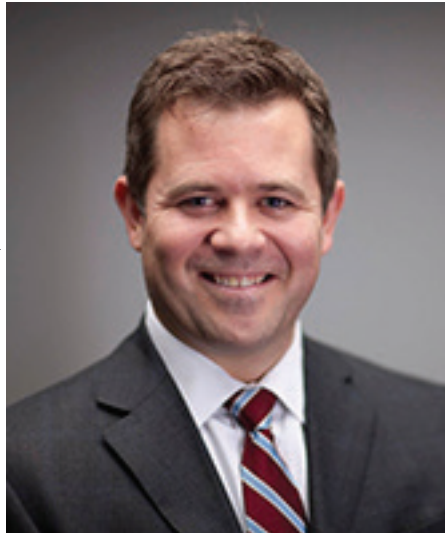
“It was the way of thinking my teachers taught me that opened the field of politics to me,” observes the co-chair of the Boston Bar Association’s Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Committee. “I was lucky enough to have teachers and professors who encouraged me to dig deeper than the most obvious answers in the classroom; they taught me to examine why a particular answer was correct. I was also pushed to think about whether the ‘correct’ answer to a question... was the right, or just, one.”

Being allowed and encouraged to think about his answers in a larger context, instead of for the sake of just achieving a score on a test, gave Day the chance to not only learn but

to understand and know how to use information for his own betterment and that of those around him.

“I would often find myself... questioning why things are the way they are, how they came to be, and how they could be changed for the better,” he recalls. “These inquiries are, to me, the essence of politics.”

While he was both supported and educated by teachers at home and at



HELPING OTHERS BE HEARD
Representative Michael Day

school, Day realizes that many children today are not so fortunate. That is why he has remained a strong advocate of public education throughout his time in the House.

“I have been fortunate to have many exceptional teachers in my life,” he recalls.

“I benefited greatly by learning from teachers who weren’t bound by the four corners of a text book, and who, instead, made their courses come alive by individualizing their classrooms to meet the needs of their students.”

This personal history has engendered a personal perspective that teachers need to be given the opportunity and support to teach.

“From adapting to the ever-changing technological advances to dealing

with chronic funding challenges,” Day suggests, “our educators and our students face a host of issues every day they go to school. I hope to play an important role in reforming our education funding formula to ensure that we are not only providing adequate funding for our educational needs but also that the funding going to our communities is equitable.”

In addition to expanding funding programs for schools, Day would also like to see curricula expanded, at least to the levels he enjoyed as a student.

“I would absolutely like to see increased course offerings and an increased focus on civics, government and history in our classrooms,” he says. “I certainly recognize the importance and a need for STEM classes, but those classes should not come at the expense of courses offering critical thinking about the state of our society. When we engage our students in civics classes we prepare them to be active citizens. This leads directly to more responsive and better government, which, in turn, allows us to move forward together as a society in many different areas.”

So while Massachusetts is often cited as the best education system in the nation, Day sincerely thinks that it can be made even better.

“As a product of that system, and as a father of three boys who are making their own way through that system, I am committed to making that happen,” he says. “Giving teachers the freedom to innovate and do what they do best – teach our youth – is one of the factors that motivated me to run for this seat in the first place.” ■

Getting Into the Stacks

BTU teacher wins BPL award

Public schools have helped many creative people find their way and have given millions the skills and confidence they need to take their ideas and make them real.

Among the latest examples of this positive trend is Boston Teachers Union School teacher Jennifer De Leon. In addition to being the winner of the 2011 Fourth Genre Michael Steinberg Essay Prize and the recipient of multiple international scholarships and grants, De Leon was recently awarded the Children’s Writer-in-Residence fellowship at the Boston Public Library.

Since 2004, the Associates of the BPL have been granting this award to authors who they hope to encourage to deepen their commitment to literature. In addition to a dedicated office at the library, winners receive a \$20,000 stipend (which makes this one of the most generous programs of its kind in the nation).

When asked how she came to be considered for the award, De Leon explains that she had been informed about it by a student.

“I remember glancing at it and thinking, ‘Oh, this is for writers of children’s books. I guess I can’t apply.’ But on closer read, I realized that the call for submissions included writers of Young Adult fiction. So, I decided to throw my hat in the ring!”

“We had a call for submissions on our website (www.writer-in-residence.org) and via social media,” explains Associates Executive Director Louisa D. Stephens, noting that the panel of seven judges included publishers, authors, and librarians who considered each book proposal and writing

sample in a “blind” process, without knowledge of the applicants’ name, gender, race, educational background, or writing experience.

The piece that De Leon submitted for judging was her book *Volar*. It is the story of a 14-year-old girl in a working-class Boston neighborhood that moves to a more affluent but less



AWARD-WINNING WRITER
BTU teacher Jennifer De Leon

diverse suburb. As the main character struggles to fit in her new community, she learns to value her culture even more.

“I have always loved writing,” De Leon says, claiming she was enamored with expression since before she could spell. Despite her life-long passion for prose, it took De Leon much of her life before she began to study writing intently.

“I was 25 years old,” she recalls of

her first class at the Boston Center for Adult Education, which was soon followed by further study at Emerson College, Grub Street Creative Writing Center, Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation, Macondo Writers’ Workshop, and Bread Loaf Writers Conference. Eventually, De Leon earned an MFA in Fiction from UMass Boston.

When asked how her lives as a teacher and writer relate to each other, De Leon replies, “both fields require a tremendous amount of patience!” Clearly, her patience and hard work have paid off in both fields, as her students and her fellow writers continue to praise and reward her work.

In their remarks, many of the judges cited the way De Leon’s story captures not only a given scene but also the thoughts of her young readers. As De Leon grew up in Boston, her book *Volar* accurately represents the life and mindset of a young Latina in the city.

“The idea for the young adult novel came from a short story called ‘Flip, Fly, Fall’ that I wrote years ago,” De Leon explains. “The character, Lilianna, stayed with me and so I wrote more about her, put her in sticky situations, and really just got to know her more. I realized that the story was much bigger than I had originally thought.”

As much as De Leon’s stories and writing career have grown, the Associates of the Boston Public Library committee and others look forward to seeing what comes of her award and what comes down the line.

“We can’t wait to see what Jennifer’s year means for her work and her future as a writer,” said one of the judges.

As far as what she hopes comes next, De Leon says that she looks forward to publishing the young adult novel she will write for the BPL

program and also that she recently learned that her short story “Home Movie” was selected as this year’s Boston Book Festival “One City, One Story,” pick. “Over 30,000 copies will be distributed around Boston leading up to the festival in October in Copley Square,” she says, directing people to www.bostonbookfest.org. “It is all very exciting!” ■

We put the



in



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Leaders

Continued from page 1

he said. "I believe we were the critical group and I thank you all for that." Even so, Gosnell continued, pro-charter organizations like Families for Excellent Schools have begun to infiltrate MA districts and are pouring a lot of money into pro-charter publicity. Even with more support from the MTA and other organizations, Gosnell suggested, the battle will be a difficult one.

"They want to be able to create 12 new charter schools each year," Gosnell warned. "This will take hundreds of millions of dollars away from the public schools.... They are a major threat to everything we believe in."

AFT MA Field Representative for Legislation Mike Canavan pointed out that a potential doubling of charter school tuition payments could use up most of the state aid to public schools and "crowd out" things like early childhood, as well as more money for K-12 schools and libraries."

"Share that fact with your legislators...so they can support us," Canavan suggested.

Gosnell also urged members to distribute the glossy "Broken Promises" flyer that is available from AFT MA.

"Our public schools cannot afford to lose more money," Gosnell reminded the members at the conference, noting the recurrence of cutbacks in recent years. "We want to accept all students. It is an obligation and it is a commitment."

In fact, Gosnell noted, it is this sense of commitment that encouraged our ancestors to start the first public school in the nation.

"Public schools are one of the bulwarks of America," Gosnell maintained. The first public school was in Boston. The first state to make a commitment to universal public education was MA. The first country to make a commitment to universal public education was the United States. It is intimately connected with our democracy and the magnificent achievements of our nation.... That is why we have to do what we can to educate these girls and boys."

Encouraged by Field Representative Coley Walsh, Salem Teachers Union President Beth Kontos shared how a Salem charter school starts the year with 100 students but only graduates 30. "They do a great job with that 30," she admitted, "but they probably would have been fine in our schools."

Kontos also pointed out how nearly 70% of charter teachers are not licensed in the subjects they teach and noted that authentic statistics are available on the website for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (www.doe.mass.edu).

"This is a significant attempt to undercut public schools," Gosnell concluded, "particularly in low-income areas.... Poor kids are still being cheated."

UMass Dartmouth Science & Engineering Center Director John Fernandes then asked what happens to the students who are asked to or find reason to leave a charter school.

"If a charter schools kicks them out," he observed, "we have to take them in."

Librarian Pat Kelly added that, if a student is kicked out after a certain point in the year, the charter school keeps the funds that came with them.

While on the subject of funds, AFT MA Treasurer Mark Allred offered a presentation about what local leaders need to know in order to handle their finances responsibly. Among the vital points he raised were that all voided checks must be filed with AFT MA and that all checks should have two signatures that are inscribed at the time the check is written.

"The left hand needs to know what the right hand is doing," Allred advised, speaking to the many presidents and treasurers in the room.

AFT MA also requires an annual audit by an experienced CPA (a sample list of which was distributed to the leaders in attendance), as well as a Fidelity bond of at least \$50,000 or 10% of annual income.

"That costs the local \$60 a year," Allred noted, "so it is a very small amount for an insurance policy."

Allred also suggested keeping detailed receipts, having "adequate" reserves of 25% of the local's annual

budget, keeping all statements and legal documents, tracking monthly reconciliations and presenting the annual budget to the board and membership of each local.

"Your local is a business and it needs to have a budget," Allred maintained. "Your members rely on the fact that their money is being well spent and that it is being accounted for."

"The most important thing is to keep accurate records and keep them organized," AFT MA General Counsel Haidee Morris reminded. "If an auditor has to go through a big cardboard box, they are going to charge you for that time and you do not want that."

"Do it the right way," Gosnell urged. "It is super important!"

After a brief break, Gosnell briefed members on the proposed constitutional amendment to raise taxes for people earning more than \$1 million each year and to use the funds for education and infrastructure, explaining that the campaign (which involves MTA, SEIU, the Coalition for Social Justice, and many other unions and organizations) is being led by Raise Up MA (<http://raiseupma.org>).

"You may not believe this," Gosnell smiled, "but public education is very popular. Polls show how popular it is. After last winter, two other things people are looking to spend money on are bridges and roads and transportation."

Noting how much trouble our bridges are in (with over 40% considered in need of repair), Gosnell added how much trouble many of our children are in and how this amendment could help solve both problems."

As of now, there appears to be 14,000 in MA who earn more than 1 million," he suggested. "[The amendment] will raise \$1-2 billion."

When asked what individuals who do not make that salary can do, Gosnell replied that the key is to get people involved.

"We want to get 120,000 signatures to get it on the ballot," he explained as leaders distributed petition sheets. "Millionaires will not have too much trouble raising money for other millionaires, so this will be a big, big battle."

AFT PA has sought to unionize charter school employees through grassroots organizing, taking Philadelphia charter schools piecemeal into union membership. According to members, unionizing the charter membership is a process - not a miracle - and one that has taken great patience and effort on the part of educators seeking to unionize. Members have cited solidarity, communication, organization and consistency as being key to their successes in bringing the union to charter employees. Eight charter schools in Philadelphia have voted to organize, despite anti-union campaigns of varying degrees of sophistication and legal representation.

In today's political climate, it is almost certain that more charter schools are coming to Massachusetts. The immediate effect will be our lowest-performing districts being further defunded, children's educations devalued, and the continued deprofessionalization of teaching as a career. But with recent developments in national labor laws favoring the organization of charter employees, the expansion of charter schools in Massachusetts may provide an opportunity for growth of unionized teaching jobs within the charter system. The charter model of burning through teachers while dropping underperforming children

AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre then explained how to gather signatures and how to submit them to his office for collection. "We have plenty of sheets," he noted, encouraging members to contact him at blapierre@aftma.net to request more. "People are eager to sign to tax millionaires."

With ideas and actions buzzing, the conference broke for lunch, after which it was time to deal with the fraught situation known as "the Friedrichs case" (i.e., Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association).

Gosnell explained that the plaintiffs in the case are challenging the right of public sector unions to collect dues. "Forty years ago the U.S. Supreme Court upheld this right," he noted, "but the current court has chosen to look at the issue again.."

While the AFT MA and its locals have worked "diligently and effectively" to raise salaries, improve working conditions, and provide what he called "the best possible education to the students and the best possible services to the public," Gosnell pointed out that there are many who are out to "destroy" unions.

"You can bet your life," he added, "if this decision goes the wrong way, the private sector is next."

What makes the situation so perilous is that many new local members are not aware of the AFT's proud history and all the union offers them and so may not be as engaged in union life.

"Many of our younger teachers do not know what a union is or what it does," observed AFT MA Assistant to the President Ed Doherty, encouraging the AFT's national push for member involvement.

In the end, Gosnell said, "we will still do our jobs. We still love the people in the library and we love our students. But it is a mushroom cloud hanging over us and, as leaders of the union, we really have to know and understand that."

"It is hurricane season," suggested Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, "and we gotta' prepare!" ■

Policy Perspective: Unionizing Charter Schools

By Cory O'Hayer

Governor Charlie Baker has long promoted the expansion of charter schools in Massachusetts and suggests lifting the cap for students in the lowest performing quartile of the commonwealth's public school districts. Simultaneously, districts such as Boston have made progress toward facilitating the charter school application process, creating a plan to unify charter and public schools into a single system that would likely draw more students and resources away from the city's traditional public schools. The governor's plan calls for the introduction or expansion of as many as 12 charter schools per year. This plan would likely overwhelm the already under-resourced districts in which the proposed new charters are anticipated to operate. In the span of a generation, a new teacher planning a career as an urban educator may have no other choice than to join a school whose reputation is likely unfriendly to those seeking to become professional teachers.

The political popularity of charters is by no means unique to Massachu-

setts, and nationally Federal and State education policy has increasingly favored the privatization of the nation's public education system. In Pennsylvania, cities like Philadelphia have seen a proliferation of charter school openings as public schools continue to be shuttered and nearly a third of district students now attend charter schools. In Chicago, a city notorious for closing neighborhood schools in an often politically charged environment, nearly one in seven schools is a charter.

The overwhelming majority of charter schools are non-union, which their advocates claim permits innovation in lieu of a contract offering employees workplace protections. In 2013, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that despite the schools having adopted the moniker "public charter" and being the recipients of public money, the schools' nonprofit structure was more similar to a private rather than a public entity. As private organizations, charter schools would be permitted to vote to form a union on a secret ballot, despite the outcry of national charter network organiza-

into the district pool is untenable, and less likely to succeed as charters stand the potential to replace more urban public schools. Replicating the unionization drive of other cities who have seen a growth in charters while their public schools go unfunded may be one course of action to best maintain the professionalism of the teaching profession in spite of political opposition. ■

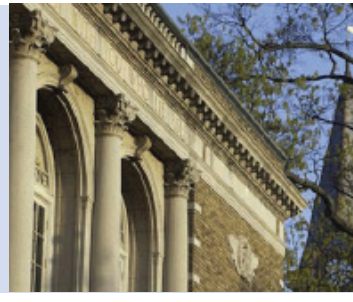
Cory O'Hayer has a Master's degree in urban education policy from Brown University and works in the Boston Public Schools.

**Do you have
stories and ideas
to share?
Send them to
advocate@aftma.net**



On Campus

Susan Krumholz, President
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Reducing the “School-to-Prison” Pipeline

I am writing this month about something that may not directly concern the union, but is vitally important to the future of our students. It’s also my field of study.

Two bills before the Massachusetts legislature, Senate bill S.842 “An Act decriminalizing non-violent and verbal student misconduct” and Senate bill S.297 “An Act further defining the role of school resource officers,” both sponsored by Senator Pat Jehlen, could begin that process. It is time to reduce the number of students whose educational experience is brought to a rapid halt by the criminal/legal system, and supporting these bills will at least move us in the right direction.

We have all heard about the school-to-prison pipeline, an accurate description of policies and practices that move children from school into the criminal/legal system. This has been a growing social problem for at least the past decade, fueled by inadequate funding and resources for our public schools, “zero-tolerance” policies, and the rising reliance on school resource officers for in-school discipline. The brunt of these actions is disproportionately felt by students of color and students with disabilities. But they clearly affect us all.

The social costs of suspending, expelling or arresting large numbers of students for minor offenses, especially those who are most in need of the support and structure offered by school, is profound. We will pay as we lose the contributions to society these

students might make if allowed to continue their education, and we will pay again when we allocate increasing dollars that could go to education to jails and prisons. For those of us in higher education, the profound absence of men of color in our classrooms is but one cost. According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, in 2008 “32.6 percent of the non-Hispanic white population over the age of 25 holds a college degree compared to 19.6 percent of adult blacks.” The imbalance is more significant if we factor in gender.

Reductions in financial and personnel support for our public schools, often exacerbated by the transfer of funds to private “charter” schools, lead to overcrowded classrooms and fewer support staff such as librarians and guidance counselors. The easiest way to respond to the added stress on teachers was to institute “zero-tolerance” policies--punishment, often suspension or expulsion, would result from even the most ordinary rule violation, regardless of extenuating circumstances. Rule enforcement, no longer an administrative add-on, became a full time job.

The introduction of full time police officers dates back to the late 1980s when there was talk of youth as “super-predators.” And though this notion was abandoned, the movement toward police in schools was only heightened by the publicity surrounding school shootings a decade later. When I was in high school the Assis-

tant Principal dealt with discipline issues (I know this first hand!). If you got in trouble you most likely had to stay after school. On rare occasions someone got suspended for a day. Now when a teacher has a problem they call in the SRO. And the SRO, doing what s/he is trained to do, arrests the student. In a study a few years ago of 11 school districts in Texas it was found that out of 3,500 student arrests only 20% involved violence or a weapon (including fists). Stories about special needs (or black or latino) students being arrested for incidents that began with a teacher asking them to be quiet or sit still. And if students are not arrested but are suspended or expelled, studies find their likelihood of coming into contact with the juvenile legal system within a year is three times as great. Research in New York found that African-American students were twice as likely to be suspended as White students, Hispanic students were 1.5 times as likely as White students. And this disparity was even higher in schools with increased security.

How would the proposed legislation address these problems? Senate bill S.842 takes a step towards limiting criminal charges that can be brought against students by excluding students from prosecution for disturbing an assembly or for disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace when that conduct occurs “within school buildings or grounds or in the course of school-related events.” This could

reduce arrests of students considerably. Senate bill S.297 will be significant in that it proscribes the skills an SRO should have, including training in de-escalation and conflict resolution, and it requires an MOU between the local police department and the school superintendent. Recent studies suggest that at least some of the concerns regarding SROs stem from lack of role clarity. The bill also contains an oversight requirement that could improve the public’s ability to track arrests made in schools. In conjunction these bills could make progress toward halting the school-to-prison pipeline in Massachusetts.

With all this in mind, I would like to make a pitch for restorative practices in schools. According to the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University, restorative justice practices in schools have been used successfully for “classroom management, collaborative pedagogy, student support, emotional awareness and literacy, building a positive school climate, alternate discipline” and more. If anyone still wonders whether restorative practices can alter a school environment, we have numerous examples in schools from Philadelphia to Oakland and San Francisco to right here in Charlestown, Massachusetts. These schools have shown that building healthy and respectful relationships among students and between students and educators would reduce the need for involving the criminal/legal system in our student’s lives. ■

Retirees of AFT MA, UNITE!

Peabody provides new venue for retired union members

While Marie Ardito and Mass Retirees United (MRU) provide a wide range of services to retirees, many locals have been finding ways to serve their members more locally.

Just last month, the Peabody Federation of Teachers (PFT) started a new retirees group. At the very first meeting, over 60 members gathered to discuss issues that were especially relevant to retirees and to share ideas as to how to plan and handle their post-employment years most effectively.

“The initial meeting...far exceeded all expectations in attendance and good will,” says PFT President Bruce Nelson.

As he is both the PFT President and a retiree himself, Nelson is especially attuned to the needs of this group of fellow local members. His retiree status has been an advantage, in fact, as Nelson says he is “able to interact on a more equal footing with district and municipal officials” and thus more able to act freely on his fellow members’ behalf.

When fellow retiree Barbara Brown came to Nelson expressing a desire to continue to serve, they began to discuss what would eventually become this new group.

“Last March the PFT created the position of Coordinator of Retiree Activities,” Nelson explains, “and ap-

pointed Barbara to the position.”

With advice and support from colleagues such as Lowell Teachers Union members Micki Dumont and Midge Farrell, Nelson and Brown began to approach other retirees and to put together plans for the new group.

“We owe a great debt of gratitude to our Lowell counterpart, who offered support, encouragement, and know how,” Nelson says.

When asked what the primary goals of the new group are, Nelson replies, “we have three major goals. First, we want to provide a social platform to help our emeritus colleagues stay connected with one another. Second, we want to act as a conduit for important information and educational issues that affect both active and retired teachers. Finally, we see this as an opportunity to strengthen the voice of educators in local, state, and national politics.”

As there were already two retiree groups who met regularly for lunch and conversation, Nelson says that recruiting was relatively easy.

“The email contacts for these retirees made a terrific starting point,” he notes.

Taking a tip from their colleagues in Lowell, Nelson and Brown invited local retirees to a casual dinner at a local fraternal club. The turnout was impressive and the ideas that were shared promising and productive. Nel-

son and Brown are already planning the next event and hope to involve Ardito and MRU in the near future.



KEEPING ACTIVE
Peabody Federation of Teachers
President Bruce Nelson

“Many of the retirees made a point of telling me that they knew former colleagues who would certainly attend future gatherings,” Nelson notes, citing the “momentum” he already feels in the new group.

As so many current retirees entered their respective fields immediately after college, some may not have many outlets for social interaction or intellectual stimulation after they leave the workplace. Nelson hopes that groups

like his will provide his colleagues and others with a source of activity and engagement, both of which have been proven to be vital for retirees.

“We hope that the activities of our Retiree Unit will provide individuals with...purpose,” he says.

Nelson also notes how, with the “constant onslaught of politically motivated mandates, regulations and attacks on public education, active educators need all of the help they can get!”

As the first meeting of the new group in Peabody was so helpful and so well attended, Nelson encourages other colleagues to follow Lowell’s lead and to organize their own events for retired members.

“We strongly suggest that other AFTMA locals consider forming a retirees group if they already don’t have one,” Nelson says, observing how such groups can also help active teachers to prepare for retirement and also help both active and retired members to support each other with all relevant legislation and organization. “By standing together, we can better assure that our voices will be heard.” ■



Retiree Corner

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



Together We WILL Prevail

There is no topic I have written on more in this column than the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO) that are attached to Social Security for those of us working in the public sector in some 15 states.

According to the Social Security Fairness Group of California (SSFG), many active employees are entirely unaware of these penalties and retire not realizing that, if they have carried a second job in their working career to build up Social Security, they may only get a reduced amount. Also, those

one-career professionals know about the offsets, but they often are building large enough public pensions that the loss of Social Security retirement benefits does not seem to be a big an issue for them. They do not realize the devastation that can be caused to others by these offsets. Then, there is the issue of younger people believing that Social Security may disappear or be of minimal value to them when they retire. This is wrong. Benefits may be reduced if Congress does not implement some fixes, but they will be there.

The WEP says that if you have worked under Social Security and earned 40 units you will collect Social Security but it will be reduced by as much as half. In other words, you may collect only half of what you are entitled to but you will still collect Social Security. The GPO, on the other hand, is spousal benefit. If you are going to collect a public pension from one of the above states, you have an offset number. Your offset number is two-thirds of your monthly pension. So if your monthly pension is \$3,000 a month your offset number would be \$2,000. If half of your spouse's Social Security is \$1200 a month, 1200-2000 is a negative number, so you will never collect any of your spouse's benefits either as a spousal or survivor benefit. This is not right!

Not only are state workers affected by these two penalties, but also all Federal employees hired before 1984 are affected as well. Those workers hired after 1983 and covered by the Federal Employees' Retirement System pay into both a Federal pension and Social Security. Is it not strange that when the law was introduced regarding the penalties, the Federal government changed it so that new hires who would be collecting a Federal pension would start contributing to both to enable them to get both a pension and Social Security but those of us with a state pension were left behind? It is probably safe to assume that the members of Congress at the time made sure that they were protected.

who are married and counting on collecting a spousal benefit probably will get nothing. SSFG is hoping active workers will join those of us who are retired in the fight for the repeal if they understand the implications to their own futures. They want all of us to get the unions and all leadership that represent us behind working to get these injustices repealed.

The GPO and WEP affect public employees in virtually every state. The states with the greatest impact are Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Texas. These 15 states are known as "non-contrib" states, as those working in the public sector in these states do not contribute to Social Security in their primary jobs.

None of us had any say in contributing only to our pensions and not to Social Security in our teaching jobs. Not only that, but Social Security contributions have to be matched by an employer. Who would be the employer be in MA- the state or the community? Where would they get the money to pay half of our Social Security contributions? Not only don't we pay now into Social Security, but the chances of ever being allowed to are slim to none. As a result, we are hostages to something over which we have no control.

SSFG asked me to explain that many current public employees still do not know about the offsets or only have a vague idea of their effects. In a recent study of active teachers in California, half of them did not know if they would be affected by the offsets. We rely on our worker associations to inform us. However, many of the people in union leadership and other

a women's issue in addition to being a worker's issue.

According to the SSFG, there are just over 1.4 million affected by the WEP. Most of these people were never told by their employer or by the SSA at any time during their employment that they would lose the amount of money they do through this penalty.

Social Security was very solvent until the time that administrations began raiding the funds and using the money for things other than paying the benefits of those who had contributed. It was not until July of 2001 that House and Senate bills were filed for the complete repeal of both of these penalties. The present House version of the complete repeal of both the WEP/GPO is HR973. As of this publication, the bill has 115 co-sponsors. The Senate Bill is S1651. It currently has 16 Senators signed on.

Some think that if they retire to a state that is not in the above list, they will not be affected. This is also incorrect. The penalty is attached to where the pension originates; not where you are living after retirement.

Another misconception is if you take an Option C and make your spouse the beneficiary of your pension, then you and he/she collects two-thirds of your pension, your spouse will lose some of their Social Security benefits. In actuality, the penalty applies only to the member - not the survivor - so the survivor can collect the MA pension and their full Social Security with no penalty.

Some also seem to think that, if they collect their pension in a lump sum instead of annuitizing it, they will not be affected. The truth is that, if you are vested, it does not matter how you take your pension. You are still under the penalties.

According to the leadership of SSFG, the vast majority of those in Congress do not understand the penalties and how they affect us. I feel that the reason we do not have more citizens involved in the fight to repeal these two measures is that they are not educated on the effects of the penalties and why they are wrong. That is why I encourage you to go to the SSFG website (www.ssfairness.com) and educate yourself so that you can, in turn, educate and support others as well. Once people know what is at stake and what they can do, they will be more likely to join the fight and to stick with it until justice is done.

Those of you still working, please do the same. Don't wait until you are a victim to correct what should never have happened. Make it a point to have your union leadership know this is very important to you and you want them involved in the effort. Please join with us now and together we WILL prevail! ■

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SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

November 17, 2015, 3:15-5:15 PM, Lynn Teachers' Union Hall, 679 Western Avenue, Lynn

Wednesday, November 18, 2015, 3:45-5:45

South Hadley High School Library
153 Newton Sreet, South Hadley

Tuesday, December 1, 2015 3:30-5

Amesbury High School Library
5 Highland Street, Amesbury

Wednesday December 9, 2015, 3-5

Northshore Education Consortium
Cafeteria, 112 Sohier Road, Beverly

Wednesday, December 16, 2015, 3-5

Charlotte Ryan Theatre at Ralph C. Maher
Regional Middle/High School
507 South Main Street, Orange, MA

These free seminars, presented by Marie Ardito, deal with issues one should address in preparing for retirement from a public sector job in MA. They are open to ALL.

How to Protect Your Nest Egg

Saturday October 24, 2015, 10-noon
Saturday December 5., 2015 10-noon
314 Main Street, Wilmington

This free seminar by Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie deals with wills, trusts (irrevocable and revocable), gifting, probate, joint tenancy, direct transfers upon death, and much more.

Living in Retirement as an Informed Retiree

Monday October 26, 2015, 10-noon
Lynn Teachers' Union Hall,
679 Western Avenue, Lynn, MA

This free seminar, presented by Marie Ardito, deals with such topics as working in retirement, Social Security and Medicare benefits and possible penalties, pension tax structure, avoiding double taxation of TSA, 403b, legislation that affects you as a retiree, and more.

To Move or Stay Put

Saturday, November 14, 2015, 10-noon
314 Main St Unit 105, Wilmington, MA

This free seminar, presented by Marie Ardito and Jomarie O'Mahony, looks at the choices involved in moving, such as how you will adjust, what you are looking for, how elder housing rules may come into play, and how you will you pay for it all.

To register for any seminar, call 781-365-0205 or email contact@retireesunited.org. Please give the name of the seminar you wish to attend, your name, phone number and the number of people who will be attending.

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?

Contact advocate@aftma.net

Hearing

Continued from page 1

Noting that charter schools were originally proposed as “experimental” and had originally been capped at 25, Pacheco pointed out that there are now over 70 such schools and that many have closed when the “experiment did not work.” He also noted that, even in schools that had been created to devise and distribute new ideas, many of the ideas were labeled “proprietary” and kept away from the traditional student population.

“Every time we open a new charter school, we divert more funds away from traditional public schools,” observed Pacheco, recalling a decade of service to his local school board. “It is great to open up new opportunities, but I believe we should open it for all students.”

Raising the issue of discipline, Boston City Councilor Tito Jackson encouraged everyone to visit the DESE website (www.doe.mass.edu) to view discipline data profiles. He then offered other telling data, including the fact that, even when test schools like Boston Latin and vocational schools like Madison Park are taken out of the equation, Boston Public School students still enjoy a 45% rate of college attendance, as opposed to the 46% touted by charter schools.

“When we discuss closing the opportunity gap and achievement gap,” Jackson recommended, “we should not be widening the democracy gap and the power gap.”

As everyone loses when any students fail, Jackson urged the panel to help pass S 336 and to “hit the pause button and look at the dollars and whether they make sense” before deciding on the charter school cap.

“There are a lot of good things happening at the charter level,” Jackson demurred, “and we need to support that...but we have things that need to be looked at [because] a deficit in education means a deficit in the future.”

As a former legislator, Boston Mayor Martin Walsh found himself on the other side of the panel dais for the first time. Aided by senior members of his staff, the Mayor shared his own views on education.

“There is no more valuable issue than the education of our children,” Walsh maintained, noting that, while traditional public schools in Boston educate 57,000, charter schools provide room for only 8,000. “I support all schools. My only concern is that every young person gets the first-class education they deserve.”

Torn between being “proud” of what BPS has done and his admiration for new BPS Superintendent Tommy Chang (who he called an “innovative leader”) and his allegiance to Neighborhood Charter Schools (for whom he serves as a founding board member), Walsh suggested that, “if we can come together and act as a community, we can do something very brave. We can devise a new model for urban education.”

In order to avoid further “injustice to the students we serve,” Walsh suggested rising above inter-school competition and, with the support of the Commonwealth, engage “significant reforms” that will help all schools.

“We can see the road forward,” he suggested to his former colleagues, “but we can’t get there if we are divided and we can’t get there without your help.”

Maintaining that complete removal of the cap would be “reckless,” Walsh instead offered a plan in which the cap is raised and reassessed incrementally.

“Children are at the core of our

community and public schools at the heart of democracy,” Walsh observed. “We cannot continue to see education as a battlefield. On behalf of our children, let’s climb out of the trenches and come together!”

Suggesting that the current charter school system is “essentially a series of private schools with taxpayer dollars...run without public oversight,” Representative Frank Smizik cited data that proved their lack of service to “challenging populations” (e.g., English language learners and students with special needs) and also suggested that many charter schools were not teaching pop-

ulations that were similar to that of their districts. Smizik proposed that House Bill 485 be moved forward in order to break funding for charters from that of traditional public schools (noting that much charter school funding comes from private entities, many of which are not even in the same district or state).

Representative Denise Garlick supported her colleague by suggesting that the Legislature should require the same standards for all educators.

“Anyone in a position of responsibility to educate our children should be certified,” she said, noting how this is the case in every other professional field.

As the debate was opened to people not involved with the Legislature, representatives from the MA Association of School Committees (MASC) noted how many charter schools “do not meet the letter or spirit of law when it comes to serving all students,” especially English language learners (ELL) and students with special needs (SPED).

“We urge that you put them on notice that failing to provide for all students will not be tolerated,” MASC members said, urging the imposition of “significant reforms” before further expansion is considered.

As part of a panel representing the MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS), Fitchburg Superintendent Andre Ravenelle echoed Smizik and others when he suggested more time be taken to analyze data relative to populations being served.

“Charter schools are the most divisive issue,” Ravenelle observed, encouraging that we “move past acrimony” before moving forward.

As many communities offer diverse school choices, Ravenelle suggested raising other so-called “caps,” including funding for transportation, special education services, homeless students, new immigrants and gateway cities. “These are the caps that feed perception of underperformance,” he maintained.

Norton superintendent Joseph F. Baeta then asked how charter schools align with Civil Rights legislation and State and Federal regulations. “Charters engender segregation,” the self-identified ELL student suggested.

Revere Superintendent Emeritus Paul Dakin suggested that even doubling the number of charter schools is “short sighted and small thinking” because, if they open seats for only three percent more of the population,

“what about the 97 percent we are not offering them to?”

Citing UFT leader Al Shanker’s vision of “partnering charter and traditional schools to create innovative schools,” Chelsea Superintendent Mary Bourque (who is also the president-elect of MASS) cited the partnership between Chelsea Public Schools and the Phoenix Academy in her district, but also noted how few ELL or SPED students are served at Phoenix.

Citing the complete dearth of ELL students served by Mystic Valley Charter School in his district, Medford Superintendent Roy Belson also cited

the apparently common charter practice of “rolling over” waiting lists in order to falsely suggest greater demand.

“Charters may be part of the answer,” Belson said, “but are not a panacea.”

And yet, according to Ludlow Superintendent Todd Gazda, charters get preferential treatment.

“I have to justify every penny of my annual budget,” he explained, “and yet I have no say regarding the bill from charter schools.”

After some heart-tugging stories by charter school parents, Representative and Committee member Mel King made his way to the microphone to express his “grief and opinion” regarding this issue. Touting the pioneering innovation centers he created with colleagues from MIT, King suggested that students could “get the skills they need” from the current system and that a two-tier education system flies in the face of American policy.

“The meaning of the Pledge of Allegiance is being undermined,” King observed, maintaining that legislation in favor of lifting the cap “is not set for ‘justice for all.’”

Representative Rady Mom made a similarly patriotic speech from the dais, citing his Cambodian roots and the opportunities he has enjoyed as an American citizen.

“It gives me chills that you all care so much,” he said of the friends and colleagues from the public school system who had offered him so much support as he learned about America and its language, culture, and political system. “I need all of you to give back so...all our children so they can live in the greatest country on earth!”



UNITED AGAINST CHARTER SCHOOLS
MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman, BEJA Coordinator Marlena Rose, MTA President Barbara Madeloni and AFT MA President Tom Gosnell testify in favor of keeping the cap on charter schools

In his testimony, Stutman maintained that charter school growth will “foster...a dual system, growing a quasi-private school system at the expense of our public schools.” While public schools take all students, Stutman suggested, “charters do not fulfill that obligation and...do not deserve the public funding they get.”

Testifying alongside Marlena Rose, coordinator for the Boston Education Justice Alliance (BEJA) and Juan Cofield, President of the New England Area Conference of the NAACP, Madeloni, and AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, Tolman spoke as a past legislator, reminding his former colleagues that, when charters were first devised, they were intended to share the pioneering ideas and best practices they developed.

“We now have a system in which charters compete for resources that they were supposed to share,” he maintained.

Speaking as a proud public school graduate, Tolman also touted the “commitment” of public school educators.

“Everybody in this room has a common goal of improving public education,” he observed. “We need to stop dismantling the system. This two-tiered system no longer serves every student.”

“We demand the schools our communities deserve...in Boston and in MA,” Rose added, citing stories of parents who were “traumatized” by their experiences with charter schools. “We need to keep the charter cap, serve all students and demand that charter schools follow the same rules as other schools...so that all students are served.”

Citing public education as “foundational to democracy,” Madeloni recalled the Commonwealth’s “historic commitment” to public education.

“It is an amazing commitment we have made no one that we should cherish and nurture,” she suggested. “Charters are privately held and often work against the will of the districts in which they are established. Charter schools place public interest over the public good. We need the opposite.”

Using established statistics, Gosnell concluded the panel by noting how, though they only serve four percent of students in MA, charter schools receive an ever-growing amount of funding. “The predicted net loss to public schools of \$426 million,” he explained. “The loss of dollars means larger classes, loss of music art science and tech programs, fewer counselors, nurses and wraparound services and even closing cherished neighborhood schools.... This is damaging public schools and damaging education.” ■

