



The Advocate



September 2014

AFT Continues to Reclaim Despite challenges, AFT Convention full of hope and fun

From July 9-14, thousands of educators, healthcare professionals, community leaders and concerned citizens gathered in Los Angeles for the 2014 AFT Convention.

Despite the myriad challenges that face our union and its members, there was a sense of hope and of a coming resurgence throughout the event.

"The AFT did not disappoint in putting on a grand show," said Boston Teachers Union member Michael Maguire.

As more and more teachers, parents and administrators wake up to the darker realities of Common Core and the high-stakes testing it will engender and encourage, and also to the broken promises of charter schools, there is a growing sense that public school educators and their colleagues and supporters could truly reclaim the promise, not only of education, but of America.

One of the most spoken names at the Convention was that of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. While many would like to see him ousted, especially after his support of decisions such as Vergara v. California (see previous issue), the overall decision made during a special meeting at the Convention was to give to him what he and his supporters refuse to give to many educators - a fair chance. Instead of simply pushing to have him fired based on evidence that might be otherwise interpreted and that may not even be relevant, the AFT community chose to offer him another chance by proposing that President Obama present him with a "Secretary improvement plan." If he changes some of his policies to be more supportive and less punitive of teachers and if he shows a willingness to work with AFT and to realize that he shares their goal of educating every child in America, the decision suggested, he can stay. Otherwise, AFT will in fact call on Secretary Duncan to resign.

When asked why he travelled all the way across the country, Amesbury Building Representative and AFT MA Executive Board Member Tim Angerhofer explained how "a firsthand education on our organization, its activities, and goals from a national perspective is important for me to more effectively represent my local and state as a member of each of their executive boards."

While this was Angerhofer's first national convention, he said that he was able to take full advantage of the opportunity by attending workshops and meeting with colleagues from across the country. "Of particular interest were the positive, collaborative, solution-based relationships forged between our members and New York City's government and business leaders," he said, "the bargained evaluation system in Cleveland, and St. Paul's contract negotiations."

Seeing how so many members of AFT came from near and far to at-

tend and participate, Angerhofer was encouraged, despite the challenges we all face.

"This is a union that takes it to the streets for children, their education, and the dignity of its members," he observed. "It gets after it on all levels."

"I have attended four [previous] national conventions as an elected delegate," explained Amesbury President Cindy Yetman, "and I find each one to be informative and educational."



RECLAIMING IN LA
BTU member and long-time paraprofessional Jenna Fitzgerald shows where she stands at the AFT convention in Los Angeles

While she found many of the workshops and events stimulating, Yetman makes special note of a workshop she attended on creative bargaining. "We discussed a new approach called Open Negotiations," she recalled, "where the public is invited to attend. I am considering this new strategy in Amesbury and will see if it will be received by the other side of the table."

While she was able to come away with many ideas and items that she can put to use, Yetman also noted how many difficult situations she and her colleagues still face.

"I learned a great deal of the struggles in major cities to fund public education and the attacks to privatize education happening throughout the country," Yetman said, citing such recent developments as the Vergara decision. "It is alarming!"

Perhaps thanks to the change of perceived value for teachers in California, Best was not so keen on the host city. Even so, she had a great time at her latest AFT Convention.

"Randi is an incredible President," said Massachusetts Library Staff Association President Mary Frances Best of AFT's leader Randi Weingarten, who impressed and inspired the crowd by introducing her partner, a female rabbi. "She is dynamic, inspiring and very forward thinking."

Another of Best's favorite speakers was Rev. William Barber, the President of the North Carolina NAACP and the creator of the civil disobedience effort called Moral Mondays. "It

is [an] incredible...movement," Best said.

"Rev. Barber's speech on 'America's Moral Crisis' was the most moving of them all," agreed Amesbury member Brian Hopkins.

Another incredible movement that was put under the spotlight at the convention is the work that is being done at the Oliver Partnership School In Lawrence. As Weingarten has visited often and kept a close eye on the goings-on in our beleaguered local, it was encouraging to hear and see all the good that is going on there. In fact, Weingarten and others are feting Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin and holding up the Oliver as a blueprint for successful partnerships that may soon be replicated across the country!

According to Oliver teacher Monica Trust, her school is "a place that has excellent teachers with varied backgrounds [who] all have the same goal: to inspire and educate our students." By giving teachers accountability and a say in the planning and procedures, Trust suggested, the Oliver gives the teachers a voice and a sense of control and encourages them to bring their individual passions and best practices to bear.

"[We] make sure our students' educational needs are met," said Oliver counselor Teri Pouliout.

Another AFT MA member who went the extra mile in California was Boston Teachers Union member Adrienne Jordan, who volunteered with First Book (see previous issue) at the convention. "It felt good knowing that

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Congratulations to our Endorsed Candidates!

The following are AFT MA-endorsed candidates who won their primaries:

National Office

United States House of Representatives
1st District - Richard Neal
2nd District - James McGovern
4th District - Joseph Kennedy, III
5th District - Katherine Clark
7th District - Michael Capuano
8th District - Stephen Lynch
9th District - William Keating

United States Senate - Edward Markey

Statewide Office

Massachusetts State Auditor - Suzanne Bump
Massachusetts State Treasurer - Deb Goldberg

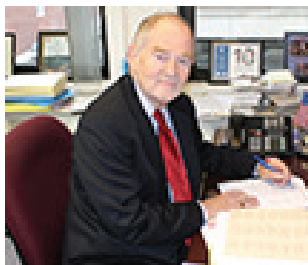
State Representatives and Senators

Massachusetts Representative Daniel Cullinane - 12th Suffolk
Massachusetts Representative Gloria Fox - 7th Suffolk
Massachusetts Representative Daniel Ryan - 2nd Suffolk

Massachusetts Senator Harriette Chandler - 1st Worcester
Massachusetts Senator Pat Jehlen - 2nd Middlesex
Massachusetts Senator Jason Lewis - 5th Middlesex
Massachusetts Senator Richard Moore - Worcester and Norfolk
Massachusetts Senator Kathleen O'Connor Ives - 1st Essex
Massachusetts Senator Marc Pacheco - 1st Plymouth and Bristol

State Senate Open Seats

For Senator - Barbara L'Italien - 2nd Essex and Middlesex
For Senator - Eric Lesser - 1st Hampden and Hampshire



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Looking Back and Moving Forward

The last school was another challenge for all us. Retell and district determined measures (DDM) continue to haunt us. For some strange reason some shortsighted individuals believe that the single goal of a performance evaluation system is to ferret out what they deem are incompetent teachers. A more positive approach would emphasize the importance of strengthening a teacher's talents. The issues are here and will not go away. How we respond to them is critical.

Our public libraries continue to be underfunded. Like public schools they are cherished institutions. Although we have managed to arrest the funding slide in most communities, we still need to increase funding for public libraries. Future budgets will be battlegrounds.

Expansion of the number of charter schools is omnipresent. However, in the past session of the legislature we achieved a great victory when the state senate defeated a proposal to lift the cap on charter schools. We thank the twenty-six senators who voted no. In the last issue of the newspaper their names were listed.

Below is a letter I sent to all the presidents and treasurers in the locals and to all the chapter chairs in the public libraries.

July 25, 2014

Dear AFT MA Leader:

The campaign to prevent the raising of the charter school cap in the current session of the legislature ended successfully when the Senate defeated the attempt to raise the cap on a 26-13 vote.

Many factors, when taken together, provided a robust coalition in support of the regular public school system.

The following is a list, but not an exclusive one, of the factors that contributed to success:

1) Membership and leadership communication with senators occurred frequently. In addition to locals encouraging members to contact their senators, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT MA), the Boston Teachers Union (BTU), and the Lynn Teachers Union (LTU), among others, organized members to meet with senators.

2) Comprehensive arguments about the harm to be done to the regular public schools were developed. Particularly potent was the argument that the regular public schools, already lacking needed resources, would suffer even more.

3) AFT MA ran internet ads and the BTU ran printed ads.

4) A number of community groups

forcefully expressed their opposition.

5) Skillful lobbying at the State House reinforced the organizational opposition.

6) Support by the AFL-CIO and the AFT, our national union, showed how valuable those affiliations are.

7) A core group of senators worked strenuously to garner their colleagues' votes.

8) The AFT MA's Committee on Charter Schools produced many terrific ideas for the campaign.

While AFT MA is pleased that the legislation failed, we are most mindful that the issue will resurface in some form or another. We must be vigilant.

I thank you for what you did in this campaign.

Sincerely,
Thomas J. Gosnell
President

AFT MA is proud to represent all of our members in whatever capacity they are contributing to the quality of life in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I wish everyone a successful 2014-15 school year.

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

BOLD PRINT

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

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

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

□□□□

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

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



If you would like to receive an electronic version of the Advocate, send an email to advocate@aftma.org.

Please include your home mailing address for identification.

ATTENTION NEW TEACHERS

Have you been teaching for fewer than five years?

Do you want to share why you entered education?

Do you have life lessons to impart?

Do you want to support your colleagues and community?

Write to advocate@aftma.net

The Advocate

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AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO

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Check out our NEW Website at www.aftma.org



Check out AFT MA-related news,
information, calendar, benefits and
MORE!

AFT Leadership Conference Emphasizes Importance of Locals

By Dena Capano

In 1902, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) led 140,000 coal miners on strike, setting the tone for the labor movement of the twentieth century. Without strong union leadership, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) cannot carry the torch of the labor movement into the twenty-first century. As is the case with all unions, the AFT is made up of locals, each one of which plays a vital part in supporting and strengthening the whole.

On September 13, over 40 AFT MA leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered for a leadership training at the Doubletree Hotel in Westborough. Together, they spent the day learning how to run and support their locals. AFT MA staff trained union leaders on how to perform their jobs successfully in terms of every aspect, from the financial to the political.

AFT MA President Tom Gosnell praised Massachusetts as having the top students in the nation and the world, reminding everyone that, unlike in many other regions, they work under a collective bargaining agreement. "A strong union is good for the kids," Gosnell boldly proclaimed.

During his presentation, AFT MA Political Organizer Brian LaPierre emphasized the importance of political action. "I think that member engagement in the political arena is vital for improving the working conditions of our profession in giving us a collective voice in electoral politics," LaPierre said. Together with Field Representatives Eric Blanchet, LaPierre discussed how, at the turn on the twentieth century, Teddy Roosevelt sided with the UMWA, marking a major advance for the labor movement in the United States. Blanchet pointed out how this episode and others like it emphasized the impact each local can have on political candidates. He discussed the positive impact Governor Deval Patrick had in helping workers in the recent Market Basket strike. Gosnell

also emphasized the importance of political action, "It benefits us sitting here, and the women and men we represent."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Gosnell praised The AFT MA-endorsed candidate for Massachusetts Treasurer Deb Goldberg. "She's terrific on our issues," he said.

In urging AFT MA members to vote, LaPierre also explained that teacher contracts are signed by the people we elect. He reminded union leaders that we belong to a larger labor movement - the AFL-CIO. In order to strengthen the national labor movement, he suggested, political action must be a priority at local union meetings. "Too often, political action is a bottom rung priority," LaPierre observed, "because union reps at schools are bogged down by grievances and arbitrations." LaPierre said that he wanted local unions leaders to make political action a priority. "I hope you will all put political action at the forefront of your meetings," he earnestly suggested.

Before the local leaders encouraged their colleagues to go out and support endorsed candidates with their words and their dollars, however, AFT MA Secretary-Treasurer Mark Allred offered them some important advice. Among the many important reminders Allred offered was that, while union dues can be used for political action campaigns, they cannot be given directly to political candidates- especially federal candidates.

With this caveat established, Blanchet and LaPierre reiterated the importance of engaging membership

to become involved in political action campaigns. They urged union leaders to become particularly involved in two current campaigns: "Yes on 4" and "Stop Staples." "Yes on 4" urges voters to vote yes on Question 4 in the election this November to allow all workers to earn sick time. "Stop Staples" urges teachers to boycott Staples, the popular office supply store that has been putting postal counters in its stores and staffing them with low-wage workers instead of unionized postal workers. LaPierre showed union leaders photographs of activists from the Lynn Teachers Union rallying outside of a Staples in solidarity with the postal workers.

Offering tactics to engage membership, LaPierre urged leadership to form Committees On Political Education (COPE). By forming such committees, LaPierre suggested, union leaders can develop productive political action campaigns. "A strong COPE committee guarantees that members voices are heard in the political and legislative arenas," LaPierre said.

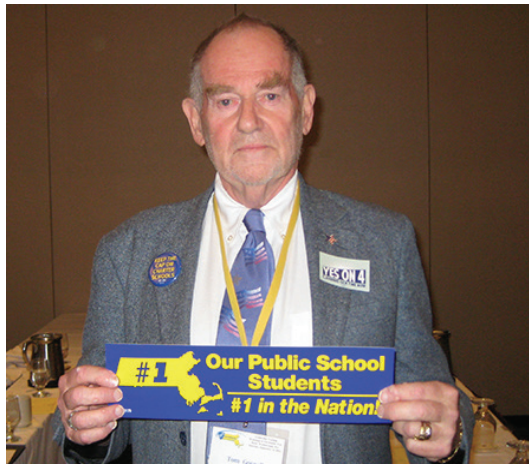
Gosnell echoed this important note. "If we are not involved in the political arena," he said, "we are completely ignored. If we are not involved, we get nothing." While he noted that involvement in the political arena "does not guarantee that we will get what is just and right for public education," Gosnell proudly reminded the assembled that, "We just won the charter school fight." Discussing the significance of this recent development in education policy, Gosnell explained that the failure of the legislature to lift the cap on

charter schools represented "the first time that the legislature ever told the charter schools, 'no.'" While he admitted that there were "piles are reasons" why the cap was not lifted, Gosnell made sure to point out that "one of them is that our members contacted their representatives." In thanking his colleagues for their efforts, Gosnell pointed out how, "As leaders we are important, but our members are even more important."

AFT MA Director of Educational Policy and Programs Dan Murphy discussed another campaign, First Book (see previous issue). First Book is a nonprofit that provides new, high quality books to schools and programs serving children in need. First Book and the AFT recently began a partnership through which AFT members can receive books for their districts. Murphy noted that the Lynn Teachers Union have already engaged First Book and will be launching a registration drive this month.

Aside from being active politically, union leaders need to play a significant role in helping their members in legal matters. AFT MA General Counsel Haidee Morris used her presentation to inform union leaders about what rights members have and how to deal appropriately and effectively with management. Her presentation explained what the role of local leaders is when one of their bargaining unit employees is accused of conduct which could result in discipline or dismissal. Her informative training emphasized to union leadership the ways in which they can represent teachers and bargaining unit members in disciplinary situations.

Gosnell concluded the training on a positive note, stating the single most important message he wanted leadership to retain from the training. "We must leave others with the view of a very professional union that operates in the best interest of its members and students," he said. ■



LEADING OUR LEADERS
AFT MA President Tom Gosnell reminds fellow members why we work so hard at the annual AFT MA Leadership Conference

Benefit Bulletin: Membership Offers Security

In this series, we hope to inform our members about the many benefits of belonging to and participating in AFT. Should you have any questions or comments, send them to advocate@aftma.net.

AFT Massachusetts' members are now able to take advantage of the many benefits and savings offered through the AFT + Member Benefits' programs. AFT + Member Benefits can help union members save money by giving them access to valuable services that provide assistance in time of need.

Many of the AFT + Member Benefits' programs are through AFT's affiliation with Union Plus, the AFL-CIO benefits program. The Union Plus programs have been added to the AFT + Member Benefits roster of benefits to bring union members additional savings on an even wider array of products and services.

AFT Massachusetts' members can save with MetLife Auto and Home Insurance. Members receive special group discounts on auto and home insurance and may be eligible for discounts, including but not limited to, insuring more than one vehicle, maintaining a good driving record and paying monthly premiums through automatic bank account deductions.

The auto and home program also includes a Deductible Savings Benefit that rewards members with a \$50 credit for every year of claims-free driving up to \$250 that can be applied to a collision or comprehensive deductible in the event of an accident.

In addition to auto and car insurance, AFT + offers No-Cost Term Life Insurance for new members. New members who are actively employed are entitled to \$10,000 of term life insurance coverage at no cost for twelve months. Coverage is provided through MetLife.

Term Life Insurance is also offered through MetLife. Coverage is available in amounts up to six times the member's annual base earnings up to a maximum of \$1 million. Limited amounts are available for spouses, domestic partners, and eligible dependent children.

Senior Term Life is also available for members and their spouses or domestic partners ages 55-74. Benefit levels up to \$25,000 are available and coverage is guaranteed, and there is no termination age. Benefits reduce at age 80.

Disability Income, a voluntary insurance program with Met Life, provides up to 60 percent of a member's monthly income, up to \$5,000 a month, if an accident or sickness

prevents them from working. There are three benefit programs available: two years; five years; or to your Social Security normal retirement age or the reduced benefit period, whichever is later.

AFT + even offers Pet Insurance at plans as low as \$11.99 per month!

To learn more about the many insurance programs offered by AFT +, members should visit AFT.org/benefits. ■



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The Write Way to Learn

Lowell paraprofessional wins AFT Porter Scholarship for essay

We all know that working with students and school administrations can be taxing. Even so, few know as well as Lowell paraprofessional Marcy Winer just how taxing and rewarding it can be.

As a former employee of the Internal Revenue Service, Winer knows all about dealing with difficult people and having things we worked hard for taken away. Perhaps that is why she has excelled so in such a challenging field as education, where both the educators and the students have to deal with outside forces who are apparently bent on diminishing their prospects and potential, even as they are asked to do more and more with less.

Overwhelmed with the “monotony” of life in the IRS and eager for a change, Winer says she was inspired by friend and now colleague Paula Tye-Flagler to become a paraprofessional in 2005.

“I went downtown the next day to apply for a para position,” Winer recalls. “I was called to interview shortly thereafter.”

As a paraprofessional, Winer has the opportunity to work closely and directly with her students and thereby to have a direct impact on their education and their overall success. It is a role she takes seriously and one to which she dedicates herself appreciatively.

“Becoming a para was a great opportunity to learn more about education, how and why children do what they do, and to interact with a new group of people in education,” Winer says. “It has been an amazing learning experience over the years. I have learned something from all of the teachers I have worked with and have utilized that important knowledge and apply it daily in the classroom.”

At the same time as she is helping to teach others, Winer is also busy expanding upon her own education by taking courses at Rivier University that will result in Early Childhood certification. As this commitment is also taxing, Winer was looking for ways to make it easier. Little did she know that her inspirational dedication to her own students would also inspire colleagues to help her on her own learning path.

Winer found out about the award when a colleague who had been at the AFT convention in Los Angeles called to tell her she had won a Porter Scholarship worth \$1000. When asked how she knew to apply in the first place, Winer explains, “I found out about the contest while reading the AFT newspaper and thought that this was a great opportunity to exercise my writing skills and try to win the educational grant towards my degree.”

The essay (published here) was entitled “Reaching each Child.”

“It was a series of questions that were asked that I formulated into an essay about reclaiming the promise of public education,” Winer explains.

When asked how she sees her role as a paraprofessional, Winer replies, “My role as a para is to be supportive to the classroom teacher while work-

ing with the children daily.” Making working with her students a “priority,” Winer is careful not to “overstep” her role, but makes sure to do all she can to support everyone else in the classroom. In this way, she has been able to establish supportive and successful relationships with the teachers and students with whom she interacts each day.

“I envision the classroom teacher-para team to be easy and fun as well as

rewarding and a great educational experience,” says Winer, who was recently added to the talented team at Moody Elementary. “I have been very lucky to be paired up with great teachers who I have learned a lot from.”

As much as her colleagues may support and encourage her, however, Winer

says that her greatest inspiration comes from her students.

“The children who come to school each day with hardships are the ones who inspire me the most,” Winer says, recalling such examples as a young student who had recently lost a parent yet who still came to school with a smile, as well as the underprivileged children who may come to school hungry for attention in addition to food.

“The children who have the most difficult behavior issues need the love we provide the most,” Winer observes, noting that even the most experienced and resourceful of her colleagues are often too over-taxed with other demands to be able to reach each student individually all the time.

“I can do that,” Winer suggests. “I can sense the needs of a child and sometimes (but not always) figure them out.”

No matter how taxing demands become, however, Winer advises all educators and everyone who works with children to remember one thing. “It is human nature to care,” she says. “It validates what they need and all children need love.”

With this in mind, Winer feels that teachers, parents, and others can come together to support their children and to make public education and society stronger.

“Children need the very best that we can give to them in the classroom,” she suggests. “Parents need to support teachers and teachers need to support parents.... A school community is vital. It really is a necessary teamwork to ensure the needs of all children are met.”

So while Winer and her colleagues may face “monumental issues” every day, such as high-stakes testing, data collection and assessment, professional development, and more, they must still keep their focus on the students and what each individual student needs. This is not only Winer’s opinion, but also her pledge.

“I will continue to work with children each day and hope to make positive impacts on them and for their future,” she says, recalling all she has, both in school and in life. “I will always contribute 100% to a classroom, a school community and the children I interact with on a daily basis.” ■



PORTER-WINNING PARA
Marcy Winer

Reaching Each Child By Marcy Winer

I am a firm believer in a school system in public education that reaches each child. The public school system is a gateway to learning for every child that walks through its doors. Each child that I see daily has a different background situation. Some come from poor families in the urban setting in Lowell. Many are single parents on welfare or indigent. Each child deserves the best public education we have to offer.

We, as public educators, need to meet and reach ALL of our students. Often, we are so rushed through the day that we miss the little things they are trying to tell us.

One boy, who had his hand up the entire time during my reading group, would not wait for me to let him have his turn. He waved his hand wildly in the air, until I called on him. I said, “Johnny (not his real name**), can this wait?” “No,” he said, “I just want to tell you I like your necklace.” Wait, that was an AH HA moment (to borrow Oprah’s phrase). “Thank you, Johnny.” I said. He smiled and I did too.

We made a nice connection and went on with the story we were reading together.

If we do not take the time to connect, we miss important moments like that.

Often times, our students come to school hungry and leave hungry. Poverty, hunger and anger are all too common at my school. I try to give each child some extra attention when I see certain behaviors that warrant a “gentle touch.”

As educators, we are busy, busy with the day to day curriculum and multiple tasks that fill up our day. I find that a moment or two to sit and breathe with the children is a good time to regroup-center ourselves and move along. I often do this when the children are on the rug and we have a few minutes after lunch to catch our breath and move the day along.

Hunger is an awful barrier to learning. Many times, we have such hungry children that it breaks my heart. It impedes their learning, their health suffer and they are unable to focus and learn. Meeting academic benchmarks is nearly impossible. As adults, we are surrounded with a surplus amount of food all the time. It is the saddest thing to see a hungry child. One child I had about 8 years ago, was hungry all day. He had severe behavior problems as well and was suspended quite often. I used to sneak him extra food at lunch for him to put in his backpack to take home. I wish I could have taken him home myself and cooked him a meal to eat.

Children in urban schools are suffering with poor health and especially dental care. Something must be done about this to ensure that these children do not become ill from poor dental hygiene. Many children are allowed to visit the dentist when the traveling dentist comes to school on a semi-regular basis. When that occurs, the children get their teeth cleaned for free and even receive dental fillings. While it is sometimes traumatic for the children, (their parents do consent to this) at least it is helping them with dental care and maybe and hopefully they can practice good dental health at home.

Each day, I try to reach each child. I give them a smile, try to make them feel that they are wonderful, loved and cared for when they come into the class in my room. I love working with children and will continue to reach each child as long as I am able to. ■



STILL LOOKING OUT FOR LAWRENCE

AFT President Randi Weingarten (third from left) recently returned to Lawrence where she met with local and state administrators at the Wetherbee School. Pictured with Weingarten are (from left to right) State Rep. Marcos Devers, Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, Lawrence Receiver Jeffrey Riley, U.S. Rep. Niki Tsongas and Massachusetts Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester.

Mentoring Takes More Than a Village

Educator's Opinion

By Ken Craft

A crossover from the corporate world, I started my career as a high school English teacher in 1990. Luckily, my school had a mentor program. Unluckily, the guidelines were only loosely defined.

My mentor showed up in my classroom perhaps two or three times in the course of a very rough year when I needed her experienced eyes closer to two or three dozen times.

One problem was geography, as she was located on another floor of the building. Thus, we did not enjoy the luxury of brief but valuable hallway discussions before and between classes or on our way to lunch or after-school department meetings.

During the debriefings after those rare observations, my mentor served up some cold facts – namely, that I had messed up a lot and had a lot to learn. As proof, my mentor ticked off the many things I did wrong in front of my 27 energetic freshmen. She was accurate, I admit, but I could have created that list myself. As my own harshest critic, I excelled all too well at enumerating my own mistakes. What I was too reticent to ask for was advice on what I did right – or at least, what I attempted to do right. From there, maybe I could build something.

Now, some 24 years later, I can look back on that class and that kind but elusive mentor and chuckle. But a look at statistics on new teacher turnover is not a laughing matter.

According to the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 46% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their employment. This turnover rate – coupled with substantial waves of retiring educators from the baby boomer generation – comes at considerable cost, both financial and educational, and is even more acute in urban districts where budget issues affecting building infrastructure and poverty issues affecting student attendance and performance come to the fore.

Though it is a leader in education, Massachusetts is not immune to the plague of new teacher dropouts. According to the Massachusetts Depart-

ment of Elementary & Secondary Education, "Of those teachers who were newly hired in 2008-09, just 76 percent were still teaching in Massachusetts public schools two years later, with 63 percent remaining in the same district and 56 percent remaining in the same school."

Mentor programs have come a long way in recent years and unions such as the AFT have played a constructive role. Still, there are many ways veteran teachers can help new teachers to "hang on" during the early years of their professional lives. It is not the sole task of the assigned mentor.

To adapt a line from Hillary Clinton's famous "It Takes a Village" speech, "It takes an entire school" and that means the community of teachers in any given building. Just as a family looks out for its young, a teaching staff looks out for its newest members.

How to go about this? First, we



CARING COLLEAGUE
Ken Craft

should recognize that just because everything seems all right with a new teacher does not mean that it is. No one likes to admit to self-doubt and angst, and beginning teachers are no exception. While they will most often smile and give a perfunctory "Fine" in response to your perfunctory "How's it going?" as you pass in the hallway, it is better

to assume that the "3 D's" -- difficulty, doubt, and dilemmas -- are all present and accounted for in your new colleagues. There are more than a few ways any teacher can help, and all would come under the category of "random acts of kindness" – the very thing we encourage our students to commit daily.

There are many ways to show support. Visit a new teacher during a prep period, ask how things are and show that you are setting time aside to get real answers. Veteran teachers need to be good listeners. A new teacher is forever grateful for sympathetic ears, and though advice is always welcome, just having that sounding board cannot be overestimated.

You might also share an anecdote about your own rocky initiation to teaching. Beginning teachers are often under the assumption that experienced teachers are born with the skills

to instruct and inspire. By assuring your colleague that great teaching is not genetic, you will create a relaxed atmosphere more conducive to questions and "3 D" admissions.

Once a problem has been identified, be direct and ask how you can help. No matter what approach you try, however, try using humor. For new teachers, first years are fraught years. They need to laugh, both at themselves and at the situation. Humor creates collegiality and heightens comfort levels. Just as failure is part of learning for students, mistakes are part of learning for rookie teachers. It's all part of the process.

Many new teachers tend to magnify their own faults and failings. They are bedeviled by such questions as "Why me?" and such statements as "It's only me." Sharing your own failings – not just as a rookie many years ago, but even in the past week – will reassure young teachers that problems are part of our profession.

One of the biggest obstacles new teachers face is classroom management. Face it. This cannot be "taught" in any teacher education program. It can only be forged on the anvil of experience – and for many newbies, it feels like a hammer and anvil indeed.

If the problem is with a particular student, suggest that the new teacher talk to other teachers who have this student, including the often overlooked "specials" teachers. The problem may be because of the teacher, but it also may be predicated on a subject. Sometimes, for instance, a student who is restless in academic classes shows model behavior in art or gym. It could be because he loves drawing or sports, of course, but it could also be because he needs to get up and move a bit during class. Being deskbound for an hour can invite trouble. In the classroom of a less experienced new teacher, the risks are even higher. That is why asking around can be so beneficial. Other teachers may have words of wisdom about the child's personality, approaches that have worked for them, avenues to parental support, and ideas for instructional strategies that might preempt undesirable behaviors before they even start.

Logistics and "administrivia" are especially important to new teachers. Never assume that an assigned mentor has it all covered. If a new teacher looks a bit lost in the office or the copying room, ask if you can help.

You may be surprised at how often the answer is "yes."

Be cognizant of your attitude around new teachers. Steer them away from any entrenched Negative Nancies and Neds on the staff. Beginners feel like Job as it is, with all the work and challenges raining down on them. The last thing they need is the lightning of sarcasm and thunder of bitterness to further afflict them.

Instead, show pride in your profession by singing its praises. Assure new teachers that there is no such thing as a "master teacher," even though we hear the phrase all the time. No matter how experienced we may be, we are all perpetual learners, forever seeking the holy grail of teaching perfection that can never be found. The joy is in the pursuit. New teachers need to hear that and be invited along for the ride.

Another way to connect and support is to open your Professional Learning Network to new teachers. If they lack educational contacts, share yours. Tell them about upcoming discussions, such as those under such Twitter hashtags as #edchat, #engchat, #elachat, and #mathchat.

New teachers need not only mentors but champions. Advocate for them on an administrative level. New teachers often overlook or are never privy to seminar opportunities that pass through our inboxes. The education of our newest member must continue on many fronts, and seminars and coursework can reignite the very passions that led these young people to our profession in the first place.

Finally, while constructive criticism is welcome, look for and accent what the new teacher does right. Really. Such words are like the sun shining through cloud breaks after a storm – warming, reassuring, spiritually lifting and, in some cases, career-saving.

Our new mentor programs are playing an important role in stanching the bleeding that has occurred with so many new teachers leaving our profession during their early years. Still, more can be done, and if the entire school looks at each new professional as part of the teaching fraternity -- someone to be nurtured and guided not just by one individual but by all -- the losses will go down, the quality of our students' learning will go up, and we will all be winners. ■

Ken Craft is an eighth grade English teacher in Holliston.

AFT convention

Continued from page 1

I could help a child find the perfect gift of a book that interests them into reading more," said Jordan, who also participated in other volunteer events while in LA. "The lesson I received is it's never too late or you are never too far to get involved to help out your fellow man or members. We are educators not only in the classroom but in our daily lives. Let's continue to support each other!"

As the convention was in California, delegates were also addressed by LA Mayor Eric Garcetti, U.S. Representatives Judy Chu, Michael Honda and Mark Takano and Governor Gerry Brown.

"After listening to Governor Brown and the mayor of Los Angeles it appears that California is on the right path," suggested Hopkins. "They are providing the funds necessary to assist high-risk schools and are including the

teachers to collaborate in providing a better way for students to learn."

"Governor Brown has made educational funding – real funding – a priority," Angerhofer agreed. "The climate in our own state seems more supportive, too, as shown very recently with the legislature's vote to not raise the cap for charter schools."

During the AFT-er Party at the end of Thursday's session, celebrity impersonators mingled with delegates, taking pictures and adding to the LA vibe of the event.

"The weather was beautiful," said Chelsea Teachers Union President and AFT MA Executive Board member Bob Salois, who shared the "experience" of driving in LA with his family, "but the traffic signs are horrible!"

Fortunately, Salois and his colleagues were all able to find their way to the convention hall, where political strategist Donna Brazile used her moment at the microphone to announce another important movement- a

program called Democrats for Public Education.

"The very premise of market-driven education reform rests on the fallacy that the public school system is in crisis," Brazile explained, "and that the only solution is to let the market pick winners and losers."

Instead, Brazile suggested moving away from testing and refocusing on such vital elements as character, inquiry and community.

"The promise of America is being undercut by people who devote their fortunes to decreasing our strength, to advancing the politics of division, and to promoting economic policies that redistribute more income to fewer people," Weingarten said when commenting on Brazile's new group, which she claimed wants to "stand up for our students, for our educators and for public education."

"Public education helps us to preserve our values," Brazile continued. "We are not going to be silent as you

are getting attacked."

And while this organization is based in the Democratic party (for whom Brazile served as National Committee Vice Chair), even she asserted that education is "not a partisan issue, it's an American issue."

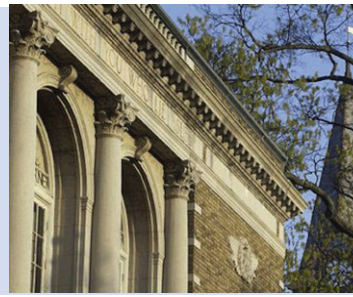
Such stirring speeches provoked many AFT MA members to come to California and to plan to attend future AFT events as well.

"The message is clear that we involve our communities, ourselves and seek to provide our children with the education that helps them become life time learners," Hopkins said, thanking AFT President Randi Weingarten for sticking to her guns and for doing so much to help maintain AFT's message and momentum. "To do this we must hold accountable our policy makers who we elect to be responsible to adequate funding of our schools for them to succeed. They should not sell out our students." ■



On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Falling Back Into the School Year

As its name tells, fall means the end of things. Summer ends, temperature drops, leaves fall, and daylight grows shorter as darkness grows longer. Soon it will be dark and cold at 5 o'clock.

The start of the school year is the exception to fall signifying an end. The start of the school year in fall traces back to farming as the dominant occupation in the 19th Century. Children were needed on the farm through the summer, and the start of school was often delayed or interrupted for farm kids. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, I was taken out of grammar school in October to pick grapes with my family in New York's Finger Lakes region.

This seems like ancient history, but the custom of school starting in the fall lives on.

At colleges and universities, the new school year begins with a bang. Noisy hallways are crowded with students rushing about, and with faculty greeting colleagues and friends. The start of the school year is exciting and optimistic but a bit scary. I never knew any teachers satisfied with his or her preparations for the new year.

This year's college academic year starts with plenty of problems.

Student loans driven by rising college costs and declining need-based financial aid now approaches \$1.4 trillion. College debt averages \$25,000 per borrower with those under 30 years old averaging more than that. College loan debt has carried over into other areas of the economy, reducing the amount available for other investments, such as housing.

The American Dream of children passing their parents towards a better life has been shattered for many middle-class and most poor families. Access to higher education, especially at bachelor and higher levels, has shifted towards more wealthy families and their children. Family wealth and background now reproduces itself in succeeding generations through their uncontested access to elite college education, as it did before the gains in equality of access in the latter half of the 20th Century

There are also plenty of positives about higher education in America.

According to U.S. Census Bureau, 20 million students attended the na-

tion's colleges and universities in 2012. 3.4 million were expected to graduate. Of those, about 60% borrow to pay college expenses (American Student Assistance). According to the U.S. Department of Education about 15% of college loan borrowers are in default of their loans, which means that 85% are not in default.

According to Donald E. Heller, Michigan State University dean of the College of Education (Washington Post 5/1/14), borrowing for college is a good investment given the options that most middle class and poorer students face. College graduates do better financially than non-college graduates. The unemployment rate for college graduates is about half that for non-college graduates, and their average annual income is more than 50% higher than non-college graduates.

College graduation pays. That's why virtually all parents want their children to graduate from college.

The key is to graduate, and many students do not graduate. But even here, the U.S. is among world leaders in giving students another chance. Thousands of public community col-

leges offer students 2nd, 3rd, and 4th chances. Every graduation class has graduates who have succeeded after several failures or older students who didn't have the opportunity to attend college when they were young. Almost all began their success in community colleges.

More important that financial rewards, most college graduates lead better lives. Meeting graduates later in life is a major perk from teaching and helping students learn. College made their lives better.

There are probably exceptions to this rule, but I never tire of meeting former students in their daily lives, especially those who I helped succeed in college. I think that every teacher, librarian, counselor etc. holds close to many stories of success and some of heartfelt failures.

In short, the start of the academic year offers new opportunities to teach and help students learn. Teachers should hold their heads high; you are doing the most important work.

As Frederick Douglass wrote, he actually heard his slave master say, when Douglass was a slave learning to read, "Education unfits a child for slavery." ■

A PHENOM-enal Leader

Natalie Higgins takes reins at Higher Ed organization

As our colleagues in higher education continue to work towards greater unity and strength so that they can continue to serve our students and our communities, they can take comfort in knowing that they have a powerful and passionate ally.

Atty. Natalie Higgins was recently named the new Executive Director of the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM). As a graduate of UMass Amherst who garnered her JD at Northeastern and who is currently working towards her Masters in Public Policy through the online program at UMass Dartmouth, Higgins is well aware of the tradition of excellence of schools in the Commonwealth and is eager to do all she can to continue and improve upon that trend.

"Education is so fundamental to my own identity," says the first-generation college graduate who has come to see a basic college education as a "right" that is sadly not accessible for many students.

"I was lucky to have two parents who were very determined to see me go to college," she explains, "even though they had not attended college." As her parents did not have experience with higher education, Higgins had to work hard on her own to figure out how the system worked and to make the most of it. As the new head of PHENOM, she hopes to be able to remove barriers and obstacles for those who might wish to follow in her

footsteps.

"I want to be part of a movement to challenge those barriers," she says, "to identify the support necessary for college to become a real viable option for all students in the Commonwealth."

As she had worked so hard to reach the upper echelon of education, Higgins did all she could to make her time at UMass productive, both for herself and for others.

One of her most productive projects was organizing the UMass community to push for passage of the Harassment Prevention Order bill. After graduation, Higgins continued to serve others by working with such organizations as Pathways for Change, for whom she served as a teen counselor and for whom she also organized a successful fundraiser.

When asked where her passion for community service comes from, Higgins credits her professors and fellow students at UMass. "The Massachusetts public higher education system has a stigma around it," she observes. "I think we need to make a concerted effort to change that notion. I believe

I received a fantastic education and so much of the activism I do now was encouraged by the people I met while I was an undergraduate student at UMass Amherst."

While at Northeastern, Higgins received the Rappaport Fellowship in Law and Public Policy and worked with Governor Deval Patrick. "My experience working in Governor Patrick's office confirmed the importance of working within the system," she suggests, "while also working to change the system from the outside. I think PHENOM really embraces that idea, of both small incremental legislative goals

while also advancing a larger, progressive agenda."

In her new role, Higgins hopes to expand PHENOM's reach to all 29 public higher education campuses and to grow the organization through fundraising and community outreach.

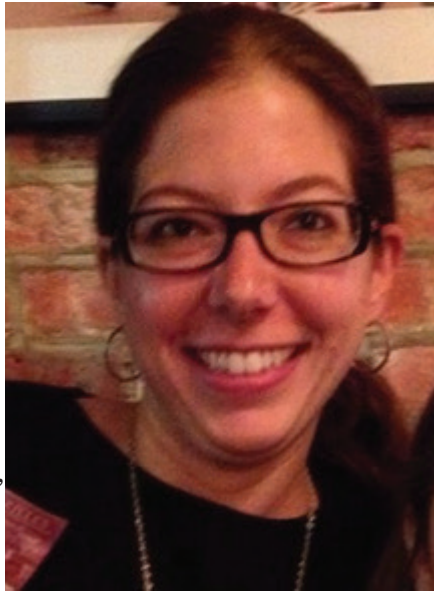
"PHENOM's principles focus on the accessibility, affordability and quality of public higher education," Higgins explains. While she hopes to see Massachusetts join Tennessee in guaranteeing free public education for all in-state applicants, Higgins realizes there are other issues to consider as

well.

"There are so many issues surrounding the accessibility of public higher education," she observes, mentioning the additional challenges faced by undocumented students, young parents, and low-wage workers. "PHENOM will continue to explore and address issues of accessibility."

By bringing together students, teachers, administrators, stakeholders and community members, PHENOM has been able to unite people with different views and needs under common goals. As the new Executive Director, Higgins hopes to continue and to build upon the strengths and successes of her organization and to advocate for public higher education that is affordable, accessible, and of unquestioned quality.

"PHENOM is in a unique position to both advance large progressive goals (e.g., free public higher education), while also taking the necessary short-term, incremental steps (e.g., fee freezes and budget increases for the public higher education system)," Higgins suggest. "I want to continue the significant legislative advocacy work that PHENOM has been so successful with in the past. At the same time, I also want to engage the larger community...in discussions and actions around the accessibility and affordability of public higher education... [and] to help shift the dialogue around public higher education from a privilege to a right." ■



THE "RIGHT" ONE FOR THE JOB
PHENOM Director Natalie Higgins



Retiree Corner

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



SENIOR SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

Monday October 6, 4-6 p.m.
Butler Middle School
1140 Gorham Street, Lowell

Monday October 20, 3-5 p.m.
Lynn Teacher's Union Hall
679 Western Avenue, Lynn

Thursday October 23, 3:30-5 p.m.
Amesbury High School Library
5 Highland Street, Amesbury

Saturday October 25, 10-noon
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

Marie Ardito's presentation is directed to people retiring in the next 10 years from public sector jobs. It provides an understanding of the retirement system and options, as well as a legal checklist, tips for protecting assets, advice about understanding Medicare, and much more.

How to Protect Your Nest Egg

Saturday November 1, 10-noon
Saturday December 13, 10-noon
314 Main Street, Unit 105, 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 As an Informed Retiree

Saturday November 15, 10-noon
314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington

This free seminar presented by Marie Ardito is directed toward those who retired on a public service pension and deals with many issues confronting retirees. Among the issues are: health insurance, Medicare, Medicare B penalty and surcharge, Social Security, working in retirement, legal checklist, tax structure of pension, and many others. All too often misinformation or lack of information on the issues presented is costly to the retiree.

To register for any seminar, email mardito@retireesunited.org or call 781-365-0205. Please give the name of the seminar, your name, phone number and the number attending.

delighted to work with any Boston teachers who want to do a community service project with us.

What is your advice to current teachers?

Each year we have different students. They know different things and lack different things that last year's kids could do. They come from always shifting background and mindsets. That's why I deeply believe that instead of sending us to endless meetings processing test scores and sitting us at our computers entering trivial data about each student, administrators should encourage every teacher to advise a club, coach a sport or engage in after school and out of school activities where the students are doing what really matters to them. We'd all teach better because we would have the data that matters rather than the trivial data that keeps us out of the AYP black hole. ■

Loyalty Rules

Loyalty is a virtue that most of us admire, but too few put into practice. Seldom do we see ballplayers retire from the teams that brought them up through their farm system. Rather, they follow the dollar wherever it leads, even to their former team's archrival.

Businesses expect loyalty from their employees, but seldom do we see workers retire from companies where they got their start. Over time either they or management parted ways probably a number of times primarily over money issues.

We all remember Aaron Feuerstein. He was the owner of Malden Mills in Lawrence, MA. When his three buildings were demolished by fire in December 1995, he promised his workers that he would continue to pay them until the buildings were restored and they could return to work. This act of generosity and loyalty cost him his company and in 2003 the company was taken over by its creditors. So loyalty is not always rewarded and in fact can be costly.

Today we are witnessing the essence of loyalty demonstrated by the

workers of Market Basket for their CEO, Arthur T. DeMoulas. They have brought to a halt a multi-billion dollar company because they refused to work until Arthur T. was returned to the position from which he was ousted. It is heartening to learn that these workers were given a few bonuses each year by this man in appreciation for their work, and were paid over the minimum wage. Yet, this store is noted for its lower prices. Maybe the workers found it easy to be loyal despite the threats because they saw in this man someone who cared more for them than the greed of excessive wealth. Not only should corporations study what is happening at Market Basket to learn how they can develop such loyalty to their company by the workers, but we can all learn something from them as far as developing loyalty in our family and ourselves.

This summer saw Billerica's own Tommy Glavine inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame. At this ceremony he spoke of being true to the team on the front of his uniform by working hard and not embarrassing the family whose name he carried on the back.

Tommy understood the old saying that "Blood makes you related, but loyalty makes you family." More importantly, he understood that one's family name should be treasured and guarded for a lifetime.

Now what has loyalty got to do with retirement? Retirees think long and hard about change as they enter this new stage in life; things they would like to correct in their family and community.

Loyalty is not sugar coating what is wrong. Loyalty is speaking the truth. It is not giving approval where it should not be given, but rather giving honest opinion. For too many, life is taking and not giving in return. For some, loyalty to family, community, country is taking from each to better themselves with little thought of what they can do to strengthen others. This has to change. If the world can change "one good deed at a time," we really can do something about restoring the principles of loyalty. We don't have to do it en masse like Market Basket, but let us look into ourselves. Let our sense of loyalty be the inspiration to others. ■

After the Bell: Judith Baker

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

What got you into teaching?

I owed student loan money and in those days, 10% a year was forgiven if you taught in an underserved area. I had done anti-racism organizing in Boston, and thought the schools would be a great place to work for civil rights since the schools were totally segregated by race and many schools were single sex also.

Most people today may not know that the school system was purposefully segregated. White students were channeled into schools that had one grade structure and students of color into ones with a different grade structure, so once you were in the system, you were channeled from elementary

to middle to high school in either the white structure or the other one. As I remember, out of 217 schools at the time, 125 or so had never had a person of color on staff - teaching or administrative. So it was actually quite exciting to be part of the process of change, even though it became dangerous for a time.

Also, there was no mention at all of anything resembling 'Black History' or women's history or participation of Latino or Native American people in the curriculum, no books on the reading lists by authors of color. We taught Greek and Roman [ancient] history to

all students, but nothing about Africa, Asia or Latin America, except for mention of the pyramids.

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

I taught for 33 years, first in History, then in English and Journalism - first at the Jeremiah Burke and then at Madison Park, with a brief stint at Latin School. I may be one of the few people who asked to leave Latin school

I don't think you end up teaching as well as you would if you knew your audience deeply and personally. You focus on the lessons themselves rather than how the students process the lessons because you just can't know enough about them.

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

I am now the Literacy Consultant to a wonderful African literacy project, the African Storybook Project. It is so wonderful that I wake up in the morning and have to pinch myself that I've been so fortunate as to land in it after five years of searching around for my new life's work after leaving teaching. I also continue to work on the Books for South Africa project that many, many Boston teachers and schools have supported over the past 8 years. If anyone wants to engage their

students and staff in helping us stock libraries in South African elementary schools and preschools, please contact me at judithbakr@aol.com. We need thousands of great children's books and plenty of school supplies, so I'm



HOLDING COURT
Judith Baker (center, in red) with Madison Park Alumni (clockwise from left) Michelle Owens, Shirelle Holley, Shona Jackson, Saudonya Daniels & child and Baker's husband Brook.

to go back to a non-exam school. I found the treatment of teachers and students of color [at that time] quite shocking there and couldn't figure out a way to challenge it.

What is the greatest lesson you learned as a teacher?

I was also the basketball coach for many years, first at the Burke then at Latin and then at Madison Park, where I worked with the team for 20 years. Coaching gave me the chance that every teacher needs -in my opinion - to work with students outside the classroom. If most of what you know of a teenager is their life as a student,

on 
www.facebook.com/aftma

Legislator Profile: Kathleen O'Connor Ives

Though she was inspired to enter politics in order to work on environmental issues, First Essex District Senator Kathleen O'Connor Ives cannot consider her inspirations without speaking lovingly of her mother, a 37-year educator who served as the President of the Chelsea Teachers Union and on the Executive Board of the MFT (now AFT MA).

Seeing education as a synonym for equality, Senator O'Connor Ives knows from personal experience and from spending so much time in her mother's classroom how education "opens doors to choices" in life.

"If you have an adequate basic education," she suggests, citing such vital elements as reading skills, mathematics and comprehension, "that empowers you to make choices down the road so you can refine what you want to do later in life." Without such an education, Senator O'Connor Ives observes, "your choices are limited, so it is important for everyone to have that so they can succeed and have those choices in their lives."

In addition to being tantamount to equality, Senator O'Connor Ives sees education as being a means of exposure that allows those who are fortunate enough to experience it the opportunity to "see beyond your immediate surroundings."

"We cannot control where we were born and what we were born into," she says, "but if you have the ability to learn and enjoy learning, you can be exposed to things beyond your immediate circumstances."

Growing up in what she calls a "traditional" family, Senator O'Connor Ives thanks her mother and older brother with establishing in her an appreciation for structure and also for literature.

"My older brother read to me," she recalls, "and we were always surrounded by books."

As her mother also brought her to school often, Senator O'Connor Ives was also surrounded by teachers. It may be no surprise, then, to learn that, when her younger sister was born, Senator O'Connor Ives

Took on part of the responsibility of teaching her younger sibling, just as her mother and older sibling had taught her. It may also not be shocking to learn that, during breaks from her own education, Senator O'Connor Ives also served as a substitute teacher in Chelsea and that she continues to teach English to friends she made while teaching in Brazil.

"That was a really hard job," she says of substituting, expressing her admiration and appreciation for those who do it day after day.

So much exposure to education and educators gave Senator O'Connor Ives a wide range of ideas on what makes education work for a wide range of students.

"I learned with a lot of different types of students with a lot of different backgrounds," she recalls, "both ethnically and geographically and class-wise."

Working and learning with all of these different people enriched Senator O'Connor Ives' own education and also taught her one main lesson. "I feel very strongly that teacher-driven learning is what it's about," she says. "I remember those teachers who taught me to love learning which is more important than anything else."

While in high school, Senator O'Connor Ives was exposed to one teacher in particular who made a special difference in her life. "Mr. Luther at Burlington High School was very free in his teaching style," she explains, "and let us learn in our own ways with a lot of flexibility involved." His class on environmental science was also Senator O'Connor Ives' introduction to the world of policy and set her on a path that she continues to tread today.

"When I was in college, I focused on environmental studies and I loved foreign languages," she explains, "so I majored in international relations." After spending six months in Brazil, studying environmental issues and working on her Brazilian Portuguese, Senator O'Connor Ives came back home and took an internship at Chelsea City Hall.

"That was around time of the NH primaries," she recalls, noting how fortuitous it was for her that an environmentally-conscious candidate like Al Gore was running for President. As much as she wanted to help Gore win, Senator O'Connor Ives did not know anyone in the political arena. One day, however, she saw Steve Grossman on television and realized that the then Chairman of the DNC worked in Somerville.

"I cold called him and he took the call right away," Senator O'Connor Ives recalls, clearly still grateful to the State Treasurer and gubernatorial candidate. "We met and he called the campaign manager of Al Gore's campaign and I went to work on the NH primary for Rockingham County."

This campaign experience showed Senator O'Connor Ives how elections and campaigns can change the course of history and made her even more interested in playing a role. The experience also changed her personal history in other ways as well.

"I also met my husband on the campaign trail," she notes. "He was working for Bill Bradley."

When Gore lost the fateful recount, Grossman asked Senator O'Connor Ives to be his deputy campaign manager. When that campaign also went other than how she had hoped, Senator O'Connor Ives applied for the environmental law program at Pace University in New York, knowing all along that she was destined to come back home to "the cradle of democracy."

"The Massachusetts Constitution is the blueprint for the U.S. Constitution," she explains, "and, besides, I am from here and there is plenty of work to be done here!"

So after graduating from Pace and returning for some more teaching and learning in Brazil, Senator O'Connor Ives went to work in the court system in Woburn. Wanting to be close to the water but also in a place with a sense of history and a real downtown, she and her husband found a place in Newburyport. As soon as she arrived, Senator O'Connor Ives became involved in local politics.

"I saw in the local paper that they were having landfill issues," Senator O'Connor Ives recalls. As she cares so much for environmental issues as well as historical preservation, she immediately ran for city council.

"It was a crowded field," she recalls, "and I didn't know many people, but I spent the knocking on doors and meeting people and doing debates and, even though I was a newcomer, I came in fourth out of five seats available and ended up serving five years there."

Later, when she saw no one from her region running for the State Senate seat, Senator O'Connor Ives again threw her hat into the ring and emerged victorious.

"In all of my offices, I am working hard to convince the public that being an environmentalist is reasonable,"

she says. "It is about clean air and clean water."

Building on her environmental concerns, Senator O'Connor Ives has been working to enhance the attractiveness of the Merrimack River, not only in terms of health and cleanliness, but also in terms of profitability.

"It is a unique asset that should become a destination," says Senator O'Connor Ives, who also chairs the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

As her district contains public, private, charter, regional and technical schools, education remains a major priority for the district-crossing Senator. Across her district, one of the most prevalent and pressing issues is funding, especially for special education programs.

"I am no type of expert," she admits, "but I appreciate that there is a pattern that every city and town says they are at competitive disadvantage regarding public options for special education. It puts everyone who says they have the best interests of students at heart at each other. I want to help these people work together."

In an effort to help support the SPED community, Senator O'Connor Ives started a special education working group that brings educators, administrators, municipal leaders and parents together to discuss funding, best practices and other ways to strengthen the services for these students.

"We meet once a month," Senator O'Connor Ives explains, "and anyone who is interested can come participate."

The Senator is also involved with the Joint Committee for Higher Education. While she sees community colleges as an attractive low-cost option, Senator O'Connor Ives does not see how they can keep costs and fees down and still remain attractive.

"They have kept fees and tuitions low," she observes, "but as a result they are dealing with a lot of deferred maintenance and the inability to compensate professors and lecturers."

The issue, therefore, is how these schools can "address these issues so community colleges can be competitive and be institutions at people will be proud to attend."

One particular project the Senator has taken on is encouraging businesses around Northern Essex Community College (which is in her district) to partner with the school in order to offer workforce development programs and other benefits that will encourage enrollment and support the companies and the community down the road.

"I want to work closely with Northern Essex to ensure that the private sector is partnering," she says, "because if not a real partnership, it is going to be hard for them."

Like community colleges, public schools also accept all students and are also struggling to offer attractive and competitive programs as more and more funding is directed elsewhere. This is one reason why Senator O'Connor Ives voted against raising the cap on charter schools.

"I feel very strongly that public education is the great equalizer," she explains. "For public education to remain both public and high quality and on par with any other alternative, we can't divest from public education."

Having established an understanding that charter schools were originally intended to be "an experiment

where best practices were found and then shared with public schools," Senator O'Connor Ives says that now many of her constituents and colleagues have come to see them as part of "an either/or situation."

"It would be different if there were ample funding for public education and we could have two tracks," she suggests, "but it isn't."

As a result, more and more public schools are being forced to cut more and more useful programs while more and more charters offer entire programs based around those same programs.

"Children in public schools often not exposed to electives that would be of benefit," Senator O'Connor Ives observe, citing such things as sports, arts and languages. "I voted against that bill because we have not addressed the issues of charters that make them more exclusive."

As is the case with community colleges, public schools' public nature is coming to be seen by some as a bane instead of a boon.

"Public schools accept all students," Senator O'Connor Ives points out, "including ELLs and SPED. However, the funding formula hasn't been fixed so that public schools are not impacted by students leaving the system and seeking an alternative."

While she is for doing everything possible to find new and better ways to teach and learn, Senator O'Connor Ives believes that charter schools have not been sharing their discoveries and have instead been siphoning off not only the best ideas but also the best students, in addition to millions of dollars that our public schools desperately need. "We should not give up on goal of integrating best practices into public schools and giving public schools resources they need so parents can be confident in quality of public education," she suggests. "That is the goal!"

Another element that she sees as being in the way of that goal is high-stakes testing. "Teachers want to teach students and parents want their children to have a rich learning environment where they want to learn, the Senator suggests. "I do not believe that mandates and administrative paperwork helps that goal."

Instead, Senator O'Connor Ives suggests, teachers should be freed from such drudgery and demands so that they can teach with passion. This is the only way, she says, that the teaching profession can maintain any sort of attractiveness.

"We have to recruit the next generation of teachers," she observes, "and it is not that appealing to young people who have options to know that a good chunk of their time will be taken not by inspiring students or teaching in a style they find effective but responding to mandates from people who are not in that building. Going forward, I think if we're going to have the teaching profession recruit the best and the brightest, we need to keep that in mind. If teachers do not have input into what and how they teach, it will not be an attractive career choice." ■

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Senator Kathleen O'Connor Ives