

AFT Massachusetts 2023 Convention Report



Saturday, April 29, 2023
IBEW Local 103 Union Hall
256 Freeport Street, Dorchester, MA

Got Student Debt?

The AFT settled a landmark court case in October 2021 that set in motion significant, but temporary, changes to the eligibility requirements for Public Service Loan Forgiveness. Since that time, we have heard from hundreds of members who have had their entire loan balances wiped away thanks to our union's efforts.

If you have student debt and, like most AFT members, work for a public employer or nonprofit organization—regardless of whether you work in education, healthcare or another profession—you **could have your entire debt balance forgiven, but YOU MUST APPLY before the end of 2023** to benefit from the temporary PSLF waiver and income-driven repayment readjustment. This now applies to Parent Plus loan borrowers, too, but only for a limited time!



The deadline to apply under the waiver is **the end of 2023**, and we're here to help!

Here are steps you can take now to make sure you're on the right path:

1. Sign up for Summer, the **free AFT member benefit** that helps you manage your student loans. Summer provides information and additional support to help you navigate applying for PSLF and other loan forgiveness options. Sign up for a free account at **meetsummer.org/pslf**.
2. Use the U.S. Education Department's PSLF Help Tool at **studentaid.gov/pslf** to start your application right away.
3. Need more information? Attend an **AFT virtual student debt clinic** for more details about how these programs work and what you can do to qualify. Sign up for an upcoming virtual clinic at **cvent.me/17XZka**.



Summer
Simplifying student debt

AFT Massachusetts members are...

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Saturday, April 29th, 2023

IBEW Local 103 Union Hall

256 Freeport Street, Dorchester, MA

The past year has brought important changes to the educational landscape in Massachusetts, from the passage of the Fair Share Amendment to the election of a new Governor who is a strong supporter of public education. In this new era, AFT Massachusetts is working to deliver the schools and libraries our communities deserve, the services and staffing our students need, and the workplace protections AFT Mass members rely on.

On April 29, convention delegates from across the state will celebrate our victories, discuss the battles we face, and be inspired to act. We'll welcome new members of our union, celebrate new caucuses, hear about important initiatives, and further develop our collective strength as educators and organizers. We'll hear from speakers, including:

- ▶ AFT Massachusetts President Beth Kontos and Secretary-Treasurer Brant Duncan
- ▶ AFT President Randi Weingarten
- ▶ Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman
- ▶ AFT Massachusetts leaders from across the state

We have multiple important campaigns ahead of us: fully implementing the Student Opportunity Act; ending the failed state takeover/receivership system; fully funding all of our public schools; winning living wages for paraprofessionals and school-related personnel; delivering affordable, high-quality public higher ed for all; providing fair and affordable public retiree benefits; and more.

By moving forward together, we have the power to win these victories and build the schools, libraries, and communities we dream of.

#AFTMA #MovingForwardTogether23

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2023 AFT MASSACHUSETTS PRESIDENT'S REPORT FROM BETH KONTOS

We are winning victories for our members, our students, and our communities.

Dear delegates,

As we gather for the 2023 AFT Massachusetts Convention, I am delighted to report that our union is thriving. On the ground in our schools, libraries, and campuses; at the ballot; and on Beacon Hill, we are winning victories for our members, our students, and our communities.

On the ground

One of my top priorities as AFT MA President has been to enhance our union's member organizing capabilities, and that work is paying off. AFT locals in Springfield, Lawrence, Lynn, Chelmsford, and at Berklee College of Music all won strong contracts this year thanks to their increased member engagement, well-planned contract actions, and the support of our full-time AFT MA organizing department. Our organizing department is hard at work supporting locals across the state with contract campaigns, electoral and budget advocacy, and more.

We have also created additional opportunities to train and connect union leaders from across the state. Last summer, we hosted our first emerging leaders conference, and our annual leadership conference in October was a great place for local leaders to exchange ideas and tactics. Educadores en Accion, the Latino Caucus of AFT MA, has been building strength with the support of AFT organizer Anabel Santiago. And our AFT Member Organizing Institute, which trains union members to work as part-time member organizers on issues important to the local school community, kicked off a new cohort in January, and has now trained over 50 members as Member Organizers since 2018.

I was proud to help host the national AFT convention in Boston in July, where speakers including first lady Dr. Jill Biden, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, and future Governor Maura Healey. And our union's reach extended all the way to Eastern Europe when Toni Bourgea, a veteran teacher at South Shore Vocational Technical



High School, joined an AFT delegation teaching English to Polish and Ukrainian students in the small town of Ciezsanow, Poland, near the Polish-Ukrainian border.

To me, nothing compares to helping a child discover a life-long love of reading, so I always make time to visit schools, read books to students, and distribute books as part of AFT's Reading Opens the World campaign. This year, I've visited schools in Boston and Fall River. We also partnered with SkillsUSA at Lynn Tech to host a FirstBook event during the holiday and giving season.

At the ballot

A lot was at stake during last November's election, and thanks to the hard work of AFT MA members and staff, as well as our coalition partners, we won several important victories.

After years of advocacy from AFT MA and others, Massachusetts passed Question 1: the Fair Share Amendment. With the passage of the Fair Share Amendment, we now have a fairer tax system, and an additional \$1-2 billion in annual funding dedicated to education and transportation that will be a great boon to the state, and to future generations in Massachusetts.

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2023 AFT MASSACHUSETTS PRESIDENT'S REPORT FROM BETH KONTOS

I'm incredibly proud of AFT MA role in the Fair Share campaign and the work of thousands of AFT members who spent time knocking doors and talking to voters to help deliver this lasting victory.

We also won another important victory on Election Day with the passage of Question 4, keeping in place the "Work and Family Mobility Act," the state law that allows all drivers in Massachusetts to be properly vetted for drivers' licenses, regardless of their immigration status. This victory means safer roads and better tools for law enforcement to do their jobs.

We also supported candidates up and down the ballot, from Governor Maura Healey to candidates for the State Legislature. More than 90% of our endorsed candidates won their respective races for public office.

On Beacon Hill

With the election of Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, we now have a strong supporter of public education in the corner office, a welcome change after years of an administration that viewed educators as an obstacle rather than a partner.

I was honored to serve as a member of the Governor's transition team's Thriving Youth and Young Adults Committee. This was an important opportunity to share our recommendations for education policy, board assignments, budget priorities, and more. I appreciated the chance to discuss our shared priorities, from improving mental health and wrap-around services to students, to raising pay for educators

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I was especially delighted by Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll's choice of Dr. Patrick Tutwiler as Secretary of Education. AFT MA members have worked alongside Dr. Tutwiler for many years, first as a teacher in the Boston Public Schools, and then in Lynn where he served as superintendent. Dr. Tutwiler is a professional educator of the highest caliber who puts students and families first, while also respecting dedicated educators in the classroom. In a few short months, he has already brought a refreshing student-focused approach back to the job.

The new administration's approach to education can be seen in their budget proposal for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, which would make significant new investment in education from birth through college, including continuing the full funding of the Student Opportunity Act for another year. As we work to secure continued increases in education funding promised by the SOA, we're also focused on talking to state leaders about our legislative priorities, which include:

- ▶ **The Thrive Act**, which would replace the state's failed approach to educational assessment and improvement, including the undemocratic state takeover system and the MCAS-based graduation requirement, with policies that will help all students to succeed and thrive. The Thrive Act would establish a modified graduation requirement based on coursework rather than high-stakes standardized testing, and implement a new 'comprehensive support and improvement' system designed to empower local communities to give students the tools and resources they need to succeed.
- ▶ **An Act to guarantee debt-free public higher education**, which would establish a right to free public higher education for all students, and create a grant program to pay the

equivalent of tuition and mandatory fees to an eligible student at any Massachusetts public college or university.

- ▶ **An Act uplifting families and securing the right to strike for certain public employees**, which would restore to educators the right to strike, so that in the rare cases when obstinate school committees refuse to bargain, we can have the leverage we need to win fair contracts that benefit our students and communities.
- ▶ **Two bills to improve educator retirement benefits**, including legislation that would allow educators who didn't properly enroll in the TARP enhanced retirement option to opt in to the program, and legislation that would ensure greater economic security for retired educators by increasing the COLA base and protect retirees from rising healthcare costs.
- ▶ **Making Massachusetts a global leader on climate issues**, an especially personal priority for me. I serve on the Executive Boards of the Better Future Project, which works on climate issues across the state, and the Mass Renews Alliance, which seeks to support a Green New Deal in Massachusetts. AFT MA has a climate caucus that meets monthly to work on a variety of issues with our organizer Gina O'Toole, and I'm also thrilled to have joined the Massachusetts AFL-CIO's Climate Jobs Board of Directors, where I'm working to pass legislation, ***An act relative to healthy and sustainable schools***, which would establish a statewide goal and plan to decarbonize public schools, public universities, and community colleges. The bill would mandate energy audits and dedicate a budget to financing energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy systems in our schools and college campuses.

As we speak to legislators on Beacon Hill, we are also advocating for universal pre-k, affordable child care, changes to the composition of the BESE board, increases to the school



building assistance program, restored collective bargaining rights, universal school meals, and more. With a new administration and legislators who understand the value of a strong public education system, we are poised to make progress on many of our priorities this legislative session.

Whether I'm supporting local members at a contract rally, knocking doors for the Fair Share Amendment, or speaking to legislators about our priorities, I always have our members at the front of my mind. You've spent the last few years persevering through difficult conditions, and never stopped working to do right by your students and communities. I am constantly in awe of the work we can do when we do it together, and I have no doubt that we will continue to win victories in the year ahead.

Beth Kontos

President, AFT Massachusetts



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2023 AFT MASSACHUSETTS SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT FROM BRANT DUNCAN

Excited to be moving forward together with all of you.

This year, as we gather under the words “Moving Forward Together,” I am struck by all of the victories we have won over the past few years by working together. We passed the historic Student Opportunity Act, and just a third of the way through the law’s implementation, it’s already making a real difference in our schools and classrooms.

In November, we won the passage of the Fair Share Amendment to deliver a long-term source of funding for transportation and public education. We elected a new Governor who is a strong supporter of public education – a sea change from the years of leadership on Beacon Hill that was openly hostile to teachers and our schools. And our locals have won strong contracts that deliver increased pay and benefits, especially for our lowest-paid members.

Your support is essential to the success of your locals and our union as a whole.

We also face many challenges in this new economy, from staffing shortages and inflation to the increased needs our students have as they recover from the pandemic. I want to thank our local treasurers for all of their work behind the scenes, especially this year as many districts experienced high turnover and you welcomed many new hires to your locals. It’s not always the most flashy job, but your work to support the union’s internal operations is essential to the success of your locals, and of our union as a whole.

As your AFT Massachusetts Secretary-Treasurer, I oversee the strategic use of our union’s financial resources, and I work closely with our Executive Board and President Beth Kontos to appropriate funds to the union’s programs, staff, and priorities. I’m guided by a commitment to maintaining and growing the quality services and support provided by the exemplary AFT MA staff to members and their communities.

Continuing to partner in coalitions that advance the interests of our members.

This year, we were excited to welcome several new locals to our union. Librarians in Grafton have joined and graduate students at UMass Dartmouth are voting to join their colleagues in AFT Massachusetts, and we’re excited that they’ve joined our



growing statewide union. And we are especially pleased to welcome the members of the AAUP: faculty and other academic professionals from 23 colleges and universities across the state. To all of our new members, welcome to AFT Massachusetts. We’re thrilled to have you as part of our union family.

Looking forward, we will continue to be a strong partner in coalitions that advance the interests of our members and benefit our students. We’re proud to be part of the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition that won the Fair Share Amendment and continues

to fight to protect the state revenue that is necessary for continued investment in our students and schools. Raise Up Massachusetts is also organizing to again raise the state’s minimum wage and ensure that municipal and school employees are covered by its protections.

We’re also very excited about our work with other members of the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance to pass the Thrive Act and finally replace the failed state takeover/receivership system with a better system that truly supports high-need schools. We’re working with the Higher Ed for All campaign advocating for fully funded, fully affordable community colleges, state universities and UMass campuses. And we’re organizing to advance other legislative priorities, including legislation that strengthens benefits for retirees in response to record inflation levels.

Our union’s financial strength has given us the ability to invest in organizing.

We’ll also continue to support our locals in the important work of organizing your members, running contract campaigns, and winning strong new contracts. From our AFT Member Organizing Institute to our amazing team of full-time organizers, I’m pleased that our union’s financial strength has given us the ability to invest in organizing that pays enormous dividends for our members.

Today, I’m pleased to report that our union is in a strong financial position, and that our locals remain committed to the membership engagement and collective action that are needed to continue winning victories for our members, students, and working families throughout Massachusetts.

I’m excited to be moving forward together with all of you.

2023 AFT MASSACHUSETTS CONVENTION

Keynote Speakers

AFT President Randi Weingarten

Randi Weingarten has led the AFT's efforts to strengthen public education for all children and to address the crisis in the teaching profession caused by deep disinvestment and the deprofessionalization of teaching. Through the AFT's Fund Our Future campaign, AFT members and leaders throughout the country are fighting for adequate investment in public education. She has launched major efforts to place real education reform high on the nation's and her union's agendas. Randi created the AFT Innovation Fund, a ground-breaking initiative to support sustainable, innovative, and collaborative education reform projects developed by members and their local unions.

Under Randi's leadership, the AFT continues to grow and expand its voice as a union of professionals. Weingarten is an advocate for a New Deal for Higher Education, a campaign calling for substantial federal investment in higher education that would prioritize teaching, research, and student supports; provide sustainable careers with professional voice for all faculty and staff; allow all students to attend regardless of ability to pay; create academic environments free of racism and other forms of bigotry; and cancel student debt.

**Massachusetts AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman**

In October 1972, Steven A. Tolman went to work on the railroad, and five years later he was elected to his first union office, Local Chairman of the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks. In 1998 he was elected to the Massachusetts Senate, where he served seven terms. Senator Tolman was one of the Legislature's leading voices – some would say firebrand – for working families. While serving in elected office, Steve was an outspoken advocate for accessible health care, quality public education, enhanced workers' rights, and the preservation of vital safety net programs for those in need.

Steve was Assistant Majority Leader when he resigned to become President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO in 2011. Under his leadership, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO has been a part of ground-breaking victories in electoral politics as well as advancing a policy agenda – such as raising the minimum wage, passing the strongest state-earned sick-time law in the country, and establishing a domestic workers bill of rights – in the fight for the rights of all workers, those organized and those not yet organized.

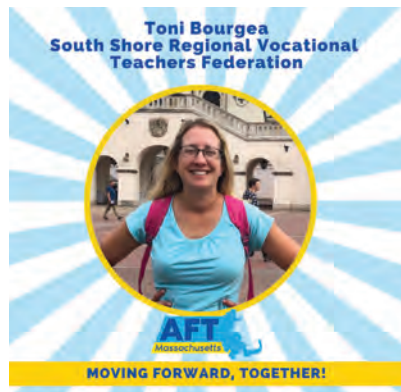




Congratulations to our AFT Massachusetts 2023 Distinguished Service Award Recipients.

The AFT Massachusetts Distinguished Service Awards are presented annually to AFT Massachusetts members who have demonstrated an outstanding level of service and dedication to their local union.

Humanitarian Award



Licensed educators in the PreK-12 system, vocational education, and school collaboratives



Members in the public or private higher education system, municipal librarian, or nurse



Retired AFT Massachusetts member



Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PSRP)



Emerging Leader





Congratulations to our Massachusetts AFL-CIO 2023 Labor Scholarship Award Recipients.

All recipients will receive a \$1,500.00 scholarship award. Winners were selected based on their score on the Massachusetts AFL-CIO annual labor examination and must have a parent or guardian who is a dues paying member from one of our AFT Massachusetts locals.

Kathleen A. Kelley Scholarship Award

Shalyn Medailleu, Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School

Albert Shanker Scholarship Award

John Cavanaugh, Norwood High School • Ethan Cliff, Billerica Memorial High School
Devan Hernandez, Phillips Academy • Samantha Kimball, Amesbury High School
Madison Reilly, Bishop Fenwick High School

Sandra Feldman Scholarship Award

Declan Hocker, Archbishop Williams High School, Braintree • Lily McDonough, Malden Catholic

Jay Porter Scholarship Award

Ronan Dowd, Chelmsford High School

Congratulations to our Locals celebrating Anniversaries with the AFT.

Lawrence Teachers Union, AFT Local 1019

75 years

New Bedford Federation of Paraprofessionals, AFT Local 2378

50 years

Norfolk County Agricultural High School Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2335

50 years

Wentworth Faculty Federation, AFT Local 2403

50 years



Reading Opens the World at Silvia Elementary School.

Reading is a foundational skill necessary for virtually everything we do. It opens possibilities for all children to succeed—to learn and grow, to explore and imagine, to investigate and verify, and to lead fulfilling lives. That’s why one of the focuses of the multi-year AFT literacy campaign, Reading Opens the World, is giving children and young people free books to read, love, and keep.

AFT Massachusetts President, Beth Kontos, visited the Silvia Elementary School with Secretary Treasurer Brant Duncan and **Fall River Federation of Paraprofessionals’ leaders, Stacey Alves and Kim Luz**, as part of this program. “We know that access to books can be a watershed moment for a student, as well as their family,” said Alves. Luz agreed, adding, “We know kids love to read and we are here to nurture and empower students to keep that passion alive.”

“The union leaders read to the 4th graders and gave copies of the Pura Belpré Award Winning book, *Lupe Wong Won’t Dance*, to each of them. In all, they distributed 500 books to the students!” “This is the best part of my job,” said Kontos. “This is the heart of our union and showcases the value our members bring to families and students everyday.”



Principal Patrick Lenz, Beth Kontos, Kim Luz and Stacey Alves

AFT MA is proud to participate in this program because reading well instills confidence and helps reduce inequities. When the Reading Opens the World initiative launched in December 2021, AFT President Randi Weingarten said, “Instead of seeing educators dig into their own pockets for supplies... we are finding ways to get books into those classrooms for free. We are finding ways to get teachers the tools they need... we’re bringing everyone together to experience the joy of reading.” From the looks on the students at Silvia Elementary School faces, you can bet we’re doing just that.

AFT Massachusetts endorses Maura Healey for Governor of Massachusetts.

“As the People’s Lawyer, Maura has always stood up strong for Massachusetts students and educators. As our next Governor, she’ll bring Massachusetts together to build an equitable recovery in our schools,” said **AFT Massachusetts President Beth Kontos**. “As Governor, Maura will invest in the academic supports, wraparound services, and mental health resources our students need to recover from the effects of the pandemic. She’s offering real solutions to close the opportunity gaps in our schools, and to make Massachusetts more affordable so that educators can afford to live and raise our families here. Maura Healey is the public school champion Massachusetts needs right now.”

“As our Attorney General, Maura took on Betsy DeVos and the Trump Administration to protect survivors of sexual assault. She led the fight against predatory student loan servicers like Navient, winning millions of dollars in restitution for Massachusetts borrowers who were cheated by deceptive practices,” said **AFT Massachusetts Secretary-Treasurer Brant Duncan**. “As Governor, she’ll fully fund the Student Opportunity Act, ensuring that students in every community have access to a well-rounded education with the resources they need to succeed. And under her leadership, state government will be a real partner with local communities to help improve our schools.”



AFT Massachusetts joins new “Higher Ed for All” campaign for increased higher education funding.

In November, Massachusetts voters passed the Fair Share Amendment, generating a permanent revenue source for investment in transportation and public education. Now, a statewide public higher education coalition is emerging to advocate that a significant portion of the funds generated from the Fair Share Amendment be invested in an affordable, high-quality public higher education system.

This month, the AFT Massachusetts Executive Board voted to support the Higher Ed for All campaign.

“With the passage of the Fair Share Amendment, Massachusetts has an opportunity to build a public higher education system that lives up to our values and prepares Massachusetts students to be active, engaged participants in their communities, the workforce, and our society,” said **AFT MA President Beth Kontos**. “Students today are struggling with the cost of college and a lack of adequate support services, while adjunct educators struggle with low pay and limited benefits. Our public college campuses have insufficient funding to address crumbling buildings, rising student needs, and staffing shortages. We’re pleased to support the Higher Ed for All campaign to reverse the budget cuts that have occurred over the past several decades, and begin rebuilding a truly public state college and university system.”

Creating a public higher education system that demonstrates its respect for workers.

Higher Ed For All is advocating for fully-funded community colleges, state universities and UMass campuses and proposes the following actions to knock down the barriers that too many potential college graduates encounter – and to create a public higher education system that demonstrates its respect for workers by providing fair wages and working conditions.

- ▶ Implement a debt-free college plan that covers not just tuition and fees but also living expenses, including food and housing.
- ▶ Expand existing programs that support student success and address staffing shortages.
- ▶ Promote the recruitment and retention of high-quality and experienced faculty and staff – and make it possible for them to meet the needs of their students, particularly those who face the most significant challenges.
- ▶ Return to the historic model of public funding for public buildings on college and university campuses and include faculty and staff when assessing campus needs.



Educators and staff at UMass Dartmouth, who have been advocating for greater state investment in Massachusetts’ public colleges for several years, are taking an active role in the Higher Ed For All campaign.

“As we move away from the worst of the COVID pandemic, the impacts of over a year away from the classroom are becoming more and more evident,” said **Grant O’Rielly, President of the UMass Faculty Federation**. “The absence of social contacts with their friends and peers, as well as missing frequent and meaningful interactions with teachers in their classes, have left students ill-prepared as they have returned to in-person learning. This is particularly true in colleges and universities where the need for support services in mental health counseling as help sessions”) has ▶



To continue reading online, scan the QR code.

“The absence of social contacts with their friends and peers, as well as missing frequent and meaningful interactions with teachers in their classes, have left students ill-prepared as they have returned to in-person learning. This is particularly true in colleges and universities where the need for support services in mental health counseling as well as quality academic tutoring has increased significantly.”

— **Grant O’Rielly, President,
UMass Faculty Federation**

Major push for Thrive Act underway – Member action critical to success.

An education bill filed in January 2023 has the potential to transform the educational landscape for generations to come, bettering the lives of students and harnessing the knowledge and assets of local communities to improve schools, according to AFT Massachusetts President Beth Kontos and other education leaders.

The bill, An Act Empowering Students and Schools to Thrive (or the Thrive Act, for short), would equip local communities with the tools and resources that students and schools need to succeed, and dramatically reduce the harm caused by the high-stakes, punitive use of standardized tests, such as state takeovers and denying students high school diplomas.

“This bill is about lifting up students, lifting up schools, and lifting up communities,” says Kontos. “And it’s about freeing students and educators from the shackles of punitive, high-stakes standardized testing. Like the Student Opportunity Act, the key to victory will be grassroots advocacy and organizing, and AFT MA members must be front and center in those efforts.”

The bill was shaped with substantial input from AFT MA, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, Citizens for Public Schools, and many other organizations affiliated with the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance (MEJA). All MEJA-affiliated groups have agreed to make the bill a major legislative priority during the current legislative session.

Specifically, the Thrive Act would:

- ▶ End the state’s harmful, failed, and undemocratic practice of taking over entire school districts based on low MCAS scores.
- ▶ Provide real help to high-need schools by eliminating the state’s failed and punitive state intervention/takeover system and replacing it with a more democratic and locally driven process for supporting schools and students.
- ▶ Establish a modified high school graduation requirement in which coursework as certified by the student’s district would

replace the MCAS as the basis for showing student mastery of the skills, competencies, and knowledge required by the state standards.

- ▶ Create a special commission with a range of education stakeholders to shape a positive future vision for student/school assessment that is authentic, equitable, and focused on supporting the whole child.

The Legislature’s bill numbers are H.495 in the House and S.246 in the Senate (the House and Senate versions are identical). Reps. James Hawkins and Sam Montañó are the lead sponsors in the House, and Sens. Jo Comerford, Adam Gomez, and Liz Miranda are the lead sponsors in the Senate. Numerous other legislators have already signed on as co-sponsors, and bill supporters hope to add even more.

Here are some things you can do today:

- ▶ Contact your state representative and senator and ask them to co-sponsor/support the bill. If they’re already co-sponsors, please thank them for their support.
- ▶ Talk with your local union about officially endorsing the Thrive Act and/or setting up an educational forum with local legislators and the community. Local union leaders may contact AFT MA for assistance.
- ▶ Encourage your local school committee to endorse the Thrive Act.
- ▶ Plan to participate in the MEJA Thrive Act Coalition Advocacy Day, scheduled for the week of May 22

“It will be all hands on deck,” says Kontos. “This is a special opportunity to put our imprint on education for years to come—to move from a deficit model of test and punish to an asset-based model of resources and support. And to a model that supports the whole child—all facets of learning and growth. We must seize the moment and work strenuously in partnership with our allies to make this bill a reality.”

“Like the Student Opportunity Act, the key to victory will be grassroots advocacy and organizing, and AFT MA members must be front and center in those efforts.”

— Beth Kontos, President, AFT MA

Scan the QR code to go to the AFT MA website to find additional content that includes links to fact sheets, the Thrive Act itself, a legislative e-mail tool, a sample resolution, Advocacy Day details, and more.



Lawrence Federation of Paraprofessionals reaches historic settlement with transformational wage increases.

After a contract campaign that brought hundreds of educators, elected officials, and community members together to demand a living wage, the Lawrence Federation of Paraprofessionals (LFP) has reached a tentative agreement on a historic contract settlement. The LFP pushed for months to lift its members out of poverty and win a living wage for all members. LFP members are overwhelmingly Lawrence residents, LPS parents, and women of color. The LFP fought to ensure that this new contract created more educational stability for students, greater support for families, and better working conditions for staff.

“Our union, over 400 members strong, sent a very clear message that when we unite as workers, we can win the wages and working conditions we all deserve,” said **Suzanne Suliveras, the president of the Lawrence Federation of Paraprofessionals**. “We are excited to build off this momentum to make our school community the best possible. We are now in a position where our members can focus on their jobs educating the students of Lawrence rather than how they will feed their families.”

The tentative agreement raises the minimum wage for instructional paraprofessionals in Lawrence from \$14.79 to \$21 an hour. It will increase the maximum wage from \$22.44 to \$31.83 an hour by the end of the three-year pact. In addition, lunch aides represented by the LFP will see a \$5,500 annual pensionable stipend, as well as hourly wage increases.

New contract recognizes years of dedication our hard-working members have given.

“For the first time in over two decades, we are seeing some of our lowest-paid workers get a real raise,” said **Juan Santiago, a lunch aide and negotiation team member**. “One of our lunch aides has been employed by LPS for 25 years and was only making \$16.64 an hour. After this agreement, between the increase in hourly wages plus the new stipend, this member will see an almost \$9,500 increase to her annual wages in the first year alone.”

Contract negotiations took place during a time when the Lawrence Public Schools received an unprecedented influx of money, receiving over \$84 million dollars in federal COVID-19 relief funds and seeing an \$18 million dollar increase in Chapter 70 aid this fiscal year alone.

“We finally achieved wage justice!” proclaimed **Maria Bones, a 29-year veteran parent liaison and union activist**. “Our new contract finally recognizes the years of dedication our hard-



working members have given to this district and community. In some cases, members are receiving over a double-digit dollar hourly increase. This outcome will be life-changing.”

The Lawrence Federation of Paraprofessionals will move to ratify this tentative agreement and looks forward to this contract being approved by the Lawrence Alliance for Education shortly thereafter.

“As a paraprofessional who has aspirations to become a certified teacher, this new agreement gives me confidence that I can achieve those goals,” said **Heidy Castillo, a paraprofessional at the Oliver Elementary School and contract action team chair**. “My colleagues and I will finally be getting paid for putting in the extra work, going to college, and earning our degrees. This change will undoubtedly help keep many of us in LPS and ensure long-lasting relationships with our students.”

“Our union, over 400 members strong, sent a very clear message that when we unite as workers, we can win the wages and working conditions we all deserve. We are excited to build off this momentum to make our school community the best possible. We are now in a position where our members can focus on their jobs educating the students of Lawrence rather than how they will feed their families.”

— **Suzanne Suliveras, President, Lawrence Federation of Paraprofessionals**



For AFT Member Toni Bourgea, teaching Polish and Ukrainian Students was “a melting pot of education.”

Many AFT Massachusetts members spend their summers teaching summer school, but for Toni Bourgea, a veteran teacher at South Shore Vocational Technical High School in Hanover, this summer presented an incredible opportunity: teaching English to Polish and Ukrainian students in the small town of Ciezsanow, Poland, near the Polish-Ukrainian border.

This spring, after AFT President Randi Weingarten traveled to the border to visit displaced Ukrainian students, she had the idea to send a group of educators to the region. 15 teachers were selected out of hundreds of applicants.

Toni, an English teacher and president of the Union at South Shore Vocational Technical High School, used to run overseas trips for students and parents from the school, traveling to 17 countries in 7 years. When she learned about the planned trip to Poland, she jumped at the opportunity to apply.

Honored to be part of this trip.

“I was thrilled I had gotten the request and submitted my application right away,” says Toni. “By a few days, later, there were hundreds of applicants and I thought I had no chance. I was delighted when I got the call that I’d been selected; it was really such an honor to be part of this trip.”

After being chosen, Toni and her 13-year-old daughter, Anne Bourgea, booked their tickets and headed to Poland on July 16, flying from Newark, New Jersey, to Warsaw and then on to Rzeszów Airport, where they had a 1½-hour drive to Ciezsanow.

“Bringing teaching to this new level helped me reset my teaching button. I saw how I can make English a little more fun, and a little more interactive, with less paperwork and more moving around. It was incredible to build these relationships across cultural boundaries, and be part of something bigger. I’d go back in a heartbeat.”

— Toni Bourgea, Union President, South Shore Vocational Technical High School



The two-week residential education program brought together 30 Polish students and 30 Ukrainian students to learn English, and the educators and staff of the program included adults from Poland, Ukraine, Israel, Brazil and America.

“Not only were we bringing students together across the border, but adults from all around the world too,” Toni explains. “I taught English to 10 high-school students, five Polish and five Ukrainian, from nine to noon every weekday. We also fit in many fun activities such as kayaking, disco, obstacle courses, BBQs, team work activities, kick-boxing, mural-drawing, sports competitions, and tours of Zamosc and Przemyśl.”

The American teachers stayed in cabins at a campground near the school, while the Polish and Ukrainian students stayed on mats at the school, summer camp-style.

Teaching in this setting generated lessons.

“What a melting pot of education and shared knowledge!” says Toni. “I’ve traveled all over the world, but this was the first time I traveled and lived among regular people, rather than as a tourist, and it was such a nice exchange with everyone in the town. We made such a real impact on their lives and they made one on ours.”

For Toni, teaching in this setting generated lessons that she’s excited to bring back to her students at South Shore Voc Tech.

“Bringing teaching to this new level helped me reset my teaching button,” she explains. “I saw how I can make English a little more fun, and a little more interactive, with less paperwork and more moving around. It was incredible to build these relationships across cultural boundaries, and be part of something bigger. I’d go back in a heartbeat.”

#AFTVoices: Mike Cooney, member of the United Teachers of Lowell, Special Education teacher.

Mike Cooney, as described by his coworkers as the “energizer bunny,” took time out of his busy schedule to chat with us. It is well known that being an educator has not been easy, and that is certainly true as we start 2023. Record lows for educator retention, paraprofessionals demanding fair pay for fair work, and students working hard to close reading and math gaps are common themes across the Commonwealth. Mike touches on all this and much more.

“As a Special Education teacher who had challenges as a student, I can relate to someone who has trouble reading or is trying to keep up with the other kids, praying the teacher doesn’t call on them,” Mike says. As an educator who is known for going above and beyond, Mike pulls his energy from deep down, knowing well the struggles his students experience too. “A teacher pulled me aside and helped me when I needed it, and I strive every day to make students feel comfortable and good about themselves because it’s hard to advocate for yourself.”

Compelled to fight for equitable pay.

When Mike came to Lowell, he had been teaching in other schools and was new to public schools. It took a paraprofessional mentor to help pull him through. “My first year was a real struggle. The para in my room became my mentor.” Seeing the importance paraprofessionals are to both educators and students, he is compelled to fight for paraprofessional representation and equitable pay. “I was upset to learn that my mentor, and paraprofessionals in general, are paid less compared to teachers. The truth is, paraprofessionals are often the ones who guide many educators through the educational system.” Mike smiles and says, “27 years later, I’m going strong, and she is still teaching too. I owe her many, many thanks.”

Even before the pandemic, educators across the country were calling for additional support for everyone involved in the education community. Mike echoes the resources educators still need, especially those working with children who need additional support. “We are stretched thin in Special Ed. Kids who are struggling need support and extra attention. I can’t be in the classroom all the time.”

Calls for hiring more educators, paraprofessionals and mental health specialists is still an urgent need. Mike says, “we need to hire more people. Period. Children lost a lot during the

pandemic, and there’s just not enough staff to satisfy the gaps students have from online learning. Nothing can replace one on one time. During the first lockdown, I made a little class in my basement for our online lessons, and later I went in every day and taught from the classroom, but it’s very difficult to motivate kids at home.” Mike concludes that while online classes may be fine for some, his students need in-person support to truly succeed. “You can’t replace the classroom. You can try, but the kids I work with need to be in the classroom.”

Being an AFT MA member benefits educators.

In-person classes benefit the students Mike works with, and being an AFT Massachusetts member benefits educators, paraprofessionals and everyone that makes sure the school is a safe and welcoming environment for all. “I’ve been a mentor for new hires and student-teachers for 15 years now, and I tell them if you don’t join the union, you are probably going to be sorry down the road. I love the union. When you need them, they are there for you.”

Through thick and thin, Mike is there for his students and he knows that AFT Massachusetts is there for him. “If kids have good teachers, supported by their union and respected by their coworkers, they will succeed. COVID may have set us back, but we will move forward because the education system is strong and because our union is strong.”

“As a Special Education teacher who had challenges as a student, I can relate to someone who has trouble reading or is trying to keep up with the other kids, praying the teacher doesn’t call on them. A teacher pulled me aside and helped me when I needed it, and I strive every day to make students feel comfortable and good about themselves because it’s hard to advocate for yourself.”

– Mike Cooney, United Teachers of Lowell



AFT MA Member Spotlight Series

The #AFTVoices Member Spotlight Series aims to uplift the voices, members and educators that make up AFT Massachusetts.



When I was a participant in the Member Organizing Institute myself, it gave me the opportunity to have conversations and be an ambassador and connect with members and others. I had conversations with over 370 members. As I was meeting with others, I saw firsthand how this program was an extension of the union president, because you can be so hands on.

When we say we're member-run, we mean it. It takes work and that requires member activation and owning it.

Gina O'Taole
Organizer
AFT Massachusetts



I got into teaching because I enjoy working with young people. However, I realized that if I was going to truly support my students, I could only do so much in the classroom. That's when I decided to get involved in the union. I ran for union rep and joined the Organizing and Bargaining Committees.

I believe through organizing we can improve the lives of not only our members, but our community.

Phil O'Connor
Breed Middle School
Lynn Teachers Union



Through my work in the union, starting out as a building rep., I see that the union makes the lives of members easier. There are so many times as a teacher you know things are wrong, not the best for our kids, and you feel powerless. Through the union, I know we can improve the situations we find ourselves in, for students, teachers and families alike.

In witnessing all of this, it has increased my excitement and passion for this work and the power of the union.

Karen Tucker
Executive Board, Salem Teachers Union
VP AFT Massachusetts

Students need the support paraprofessionals provide; emotional, physical and mental. COVID has shown the importance of this type of broad spectrum support, and the data backs us up. More importantly, we work to build the trust needed between parents, teachers, and students that benefits all of us.

Paraprofessionals are vital to student success.

JEZABEL MUHAMMAD

Member Organizer
Small Group Paraprofessional
New Bedford Public Schools



If I could talk to our elected leaders, I'd tell them: If you love libraries and the services we offer, pay for them.

Pay workers, support the hiring of new people, take care of the people willing and able to do that work. Also, the people who work for libraries and make them what they are—custodians, shelvers, admin, librarians—need to feel like they're important.

It's hard to hear a politician say they love libraries, but we're the first thing to go when it comes to budget discussions.

Akunna Eneh
Programs and Community Outreach Librarian
Roxbury Branch, Boston Public Library



“

Having experienced people who can handle opposition and make you feel respected, I want to be like that.

I want the administration to have a good relationship with the union and for us to work together.

We're all together here for the students. ...we share a common goal.

Yami Cruz

Teacher and Building Representative
Chelsea High School



“

I am going to do what I can to improve the lives of my colleagues and students, especially injustices experienced by students and educators of color.

To me, this is urgent. Ensuring every student, educator and staff person has what they need to succeed is very urgent to me. It always has been.

Joel Richards

Chair, Boston Teachers Union Black
Lives Matter Committee



“

As a Special Education teacher, who had challenges as a student myself, I can relate to someone who has trouble reading or is simply trying to keep up.

As a kid, a teacher pulled me aside and helped me when I needed it. I strive every day to make students feel comfortable and good about themselves, because it's hard to advocate for yourself.”

Mike Cooney

United Teachers of Lowell

Being in a school with educators who share their language and background can create a more welcoming environment and completely transform a student's relationship to learning.

I'm proud of the work our caucus is doing to create a space for Latino educators to come together and see how we best serve ourselves and the students we interact with everyday.

Rosalinda Midence

School Counselor
Madison Vocational Technical Park High School



“

If you're asking yourself, how can I support students in being supported in the classroom, the answer is simple: **support paraprofessionals**. Paraprofessionals are the first and last person students see in their day at school. **Student success depends on para success.**

Working together and demanding the respect we're owed makes our union strong, get good wages and benefits, and ensures community programs like making sure every child gets their own books.

Cathy Mastronardi

President of Springfield
Federation of Paraprofessionals

We need to increase COLA bases and preserve health insurance benefits for our retirees. Local pensions, Medicare and Medicaid all need to be priorities for our retired educators. We have fought and earned them.

Don't balance budgets on the backs of seniors.

Jim Lucia

President of the Massachusetts
Retirees United (MRU)



AFT
Massachusetts

Cathy Mastronardi: “Paraprofessionals are vital to student success.”

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and that saying remains true especially today. While teachers and staff are working for the betterment of students across the Commonwealth, others work behind the scenes playing equally valuable roles in providing students with the resources and attention they need to succeed.

Paraprofessionals provide a critical service to our schools and communities by providing essential assistance in a variety of ways. Certified Nursing Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants, Physical Therapy Assistants and Paraeducators, represented by the Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals (SFoP), are all vital members of our communities that ensure communities across Massachusetts can thrive. We talked with **Cathy Mastronardi, President of SFoP** about the myriad of ways these critical professionals help students, staff and communities succeed, but are too often overlooked.

Increased engagement with students.

Mastronardi said increased engagement with students was one of her top priorities when she took the helm as President.

“When I first became president, we were a union, but only in name. I know that it takes all of us to create the union we need. I knew, we all did, that we wanted more engagement with each other and everyone who is in the school community,” she said. “After working hard and working together, we’re now known for giving away 40,000 books to students and their families and for our annual book giveaways at the Back to School celebrations.” Backpacks filled with school supplies and a book for each month of the fall semester of 2019 were given out to every Kindergarten student through a First Book “Books for Kindergarten Joy” grant and Mastronardi said they had a lot of fun during the process. “We care about our community and it shows.”

*“I see the role of our union coming in strong.
It takes a village to inspire and raise a child.
That’s why paraprofessionals are life changing.
They step up where others can’t.”*

— Cathy Mastronardi, President of SFoP



With a poverty rate of over 25%, or 1 in every 3.5 people living below the poverty level, Cathy reflects on the importance of making sure not only students feel supported, but their family as well. “Springfield is a high needs district and the families in our district don’t always have the spare money for books. That’s where I see the role of our union coming in strong. It takes a village to inspire and raise a child. That’s why paraprofessionals are life changing. They step up where others can’t.”

Dedication to literacy a hallmark of Union.

“When I became president, we were in a low place; we were a union in name only,” she said. “What members were saying was not only about pay or benefits – they wanted respect. We were trying to think of different events to change the culture about how paraprofessionals are seen and appreciated. We have pro-para leadership within the district, but it needs to filter into the schools. It needs to be felt by para’s.”

During an event held in 2015, Mastronardi said she and the members of her union started to feel seen—truly seen—for their dedication to literacy and that dedication to literacy has remained a hallmark of their union.

“The Truck of Books event was where para’s got really involved. Para’s and teachers had to partner and work together. We worked tirelessly to get this event up and running. This was the first time a lot of my folks felt seen and respected,” she said. “Physically seen in articles and newspaper reports, even working together, we were shown respect for the value and impact ▶

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#AFTVoices: Kathy Peluso, Para Educator at Chelmsford High School.

In Fall 2022, Chelmsford paraprofessionals launched the We're Worth It campaign. Citing pay gaps and inequitable, unsustainable workloads among paraprofessionals, the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers (CFT) rallied both in and outside the school building to raise awareness and win a just contract for para educators. And win they did. We sat down with Kathy Peluso, a para-educator at Chelmsford High School, to discuss what it felt like to win this new contract and what next steps look like for her team.

"We launched this campaign to improve the working conditions for paraprofessionals. We are an often overlooked part of the education system." A longtime para-educator and community member, Kathy reflects on her time at Chelmsford High School and how the workload over the years has increased, but the pay has remained low and recognition nearly nonexistent.

Going above and beyond to assure that students' needs were met.

"Paraprofessionals are a catch-all term for the various positions we fill in our schools. It's important to retain paraprofessionals for the long term, but that's not going to happen if they aren't paid what they deserve or continue to be invisible within the larger educational community," says Kathy. "When we launched our campaign, people were blown away at how little we were making. Such low pay leads to a revolving door, and with such overturn, kids are not receiving the support they need."

CFT President, Lauren Cochran, stated in a press release that paraprofessionals earn about \$17,000 per year, and secretaries earn less than \$25,000. "During the pandemic, support personnel went above and beyond to make sure the students of Chelmsford's needs were met."

The #AFTVoices series aims to uplift the voices, members and staff that make up AFT Massachusetts.



Kathy says this was the impetus for the campaign: fair pay for the labor we provide to staff, students and community members. "When we stepped out into the community to ask for support, they listened, and asked what they could do to help. Even people with no kids in the school system were coming up to us asking us what they could do to support us."

Kathy goes on to talk about what it felt like feeling both community and staff support.

"When we launched this campaign, we recognized we were underpaid and underappreciated. Then we found the support we wanted to win the contract we needed. We won a six percent increase in salary for year one (6 and 3 and 3 - for a total of 12 percent). Even though we didn't get the exact dollar amount we wanted, we are pleased that our value is being seen throughout the community and schools where we work.

When looking ahead, Kathy pauses. She mentions how empowered her and her team felt from this contract fight, but acknowledges the work is not over. "Moving forward, we still need to become a stronger union. We can do that by educating more para-educators about what our union is for, which includes providing resources for us to feel good about our jobs and to know that we are a vital part of the school system."

"It's important to retain paraprofessionals for the long term, but that's not going to happen if they aren't paid what they deserve or continue to be invisible within the larger educational community. When we launched our campaign, people were blown away at how little we were making. Such low pay leads to a revolving door, and with such overturn, kids are not receiving the support they need."

— Kathy Peluso, Para Educator
Chelmsford High School

Peabody Paraprofessionals reach tentative contract agreement with School Committee.

Paraprofessionals represented by the Peabody Federation of Teachers have reached a tentative contract agreement with the Peabody School Committee, calling for increased compensation, additional training, and more access to technology in the classroom.

Critically, the parties have agreed to a pathway for all full-time paraprofessionals to earn an annual wage of no less than \$25,000 per year.

“An agreement such as this has been a long time coming for paraprofessionals in Peabody,” said **Doreen Blaisdell, a Paraprofessional from the South Memorial Elementary School.**

“Pay for paras has dramatically increased in nearby communities in recent years and I am proud to see Peabody join that trend.”

“Recent achievements such as the passage of the Student Opportunity Act and the Fair Share Amendment have

provided our schools with the resources to finally take steps to recognize the critically important work done by paraprofessionals to support our students,” said **Eric Blake, President of the Peabody Federation of Teachers.** “The PFT appreciates the School Committee’s recognition of the importance of paraprofessionals.”

“Paraprofessionals play an important role in our schools,” said Peabody Mayor Ted Bettencourt, who serves as Chairman of the Peabody School Committee. “We feel that this agreement is fair to paraprofessionals and demonstrates how much we value the work they do.”

“Paraprofessionals provide much needed support to our students, staff and families,” said Peabody Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Josh Vadala. “I appreciate that we were able to work collaboratively to reach a fair and equitable agreement that values our paraprofessionals and recognizes their professionalism.”

A planned rally at the Peabody School Committee meeting on Tuesday evening was cancelled. Votes by the union and the School Committee to ratify the tentative contract agreement will be scheduled in the coming days.

Paraprofessionals assist teachers with classroom instruction, provide individualized support to struggling students and students with disabilities, monitor bus arrival and departure, and help maintain order throughout the school, among a myriad of other critical tasks.

“An agreement such as this has been a long time coming for paraprofessionals in Peabody. Pay for paras has dramatically increased in nearby communities in recent years and I am proud to see Peabody join that trend.”

— **Doreen Blaisdell, Paraprofessional, South Memorial Elementary School**



#AFT Voices: Fighting for justice by living the example – a conversation with Joel Richards.

In honor of Black History Month, we sat down with Joel Richards, Boston Teachers Union member, local activist and chair of the BTU's Black Lives Matter committee. Joel is committed to justice both inside and out outside the classroom, ensuring that he leads by example.

As an educator, Joel feels compelled to correct the wrongs he sees running rampant throughout the education system. "I am going to do what I can to improve the lives of my colleagues and students, especially injustices experienced by students and educators of color." When asked what motivates Richards, he smiles and says that his energy comes from a much deeper place. "I am motivated by the Christ-like mindset I have. It's urgent. It's needed. Education is very urgent to me. It always has been." Richards said that as a Christian, he is a person who works towards justice no matter where he is.

Solving students' issues requires investment in educators and accessible resources.

Richards' motivation to become an elementary school teacher, while informed by his faith, is also rooted in his own experience as a student. "I wasn't the strongest student. When I became a teacher, I knew I wanted to focus on elementary." He goes on to explain how his elementary school years were a struggle, but was able to succeed because of dedicated mentors and strong support systems. "To me, elementary school is where you learn the fundamentals. Like in basketball, you must learn how to dribble before you play a full game." When asked how he sees justice and elementary school overlapping, he laughs and says that they overlap more than one might think. "Injustice pains me, and not learning how to read or do math is an injustice. We live in a country – and city especially – that has an obligation to fund these programs. If they don't, it is an injustice. Not investing in early childhood education is an injustice."



When summertime hits, Richards teaches middle school with the first two weeks of the course spent learning how to multiply. Richards said this is something that students should already know how to do by the time they reach him in middle school, but that over the past summer they were able to make huge leaps with the aim of building confidence in his students. "You want to build confidence," he said. "That's when you know justice has been served."

Confidence is a big issue for students, especially after the pandemic. Richards said that the pandemic didn't create new problems, but merely exposed problems that had been underlying in education for decades. Richards said to solve these issues once and for all is to invest in educators and resources students can access while in school, especially in mental health services. "Anyone of color in the education systems needs these resources—regardless of if they're an educator, student, or paraprofessional. And it's not just resources, we need to build new schools in Boston; get them out of buses and build true community schools with enough adults to teach all students at all learning abilities," he said. "You were born a human, you deserve to read, write and feel valued."

"We need to build new schools in Boston; get them out of buses and build true community schools with enough adults to teach all students at all learning abilities. You were born a human, you deserve to read, write and feel valued."

– Joel Richards, Boston Teachers Union member, and chair of the BTU's Black Lives Matter committee

The **#AFTVoices Member Spotlight Series** aims to uplift the voices, members and educators that make up AFT Massachusetts.



Berklee College of Music Faculty Union members are stronger together.

On October 28, after five months of contract negotiations, members of the Berklee Faculty Union voted overwhelmingly to ratify a new faculty contract agreement. The three-year agreement achieves significant progress on multiple fronts: wages, workload, equity, and additional benefits for full-time faculty, part-time faculty, Conservatory program faculty, and retirees.

“This contract was one of the strongest bargained in the past 20 years and was the result of an incredible team effort, solidarity of the faculty, and the overwhelming support of the students,” said **Will Silvio, President of the Berklee Faculty Union, AFT Local 4412**. “I would also like to say a very special thanks to AFT Massachusetts General Counsel Haidee Morris and Pyle Rome attorney Al Gordon for their expertise and advice.”

Wages of the lowest-paid faculty members will increase by up to 19%.

Under the new contract, all faculty will receive a 3% raise each year and, additionally, a one-time 2% bonus in the first year. Meanwhile, the wages of the lowest-paid faculty members will increase by up to 19% over the same period due to adjustments to the minimum wage for each faculty rank. This provision is especially important for faculty who came to Berklee as part of the 2016 merger with Boston Conservatory. Additionally,

part-time faculty who teach in the Boston Conservatory program will now be paid for office hours and department meetings, like other part-time Berklee faculty.



In addition, the new contract will for the first time mandate the formation of joint faculty/administration working groups to examine course weighting and full-time workload levels at Berklee. If consensus is reached by those working groups, the relevant sections of the new contract can be re-opened and re-negotiated.

“I’m thrilled we brought home a strong contract,” said **Andrew Shryock, Secretary-Treasurer of the Berklee Faculty Union**. “What’s just as satisfying was to see so many people come together around a shared vision for Berklee where faculty can do their best work and provide a world-class experience for Berklee students.”

Petition campaign to increase awareness of their contract issues.

To win their contract, members of the Berklee Faculty Union ran a petition campaign to increase awareness of their contract issues. They solicited signatures in support of the campaign from students, their parents, and other members of the Berklee community. A change.org petition allowed the union to provide regular updates to petition signers.

Each week in October, the union distributed a new physical and digital postcard to inform students, their parents, and others in the Berklee community about the ways in which faculty working conditions affected student learning conditions and outcomes.

In the end, strong faculty solidarity, support from the broader Berklee community, and an organized campaign helped the Berklee Faculty Union win a strong new contract that will help support faculty over the coming years. Congratulations to the Berklee faculty on their victory!

“This contract was one of the strongest bargained in the past 20 years and was the result of an incredible team effort, solidarity of the faculty, and the overwhelming support of the students.”

— **Will Silvio, President,
Berklee Faculty Union**



#AFTVoices: Rosalinda Midence, School Counselor at Madison Vocational Technical Park High School.

As educators, we understand how important it is to have representation and culturally-responsive teaching in our classrooms. Being in a school with educators who share their language and background can create a more welcoming environment and completely transform a student's relationship to learning. Unfortunately, schools don't always have the resources or policies that we need in order to retain educators of color, bilingual and multilingual educators and support our students.

As one of two school counselors at Madison Park, I've seen firsthand how this lack of support can impact learning and teaching conditions. When our union's Director of Organizing approached me about creating a caucus for Latino members, I knew this could be a space where we shared resources and information to best support our communities. Across the state, many members of our caucus are voicing similar concerns – a lack of investment in our professional development, lack of mental health support for educators, and lack of services for the families we work with.

Proud of the work our caucus is doing to create a space to come together.

As a union, when we fight for strong contracts, we're not only fighting for better working conditions – we're fighting for better schools for our students. In many ways, we still haven't recovered from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our schools and communities. Many Latino families at Madison Park and throughout the state were struggling with housing insecurity, job loss, no access to the internet for remote learning, and adjusting IEPs. Educators were left with the

difficult task of supporting families with limited resources, all while trying to process our own experiences in the midst of a global pandemic.

I'm proud of the work our caucus is doing to create a space for Latino educators to come together. Affinity spaces and caucuses are a crucial part of union organizing because they allow us to identify and amplify the issues that are impacting our communities. The ability to relate to our students' lived experience allows us to advocate for culturally-responsive solutions. When educators come together to build identity-based caucuses, we can ensure that our unions are prioritizing the fight for racial justice in our organizing.

Join the AFT Massachusetts Educadores Latinos en Acción! For Latino/a/x members of BTU or AFT Massachusetts interested in building Respeto, Apoyo y Solidaridad.

“The ability to relate to our students' lived experience allows us to advocate for culturally-responsive solutions. When educators come together to build identity-based caucuses, we can ensure that our unions are prioritizing the fight for racial justice in our organizing.”

— Rosalinda Midence, School Counselor, Madison Vocational Technical Park High School

We are Stronger Together: the power and advantage of Union membership.



“Say cheese” with Santa: AFT Educator gives back during holiday season.

Our educators go above and beyond in many ways to ensure the needs of the students in the Commonwealth are met. Sometimes this means staying after with students, sometimes it means dipping into personal funds to make sure they have supplies, and sometimes it means donning a red suit and spreading some Christmas cheer.

In 2018, **Michael Curley of the Lynn Teachers Union** received a phone call from one of his wife’s closest friends. This friend loves Christmas and hosts an annual holiday gathering following Thanksgiving dubbed “Thanksmas,” and this year she was asking if Michael would be interested in donning the role of Old Saint Nick. He said he couldn’t say no to a close friend, and that the chance to play Santa seemed fun.

He donned a red suit, and his own beard, which he said wasn’t quite “Santa ready” but the kids and winter revelers had a blast all the same. In 2019 he returned with his beard more grown out, and a suit more suitable for Santa. Once again everyone had a wonderful time. At the time Michael and his wife didn’t think much of it except how to make their friend’s party more fun for the family, but the role would become more meaningful to more people in the following year.

“Then Covid hit...in 2020 we sat around, like most people did, and we lamented the things that were lost for the time being,” Michael said. “As Christmas approached, we thought of all the kids who would not be able to get Santa photos that year, and how disappointing that would be for their parents.”

Using the role of Santa for some good.

Then the idea came to them, why not try to find a way to use the newfound role of Santa for some good. Michael and his wife purchased a backdrop, went to their local Facebook community board and asked if anyone wanted to take socially distant photos with Santa in the Curley’s driveway.

“We created our own Facebook Group called ‘2020 Santa Photos.’ I wore a face shield, and people wore masks until it was time for the photos to be as safe as possible,” he said. “There was a lovely response. We decided not to ask for money, but to suggest donations that we would use to help people who were in need during this difficult time of year.”

People showed up for the photos, and this led to an idea to host a breakfast with Santa. They partnered with a local restaurant and by the end of their Santa sessions, they had raised a little over \$2,000. All of that money went to local causes.



Michael Curley of AFT Local 1037

“We put it into the local food pantry, and we gave some to the Classical High School Secretary. Coula helped Lynn elementary school children in need have a better Christmas,” he said. “We have expenses, but those are taken care of by us. Every single penny donated to us goes directly back to the local community. We are incredibly transparent with what we collect and what we donate.”

“The Santa Project” continues to grow.

The following year the tradition continued and more partnerships ensued. The Santa Project continued to grow, and so too did the donations. “We have had people donate \$500 and people who have donated a teddy bear,” Michael said.

In 2021 they were able to raise just over \$7,000, and with that success behind them, the momentum continues forward into today. As the project began in the driveway of their blue house, they decided on the name “The Blue House Santa Project,” and Michael updated the suit, grew out his beard and asked members to invite people who might need them.

The project has grown in 2022, with Michael saying they had raised more than \$5,000 only halfway through the season. They have plans to visit the pediatric ward at his wife’s hospital, as well as plans to play the role of Santa for a special party for a child with special needs. This on top of the regular appointments Santa will be keeping.

“We did not plan this project, we just saw a need and tried to fill it,” Michael said. “It’s been so well received and we have had so much fun doing it, we can’t imagine stopping.”

#AFTVoices: Yamilis Cruz, Teacher and Building Rep at Chelsea High School.

In the discourse around public education, teachers are often pitted against administration. This false dichotomy can not only create unnecessarily difficult dynamics in our schools, but it can stop us from building power together in the fight for better schools. In my time as a building rep in our union, I've been exploring what it looks like to foster stronger connections between educators and the administration.

Throughout my time at Chelsea High School, there has been high turnover of both teachers and leadership. We have had three principals in the last five years alone and, like many schools across the state, that turnover has led to ongoing challenges and policy changes. The inconsistency is difficult, but it also presents an opportunity for partnership



between educators and admin. Becoming a building rep has allowed me to engage with my school in a different way by listening to the needs of my co-workers and working toward solutions.

It is important that we disrupt the idea that our relationships with administration are inherently adversarial. When we are bargaining contracts, we are fighting for schools that set our students up for success, including more sustainable working conditions for their teachers.

This requires strategic demands and persistence from educators and accountability from leadership. Being active in our union can shift this process toward one that centers the needs of students and educators while creating a pathway for collaboration and success.

“It is important that we disrupt the idea that our relationships with administration are inherently adversarial. When we are bargaining contracts, we are fighting for schools that set our students up for success, including more sustainable working conditions for their teachers.”

—Yamilis Cruz, Teacher and Building Rep, Chelsea High School

AFT MA applauds Biden Student Debt Relief Plan.

AFT Massachusetts released the following statement from AFT MA President Beth Kontos in response to the student debt relief plan announced by President Biden:

“President Biden’s student loan forgiveness plan will be life-changing for tens of thousands of Massachusetts teachers, counselors, librarians, and other workers who have dedicated their lives to public service, as well as for millions of borrowers across the country who have been failed by a broken higher education funding system.

“Forgiving \$10,000 of student debt for all low- and middle-income borrowers, and an additional \$10,000 for Pell Grant recipients, will greatly reduce the burden of debt that is holding many borrowers back from buying a home, starting a family, or following their chosen career. By reducing costs for thousands of educators, this plan will aid educator retention



and help combat the teacher and staff shortages our schools are facing. Through this plan, and through other executive actions such as reform of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, the Biden Administration is delivering transformative student debt relief where it is needed most.

“I want to thank AFT President Randi Weingarten, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Representative Ayanna Pressley for their tireless advocacy in support of student loan borrowers over the last several years. Now, we must focus on fully funding a debt-free future at our public colleges and universities, in Massachusetts and across the country. Our state and our nation have the ability to make college affordable again – we just need the will to act. Today’s student debt relief announcement is a great first step, but the work is just beginning.”



Chelmsford Federation of Teachers and AFT Massachusetts win a victory for labor.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations (DLR) found the Chelmsford School Committee guilty last week on 12 counts of violating labor law in the case involving then Chelmsford Federation of Teachers President Jennifer Salmon.

The case stems from an incident in 2017 when President Salmon requested to meet with the principal over classroom safety concerns. The principal refused and left, while Ms. Salmon and an AFT Massachusetts field representative waited in the main office hoping to schedule a future meeting. Meanwhile the Superintendent, who was not at the school, had called the police.

The law states that a public employer cannot “interfere, restrain, or coerce any employee” regarding their protected rights or “discriminate in regard to hiring, tenure, or any term or condition of employment to encourage or discourage membership in any employee organization.”

Although, Ms. Salmon did nothing but sit quietly at a table in the main office, Ms. Salmon was escorted from building by police, placed on leave and disciplined. According to the decision, all witnesses including the police, stated that Salmon was cooperative and was not a threat,” DLR Hearing Officer Meghan Ventrella wrote.

The DLR found that Ms. Salmon was both disciplined and placed on administrative leave in retaliation for her protected union activity in advocating for safety concerns of teachers.



“The school administration clearly trampled on the rights of the union president, who was simply trying to schedule a meeting with the school principal to discuss safety issues,” **said Beth Kontos, president of the AFT MA.** “The school department’s retaliation against the democratically-elected union president for her protected union activity was nothing short of egregious.”

Summary: A hearing officer of the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations has held that the Chelmsford School Committee (School Committee) violated Section 10(a)(3) and, derivatively, Section 10(a)(1) of M.G.L. Chapter 150E (the Law) by placing Jennifer Salmon (Salmon) on administrative leave and issuing her a written warning in retaliation for engaging in concerted, protected activity.

The School Committee was ordered to cease and desist from disciplining unit members in retaliation for their protected, concerted activity; In any like manner interfering with, restraining and coercing its employees in any right guaranteed under the law [Chapter 150 E]; Rescind the discipline and administrative leave letter issued to President Salmon; and Immediately post a notice in all conspicuous places where bargaining unit members usually congregate stating the following:

School Committee independently violated Section 10(a)(1) of the Law when:

- 1) Superintendent Jay Lang (Lang) requested police remove Union representative Eric Blanchett (Blanchett), from Harrington Elementary School in the presence of union members.
- 2) Lang allowed a police officer to escort Salmon from Harrington;
- 3) Lang made comments of disappointment at a November 22, 2017 meeting with unit members;
- 4) Lang made comments at the same November 22 meeting with unit members regarding the “right way and a wrong way to get help within the school”;
- 5) Lang made a November 22, 2017 statement which was posted on Facebook;
- 7) Lang made comments in a December 8, 2017 email; ►

“The school administration clearly trampled on the rights of the union president, who was simply trying to schedule a meeting with the school principal to discuss safety issues. The school department’s retaliation against the democratically-elected union president for her protected union activity was nothing short of egregious.”

— Beth Kontos, President, AFT MA

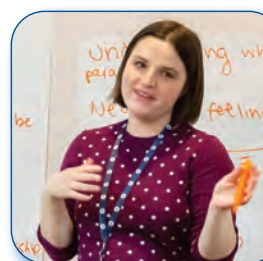


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AFT MA Paraprofessionals from around the state attend Boston Teachers Union 2023 PSRP Conference.



AFTMA paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRP) joined their colleagues from across the state at the AFT MA Boston Teachers Union Annual PSRP Conference on Saturday April 1st, 2023. PSRPs have rightly focused on student mental health, but educator health and well-being are equally important. They had the opportunity to participate in workshops, collaborate with colleagues and have the chance to win gift baskets and gift certificates focused on health and well-being.



AFT Massachusetts statement on passage of Question 1 – the Fair Share Amendment.

The Commonwealth has taken a much-needed step in the direction of supporting our educators, students and communities with the passing of Question 1 – the Fair Share Amendment. Now that we’ve passed Question 1, we will have a fairer tax system, and an additional \$2 billion in annual funding that will be a great boon to the state, and to future generations in Massachusetts.

The AFT Massachusetts has been a longtime advocate for improving the lives of educators and students within the Commonwealth. This new funding will help improve school facilities, provide additional after-school programs for students, and help retain and attract new teachers to the field of education amidst a historic shortage of qualified educators.

A huge thank you to AFT MA members.

“By passing Question 1, we’ve won an enormous victory for Massachusetts students, families, and educators that will reverberate for decades,” says **Beth Kontos, President of AFT MA** “Starting next year, Massachusetts will have a fairer tax system and substantial new revenue to invest in our public schools, colleges, and transportation systems. Years from now, our communities will continue to see the benefits of better schools, safer roads, and a tax system that asks those at the very top to do their part. A huge thank you goes to all the AFT Massachusetts members who devoted their time to door-



knocking, phone-banking, and having conversations with neighbors to help push us over the finish line and deliver this historic win for Massachusetts.”

The Fair Share Amendment will help ensure a prosperous future in our state by ensuring every student in every district has the same opportunities for excellence. It will ensure more, better paying jobs for our educators, and it will ensure the trains, roads and bridges that connect our communities are strong.

The new revenue will help to provide much-needed improvements across the board for our early education, K-12 and higher education institutions. Districts burdened with low funding will now have the resources they need to take the burden off teachers who have oftentimes needed to dip into their meager incomes to provide for their students.

New roads and updates to our state transportation and infrastructure will also help our students get to and from class, in addition to helping a myriad of blue-collar workers do the same. A rising tide raises all ships, and the investment the citizens of the Commonwealth have decided to make will yield benefits for generations to come.

“By passing Question 1, we’ve won an enormous victory for Massachusetts students, families, and educators that will reverberate for decades. Starting next year, Massachusetts will have a fairer tax system and substantial new revenue to invest in our public schools, colleges, and transportation systems. Years from now, our communities will continue to see the benefits of better schools, safer roads, and a tax system that asks those at the very top to do their part.”

— Beth Kontos, President, AFT MA

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UMass Faculty Federation celebrates educators during annual award ceremony.

The UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, celebrated educators who worked tirelessly to help prepare the minds of tomorrow's leaders. **Dr. Hua (Julia) Fang, Professor Meghan Fair** and **Deidre Healy** were all honored in December 2022 during the Federation's annual award celebration. AFT Massachusetts wants to highlight these educators and celebrate their accomplishments as well. **UMass Faculty Federation President Grant O'Rielly** had high praise for the educators and support staff who were honored at the annual event and said that the entirety of those who fill the classrooms and support the students at UMass Dartmouth deserve recognition as well.

"We are immeasurably proud and grateful to these committed and hardworking individuals who have gone above and beyond to ensure that the students who sit in our classrooms emerge with the best education possible," he said. "We are also grateful to those who secure the resources and support that allows these educators to accomplish this mission. The importance of unions is our ability to work together and ensure that we as educators and support staff are taken care of so that we can take care of our students."

Dr. Hua (Julia) Fang

Dr. Fang was honored with the 2022 Scholar of the Year Award, which recognizes a substantive body of work, as well as exemplary scholarly or artistic achievement by an individual in their discipline. Dr. Fang joined the Department of Computer and Information Science at UMass Dartmouth in 2017, and breakthroughs in her scholarly work inspired former 2010 Scholar of the Year recipient Dr. Liudong Xing, and the other members of her department, to nominate her for the award.

"Since she joined UMass Dartmouth in 2017, Dr. Fang has been making remarkable breakthroughs in her scholarly work," Xing said. "For her extraordinary research accomplishments and research impact on UMass Dartmouth community and programs, UMass System, Southcoast and New England regions, U.S. and International research community as well as her outstanding student research mentoring, we enthusiastically nominate Dr. Fang for the 2022 Scholar of the Year Award."

Assistant Teaching Professor Meghan M. Fair

Assistant Teaching Professor Meghan M. Fair was honored with the Leo M. Sullivan Teacher of the Year Award. Established in 1971, the "Teacher of the Year" Award is a memorial to the late Leo M. Sullivan, founder of and former professor and



Dr. Hua (Julia) Fang, Professor Meghan Fair and Deidre Healy

chairperson of the UMass Dartmouth's Department of Psychology. It recognizes an educator who has demonstrated a particular dedication to students through exceptional teaching and advising. Colleague Dr. Eli Evans said he nominated Fair for her exhaustive efforts to engage and support their students.

"I have taught alongside Meghan for seven years, witnessing her unparalleled pursuit of student engagement, student wellbeing, and collegiality," Evans wrote in his nomination letter. "She is spirited, ambitious, and caring and I can attest that her students share my sentiments. Meghan embraces her role as teacher/advisor/colleague with grace and grit and a tireless spirit."

Deirdre Healy

Deidre Healy was the winner of the Bruce A. Sparfven ESU Service Award, awarded to educational service unit members who have demonstrated service for the ESU, as well as service to the university. Brian Sullivan, who offered his nomination for Healy, said she had been an avid supporter of the university and union since her first day on campus.

"Deirdre has been a grassroots supporter of the union since her first day on campus. She has served as an Area Rep for the Liberal Arts Building as well as in the most recent Negotiations Committee. She also serves as a member of the new Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee (JEDI-B). She is a welcoming voice to new members who have questions about the union and a strong supporter of more seasoned members across the campus."

Deirdre's work as the Director of Community Service and Partnerships touches the lives of so many students who choose to come to UMass Dartmouth.

Scenes from the AFT Massachusetts 2022 Convention.



AFT MA hosted the AFT 2022 National Convention.





AFT Massachusetts applauds Healey Driscoll team for appointing Tutwiler as Secretary of Education.

AFT Massachusetts, which represents 23,000 public school employees, higher education faculty and staff, and public librarians, released the following statement from AFT Massachusetts President Beth Kontos in response to the announcement that Governor-elect Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor-elect Kim Driscoll have selected Dr. Patrick Tutwiler as the next Secretary of Education:

“AFT Massachusetts members have worked alongside Dr. Patrick Tutwiler for many years, first as a teacher in the Boston Public Schools, and then in Lynn where he served as superintendent. Dr. Tutwiler is a professional educator of the highest caliber who puts students and families first, while also respecting dedicated educators in the classroom.

“As we continue to navigate the post-COVID impact on students throughout Massachusetts, Governor-elect Healey and Lt. Governor-elect Driscoll have made the right choice in Dr. Tutwiler to lead our public schools. We look forward to working with them both to improve education opportunities for all students in our state.”



Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, Massachusetts Secretary of Education

Second Chance for Transferees for R+ Participation.



Teachers who transferred into the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System from another Massachusetts public retirement system can now opt in to Retirement Plus. With AFT Massachusetts support, the Legislature has at long last passed a bill which allows those teachers who transferred into Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System (MTRS) or the Boston Retirement System after June 1, 2001 and before June 30, 2022 a one time opportunity to opt into RetirementPlus.

The Governor has signed legislation that offers eligible members who transferred into the MTRS a second opportunity to elect to participate in the RetirementPlus (R+) program. The R+ program, signed into law in 2000, provided eligible members with increased retirement benefits. As stipulated in the R+ legislation in 2000, members who transferred into the MTRS from another Massachusetts public retirement system (e.g., a teacher aide who became a teacher) had 180 days to elect to participate in R+. If they did not respond, they were not enrolled in R+. MORE



AFT Massachusetts

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Click on any email address to send an email to that AFT Massachusetts staff member.

Our Mission

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities.

We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.



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