



## Facing the Coronavirus as a Just Community:

### An Agenda for Our Public Schools and Colleges and for the Common Good

#### Massachusetts Teachers Association

The MTA is a union of 116,000 educators, dedicated to educating our young people — helping them gain the knowledge, skills, and human qualities to be confident citizens in a democracy. We are professionals and experts who start from a position of care for the whole child, understanding the student as a thinking and feeling person. We don't train future workers. We cultivate human beings.

Everything we do, especially now in this frightening time, starts from a place of care and concern for our students, their families, and our members, extending to working people across the Commonwealth.

We are entering a dangerous and unknown peak period of this pandemic. The way we respond will determine the way we fare in the end. We must turn toward each other and create communities of mutual aid and support. Through collective action by our members, other workers, families, and communities, we can organize local, statewide, and national common good campaigns.

We present these demands of local and state officials, which will be updated as the situation develops:

#### **All of Our Public Education Institutions (preK through higher education):**

- **Keep schools closed statewide for as long as necessary to ensure the health of students, faculty, and staff.** No educator should be required to come to work when schools are closed for students. Any vulnerable staff should be able to stay home with no loss of pay or benefits.
- **All educators – full-time, part-time, hourly and per-diem workers, including teachers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and substitute teachers – must be fully paid during this time,** without needing to take sick leave, personal time, or paid family and medical leave. Municipal budgets take into consideration projected revenue to cover staffing needs. They should use the funds to pay all employees.

- **Guarantee that pay and pensions are not affected by the pandemic.** No one should lose creditable service due to work status during this period.

#### Our PreK-12 Public Schools:

- **Reject any policy move that would suggest that classroom learning can be replaced with online learning.** That is impossible. Instead, provide technology supports for students and educators so that connections, communication, and engagement can take place during this time.
- **Guarantee that the timing for receiving Professional Status for pre-status educators will not be impacted by school closures.** No one should lose time toward Professional Status in a state of emergency and when the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has declared that days of school beyond March 15 do not need to be made up.
- **Create a system for feeding our students** who depend on school meals, either through meal delivery or vouchers for grocery stores or restaurants.
- **Cancel the MCAS.** In normal times, the MCAS tracks socioeconomic status, not student learning. In this crisis, MCAS tests should be canceled as educators focus on students and our core mission.
- **Delay SOA reports.** There must be an indefinite delay on the reports on *Student Opportunity Act* plans that are due, by statute, on April 1.
- **Declare a moratorium on all educator evaluations** — yearly, those for Professional Teacher Status, and others. These evaluations will be of little value as educators adapt their work to meet the needs of the current crisis.

#### Our Public Higher Education Campuses:

- **Guarantee that all higher education workers are paid, including adjunct and visiting faculty, tutors, students, graduate students, and contracted and per-diem employees.**
- **Strictly limit who is considered an “essential employee” and must come to campus, allowing the vast majority of employees to work remotely.**
- **Immediately pass legislation providing access to health insurance for adjunct faculty.<sup>i</sup>**
- **Guarantee that essential personnel — including our custodians and cafeteria workers — have all of the equipment and supplies they need to perform**

their duties safely. Do not require that they use new, harsher chemicals for cleaning, as they are unnecessary.

- **Make provisions for feeding food-insecure students.**
- **Allow housing-insecure students and those who cannot return home to stay on campus.** Work with local landlords to arrange forgiveness of rent payments for students who leave off-campus housing.
- **Place a moratorium on student debt payments.**<sup>ii</sup>
- **Move to temporary remote learning, with only essential personnel on campus.** As many staff members as possible should have the option to work from home. We are in solidarity with staff (professional staff, classified staff, maintenance and food service staff), graduate and undergraduate employees, and other workers on campus. Vulnerable populations should be especially protected, and no staff should be penalized for working from home.
- **Campus administrations must provide easily accessible resources to assist faculty with the transition to temporary remote teaching.** This includes help with Moodle, Blackboard, Zoom, and other technologies; hardware support, including laptops and microphones; and examples of how to teach different types of classes effectively and how to adapt assessments such as exams.
- **Faculty and librarians, IT staff, and many others should get credit for their additional efforts this semester** as they do the work to create remote teaching and learning systems, including covering other colleagues' work if necessary.
- **Faculty and librarian evaluations must acknowledge the unusual circumstances this year.** No one can be penalized for canceled conferences, work that is suspended for public health reasons, or teaching evaluations that may be adversely affected. Faculty and librarians should be assured that these disruptions will not affect their evaluations, tenure, or promotion decisions now or in the future.

#### **Our Families and All Working People:**

- **Provide a minimum of 14 days of paid sick leave for every worker, beyond normal sick leave.**
- **Require paid family and medical leave for all workers, including municipal workers, either through their employer or through the newly established**

state system, to cover any needed self-quarantining to reduce the spread of the virus. As more preK-12 schools close, workers will be responsible for caring for children and/or sick household members, and they will need to take time away from work responsibilities.

- **Provide funding for universal child care**, given that nearly a million students are likely to be out of school for an extended period of time.
- **Extend unemployment insurance** for people whose hours are reduced due to COVID-19. Provide a basic income subsidy to those workers not covered by unemployment laws.<sup>iii</sup>
- **No foreclosures. No evictions. No utility shutoffs.** Many people are going to be without work and therefore likely to be behind on rent, mortgages, and utility payments. It is cruel to evict or foreclose on a family. Furthermore, housing courts are generally very crowded and represent a health risk.<sup>iv</sup>
- **Impose a moratorium on mortgage payments, student loans, and credit card debt.**<sup>v</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://massteacher.org/current-initiatives/legislative-action>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/488038-ny-attorney-general-suspends-the-collection-of-state-medical-and-student-debt>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/employers-subject-to-unemployment-insurance-ui-contributions>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.clvu.org/petition\\_covid19\\_eviction\\_moratorium](http://www.clvu.org/petition_covid19_eviction_moratorium). And <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2020/03/13/massachusetts-eviction-moratorium-coronavirus>

<sup>v</sup> This is being done in Italy. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/italy-plans-debt-moratorium-to-cope-with-coronavirus-lockdown-11583849663>