



RETIRES 'READY TO SHARE' EXPERTISE

Gathering features calls to action, help for schools and many workshops

By Scott McLennan

The 2018 MTA Retired Gathering included calls to action on many issues, including fighting for greater education funding, engaging in the November election and serving as a vital link to support union solidarity amid increased attacks on organized labor.

Retired educators from across the state who attended the annual conference responded overwhelmingly, filling out so many *All In* union commitment cards that Jacqueline Gorrie, chair of the MTA Retired Members Committee, looked like she was hoisting a brick when she showed off the stack of pledges.

"We are ready to share our expertise and experience," Gorrie said at the dinner on the first night of the Gathering, which took place Sept. 24 and 25 at the Sea Crest Beach Hotel in Falmouth.

Participants were also ready to celebrate and learn.

The event's opening dinner served as the occasion to present Dr. Charles Levenstein with the 2018 Honor Our Own award. Levenstein, a professor emeritus at UMass Lowell, combined research and social justice to forge a career of activism aimed at making schools and other workplaces safe and healthy.

Levenstein, who was nominated for the award by fellow UMass Lowell professor emeritus Craig Slatin, is considered a pioneer in the worker safety and environmental movements. He oversaw the state's Work Environment Justice Fund when it was established in 1994, and he helped assist more than 50 communities with projects supported by the fund.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Jacqueline Gorrie



MTA Retired Members Committee
Chair, Jacqueline Gorrie

Joan McGourty, Louise Russell, Nancy Meyer, Nancy Mikunas, Kathleen Roberts, Richard Liston and now me, Jackie Gorrie. It is truly an honor to follow such respected colleagues as the Chairperson of the Retired Members Committee. Over the 27 years of our existence, these leaders molded the Retired Members Committee, shaping it into the integral body that we have become.

Together we have much to do to continue their legacy. Together we must be “All In” by sticking with our union and unionism. Together we must grow our membership, activate our base and reach out to each other in solidarity, in order to preserve our hard-earned benefits of quality affordable health care, COLA increases and defined benefit pensions.

How do we do this? Simply by joining our “All In” Campaign. If you haven’t already done so, please fill out an “All In” Campaign Commitment Card. You have either received one at the Gathering or electronically. If not, you will also find one on a page in this Reporter.

I ask that you fill out the card, commit to one, two, or maybe all, of the opportunities on the Card and return it to MTA.

When you do that you will then receive your coveted MTA Retired Pocket Calendar and a calendar cover. More importantly you will play an integral part in achieving our goals.

Over the years, our leadership and our persistence has made MTA what it is today. We owe it to our history and the history yet to be written to honor what we have built. It is our collective resolve that will keep us union strong. ■

**ALL
IN**
UNION
POWER

“I’m sticking with my union”



John DeCicco, MTA Retired
Members Committee

I’m a lifetime retired member because without the work of the retired members of the past, there would be no Retirement Plus option.

For this reason and many other MTA benefit programs it’s a smart investment in your future and your beneficiaries to stay engaged with your union throughout your retirement.

You can continue to save by accessing MTA Benefit programs such as auto & home insurance along with fuel savings and low-cost loan programs. This will stretch your hard-earned pension dollars and increase your buying power.

Being a retired member also allows all of us to pay it forward for those who are still in the active ranks, by being their voice for meaningful change and financial support of public education which in turn will make our world a better place for future generations.

So don’t wait, you can become a lifetime retired member now while you are still working, so that the your MTA transition from work to retirement is seamless.

TOGETHER we **CAN** keep Massachusetts schools K-16, #1 in the nation!

RETIREES ‘READY TO SHARE’ EXPERTISE

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Levenstein opened his acceptance speech by noting that the union job held by his father allowed him to attend college. He went on to criticize the state’s failure to fully fund public education.

“When you talk about the shortfalls in the foundation budget, you’re not even talking about building costs related to health and safety,” Levenstein said.

The shortfalls in school funding hit home when MTA Executive Director-Treasurer Ann Clarke handed out oversized “checks,” made out in the amount that each public school district would receive in additional funding once the foundation budget formula is finally fixed to reflect the true cost of educating students. She welcomed the retirees’ activism in the MTA’s Fund Our Future campaign, which is aimed at getting the state Legislature to make proper and ongoing investments in public education funding, from prekindergarten through college.

State Senator Julian Cyr (D-Truro), who represents the Cape and Islands District, delivered the evening’s keynote address. In introducing him, Retired Members Committee member Julia Monteiro Johnson noted that Cyr was just 16 years old when he took on a student leadership role in a Proposition 2½ override campaign to win increased school funding for Nauset.

Cyr elaborated, explaining that he joined the fight because budget cuts were going to hit the choir program in which he was active in high school, and the job of the choir teacher was going to be cut.

“I got into this work because of a teacher,” said Cyr, who held various positions in the field of public health before winning his Senate seat in 2016.

Cyr called the Supreme Judicial Court’s decision in June to block the Fair Share Amendment question from the November ballot a “wrenching disappointment,” but he vowed to stay in the fight for increased funding for public education.

Former MTA President Anne Wass, a member of the Retired Members Committee, added to the discussion by explaining the MTA’s support for Ballot Question 3, which

keeps legal protections in Massachusetts in place for those who identify as transgender, and Ballot Question 1, aimed at ensuring safe staffing levels for nurses working in hospitals.

Both days of the Gathering featured a wide assortment of workshops covering topics ranging from financial planning to popular works of art. Giveaways of prizes supplied by MTA Benefits also enlivened the event.

The retirees themselves gave generously in the form of donations collected for the Wareham Public Schools.

Tables were piled high with pencil sharpeners, markers, notebooks, boxes of tissues, rolls of paper towels and other classroom supplies that the retirees brought with them to the Gathering.

Wareham Education Association President Deanna Semple was both overwhelmed by and thankful for the donations.

It is not surprising, however, to see MTA retirees still making important contributions to public education and students.

“You built these public schools. Thank you for the schools I inherited from you,” MTA President Merrie Najimy told the crowd on Sept. 25. “Your passion, your love for your students and your professionalism built the schools.”

Attacks on unions continue on many levels, she noted. For example, before arriving at the Gathering, Najimy and MTA Vice President Max Page met for coffee and doughnuts with Everett Teachers Association members outside the Parlin School — and the group of educators was told to disperse by Everett police. The police had been called by school administrators.

Najimy further detailed ongoing attempts by wealthy, conservative organizations to privatize public education and weaken unions.

“We need you to be part of the movement,” Najimy said. “You have the ability to tell people what schools were like when you were teaching and how that is different from what schools are like now. You can say without fear of retaliation what public education can be again.” ■

'FUND OUR FUTURE' CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Laura Barrett



As MTA President Merrie Najimy likes to say, “In the words of Twisted Sister, ‘We’re not going to take it anymore!’” The “it” in this case is the chronic underfunding of public education, from prekindergarten through higher education.

Najimy quoted that line at an All Presidents’ Meeting on Sept. 15, launching MTA’s ambitious campaign named “Fund Our Future: Invest in the Schools and Colleges Our Communities Deserve.” More than 200 local leaders attended the meeting, which was held in Newton.

The campaign goal is to win significant new funding in the Legislature for both preK-12 schools and public higher education. For schools, the proposal builds off a plan to update the foundation budget formula that made progress in the Legislature in the last session but ultimately failed to pass.

The formula sets minimum school spending requirements for each district. In 2015, the nonpartisan Foundation Budget Review Commission determined that the formula is woefully out of date, providing too little state aid to cities and towns to meet their constitutional obligation to “cherish” the state’s public schools. The current formula underestimates costs in four major areas: educating students who have

disabilities, are English learners, or are from low-income families; and providing health insurance to staff.

The MTA-backed plan would address those shortcomings and guarantee all districts new resources. In total, it would provide cities and towns with \$1.1 billion in new Chapter 70 school aid per year once fully phased in.

The MTA proposal also would increase state funding for public colleges and universities by a projected \$574 million a year. That is the level needed to bring state funding back to where it was in 2001, in inflation-adjusted dollars, and is in line with the recommendations made by the Higher Education Finance Commission in 2014.

The MTA will be working on the campaign with the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance and other groups representing parents, students and other community residents, including many of the same organizations that joined the MTA in defeating Question 2, the charter school expansion ballot initiative, in 2016. “The Fund Our Future campaign is for students, for educators and for our communities,” Najimy said. “We must be *all in* with this effort if we are going to win.”

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"I'm sticking with the union"

When we are ALL IN we have the power to:

Fight to maintain fair and adequate pensions for all members.

Guarantee access to quality, affordable health care for all.

Ensure adequate funding for our public schools and colleges.

Complete and return this form or go to www.massteacher.org/retiredallin to receive the MTA Retired Pocket Calendar



YES, I'm



I COMMIT TO:

- Continuing my retired membership
- Signing up a new retired member
- Signing up a new pre-retired member
- Being a local liaison _____
- Mentoring a student (SEAM) member
- Being a cyber lobbyist
- Lobbying on Beacon Hill
- Phone banking
- Attending Spring Brunch and bring a friend
- Being interviewed for the *MTA Reporter*

"I commit to being an active and engaged MTA retired member so that I can continue fighting for public education in Massachusetts."

NAME

STREET ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

CELLPHONE OPT INTO TEXTS? YES NO

PERSONAL EMAIL

SIGNATURE

A MESSAGE FROM MTA BENEFITS

NEW

MTA Benefits is introducing its blog. The blog will address topics that relate to members' home and work lives and will help them better utilize and benefit from our programs.

REMINDERS

There's still time to book one of MTAB's fabulous European group tours in early 2019. Choose from Costa

del Sol, Spain; Greece or Ireland. Trips are coordinated by Durgan Travel and offer members exceptional prices. For details visit www.mtabenefits.com/benefits/travel/vacation-center.

A free family membership is available to all MTA members and now covers grandchildren. For details visit www.mtabenefits.com/family-members. ■

As an MTA member, you are entitled to the discounts and programs offered by MTA Benefits.

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Complete and return this form in a stamped envelope to the address below or go to www.massteacher.org/retiredallin to receive the MTA Retired Pocket Calendar

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‘FUND OUR FUTURE’ CAMPAIGN BEGINS

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MTA locals have already begun to take action. Early steps include asking school committees to pass funding resolutions, distributing leaflets, participating in marches and holding member meetings to envision what could be accomplished for students with additional funds. To guide those conversations, the MTA has simulated how much each district would receive if the MTA-backed proposal is passed and phased in over five years. Those projected totals are available on an interactive map on the MTA website.

The numbers cannot be calculated in the same way for public higher education, but all 29 campuses would benefit and student debt would be reduced if state funding were increased by \$574 million a year.

Maureen Colgan Posner, president of the Springfield Education Association, used the figure projected for Springfield – \$94,614,747 – when testifying in support of a school funding resolution on Sept. 20. Dozens of Springfield educators packed the School Committee chamber to cheer her on.

Colgan Posner said it was “incomprehensible” to her that legislators failed to approve the foundation budget bill last spring, which is why educators are now taking the lead in trying to pass a new bill before the end of the school year.

“When you are talking about Springfield, what does \$94 million mean?” she asked.

“Imagine what we could do with that money,” she said. “We could have art and music back in all of our schools. We could have foreign languages back in our middle schools. We could have after-school programs, more special education support, more English learner support, small class sizes, etc. The possibilities are 94-million-dollars-unlimited. We need to demand that this money come back to this community.”

To loud applause, the School Committee voted unanimously in favor of the resolution and agreed to send a copy of it to the city’s legislative delegation, the speaker of the House, the Senate president and the governor.

Other locals, including the Haverhill Education Association, are incorporating the funding message into contract fights. At a March for Respect on Sept. 13, HEA President Ted

Kempinski told the crowd, “The City of Haverhill is failing to provide its children with the resources needed to achieve a 21st-century education. There are no computer teachers in our elementary and middle schools across the city. And there are not enough computers in more than three-quarters of the elementary and middle school classrooms.”

Faculty and staff at public higher education campuses have been grappling with funding issues for decades.

Per-student funding for campuses has declined by one-third since 2001 when adjusted for inflation, and scholarships for students have declined by a comparable amount.

As a result, student debt has skyrocketed, staff have been laid off, many full-time faculty members have been replaced by poorly paid adjunct faculty, and some buildings are in poor repair.

These issues are all present at the University of Massachusetts Boston campus, which has been rocked by funding woes ever since corruption led to shoddy and costly construction work in the 1970s.

Speaking at the All Presidents’ Meeting, Annetta Argyres, president of the Professional Staff Union at UMB, said, “Austerity has been our life.” She talked about the layoff of 100 adjuncts two years ago and additional layoffs this year. The campus-based day care center, used by students and staff alike, has been closed. And the administration is planning to significantly increase parking fees.

“The administration is saying we have to raise fees rather than demanding that the state do what it is supposed to do,” she said. “Our share of \$574 million in new money could go a long way.”

Advocating for funding for higher education will be a continued focus of the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts — PHENOM — which includes college and university students as well as MTA members and other staff.

Speaking about the campaign at the All Presidents’ Meeting, MTA Vice President Max Page paraphrased a famous saying, asking, “If not now, when? If not us, then who?” He then answered his own question. “The MTA represents the community of educators who will make this happen.” ■

For more information on the campaign, please visit www.massteacher.org/FundOurFuture.



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