

COVID-19 in Brazil

A letter from RMC member Ana Maria Nogueira

August 23, 2020

The current COVID-19 health crisis has hit my home state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with tragic consequences. As in many other places, thousands have died and many others have lost their jobs. But the one area most hard hit has been public education and, by consequence, children.

The state of Rio de Janeiro has 1,200 public schools, 700,000 students and 80,000 staff. As in so many other countries, public schools in Brazil provide basic nutrition and a safe place for the children of working families.



Public schools in Rio were closed five months ago to protect children and staff from the spread of the virus. Some of the schools have two or three shifts — morning, afternoon, and evening for young adults. The schools serve breakfast, full lunch or early dinner (rice or pasta, beans, vegetables and meat). Some public schools

have a full-time schedule, so a snack in the afternoon is also served. For most of the families, this is the main source of food for the kids. Since schools were closed, some districts have managed to deliver meals to neighborhoods, but according to union members, families could never fully rely on this — and many times, the food they delivered was rotten.

Schools have been closed since March. The idea was that online teaching would happen “everywhere,” but in reality it didn’t. My granddaughter, for example, who attends eighth grade at a public school, has had only a few days of online learning so far. Many students do not even have computers at home; others have phones but very little access to the internet.

A friend who works in a rural area and is a union member said that her district has not engaged in online teaching because a large number of families simply do not have access to the internet. So teachers were told they should produce their own materials and deliver those to students. Some did, others didn’t, and many students have been left on their own for five months. No school, no food, nothing. As my friend says, she does not know what to expect when schools reopen. And there is a fear of the “Uberization” of education, the substitution of teachers by machines.

The administration has recently decided that students should return to school

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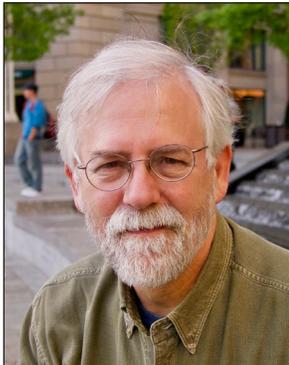
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Patrick Patterson



MTA RMC Chair Patrick Patterson

As the new chair of the MTA Retired Members Committee, I would like to introduce myself. I was first elected to the committee in 2018 and re-elected at the remote meeting in May this year. Over the last two years I have learned much from the former chair, Jackie Gorrie. As she noted in her inaugural message, she was one of a long line of respected

educators who held the position, and it was their leadership that formed the character of the Retired Members Committee. As the new chair, I am humbled to stand in that line and I hope that I can measure up to the standard that they have set. This is especially true in relation to Jackie. Jackie and I may not have always agreed, but she was always open to discussion. It was this example that I hope to continue as the new chair. I am a 30-year veteran of teaching, retiring from Andover in 2015. While there, I was a building representative, held the position of treasurer and was on the bargaining team. I have advocated along with others to make the committee more directly support the rank and file of the MTA. But then that describes just about all of us on the committee — and for that matter, retirees in general. I am particularly proud of being part of the group that advocated for the formation of the Wisdom Warriors. You should consider joining!

We are certainly living through turbulent times. The COVID-19 pandemic has put our society through a stress test. And like the stress test that too many of us at our age have gone through, much in the system was found in need of repair. Unemployment has soared not simply to levels of the recent Great Recession, but in some sectors rivaling the Great Depression. Much of the value created since the beginning of the pandemic has passed into the hands of not simply the 1%, but the .1%, leading to even greater levels of inequality. Just to give you an idea of what this entails, the three richest people in the U.S. — Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett — own as much wealth as the bottom half of the U.S. population, or 160 million people. And at the same time, state and local budgets are suffering because of a loss of tax revenue, leading to calls for cuts in local services and education and an imposition of austerity on those who still are employed. As educators, we are only too familiar from past economic downturns with how we are asked to do more with less.

Why is there an increase in inequality and why are there

increasing calls for austerity? An answer to that question can be found in the work of many, but Naomi Klein sums it up best in *The Shock Doctrine*, where she lays out how those who hold economic power use a crisis to remake society in their interest. She of course is referring to the example of the rebuilding of New Orleans, where large swaths of housing were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and never rebuilt, or they came under the wrecking ball and were dismantled, as was public housing. And then there was the charterization of education, which was removed from the public domain and democratic governance and privatized. But Klein also notes that a crisis is ambivalent; just as it is an opportunity to grab even more by the few, it is also an opportunity to redistribute wealth more equitably to the many and address long-standing social problems. One need only recall that the U.S. was over a third of the way through the last century before the creation of Social Security. It was the emergence of a militant labor movement in reaction to mass unemployment and old age insecurity during the Depression that forced President Roosevelt to introduce legislation that created Social Security. There were many New Deal programs passed through Congress that improved the quality of life.

Now we are living through yet another crisis: We need to re-engage and demand a more equitable distribution of the wealth of society. The millionaire's tax, a change in the capital gains tax, a proposal for a bond specifically dedicated to the funding of education — each in its own way would begin to address the inequality of wealth within society. As Andrei Joseph notes in his *Report from the Board* in this issue of *The Reporter*, concessions were won by the MTA and AFT MA from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, governor and the Legislature. Much remains, though: MCAS is still a condition of graduation, the increased funding won through the Fund Our Future Campaign is on hold and the second half of the campaign — to provide adequate funding for higher education — has yet to make its way through the Legislature and the governor's signature. But public school teachers face an even more immediate life and death struggle: whether to return to in-person teaching. The science indicates that there is increased risk of COVID infection in enclosed spaces, and it doesn't matter whether there are fewer students and/or staff maintaining social distance. To limit exposure, the MTA and AFT have demanded that education remain remote, from home, until it is safe to be in the classroom. Retirees can help their working colleagues by writing or calling their local School Committee and with proper precautions, participating

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REPORT FROM THE BOARD – AUGUST 8, 2020

Andrei Joseph



MTA RMC Member Andrei Joseph

At this spring’s virtual Annual Meeting, I received the honor of being elected as the representative of 11,000 Retired members to the MTA Executive Committee. As such, I also serve on the MTA Board of Directors and, keeping with tradition, will report to you regularly about what transpires. It is my intention to inform you not only of the

major activities and votes of the Board, but also to include my perspective and how I voted on matters of contention. You should hold me accountable: If you approve of my position and votes, wonderful. If you disagree on a regular basis, you should replace me in the next election.

By way of further brief introduction, I spent my active years teaching high school social studies at Concord-Carlisle High School. I have been an MTA member since 1978, served on multiple MTA committees, attended every Annual Meeting, and was elected local president nine times.

The activities of the current Board – and there are several new members as of July 1 – have centered on our union’s response to the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on our bargaining units. The regular schedule of Board meetings has been long abandoned, replaced by a litany of special meetings of the Executive Committee and the Board itself. Protocols have been adjusted. All meetings are virtual. Speakers are recognized through the “stack” on the Chat function. Red, green and yellow “cards” continue to be employed.

Enduring these adjustments, the Board and the leadership

of President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page have led our union to two major successes:

- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner Jeff Riley) has agreed to grant 10 days of professional development to all districts as our members prepare for the coming year.
- The governor and Legislature have agreed to fund all districts to at least to the level of last year. This provides at least a modicum of financial stability in the middle of an economic crisis.

Neither of these steps would have been accomplished without pressure from the MTA and our sister union, AFT MA (which includes the Boston Teachers Union).

The Board has also attempted to address issues of racial justice that have come to the fore following the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing nationwide protests. We struggled to clarify our position as some Board members argued “cops out of schools” and others “defund the police.” A different position was held by some Board members who felt no less strongly about our commitment to racial justice but thought our position had more clarity if we enunciated our intention to transfer funding from a militarized police force to social and emotional services that would better serve our students. I am more comfortable with this perspective.

Finally, the Board has chosen a Negotiations Team, which is currently attempting to reach contract settlements with each of our three employee unions: Field Services Organization (FSO), Massachusetts Association of Teacher Attorneys (MATA) and Massachusetts Teachers Association Staff Organization (MTASO). These matters, as well as personnel issues, were dealt with during Executive Session and remain confidential. ♦

FREQUENTLY REQUESTED CONTACT INFORMATION

<p>Massachusetts Teachers’ Retirement System (MTRS) <i>www.mass.gov/mtrs</i></p>	<p>State Board of Retirement <i>www.mass.gov/treasury/retirement/state-board-of-retire</i></p>
<p>MTRS Headquarters 617.679.6877 500 Rutherford Avenue, Suite 210 Charlestown, MA 02129-1628</p>	<p>SBR Boston Office 617.367.7770 One Winter Street, 8th Floor Boston, MA 02108</p>
<p>MTRS Western Office 413.784.1711 One Monarch Place, Suite 510 Springfield, MA 01144-4028</p>	<p>SBR Springfield Office 413.730.6135 463 Dwight Street, Room 109 Springfield, MA 01103</p>

Questions regarding your MTA Member ID Card or Calendar can be directed to:
Renee Gatewood – rgatewood@massteacher.org – 617.878.8000, ext. 8208

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: SOCIAL SECURITY ISSUES

The federal legislative session of the 116th Congress is at its halfway point. The bills for this session were filed in 2019 for the 2019-2020 two-year session. A number of bills were filed regarding the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). The status of these pieces of legislation are summarized below.

The Repeal Bills: H.R. 141 and S. 521 – The Social Security Fairness Acts

H.R. 141 and S. 521 are companion bills in the U.S. House and Senate and both are titled *The Social Security Fairness Act of 2019*. Each bill would repeal the provisions of the Social Security statute that provide for the WEP and the GPO. In doing so the bills would stop the application of the WEP and the GPO to already retired persons, and for all future retirees going forward. **H.R. 141** has 235 co-sponsors (including all nine members of the MA delegation); it is currently in the House Committee on Social Security. **S. 521** has 36 co-sponsors (including Senators Warren and Markey). Currently, it is in the Senate Committee on Finance.

While it is encouraging that the entire Massachusetts delegation has signed on as co-sponsors to these bills, it is still urgent that constituents contact their legislators. Thank them for being a co-sponsor, but also push, cajole, demand that they do everything within their power to move these bills out of committee.

The Bills to Modify the Windfall Elimination Provision

H.R. 3934 – Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act

Introduced by Representative Kevin Brady (R – TX), this bill would deal with **only** the Windfall Elimination Provision, calculating the WEP using a different formula (which has not been established yet), one that will take into account a person's years of covered and non-covered Social Security income for people retiring, going forward from a date certain after it passes.

H.R. 3934 would not recalculate the retirement benefits for those already retired, but those benefits recipient would receive an extra \$100 per month for the retiree and \$50 per month for a spouse. Again, this bill does nothing regarding the Government Pension Offset provision of the Social Security statute.

H.R. 3934 has 44 co-sponsors: 41 Republicans; 3 Democrats – and has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. No member of the Massachusetts delegation has signed on to this bill as a co-sponsor.

H.R. 4540 – The Public Servants Protection and Fairness Act

Introduced by Massachusetts Representative Richard Neal (D–MA) and Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means, H.R. 4540 would, similar to H.R. 3934, above, calculate the benefits of someone retiring using a different formula (not yet determined) that takes account of the person's covered and non-covered Social Security income. Like H.R. 3934, this bill does not recalculate the benefits for those already retired, but the individuals would receive \$150 per month and a spouse would receive \$50 per month. H.R. 4540 also does not make any changes to the GPO. This bill sits in the House Ways and Means Committee. **H.R. 4540** has 79 co-sponsors.

Bills to Expand Social Security Benefits for All Retirees

H.R. 860 – The Social Security 2100 Act

Introduced by Representative John Larson (D–CT), this bill would increase Social Security benefits, as well as contributions to the Social Security retirement funds. H.R. 860 does not currently affect the WEP or GPO, but there is a campaign to add the repeal of both offsets to this bill. It is currently in the House Ways and Means Committee for Social Security. **H.R. 860** has 208 co-sponsors.

► For a full listing of MTA legislative priorities, go to [massteacher.org/legislation](https://www.massteacher.org/legislation).

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR *continued from page 2*

in job actions in the open air.

This brings me to the Retired Gathering, which is usually held at a hotel in the area. Rather than cancel the event because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have decided to move forward and hold it online. Some may say that it's not the same, and they would be right. And yet this may be an opportunity to enlarge participation since one no longer must travel to attend. We

hope that everyone will find something that they are interested in. The Gathering will be held from October 19 – 23, Monday through Friday, with two sessions a day and an opportunity for discussion between the sessions. The sessions relate directly to our current situation discussed above. We need to start with an understanding of how we got to where we are in order to begin the process of repair. ■

2020 MTA Virtual Retired Gathering

Sponsored by the MTA Retired Members Committee

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presentations per day**

Morning Session:
10 – 11:30 a.m.

Afternoon Session:
2 – 3:30 p.m.



Presentation Topics

Day/Date	Morning Session	Afternoon Session
Mon., Oct. 19	Plenary Session	Support for New Retirees
Tues., Oct. 20	Election 2020	Women's Suffrage
Wed., Oct. 21	Institutional Racism and Social Justice at the MTA – A Panel Discussion	Institutional Racism and Social Justice <i>(continued)</i>
Thurs., Oct. 22	Fighting Climate Change Across Generations	COVID-19: Science/Mental Impacts
Fri., Oct. 23	The History of Funding for Public Education	Retiree Activism in the Age of COVID-19

Stay tuned for registration information

www.massteacher.org/retired

AN NEA RETIRED ANNUAL MEETING AND RA LIKE NO OTHER

Jackie Gorrie



MTA RMC Member Jackie Gorrie

Signing in from Randolph and Wareham and Foxborough, from Groton and Brockton, Worcester, Malden, Everett and Braintree were your elected delegates to the 2020 NEA Retired Annual Meeting and the 2020 NEA RA. Like our MTA Annual Meeting, the NEA Retired Annual Meeting and the NEA RA were both held in Atlanta but attended virtually. Your elected delegates to

the NEA Retired Annual Meeting and NEA RA were: Stephen Gorrie, Jacqueline Gorrie, Robert Brousseau, Dennis Naughton, Louise Gaskins, Eileen Cleary, Claire Naughton, Richard Shea, Gerard Ruane, Richard Liston and Timothy Sullivan.

The virtual meeting was held over two days. Delegates debated Bylaws, listened to candidate speeches and applauded scholarship and communications award winners and states with membership growth. The good news is that MTA Retired was one of thirteen (13) states lauded for membership growth for last year. This is something that we have not accomplished in many years.

Serving as Elections Committee chair for this unprecedented Annual Meeting was our MTA Retired top vote-getter, Stephen Gorrie. Steve clearly and competently guided candidates and delegates through a totally new election process. All delegates were able to vote by secret ballot, mailed to their homes and returned to NEA. Elected to office were:

Sarah Borgman (IN) – President

Julie Horwin (AZ) and Judy Rohde (MN) – Retired Directors on the NEA Board of Directors

Tom Wellman (NV) and JoAnn Smith-Mashburn (TN) – NEA Retired Executive Council

Diccie Smith (TN) – NEA Director Alternate

Kudos to Steve on a job well done!

MTA Retired delegates then participated in the Virtual NEA RA. Again Richard Liston and I served as PAC co-captains for this year. This was President Lily Eskelsen García's final RA as NEA president. Many accolades were recorded for Lily by well-wishers such as Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Lily's husband, mother and many more. Delegates participated in a budget hearing and heard from candidates for office. Delegates voted to recommend Joe Biden for President of the United States and elected NEA officers. Your NEA officers for 2020 are:

Becky Pringle (PA) – NEA President (Yes, this is the same Becky Pringle who was our keynote speaker at last year's Gathering)

Princess Moss (VA) – NEA Vice President

Noel Candelaria (TX) – NEA Secretary-Treasurer

Hanna Vaandering (OR) – NEA Executive Committee

Saúl Ramos Espola (MA) – ESP At-Large Director on the NEA Board of Directors

A runoff election is now being conducted for three (3) ESP At-Large Director seats on the NEA Board.

Thank you for exercising one of the benefits that comes with MTA Retired membership — that is, your right to vote for your leaders. ♦

COVID-19 IN BRAZIL *continued from Page 1*

on October 5, when it is expected that the “green stage” level of their “return to normal” protocol will be reached. This first phase would only include the last grades of each cycle (elementary, middle and high school). Teachers and staff would have to be tested, the use of masks would be mandatory (but schools will not provide them) and groups of students would have alternating schedules and shifts. Physical education and recess were left for each school administration to decide on.

The teachers' union is disputing the reopening decision. The majority of teachers have decided on virtual assemblies held statewide not to return to school “until it is safe.” This

decision was based on studies done by Fiocruz, the publicly owned scientific health organization that points to the possibility of increasing COVID spread if schools reopen in October. According to Fiocruz, public transportation is not safe (and many students, teachers and staff use buses). On the other hand, many schools are considered incapable of complying with health protocols for more than a month, due to lack of resources.

Many communities are struggling with hunger and insecurity. But teachers are fighting for the distribution of food in the communities. Until there is a vaccine, most people will not feel safe. ♦

MEET SOME OF THE NEW FACES ON THE RETIRED MEMBERS COMMITTEE



SETH EVANS, Brookline

Seth served 19 years as an elementary school (Grades 4 and 5) teacher in Needham before retiring in 2018. Prior to teaching, Seth was a business consultant in community economic development and worker ownership settings. He also started and ran a worker-owned home health care company in Boston.

Since retiring, Seth has remained active in education-related causes. He works as a volunteer for the Children's Screen Time Action Network, specifically organizing teachers and parents to limit the overuse of digital technology in schools. Seth is an elected member of the Retired Members

Committee and co-chairs the MTA's Educational Policy and Practice Committee. He also is a member of the leadership team of Elders Climate Action Mass.

A father of two grown children, Seth lives in Brookline with his wife, Kim Nelson, and his puppy, Maggie.

ROBIN SMITH, Springfield

Greetings. My name is Robin Smith and I am a lifelong resident of Springfield. I retired from the Springfield Public Schools after 30+ years in education. I am beginning my second year on the MTA Retired Members Committee. In addition, I am a member of the Wisdom Warriors, Springfield Education Association's Committee of Retirees, and ALANA Educators. In my spare time I love to read, volunteer at my church, and make cards.

I am excited about continuing to serve on the MTA Retired Members Committee.



MARY COWHEY, Florence



Mary Cowhey taught in the Northampton Public Schools as an elementary classroom teacher and math specialist for 22 years and she retired in 2019. She is the author of *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*, which was honored by the National Association for Multicultural Education with its book award. This award and others, including the Milken National Educator Award, recognize her contributions as an educator for social justice, committed to developing her practice and the lives of students and their families. She has been a grassroots community organizer for 40 years and is a founding member of Families with Power/Familias con Poder.

Mary Cowhey is a rank-and-file unionist. She was a building rep for the Northampton Association of School Employees for many years and represented District 3A on the MTA Board of Directors. She is one of the founding members of WeMEAN (Western Mass Educator Action Network), building solidarity among MTA locals throughout the region. She is a newly-elected member of the MTA Retired Members Committee.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE PAYING THE LEAST FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

A message from MTA Benefits

A number of factors play into how pharmacies price their drugs, which means that picking your pharmacy is more work than just searching for the closest one on Google Maps. You can call pharmacies to ask for prices. However, if you have insurance, your co-pay could be very different (and not always cheaper!) than the cash price. Sometimes, pharmacies won't give you a co-pay price until you arrive with a prescription in hand. If you haven't shopped around for the best pharmacy prices, you could be paying too much (even on generic drugs).

A great way to save yourself a lot of time, energy and money is with SingleCare's drug search. Type in the name of a prescription drug and your ZIP code to see a map of prices in your area. When you check prices at www1.singlecare.com/mta, you know you're getting the best price possible. It lets you find which pharmacy has the best prices for your prescription—and compare price history—before heading to the pharmacy.

For more information on the MTAB's pharmacy savings program with SingleCare visit www.mtabenefits.com/pharmacy-savings. ■



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