

# MTA REPORTER

**RETIREED** The Voice of MTA Retired Members

## VIRTUAL BRUNCH: PANDEMIC EDUCATION

Patrick Patterson and Rafael Moure-Eraso

Around this time each year, the MTA Retired Members Committee offers retirees a series of regional spring brunches. The program is the same, and it is taken on the road in various parts of the state on different days. Because of the pandemic, however, the committee chose to follow the online format used with the highly successful Retired Gathering in the fall.

The program included an opening session with MTA President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page; three presentations related to the pandemic; a lunchtime break to socialize in regional groups or further explore the issues raised by the presentations; and a concluding presentation on the MTA's legislative priorities by Paul McClory, director of the Grassroots Campaigns Division, and Anthony Moreschi, a government relations specialist in the Division of Government Relations. (See Page 3 for the MTA's legislative agenda update). They concluded by offering ways that retirees can help win the agenda with a presentation by Senate District Coordinator Tom Meyers.

Some of the salient points that were made:

Najimy pointed to the opportunities the pandemic has created for educators to change the narrative about public education. Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley relies on the old narrative of "ed reform," she said, viewing students as vessels in which knowledge is deposited and then measured. He claims that students have suffered a "colossal learning loss," she continued, adding that

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## RETIREED MEMBERS COMMITTEE 2020-2021

### CHAIR

Patrick Patterson, Ipswich

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Mary Cowhey, Florence

Seth Evans, Brookline

Kip Fonsh, Leverett

\* Sonia Fortin, Framingham

\* Silvia Golijov, Ashland

\*\* Jacqueline Gorrie, Randolph

\*\* Andrei Joseph, Chestnut Hill

Richard Liston, Everett

\* Jen Meagher, Ashland

Rafael Moure-Eraso, Medford

Ana Maria Nogueira, Ashland

Bonnie Page, Tewksbury

\*\*\* Robin Smith, Springfield

\*\* Anne Wass, Carver

### RETIREED MEMBERS ORGANIZER

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- \* Appointed Active Member
- \*\* MTA Board of Directors
- \*\*\* President's Designee

## WISDOM WARRIORS IN ACTION



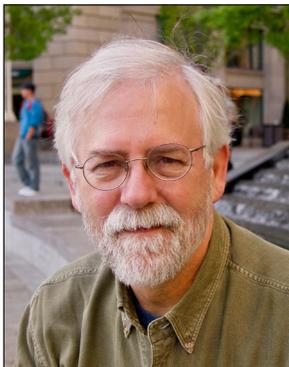
Photos by Bob Duffy



*Kathy Greeley and Andrei Joseph were among the Wisdom Warriors at a school safety sit-in outside the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on March 25. Read more about this activist singing group on page 10.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

### Patrick Patterson



MTA RMC Chair Patrick Patterson

Like many of you, I just completed my second round of the COVID-19 vaccine. Fortunately, I didn't have to scour online websites, only to find that no appointments were available. I received a call from our local Council on Aging that I could sign up on their website, and a local pharmacy provided the service in the basement of the local Catholic church. Also, like many of you, I am considering what the implications are now that I have a certain degree of immunity. Can I now get together with friends unmasked? Go out to eat masked? Even entertain the possibility of travel? But it remains to be seen exactly how it will change things. We may have received the vaccine, but many have not; until they do, they are susceptible to infection.

Which brings me to the focus of this message. For anyone who has followed the problematic rollout of the vaccine in Massachusetts, Governor Baker has received his share of blame, some of it deserved and some undeserved. Favoring large distribution sites over local ones, like the one at which I received my shot, is a case in point. Fortunately, he changed direction!

Where he did not change direction, though, was in his dealings with educators and their unions. Baker and Commissioner of Education Jeffrey Riley mandated a phased-in, full reopening of public schools to start near the beginning of April. Elementary schools will be first, followed by middle schools, with high schools yet to be determined. Hybrid teaching will end. Students will be brought back full time.

The educators' unions, the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts, Massachusetts AFL-CIO and other labor organizations had proposed mass vaccination of educators in their districts. The Baker administration's response was to accuse the unions of trying to jump the line, cynically setting up a false opposition between educators, the elderly and those at increased risk. The unions' proposal was rejected because there was allegedly not enough vaccine to go around. Baker did change the date when educators could start being vaccinated, but his demand to return to regular in-school education remained. The union response is, why the rush? Why not wait until school workers are vaccinated and then return. Baker has rejected that option. And as of this writing, that is where it stands.

We all want to reopen schools. Virtual learning pales in comparison to in-school instruction. And the stories of psychological trauma because of the isolation imposed on students are widespread. But the health effects of the virus, if we should contract it, cannot be wished away.

There are two important points to be made concerning the need to vaccinate all those who work in schools.<sup>1</sup>

- The virus can be spread not only by those who show symptoms, but by those who are asymptomatic. This is particularly true in the case of children, who do not seem to become as ill when they are infected by the virus (though there is growing evidence that there are long-term health effects). Testing only occurs when an individual is symptomatic, which misses that whole group of individuals who are infected, particularly asymptomatic.
- Distancing and masking are important, but they have displaced the critical issue of ventilation. The virus is spread through fine aerosolized particles released, not simply with a cough or a sneeze, but even in the simple act of talking. Wearing a mask helps to reduce the spread, but not completely. Aerosol transmission can occur beyond six feet, to say nothing of the new CDC recommendation of three feet. There are attempts to address the issue of ventilation, but they are not systematic. What is needed is a thorough overhaul of standards and codes for the construction of our public schools, to say nothing of buildings in general.

We need to face the fact that society is dealing with a virus that we are only beginning to understand. The move to reopen schools that Governor Baker called for — and, it should be noted, President Biden as well — fails to take into account the increased risk to which educators, students and communities are being exposed. The vaccine will reduce the risk of infection, and educators and staff must have at least received their first dose before returning to full-time teaching in the classroom.

Something you can do as a retiree is to call or write your state representative and senator and ask them to support waiting to reopen schools until school staff can be vaccinated. You can also sign the petition that the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance is running on its website, [massedjustice.org](https://massedjustice.org), calling for Governor Baker to put off full-time opening of schools until April 26. Please consider signing it. ■

<sup>1</sup> Deepti Gurdasani, Phillip Alvelda, and Thomas Ferguson, "New CDC Guidelines to Re-open Schools Could be Dangerous" (*Institute for New Economic Thinking* March 19, 2021)

## 2021-2022 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA UPDATE

The MTA's legislative priorities for the 2021-2022 session have all been filed. The legislative agenda focuses on a wide range of issues that reflect the MTA's commitment to students, public education, fairness for all workers in our communities, and a secure retirement for public-sector employees.

Among the MTA's priority bills is *An Act to provide fair and affordable public retiree benefits*, filed by Senator Julian Cyr (D-Truro) and Representative Dan Donahue (D-Worcester). This bill includes several important provisions aimed at ensuring greater economic security for public-sector retirees. Specifically, the bill would:

- Immediately increase the COLA base from \$13,000 to \$18,000, and over time raise the base to align with Social Security's maximum allowable benefit for an individual worker (\$36,132 in 2020).
- Freeze the health insurance premium contribution share for current municipal retirees at their current rate and lock in the rate for future retirees based on their retirement date.
- Cap out-of-pocket expenses for non-Medicare-eligible retirees.

We can expect this legislation and the other MTA priority bills to be referred to a legislative committee and assigned a bill number in the coming weeks. Following that, the next development will be the scheduling of legislative hearings, where each bill will be publicly considered by its respective committee. Legislative hearings will likely be taking place through the fall on dates determined by each committee. For information on the MTA's priority bills and the legislative process, please visit [massteacher.org/legislation](https://massteacher.org/legislation).

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

### FY 2022 budget update

In January, Governor Charlie Baker released his annual budget recommendation, also known as H.1, which kicked off the Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2022 budget process. The governor's budget recommendation makes the required appropriation to the state and teachers' retirement systems and provides a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment on the first \$13,000 in pension benefits for retired members of the state and teachers' retirement systems. However, the governor's proposal does not make the crucial investments in public education that are urgently needed.

The MTA is urging the Legislature to support critical investments in our public schools and colleges in the FY2022 state budget. Priorities include funding for the full and on-time implementation of the *Student Opportunity Act* and a substantial investment in public higher education, as called for by the *Cherish Act*. For more information on the MTA's FY2022 budget priorities, please visit [massteacher.org/legislation](https://massteacher.org/legislation).

The next step in the budget process is for the Massachusetts House to release and pass its own proposal in April. The Senate will then follow by releasing and passing its own version in May. The goal is to have a final budget passed by both chambers and signed into law by the governor by the start of the new fiscal year on July 1, although that timeline has not always been met in recent years. ■



**UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION TODAY TO**

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face mask**

Send your updated email address, mailing address and preferred phone number to

**[RETIRED@MASSTEACHER.ORG](mailto:RETIRED@MASSTEACHER.ORG)**

## REPORT FROM THE MTA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### Andrei Joseph



MTA RMC Member Andrei Joseph

I saw a cartoon recently: Clad in animal skins, an early human cave dweller sits by the fire and intones to a companion, “Now that we can talk, we have to have meetings.” True, that! Executive Committee. Board of Directors. Courageous conversations about race. Statewide Bargaining Summit. All MTA — membership. All necessary. All on Zoom. The

long haul of this school year brings not only spring and hope, but also fatigue. Our members are exhausted from the stress, the worry, the work.

**Leadership battles for safety:** President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page have led the effort to bring Governor Baker, Commissioner Riley and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to their senses. We have been partially successful in delaying the return to all in-person learning but continue to oppose the administration of MCAS and ACCESS testing. We offered an imaginative solution to the vaccination rollout by arranging for firefighters across the state to administer the vaccine to educators. The governor rejected the plan. We continue to insist that all educators, including those in higher education, be declared eligible for early vaccination. One step in that direction is a Board decision to hire a full-time health and safety staff person. We voted to move money from our contingency fund to accomplish this. I voted “yes.”

**Annual Meeting of Delegates:** Once again, our Annual Meeting will be virtual, although this year we will have advanced technology that allows for debate and voting on new business items, amendments to the bylaws and the budget. Considerable time and effort has gone into adopting special rules for virtual meetings to encourage the maximum amount of democracy during a pandemic. We voted to enact rules similar to those used by the NEA and other states that strike a balance between participation and time limits. I voted to adopt these rule changes. Annual Meeting in 2022 is planned to be back at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, with 2023 and 2024 scheduled to take place in Springfield.

**MTA budget:** Approval of the annual budget for the MTA is an extensive process that travels from the executive director-treasurer to the Advisory Budget Committee, to the Executive Committee, to the Board of Directors, and then to Annual Meeting for final approval. Almost all of our revenue comes from member dues. Thus, membership is critical in determining how much money is available. Our membership has shrunk due to furloughs and the economic hardships faced by educators. There are increased costs due to salaries negotiated, rising insurance premiums and the hiring of 16 new employees whose emphasis will be grassroots organizing. Fortunately, some costs are down, as we have had fewer in-person meetings and lower travel expenses during the pandemic. Our future pension obligations are met. Our reserves are healthy. The current financial position of the MTA is strong. We voted to recommend a budget of \$49.7 million, with total dues of \$503 for teachers, \$302 for clerical and custodians and \$151 for aides, food service personnel and other ESPs. This represents a maximum \$3 dues increase. I voted “yes” to approve the budget. Appreciation and regret met the announcement that our director of finance and accounting, Kathy Conway, will retire in July. Her skill and hard work over years of devotion to the MTA brought universal acclaim.

**Proposed name change:** A bylaw amendment that calls for our name to be changed to the Massachusetts Educators’ Association will reach the floor at the Annual Meeting. The argument in favor of this amendment is that our name should reflect our membership. We are not only “teachers,” but ESPs, clerical workers, bus drivers, etc. The arguments against are that this proposed change is more complicated and expensive than one might imagine. It would require changing everything from our stationary to our legal contracts. Tax documents and internal documents would have to be altered. Cost estimates ranged up to \$1 million over five to six years. While there was broad support for the concept, there was considerable hesitation regarding logistics. Others allowed that if we were changing our name, we should also substitute “union” for “association.” Ultimately, the Board voted to take “no position” and the amendment will now reach the floor without a recommendation one way or the other. I support the idea of a name change enlightened by a thoughtful, democratic process.

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“HONOR OUR OWN”



AWARD

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## NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION MATERIALS DUE MAY 28, 2021

## IS THERE AN MTA MEMBER WHO:

- Encouraged you professionally or personally?
- Fostered your involvement in the MTA?
- Mentored you as a beginning educator?
- Helped you as a student?

## “HONOR OUR OWN”



## AWARD

## NOW IS THE TIME TO RECOGNIZE HIS OR HER CONTRIBUTION.

Each year, the MTA Retired Members Committee sponsors the “Honor Our Own” award. The award honors members of MTA Retired for their outstanding influence on students, beginning educators and association members. To nominate a retired educator, complete the nomination form and provide a written explanation of why you believe the candidate meets the guidelines for the award. The guidelines include demonstrated professional responsibility and achievement in one’s field; displays of leadership, creativity or innovation; evidence of the nominee’s impact on the school community, students and association; and examples of how the nominee has improved the image of public education.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE AND WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES FOR THE AWARD?

**Nominees must be MTA Retired members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association at present.**

Please explain why the nominee should be honored. Consider the following about the nominee when you are writing your submission:

1. Professional responsibilities and personal achievements in his/her field.
2. Leadership, creativity or innovation.
3. Impact of the nominee’s professionalism on the school community, the students, the association and/or the community.
4. Advocacy for association members, the profession and public education.
5. Improving the image of public education.

## HOW DO I SUBMIT A NOMINATION FOR THE “HONOR OUR OWN” AWARD?

1. Complete the nomination form.
2. Attach a written explanation about why the nominee meets the guidelines for the award. Follow the award guidelines listed above.
3. Mail or email the completed application. Materials must be received no later than May 28.

**“Honor Our Own” Award**  
**Attn: Robert Whalen, MTA**  
**2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor | Quincy, MA 02171-2119**  
**[rwhalen@massteacher.org](mailto:rwhalen@massteacher.org)**

For a copy of this nomination form, please visit: [www.massteacher.org/honorourown](http://www.massteacher.org/honorourown)

# 1

## Complete the nomination form.

### Nominee Information:

- Nominee is a member of MTA Retired.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

### Submitted By:

(Please check one)

- Member of \_\_\_\_\_ Association

- MTA Retired

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

This form may be printed and mailed or completed electronically and emailed. For best results, view the PDF in Adobe Reader.<sup>®</sup> Complete any fillable areas by typing in the fields or clicking on check boxes. Save a copy to your computer for your records.

# 2

Attach a written explanation of 250-500 words on why the nominee meets the guidelines for the award.

# 3

Mail or email the completed application.

“Honor Our Own” Award  
Robert Whalen, MTA  
2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor | Quincy, MA 02171-2119  
[rwhalen@massteacher.org](mailto:rwhalen@massteacher.org)

Materials must be received by the MTA no later than May 28. The decision of the Retired Members Committee is final.

# Recent Recipients of the “Honor Our Own” Award

2020

**Judith Babb, *Wakefield Education Association***

Nominated by MTA Retired member Maura D. Buckley

“Judy recognized early in her teaching career that in order to have a quality educational system she needed to be a strong advocate for students, teachers, public education and social justice. She realized that this could be accomplished by being involved in the political process. This participation in politics throughout her years as an educator and in retirement included constantly communicating with elected officials and working on political campaigns at the local, state and national levels.”

2019

**Louise Gaskins, *Ayer-Shirley Regional Education Association***

Nominated by Jacqueline Gorrie and Anne Wass, MTA Retired Members Committee

“During her long career, Louise Gaskins worked tirelessly on civil rights issues and efforts to expand the power of ethnic minority educators in public education through their unions. At the state level, her work led to the establishment of the MTA Human Relations Committee, which created an annual award in her name, and the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. In retirement, Gaskins has remained an MTA and NEA activist, playing key roles on countless committees and working groups. Gaskins has also been active on the national level as an NEA director and a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly.”

2018

**Dr. Charles Levenstein, *professor emeritus, UMass Lowell***

Nominated by UMass Lowell professor Craig Slatin

“Dr. Levenstein integrates his academic work with advocacy and activism, supporting healthy and safe work and living conditions. In 1987, Dr. Levenstein wrote a successful grant proposal to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and began a New England-wide worker health and safety training consortium that has lasted for 30 years. ... His advocacy for school health and safety continued with publication of his most recent book in 2014 — *The Toxic Schoolhouse* — a collection of articles on chemical hazards endangering students, teachers and staff in the U.S. and Canadian education systems.”

2017

**Springfield Education Association Committee of Retirees**

Nominated by SEA President Tim Collins

“The mission of the Tools 4 Teaching recycling store is to provide Springfield Public Schools teachers, especially new teachers, with quality educational materials for their classrooms at no cost. The Tools 4 Teaching store is a nonprofit organization that receives educational materials through many varied sources. Donations are received from local businesses and retiring teachers. This keeps quality and usable school materials out of landfills and puts them into SPS classrooms.... The T4T store and the social events that these hardworking, dedicated retirees manage promote unity among teachers and the community. This demonstrates to the public that we can all come together for the benefit of students — our future leaders.”

2016

**Gladys Durant — *Bristol County Educators’ Association***

Co-Chair Richard Liston spoke for the Retired Members Committee

“As the Retired Members Committee contemplated the Honor Our Own award for 2016, it was a no-brainer that we needed to honor the life, career and service of Gladys Durant. She embodied everything this award was created to honor. Gladys was a dedicated educator in the Attleboro school system for over 30 years and was a very active member of her local association and of the MTA. After she retired, she continued to stay active, serving as a representative and former treasurer of the Bristol County Educators’ Association. She was also active within the MTA and was an active member of the Retired Members Committee at the time of her passing.”

**Questions About the  
“Honor Our Own” Award?**

Robert Whalen, MTA  
2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor | Quincy, MA 02171-2119  
[rwhalen@massteacher.org](mailto:rwhalen@massteacher.org)

**For a copy of this nomination form, please visit: [www.massteacher.org/honorourown](http://www.massteacher.org/honorourown)**

## RETIRED MEMBERS COMMITTEE CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

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The Retired Members Committee is described in Article X, Section 9 of the MTA Bylaws. There are eight members elected from the Statewide Retired District membership. Four terms expire each year. This election takes place at the MTA Annual Meeting among the delegates representing the Statewide Retired District. Those elected to the committee may serve up to three consecutive two-year terms.

Retired members may self-nominate for this committee. Nominations were due by the first Friday in March. The election is conducted by the Credentials and Ballot Committee, which also conducts the lottery to determine the order of names on the ballot.

Those on the ballot in 2021 for the four open committee seats are listed below (in ballot order):

### **1. Phyllis Neufeld | Burlington, MA**

I have 40 years of MTA experience, on the MTA Board, Executive Committee, and as local president. I have built relationships with my reps and senators. Retirees are in a position to benefit education – but we have not yet fully harnessed our collective power. Let's change that!

### **2. Beverly Saccocia | Dennis, MA**

I ask for your vote for the MTA Retired Committee. I believe ESPs are under-represented on this committee. I was on MTA BOD six years, MTA ESP Committee, MTA RA for many years, MTA CRC member. I want to be involved as a retired member to energize this committee.

### **3. Richard Liston | Everett, MA**

I'm Richard Liston, and I'm running for re-election to the Retired Members Committee. Past chair of committee. I am looking forward to continuing working on COLA and health insurance issues for retirees. I would be grateful for one of your four votes. As always I am thankful for your support.

### **4. Seth Evans | Brookline, MA**

Seth taught elementary school in Needham for 19 years before retiring in 2018. He's a current member of the RMC and EPPC (co-chair) and has served as building rep, PAL and NEA retired delegate. Prior to teaching, Seth was an organizer and a business consultant in worker ownership settings.

### **5. Sally Sennott | Belmont, MA**

I am a Duke grad and support fighting for the repeal of the WEP and GPO. Wilmington, NC was not integrated when I practice taught there. I was labelled as that teacher from up North. I believe in a diverse teaching force and have experience mentoring black and brown students.

### **6. Dale Melcher | Northampton, MA**

I retired after 37 years at UMass Amherst as a labor educator and union activist. I'm on the board of the Northampton Education Foundation and chair our Small Grants to Teachers Committee. I believe retirees can be a critical resource in advocating for staff and the schools our children deserve.

### **7. Rafael Moure-Eraso | Medford, MA**

I am an elected representative on the Retirees Committee 2019-21. I would work to reexamine the formula of representation of Retirees as voting members in MTA. I am also a rep for the retirees on the MTA EH&S Committee. Will work to institute a permanent H&S function within MTA.

## WISDOM WARRIORS NEEDS YOU!

Calling on retired MTA members to show up to support

- Locals and their issues
- The MTA legislative agenda

Wisdom Warriors is a statewide program of the Retired Members Committee of the MTA. And now we have coordinators in both Eastern and Western Massachusetts!

The Wisdom Warriors provide solidarity and encouragement to locals in need, demonstrate union solidarity, and engage in friendship and fun while supporting MTA-sponsored legislation and our broader mission to champion public education. While frequently injecting song and humor into otherwise challenging situations, the particular manifestation of our solidarity varies according to the issue, the circumstance, and the members' needs.

We welcome all retired MTA members as an important way to stay involved with our union! Come be a part of



creating what it will look like as retirees support our members. It will be fun!

We have set up an email and text list of retired MTA members who are willing to be contacted when we receive a “bat signal” request to support a local struggle or a statewide action. If you can participate in the action, that’s great. If not, don’t worry about it!

To join our list, simply send an email to [mtawisdomwarriors@gmail.com](mailto:mtawisdomwarriors@gmail.com) with your contact information. Please include where you live. You will then be contacted by either the eastern or western coordinator to get you on the list.

Being mindful of retirees’ health during the pandemic, some of our activities will be by Zoom. At this point, any in-person support activities would be outdoors and follow mask and social distancing requirements. However, we can still be powerful with emails and phone calls. Join us! ■

## MTA’S HEARING AID PROGRAM IS BETTER THAN EVER

### A Message From MTA Benefits

Thanks to a new partnership between Hear in America and TruHearing, your hearing aid benefits have gotten even better. Most notably, the new low-price guarantee ensures that in addition to all the great perks of this program, you’re also getting the lowest price on the product. Benefits are available to MTA members and their families and include:

- Price match guarantee plus an additional 5 percent discount
- Free hearing screenings
- Easy enrollment with no registration fees or premiums
- Financing options with no interest for up to 18 months
- Three-year Complete Care program (includes warranty, office service and batteries)



- 45-day money back trial period for exchanges and returns

To get started, call Hear in America at 800.286.6149 or visit [www.hearinamerica.com/mta](http://www.hearinamerica.com/mta). ■

## REPORT FROM THE MTA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE *CONTINUED*

### Andrei Joseph

**Funding/taxation:** Our spring campaigns will concentrate on achieving progressive taxation and adequate funding for public education. We have achieved partial success with the passage of the preK-12 *Student Opportunity Act*. We need to continue to ensure that the SOA is fully funded and ensure that the *Cherish Act*, which focuses on higher education, passes as well. There will be lots of work to do, and your lobbying support will be most welcome.

**Support for other unions:** Two labor struggles have come to our attention, one very close to home. As I write this,

800 members of the Massachusetts Nurses Association are in their second week of a strike at St. Vincent Hospital in Worcester. Members of the MTA, including our very own Wisdom Warrior retirees, have joined the picket line in support of the nurses' demands for a safe workplace. And we reach out across our state borders to support the efforts of Amazon workers to unionize in their Alabama warehouse. Being part of a broader labor movement is a step toward the growth of the MTA into a social justice union. Solidarity Forever! ■

## VIRTUAL BRUNCH: PANDEMIC EDUCATION *CONTINUED*

### Patrick Patterson and Rafael Moure-Eraso

Riley claims that the “loss” can only be made up through the speed up of “accelerated academies” during the summer.

She then offered an alternative model, one that takes into account the fact that that even in the midst of the pandemic, students have learned resilience, compassion and the importance of family and community, as well as skills that can't be crammed into a standardized metric.

Najimy added that summer should be a time of play and outdoor activities that explore the natural environment. She pointed to the important role played by retired educators, who have the institutional memory to move beyond the ed reform model.

The first presentation, by Alan Geller, senior lecturer at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, focused on how to secure a safe return to healthy school buildings. Geller began by asking, “Where is the evidence for the claim by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that it is safe to reopen schools?” The claim that rates of COVID-19 infection in schools is low is a myth, he said.

1. In a study of 67,000 children and 556,000 residents, 5 percent of schoolchildren and 5 percent of residents in the same community have been diagnosed with COVID-19. The infection is the same in schools as in the community. Usually, epidemiologists want that rate to be below 3 percent.
2. There are few differences in rates between elementary, middle school and high school students.

3. In a review of the data concerning COVID-19 infection in more than 80 Massachusetts cities and towns, there are more than three times as many cases as the DESE numbers show. DESE has dramatically understated the true level of infection, he added. Geller stressed the importance of multiple steps, or interventions, to increase the level of protection in schools.

A presentation by psychiatrist Samir Patel on pandemic challenges to the social and emotional health of elder adults noted that compared to the general population, seniors are surprisingly resilient to the pandemic's social and emotional impacts. They had lower levels of stress and anxiety, and they adapted better. Patel emphasized that caregivers, including educators, should take care of their mental and emotional health, focus on what can be controlled, limit their exposure to social media and upsetting news, seek out help when needed, and volunteer to help when they can.

A presentation by Cynthia N. Brown-Clemons on “Social and Emotional Aspects: Returning to Normal”, confirmed the resilience of the elderly. She noted that seniors have considerable experience with past tragedies and have developed strategies to deal with them. For those taking care of the elderly, it is important to simply be available to listen and acknowledge the impact of losses. As caregivers, she said, educators should not forget to care for themselves and rely on family and friends for support. ■



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# MTA **REPORTER**

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