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MTA Today

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MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS FACE CHANGES AND CHALLENGES



MSNO honoree promotes health for entire community

By Sarah Nathan

Ask school nurse Cathy Vieira what she does during the course of a given week and you will likely get a long, thoughtful and involved answer. That is because she spends a great deal of time working to make a difference in the lives of the students, educators and staff at the Fitzgerald Elementary School in Waltham, as well as promoting a message of good health in the community.

Vieira, a longtime nurse who has spent the last 16 years working in the Waltham Public Schools, was recently honored for her passion, dedication and creativity by the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization, which recognized her as School Nurse of the Year.

Known by her colleagues as the “food allergy guru,” Vieira goes the distance to help her students, the school staff and the public understand not only what food allergies are, but also how to address them and why it is important for everyone, living with these allergies or not, to be on the alert.



Photo by Sarah Nathan

School Nurse of the Year Cathy Vieira practices “safe sneezing” with students at the Fitzgerald Elementary School in Waltham. With Vieira, from left to right, are Christian Morales, Katherine Morales, Jessie Waltz, Haley Sullivan and Isabella Babstock.

In the late 1990s, when awareness about food allergies was on the uptick, Vieira took the lead in developing programs and materials for students. Over the years, she has come up with a variety of innovative ways to provide education about food allergies.

One year she wrote a play and recruited students with food allergies

to act it out for the entire school. She also wrote and directed a video in which students discussed how they felt about food allergies and how their classmates could help them.

In addition, Vieira has authored newsletters with help from her students and has started a support group at her elementary school for students

with food allergies and asthma. She is credited with helping to start a citywide support group for students dealing with these issues, as well as their families.

Vieira considers empowering her students and teaching them how to care for themselves a key part of her job.

“One of the reasons I love this job so much is because it allows me to see the children in this school from kindergarten all the way to fifth grade,” Vieira said. “I get a real opportunity to know my students and have a relationship with them. That gives me the chance to teach them how to take care of themselves. That’s what I’m here for — to help children learn how to take care of themselves.”

Marie DeSisto, director of nursing in the Waltham schools, nominated Vieira for the MSNO honor.

“Cathy is dedicated to outstanding nursing care; she is enthusiastic, a passionate advocate for her students, and she is calm, sensitive and nurturing,” DeSisto said. “She is not only a nurse, but an educator and a

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MTA Today

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Read Across America Resources

The NEA’s Read Across America Web site is the place to go when you’re planning your RAA activities. The official RAA Day is March 2, but the reading celebration can last all year long.

www.nea.org/readacross

MTA’s Mission Statement

The Massachusetts Teachers Association is a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles, that accepts and supports the interdependence of professionalism and unionism. The MTA promotes the use of its members’ collective power to advance their professional and economic interests. The MTA is committed to human and civil rights and advocates for quality public education in an environment in which lifelong learning and innovation flourish.

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On the cover

Local association leaders and members returning to school from the winter break were faced with a difficult decision about whether to sign on to become part of the federal Race to the Top program.

Cheryl DeSignore, president of the Educational Association of Worcester, ultimately decided to sign, though she expressed concern about some of the particulars. DeSignore is shown talking to Fran Weeks, a school facilitator at Burncoat High School in Worcester. See pages 6, 7 and 13 for coverage of the RTTT program and the new state education law.



Cover photo by Christine Peterson

Quote-Unquote

“During the school day, there should be extended time for play. Research has shown unequivocally that children learn best when they are interested in the material or activity they are learning. Play — from building contraptions to enacting stories to inventing games — can allow children to satisfy their curiosity about the things that interest them in their own way.”

— Susan Engel, a senior lecturer in psychology and the director of the teaching program at Williams College, in “Playing to Learn,” a *New York Times* op-ed published on February 2



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Why social media?

Newspapers declare bankruptcy. Radio networks fold. Voicemails and e-mails linger in limbo as we keep up with family and friends via text messages or Facebook "status updates."

Our media habits are clearly changing. No question these shifts are disruptive to old-line communications industries, but there is evidence that as a society we are consuming more news and information via new channels. A perfect example is YouTube, which made short-form videos popular and accessible and surpassed 100 million users last year.

The computer in our den is no longer the only place to connect to our new channels. We now connect with new devices that fit in our pockets. Video viewing on mobile phones, for instance, increased 70 percent last year.

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and similar services can be lumped under the term "social media," whose shifting definition includes Internet-enabled tools that allow many-to-many communications (as opposed to the old one-to-many broadcast model) and often turn users from passive consumers into creators of content.

If you are inclined to think of social media as the playground for a small, young, tech-savvy cohort, consider these statistics:

- Facebook reaches 67 percent of active U.S. Internet users and is the third most visited site among those 65 and older (Nielsen).
- 19 percent of U.S. Internet users are on Twitter (Pew). The largest group is working adults, ages 35 to 49 (Nielsen).
- In December 2009, Internet users spent an average of five hours on social networking sites, up from three hours in December 2008 — an 82 percent increase (Nielsen).
- Facebook users send 1 billion instant messages through the site's IM service each day, an average of four to five IMs per user (Mashable).

Organize your local

MTA entered the social media space last spring with the launch of a Twitter account, <http://twitter.com/massteacher>, and a Facebook Fan Page, <http://facebook.com/massteacher>. Assuming some overlap among Twitter "followers" and Facebook "fans," the two services reach an audience of about 1,500 with regular updates from the association.

Typical messages include links to news and research articles, free stuff for teachers and lesson plans, Beacon Hill news and other items of interest. Facebook fans, for example, recently discussed a provocative article in *The Atlantic* titled "What Makes a Great Teacher?" and shared news from their schools about the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti.

Both Twitter and Facebook are proving to be great platforms for breaking news items. In particular, Twitter, which consists of short text-message-style items, is a great way for the association to provide live coverage of a State House hearing, the MTA Retired Gathering and other events.

The network effect of social media is particularly exciting. As more members and locals come into the fold, the association is able to spread news and good ideas and take part in the conversations.

Anyone over 18 can become a fan of the MTA on Facebook, and Twitter is an open network. Along with MTA members from all categories and sections of the state, we count as fans and followers local and national news reporters, state officials, advocacy groups and think tanks of all persuasions, schools, the state university and colleges and MTA locals.

The network effect of social media is particularly exciting. As more members and locals come into the fold, the association is able to spread news and good ideas and take part in the conversations.

Online? Stay in bounds

Educators are entitled to enjoy their personal lives outside of school and to express themselves and their opinions in person and online. That said, because educators work with children and young adults and are seen as role models in the community, they are held to high standards for their public behavior and online activities.

An MTA advisory, *Online? Stay in Bounds*, is available in the member area of our Web site at http://massteacher.org/members/handbook/members_handbook_online.cfm.

In the June-July issue...

The June-July issue of *MTA Today* will look at how MTA members are using social media for educational purposes. We'll be crowdsourcing! If you'd like to be part of the story, follow @massteacher on Twitter or become an MTA Facebook fan.



Photo by Meg Secatore

Fuji Fulgueras, director of admissions at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, has been using Twitter to tell prospective students and others about the academy and its programs.

'Crowdsourcing' an earthquake

Twitter and Facebook provide instant information on tragedy in Haiti

By Meg Secatore

When an earthquake rocked Haiti on Jan. 12, MTA scrambled for news and educational resources that could help members and students respond to the disaster. Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter were key.

"Crowdsource" is a term of new coinage in media and marketing circles. It refers to tapping into the collective intelligence of the group to produce results with more depth and breadth than the usual "expert" or "authoritative" models of communications. To build a Web page of links to resources on the earthquake, we turned to the wisdom of the crowds on Twitter and Facebook.

Within minutes of the quake, Twitter, a micro-blogging service, offered a stream of news about the disaster.

One early tweet referred to the *Boston Haitian Reporter* Web site, which was blogging about the earthquake and collecting information about missing persons. In a state with the third-largest Haitian population in the U.S., this would be a valuable resource, and we passed it along on Twitter, Facebook and *massteacher.org*, the MTA Web site.

Meanwhile, national news organizations such as CNN and *The New York Times* were tweeting and Facebooking about their own news coverage and classroom materials.

Social media users have developed their own tools and protocols to sift through and make use of the stream of communications, and some of these techniques can be quite confusing to new users.

But they are useful for sorting information on events such as the tragedy in Haiti.

"Hash tags" are used to mark posted content by topic (e.g., #Haiti). Twitter users forward useful posts

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to others by "re-tweeting," a process that includes the Twitter name of the original source. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, so spelling, punctuation and grammar sometimes go out the window for good reason.

A few days after the quake, Reading Rockets (Twitter handle @readingrockets), a literacy project of WETA Public Television & Radio, offered this tweet: *It happened "over there" in Haiti: understanding and empathy through children's books: [#Haiti](http://ow.ly/WBXL). "@massteacher," as the MTA is known on Twitter, passed along this resource to its own Twitter followers.*

What was happening in Massachusetts schools? We used Twitter and Facebook to find out. On Jan. 18, Boston television station WBZ sent a tweet: @wbz: *Mass Maritime ship with 600 cadets on board ordered to Haiti.*

The deployment was soon canceled. But in Buzzards Bay, Mass. Maritime's director of admissions, Fuji Fulgueras, had picked up the WBZ tweet and our re-tweet through a Twitter keyword search.

Please turn to **Social**/Page 12

Using social media as an organizing tool

MTA Communications offers a workshop called *Social Media as an Organizing Tool* to share ideas among locals and members interested in Twitter, Facebook and other new communications tools. Also offered on the dates listed below will be a session titled "Visualize" a *Great Lesson or Presentation*. Register for these free workshops at <http://web.massteacher.org>.

- Tuesday, Feb 16, Auburn
- Thursday, Feb. 18, Cape Cod or Raynham
- Tuesday, April 20, Lynnfield
- Thursday, April 22, Pittsfield

Further information, including the final location of the Feb. 18 session, will be posted on the Web site.

For locals interested in adding social media to their communications toolkits, here are a few ideas gleaned from past workshops.

Start a conversation: Pose a question to your

Facebook fans. Comment on the news.

Provide information: Answer a question. Post a photo. Share a link to an interesting Web item. Send or post a document or flier. "Live tweet" from a meeting or an event.

Network with other unions and locals: Fan and follow other MTA locals, NEA and NEA state affiliates. (See <http://twitter.com/massteacher/nea-state-affiliates> and <http://facebook.com/massteacher>.)

Provide member services: Tweet or post reminders of important contractual deadlines or events. Post photos or articles about area attractions, history and discounts.

Educate: Share teaching tips among members. Offer brief "know your contract" notes or posts about regulations that affect your members. Collect good ideas and success stories from other locals, unions and activists and share them with your fans and followers.

Catching our breath after RTTT rush

Race to the Top turned into Race Against the Clock as everyone was forced to rush to meet the federal government's deadline of Jan. 19 to apply for a share of the \$4.35 billion fund. That's a terrible way to make good education policy. Copies of the state's final 200-page grant



Anne Wass
MTA President

application were not even available for review before local associations had to decide whether to sign a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to consider participating in the program.

In the end, some locals signed after they received a guarantee that they could withdraw if they didn't like the direction the program was headed. They didn't want to leave the money on the table and also

wanted a seat at that table to shape the program in Massachusetts.

Other associations decided not to sign. They either opposed key provisions of the plan or believed that the money being offered was not worth the mandates they would have to accept.

The MTA wrote a letter of support for the grant proposal, but with reservations. It was not an easy decision, and the process was messy.

Now we have some time to catch our breath and discuss among ourselves how to make sure this plan — and probably more state and federal requirements along these lines — will be helpful to students, good for schools and fair to teachers.

Several sections of the RTTT application are not very controversial, including the state's plan to establish a Teaching and Learning System along with a digital library that will include model lesson plans and assessment tools that teachers can access if they choose.

The most controversial section concerns evaluations. Today, teachers must be evaluated based on the seven Principles of Effective Teaching. Typically, determinations are made through observations.

In some schools these evaluations work well, but I hear from many members about schools where that is not the case. We know of schools where supervisors don't even bother to do the required evaluations at all. In others, the evaluations are

superficial. The principal — who may know very little about the subject being taught — sits through part of a class once every two years and fills out a checklist. There is little real analysis, guidance or followup.

Are teachers at fault for this? Absolutely not! There is no question that even the current system would be much better if evaluators did a better job. One provision in the bill we can all get behind calls for more training for evaluators.

But the grant calls for more. Specifically, it calls for evaluating teachers in part based on "multiple measures" of student academic performance. What does that mean? It is not spelled out in detail in the grant, and that is for the best. This is where teachers need to be involved to make sure MCAS and other standardized test scores aren't used in a mechanistic, inappropriate, punitive way.

The arguments should be very familiar by now.

- Teachers do not have complete control over how students behave or how much they study. Home and community environments, school resources and a student's own abilities and motivation are huge factors.

- A student's success or failure can never be attributed to one teacher alone. All the teachers who came before and other teachers and education support professionals in the school play a big role.

- Even measuring student "growth" is not infallible. We've seen instances where fourth-grade teachers whose students did very, very well on MCAS — much better than most students with similarly disadvantaged backgrounds — had poor "growth scores" because these students did even more spectacularly in third grade. Progress from one year to the next for these kids may look poor even though their teachers at both grade levels actually deserve medals, not poor evaluations.

- Putting even more emphasis on MCAS than currently exists will inevitably lead to more teaching to the test and narrowing of the curriculum.

While all of this is true, in my personal opinion it is also true that student test scores can be a small factor if a rational, common-sense approach is used.

Take, for example, an elementary school where there are three fourth-grade classes. It would make sense to me that a principal would look at the MCAS scores for those students to see if there are any unusual results. Is there one teacher whose students' scores are consistently and significantly lower than the others?

If so, that could trigger a more in-depth evaluation. Talk to the teacher. Examine the characteristics of her students. Does she have more

high-need students than the others? Spend more time in her classroom. Are her lesson plans well aligned to the curriculum? Is there a problem with classroom management skills?

This kind of diagnosis is not only a fairer way to evaluate, but more helpful to all concerned. Without such an analysis, how can the teacher be shown how to improve?

In other words, think of tests as a thermometer. They may indicate that there is something wrong with the patient, but a fever isn't a diagnosis. The diagnosis takes skill and experience and goodwill.

Not all principals have those qualities, and principals may not always be the best evaluators.

In survey after survey, teachers tell us that the people whose judgment they trust the most are those who teach the same grade or subject that they teach. Many are understandably wary of "peer review," though apparently it is working well in some districts. Personally, I am not prepared to say that this is the way to go, but I am prepared to say that this is a subject worthy of study and discussion.

Some ideas may never make it out of the starting gate. Anyone who thinks individual teachers should be paid more — or less — based on their students' test scores is going to have a hard sell with teachers, myself included. In a recent survey, more than 90 percent of our members said they oppose such a merit pay system.

In addition to all of the reasons listed above, I strongly believe it would undermine teamwork, would be ineffective at improving student performance, would leave out all those who teach subjects and grades that aren't tested and would ultimately be abandoned as expensive and unworkable.

Fortunately, the RTTT grant program does not insist on individual teacher merit pay, though it does call for experimenting with "alternative compensation" and "career ladders." Career ladders that involve offering more pay to educators who take on new responsibilities, such as mentoring and curriculum development, are well worth considering.

Again, we need to make our voices heard on this and other issues. If, as the process unfolds, we find that state or district officials are unresponsive to our views, we will fight hard against changes we consider damaging. Until then, let's hold them to their word that they want this to be a collaborative process, with good faith exhibited by all parties concerned.

Letters to the Editor

Lots of reasons to sign Race to the Top MOU

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to see the number of locals that refused to sign the state's memorandum of understanding for the federal Race to the Top program.

To be sure, there was language in the program that was troubling; some of it smelled like an attempt at instituting merit pay. It also seemed like a lot of hoops to jump through, and in my district, the payoff is small (Dover-Sherborn estimates it will receive around \$10,000). But after a careful read and listening to the facts, I realized that we had nothing to lose. So I signed it, and everyone should have signed it.

Teachers' unions are the only unions that even pretend to care about anything other than their members' compensation packages. The slogan for the 2007 MTA convention was "Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility"; how can we claim this when we do something as self-serving as block the district's access to funds because we are afraid of what might happen? Is it any wonder that the prevailing mood is that teachers' unions are part of the problem and not the solution?

I feel sorry for those locals that did not sign on to the MOU. In the end, they will have to sit down at a negotiating table and try to get a raise after they blocked the district's access to money. Good luck with that.

Brett McCoy

President, Dover-Sherborn Education Association

Letters policy

MTA Today welcomes letters to the editor from MTA members. Letters should be no longer than 200 words. Each letter submitted for publication must address a topic covered in *MTA Today*, must be signed and must include the writer's telephone number for confirmation purposes. Opinions must be clearly identified as belonging to the letter-writer. We reserve the right to edit for length, clarity and style. To submit a letter, mail it to MTA Today, 20 Ashburton Place, 8th floor, Boston, MA 02108 or e-mail it to mtatodayletters@massteacher.org. For additional information, please refer to the guidelines posted at:

www.massteacher.org/news/mta_today

'The ways that peace gets made'

Concord-Carlisle teacher develops exchange program with Turkmenistan

By Laura Barrett

When the central Asian nation of Turkmenistan started opening its borders to the outside world, first came the Peace Corps volunteers, next came the oil technicians, and then came the teachers.

David Nurenberg, an English teacher at Concord-Carlisle High School, was one of three teachers picked by the U.S. State Department in 2008 to spend two weeks visiting a school in the city of Balkanabat. Since then, he has organized having two pairs of Turkmen students come to CCHS, and, in February, 10 U.S. teachers, seven of them from CCHS, will travel to Turkmenistan to visit what may soon be their "sister" school there.



David Nurenberg

How Nurenberg made a connection with this country that was formerly a republic within the Soviet Union largely involved serendipity.

"I've always loved traveling and have been to 30 to 35 countries," he explained. "I saw that the State Department had started this new program, and since I knew nothing about Turkmenistan I decided to go there."

Nurenberg admitted that as an American Jew traveling to a Muslim country that shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran, he was "a little nervous" about the trip. When he arrived, his fears were allayed.

"The people there were so welcoming to me," Nurenberg said. He was delighted to find that the teachers at Balkanabat School 17 expressed similar views to his own about the joys — and pains — of teaching.

"I asked them if teachers are respected in their country," he said. "They said that in theory, yes, but not necessarily in reality. I said, 'Here, too.'"

One difference between the two nations involves student behavior. Nurenberg asked if his Turkmenistan counterparts had any problem with bullying, and the teachers looked puzzled. "'You know, kids getting into fights and hitting each other,' I explained to them," he said. "The teachers thought and thought and one said, 'I think about five years ago there was a kid who made another kid cry. So we talked to his parents and it didn't happen again.'"

Nurenberg acknowledged that the State Department's efforts may be motivated in part by the fact that Turkmenistan has one of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world lying



Photo by David Nurenberg

Students Gozel Berdiglijova, left, and Didar Garayev take a break on the steps of Widener Library during a visit to Harvard University.

beneath the vast Karakum Desert. The desert covers 80 percent of the country — a country the size of California with a population of about 5 million. Good relations with the U.S. are mutually beneficial. Nurenberg himself is less interested in Turkmenistan's oil than in its people.

"I think these are the ways that peace gets made — through personal contacts and understanding," he said.

This year's exchange students, Gozel Berdiglijova, 18, and Didar Garayev, 17, nodded in agreement one recent afternoon at CCHS. They were both enthusiastic about their first three months in the U.S., where they quickly made friends and became increasingly fluent in English.

"This country is so beautiful. Here it is so green. I love it," said Garayev.

Berdiglijova added, "At first I missed my parents, but not so much now because my host parents are so very nice and are like my parents in Turkmenistan."

Garayev said that being out of his country was difficult at first. "I couldn't feel good when I was first here because I had only a little bit of friends," he said. "After one month I had many, many friends. There's a Russian saying, 'We are between two fires.' It means you want to see your friends and family at home, but you also want to stay here."

Garayev played on the CCHS soccer and wrestling teams, and Berdiglijova has participated in many after-school activities, including yoga, art, dance and the environmental club. Her opportunities are much greater than they would be in her home country, where girls and women have to wear full-length dresses and head scarves and women were only recently allowed to drive.

Berdiglijova's goal is to go to a university back home; Garayev would eventually like to attend college in the U.S. or, if that is not possible, in his own country. Getting into the university in Turkmenistan hinges on doing very well on an entrance exam. For the few who are admitted, however, it is free. Also free for everyone are oil and gas for the home and 500 liters of gasoline every six months for those fortunate enough to own cars.

Less free are elections, travel, women's rights and other fundamentals of democracy.

After Turkmenistan declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, ruler Saparmurat Niyazov was declared "president for life." Among other changes, he closed the borders so that most residents could not travel abroad, had gold statues of himself erected throughout the country, renamed the months after members of his family, and banned satellite dishes, opera and

'I've always loved traveling and have been to 30 to 35 countries.'

—David Nurenberg
CCHS English teacher

recorded music. Under his rule, the country had one of the lowest rankings in the world for press freedom.

After Niyazov died unexpectedly in 2006, a new president was selected for a five-year term. While the country is still considered repressive by Western standards, improvements have been made. The borders have been opening, enabling programs such as the student and teacher exchanges with CCHS.

Turkmenistan is also relatively poor, despite having such large oil and gas reserves. Nurenberg said that in one classroom, the teacher unscrewed the light bulbs at the end of each day to preserve them. Berdiglijova and Garayev said that their lives were comfortable back home and that they had access to Western movies and music, but had limited technology.

In Concord, both quickly became proficient users of the Internet. Neil Lynch, the ESL coordinating teacher at CCHS, said Garayev "soaked up" technology, including video production.

He has a dream of obtaining a grant to buy interactive whiteboards for his school in Balkanabat so he can show his former classmates what he has learned.



Neil Lynch

Their school back home resembles an old American one-room schoolhouse, Nurenberg said. Students from all grades are in one school, and free public education ends in 10th grade. The style of education is very teacher-centered, with students required to memorize facts and rarely engaged in projects or presentations, he added.

That said, the two Turkmen students praised both education systems and were proud to note that they are now acquiring a fourth language, adding French to Turkmen, Russian and English. They expressed great respect for their teacher in Balkanabat, who selected them for this program and made the exchange possible.

"I want to thank my teacher Margarita. I can't find words for her," said Garayev. "And I want to thank Mr. Nurenberg. I can't thank him enough." Berdiglijova jumped in to express appreciation in her own words. "The teachers are so good and the students are so nice," she said.

SUMMARY OF 2010 MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATION BILL | Enacted in January

A new education law primarily focused on improving student performance in low-income urban schools and districts was enacted on Jan. 18. Although it was several years in the making, this bill was rushed through in early January to meet a federal Race to the Top application deadline.

Below are brief descriptions of key provisions in the new law.

Underperforming Schools (UPS)

Designation: A total of 72 schools may be designated UPS, also known as Level 4, from among those with MCAS scores in the bottom 20 percent. A group of stakeholders that includes union/teacher representatives will develop a turnaround plan. The plan must include issues such as health and social services for students. Once the plan is put in place, schools are given three years to improve. After three years, a school can be taken off the list, given an additional three years or be designated chronically underperforming.

Dismissal: A turnaround plan may require staff and teachers to reapply for their jobs. PTS teachers may only be terminated for “good cause,” which includes being evaluated and found deficient. Disputes over terminations go to expedited arbitration.

Collective bargaining: A superintendent may propose waivers to the contract. The contract can be reopened and negotiated for 30 days. If there is no agreement, the issues go to an expedited process before a three-person resolution committee. Participants are named by union and management, and an agreed-upon third person comes from a list provided by the American Arbitration Association. AAA procedures are used. The best interests of the students and positions of both parties are factors considered. Decisions by a majority of this committee are final.

Chronically Underperforming Schools (CUPS)

Designation: An unspecified number of the 72 UPS that have not improved significantly in three years (or six years

if the UPS designation is extended for three years) may be designated CUPS, also known as Level 5. There is a similar stakeholder group. The turnaround process is similar, except it is led by the education commissioner, who may appoint a receiver.

Dismissal: The process involves the same dismissal process and “good cause” standard used for UPS.

Collective bargaining: The commissioner may propose waivers to the contract. The contract is reopened and negotiated for 30 days. If there is no agreement, the commissioner can impose changes unilaterally, with some restrictions (e.g., he may not reduce salaries).

Chronically Underperforming Districts

Designation: From among lowest performing 10 percent of districts, no more than seven at one time can be designated “chronically underperforming.” A stakeholder group is convened to develop a turnaround plan.

Dismissal: The process involves the same dismissal process and “good cause” standard used for UPS and CUPS.

Collective bargaining: The commissioner may require the union and school committee to bargain over proposed contract waivers for 30 days. If there is no agreement, the issue goes to the same kind of three-member resolution committee used for UPS. However, instead of agreement of two out of three committee members, unanimous agreement is required for a ruling to be dispositive. If there is no unanimous agreement, the commissioner may impose changes unilaterally.

Commonwealth Charter Schools

The level of a district’s annual net school spending that may be diverted to charter schools is raised from 9 percent to 18 percent over several years for the lowest performing 10 percent of districts. Operators of new charters must have track records of successfully running schools serving similar populations. There is a slightly increased reimbursement formula and there are new requirements concerning recruiting and retaining students to reflect demographics of the community, taking students off waiting lists and filing additional financial information.

Horace Mann Charter Schools

For conversion schools, a memorandum of understanding must be approved by a majority of the school faculty. For new schools, contract waivers also must be negotiated. However, in 14 new Horace Mann Schools, a bargaining agreement does not have to be reached by the date the charter is approved. Four of the 14 must be located in Boston.

Innovation Schools (previously called Readiness Schools)

A new mechanism is established, in addition to those for Horace Mann and Pilot schools, for districts to create “innovative” schools, which are either new or conversion schools. Teachers and the local union are involved in development. For conversions, two-thirds of teachers in a school must approve a plan that may include waivers to the contract. For new schools, the union must agree. If there is no agreement, differences are resolved through expedited binding arbitration, similar to the process used in UPS.

RACE TO THE TOP | Summary of Massachusetts Grant Application

Massachusetts is one of 40 states, plus Washington, D.C., to apply for federal Race to the Top grant money. The state is seeking about \$250 million over four years. Title I districts that may want to participate each had to sign a Memorandum of Understanding by Jan. 13. Signatures were needed from the superintendent, union president and school committee chair.

PARTICIPANTS AND TIMELINE

- MOUs were signed in 256 school districts covering 72 percent of Massachusetts students. MOUs are from 146 cities and towns, 31 regional districts, 20 vocational-technical schools and 59 charter schools.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will schedule a meeting for all participating districts in late February or early March.
- The U.S. Department of Education will invite teams of state finalists to Washington, D.C., for interviews and expects to announce recipients in April. If Massachusetts is awarded a grant, districts that choose to apply will have 90 days to prepare work plans. Each work plan will address the four key objectives of the grant.

FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES OF MASSACHUSETTS PROPOSAL

(1) Effective Educator Work Force

- The DESE and education stakeholders will develop new teacher evaluation requirements that include: (1) Multiple measures of teacher/principal impact on student academic performance and growth; (2) Supervisor evaluations based on research-based observational tools; (3) Evidence of educator content knowledge, skills and professional growth. New tools for measuring student growth will be needed, especially for teachers in non-MCAS-tested grades and subjects.
- The DESE will identify 10 districts that have union and management buy-in to pilot new evaluation systems. At least half will serve more than 50 percent low-income students, and there will be at least one urban, one rural, one suburban and one high-performing district. Evaluators will be trained in conducting fair and effective performance assessments.

- Piloted evaluation models will include at least one “peer review” system, at least four experiments in “alternative compensation” and at least three focused on recruitment, induction, advancement and other human resources practices.
- The remaining RTTT districts will be part of regional networks that will report on existing evaluation tools and human resources practices based on the evaluation results.
- In 2013-2014, the DESE plans to issue new regulations requiring all evaluation systems to include measures of educator effectiveness based on results of the piloted programs.
- The DESE will “embed effectiveness into the licensure process, from initial through re-licensure. At a minimum, the professional teaching license of the future will likely include: measures of effectiveness; evidence of professional growth; a portfolio review based on professional teacher standards; and demonstrated content knowledge.”
- The DESE will develop statewide career ladders. The application cites MTA’s Teacher Career Path proposal as one possible model.

(2) Curricular and Instructional Resources

The DESE will develop an online “Teaching and Learning System” that will include “formative, interim and curriculum-embedded performance tasks” and a “digital library” that will include curriculum materials, model units and other instructional resources. Educators will be involved in designing these resources and will have online access to the system, as well as training in its use.

(3) Lowest-Achieving Schools

The new state education bill changes how low-performing schools are identified and what intervention options are

possible. Its provisions will guide the implementation of this section.

- In 2009-2010, the DESE plans to designate 36 schools from nine districts as Level 4 underperforming schools that will be involved in RTTT initiatives. (While the new law caps the number of these schools at 72, the DESE plans to limit the number to 36 at first.) One of four models must be adopted to transform Level 4 schools:
 - Turnaround Model:** Replace — either fire or transfer — the principal plus at least 50 percent of staff.
 - Restart Model:** Turn school over to a charter or education management company.
 - Closure Model:** Close the school.
 - Transformation Model:** Replace school leadership; evaluate and reward teacher/leader effectiveness based on multiple measures; adopt comprehensive instructional programs, expand learning time and provide other supports. (Note: Under the “Rule of Nine,” a district with nine or more Level 4 schools can only use this model in half of those schools.)

Initiatives in Level 4 schools will include assistance from a specialized corps of educators, improving wraparound services for students and identifying nonprofit partners.

(4) College and Career Readiness

- MassCore — currently a recommended program of high school studies — will become “the *de facto* curriculum for the Commonwealth.”
- Curriculum Frameworks are expected to be aligned with federal Common Core Standards, which are under development.
- The DESE will develop an early warning system to identify dropouts and promote Early College High Schools, International Baccalaureate programs and use of the Certificate of Occupational Proficiency.

Changes and challenges

Education bill, RTTT program could reshape education landscape

By Laura Barrett

The education landscape in Massachusetts could change significantly in the next few years as a result of sweeping new state and federal mandates intended to boost student performance, particularly in schools and districts serving low-income urban students.

Some of the changes are controversial and were opposed by the MTA, while others are being welcomed by the association.

Throughout the debate, the MTA has played an active role in keeping the teachers' voice at the forefront, and it was successful in modifying several provisions that would have greatly diminished educator bargaining and due process rights.

The changes are coming down twin paths. The first is a new state education law that was initiated by the governor, revised significantly by the Legislature, moderated by the MTA and ultimately signed into law on Jan. 18. The second is the federal Race to the Top grant program; 40 states are currently vying for RTTT funding, including Massachusetts.

Through lobbying, meetings with state and federal officials and member e-mails and phone calls, the MTA was able to win improvements in both the state law and the state application for the RTTT grant. A key victory was preserving members' fair-dismissal rights in low-performing schools. These rights had been gutted in some versions of the state bill.

Despite the MTA's successes, however, the association ultimately opposed the new law, primarily because it gives the commissioner of education power to alter contracts in certain chronically underperforming schools, almost all of which serve high-need students. As of this writing, it is unclear how many schools will be affected by this provision, though the new law states that no more than 72 schools combined may be labeled "underperforming" and "chronically underperforming" and that no school may be named chronically underperforming unless it has been underperforming for at least three years.

Another well-publicized section of the law raises the cap on charter schools in the lowest-performing 10 percent of districts statewide, permitting charters to account for 18 percent of those districts' budgets rather than 9 percent. Although the MTA has concerns about charter schools, the "smart cap" plan in the education law was seen as preferable to a state ballot initiative that would have lifted all caps on charter schools statewide. The sponsors of the initiative had collected the first round of signatures needed to place it on the ballot, but pledged to drop it once the law was passed.

MTA's response to the RTTT grant proposal was also mixed. The association did not want to stand in the way of the state receiving an estimated \$250 million over four years — about \$62 million a year — and the association supports the federal government's stated intention of closing the achievement gap.

At the same time, in its letter of support, the MTA expressed "reservations and concerns" about two key provisions: the use of student test scores in teacher evaluations and compensation and the so-called Rule of Nine. Under that rule, which the MTA and NEA are fighting to change, any district with more than nine underperforming schools must adopt one of the following three turnaround strategies in at least half of those schools: close the school, turn it over to a private management company or remove at least half of the staff through transfers or terminations.



Photo by Sarah Nathan

Like many MTA locals, the Fall River Educators' Association grappled with whether to sign on to the federal Race to the Top program. Above, FREA members voted on the proposal on Jan. 13. They initially opted not to participate, but later reversed their decision.

"MTA was deeply involved in efforts to make both the state and federal initiatives better," said MTA President Anne Wass. "Our lobbyists, leadership and members were all enlisted to meet with or contact state policymakers to advocate for positive elements in these plans and push back against negative ones. In the end, both the bill and the Race to the Top proposal were made better because of our involvement."

"We reversed an early plan that would have gutted due process dismissal rights in certain high-need schools," she said. "We won significant limits on the number of schools in which the commissioner can impose contract changes. We insisted that teachers and the union have a seat at the table in school and district improvement processes. We won the right to bargain over changes under Race to the Top and to reject any changes we don't approve."

"Despite all that we won, there are provisions in both the state and federal initiatives that some of our members don't like and that I personally don't like," Wass said. "That's all the more reason we have to stay in the game. We have to make sure that the teachers' voice is heard during implementation of these plans. If they try to make changes in a way that is punitive, unfair and hurts our members or students, we will fight back."

"We also have to take the lead when it comes to new ideas," Wass continued. "We need to explore and consider new ways to help our struggling students. If we don't come up with our own ideas, you can be sure they will not hesitate to impose their ideas on us."

Although school districts have no choice but to comply with the new state education bill, they did have a choice about whether to sign on to the RTTT proposal.

The original RTTT plan would have required local applicants to adopt the state plan if they applied for the money. This was long before a copy of the state plan was even available for review. The MTA initially did not encourage local associations to sign on to the application, given the lack of information about what participating would require and the lack

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— MTA President Anne Wass

of any guarantee that an association could back out if the implementation proved negative.

MTA attorney Sandra Quinn helped break the logjam by adding language to the state Memorandum of Understanding clarifying that all contract changes must be bargained in good faith and may only be implemented with the agreement of all parties. The state MOU had to be signed by the superintendent, local association president and school committee chair. MTA field staff developed an additional Memorandum of Agreement that was signed in many districts reinforcing that "any party at any time may withdraw from the RTTT process."

Once that language was adopted, the MTA recommended that associations sign the MOU as long as certain conditions were met, including that the association and school administration had a good relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Approximately two-thirds of all districts applied, though that number includes individual charter and vocational schools, both of which count as separate districts.

Explaining why he signed, Springfield Education Association President Tim Collins said that financial concerns carried significant weight, as did provisions protecting collective bargaining.

"When you are in a cash-strapped city like Springfield, you can't ignore the opportunity to get

Please turn to **Schools**/Page 13



Photos by Sarah Nathan

Craig Slatin, an associate professor at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell and a member of MSP-Lowell, asks a question during a morning session at the recent MTA Higher Education Conference. In photo at right, NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, center, talks to Mark Bashour, an adjunct faculty member in the political science department at Quinsigamond Community College, as MTA President Anne Wass looks on.

Higher ed members focus on issues, action

By Sarah Nathan

MTA members from different college campuses and all corners of the Commonwealth traveled to Framingham recently to participate in the 2009 MTA Higher Education Conference.

The two-day event, sponsored by the MTA and the Higher Education Leadership Council, was held at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center. It featured a mix of workshops and plenary sessions focused around the theme “Professional Issues in Massachusetts Public Higher Education.”

From the opening remarks on Dec. 4 to the closing assembly on Dec. 5, the conference was structured to allow participants to learn, exchange ideas and gain new skills.

NEA President Dennis Van Roekel and MTA President Anne Wass briefed members on union efforts at the state and national levels, and there was time for questions and networking. The workshops covered a wide range of issues, including workplace bullying, social media, workplace health and safety, living wage campaigns, political organizing and staffing and financial trends in public higher education.

“I left the conference with a sense of community and a real feeling of ownership,” said Kelly Galanis, a first-year officer of the Westfield State College chapter of the Association of Professional Administrators. “It was a great opportunity to learn a lot and meet with other colleagues from across the state. I was surprised and happy to find that so many people have the same interests and issues.”

Galanis added, “I think people want a chance to speak their mind and be heard, and this conference provided that to them.”

Wass and Jim Rice, a Quinsigamond Community College professor who heads the National Council for Higher Education, offered their own unique insights during the opening session.

Wass updated members on legislative and political issues in play on

‘I left the conference with a sense of community and a real feeling of ownership,’ said Kelly Galanis, a first-year officer of the Westfield State College chapter of the Association of Professional Administrators.

Beacon Hill, including pension reform, ballot questions, the state’s economic picture and MTA’s efforts to create new revenue streams to support public schools and public higher education. Rice offered an overview of the NCHE,

which is the higher ed caucus of the NEA, and various NEA functions and services provided specifically to the higher ed community.

On Dec. 5, Van Roekel talked about the “incredibly challenging

times facing public higher education” in Massachusetts and throughout the country.

He emphasized the need for NEA members to organize and fight for positive change to combat the current political climate, in which unfair attacks on unions and educators have become commonplace.

“There is nothing in America that has ever been accomplished without collective action,” Van Roekel said. “We need to do this better than we’ve ever done it before.”

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EMAC event helps build involvement

By Bob Duffy

NEA Executive Committee member Princess Moss and MTA President Anne Wass both issued calls to action during the recent MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference.

Their common message was that everyone should help recruit and identify minority members to become active in the union.

“The NEA and the MTA can’t do this alone,” said Moss, a former elementary school music teacher and Virginia Education Association president. “We need more minority involvement at every level of the organization, and conferences like this help to foster that involvement.”

Like Moss, Wass focused on the theme of the event, which was “Working Together to Create a Stronger Union.” One topic she discussed was the ongoing effort to have the MTA meet its goal for ethnic minority representation at the NEA Representative Assembly.

“This conference and our Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee are key ingredients to reaching our goal of implementing a plan for meeting our target for ethnic minority representation at this year’s RA,” Wass said.

For the last several years, the MTA has fallen just short of its goal under



Photos by Bob Duffy

Conference participants were treated to an inspirational performance by the Boston Community Gospel Choir, with Artistic Director Dennis Slaughter, who is also an organizational specialist for the NEA, on the piano. At right, EMAC Chairwoman Susan Baker, standing, and NEA Executive Committee member Princess Moss shared a light moment.

NEA Bylaw 3-1(g), which states: “It is the policy of the Association to achieve ethnic-minority delegate representation at least equal to the proportion of identified ethnic-minority populations within the state.” The MTA is working to ensure that the target is met for the 2010 RA, which will be held in July in New Orleans.

Meeting the representation goal was one of many subjects discussed

during the conference, which ran from the evening of Dec. 4 to the afternoon of Dec. 5 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Natick. Participants were able to choose from a wide variety of workshops, including *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color*, *Cultural Mathematics*, *Helping Minority Teacher Candidates into the Profession*, *Knowing and Enforcing Your Union Contract*, *The Bully-Free*



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They also had a chance to talk, share experiences and hear a performance by the Boston Community Gospel Choir.

Christine Boseman, a member of the Classified Staff Union at UMass Boston and the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, said the conference and other structured MTA activities have helped give her the tools to foster more minority participation. Her local has recruited eight minority higher ed staff members to become more active in the union, she said.

“It has given me a chance to meet new people within a minority setting,” said Boseman, who was so impressed with the anti-bullying workshop that she has asked MTA Training and Organizing Coordinator George Luse to give the presentation to association members on her campus.

Moss noted that events such as the annual EMAC gathering serve other functions in addition to building association strength.

“Another important piece is that these conferences provide tools on how to better reach minority children,” she said.

In the workshop on cultural math, educators had the chance to connect the subject to things that interest them and to what happens in their students’ lives. Participants were given examples of how to make connections between playing culturally appropriate games and measurement systems that directly connect to mathematics.

“When educators come to these types of workshops, they want something they can do Monday when they go back to school, so hopefully they will take the information and use it to engage students in their classroom,” said University of Toledo Associate Professor of Education Tod Shockey, who conducted the session.

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Governor's budget spares education

By Laura Barrett

Education is one of very few areas to be spared the ax in Governor Deval Patrick's budget proposal for the coming fiscal year.

While deep cuts in other services and modest revenue increases are proposed to make up for a \$2.7 billion budget gap caused by the national recession, the governor is calling for the state to level-fund public schools, public higher education and non-school local aid accounts.

"Governor Patrick deserves credit for seeking to protect public education in his budget," said MTA President Anne Wass. "In normal times, we would strongly argue against level-funding, given that costs inevitably rise. However, these are not normal times. The economy is still extremely shaky, unemployment continues to be very high and many important public services are facing significant and damaging cuts."

Environmental protection, mental health programs, housing and human services are among the areas proposed for cuts to make up for the continued loss of revenues caused by the national economic crisis.

The governor's budget, filed on Jan. 27, marks the start of a process that will continue for the next several

months. Both the House and Senate will develop their own spending proposals and debate them this spring. A final budget must be in place when fiscal 2011 begins on July 1.

Wass noted that level-funding — while appreciated this year — is not sustainable over the long term, especially since education funding has eroded over the past several years.

"To many members at the local level and on our college campuses, level-funding will feel like a cut, especially if reserves have been depleted," she said. "Nonetheless, we appreciate that the governor spared public education and public higher education from the budget ax because it could have been a lot worse. Now we need to focus on making sure the House and Senate make this same level of commitment to education."

To help close the budget gap, the governor proposed a series of revenue initiatives that raise close to \$200 million. These include eliminating tax breaks for the film industry and repealing the sales tax exemption for candy and soda. Shortly after the budget was released, however, House Speaker Robert DeLeo (D-Winthrop) announced that the House budget will not include any tax increases.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Charles Baker, who is seeking to



run against Patrick in this fall's election, went a step further by announcing his support for reducing both the state income tax and the sales tax, proposals that the State House News Service reported "would suck hundreds of millions of dollars out of state government coffers."

Patrick's budget proposal relies on the federal government to provide additional state fiscal relief. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a jobs bill that includes money for public education. Unless similar legislation passes the Senate and a final bill is signed by the president, there will have to be more cuts or additional tax increases in order to balance the state budget.

Along with the budget, the governor has filed two bills related to retirement: one that allows for a local-option early retirement program for employees who are part of the municipal pension system and another

that would make changes to the pension system.

A municipal relief bill was filed on Jan. 22 that includes an optional early retirement incentive for municipal employees with at least 20 years of service in the affected local retirement system, provided participants forgo any rights to accrued sick and vacation time. The bill does not apply to teachers since they are members of the state retirement system, not a municipal retirement system. However, non-teacher employees of school districts may be eligible since they are members of local retirement systems.

The governor's public employee pension bill was filed on Jan. 26. If the bill is enacted, most of its provisions would apply exclusively to new public employees hired on or after July 1, 2010, though some would also apply to current employees. One provision that would negatively affect future members calls for increasing from three to five the number of years on which average highest earnings are based to calculate a member's pension. A second provision would cap the maximum annual pension payment at \$85,000, indexed to inflation.

Details about the pension proposals and the governor's education budget are available on the MTA Web site, www.massteacher.org.

Reversal of transportation cuts helps regional districts

By Bob Duffy

After two months of anguish over how to absorb \$18 million in mid-year transportation cuts, education leaders in 12 regional school districts were relieved when Governor Deval Patrick restored the funds several weeks ago.

The governor reached his decision to provide the money after being convinced by affected educators and local officials that the reduction would result in teacher layoffs and other serious cuts. The MTA also lobbied to have the cut reversed.

The reduction in state aid for regional school transportation was among some \$277 million in so-called 9C emergency reductions that Patrick unveiled to help close a \$600 million

gap in the state's \$27 billion budget for the current fiscal year. Had it gone through, it would have been devastating.

"The impact of the governor's 9C cuts created an immediate crisis," said Michael Vecchia, president of the Berkshire Hills Education Association.

Under state law, regional districts must provide transportation to students who live more than 1.5 miles from the schools they attend. That meant affected districts could not cut transportation services, so they were looking at other possible reductions in education services.

"The restorations of transportation funds saved three jobs for us," noted James Boland, president of the Tantasqua Education Association.

In the Berkshire Hills Regional School District, the local association and the administration had immediately embarked on a collaborative effort to close a gap of \$390,000 that would have resulted from the funding loss. The resulting measures reduced the number of positions that might have been lost from 30 to 15.

They included two and a half days of furloughs for teachers and education support staff; three days of furloughs for administrative staff, as well as other administrative cost savings; borrowing against FY 2011 federal stimulus funds; and fundraising efforts by concerned families and community members that brought in \$60,000 in about a week.

The restoration of the \$18 million allowed the district to abandon the

furlough plan and avoid any layoffs. Vecchia, while relieved, said the process actually will be a benefit going forward.

"This community-wide collaborative effort has been nothing short of extraordinary," he said. "I think that this problem-solving energy will continue to be a positive force as we move ahead to face any remaining challenges for FY 2010, FY 2011 and beyond."

State budget cuts to regional transportation have hit disproportionately hard in recent years. To make sure that regional transportation is treated more fairly, advocates worked with state Senator Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst) to draft and win passage of an amendment to the 2010 education reform bill that

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New teachers say support is vital

By Laura Barrett

The MTA's recent Just for New Teachers Conference was a big success, providing 200 members in their first four years of teaching with the chance to get together for a day of learning and networking.

The lunchtime keynote speaker, back by popular demand, was Michael Flynn, 2008 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. Flynn described his own embarrassing mistakes when he first started teaching by way of reassuring new teachers in the room that everyone feels overwhelmed at first — and it does get better.

Those stories were no doubt comforting to Richard Wyner, a second-year teacher attending the conference and a member of MTA's New Teacher Committee. Wyner, a career changer who now teaches middle school math in Springfield, said his biggest challenge is classroom management.

"I was observed for my practicum and was told that I know my math, but what I need is to make more of a connection with the kids," Wyner said.

He must regularly deal with students who fight, run out of the classroom or bang on his doors from



Photo by Laura Barrett

The JFNT Conference is a great place to share strategies and compare notes. Talking during a break, from left to right, are New Teacher Committee members Heather Macpherson, Deidre D'Egidio and Chris Saulnier.

the hall. One of his students has a 5-month-old baby. Another was arrested for drug possession. As a white

male who grew up in the suburbs, Wyner sometimes finds it challenging to connect with his students, but he is committed to making it work.

"I don't regret making the change into teaching at all," said Wyner, who previously worked for a business that sold sports and tour packages. "As bad as the bad days are, the good days are good. I don't face a boring day in my life going to Springfield to teach."

Katherine Kennedy, a third-year English teacher at Acton-Boxborough High School, came to teaching by the more traditional route, studying for the profession at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

While attending graduate school at Boston University, she had planned to teach in an inner-city school. Since she was one of the few students who had a car, however, she was assigned to teach in Newton, which she really enjoyed. She was happy to be offered the job at Acton-Boxborough.

"I don't have to deal with many behavior problems," she said. "For me the biggest problem is being able to reach all students within the time constraints I have."

Kennedy said that even in her relatively affluent district, she has students who struggle to meet educational standards. "In my lower-level classes I still have students who have trouble with paragraphs in high school."

Regardless of their differences in training or district assignments, new teachers all need some level of support from both their peers and more experienced colleagues.

New Teacher Committee members Abby Cordell and Kerry Volke said that the JFNT Conference and the MTA Summer Conference are both great places to find that support.

'I don't regret making the change into teaching at all. As bad as the bad days are, the good days are good. I don't face a boring day in my life going to Springfield to teach.'

— Richard Wyner
Springfield teacher

Topics covered in JFNT workshops during the 2009 conference, which was held Dec. 4 in Marlborough, included differentiating instruction, teaching English language learners, understanding autism spectrum disorders, managing the inspired classroom and navigating the state's teacher licensing requirements.

Workshops on these kinds of topics and many more are offered to new and experienced teachers alike at the Summer Conference. A separate track at Williams is designed specifically for new teachers.

"The Summer Conference is amazing," said Cordell. "I found it inspirational as a union member, and it made me a better teacher. You feel like you are not alone." Both Volke and Cordell said that social opportunities and the chance to talk to other new teachers about their experiences are valuable as well as fun.

The 2010 Summer Conference will be held in Williamstown from Aug. 8 through Aug. 12. More information will be available on the MTA Web site, www.massteacher.org, and in the April-May issue of MTA Today.

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Haverhill teachers to receive back pay

By Sarah Nathan

Eight Haverhill teachers who were unfairly hired as permanent substitutes, paid significantly lower wages and excluded from the union will be provided with back pay as a result of a successful arbitration won by the Haverhill Education Association and the MTA.

The case centered around educators hired by the Haverhill Public Schools in the 2007-2008 school year to fill new positions created to meet increased student enrollment. While the eight were hired as permanent substitutes, they were not asked to cover for absent faculty members, as is traditionally the role of a substitute teacher, yet they were not considered classroom teachers. As a result, they did not receive the wages or job protections extended to bargaining unit members.

On Dec. 7, an Essex Superior Court judge confirmed an earlier opinion issued by an arbitrator stating that these men and women were not

'The judge's ruling is an unequivocal rejection of the Haverhill School Committee's methods in this matter. The unnecessary decision to take this case to arbitration took money away from educating Haverhill's children. Clearly, the school committee made a conscious decision to spend money on attorney fees rather than treating the teachers of Haverhill as the professionals that we are.'

—Marc Harvey
President, Haverhill Education Association

permanent substitutes, but regular teachers placed into new positions.

"The judge's ruling is an unequivocal rejection of the Haverhill School Committee's methods in this matter," said HEA President Marc Harvey. "The unnecessary decision to take this case to arbitration took money away from educating Haverhill's children. Clearly, the school committee made a conscious decision to spend money on attorney fees rather than treating the teachers of Haverhill as the professionals that we are."

Harvey first became aware of the situation in August 2007 and pursued

it with city school administrators. He then filed a grievance. From there, the HEA and the MTA sought arbitration and won. After losing the arbitration, the Haverhill School Committee refused to provide the back pay and pursued the case in Superior Court.

Financial concerns were at the root of the decision to hire the teachers at lower wage rates, the HEA and MTA argued throughout proceedings. The arbitrator assigned to the case agreed.

The Haverhill school administrators were "candid that financial constraints motivated the hiring of the grievants as permanent substitutes

rather than as bargaining unit members," the arbitrator wrote in an opinion released on Feb. 10, 2009. She also noted that the educators accepted appointments as permanent substitutes to get a "foot in the door" and were then "given status that was not commensurate with their work."

Because they were treated as permanent substitutes, their pay was set by the school department. In the 2007-2008 school year, substitutes were paid at a daily rate of \$110, which was roughly half of the lowest step on the negotiated wage scale for Haverhill teachers. The teachers were paid the daily rate during their first 90 days of employment. After that, they were paid in accordance with the HEA's contract with the city.

As a result of the legal proceedings, the teachers are now owed all of their back pay for the 90-day period in 2007 plus accrued interest.

MTA field representative Jill Coleman and MTA attorney Ira Fader represented the HEA in legal proceedings.

GLBT committee to hold forum

The MTA Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Issues Committee is hosting **COMMUNITY CONNECT**

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NESDC sets inaugural conference

The New England Staff Development Council will hold its inaugural conference, *Are We Making a Difference: Assessing the Impact of Staff Development*, on April 7 in Marlborough. For information and registration information, go to:

www.ne-nsdc.org



Social media help spread quake info

Continued from Page 3

The Association of Professional Administrators member started to follow @massteacher. The MTA followed back, in order to keep up with news of the academy's staff and students.

On the MTA Facebook Fan Page, <http://facebook.com/massteacher>, we asked members to share news from their schools. Kathleen Kelleher Crowley wrote: "North Middle School in Brockton is collecting change in classrooms and at lunches."

"Quincy High School is doing the same," commented Erin Twomey.

Visit our *Earthquake in Haiti* Web page at http://massteacher.org/news/headlines/headlines_2010-01-13.cfm.

Follow first responders

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Schools face changes and challenges

Continued from Page 7

additional money,” he said. “The fact that we got in the MOU that collective bargaining will be part of this and that if we can’t reach agreement we do not have to participate made all the difference. I was more than willing to sign to keep us in the running for this money.”

Collins added that he was assured that some of the policies already in place in Springfield would count as complying with the plan. For example, Springfield has a career ladder under which student achievement may be considered in promoting teachers to the positions of teacher leader or instructional leadership specialist. While those educators are paid more than regular classroom teachers, they also have additional duties, such as mentoring or curriculum development. Collins said he has been assured that this satisfies the state’s RTTT guidelines for linking student performance to teacher evaluations and pay.

His bigger concern is over the Rule of Nine.

“There is no way we can displace half the staff in four to eight of our schools. That would be destructive to the school system and harmful to the children under our charge,” he said. Collins is hoping that provision is changed.

Kim Auger, president of the Everett Teachers Association, was more upbeat, in large part because she has a good relationship with her superintendent. Hers was the first non-charter district to sign on.

“We’re looking at using the money beneficially toward developing a new evaluation process and better professional development,” Auger said, noting that her district had identified those areas of need two years ago when local educators participated in the Teaching, Learning and Leading Survey.

“We’ve all agreed that the evaluation process is superficial and really isn’t helpful,” she added. “We have an evaluation committee already set up, and we will use the money to move that process forward.”

Although Auger is no fan of paying individual teachers more based on student test scores, she is



Cheryl DeSignore

optimistic that the association and district leadership can find ways to comply with the grant requirements that do not undermine teamwork in her schools.

Cheryl DeSignore, president of the Educational Association of Worcester, also signed the MOU, but with reservations.

“There were a lot of reasons not to sign, including the fact that the process was so rushed we had never seen the final application by

the state,” DeSignore said. “Because there were so many unanswered questions, in the end we felt it was better to be part of the discussion than not in order to mold the reform in Worcester.”

Other local associations chose not to sign.

Jody Curran, president of the Brookline Educators Union, said that her executive board had a full discussion of the pros and cons before voting against participating. Although high-performing Brookline would not be affected by the Rule of Nine and several other provisions, Curran said that her association opposed the grant program on philosophical grounds.



Jody Curran

In testimony to the Brookline School Committee, Curran’s first objection was to linking teacher evaluations and pay to student test scores.

“We worry for the future of our students,” she said. “Who will want to volunteer to teach classes of struggling learners that may not do well on general assessments? How do you measure the work of social workers, guidance counselors, school nurses, specialists and librarians? If we’re not relying solely on MCAS scores to measure teacher effectiveness, what other measures could be used that would allow for a comparability that such a policy demands? We haven’t heard any clear answers to these questions, and that makes us very nervous.”

She also said that the Rule of Nine, while not directly affecting Brookline, “gives credence to the idea that teaching staffs are to blame for issues created by many social, economic and political factors.”

The Quincy Education Association also did not sign. Paul Phillips, president of the QEA, said that in the end it came down to a matter of trust. The problem was not a lack of trust in local officials, he said, but a lack of faith in future actions by state and federal officials.

“What if Deval Patrick is not around after November or Barack Obama is not around in three years?” Phillips asked.

“My executive board did not trust future administrations to honor verbal commitments that are being made to us now,” he said. “They did not trust that the money to implement these new mandates will be there in the future. So there was a real fear that we’d have new people in charge with a very different agenda and no money. Meanwhile, we’d have already given away the store.”

Phillips said the biggest concern was over linking student test scores to evaluation, pay and possibly even licensure. He also pointed to past issues involving the Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education. “Our board launched into this huge discussion about how these folks are the ones who brought us licensure hell a few years back,” he said, “so why are we now going to trust these same people to link your evaluations to your license?”



Paul Phillips

Quincy was one of the larger districts that didn’t sign. Many smaller or more affluent districts did not because the money for them was so minimal — in some cases just several thousand dollars a year — that the association and local school officials felt that the cost of complying would far exceed the revenues.

The new state education law still contains several ambiguous sections that must be clarified. The MTA is meeting with education officials to advocate for regulations that ensure a key role for teachers throughout the school improvement process.

The next step for RTTT is that federal education officials must select the grant recipients and decide how much money each will get. The money will be divided equally between the state and the local districts that signed the MOU.

President Obama recently announced a plan to add another \$1 billion to the \$4.35 billion already allocated for the program.

If Massachusetts is approved, as expected, local negotiations could begin soon to determine how the program will be implemented in each district.

Against this backdrop is the fear that more districts will have to make cuts if state revenues don’t improve and if new federal stimulus dollars are not allocated. Since RTTT funds may only be used for supplemental services, not to support existing staff and services, they cannot take the place of the hundreds of millions of dollars in stimulus funds that are being used in the current fiscal year to maintain services.

“There is good reason to fear that no ambitious new initiatives will get off the ground if core educational services and personnel — including classroom teachers, guidance counselors, administrative staff, extracurricular activities and education support professionals — are decimated,” said Wass.

Or, as the QEA’s Phillips put it, “This really isn’t going to work if it amounts to putting a tiara on top of a decaying head.”

Before long, MTA members will almost certainly once again be asked to lobby at the local, state and federal levels for adequate funding — an essential tool for ensuring great public schools for every child.

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The Credit Card Act of 2009

President Obama signed the *Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure Act* on May 22, 2009. Some portions of the act went into effect at the end of August, and additional provisions will go into effect at the end of February. The following are key elements of the legislation. Additional information can be found at www.whitehouse.gov or at www.mass.gov.

KEY ELEMENTS

Bans unfair rate increases:

Financial institutions will no longer raise rates unfairly, and consumers will have confidence that the interest rates on their existing balances will not be hiked.

Bans retroactive rate increases:

Bans rate increases on existing balances due to “any time, any reason” or “universal default” and severely restricts retroactive rate increases due to late payment.

First-year protection: Contract terms must be clearly spelled out and stable for the entirety of the first year. Firms may continue to offer promotional rates with new accounts or during the life of an account, but these rates must be clearly disclosed and last at least six months.

Ends late-fee traps: Institutions will have to give cardholders a reasonable time to pay the monthly bill – at least 21 calendar days from time of mailing. The act also ends late-fee traps such as weekend deadlines, due dates that change each month and deadlines that fall in the middle of the day.

Enforces fair interest calculation: Credit card companies will be required to apply excess payments to highest-interest balance first. The act also ends the confusing and unfair practice by which issuers use the balance in a previous month to calculate interest charges on the current month, so called “double-cycle” billing.

Requires opt-in to over-limit fees: Institutions will have to obtain a consumer’s permission to process transactions that would place the account over the limit.

Restrains unfair sub-prime fees: Fees on sub-prime, low-limit credit cards will be substantially restricted.

Limits fees on gift and stored-value cards: The act enhances disclosure on fees for gift and stored-value cards and restricts inactivity fees unless the card has been inactive for at least 12 months.

Plain sight/plain language disclosures: Credit card contract terms will be disclosed in language that consumers can see and understand so they can avoid unnecessary costs and manage their finances.

Plain language in plain sight: Creditors will give consumers clear disclosures of account terms before consumers open accounts and clear statements of the activity on consumers’ accounts afterward.

Real information about the financial consequences of decisions: Issuers will be required to show the consequences to consumers of their credit decisions. Issuers will need to display on periodic statements how long it would take to pay off the existing balance – and the total interest cost – if the consumer paid only the minimum due.

Public posting of credit card contracts: Issuers will be required to make contracts available on the Internet in a usable format.

Holds regulators accountable to enforce the law: Regulators will be required to report annually to the Congress on their enforcement of credit card protections.

Credit reports and your FICO score

The interest rates that you are offered on credit cards and different types of loans are affected by your credit score. Your credit reports, which determine your score, should be up to date and correct. Every year, you are entitled to one free report from each of the three credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion.

Use the following information to check on your credit.

- Obtain your free credit reports by going to www.annualcreditreport.com (if a site asks you for your credit card to receive a report, you’re at the wrong place).
- To request your credit report by phone, call 877.322.8228. You will go through a simple verification process on the phone.
- Once you receive your reports, you should review the reports to look for any mistakes.
- Follow the directions for filing a dispute if you find any mistakes.
- Once corrections have been made, you can go to www.myfico.com to obtain your credit score.
- Please note: There is a \$16 charge to obtain your actual FICO numerical credit score, as opposed to the reports, which are free. According to *About.com*, FICO is short for Fair Isaac and Co. The Web site states: “The Fair Isaac Company developed custom software back in the 1980s that helped other companies determine a credit risk based on a number derived from a person’s credit history. This number soon became a standard that was adopted by the three main credit bureaus: Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax. The FICO score ranges between 300 and 850.”

Holds regulators accountable to keep protections current: Regulators will be required to request public input on trends in the credit card market and potential consumer protection issues on a biennial basis to determine what new regulations or disclosures might be needed. Regulators will be required either to update the applicable rules or to publish findings if they deem further regulation unnecessary.

Increases penalties: Card issuers that violate these new restrictions will face significantly higher penalties.

Cleans up credit card practices for students: The act contains new protections for college students and young adults, including a requirement that card issuers and universities disclose agreements with respect to the marketing or distribution of credit cards to students.

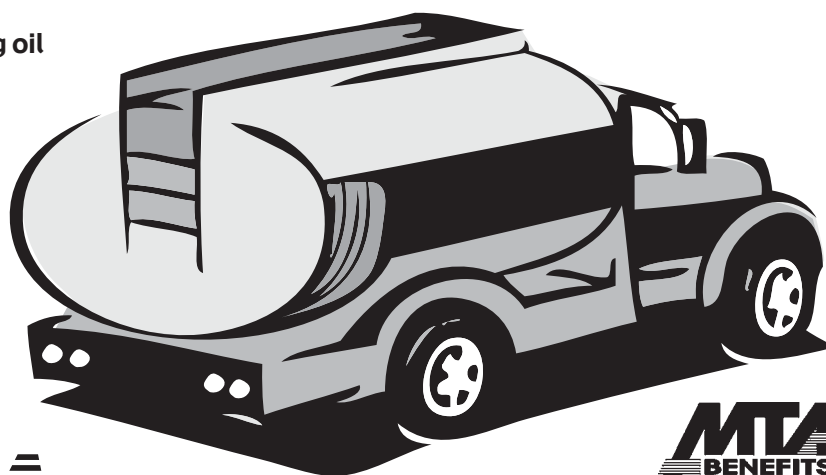
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Transportation cuts reversed

Continued from Page 10

would prevent disproportionate cuts in this area in the future.

The amendment states that regional school transportation payments made by the state in any fiscal year will not be lowered by a greater percentage than any reduction to state Chapter 70 payments in that fiscal year.

Rosenberg said in a press release that during each of the last two recessions, Chapter 70 was cut on the order of 20 percent to 25 percent. During that same period, he said, regional school transportation was cut in the 50 percent to 80 percent range. This means that regional schools were cut twice, once in their Chapter 70 accounts and again in their transportation accounts.

“Regional school transportation funding is essential to the successful operation of regional school districts,” Rosenberg said.

Although regional districts still feel like they are at a disadvantage in the state budget process compared

to other districts, Vecchia lauded the amendment as “a step in the right direction.”

“In order to maintain high-quality and effective educational programs for all children, we need to be able to rely on a fair and equitable funding mechanism,” he said. He added that if the state truly wants to encourage regionalization as a way to save funds, it needs to start treating regional districts with more of an even hand when it comes to budget cutting.

“I realize that in the face of challenging economics and shrinking state revenues, the Commonwealth will have to find new and more effective ways to fund education and other essential services,” Vecchia said. He said, however, that unfunded and underfunded mandates such as regional transportation and the circuit-breaker program for children in need of intensive special education placements or programs “place regional school districts in an unfair position and their high-quality education at tremendous risk.”

Nurse of the Year is active on many fronts

Continued from Page 2

leader who uses her creative talents to show her students how to take care of themselves and increase awareness in the community.”

Vieira’s work is varied and involved. She spends her days attending to the steady stream of students who visit her office. She educates students and the public, and she trains the faculty and staff at her school on the warning signs associated with major health issues. She also ensures that her school is meeting the state’s laws, regulations and mandates.

As part of her efforts to reach out to the public, Vieira recently organized a series of video segments that air weekly on the Waltham community access television station.

The theme is “Ask a Nurse.” The segments feature Waltham students who ask health-related questions and Waltham school nurses who provide the answers. Questions range from “What’s the difference between cold and flu?” to “What’s a headache?” Others include: “How do you know if you have strep throat?” and “How many bones are there in your body?”

In order to produce a professional product, Vieira collaborated with the drama teacher at the Fitzgerald School, and the participating nurses learned how to read a teleprompter and speak on camera.

Vieira believes school nurses serve a key function and supports legislative efforts to establish specific and uniform student-nurse ratios in all of the Commonwealth’s public schools. Not all public schools have a full-time nurse on duty during the school day, as it is not required by law.

“School nurses have a unique position in each school building,” Vieira said. “My job is to keep kids in school.”



Photo by Bob Duffy

METCO guidance counselor Melissa Wong was joined by students from the Brown and Oak middle schools in Newton during the kickoff for the Celtics Honor Roll Program. Standing with them are Lucky, the Celtics’ mascot, and Paul Lynch, a representative of SBLI.

Partnerships promote achievement

Continued from Page 28

picture autographed by team Captain Paul Pierce.

The honor roll program will recognize 275 students in kindergarten through grade 12 this winter. Public school students with a B average or perfect attendance are eligible to enter. Participants have the chance to buy discounted tickets to select games, and a few lucky students are selected at random to go out onto the garden’s legendary parquet floor and greet the players as they take the court.

The honor roll effort is sponsored by SBLI, which is a partner of MTA Benefits. “SBLI welcomes

the opportunity to support programs like the Celtics Honor Roll that enhance the quality of education in our community,” said SBLI President and CEO Robert K. Sheridan. “We have built a strong relationship with both the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the Boston Celtics to support educational issues.”

MTA President Anne Wass noted that the association’s Reading Matters partnerships have been growing steadily and called them a source of pride for educators.

“Helping students achieve is the cornerstone of our work as teachers and public school employees,” Wass said.

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Board members discuss RTTT, ed bill

A Q&A with Harneen Chernow and Ruth Kaplan on challenges and opportunities

This is the second of two parts of a Q&A with Harneen Chernow, vice chair of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and fellow BESE member Ruth Kaplan. Chernow works for 1199 SEIU and is the labor representative on the board, while Kaplan works for Combined Jewish Philanthropies and is the parent representative.

In the first segment, which was printed in the October-November-December 2009 issue of *MTA Today*, Chernow and Kaplan discussed a variety of issues, including charter schools, their views on good ways to promote school innovation and improvement and the role of collective bargaining in education.

In this segment, they address challenges posed by the Race to the Top grant program and the state's new education law, as well as their personal experiences while serving on the recently expanded BESE under a new governance structure. Under that structure, Education Secretary Paul Reville and Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester have different — though at times overlapping — roles in shaping education policy.

Q: *What's your opinion of the Race to the Top grant program and the new state education law?*

Chernow: As someone who writes lots of grants for labor-management partnerships, I am sensitive to the issues involved when a large sum of money is put on the table. It is a challenge to walk the line between writing a proposal to fund what is really needed and writing a proposal that gets you the money. I've heard from school and union leaders across the state that they are concerned about the additional requirements that RTTT is calling on districts and schools to fulfill while the funding for existing requirements and programs is being cut.



Harneen Chernow

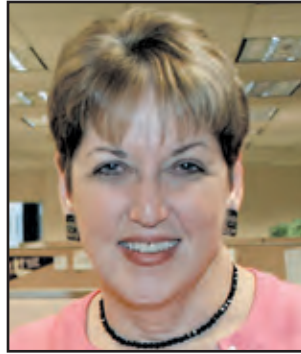
Regarding the new education law, there are a number of areas of concern. For those who believe that school change happens best when school personnel are partners in making that change, rather than recipients of that change, there is much in this legislation that is not ideal. I wish that this legislation welcomed the voice of educators as partners in transforming schools. I wish that we as a society did a better job of listening to those who are in the classroom with kids every day.

Kaplan: I am concerned about the top-down nature of federal policy as applied to our state. Part of my role is to make sure we're not

giving up the kind of culture of cooperation and collaboration that we value in order to chase federal dollars.

Q: *And there is more emphasis on the role of testing under these initiatives.*

Kaplan: The overuse of standardized testing is a national and even global issue impacting teachers and students. I continue to oppose the notion that you can evaluate students, teachers or schools on the basis of a single standardized test. To use such tests to screen out teachers, deny diplomas and label schools, it's all really short-sighted, and, frankly, it's really 20th-century. It's not very 21st-century! We should be looking for what is going to engage kids, enhance creativity and improve problem-solving skills. Test preparation is not engaging. It is training our students to identify the right answer, but not to think. Unless we foster questioning and inquiry, the very essence of our democracy will be undermined.



Ruth Kaplan

My dream is for the business community to get on board. There seems to be a disconnect between what skills are valued in the workplace versus what is measured on standardized tests.

Chernow: In our society we've moved into believing that high stakes is the only way to demonstrate high standards. We're so focused on everything being quantifiable. The question is how to demonstrate high standards in all areas without needing to hold on to a high-stakes outcome. I think there has to be a different approach.

Q: *How is the structure working now that you have a secretary of education as well as a board and a commissioner?*

Chernow: I think that people are still trying to figure out how all the departments and agencies should work together. It hasn't quite settled yet. Because we're also in the middle of new education legislation and Race to the Top, there's a lot of ongoing discussion and messiness about who is responsible for what.

Kaplan: I think at times it's a challenge for the commissioner. Before the new governance structure, he used to answer to the board, but now he is also answering to the secretary of education, who is answering to the governor. It can be a bit unclear at times and has the potential to confuse the role of the board.

Q: *Do you enjoy being on the board?*

Kaplan: It's an honor to be on the board, notwithstanding some of the limitations and

frustrations. I think that we have a very good board of education. There are certainly a lot of divergent views, but there's a lot of civility and room for discussion and deliberation and mutual respect.

I find you cannot make assumptions about board members and what their views will be on any given issue. For the most part, people do not react in a knee-jerk way. I feel that it's a committed group. It has people with knowledge bases bringing their intelligence and concerns to the table.

I also appreciate that being on the board gives me a chance to be helpful to individuals who call me from time to time. Often it's teachers looking for answers. I may not know the answers, but sometimes I can help them cut through the red tape. I have found department staff to be very helpful when these situations arise.

One of my personal accomplishments of which I'm proud happened at the outset of my board tenure. I pulled together a public comment task force to figure out how to streamline the process and open it up. That was an important step forward. I continue to encourage people who talk to me to speak during the public comment period.

Chernow: When I started, it was a much different board. I was on the board under the Romney administration. It was a tough board to be a progressive on. I feel like I kind of survived that. I'm very glad to be on the board I'm on now. There's good collegiality.

One of the challenges is that the board is made up of people who are not in the schools. I spend a lot of time learning about the issues and talking to people so I can represent as much as possible how the field views a number of issues. It's easy for all of us to talk about theories of what might and might not work.

It continues to be humbling and grounding for me to talk to teachers, to hear from people who are in the classroom every day, to hear how our decisions impact what goes on in the classroom in a daily way. I think that is an important voice to be shared with the board.

On a personal note, I have really learned a lot from the other board members about different ways of disagreeing and expressing yourself, having conflict but trying to be respectful. Regardless of their political perspectives, people are there because they really want to do the right thing. They believe that their participation will make the education system in the Commonwealth better for all the kids.

Part one of the interview is available on the MTA Web site at http://massteacher.org/news/mta_today/pdfs/091011.pdf.

Effort to repeal offsets continues to gain support in Congress

Legislation aimed at repealing two Social Security provisions that unfairly penalize educators in Massachusetts and 14 other states continues to gain co-sponsors on Capitol Hill.

The Social Security Fairness Act of 2009, H.R. 235, filed by Representative Howard L. Berman, a California Democrat, now has 314 co-sponsors.

Senator Diane Feinstein, also a California Democrat, has filed identical legislation in the Senate. The Senate bill, S. 484, has 30 co-sponsors.

The two bills would repeal both the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision.

The two bills would repeal both the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision.

All members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation — except U.S. Senator-elect Scott Brown, who had not yet been sworn in as MTA

Today went to press and thus had not been able to sign on to legislation — continue to be strong supporters of the repeal effort, and all are co-sponsors of the proposal.

The GPO reduces the spousal or survivor benefits of educators and

other public employees by an amount equal to two-thirds of their public pensions. The WEP affects people who have worked in jobs in which they have earned Social Security and in jobs in which they have not earned Social Security benefits.

To receive regular updates on the effort to repeal the offsets, please send your name, complete address, MTA ID number, current or former local association affiliation and home e-mail address to Jo Ann Fitzgerald, MTA retired members service specialist, at jfitzgerald@massteacher.org.

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Continuing education units OK contracts

By Sarah Nathan

The Massachusetts Community College Council and the Massachusetts State College Association recently ratified new contracts for members of their respective continuing education units.

In December, members of the MCCC's Division of Continuing Education ratified a multi-year deal by an overwhelming vote of 982-139. Members of the MSCA's Division of Graduate and Continuing Education voted in January to ratify a two-year contract that commenced on the first of this year and will expire on Dec. 31, 2011. The DGCE contract was settled in mediation in December.

Just as the full-time faculty members did, the DCE and DGCE members agreed to bypass pay raises for the current year. Both contracts include modest pay raises in subsequent years.

MCCC and MSCA members voted by mail. The MCCC mailed out ballots to members and counted them on Dec. 10. The MSCA election took place over an 11-day period in January, and the ballots were tallied on Jan. 19. The final count was 325 to 33 in support of contract ratification.



Photo by Sarah Nathan

MCCC President Joseph LeBlanc addresses higher education members who visited the State House to lobby for a bill that would give faculty and some administrators a one-time opportunity to transfer out of the Optional Retirement Program and into the state retirement system. More than 100 members took part in the lobby day.

Members of the MCCC's DCE unit teach and work at all 15 public community colleges. Members of the MSCA's DGCE unit teach and work at all nine state colleges.

ORP efforts continue

Grassroots lobbying has continued through the fall and winter on a bill that would give faculty and some administrators a one-time opportunity to

transfer out of the Optional Retirement Program and into the state retirement system.

The MTA has lobbied persistently for the measure, Senate Bill 1173. In addition, a steady stream of letters, e-mails and phone calls have made their way to legislators since a Sept. 21 lobby day at the State House. At a hearing on the same day, MTA higher ed members representing the state's community colleges, state colleges and the University of Massachusetts offered persuasive and personal testimony to members of the Joint House-Senate Public Service Committee.

Marie Canaves, a longtime art professor at Cape Cod Community College and a member of the Massachusetts Community College Council, was among those who spoke about the lack of information provided at the time she enrolled in the program. "We were told the ORP would be, in all likelihood, more financially beneficial to us in the long run," Canaves said. "Because of the weight of their arguments, we believed that the amount we would receive from the ORP at retirement, at the very least, would be comparable to what we would have received from the state retirement program."

The Optional Retirement Program is a defined-contribution pension plan. That means the plan provides program participants with retirement income that, for the most part, is based on the account balance at the time of retirement. This is substantially different from a defined-benefit pension plan, which gives participants a specific amount of money at retirement based on a set of variables including length of creditable service, job classification and the employee's average annual compensation.

MCCC Vice President Diana "Donnie" McGee, who is leading the lobbying effort, said working on passage of the bill has been a positive learning experience for MTA higher ed members across the Commonwealth.

"It's been great to see faculty members make a connection with legislators, share their particular concerns,

and clarify how this retirement option will affect them personally," McGee said. "Their political involvement is important not only because it's needed to get this bill passed, but also because it might motivate more members to get actively involved in democracy for the long term. This grassroots campaign has really helped many people to understand that they need to tell their stories and educate legislators about their issues in order to be heard."

McGee added, "Legislators are bombarded with issues every day — they need to be made aware of what is happening in order to change things."

The bill, sponsored by Senator Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton), would allow participating faculty and administrators to transfer creditable service into the state retirement system during a 180-day window. At press time, the members of the Public Service Committee had not taken a formal vote on the legislation, but were expected to take up several bills, including this one, in the weeks ahead.

Lawsuit response delayed

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been granted additional time to respond to a lawsuit filed by the MTA seeking health insurance coverage for hundreds of adjunct instructors working in Massachusetts public higher education institutions.

The MTA, along with the Massachusetts Community College Council and five adjunct faculty members, accused the state of unfairly denying health insurance to part-time faculty working at community and state colleges and the University of Massachusetts in a lawsuit filed on Nov. 23 in Suffolk Superior Court.

The defendants in the case are the state Board of Higher Education, the University of Massachusetts Trustees, the Group Insurance Commission and the Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority.

The Commonwealth now has until Feb. 12 to file a formal reply to the complaint.

An advertisement featuring a large image of Mickey Mouse in a tuxedo. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top, it says "Employee Disney World Discounts for MTA Members" in yellow and white. Below that is the website "www.orlandoemployeediscounts.com". At the bottom, it says "Save up to 50% on select Orlando vacation packages, hotels & homes." and "member code: mtambrsaves". The largest text at the bottom is "CALL 866-463-0378".

Energy efficiency makes a big comeback

Long lines at the gas pumps weren't the only visible signs of a larger energy problem in the 1970s. Houses began to sprout solar panels, pipes for woodstoves and all sorts of passive solar devices such as heat-absorbing Trombe walls, south-facing glass walls, massive insulation-filled window coverings and even wind turbines.

While being fuel efficient never really lost its appeal, the recent dramatic increases in prices for heating oil and electricity, combined with a mandate to reduce carbon emissions that could lead to higher energy prices, have motivated many people to be much more serious about lowering their total energy needs and shrinking their "carbon footprint."

The basics still apply

Start with simple energy-saving adjustments such as reducing the thermostat setting and making sure moving parts in your furnace are lubricated for maximum efficiency. Together these might save \$100 to \$200 a year. A heating and cooling expert can point out maintenance points where additional adjustments could reduce energy consumption.

Big savings are possible when replacing your house's main energy-using machine: the furnace. For instance, a 96 percent efficient furnace actually converts 96 percent of gas consumed into heat. Compared to a 20-year-old furnace, that could be nearly twice as efficient.

Also consider installing highly efficient triple-glazed windows and save up to 12 percent in heating costs compared to standard double-glazed windows installed 15 or 20 years ago. Compared to a single-pane window, triple-glazed windows could save more than 30 percent.

Woodstoves and fiberglass

The woodstove rage of a decade ago has subsided because of pollutants from burning wood and coal — regardless of woodstoves' improved heating efficiency. Likewise, fireplaces are a less attractive source of efficient and environmentally sensitive heating.

Increasing ceiling insulation is one of the easiest energy improvements. Another is reducing



air infiltration in the house's shell with spray foam and new clay-like sheets that can be formed around electrical outlets and switch boxes. Adding wall insulation is often not feasible.

Professional installation

Generally, licensed contractors should install windows, furnaces and thermostats, solar panels for hot water or electricity, and wind turbines. Not only will the installation be faster and safer, but you have guidance in selecting the right product for maximum efficiency. For instance, if you choose a furnace with too many or too few BTUs for your home's cubic footage, it will be less efficient than a properly sized furnace.

Installing products that use electricity, channel water or affect the structure of the house (as windows might) will likely have insurance implications. Should a fire or another event destroy your house as a result of your improper amateur installation, you might not be able to collect on your claim. A neighbor or visitor injured as a result of your installation might sue you, and you

may not be covered under a typical homeowners policy.

Before installing energy devices, consult your insurance professional to be sure your homeowners coverage is adequate. In some cases, you'll be boosting the value of the home and you should adjust the coverages and limits of your policy to ensure you can rebuild with efficient new products if your house has been destroyed.

While improving the efficiency of your heating and cooling systems can yield big savings and greater comfort, challenges can also be big. Because these systems constantly benefit from new technology, study is required to make an intelligent selection.

But with the right approach, even an older home can be toasty or cool at your command — and energy efficient.

Before making your home more energy efficient, talk to the insurance professionals at MTA Benefits to see if any changes should be made to your homeowners coverage. Call 888.908.6822.

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Dennis Koontz, a member of the Association of Professional Administrators at Salem State College, is one of hundreds of MTA members who have worked with Greenpark Mortgage.

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"I decided to use Greenpark because I had confidence that MTA Benefits would only choose exceptional partners," he said. Koontz added that he was "very, very pleased" with Greenpark's service.

"The Greenpark professional I worked with to refinance my home was very informative, patient and responsive — extremely diligent in getting answers and following through on promises," Koontz said. "It made the process easy. In addition, as an MTA member, I was able to refinance without any points or closing costs. I would definitely recommend the MTA Mortgage Program to other members."

For information on how to make buying or refinancing easier, contact the MTA Home Mortgage Program at 800.336.0990 or visit www.mtabenefits.com.



Dennis Koontz

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*Rates as of the time of writing of this article.

Union leaders congratulate Brown, praise Coakley's service

MTA President Anne Wass and NEA President Dennis Van Roekel both offered congratulations to Massachusetts state Senator Scott Brown, who was elected on January 19 to fill the unexpired term of the late U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

The two leaders also had praise for his opponent in the special election, Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley.

"On behalf of the 107,000 educators of the MTA, I'd like to thank Martha Coakley for her many years of public service and her commitment

to public education and public higher education," Wass said. "I congratulate Senator-elect Brown on winning the special election and plan to reach out to him in the coming days to begin to establish a good working relationship. I would like to hear more about his plans for public education and public higher education and share our expertise, experience, insights and



Scott Brown

perspective on the important issues facing our public schools and colleges.

"It is my hope that we'll be able to work together to provide each and every student in Massachusetts, from preschool to graduate school, with a great education," Wass added.

"The National Education Association, representing 3.2 million educators across America, thanks Martha Coakley for her years of public service and for her work campaigning to be Massachusetts' next U.S. senator," Van Roekel said. "NEA and the Massachusetts Teachers Association have been and will

continue to be honored to work with Attorney General Coakley on issues of critical importance to educators and the students they serve.

"As attorney general for

Massachusetts and for the last 20 years of her career as a public servant, Martha Coakley has been a leading voice for public education," he continued. "She



Martha Coakley

is an advocate for public safety in schools and communities, she works tirelessly to open up the doors of higher education by ensuring that student loan policies are fair and she is working daily for the rights of children.

"We congratulate U.S. Senator-elect Brown on his victory and look forward to working with him in service to the people of the Commonwealth and the United States," Van Roekel said. "There are a host of issues that will require Brown's immediate attention, not the least of which is health care reform. An estimated 46 million Americans, including 8 million children, are without health insurance. We look forward to working with U.S. Senator-elect Brown to tackle this and other issues facing America's middle class families."

NEA president stresses need for collective action

Continued from Page 8

"I believe in this organization," he added. "I believe in our power, our ability to act, to influence and make a difference. And more than that, I don't know that there is another institution or organization in America that can do what we say we want to do."

Before fielding questions, Van Roekel concluded with a comment about how today's leaders might be remembered in years to come.

"My greatest fear is that they'll say we were timid and shy," he said. "I want them to say we had the audacity to dream big."

Diana "Donnie" McGee, vice president of the Massachusetts Community College Council and an MTA Board member, deemed the conference "a real success."

"This conference came at just the right time," McGee said. "Faculty and professional staff were able to talk about the current political and economic challenges that public higher education is facing. Our members have real concerns about bargaining rights, health insurance costs and the privatization of our colleges.

"The conference also helped members get a better understanding of how the NEA works with the MTA to support educators on public college campuses across the state," McGee added. "This conference should definitely be repeated."

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The MTA conducts retirement consultations throughout the state to assist members. Proof of membership must be submitted when requesting retirement services. This schedule is in effect from September to June. In the event of inclement weather, it is advisable to call consultants in advance.

ASHBURNHAM — Robert Zbikowski: second Thursday of each month (**walk in**), 4 to 8 p.m., Overlook Middle School library, front entrance, 10 Oakmont Dr., Ashburnham; 978.827.1425, or at home, 978.297.0123; e-mail: zibstar702@verizon.net.

AUBURN — Louise Gaskins: first and second Saturdays of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Central Office, 48 Sword St., Auburn; 508.791.2121, or at home, 978.448.5351.

BOSTON — Harold Crowley: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (**by appointment only**), 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., MTA, 20 Ashburton Place, Boston; 617.742.7950, ext. 8240, or 800.392.6175, ext. 8240.

BRAINTREE — Mary Hanna: second Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Metropolitan Office, 100 Grandview

Road, Braintree; 781.380.1410, or at home, 781.545.2069.

CAPE COD — Lawrence Abbruzzi: second Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Barnstable Teachers Association (BTA), 100 West Main St., Suite #7, Hyannis; 508.775.8625, or at home, 508.824.9194.

HOLYOKE — Dennis O'Connor: third Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Western Office, 55 Bobala Road, Suite 3, Holyoke; 413.535.2415, or at home, 413.737.7509.

LYNNFIELD — Mary Parry: third and fourth Saturdays of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Northeast Office, 50 Salem St., Building B, Lynnfield; 781.246.9779, or at home, 978.372.2031; fax, 978.372.2035.

PITTSFIELD — Ward F. Johnson: second Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Berkshire Office, 188 East St., Pittsfield; 413.499.0257, or at home, 413.443.1722; e-mail: wardman33@aol.com.

RAYNHAM — Sandra Stephenson: third Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 90 New State Highway (Rte. 44), Raynham; 508.822.5371, or at home, 508.747.2234; e-mail: rockowl@aol.com. Edward Nelson: fourth Saturday of each month (**walk in**), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 90 New State Highway (Rte. 44), Raynham; 508.822.5371, or at home, 508.853.5769.

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HIGHER EDUCATION AT-LARGE — Edward McCourt, Massachusetts Bay Community College, Wellesley; 781.239.2207; e-mail: emccourt.mccc@gmail.com.

Note: If you or your association would like to have a retirement workshop at your school, your local president should call Harold Crowley at 800.392.6175, ext. 8240. Please be aware that the MTA does not have a record of your service, so members are advised to bring that information along to meetings.

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NEA director candidates declared elected

Two candidates for NEA director have been re-elected under the MTA election waiver.

They are former MTA President Catherine A. Boudreau of MCCC-Massasoit and Robert V. Travers, Jr., of Cambridge.

The two were the only candidates for those posts, triggering the election waiver. The waiver, under a policy passed by the MTA Board in February of 1995, provides for automatic election when the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of available seats.



Catherine A. Boudreau



Robert V. Travers, Jr.

Boudreau and Travers, both of whom have been NEA directors since 2007, will serve new three-year terms beginning in September.

Preconvention meetings to be held in April

Preconvention meetings have been set for elected delegates to the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates in May.

At these preconventions, the delegates will receive information and materials critical to their decision-making on organizational matters.

Registration for the preconventions begins at 3:30 p.m.

Each meeting is scheduled to run from 4 to 7 p.m.

The following is a list of locations and dates for the 2010 preconventions:

- Tuesday, April 13, Cape/Islands, Cape Codder Resort & Spa, Hyannis.
- Wednesday, April 14, Southeast/Metro, Holiday Inn, Taunton.
- Thursday, April 15, Central, Holiday Inn, Marlborough.
- Monday, April 26, Western/Berkshire, Clarion Hotel & Conference Center, Northampton.
- Tuesday, April 27, Northeast/Metro, Holiday Inn Select, Woburn.

Further information will be provided to delegates as it becomes available.

The Annual Meeting of Delegates will be held May 7-8 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston.

Involvement is theme of EMAC Conference

Continued from Page 9

"If the teacher is not having fun," Shockey continued, "you can count on the fact that the students are not having fun, and I want there to be more fun in mathematics."

EMAC Chairwoman Susan Baker, who teaches in Falmouth, said that the 2009 conference, like others before it, helped the committee fulfill its mission, which involves advising the MTA Board of Directors on improving communication between the state association and its minority membership.

"Many connections were made, and information was given to those who did not know about the opportunities out there for them when it comes to the MTA and union involvement on the local, state and national levels," Baker said.

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NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR MTA HCR AWARDS

The MTA is seeking nominations for its 2010 Human and Civil Rights Awards, which will be presented at a banquet in Boston as part of the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates.

The awards honor MTA members and others who work in the areas of human and/or civil rights and whose activities have had a community and/or organizational impact. Nominees may be individuals, students, teachers, administrators or agencies.

The awards will be presented as part of the Human and Civil Rights Banquet on May 6.

Nominations and supporting data must be received no later than March 1. Award criteria, guidelines and application forms have been mailed to local association presidents.

To obtain additional copies, contact the MTA Center for Education Policy and Practice at 800.392.6175 or 617.742.7950, ext. 8232. Copies are also available at http://massteacher.org/teaching/grants/grants_hcr.cfm.

MTA ESP Conference set for April

'Lots of great things planned' for event in Hyannis

Education support professionals from across the state will gather in Hyannis in early April for two days of learning and networking.

This year's MTA ESP Conference, which will be held April 9 and 10 at the Cape Codder Resort, promises to be jam-packed with skill-building opportunities.

But Donna Johnson, chairwoman of the MTA ESP Committee, says there will be some time for socializing as well.

"This is a great opportunity for ESPs to get high-quality professional development and conference materials while spending some time in a wonderful setting," Johnson said. "We'll enjoy lovely accommodations and fabulous meals — all for a really reasonable price."

In addition, there will be a number of raffles, with gifts provided by MTA Benefits.

The event will begin the afternoon of April 9. There will be a session allowing participants to meet the members of the ESP Committee, along with a variety of workshops, including *Environmental Health & Safety, ESPs and Their Political Power, ESP Retirement Information Workshop: What You Should Know about Your Retirement, Reporting Live from the ESP Conference in Hyannis, Current Trends In Special Education, What Would You Do? What Should You Do?* and *Not Everyone Cries*.

After a reception, participants will have dinner and hear from the conference guest speaker, NEA Executive Committee member Paula Monroe. They will also watch as the annual ESP Award is presented to Anita Thompson, a member of the Classified Staff

Union who works in the Purchasing and Procurement Department at UMass Boston.

April 10 will start with a breakfast buffet and a morning that is jammed with interesting workshops in two sessions. The first session includes *Connections 1, Surface Behavior Management, Defining Yourself, Effective Meetings — Myth or Reality?, Moving Off of Stuck — How to Build Strong Locals, ESP Leadership Skills* and *Contract Checkup: Diagnosing the Pitfalls and Plagues of Your Compensation*. The second features *Connections 2, Surface Behavior Management, Conflict Resolution, Building Power in Your Local, Representing Your Members — The Front Line of Union Defense, Grassroots Organizing for Power the Wellstone Way and Gangs — Violence Recognition and Alternatives*.

NEA Executive Committee member Princess Moss will address the closing luncheon.

"Every year, we hear great things from ESPs about the ideas they take away from the conference and the people they've met," Johnson said. "We have a lot of great things planned for this year's conference," she added. "It's truly an event not to be missed."

The conference costs \$50 per person. Accommodations cost an additional \$50 to \$130, depending on how many people share each room. To register, go to www.massteacher.org/esp10. Registration must be completed by Feb. 26. Some conference grants are available. For more information, e-mail MTA ESP Organizer/Consultant Nancy Robbie at nrobbie@massteacher.org or call her at 800.542.5504.



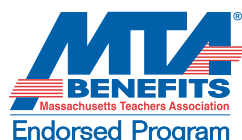
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Obituaries

BettyAnn M. Bernard, 66, of Uxbridge. Taught elementary school for 35 years before retiring in 2000 from the Balmer Elementary School in Northbridge. Oct. 7.

Elizabeth J. Bishop, 77, of Gloucester. Taught in Beverly and was employed at the Memorial Middle School before she retired. Oct. 15.

John Bradley, 84, of Winchester. Taught in Medford for 53 years. For 34 years, taught biology at Medford High School. Nov. 21.

Joseph A. Brita, 65, of Milford. Taught middle school social studies at the Stacey Middle School in Milford for seven years. Nov. 27.

Betsey A. Bushnell, 65, of Easton. Was a middle school teacher in East Bridgewater. Oct. 22.

Elizabeth C. Champion, 84, of Agawam. Taught elementary school for 25 years in Indian Orchard, retiring in 1984. Dec. 6.

Alice G. Casey, 94, of Milford. Was a second-grade teacher at the

Macy School in Bellingham, retiring in 1980. Oct. 29.

Valerie Corradino, 51, of Merrimac. Was an elementary teacher at the Tilton Elementary School in Haverhill. Dec. 16.

Clista Dow, 78, of Sharon. Worked for the Sharon public schools for 38 years. She developed and launched a gifted-and-talented course that became a model for many other schools. She also taught graduate courses at Lesley University and

Fitchburg State College and served as a consultant and workshop leader in school systems throughout New England. Nov. 12.

Ruhama Marion Gaw, 95, of Bedford. Taught at Holden High School and ran the cafeteria, becoming the head of the Home Economics Department at Wachusett Regional High School. Dec. 25.

Rose E. Giacoppo, 89, of North Attleboro. Was certified in child development, home nursing and home economics and taught at various grade levels in Attleboro until she retired in 1990. Nov. 24.

Norman J. Hendry, 83, of Wareham. Was a drafting instructor at Waltham Vocational High School and shop coordinator at Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical School, retiring in 1989. Dec. 15.

Robert P. Kelliher, 80, of Springfield. Worked in Springfield and was principal of Glenwood Elementary School, retiring after 26 years of service. Dec. 16.

John J. Koumjian, 94, of Watertown. Was the director of mathematics and sciences at Watertown High School, retiring in 1980. Nov. 2.

Alice Lamond, 97, of Brockton. Taught at the Keith, Copeland and Ellis Brett schools for over 20 years. Dec. 12.

Rosemary Lemme, 88, of Lynnfield. Taught in the Bellingham and Lynn public schools, retiring in 1986. Dec. 24.

Joseph A. Letorney, Sr., 76, of South Weymouth. Was a former principal of Avon High School and a past president of the MTA. He also worked for the NEA in Washington, D.C., to help create and pass education legislation. Nov. 7.

John F. Maher, of Woburn and Arlington. Taught at the Northeast Metropolitan Vocational School in Wakefield. Nov. 5.

A. Louise O'Donnell, 99, of Marblehead. Taught in Peabody, Salem and Lynn for many years, retiring in 1974. Aug. 18.

Eleanor J. Tahaney, 92, of Waltham. Was a teacher in the Waltham schools and later was an administrator in charge of federal programs for the city's schools, developing many programs that became models for today's classes. She served as the president of the Waltham Teachers Association in 1960. Oct. 9.

Nancy O. White, 74, of Westborough. Was a teacher in the Westborough public schools before her retirement. Oct. 31.

Nancy H. Zamarro, 63, of Shrewsbury and Oak Bluffs. Was a mathematics teacher in Holden and Shrewsbury; retired in 2006 from the Worcester school system, where she was the math curriculum coordinator for the school department. Nov. 25.



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Flu news and resources

H1N1 influenza remains a concern in the United States and many other countries, and the seasonal flu has broken out as well. For links to flu news and resources, visit:

www.massteacher.org/flu



On the ice and the parquet

MTA partnerships with Bruins and Celtics promote student achievement

By Bob Duffy

Educators throughout the state are incorporating sports-inspired materials into their lessons this winter to help promote student achievement and school attendance.

Students, they say, are greeting the efforts with enthusiasm.

“Using sports figures can grab students’ interest and motivate them,” said Maureen Cavanaugh, a teacher at the Bradford Elementary School in Haverhill. “The children become excited about what they are learning.”

Like many of her colleagues, Cavanaugh is taking advantage of the seasonal opportunities available through the MTA’s Reading Matters program, which began over a decade ago with the MTA Red Sox Reading Game and now features additional partnerships with the Boston Bruins and the Boston Celtics.

Cavanaugh is more than a participant; she also helped design the materials that she and other educators are currently using as part of the Boston Bruins I Can Excel School Program.

The I.C.E. School Program, which is sponsored by AT&T, provides preK-through-sixth-grade teachers and students with classroom materials that incorporate hockey and the Bruins. Cavanaugh and other educators devoted a considerable amount of effort to updating and revising the program in preparation for this year.

After an initial meeting of a diverse group of educators, the members split up based on grade and subject matter. The goal was to create lesson plans directly targeted to specific standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for their selected content areas. Later, the educators reconvened as a group to assess their work.

“The sharing of ideas and resources was helpful, as everyone, though working in different areas, created motivational lessons,” said Peggy McEvoy, assistant principal of academic affairs at the Barnstable Horace Mann Charter School.

McEvoy said the I.C.E. School Program helps students connect the dots between what they are taught in school and what happens in the real world. She has observed the difference firsthand, she noted, citing a recent day when she observed a fifth-grade teacher using one of the lesson plans to provide math instruction to her students.

“The different questions posed by the teacher had them manipulating the data and responding,” she said. “It was much more interesting than reading numbers from a book.”

“I think the resulting learning is more interesting for the students and gives them an understanding of how decimals have a role in real-life situations



Members of the advisory committee for the Bruins I.C.E. School Program had the chance to tour team facilities after one of their curriculum meetings over the summer. From left to right are Melissa Tuffy of Duxbury; Jeannine Joyce of Walpole; Meaghan Concannon Dietel of West Roxbury; Michelle Perron of Walpole; Kristina Hazard and Peggy McEvoy, both of Barnstable; Matt Castonguay of Haverhill; Danielle Masterson and Kristen Purdy Russett, both of Marblehead; Patti Connor of Barnstable, Maureen Cavanaugh of Haverhill and Carol Moore of Boston.

and how knowledge of them is relevant and important,” McEvoy added.

In addition to math, the curriculum areas covered by the Bruins I.C.E. School Program are science/environment, health and fitness, music, geography, reading and writing and French.

“When the kids hear that their favorite athlete speaks another language or loves science or enjoys reading, it makes learning cool,” said Kristen Purdy Russett, a middle school teacher from Marblehead who helped develop the reading curricula for grades three and six, along with the French materials.

Last year, Bruins center Patrice Bergeron visited Russett’s French class. Her students asked questions in French, and Bergeron, who is French-Canadian, answered in kind. In addition, forward Milan Lucic has visited teacher Kim Auger’s class at the Parlin School in Everett to promote music, and defenseman Andrew Ferrence has visited Ned Rice’s science lab at the Peabody School in Cambridge to demonstrate worm composting and encourage recycling.

Kerry Collins, director of community relations for the Bruins, said the team shares the MTA’s commitment to student achievement and developed the program as a way to help.

“The Bruins I.C.E. School Program creates a fun and interactive curriculum for teachers that offers Bruins incentives to keep students involved and excited,” Collins said. “Our players enjoy visiting the participating I.C.E. schools and speaking to students about the importance of getting an education.”

Meanwhile, students and educators across the state are enjoying taking part in another season of the MTA Boston Celtics Honor Roll Program.

The kickoff for the program was held on Jan. 18, which was Martin Luther King Jr. Day. During the game at the Boston Garden that evening, the MTA recognized Melissa Wong, a METCO coordinator in Newton, for her efforts to encourage students to take part. Wong, who often purchases tickets for children unable to afford them, holds the record for referring the most students to the honor roll program.

“The program is a great incentive because it motivates the students to work harder to get to their goal of making the honor roll,” Wong said. “This year, the students pushed each other to do well so that they could go to a game together.”

Wong was treated to a free ticket to the game and also was given a Celtics hat, a T-shirt and a

Please turn to **Partnerships**/Page 16

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Top picks for 2010

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FOLLOWING WOW, HERE-NOW MONEY-SAVING DEALS AND DESTINATIONS—NEW FOR 2010 AT MTA BENEFITS:

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One of New England's largest community-based choruses. The 175-voice ensemble of the Boston Gay Men's Chorus is celebrated for its outstanding musicianship, creative programming and groundbreaking community outreach. Offering a wide spectrum of classical and popular music, the BGMC performs each year in such venues as Jordan Hall, the Cutler Majestic Theatre and Symphony Hall. *Boston Business Journal* consistently ranks the BGMC as one of the top 25 performing arts organizations in Greater Boston. MTA members get a 10 percent discount on advance ticket sales for this season's subscription series. Call 617.542.7464 or visit www.bgmc.org for details.



Home of a beloved American writer.

In 1873, Mark Twain (whose real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens) and his wife bought property in Hartford, Conn., and built an expansive home in the picturesque Gothic style. The provocative interiors were designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany's firm, incorporating cultures and styles from around the globe. During his 17 years in residence, Twain wrote what would become his enduring masterpieces, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince & The Pauper* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The Mark Twain Museum on the same property provides informative exhibitions, a Ken Burns documentary film and an extensive gift shop. MTA members get a discounted admission price of \$10 for the main house tour only. **For information on the Mark Twain House & Museum, call 860.247.0998 or visit www.marktwainhouse.org.**



Inspired classical music. The **Boston Philharmonic** is passionate about performing, understanding that music is a language of the heart. Its musicians play with energy and emotion, inspiring the audience to engage in the experience. At pre-concert talks, you can hear the conductor unravel the meaning and shape of the music in the context of the composer's era. Concerts in February – Feb. 25, 27 and 28 – feature Mahler's *Symphony No. 9*. MTA members get \$10 off ticket prices in price levels A, B and C. **For information, call 617.236.0999 or visit www.bostonphil.org.**



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JOAN DILLON ~ another fan of MTA Benefits

PROFESSION: Speech language pathologist at Harwich Elementary School

ASSOCIATION: President of Harwich Education Association and member of MTA Board of Directors

What teaching means to her:

"It's important that I make a difference in students' lives."

How she takes advantage of MTA Benefits:

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Is your auto insurance up to speed?

Things are moving fast in the auto insurance business. You might not even be aware of all the changes. That's why you should call the auto insurance professionals at MTA Benefits to find the best price and best protection for your needs. They'll review your policy with you, pointing out advantages available through MTA Benefits that include:

- 1. Up to five times the coverage at only one and a half times the cost.** Increase bodily injury coverage from \$50,000/\$100,000 to \$250,000/\$500,000 for a marginal increase in premium dollars, giving you the protection you need if a catastrophic loss occurs.
- 2. Lower state-based rates and a 10 percent MTA discount for Massachusetts residents.** Together these could save you hundreds of dollars a year on your policy.
- 3. Multi-vehicle discounts.** Save even more – and simplify your life – by consolidating all your vehicles in one policy.

- 4. Additional discounts if you qualify.** Cut your costs if you have anti-theft and safety devices, drive less than 7,500 miles a year and meet other merit or safety factors.
- 5. Combined auto and homeowners savings.** Get an additional discount on your homeowners policy if you insure both auto and home through MTAB's partner carrier.
- 6. Reduced rates for "best" drivers and accident surcharge increases cut by half with only a three-year experience period.** These highly useful benefits deliver extra value.
- 7. Real-time, real-people service.** Personal service is paramount with MTAB. Knowledgeable customer service representatives are available at convenient hours to answer educators' questions about signing up, billing, credit card payments and anything else you want to know. Information is also available 24/7 at www.mtabenefits.com.



- 8. Fast claims service.** Drive-in centers and adjusters throughout the state make the claims process fast and easy. Also, MTAB offers true accountability to educators and is right there with you during every step of the process.

Make sure your auto insurance is up to speed – and that you're getting the best in savings and service. **Call MTAB at 888.908.6822 to speak with an auto insurance professional.**

Policies are underwritten by one or more of the following companies of The Hanover Insurance Group: The Hanover Insurance Company, The Hanover American Insurance Company, Citizens Insurance Company of America, Massachusetts Bay Insurance Company, Allmerica Financial Alliance Insurance Company and Allmerica Financial Benefit Insurance Company. Product availability and services may vary by state, but our commitment to MTA members does not. Member discount is available to Massachusetts residents only. LC 09-439

What do these members have in common?

They're some of our giveaways winners. You could be a winner, too! Just sign up during the 2010 dates shown here. Visit www.mtabenefits.com and click on the "Free Giveaways Members Only" box. Winners' names can be found in the "Member Photo Gallery" under "Members Only."

Giveaway	Prize	Signup dates
Winter Quarterly	\$100 gas gift card	Feb. 22 – March 7
April Giveaway	\$100 Staples gift card	April 12 – April 18
Spring Quarterly	Bose® Wave® music system	May 10 – May 23
June Giveaway	\$25 Office Max gift card	June 14 – June 20



Sharon Tener
Wilmington Teachers Association

Sheila Walsh
Nauset Education Association

Donna Costello
Mass. Community College Council

William Perry
Wachusett Regional Education Association

Giveaway dates and prizes can be found on our Web site and in future issues of the *MTA Advantage*.



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No dues dollars are ever used to market MTA Benefits programs.

The Tip Sheet

Winter thoughts and timely trivia



The great white way

Viewing the brilliant white of the slope from the top of the mountain is a great moment in skiing. MTA members can enjoy the thrill at **Okemo Mountain Resort**, which has southern Vermont's highest vertical drop and a vast trail network that spans five distinct alpine areas for skiing at all ability levels. MTA members get a discount here and at 16 other downhill and cross-country ski resorts in New England. For information, check out the Ski & Snowboard section of the Discount Directory at www.mtabenefits.com.



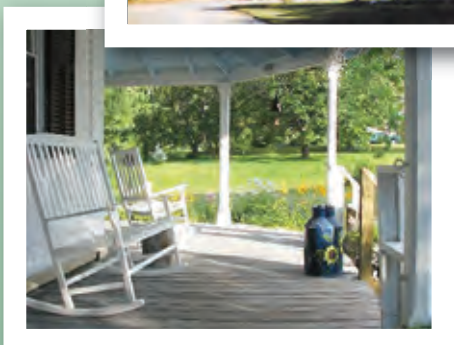
Easy winter car care

According to a recent magazine article, **using hand sanitizer gel on a car door lock gets rid of ice** – just like that! Be sure the sanitizer contains 60 percent alcohol, the same amount found in typical commercial de-icers. Another idea: **Improve your visibility in winter by coating headlights with ordinary car wax**. Its special water repellents prevent accumulation of grime from dirty snow and other messy road elements. You'll have clear headlights for safer driving. One more tip for the road: **De-ice car windows by spraying on a mixture of three-fourths vinegar and one-fourth water**. You can also spray it on windows to prevent ice from forming when you know temperatures are going to drop.



Warm winter retreat

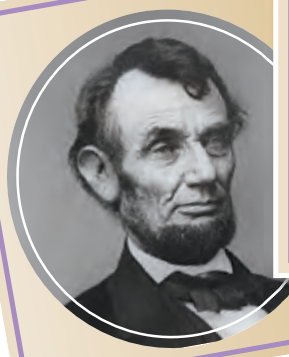
Mt. Washington B&B, an 1800s Federal-style farmhouse in New Hampshire's White Mountains, looks out to the Androscoggin River and majestic Mount Washington. You'll delight in the ambiance of winter and the warmth of a country B&B with its friendly hosts, homemade breakfasts and other special touches. MTA members get a 10 percent discount on two-night minimum stays (not available with other discounts or during foliage and holiday periods). For information, visit www.mtwashingtonbb.com. See hundreds of other listings offering a member discount in the MTA Hotel Directory at www.mtabenefits.com.




Presidents Day TRIVIA

Although George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are officially honored on Presidents Day, we thought it interesting to contemplate U.S. presidents in general. Here are some unusual facts we found:

- ★ **Abraham Lincoln** carried letters, bills and notes in his tall black stovepipe hat.
- ★ **James Buchanan** was the only unmarried man ever to be elected president.
- ★ **Andrew Johnson** never attended school. His future wife, Eliza McCardle, taught him to write when he was 17.
- ★ **Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt's** refusal to shoot a bear with her cub during one of his hunting trips is thought to be the derivation of "teddy bear."
- ★ **Franklin D. Roosevelt** was related, either by blood or marriage, to 11 former presidents.





TRIVIA

James Garfield could write Greek with one hand while writing Latin with the other.

For more information on events and savings, look in your copy of the MTA Benefits & Discount Directory or visit www.mtabenefits.com and click on "1000+ Discounts."

DISABILITY

Paying bills when there's no paycheck

These are difficult economic times, but imagine how things could worsen if you weren't able to work because of an illness or injury. The probability is high. For example, insurance industry sources report someone age 35 has a 50 percent chance of being disabled for three months or longer before age 65. Without a paycheck, who pays the bills?

The MTA Disability Plan

The MTA Disability Plan is a safety net for members, providing tax-free income on a short-term or long-term basis. No physical examination is required, and no health questions are asked. Disability benefits are paid in addition to any sick time members

Hurry!

Open enrollment for disability insurance ends in early May.

Contact your local education association for information.

are entitled to receive. Accrued or borrowed sick time alone is not a long-term solution to cover costs.

In 2009 – the first year the MTA Disability Plan was offered to members of the Waltham Educators Association – 143 signed up, almost a fourth of the WEA's total membership.

MTA Retired member George Viens, president of the Waltham association, said, "The MTA plan had been included in our negotiations with the Waltham school district because of popular demand by our members and because we strongly felt this disability insurance offers financial security no member should be without." MTA member Nate Rono, association treasurer, added, "The plan is superior to anything else out there in terms of pricing, coverage and service."

In 2010, the once-a-year opportunity to enroll in the MTA Disability Plan runs from Feb. 1 to early May. MTA members should contact their local education associations as soon as possible to find out if the plan is available to them. To date, more than 120 local education associations offer the plan.



'The plan is superior to anything else out there in terms of pricing, coverage and service.'

MTA member Nate Rono, treasurer of the Waltham Educators Association

Take control of your family's financial future



SBLI THE NO NONSENSE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Emerging from a painful recession has taught all of us the value of planning for events we cannot control. In hindsight, even the most responsible investor could not have been fully prepared for the widespread impact of the economic crisis.

The same is true where your family is concerned. Despite your best efforts to provide your family with the essentials – a safe home, education, food, clothing and more – you never know when something completely out of your control will happen. That is why protecting your family's future with life insurance is critical.

Since 1907, SBLI of Massachusetts has provided hundreds of thousands of families with affordable, dependable life insurance. In fact, its term rates are among the lowest in the country, and the company has earned an A+ (Superior)¹ rating from A.M. Best for financial strength year after year.

As a preferred provider of group life insurance for MTA, SBLI can offer all MTA members even lower rates. For example, a

very healthy 40-year-old can get a 20-year, \$500,000 policy for about a dollar a day.²

Do what hundreds of MTA members have already done – take control of your family's financial future and call 877.272.7254 or visit www.mtabenefits.com for a free, no-hassle quote.

1. Visit www.ambest.com for more details.
2. This rate is for very healthy applicants. Your rate may differ based on health and underwriting. SBLI Term Advantage life insurance is an SBLI Group Term Product. Policy form G-46, GC-46. Monthly premiums available only when using SBLI's Automatic Payment Plan (APP) which electronically debits your checking account for the premium payment due. Some conditions apply.

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