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MTA Today

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MTA Today

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Member opposition kills relicensure proposals</i>	3
<i>Editorial: Recommitting ourselves to organizing</i>	4
<i>Letters to the Editor</i>	5-6
<i>Holyoke organizes to fight takeover</i>	7
<i>Assessment mandate sparks controversy</i>	8
<i>Teachers organize to combat TS GOLD</i>	9
<i>EMAC celebrates 35 years of activism</i>	10
<i>ESP Conference to offer workshops and ocean view</i>	12
<i>Communities unite against charter schools</i>	13
<i>Forums give voice to education vision</i>	14
<i>Legislative agenda includes bills to stop high-stakes testing, charters</i>	15
<i>New teachers are making a difference</i>	16
<i>Battle continues over UMass contracts</i>	17
<i>Statements by candidates for NEA Director seats</i>	18-19
<i>Educators call for full funding and stability for GIC health plans</i>	19
<i>Boston Celtics honor a ‘Hero Among Us’</i>	20
<i>Foundation budgets fail to cover key needs</i>	21
<i>MTA charity helps educators meet students’ needs</i>	22
<i>Reading celebration ‘tried and true’ in Truro</i>	23
<i>Insurance tips for homeowners</i>	24
<i>MTAB reaches out to new members</i>	24
<i>Speakers at CPS event blast ‘testocracy’</i>	25
<i>ESPs gather to build bargaining skills</i>	27
<i>Obituaries</i>	28
<i>Nominations sought for Human and Civil Rights Awards</i>	29
<i>Regional retirement consultations available</i>	30
<i>MTA sells Boston headquarters, plans move to Quincy</i>	31
<i>Classifieds</i>	33
<i>‘Stand Up’ event helps prevent bullying</i>	36

This edition of MTA Today also includes the Winter edition of The MTA Advantage



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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

Many kindergarten and preschool teachers are sharing concerns about an assessment mandate imposed on districts that receive Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grants from the state.



DeeAnndra Hurte-Jones, shown with her class of kindergartners, joined other Brockton teachers in testifying against the mandate before the city's School Committee. They said the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment takes their focus off their work without providing them with meaningful new information about their students. Coverage begins on Page 8. Also featured in this edition of MTA Today is coverage of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee's 35th anniversary conference, which begins on Page 10.

Cover photos by Chris Christo and Jean Conley
Cover design by Alison Donato

Quote-Unquote

“The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government relief for the destitute and, above all, new wage levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life.”

— The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Activism kills relicensure proposals

MTA president: 'It was member power that turned the tide'

By Laura Barrett

In a stunning victory for MTA members, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education announced abruptly in November that it was dropping all plans to link educator license renewal or advancement to educators' evaluations or students' test scores.

The Boston Globe credited "mounting opposition from teachers and administrators" for forcing the DESE to rescind the proposals. The plans had been under discussion for several months but didn't surface as proposals under active consideration until the DESE released a report on Oct. 20 laying out various "policy options."

The report from the Keystone Research Center contended that many educators were supportive of the proposals, called Options A, B and C. To let state education officials know how educators really felt, the MTA launched a "None of the Above!" campaign.

"It was member power that turned the tide," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni.

In fighting the relicensure plan, MTA members sent the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education so many messages that BESE members complained their e-mail systems were crashing. The BESE subsequently set up a new e-mail system just for board issues to keep members' personal inboxes from being flooded.

The e-mail message from MTA members read in part, "I know of no other profession where a practitioner can lose his or her state-approved license based on an employment evaluation. To adopt such a policy for educators would be inappropriate and divisive. It would drive excellent educators out of the profession and further alienate us from the state agency that is supposed to support us, not slam us with yet another initiative that consumes our energy, silences our voices and takes us away from our top

When it's time to renew or advance your license, which of the following do you want DESE to include?



Tying your state teaching license to *your evaluation*.



Tying your state teaching license to *your students' test scores*.



Tying your state teaching license to *your student feedback*.



NONE OF THE ABOVE!

priority: providing our students with an excellent education."

Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester acknowledged to the *Globe* that "99.99 percent" of the comments he heard about linking licensure to evaluation were negative.

News that the plans were being dropped arrived just as local associations were lining up buses to bring hundreds of members to the state's final two forums on the issue, one in Malden and the other in Bridgewater. The DESE not only dropped the plans, but also canceled the forums.

In a message to members encouraging them to continue to work together as a union, Madeloni

wrote, "We won because of our solidarity. This time solidarity was easy. DESE was going after all of us. Next time, the attack might hit some members earlier and harder than it hits others, and some members might think they can escape. As a union, we have to support each other and not let them pick off the most vulnerable, whether the issue is charter schools, or Level 4 and 5 schools, or ESPs, or adjuncts."

The MTA will keep members informed about any future plans to change the state's licensure or relicensure systems. For updates, please visit www.massteacher.org.



A special delivery to Fall River's Fonseca School

Gerard Ruane of the MTA Retired Members Committee, Fall River Educators' Association President Rebecca Cusick and Principal Michael Ward, left to right, unpacked some of the books and school supplies that were delivered to the students and staff on Jan. 20 at the Mary L. Fonseca Elementary School in Fall River. The items were donated during the annual MTA Retired Members Gathering in September. Collecting school supplies and educational materials for a designated school district with limited funding or resources has become an annual tradition at the gathering. Cusick is a fourth-grade teacher at the school.



Photos by Bob Duffy

Recommitting ourselves to organizing

This issue of *MTA Today* comes to you as we are beginning to gear up for the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates. It was at the 2014 Annual Meeting that the delegates passed a new business item to encourage the MTA to demand a three-year moratorium on high-stakes testing and to hold forums across the state at which members could discuss the impact of testing and the teacher evaluation system on their work, their students and their communities.

As of this writing, we have held 31 forums in locals and regions across the state.

The conversations at these forums have been moving, unsettling and inspiring. With shocking consistency — from the east to the west, in local after local — members have described the ache of working under oppressive mandates, in fear of speaking out, as students and educators are stressed and made anxious by the focus on testing and test scores.



Barbara Madeloni
MTA President

In every forum, we have heard from members who lack time to do their work, reflect meaningfully on their

practice or learn from and with colleagues. In school after school, they feel constrained in their ability to use their knowledge and expertise to make autonomous decisions in the classroom.

But the forums have also given us an opportunity to hear from each other about our hopes for public schools as places where educators would be able to teach to the whole child and classrooms would be filled with joy and creativity. They have given voice to a vision in which schools would be well-resourced and high academic expectations would combine with knowledge of students and communities to help develop critical thinkers and imaginative human beings.

At a staff retreat in December, we took time to reflect on where the MTA has been, what the members care about and what our next steps might be. We left with a recommitment to core principles of organizing. These are:

- Organizing internally, building by building.
- Growing coalitions and alliances.
- Bringing big policy issues to the bargaining table.
- Developing a shared analysis of the conditions we are experiencing.

One thing has become very clear as I have traveled across the state: Our members are committed to our students, to our schools, and to our union. Massachusetts educators can and should stand proud for the work we do every day to make ourselves our nation's education leaders.

Now it is time to more fully bring these principles into our work, to debate next steps and to organize and act around the issues that we care about. We will be discussing these ideas with the MTA Board and at the All Presidents' Meeting. We also talked about them in depth at the MTA Collective Bargaining Summit, which was being held as this issue of *MTA Today* went to press.

We need you to enter the conversation and be part of building our power through state and local actions.

Member-driven initiatives

High-stakes testing — Our members have asked for a stop to the data-driven testing madness, and we will support efforts to achieve that at the local and statewide levels. We've put together a work team to support and coordinate actions — from the school committee to the bargaining table to the State House.

Charter schools — The state's new governor, Charlie Baker, has made it clear that he will look to raise or eliminate the cap on Commonwealth charter schools. We know that charters drain our public schools of resources and hand over decisions about education from democratically elected school committees to private entities. The use of test scores to label schools as "failing" is a weapon that then opens the door for more charters and the privatization of our public schools. We are allying with AFT Massachusetts, the Boston Teachers Union and Citizens for Public Schools, along with others across the state, to keep the cap on charters.

The schools our children deserve — We want to do more than say no to the assault on public education, our union and our communities. We want to develop a vision of public education that names what we are fighting for — the vision that members spoke of in the forums. To that end, the MTA's Education Policy Committee will be working with members to develop a draft of a vision statement to be shared with locals — a statement that reflects the schools our children, our educators and our communities deserve.

Local actions for statewide power

Act locally — Members throughout the state are rejecting mandated kindergarten and preschool assessments, mainly Teaching Strategies GOLD. Please check out our MTA website, www.massteacher.org, to learn about actions and organizing plans.

Strengthen your local — Attend a building meeting or call a meeting and organize members on the issues closest to you.

Build coalitions — Reach out to parents, community organizations and other unions. Hold a forum. Tell your stories.

Change policies — Work with your Legislative and Political Action Team to bring your state representatives and senators to your local and ask them to support our legislative agenda.

Say no to high-stakes testing — Work with your school committee to pass a resolution supporting the moratorium on high-stakes use of testing.

Strengthen our statewide union — Nominate yourself to be a delegate to the Annual Meeting; join the debate and help set our path forward.

One thing has become very clear as I have traveled across the state: Our members are committed to our students, to our schools, and to our union. Massachusetts educators can and should stand proud for the work we do every day to make ourselves our nation's education leaders.

Let's take that one step further and be leaders in taking down the testing regimes and mandates that are undoing public education and our unions. Let's be the leaders in reclaiming public education. Let's create the schools every child deserves.

In solidarity, and in anticipation of many great things ahead,

Barbara

Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: In a recent e-mail to members, MTA President Barbara Madeloni invited discussion on this question: "What should MTA's relationship be to electoral politics?" Most of the letters on this page and Page 6 relate to that subject.

Positive change occurs when voters demand action from elected officials

To the Editor:

While there is a process in place for vetting the candidates that we as a union choose to support, there is still a great deal of money thrown at candidates who are hostile to teachers and public education and who oppose us on issues that strike at the core of our profession, such as charter schools, merit pay and high-stakes testing.

The most recent election for MTA president represented a sea change in members' thinking. We rejected the philosophy of "death by a thousand cuts" in favor of fighting back. We rejected passive trust of our elected officials in favor of grassroots organizing and mobilizing.

The MTA would realize a better return on its investment by putting more funds into grassroots organizing on issues that directly affect public schools, our children and teachers than by putting money into weak candidates. History shows us that most real and positive change happens when constituents with a united voice demand that their elected officials act, rather than wait for "leadership" to happen.

For all of our spending, we now have a governor and an education secretary who are friendly to charter schools and privatization.

If we could get beyond the perception that public education is on a march to destruction and push back with a positive vision, we could make it happen.

Let's do it!

*Bill Brown
Gateway Teachers Association*

By becoming involved in education, one also becomes involved in politics

To the Editor:

Politics is inherent in the nature of public education through the establishment and maintenance of schools, staffing, curriculum, funding, policies and procedures — you name it. Therefore, by deciding to become involved in public education, one is also de facto deciding to become involved in politics. The two are inextricably linked.

The degree to which one becomes involved in the politics of public education involves many variables, but given the broad array of influences upon and ubiquitous impact of public education, I believe it's safe to say that all MTA members have

something of a presence in the political arena.

Additionally, each MTA member has the opportunity each year at the Annual Meeting of Delegates to influence and direct the degree to which our organization engages in politics. Personally, my voice and vote have been to support and expand our political presence and clout.

In my view, it is the political arena that provides the lifeblood to the public school system and allows for it to flourish, or not, as education deals with the myriad and beautiful fields of human experience.

*Neil F. Clarke
MTA Retired*

MTA should take a different approach to involvement in electoral politics

To the Editor:

With regard to MTA involvement in electoral politics, I believe we need to take a different approach. We often wait until the primaries are over and then we recommend the Democratic Party candidate. That's a mistake. Political party ideologies have changed since the birth of this nation, so to always vote the "party" candidate is a mistake.

Barack Obama gave us Arne Duncan, and there have been issues with Democratic politicians and officeholders supporting teachers at the state level. If we plan to stay involved in electoral politics, then we need to get behind candidates much earlier. We might even make an effort to cultivate or put forth our own candidates.

One reason we might want to stay out of the electoral process, however, is that teachers are often the focus of criticism of public education in general. No one looks at school committees, school administrations or the community. Democrats and Republicans alike will look to score political points at the expense of teachers.

No matter what, we should use focused, targeted lobbying and attempt grassroots actions. The trick is mobilizing the membership.

I don't have any great suggestions, frankly. There are too many factions within a school, a district and the state. Overall, we need more cohesion and something — or someone — to rally around.

*Ed Dube
Lexington Education Association*

Take all the PAC money we spend and put it into a marketing campaign

To the Editor:

Problem: public opinion of teachers.
Twentieth-century learning "solution": Take a huge amount of our MTA budget to fund election campaigns of recommended candidates who are "friendly" to education. In this state, a vast majority

of those candidates do get elected. Then, as with open classrooms, cooperative learning and the whole-language approach that "solved" educational problems, our elected leaders will take care of us.

Actual results: RETELL, endless mind-numbing state mandates, inadequate school funding and a fingerprinting policy that stinks, all of which steal our money or our time from us.

These MTA-recommended politicians aren't friendly to us because they can't be if they want to get re-elected. Public opinion says teachers are overpaid, underworked public enemies, not what we really are: underpaid, overworked public employees.

If the politicians aren't willing to help us, we must help ourselves. We can do this by cutting out the middlemen — politicians — and change public opinion ourselves.

Solution: Take all the PAC money we spend and instead put it into a marketing campaign selling one simple idea: Teachers Are Good. Done correctly, this would change public opinion. Then elected politicians would be friendly to educators anyway.

*Mark Juba, President, Blackstone-Millville
Regional School District Educators Association*

Democracy is not a spectator sport — and MTA needs to be in the game

To the Editor,

Democracy is not a spectator sport. The MTA did not sit on the sidelines cheering on our recommended candidates during the 2014 election season; members honed their communication skills, executed a game plan based on a proactive strategy and worked as a team to promote our agenda.

Only candidates who chose to participate in our Candidate Evaluation Team process — which mandates member-driven participation — were considered. The roster of recommended candidates was presented to the members in the Fall 2014 edition of *MTA Today*.

The MTA invested money and member/staff energy in the 2014 state election. The dividends were impressive, with the exception of the result of the governor's race. As the chair of the Candidate Recommendation Committee at the time of the interviews, I can attest that most of the gubernatorial candidates chose to participate. The MTA made a decision to support the winner of the Democratic Primary based on those interviews. There was no candidate who had a perfect score on every one of our major priorities.

To those members who contend that we shouldn't settle for the "lesser of two evils," my response is that we need to be in the game and *at the table* or we will be *on the table*. Assertive organized political action is imperative.

*Kerry A. Costello
Andover Education Association*

Letters to the Editor

PSU bargaining table has become a lab for corporate education reform

To the Editor:

Thanks to Michelle Corbin and Tim Scott for their Fall 2014 commentary, “From public good to profitable commodity.” It’s a dubious pleasure to learn the language of “LEAP,” “VALUE” and “scalable rubrics,” but if our colleagues in K-12 have suffered it for a decade, we in higher education deserve our turn.

We’ve endured the shock doctrine of starvation budgets setting the stage for “accountability” policies ostensibly designed to address real problems: poor retention, lack of student preparation, excessive student debt, and enrollments unmatched by increased staffing levels.

Meanwhile, the Professional Staff Union at UMass Boston has seen its bargaining table become a tiny laboratory for corporate education reform. Management’s justifications for gutting key pillars of our contract have been all about “market-based” changes, “best practices” and the need to align with the sinking standards of the non-union private sector.

Corbin and Scott remind us that our little bargaining table belongs to a much larger project, one we need to understand in order to resist. And part of that understanding is learning where our power lies: In the Legislature? At the bargaining table? In alliance with our students? In an educated and active membership?

Tom Goodkind

President, Professional Staff Union, UMass Boston

Political alliances must be based on debate — not tradition or fear

To the Editor:

As the largest union in Massachusetts, the MTA and its local affiliates represent an important voting bloc in national, state and local elections. We often fail to take this essential fact fully into account due to our strategic approach to electoral politics. For many rank-and-file members, our electoral work seems detached from our day-to-day union work. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that locals struggle to staff phone banks and thousands of MTA mail pieces are immediately trashed.

When we allied with the Democratic Party decades ago, we traded independence for political access. Two decades of education reform reveal the limitations of that access, but our loyalties have remained firm.

Rarely do Democratic candidates feel the need to make a strong commitment to our political program (sticking with, “I’m a proud product of the public schools”) because we rarely demand that they do (as we repeat that age-old mantra, “Anyone but a Republican!”).



We must use our leverage to shape the electoral debate and advance our platform on the campaign trail. I would never rule out a Democratic candidate as a potential ally, but alliances must be forged out of rigorous selection and robust debate, not tradition or fear. We must always approach elections from this position: not what is best for the Democratic Party, but what is best for the MTA.

Jamie Rinaldi

Newton Teachers Association

The MTA should have no power to recommend political candidates

To the Editor:

As a dues-paying member of the MTA, I feel misrepresented by my union when it comes to recommending candidates for election.

What should MTA’s relationship be to electoral politics? The MTA should have no power to recommend candidates.

I understand that the MTA needs to have the power to lobby for education. However, elections for local, state and national office do not revolve around just one issue. One candidate may have positions on education more favorable than those of another candidate, but those same candidates may differ on other issues that are also important to the membership.

For this reason I believe the union should not be speaking for the entire membership. Teachers come from different demographics, live in different communities and have different religious beliefs.

Elections are not solely about education and the union needs to be cognizant that some members may support a different candidate for reasons that are unrelated to education.

It is often frustrating to have to defend my political views at work and then explain them in society when I am unfairly labeled due to my union’s recommendations.

Paul Power

The Education Association of Natick

Charter schools are here to stay; now we must fight for better funding

To the Editor:

From July 1991 to June 1993, I was very involved in lobbying against legislation that became the Education Reform Act of 1993. I hate the title. We fought the good fight, but supporters at the time had the power in the Legislature and the governor’s office.

The concept of charter schools began to surface during the Reagan era and was supported by many conservative groups. The concept was supported by Massachusetts Governors Weld and Cellucci, Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and the Massachusetts Board of Education, which was controlled by the Pioneer Institute. Support continued under former Governor Deval Patrick and continues under President Barack Obama and Governor Charlie Baker.

The charter school battle is over. Charter schools are here to stay.

We need to move forward. The real battle is for better funding for the public schools. We need to focus on changing the funding mechanism for charter schools. We need to increase state funding for public education by stopping or reducing the money that goes to the charter schools, to the detriment of local school systems.

Richard E. Paul, Retired

Arlington 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 on www.massteacher.org.

Holyoke organizes to fight takeover

By Scott McLennan

The spirit of concerted union action that put Holyoke Teachers Association President Gus Morales back in the classroom is now infusing a community organizing campaign against a threatened state takeover of the city's public schools.

Morales, whose teaching contract was non-renewed at the end of the last school year, returned to the classroom on Nov. 24. The episode marked a victory for the HTA and the right of educators to speak out on issues that affect students.

Now the association is working with community leaders to increase the role of parents, educators and other residents in decisions about the future of the district's public schools.

Those efforts took on new urgency recently when Mitchell Chester, the Massachusetts commissioner of elementary and secondary education, moved up a planned review of the district from April to January. The review process determines whether a district deemed underperforming is making significant improvement based on state criteria. If it is not, the state could place the district in receivership.

"We will not compromise on the point that Holyoke should be in control of its schools," Morales said, "and the best plans to create schools that serve all our students will come from educators, parents, concerned citizens and students all working together."

The HTA has been collaborating with partners such as Western Mass Jobs With Justice to hold community forums on creating the schools that Holyoke students deserve.

Rose Bookbinder, a Jobs With Justice organizer, has been working with the HTA since last April.

"The passion and commitment that Holyoke teachers have for their students and work are truly inspiring," she said. "Jobs With Justice feels privileged to be part of this fight to make sure that teachers, students and parents have a collective voice in leading the Holyoke schools' next steps. We will stand with the HTA, MTA and members of the community until we reclaim Holyoke schools."

The campaign, called "Reclaim Our Schools," has created a Facebook page under the same name to keep the community informed.

A meeting organized by the HTA and Western Mass Jobs With Justice on Jan. 15 drew about 200 people, including several students who spoke out in favor of their teachers.

"We love our teachers; our teachers love us," said a high school student who praised her math teacher, HTA member Dorothy Albrecht, for providing extra help early in the morning before classes begin.

For Morales, fighting for a principle is not new. The English language arts teacher found himself out of a job last year after he publicly criticized various school policies that he believed were shaming



Photo by Rose Bookbinder

About 200 concerned educators, students, parents, community leaders and other residents attended a meeting on Jan. 15 to help shape a vision of the schools Holyoke deserves.

children and interfering with their education. He was especially critical of the use of "data walls" that displayed student test scores.

The eventual agreement to reinstate Morales was reached after the HTA pursued a grievance against the Holyoke School Committee and the state Department of Labor Relations decided that it would hold hearings to determine whether the School Committee fired Morales for his union activism.

"I am glad to be back in the classroom," Morales said recently. "During this fight, it was always gratifying to hear from students and families who supported me and told me I was a positive influence."

The HTA grievance focused on the district's teacher evaluation process. As noted in the DLR complaint, Morales, who did not have Professional Teacher Status, had received positive evaluations until he began speaking out against district policies.

Following his criticisms and his election as HTA president, Morales received poor evaluations and was non-renewed. Last August, Superintendent Sergio Páez tried to ban Morales from school property when he sought to meet with fellow HTA members. Páez lifted the "no trespass" order after MTA's Legal Services Division warned him that the order violated state collective bargaining laws and the First Amendment.

MTA leaders and members from across the state, along with community and labor activists in Western Massachusetts, were drawn to Morales' fight, supporting him at rallies and signing petitions calling for his rehiring.

"Our members across the state should be paying attention to what happened and what is taking place in Holyoke," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "The HTA successfully struck down censorship and the practice of administrators targeting leaders willing to speak out.

"Now the HTA is organizing itself and the community against an attempted state takeover based on the results of standardized tests," she continued. "Holyoke is a strong and proud community facing the harsh realities of poverty and economic injustice. Instead of calling for a commitment to the well-being of every child in the community, Commissioner Chester is getting ready to blame teachers. He should instead be turning to teachers for solutions and allowing Holyoke to maintain control of its schools. Test scores are being used as a weapon against teachers, students and communities. We should take note and organize to stop this attack."

Once Morales was reinstated, he and the HTA agreed to stop pursuing both the grievance and the DLR complaint. He is now teaching middle school English language arts at the E.N. White School.

"This fight was never just about me," Morales said. "As you can see, there are forces at work aiming to increase privatization of our public schools. Those who want to remove local control of the schools base their arguments on standardized test scores that bear no reflection on the quality of our students or teachers and ignore the devastating effects that poverty has in our classrooms."

Morales said that in addition to the potential state takeover of the district, the city faces many other education issues, including the state's "turnaround plan" for the Level 5 Morgan Elementary School, the loss of veteran teachers as class sizes have increased and the methods used to assess students and educators.

"For the past 20 years, the state has been foisting private partners upon our schools, resulting in costly and failed ventures," Morales said. "It is time we let Commissioner Chester know that Holyoke children deserve better than to be treated like pawns in a game."

MKEA mandate a flashpoint in battle over assessments

By Laura Barrett

Twenty Somerville kindergarten and preschool teachers sat in the high school Culinary Arts Department dining hall on a chilly January afternoon, talking about a subject that is troubling early education teachers across the state: the new mandatory kindergarten assessment administered as Teaching Strategies GOLD in most affected districts.

“I have gained nothing from TS GOLD. I have only lost,” Somerville teacher Donna Fils-Aime told *MTA Today*. “What I’ve lost is time with my kids.”

The new assessment, implemented in 171 districts this year, is the latest flashpoint in a growing movement against the excessive focus on assessments and data at the expense of learning. Called the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment, this initiative is mandated for districts that receive state Quality Full-Day Kindergarten funds. MTA members want the mandate to end.

“Our members are asking for our help,” said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. “They want their time and their freedom back to give their very young students the attention they deserve.”

Fils-Aime and other teachers interviewed all agreed that assessing the social, emotional and cognitive growth of their students is important. But many do not see the new assessment as adding value.

“Somerville has a wonderful tool for progress reports that we developed and that we all are invested in,” Fils-Aime said. “It is based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and deals with personal and social development as well as cognitive development. It is so much more useful than TS GOLD.”

She said the TS GOLD process of rating students on numerous objectives and collecting documentation to justify those ratings interferes with the flow of her class. Entering the data into a computer also cuts into time that teachers would rather spend planning lessons. Some who have been told to upload photos and other documentation of student behavior and growth to the TS GOLD website are also concerned about privacy issues.

Canton teacher Kim Willett voiced all three concerns.

“We’re teachers. They’re little children,” she said. “What we do is very hands-on. We don’t sit behind a desk. We don’t have access to a computer 24 hours a day. We’re singing. We’re dancing. We’re creative. We’re teaching math, social studies and reading. And now they want us to attach an iPad to our hip so we can document what our kids are doing instead of giving them our full attention.”

On the privacy issue, Willett said, “If the State Department’s database can be breached, so too can the TS GOLD database.”



Photo by Chris Christo

Brockton kindergarten teacher DeeAnndra Hurte-Jones said the TS GOLD assessment “takes time away from kids. It takes time away from teaching. It takes time away from family at home. And it’s stressful.” Educators from other districts around the state express similar concerns.

‘We’re teachers. They’re little children. What we do is very hands-on. We don’t sit behind a desk. We don’t have access to a computer 24 hours a day. We’re singing. We’re dancing. We’re creative. We’re teaching math, social studies and reading. And now they want us to attach an iPad to our hip so we can document what our kids are doing instead of giving them our full attention.’

— Canton teacher Kim Willett

Jeremy Brunaccioni, a 20-year kindergarten teacher from Conway, said he thinks parents would be outraged if they knew about TS GOLD.

“Some of it asks about toileting issues for students on IEPs,” he said. “I find it morally repugnant that a private company would have access to this information. It’s none of their business.”

The MKEA requirement is one of several initiatives funded by a \$50 million four-year federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant received by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Early Education and Care. The primary goal of the MKEA, according to the DEEC website, is to “support school districts in using a formative assessment tool that measures growth and learning across all developmental domains during the child’s kindergarten year.”

Although the requirement applies only to kindergarten teachers, MKEA funds can be used for training and assessment licenses if districts choose to extend the requirement to preschools.

Continued on next page

TS GOLD organizing 'has been empowering for our members'

By Laura Barrett

“Do not go for the GOLD,” advises Colorado education blogger Peggy Robertson, referring to the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment that many schools across the nation are now using.

Closer to home, many districts in the Commonwealth are using TS GOLD to meet the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment mandate — and members are asking for the MTA’s help in fighting it.

Betsy Edes of the Department of Early Education and Care explained that the MKEA grant received by the state requires districts that receive Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grants to administer the assessments through the 2015-16 school year. Her agency and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education are in the process of deciding whether to continue the mandate beyond that time, she said. Districts would have to pay for it themselves once the grant funds ran out.

Local associations whose members want to end the mandate should work with their MTA field representatives to develop a plan. Options include the following:

- Organize a meeting with kindergarten and preschool teachers to let them share their experiences.
- Set up a meeting at which teachers can tell the district superintendent and other administrators about their concerns. Bring along

‘We’ve given them opportunities to talk to colleagues and then with the superintendent. Now we’ve got a parent meeting scheduled.’

— STA President Jackie Lawrence

the hefty TS GOLD manual to show them just what the assessment entails.

- Have the association invite parents whose children are being assessed to a meeting to learn about it.
 - If parents want to take action, such as opting their children out of the assessment, make sure a representative of the union is there to explain how that would work.
 - Ask concerned residents to testify at a school committee meeting. Consider asking the school committee to pass a resolution calling for an end to the mandate.
 - Urge members to contact state policymakers about this issue, both on their own and through union-organized efforts.
 - Bring the issue to the bargaining table.
 - Contact other locals organizing around the issue and generate regional messaging and actions.
- Several locals have already begun this organizing work, including the Somerville Teachers Association.
- “We’ve given them opportunities to talk to colleagues and then with the superintendent. Now

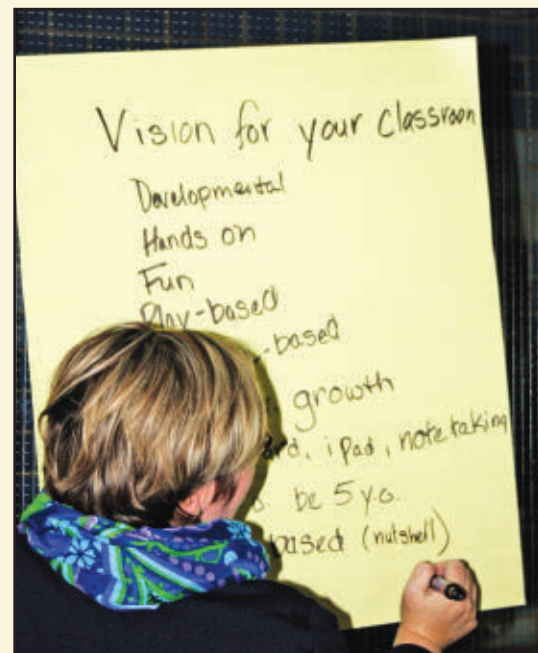


Photo by Laura Barrett

Somerville Teachers Association President Jackie Lawrence took notes during a meeting with preschool and kindergarten teachers on the MKEA mandate.

we’ve got a parent meeting scheduled,” said Jackie Lawrence, president of the STA. “It has been empowering for our members.”

For more information, please visit www.massteacher.org/mkea. Updates and organizing materials will be posted as they are developed.

Data entry and use of time are among teachers’ key concerns

Continued from previous page

Initially, two assessments — one called the Work Sampling System and the other TS GOLD — were offered. All but six of the 171 districts participating this year are using TS GOLD.

Another cohort will be added next year, the fourth year of the rollout.

Betsy Edes, early childhood education coordinator for the DEEC, said that her agency and the DESE have heard some concerns about the program, but also have heard positive feedback, mainly from administrators.

The MTA brought members’ concerns to the early education department more than a year ago. In response, the state received permission from the federal government to reduce the number of domains assessed from 10 to two for the current school year, along with other changes. Next year, however, the number is supposed to go back up to 10.

The two areas now being assessed are called “Social-Emotional” and “Cognition,” each of which has nine or 10 “objectives” that must be assessed, generally on a scale of 0 (not yet) to 10 (meaning the child exceeds expectations for the end of kindergarten). Some domains have as few

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as two objectives. The ratings are entered at two checkpoints a year. The first was on Nov. 7, 2014, and the next will be on June 5.

The program describes types of behavior falling into ratings 1 through 8.

For example, under the objective “follows limits and expectations,” a behavior that would support a rating of 2 might be “responds to changes in an adult’s tone of voice and expression.” Teachers say it is mind-boggling to rate and collect so much

documentation. If the number of domains rises to 10 next year, as scheduled, each child will have to be rated on 66 objectives twice a year.

Brockton teachers were among the first to begin organizing locally in Massachusetts to address educators’ concerns.

In October, 59 of the district’s 70 kindergarten teachers turned out for an after-school meeting called by the Brockton Education Association.

DeeAnndra Hurte-Jones was one of them.

“It took me six hours just to input the rating checkpoints,” she said, “and that doesn’t even include all the time spent in observation and collection of data. It takes time away from kids. It takes time away from teaching. It takes time away from family at home. And it’s stressful.

“I have a child going into kindergarten next fall, and as a parent I am upset about this,” Hurte-Jones continued. “I don’t want all of this assessing to be interfering with his learning.”

The Brockton teachers then met with district administrators, who shared their concerns and told them they did not have to upload photos and videos.

Please turn to **Assessments**/Page 29

Celebrating 35 years of activism

Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee honors a longtime MTA leader

By Jean Conley

The Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee celebrated 35 years of making a difference in the MTA on Dec. 5 and 6 as association members gathered for a conference featuring warm memories of the past and a message about the need to keep EMAC's spirit of involvement alive.

The theme of the 35th anniversary conference, "Standing on a Great Foundation," was reflected in the stories of EMAC members who recounted how the Minority Affairs Committee — later renamed EMAC — grew over the years to become the driving force behind ethnic minority participation and advancement within the MTA.

Several of MTA's earliest minority activists were on hand to tell their stories about becoming involved with MAC and explain its impact, both on their union and in their personal lives.

Invariably, those stories pointed back and paid tribute to the special honoree of the conference, Louise Gaskins, a primary architect of MTA's Minority Involvement Plan, which established the Minority Affairs Committee in 1979. Over the years, Gaskins became a champion of minority involvement in the MTA.

EMAC Chair Christine Boseman welcomed about 180 participants to a gala dinner on Friday night. She opened the conference by leading a moment of reflection for the lost lives of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two unarmed black men who died in encounters with police in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City.

MTA President Barbara Madeloni greeted the crowd and spoke about the deaths and the public demonstrations that occurred in their aftermath. She saluted "the amazing men and women — and the courage and wisdom it took for them to gather over the last few days to begin discussions of race."

"As much as tonight is a celebration," she continued, "I know that we are at a moment in time in this country where race relations are clearly exposed as violent, as critically disruptive to the opportunities that our children have." She said that as educators, "we need to recognize that with all the work we have done, we still have so much work to do."

After thanking the members of EMAC, who were in charge of the special event, Boseman explained EMAC's long-held purpose.

"Then, as now," Boseman said, "our mission is to increase ethnic minority involvement in all phases of the association — at the local, state and national levels."



Photos by Jean Conley

EMAC honoree Louise Gaskins, left, urged fellow MTA members to reach out to others "with a gesture of camaraderie that both congratulates our past dedication and inspires our continued renewal of the MTA and NEA commitment to children, to teachers, to education and to society." At right, Julia Hogan-Jackson of the Cambridge Education Association makes a point during a workshop titled "Beyond Discipline: The School-to-Prison Pipeline."

"We have been successful over these last 35 years," she continued, "and we have changed our association for the better in many ways. We are indeed standing on a great foundation. But we want to continue to reach higher and dig deeper. We want more ethnic minorities to be involved with the MTA at the local level, as presidents and in other capacities."

Friday night's keynote address was delivered by Anne Wass, a former MTA president who spoke of her childhood in Albany, New York, her close relationship with parents who never let her speak ill of another person, and her special bond with Gaskins, whom she called her mentor and "the most important person I have ever met."

Wass regaled the crowd with humor and anecdotes about how her "super friendship" with Gaskins began, almost accidentally, when the two roomed together at a conference.

Wass said that over the years, Gaskins patiently and persistently "carried on the things that my father had tried to show me" about not judging others. "She gave me the confidence," Wass said, to grow, to not fear speaking up in the face of injustice and to stick to her principles when she became vice president and then president of the MTA. "She taught me so much," Wass said.



Anne Wass

"I always felt that Louise should have been the MTA president," she added. "And I feel that in her time, it wasn't something that could happen because of her gender and her race. But in my eyes, she is an MTA president."

Early pioneers of MAC also spoke of their treasured bonds with the MTA and with Gaskins.

Among them was Kitty Hill, a former vice president of the Framingham Teachers Association, who recalled that "everyone loved Louise's kind and supportive spirit." She said that through her involvement with MAC, she learned "how to navigate the MTA/NEA system." Gaskins and Dr. Barbara Spence "paved the way for so many minorities at the state and national level," Hill said.

Spence, who formerly served as director of the Health and Human Services Program at Quinsigamond Community College and has attended every EMAC conference, had her eyes opened to the opportunities at the national level when she became a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. She also spoke movingly about her friendship of more than 35 years with Gaskins.

Elvoid Mayers, a former MAC chair, said that her experience as a member of the committee came in handy when she decided to run for the MTA Board of Directors. "I knew exactly what to do," she said. "There was no stopping me."

Another past chair, John Reed, recalled being at his first NEA RA and finding himself surrounded

Continued on next page



Photos by Jean Conley

Above left, MTA President Barbara Madeloni enjoyed a moment with John Reed, a former chair of the MTA Minority Affairs Committee, and Bessie Lyman, a retired teacher from Newton who knew Louise Gaskins in college, at a dinner celebrating EMAC's 35th anniversary. In the photo at right, EMAC member Susan Baker answers a question during a workshop on getting elected to office at the MTA.

Gaskins: 'Reach out to others as I have tried to do'

Continued from previous page

by 10,000 people. He said that up until that time, he had never seen such diversity all in one place. "I had a spiritual moment," he said. "It dawned on me: We are not only one family; we need to support each other to be a *better* family."

Edith Cannon, a former MAC chair who has been instrumental in EMAC since the beginning, said that the MTA and NEA taught her to "know who the players are."

"Having had these experiences led to so many other opportunities," she said, including stints on NEA's and MTA's Minority Affairs Committees, the MTA Board, NEA's Constitution, Bylaws and Rules Committee and as an NEA delegate to national education conferences.

She urged newer MTA members to "learn all you can and use the resources of the MTA and the NEA," adding: "Don't pass this up!"

NEA President Lily Eskelsen García, Vice President Rebecca Pringle, Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss and former President Reg Weaver, who could not be present, sent greetings and tributes from Washington, D.C., via videotape.

As the luncheon speaker on Saturday, Gaskins was introduced by Kevin Gilbert of the NEA Executive Committee.

Gilbert, a public educator for 17 years and coordinator of teacher leadership and special projects for the Clinton Public School District in Mississippi, called Gaskins a "game-changer."

"What separates the good teams from the great teams is a superstar," he said. "Louise Gaskins has proven to be a game-changer for the MTA."

"A game-changer recognizes what needs to be done," he said, directing his remarks at Gaskins, "and you recognized that your organization needed to be intentional about increasing diversity."



Kevin Gilbert



Lloyd Sheldon Johnson, a behavioral science professor at Bunker Hill Community College, poses a question during a workshop on the school-to-prison pipeline. The session was one of many that drew members to the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference in December.

Gaskins delivered an inspiring speech about her decades of service at the MTA — as an officer in her Ayer local and on the MTA Board of Directors, the Equal Opportunity Council, the Retirement Committee, the Bylaws and Rules Committee, the Administrators Committee and the Human and Civil Rights Council. At the NEA, she served on the Board of Directors as the first elected MTA ethnic minority director, as well as on the Elections and Resolutions committees.

Gaskins recalled sitting at her dining room table after a particularly inspiring minority involvement conference back in the late 1970s, "drafting the ideas necessary to meet the NEA requirements for the Massachusetts Minority Involvement Plan."

"Then I enlisted the support and assistance of some concerned ethnic minority members to join me in presenting these ideas to the Massachusetts president and executive director-treasurer," she said. "Out of our efforts, there surfaced the recognized need for a Minority Affairs Committee to be an integral part of the plan. Its composition and responsibilities are now history. This arm of the association is critically important and extremely useful in fostering increased involvement of ethnic minorities in the overall program of the MTA."

Gaskins asked all of the conferees to continue to "reach out to others as I have tried to do over the years, with a gesture of camaraderie that both congratulates our past dedication and inspires our continued renewal of the MTA and NEA commitment to children, to teachers, to education and to our society."

Workshops included "The History of EMAC," "Beyond Discipline: The School-to-Prison Pipeline," "Creating and Sustaining a Democratic Classroom Community," "How to Get Elected to MTA Office," "Netiquette' and Law for Educational Employees" and "An Exploration into 'Difference.'"

A workshop titled "The Skin That We Speak" served as a bridge conversation between the Just for New Teachers and EMAC conferences. The conferences were intentionally scheduled on the same day at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel in Norwood to facilitate the workshop, which explored the impact of culture and language in the classroom and beyond, and to invite newer teachers to attend the EMAC dinner and conference.

To see more photos of the conference, visit www.flickr.com/mtacommunications. To read the speech given by Louise Gaskins, visit http://massteacher.org/news/archive/2014/emac_celebrates_35th_anniversary/louise_gaskins_speech.aspx.

ESP Conference to offer workshops and ocean view

By Jean Conley

The upcoming MTA Education Support Professionals Conference on Cape Cod will offer two days of professional development tailored specifically to ESPs in a relaxing venue directly on the ocean, also giving ESPs time to rejuvenate and talk about issues common to all.

The conference, scheduled for April 10 and 11 at the Sea Crest Beach Hotel in Falmouth, will bring back especially popular workshops from past years and add some new ones. The wide-ranging workshops include meeting the needs of the whole student, stepping out of one's comfort zone as an organizer and creating and sustaining democratic classrooms.

ESP Committee Chair Tricia DiPasquale said the conference has continued to grow in popularity every year. The 2014 event attracted about 400 participants.

"Most ESPs come to this conference to learn. The event is an opportunity for ESPs to obtain quality training and professional development," she said, adding that members also come to connect, to laugh and to build camaraderie.

DiPasquale said that the ESP Committee works hard to make sure all participants who attend the conference leave Falmouth "feeling inspired and eager to go back to their locals to implement what they have learned and encourage their colleagues to attend the conference next year."

"Most important," she continued, is that conferees leave the event "knowing that they are valued members of the MTA and their local association."

One highlight of the conference every year is presentation of the ESP of the Year award. This year, the winner will be announced at dinner on Friday night.

The award is given to an ESP who is an ardent supporter of workers' rights, who seeks creative and innovative solutions to problems and who makes a difference in the lives of students.

Last year's award went to Lois Powers, a career resource librarian at UMass Boston.

Conferees may check in at the hotel starting at 3 p.m. on Friday, pick

"Most ESPs come to this conference to learn. The event is an opportunity for ESPs to obtain quality training and professional development," ESP Committee Chair Tricia DiPasquale said, adding that members also come to connect, to laugh and to build camaraderie.

up materials and attend a welcome reception.

Several workshops will be held on Friday afternoon, including sessions on meeting the needs of the whole student, personality assessments, introduction to Google Docs and Drive, and "netiquette" and the law for education employees.

On Saturday, a breakfast buffet precedes back-to-back morning workshop sessions, which include introductions to the iPad and Excel, math strategies for success on standardized assessments, health and

safety issues in schools, differentiated instruction, the school-to-prison pipeline and social pragmatics. A full listing of workshops is available on the MTA website at massteacher.org/esp.

Floyd Cox, an organizational specialist for the NEA, will offer the keynote address during the luncheon on Saturday before the conference concludes about 3 p.m.

Born and raised in Oklahoma, Cox graduated from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in 1977. He began teaching high school math and science in 1980 and became



a teaching and learning specialist for the Oklahoma Education Association in 1988.

Cox joined NEA's Department of Affiliate Learning and Effectiveness in 2008. He has trained thousands of educators in Oklahoma and has presented at conferences across the country.

The final date to register for the conference is March 27. For information on conference costs, hotel charges and registration, please visit www.massteacher.org/esp.

Other questions can be e-mailed to Jennifer Freeling in the Division of Training and Professional Learning at jfreeling@massteacher.org. Her phone number is 617.878.8151.

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Communities unite to fight charters

By Laura Barrett

Teachers, administrators, parents and local elected officials are sometimes at odds when it comes to education policy, but they often stand together in the face of an external threat to their schools and students.

That's exactly what has happened in Brockton and Fitchburg, where strong opposition to opening new charter schools has brought together a wide array of public school supporters.

In both communities, unions, school committees, city councils, central office administrators and outspoken parents have testified against the charter proposals and passed resolutions. Brockton has even brought a lawsuit to prevent the New Heights Charter School from opening.

All eyes are now on the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which is scheduled to vote on the two applications on Feb. 24. Although some observers believe that defeating charter schools will be even harder under the administration of pro-charter Governor Charlie Baker, Fitchburg and Brockton aren't giving up. They have beaten back unwanted charters in the past by organizing locally and shining a light on the flaws in charter applications.

An added twist is that state law appeared to block both charter applications from going forward because of high student growth scores in the host districts. However, state education officials sanctioned moves to get around that barrier and allowed the applications to proceed.

"New Heights purports to provide choice to all in the community without having the staffing, expertise and structures in place to support English language learners and students with disabilities, a large segment of the population," Brockton Superintendent Kathleen Smith wrote on Jan. 5 in a scathing rebuttal to the charter application. "We see this lack of appropriate services as a serious civil rights concern."

The rebuttal details the many successful programs and services that Brockton already offers, and it addresses the part of the charter proposal that would rely on public dollars to fund a "grade 13" and college credits for New Heights students.

"If the district is to be expected to fund a 13th grade for New Heights students," Smith wrote, "it will seek to compel (the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) to provide per-pupil reimbursement for all Brockton students in a 13th grade."

Yolanda DiFalco, vice president of the Brockton Education Association, testified on behalf of the BEA at a packed hearing attended by 200 residents on Dec. 8. Most of those in attendance — state representatives, city councilors, parents, educators and Brockton public school students — were against New Heights.

"I am a product of the Brockton Public Schools," DiFalco said, describing her rapid progress through



Photo by Laura Barrett

During a forum on Nov. 5 at DESE headquarters in Malden, Brockton Education Association President Kim Gibson spoke against granting a waiver for the New Heights Charter School.

high school, college and graduate school. "I am now proud to say that I am a resident of Brockton, teaching in my hometown and raising two girls who will be attending school in a few short years. New Heights Charter offers nothing new or innovative."

Sean Walker, vice president of the Fitchburg Education Association, spearheaded his local's opposition to the Academy for the Whole Child Charter School, a proposed regional school that would be based in Fitchburg.

"This school would not add any new programs or approaches to education, yet it would take funding away from the public school budget," Walker told *MTA Today*.

The FEA Executive Committee approved a resolution that affirms the local's support for the district schools, which have been striving to serve all students well despite continued budget woes. "Fitchburg Public Schools offers a comprehensive education to its students," the resolution concludes. "Innovation in education is already at work in Fitchburg. Diverting funding will only prove counterproductive to our current progress."

At one point, the state informed Academy's applicants that they couldn't move ahead because, taken together, the growth scores in the local districts that made up the proposed regional district pushed the group above the bottom 10 percent in the state. Under state law, the first two charters to be approved in a given year must be in the bottom 10 percent statewide.

Walker explained that the Academy for the Whole Child got around that by "gerrymandering" the regional district. In a revised application, some high-performing districts contiguous to Fitchburg were excluded while lower-performing districts farther away were added. The resulting new region fell below the 10 percent threshold.

Brockton also does not fall in the bottom 10 percent. Since New Heights is designed to serve only Brockton students, the state found a different way to

allow the application to proceed. By a vote of 8 to 3, the BESE approved a one-time waiver to the formula that was used to calculate the bottom 10 percent statewide.

With that change, the New Heights application was allowed to go forward. State officials justified the vote by arguing that the applicant hadn't been given timely notification about the impact the new formula would have on its application.

In its suit, the Brockton district is challenging the legality of the waiver vote.

In Brockton and Fitchburg, both the school committees and city councils have voted in opposition to the charter applications, as did elected officials in some of the other communities that are part of the Academy's region.

Parents in the affected communities expressed concern about the impact of charters on students who attend district schools.

After an initial period of reimbursement, charter schools drain funds from the sending districts. Charters also have an impact on the state budget, reducing funds that could otherwise be spent on local aid or education programs that benefit all students.

In addition, many charters use enrollment practices that effectively exclude students who have behavioral or academic challenges, artificially boosting their own test scores and leaving the district schools with fewer resources to educate a higher-need student population.

In written testimony against the New Heights application, MTA President Barbara Madeloni wrote, "I urge you to listen to the many educators, parents and public officials in Brockton who will tell you that the vast majority of Brockton residents who have a stake in public education do not want this charter school. In a true democracy, doing what's best for students as determined by the will of the community should be the driving force behind your vote on this proposal."

Forums give voice to education vision

By Laura Barrett

MTA President Barbara Madeloni and Vice President Janet Anderson have crisscrossed the state throughout the fall and winter to hear members' ideas about how to provide the schools that students, educators and communities deserve.

Between Sept. 11 and Jan. 29, Madeloni moderated 31 forums from Pittsfield to Martha's Vineyard. She and Anderson said there has been a remarkable consistency in the messages they have heard as members talked about their vision for public education and about the obstacles they face in achieving that vision.

"In meeting after meeting, we heard that members want schools that are safe, healthy environments where students not only learn but develop a love of learning," Madeloni said. "They want the kinds of schools that policymakers and elected leaders provide for their own children — schools with small class sizes, a rich curriculum and strong, positive relationships among students and staff."

She continued, "When we asked members to put up on poster paper their vision of the public schools our children deserve, not once did they write, 'high MCAS scores.' Of course they want their students to do well academically, but the goal is to foster thoughtful, creative human beings who are ready to engage in democracy — not good test-takers. Members are ready to organize to fight for schools where this can happen."

Two years ago, then-Massachusetts Secretary of Education Matthew Malone acknowledged that educators were faced with so many new mandates that trying to keep up had become like "trying to drink water from a fire hose."

Since then, members said at the forums, the number and pace of federal, state and district mandates have only gotten worse.

"We hear from members that the constant changes and new initiatives are disruptive and are taking time away from teaching," Anderson said. "Unfortunately, the stress is driving some good educators out of the profession or into early retirement. They want their union to help them advocate for a new direction."

Some of the concerns raised are:

- The high stakes associated with MCAS for students, educators, schools and districts are causing districts to impose **more and more tests** to get students ready for it.

- Each new phase of the **educator evaluation system** adds components that have to be developed and implemented. Educators contend that they have to spend so much time documenting what they do, they have less time to actually teach and plan lessons. One summed it up this way: "Now the rule is that I have to constantly prove that I am a good teacher."

- **District-Determined Measures** are the most recent requirement under the new system. DDMs are creating more testing and paperwork — though many



doubt the validity and reliability of the measures and others are concerned that they will lead to more standardization of practice.

- Kindergarten teachers in 171 districts now have to implement the new **Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment**, generally administered as Teaching Strategies GOLD. Many preschool teachers are required to administer TS GOLD as well. Many teachers say this takes time away from teaching and interferes with how they relate to their students without providing useful new information.

- **PARCC** was layered on top of MCAS in many classrooms during last year's field tests, and more than half of all districts are scrambling to get ready to administer the full PARCC assessment this year. Concerns include how the tests will be scored, whether they will be aligned with what students are being taught, and whether students and districts are prepared for the technological challenges of an online exam as well as the impact of more testing in more grades.

- **RETELL** has proven to be extremely time consuming, and scheduling courses has been a disaster in some districts. Some teachers have questioned the quality of the professional development provided; others wondered if it would be better to return to bilingual education models.

- Drastic changes are being imposed on schools designated **Levels 4 and 5** with inadequate input from educators and their unions. This has included requiring all staff members to reapply for their jobs and replacing veteran educators who had stellar evaluations with newer ones willing and able to work longer hours for less pay. "Some call this classic union busting," said Madeloni.

- New **charter schools** are being opened, disrupting district budgets and enrollments.

Forum participants were asked to analyze what forces they believe are behind the impediments to improving schools. Opinions varied widely.

Some blamed the companies that profit from selling the new tests, curriculum materials and professional development needed to implement changes.

Some blamed state and federal education officials and local administrators for being out of touch with what goes on in classrooms and failing to listen to what educators say they need.

Some blamed larger political and economic forces that they believe benefit from having a small number of elites who are well educated and a larger group of compliant workers who are good at following rules — good test-takers — but not prone to questioning authority.



Photo by Laura Barrett

Nicole Byrne, who teaches English language arts at High Rock School in Needham, shared her thoughts during a forum in Dedham.

Some blamed families and students themselves for not taking school more seriously and for not backing up educators.

Regardless of their views of who was at fault, many educators were eager to "reclaim public education" by trying to bring about change.

While there was no consensus on how to do that, there were many ideas shared and there was widespread agreement that change has to come from members themselves, starting at the grass roots.

A common theme was that educators need to build stronger connections with parents and other members of the community. Steps might include holding community forums, building coalitions, appearing more often in the media and meeting more often with local and state policymakers.

The MTA's elected leaders have begun discussing what was learned at the forums. The association's legislative agenda, which grew out of the forums, calls for a three-year moratorium on high-stakes testing and new charter schools. Statewide organizing around those bills is underway.

In mid-December, the MTA held an inter-divisional retreat to begin planning organizing activities. Teams have formed to work on specific issues that require grassroots activism and statewide leadership.

"We have shown that we can be powerful when members are informed and organized," Madeloni said. "Thanks to member engagement, we defeated a bill to lift the cap on charter schools in July and a plan to link educators' licenses to their evaluations in November. With more members getting involved, we can change the terms of the debate and breathe new life into the core values that brought us to teaching in the first place."

Bills seek to stop high-stakes testing, charters

By Jean Conley

Moratoriums on charter schools and high-stakes testing — along with other high-priority issues reflected in MTA-supported bills — make up the association’s legislative agenda for the 2015-2016 session.

In a letter to the Board of Directors in November, MTA President Barbara Madeloni and Vice President Janet Anderson laid out their vision for the agenda, which they said emerged from the conviction “that in order to provide the best for our children and their future, we must not only fully and equitably fund public education, but also support the social and economic conditions that allow families and communities to thrive.”

They added that their intent is not only to “win immediate legislative battles, but to create markers for a new sense of what is possible.”

Over the past several months, in forums and during discussions around the state, members have helped define their goals under three broad headings: providing the public schools and colleges that all students deserve, amplifying and protecting educators’ voices, and safeguarding the well-being of educators, families and communities.

Those discussions formed the basis for the legislative agenda that the Board of Directors approved on Dec. 6.

MTA-supported bills are:

■ “An Act relative to a moratorium on high-stakes testing and PARCC,” sponsored by Representative Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge). The bill imposes a three-year moratorium on the use of PARCC and on standardized testing used to determine high school graduation, evaluation of teachers and assessing performance of schools or districts. It establishes a task force to evaluate the impact of standardized tests as a high school graduation requirement, in evaluating educators, and in assessing schools’ attainment of the goals of the Education Reform Act of 1993 — that schools “provide the conditions for all pupils to engage fully in learning as an inherently meaningful and enjoyable activity without threats to their sense of security or self-esteem.”

■ “An Act establishing a moratorium for Commonwealth charter

In a letter to the Board of Directors in November, MTA President Barbara Madeloni and Vice President Janet Anderson laid out their vision for the legislative agenda, which they said emerged from the conviction “that in order to provide the best for our children and their future, we must not only fully and equitably fund public education, but also support the social and economic conditions that allow families and communities to thrive.”

schools,” sponsored by Senator Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton). The bill places a three-year moratorium on charter school expansion and requires all teachers hired by Commonwealth charter schools to obtain a teaching license.

■ “An Act for language opportunities for our kids (LOOK),” sponsored by Senator Sal DiDomenico (D-Everett) and Representative Jeffrey Sánchez (D-Jamaica Plain). The bill requires updating the law to encompass the latest in academic research and best practices in public schools serving English language learners. It allows all districts to choose high-quality alternate language acquisition programs based on the needs of students in addition to Sheltered English Immersion. The legislation establishes a state Seal of Bilingual Proficiency that districts could award to high school graduates demonstrating proficiency in two or more languages.

■ “An Act for universal early education and full-day kindergarten,” sponsored by Senator DiDomenico. The bill requires the Board of Early Education and Care to phase in a fully funded five-day-a-week early education program for all 3- and 4-year-olds by 2020. Low-income districts would be first to be phased in. All early education teachers would have to be licensed by 2020. The bill also requires all children to attend full-day kindergarten.

■ “An Act to invest in higher education faculty,” sponsored by Representative Paul Mark (D-Peru). The bill increases to at least 75 percent the proportion of undergraduate courses taught by full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty at public colleges and universities. Per-course pay for adjuncts would increase to bring compensation in line with full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and adjuncts working half time would be eligible

for the same health care and pension benefits as tenure-track faculty. Adjuncts would also receive “full and fair consideration in attaining” a tenure-track position when one becomes available. This includes accumulating seniority, being notified of job openings before they are posted outside of the institution and being interviewed during the search and screening process.

■ “An Act establishing an educational mandate task force,” sponsored by Representative Alice Peisch (D-Wellesley). The bill establishes a task force to review existing state mandates on public schools and districts and to develop recommendations on streamlining, consolidating or eliminating mandates and reporting requirements.

■ “An Act related to unfunded mandates on public schools,” sponsored by Representatives Carolyn Dykema (D-Holliston) and Dan Donahue (D-Worcester) and Senator Kathleen O’Connor Ives (D-Newburyport). The bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to conduct an analysis of all new state laws, regulations or administrative directives to include the costs these laws and directives have on school districts and their employees. The analysis would also include the impact of new laws and directives on time spent on learning in the classroom, as well as overall impact on improving student achievement.

■ “An Act relative to the composition of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education,” sponsored by Senator Ken Donnelly (D-Arlington) and Representative Sean Garballey (D-Arlington). The bill adds two teacher representatives chosen by the governor to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

One teacher representative would be chosen from a list of three submitted by the MTA, and one would be chosen from a list submitted by the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts.

■ “An Act prohibiting the bullying of public school employees,” sponsored by Representative Peter Kocot (D-Northampton). The bill prohibits public employers from creating or maintaining an abusive work environment and allows affected public employees to obtain legal remedies not currently available. The bill also protects public employees from hostile work environments created by others in the workplace. The public employer would be required to respond to allegations of bullying and to take actions to address such situations.

■ “An Act related to just-cause terminations,” sponsored by Senator Dan Wolf (D-Harwich). The bill re-establishes the “just-cause” standard in dismissal cases for teachers consistent with legislative intent and more than 20 years of case law undone by the 2014 Supreme Judicial Court decision in *Lexington v. Zagaeski*.

■ “An Act promoting collaboration at level 4/5 schools,” sponsored by Representative Michael Brady (D-Brockton). The bill maintains employment rights within the district for teachers who are transferred from “turnaround” schools.

■ “An Act relative to national background check fees,” sponsored by Representative Tom Stanley (D-Waltham). The bill eliminates the fee paid by public school employees to cover the cost of the national background check and allows employees to deduct the fee from their next educator licensure renewal. Employees or retired employees who have paid the fee and are not subject to educator licensure renewal would be reimbursed.

■ “An Act to further regulate the right to strike of public employees,” sponsored by Representative Byron Rushing (D-Boston). The bill amends the current law by allowing public employees the right to strike free from interference, restraint or coercion if the Department of Labor Relations determines that public employees’ action has been caused by unfair labor practices committed by the employer.

Please turn to **MTA**/Page 21



Photos by Scott McLennan

Alex Dos Santos, a member of the Student Education Association of Massachusetts chapter at Bridgewater State University, above left, took notes during a workshop at the Just for New Teachers conference. At right, Michael Milton of the New Member Committee, who is a social studies teacher at Burlington High School, spoke to participants about differentiating instruction.

New teachers are making a difference

MTA president urges conference participants to become activists

By Scott McLennan

The roughly 100 educators attending the Just for New Teachers conference may be fresh to the profession, but they are already having a profound influence in their classrooms and throughout public education.

That was part of the message conveyed by speakers during the 2014 edition of the event, which was held in Norwood on Dec. 5.

MTA President Barbara Madeloni congratulated the new teachers for coming into the profession at a difficult time. She stressed the importance of presenting a unified front against influences that seek to undermine public schools.

“Teachers need to be activists. This is the work where we grow our future,” she said, emphasizing that a teacher’s work ripples out beyond the classroom.

MTA Vice President Janet Anderson focused her comments on the dynamics within schools. She recalled her past few years of teaching in Taunton, where she was on teams with many new teachers.

“The veteran teacher on a team like that is viewed as the mentor. And while I like to think I fulfilled that role for my colleagues, in the end, I feel I learned just as much from them. Their energy, their fresh ideas and their excitement made me a better teacher,” Anderson said.

The MTA’s New Member Committee organized the annual conference, which provides teachers with four or fewer years in the profession with an array of tools and strategies to succeed in the classroom. Workshops covered subjects such as differentiated instruction, classroom management, assessing student performance and teacher evaluations.

There was also lots of advice. New teachers should start a “smile file,” said New Member Committee Chair Josh Chrzanowski.



“Keep the notes, pictures and cards students give you throughout your career. When you go through it, you’ll think, ‘This is why I teach,’” he said. “It’s not about test scores and grades. It’s to make a difference in a child’s life.”

Madeloni said the gathering of new teachers was a powerful image of hope, and she couched her professional advice in two “asks.”

“I understand how lonely we feel sometimes. So, don’t let it be a lonely job. Reach out to a colleague. Talk to each other,” Madeloni said.

Her second request was that educators stay



Beau Stubblefield-Tave, left, focused on cultural fluency in his keynote speech. Above, New Member Committee Chair Josh Chrzanowski welcomed the new teachers to the conference, which was held in Norwood.

involved in organizing.

Teaching is political work, particularly now, Madeloni said, with many initiatives attempting to narrow educators’ work and put public schools into private hands. Beyond that, she reminded the educators that anguish in communities is carried by students into their classrooms.

“Our students are trying to figure out how to be a person in the world,” she said. “What you do in the classroom is part of something bigger.”

Keynote speaker Beau Stubblefield-Tave focused on cultural fluency as he worked through exercises in which the teachers identified how they

Please turn to **Workshop leader**/Page 30

Battle continues over UMass contracts

By Scott McLennan

Several contracts ratified by faculty and staff at University of Massachusetts campuses in Amherst, Boston and Lowell stand in limbo because of a dispute over whether they have been funded.

Outgoing UMass President Robert Caret maintains that the contracts have not been funded, notwithstanding evidence that money for collective bargaining at the university was included in the fiscal 2015 state budget.

Most MTA-affiliated bargaining units reached contract agreements with UMass by December, and in one case ratification had been completed by October.

All of the signed and ratified agreements were sent to the office of then-Governor Deval Patrick, who determined that no further appropriation was necessary to fund the incremental cost items of the agreements. Although it is not required by the state collective bargaining law when the governor determines that an appropriation is not necessary, the Executive Office for Administration and Finance forwarded the agreements to the Legislature for validation without an additional appropriation.

Amid the confusion caused by Caret's stance that additional funding was necessary, however, the Legislature failed to pass legislation to validate most of the contracts by the end of the last session, prompting UMass to take the position that the contracts could not take effect.

Caret will be leaving the UMass presidency when he returns to the University of Maryland system as chancellor in several months.

The MTA strongly disagrees with Caret's position and is pursuing both legal and legislative channels to ensure implementation of the contracts.

The MTA maintains that the contracts should take effect immediately because legislative validation would only be necessary if the contracts required supplemental budget requests.

"It's an outrageous situation. People's livelihoods are being toyed with," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "President Caret should be committed to the strength and stability of UMass, yet what he is doing now is completely disruptive." Among the affected bargaining units is Madeloni's own, the Massachusetts Society of Professors at UMass Amherst.

The MSP and the University Staff Association at UMass Amherst, the Faculty Staff Union and



Photo by Scott McLennan

More than 100 demonstrators marched along Beacon Street from the State House to Boston Common on Oct. 7 to protest the lack of fair contracts for workers at the University of Massachusetts. Classified and professional staff, faculty and graduate employees organized the march and rally, which were held in conjunction with an event marking the 50th anniversary of UMass Boston. They were joined by MTA members from other higher education locals, MTA staff and representatives of labor and social justice organizations.

"It's an outrageous situation. People's livelihoods are being toyed with," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "President Caret should be committed to the strength and stability of UMass, yet what he is doing now is completely disruptive."

Classified Staff Union at UMass Boston, and the Maintenance and Trades Union and Classified/Technical Unit at UMass Lowell ratified contracts in December.

The MSP unit at UMass Lowell, which ratified its contract in October and received legislative validation, has not seen newly negotiated salaries or other contract provisions take effect.

Bargaining between the university and local chapters was often rancorous, stretching over many months.

In September, leaders of higher education bargaining units brought their concerns about punitive and regressive labor proposals to the UMass Board of Trustees.

In October, more than 100 demonstrators — including many MTA members — called for fair labor contracts during a UMass Boston 50th anniversary event on Boston Common.

The Professional Staff Union, which represents employees on the Amherst and Boston campuses, remains in negotiations.

The MTA and several legislators maintain that the contracts did not "die" with the end of the last legislative session, so there is no need to renegotiate them.

In response to Caret's refusal to implement the contracts, the presidents of the affected bargaining units are sending "demand to implement" letters to the chancellors at their respective campuses.

The MTA Government Relations Division is working with legislators, and the Legal Services Division is gathering evidence under the Freedom of Information Act on how collective bargaining agreements were funded in the fiscal 2015 budget. The Legal Division plans to use those findings as the basis of a complaint to the state Department of Labor Relations.

MTA leaders will be counting on all members to support higher education members in campaigns to implement the contracts.

"Our members bargained in good faith with the university and deserve to have these contracts fully take effect," Madeloni said.

JOBS AT THE MTA

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Statements by candidates for NEA Director seats

Four MTA members are vying for two seats on the NEA Board of Directors.

The NEA Director candidates are Diana Marcus, Burlington Educators' Association; Ryan Hoyt, Waltham Educators Association; Bonnie Page, Malden Education Association; and Max Page of the Massachusetts Society of Professors-Amherst.

The two open Massachusetts seats will be filled

by direct-mail vote in March and April in tandem with NEA state and regional delegate elections.

The terms last for three years beginning Sept. 1, 2015, and expiring Aug. 31, 2018, in accordance with the NEA's fiscal year. Ballots will be sent to the entire membership.

Each candidate was asked to submit a statement and a photograph. The candidates' submissions

appear on this page and Page 19 in the order in which they will appear on the ballots.

For further information on MTA nominations and elections, please contact Maureen Noyes of the MTA Division of Governance and Administration by calling 617.878.8305, e-mailing mnoyes@massteacher.org or faxing inquiries to 617.742.7046.

Diana Marcus — Burlington Educators' Association

It has been an honor to represent you as NEA Director for the past three years. I respectfully ask for your vote to return to Washington as your voice at the NEA for one more term.

During my career, I have taught at the preschool, elementary and graduate school levels and seen the need for greater support of education professionals in all sectors of our educational system. As local president, I know the battles we face to protect our bargaining rights and health insurance, retire with financial stability and be evaluated fairly. As the mother of two young adults,



Diana Marcus

one in high school and one at UMass, I am also keenly aware of the need for excellent and affordable higher education for every student.

Over the past three years as your NEA Director, I have lobbied Congress on a wide range of issues including reduced standardized testing, access to early childhood education, college affordability, charter school accountability, immigration reform, voting rights, school safety and increasing the minimum wage to improve the lives of students, teachers and our communities. Massachusetts has been at the forefront of this work and our voice must be heard. The NEA must remain true to its mission and lead the way in advocating for legislative changes in education, social justice and the best in professional practice.

You can rely upon me to be your voice at the NEA and on Capitol Hill.

Experience:

- NEA Board member 2012-2015
- NEA Legislative Committee
- Local president, Burlington Educators' Association
- Instructional coach and evaluation support
- Elementary classroom teacher
- Special education teacher
- Former adjunct faculty
- MTA Resolutions Committee (chair)
- MTA GLBT Issues Committee (vice chair)
- MA Commission for LGBTQ Youth (MTA representative)
- NEA Resolutions Committee
- MTA Annual Meeting and NEA RA Delegate past nine years
- Emerging Leaders alumna
- Education policy fellow

Ryan Hoyt — Waltham Educators Association

Union bashing. Unfunded mandates. Data overload. Test fatigue.

Sound familiar? So much of our frustration can be traced back to the tip of Arne Duncan's pen. Educators who have spent their careers dedicated to the craft of teaching are being silenced by corporate education reform, conservative think tanks and an education secretary who panders to billionaires. This is wrong.



Ryan Hoyt

In July at the NEA RA in Denver, delegates overwhelmingly voted to have our NEA President ask the secretary of education to tender his resignation; I was one of those delegates.

As NEA Director, I will impress upon our congressional leaders just how frustrated educators are here in Massachusetts. They will see firsthand just how passionate I am about public education and unionism.

In my 14 years of teaching, I've been a building representative, membership chair, vice president, and now co-president of the Waltham Educators Association. I've served two terms on the MTA Board of Directors and MTA Benefits Board, chaired both the New Member and Professional Development Committees, and

attended the MTA Annual Meeting and NEA RA a combined 20 times.

As an activist, I've enthusiastically campaigned for MTA-recommended candidates in every election since 2004. I meet with state senators and representatives, rally on the State House steps and at city halls and roll up my sleeves to hold signs and phone bank.

Union activism at the state and local levels makes me a better teacher, and I am proud of the work I do to improve our profession for my members and my students. You have two votes to cast in this election; please consider me for one of them. In Washington, I promise to be a voice of strength and reason for you and all of our union members.

Thank you.

MTA preconvention meetings set for March and April

Regional preconvention meetings have been set for elected delegates to the 2015 MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates. 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 begin at 4:30 p.m.

The following is a list of locations and dates for the 2015 preconventions:

■ Tuesday, March 31: Central Region, Best Western Royal Plaza, Marlborough.

■ Wednesday, April 1: Northeast/Metro Region, Crowne Plaza, Woburn.

■ Thursday, April 2: Western Region, Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, Northampton.

■ Tuesday, April 7: Southeast Region, Holiday Inn, Taunton.

■ Wednesday, April 8: Cape Cod and Islands Region, Cape Codder Resort, Hyannis.

The Annual Meeting of Delegates will be held May 8 and 9 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston.

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

Statements by candidates for NEA Director seats

Bonnie Page — Malden Education Association

My name is Bonnie Page and I am asking for your vote to continue to represent you as one of your NEA Directors.

I am a teacher in Malden and have represented all educators in my local as vice president; negotiations, bylaws and grievance chair; and as a building representative. Additionally, I



Bonnie Page

have served on the MTA Board of Directors for 13 years, including one year as interim NEA Director; as an MTA Annual Meeting delegate for 25 years; and as a delegate to the NEA RA for 19 years.

I have also served on MTA committees, including the MTA Benefits Board, the Committee to Evaluate the Executive Director-Treasurer, the Workplace Equity Committee, the Professional Ethics Committee and the Human Relations Committee.

MTA needs NEA Directors who will be out in front of all the issues our members encounter, such as pension reform, stopping the testing mania and Common Core implementation. ESPs need a

fair wage and good benefits. From PreK to higher education, your concerns will be heard.

I firmly believe in the impact that we can have as a union on the quality of the professional lives of our members and the education of our students. Communication and getting more of us involved are vital to accomplishing this.

I have the experience and passion that are needed to work for you at the national level. I am excited to have the opportunity to continue to serve you, the members, on a national level. I would appreciate your vote.

Thank you.

Max Page — Massachusetts Society of Professors-Amherst

I am running for NEA Director to amplify the voices of MTA members and bring the progressive vision of public education promoted by Barbara Madeloni and the new MTA leadership to our national union.

The model we are pursuing here in Massachusetts — reaching out to members in forums across the state, setting an ambitious legislative agenda, being willing



Max Page

to fight on principle against punitive licensure proposals, high-stakes testing and the expansion of charter schools — deserves a place at the NEA table. I want to be part of the effort to reclaim public education, from preK through higher education, from those who want to privatize our schools, take away union rights and narrow the purposes of education.

I grew up in Amherst and attended the very same public schools my three children now attend. My father taught at UMass and my mother was a public elementary school principal in South Hadley. I am now a professor of architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and have spent the last 13 years as an MTA member, working passionately for our public colleges and universities.

I am a former president of the Massachusetts Society of Professors (the 1,400-member chapter of faculty and librarians at UMass Amherst), a former MTA Executive Committee member and current vice chair of the Government Relations Committee, which has developed our union's progressive legislative agenda for the new legislative term.

In the face of some daunting challenges, I see exciting opportunities. We have a chance and an obligation, in the MTA and in the NEA, to articulate exactly what kind of public schools, colleges and universities our students deserve. Massachusetts has always led the country in public education. I am eager to help us lead again.

Union leaders urge GIC to seek full funding and stability

By Scott McLennan

MTA President Barbara Madeloni and local association leaders testified at the annual Group Insurance Commission public hearing on Feb. 4, arguing against proposed changes in GIC health insurance offerings that could significantly raise costs and substantially alter coverage available to public employees.

Facing a shortfall of \$160 million to \$190 million for the current operating year and the need to address long-term funding stability, the GIC was preparing to choose from options including plan design changes and higher employee contributions as this issue of *MTA Today* went to press.

The options under consideration ranged from plan design changes that would increase members' premiums and other out-of-pocket expenses to a conversion of two Preferred Provider Organization plans to Point-of-Service plans. Plan design changes could have far-reaching effects on all public employees — even those who do not participate in GIC plans — because municipalities may use GIC offerings as benchmarks for their own plans.

Madeloni testified that the GIC's budget problems stem from a chronic lack of funding by the state Legislature, and she cautioned the commission against finding a financial remedy by



At a public hearing on Feb. 4, Lexington Education Association President Phyllis Neufeld told members of the GIC that her members are feeling burdened by current costs. "Your changes would put such pressure on both active and retired members that health care might be out of their reach," she said. "Please don't let this happen."

Photo by Scott McLennan

imposing higher costs on the public employees and retirees receiving their health insurance through the GIC.

"Public employees should not be penalized as a result of this lack of funds," Madeloni said.

Lexington Education Association President Phyllis Neufeld relayed several stories from her members, detailing the difficulties many of them are already experiencing in paying for health care. Saying that her members feel "betrayed" by the GIC, Neufeld told the commissioners, "Your changes would put such pressure on both active

and retired members that health care might be out of their reach. Please don't let this happen."

Arlington Education Association President Linda Hanson, Quincy Education Association President Allison Cox and Somerville Teachers Association President Jackie Lawrence also testified. They said their communities entered the GIC because of the stability it promised, but the changes proposed would undermine that stability.

For updates on the GIC situation, please visit massteacher.org/gic.

A Hero Among Us



Photos courtesy of Boston Celtics

MTA Friend of Education and longtime activist Louise Gaskins got a standing ovation at the TD Garden when she was named a Boston Celtics Hero Among Us on New Year's Eve. In photo at left, she shares a happy moment with Celtics guard Marcus Smart, left, and the Sacramento Kings' DeMarcus Cousins. At right, Gaskins basks in the crowd's applause. Among those cheering were more than 100 MTA members who attended the game in her honor. The program honors individuals who have had a significant impact on the lives of others.

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Foundation budgets fail to cover key needs

By Scott McLennan

Outdated computers, the cost of charter schools and parents having to provide basic essentials such as toilet paper for students are just a few of the items that have been brought to the attention of the Foundation Budget Review Commission during public hearings being held across the Commonwealth.

The commission is charged with reviewing the way foundation budgets are calculated and making recommendations for any necessary changes.

Established by the Education Reform Act of 1993, foundation budgets spell out how much money is required in each district to provide students with an adequate education. The budget formula shapes state aid to cities and towns for education spending.

The MTA advocated for reviving the Foundation Budget Review Commission because the funding formula has not had a thorough review since its creation. The Legislature agreed to the proposal in the last session.

Testimony presented by educators, parents, students, school administrators and municipal officials indicates that the current formula is falling far short of meeting student needs. Educators called attention to myriad concerns, ranging from access to technology and library services to the lack of resources available for meeting students' social and emotional needs. One educator said the utter lack of resources in her district made asking parents to provide toilet paper for the schools a routine request.

As members of the review commission have heard from representatives of small rural districts, large urban ones and everything in between, the theme has been consistent: More state funding is necessary to create the schools that children deserve.

"I am glad educators are attending the hearings and telling their stories," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni, who holds a seat on the 21-member commission. "The commission must be made aware of what our teachers and school staffs need to provide the best education possible for all children.

"There also needs to be a discussion about how the current standardized testing regimen that students face further takes away resources that should go



Photo by Scott McLennan

Julie Spencer-Robinson, president of the Northampton Association of School Employees, told the Foundation Budget Review Commission that "the level of competition now and the way schools are funded impoverish the traditional public schools."

toward providing a deeper, richer educational experience for students," Madeloni added.

Springfield Education Association President Tim Collins testified at one hearing about the critical need for social and emotional support services for students.

"At our Level 4 schools, with grants, we could get services for children. But every child deserves that kind of support," Collins said. "This is the civil rights fight of our time."

Several educators urged the commission, chaired by Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz (D-Boston) and Representative Alice Peisch (D-Wellesley), to expand the scope of foundation budget allocations to include the impact that charter schools have on community schools.

Julie Spencer-Robinson, president of the Northampton Association of School Employees, said community schools often have students who require more resources to educate than do charter schools, which compete for the same public funds. To meet those needs, she said, traditional public schools have been forced to cut back in other areas, which then prompts families to seek other schools for their children.

"I can appreciate that a family would leave a school if we can't provide the enrichment they are looking for. But the level of competition now and the way schools are funded impoverish the traditional public schools," she said.

While municipal officials' testimony has tended to focus on the burdens of insurance and transportation costs on their districts, educators have steered the discussion back to the schools themselves. Nancy Stenberg, a library/media specialist at Frontier Regional School in South Deerfield, simply detailed all of the ways she helps her students meet their academic goals — from teaching them how to reset computer passwords to conducting proper research.

"I urge you, please ensure that all schools have a library and librarians they deserve," she said when she addressed the commission.

Jeromie Whalen, who teaches technology at Northampton High School, told the commission about the amount of free software he has access to from federal education programs. "But we can't install any of it because our machines are so outdated," he said.

Madeloni is encouraging MTA members to keep bringing their stories to the commission.

"The commission needs to know the reality of educating the whole child and recognize the shortfalls of current budgeting assumptions," she said.

The Foundation Budget Review Commission will hold its final hearing on March 9 in Boston. The specific location has not been announced.

Updates will be available on the MTA website, www.massteacher.org. MTA members can also submit testimony to the commission via e-mail by sending it to jennie.williamson@mahouse.gov.

MTA adopts ambitious agenda for new legislative session

Continued from Page 15

■ "An Act creating a living wage for employees and contracted employees of the Commonwealth," sponsored by Representative Dave Rogers (D-Cambridge). The bill creates a living wage of \$15 per hour for employees, contractors and subcontractors of the Commonwealth. It includes indexing for inflation and enforcement provisions based on both the Massachusetts minimum wage and Boston's living wage ordinance.

■ "An Act relative to increasing the COLA base," sponsored by Representative Garballey. The bill increases the current base used to calculate the

annual cost-of-living adjustment for retirees in the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System and the Massachusetts State Employees' Retirement System, from 3 percent of \$13,000 to 3 percent of \$16,000.

The agenda also calls for the MTA to support legislation leading to a graduated income tax.

Of the 43 states that have a personal income tax, Massachusetts is one of seven with a flat rate. The rate now stands at 5.15 percent.

The Tax Fairness Commission, a bipartisan panel established by the Legislature in 2013 to analyze a broad array of state tax laws, concluded that the overall tax system in Massachusetts is

regressive, meaning that middle- and low-income taxpayers pay a larger share of their income in taxes than do high-income taxpayers.

The commission recommended instituting the graduated tax through a constitutional amendment. Such a change would require two consecutive constitutional conventions and voter approval at the polls.

Working with partners in the State House and the community, the MTA is supporting this effort, as well as individual pieces of legislation that address inequitable taxation and the need for increased resources.

MTA charity helps educators meet students' needs

By Scott McLennan

"I have been freezing in my flip-flops for a month. Thank you for the boots." A Braintree student wrote this note to the school district's Mass Child coordinator, and it sums up why The Massachusetts Child charitable program exists.

Educators see the needs of their students firsthand. In 1996, the MTA launched The Massachusetts Child as a way for members to meet some of students' needs by reimbursing preK-12 locals for the purchase of items that will help students succeed in school. The program grew to include a special winter clothing grant, and last year a school supply grant was added.

"The Mass Child program grows more popular every year," said Christine Mulroney, president of the charity. "It doesn't matter where you teach; there are always kids and families struggling."

Since August, The Mass Child has assisted more than 50 locals whose members have helped their students with warm winter clothing and by providing appropriate school supplies and the ability for students to take part in field trips.

Kelley Knight, an outreach social worker in the Northampton Public Schools, worked with Mass Child for the first time this school year.

"The Mass Child program grows more popular every year," said Christine Mulroney, president of the charity. "It doesn't matter where you teach; there are always kids and families struggling."

"A number of our students did not have winter clothing, and we were able to help with that. Additionally, our middle school kids all use three-inch binders for their classes," Knight said. "A number of our students are not able to invest in school supplies, so we have been able to provide that. These students no longer look different and are able to fit in."

Most preK-12 locals can receive up to \$1,000 per year in reimbursements. Locals with more than 500 members are eligible for \$2 per member. In addition, each local can apply for \$250 for school supplies in the fall and \$300 for winter clothing during the cold months.

Many districts taking advantage of Mass Child reimbursements assign a coordinator who works with fellow educators in the local to identify students' needs.

The president of the local must approve purchases, which are made using the local's funds. The local then sends receipts and reimbursement forms to The Mass Child Board. Information about the types of items covered, along with reimbursement

forms for expenditures, can be found at massteacher.org/masschild.

The Massachusetts Child is funded completely by donations, which may be made at any time.

"It's gratifying when a local sends in contributions to honor a member who is retiring or in memory of a member who has passed away," Mulroney said. "It's like we become a way for that teacher's good work to carry on."

Please mail checks to The Massachusetts Child, MTA Division of Communications, 20 Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108.



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Reading celebration 'tried and true' in Truro

By Jean Conley

When it comes to preparing for Read Across America Day, Stacey Klimkosky starts early and sticks to tradition.

The media specialist at Truro Central School has been coordinating the day dedicated to reading for about 10 years. This year, Read Across America Day will be held on March 2.

Klimkosky says staff members at the preK-grade 6 school have tried different Dr. Seuss-themed events over the years, "but there are a few traditions that are tried and true."

As early preparation for the special day, Klimkosky sponsors a book fair each September during Truro Treasures, an annual town fair. With the money made at the fair, Klimkosky buys books.

On the day that the school celebrates Read Across America Day with its 128 students, she said, "We start with a 'Green Eggs and Ham' breakfast." School chef Warren Falkenburg and his assistant, Susie Roderick, are Seuss fans themselves,



Photo courtesy of Stacey Klimkosky

Spanish teacher Alison Waldo, left, and media specialist Stacey Klimkosky used "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish" as their headgear theme for last year's Read Across America Day festivities.

Klimkosky said, so "there is always some kind of Seuss-related display

for the students to look at — such as *really* green eggs, ham and fixings."

The Truro Education and Enrichment Alliance, a parents' group, sponsors a free breakfast at the school that is open to any student. Younger siblings not yet old enough to attend school are also invited, and the Truro Education Association sponsors breakfast for any adult who chooses to join in.

As the children eat, Klimkosky said, the children's librarian at the Truro Public Library "comes and dresses as our Cat in the Hat, reading to students." In the past, students have also been greeted at the bus by Seuss characters Thing 1 and Thing 2.

The idea for Read Across America was hatched at the National Education Association in 1997. The NEA chose the birthday of Theodor Seuss Geisel — known the world over as Dr. Seuss — as the date on which to center events.

The day, which is marked with events across the state and the country, focuses attention on how important it is to motivate children to read in addition to helping them master basic skills.

At Truro Central School, the celebration continues after breakfast with students, faculty and staff donning "all kinds of fun hats," Klimkosky said.

"Some of the hats are handmade and theme-based," she added. "Many of the teachers really get into this tradition."

At lunch, the cafeteria workers serve up a "Seuss-tacular" lunch. "The entrée, sides and dessert are all taken from a Seuss book or character," Klimkosky said.

Finally, all of the students at the school are given the gift of a brand new book, chosen just for them, from the profits made at the fair in September.

Suggestions, resources and reading lists are available on the NEA website, www.nea.org, under "Grants and Events." The site features a downloadable poster; the Read Across America song, oath and poem; and a link to the Dr. Seuss "Cat-a-log," where educators can buy red-and-white-striped hats as well as other items. The Read Across America Facebook fan page, www.facebook.com/neareadacrossamerica, offers educators more stories and ideas on how the day can spark a love of reading.

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Reaching out to new members



Photos by Beth Bejoian

Members attending the MTA's Just for New Teachers conference took time between workshops to peruse materials on programs and discounts offered by MTA Benefits. Above at far left, Marketing Assistant Carolyn Cassiani explains how MTAB helps members and their families save money. In photo at right, New Member Committee and MTA Board member Maryann Ziemba, left, enjoys a break with MTA Benefits President Maryann Robinson. The New Member Committee sponsored the conference, which was held on Dec. 5 in Norwood.

Speakers at CPS event blast 'testocracy'

By Laura Barrett

Seattle teacher Jesse Hagopian told a story about a public official telling Hagopian's 5-year-old child and others enrolled in a new two-way bilingual education program that they were fortunate to be at that school because "it will help you compete in the global marketplace." Is that really what 5-year-olds are thinking about? And is it really the main purpose of a public school education?

For Hagopian, leader of a successful test boycott at Seattle's Garfield High School and editor of the new book "More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing," the story underscored the need for more public discussion about the real purpose of public schools.

If the goal is to produce workers who can do "rote jobs for multinational corporations," then test-driven instruction may be a good choice, he said. But if it is to help students become thoughtful, compassionate and productive citizens capable of addressing the huge challenges facing the world today, then the focus should be on collaboration, discovery and problem-solving.

The current "testocracy," Hagopian said, "is killing creativity and teaching our kids that making a mistake is a horrible transgression."

Hagopian was speaking to more than 100 participants in an event sponsored by Citizens for Public Schools at the First Parish Church in Cambridge on Dec. 4. He was joined by MTA President Barbara Madeloni, FairTest Director Monty Neill, early childhood educator, author and activist Nancy Carlsson-Paige, and Rhode Island student activist Tim Shea.

Madeloni said that judging students and their teachers by students' scores on standardized tests is "narrowing our idea of what it means to be human." She said that low-income children of color are the main victims of the current testing and accountability juggernaut.

"Why is it black and brown children whose schools are being shut down?" she asked.

Neill, the longtime director of the Boston-based National Center for Fair & Open Testing — better known as FairTest — said the good news is that there is a real national backlash against the excessive focus on testing. Over the past two years, he said, seven states have voted to end or delay their high school graduation tests, and many others are cutting back on the use of tests to determine grade promotion.

FairTest and CPS are helping to advance that movement in Massachusetts through an initiative dubbed "less testing, more teaching." The MTA is engaged in similar efforts, including reaching out to members on this issue.

Carlsson-Paige, a noted early childhood education advocate from Cambridge, said that educators have long known what research proves: that young children learn best in a "play-based" environment. She called new assessments for young children "bizarre."



Photo by Laura Barrett

Jesse Hagopian, a high school history teacher who led a successful test boycott in Seattle, addressed an audience of more than 100 people in Cambridge on Dec. 4. The "testocracy" that is now in place in public schools, Hagopian said, "is killing creativity and teaching our kids that making a mistake is a horrible transgression."

MTA President Barbara Madeloni said that judging students and their teachers by students' scores on standardized tests is "narrowing our idea of what it means to be human." She said that low-income children of color are the main victims of the current testing and accountability juggernaut.

Carlsson-Paige was highly critical of the authors of the Common Core State Standards for failing to take input from early childhood educators. As a result of that failure, she said, they ended up with some standards that are "wildly developmentally inappropriate."

She and other teachers said that the focus on accountability at all grade levels "is a diversion

from the real issues of income inequality and poverty," which are the main drivers of low student performance.

Shea, now a freshman at Harvard, described how he and other members of the Providence Student Union organized against a state plan to institute a high school graduation test. Shea said that an estimated 70 percent of students at his urban high school were expected to fail the test.

In one of several creative actions, the students dressed as zombies and marched on the state Education Department to protest the "zombification" of their education. In another, students invited 50 volunteers — including state legislators, attorneys and government officials — to take the graduation test. Sixty percent of them failed.

In the end, the students and their allies were able to persuade the Rhode Island General Assembly to adopt a three-year moratorium on the graduation test requirement.

Several of the speakers talked about how gratifying it is to work with others to defend the kind of education they support.

Too often, said Madeloni, teachers experience "a real sense of aloneness in the struggle." The goal, she said, is to build a movement. "In solidarity, there is a sense of hope and strength and community and joy," she said.



Classical cartoons

Radio station 99.5 WCRB — which is owned and operated by WGBH — presented its annual Classical Cartoon Festival on Nov. 1, giving children and others a chance to enjoy their favorite Warner Bros. fare. The cartoons, set to classical music, were presented on a large screen in Boston's Symphony Hall. Morning host Laura Carlo read "Hello, Wally!" to the audience as Red Sox mascot Wally the Green Monster acted out scenes from the book. The MTA is a sponsor of the family-friendly event, which is designed to get kids interested in classical music.

Photo by Bob Duffy

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ESPs gather to build bargaining skills

By Bob Duffy

More than 100 education support professionals gathered in mid-November for an ESP Bargaining Summit that helped them build their negotiating skills and allowed them to share approaches, tools and tactics.

The MTA members who attended the event in Devens said it was key to preparing for upcoming bargaining sessions.

Nancy Burke, a paraprofessional at Haverhill High School and a member of the Haverhill Education Association, said that attending the summit “made me realize that everyone is facing similar challenges.”

Hearing about the actual bargaining experiences of locals around the state was among the highlights.

“This conference has given me a number of ideas,” Burke said.

Summit participants discussed organizing and issues specific to ESPs. They took part in workshops



Photos by Bob Duffy

Julia Hammond Cradle of the Newton Teachers Association, at left in left photo, and Deborah Heath of the Pembroke Teachers Association collaborate during a workshop. Above, Donna Beeler of the Haverhill Education Association takes notes during a brainstorming session.

on activities during contract struggles, interest-based bargaining and the laws that relate to collective bargaining.

They also participated in an interactive session that compared similar provisions of different

contracts and offered a primer on the use of MTA’s contract database.

The free bargaining summit, to which all MTA ESPs were invited, was sponsored by MTA’s Education Support Professionals Committee. The committee focuses on offering high-quality professional development events and conferences geared specifically to ESPs.

Participants discussed the importance of protecting and strengthening collective bargaining agreements, as well as the benefits of educating fellow members on the challenges that they and their local associations face.

Deborah Heath, a paraprofessional at North Pembroke Elementary School and a member of the Pembroke Teachers Association, said she found the summit “eye-opening.”

“Our union will be negotiating at the end of this school year,” she said, “and the information I obtained from union members in other districts will be very beneficial at the table.”

Heath was already looking forward to participating in more professional development opportunities at the annual MTA ESP Conference, which will be held April 10 and 11 at the Sea Crest Beach Hotel in Falmouth.

Registration for the conference, which typically attracts several hundred participants, closes on March 27.

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Obituaries

Margaret M. Cavanaugh, 96, of Holyoke. Was a school adjustment counselor in the Holyoke school system for many years, retiring in 1980. Sept. 28.

Elizabeth G. Chavier, 87, of Fairhaven. Taught in the New Bedford school system for many years. Dec. 20.

Frances Cooper-Berry of Cambridge. A lead teacher in the induction program for the Cambridge Public Schools before her retirement, she served her union and fellow educators in several capacities and was the MTA's Legislative and Political Action Team coordinator in the 2nd Middlesex Senate District. Oct. 22.

Anne T. Donovan, 74, of Quincy. Had served as an insurance manager for MTA Benefits. Nov. 25.

Anthony V. Freitas, 84, of Dartmouth. Had been an educator in the New Bedford school system. Oct. 4.

Caroline Giamattei, 91, of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., formerly of Winchester and Stoneham. Taught in the Winchester Public Schools before retiring. Nov. 4.

Dorothy E. Graham, 88, of Westborough. Taught fourth and fifth grade for 35 years in the Westborough Public Schools, retiring in 1985. Oct. 8.

Dr. Padmanabh Harihar, 84, of Lowell. Taught at the University of Massachusetts Lowell for 43 years. Oct. 31.

Rosemarie E. Langley, 78, of Cape Coral, Fla., formerly of Quincy. Was an elementary school teacher in the Brockton school system for 40 years. Oct. 16.

Marianne Minns, 74, of Worcester. Was a reading specialist and teacher in the Worcester Public Schools; worked for many years at the Midland Street School. Sept. 23.

Marie L. Reba, 70, of Dighton, formerly of Fall River. Was an educator in the Fall River school system for 33 years, retiring in 1999. Nov. 13.

Jane M. Russell, 66, of Plymouth. Taught in the Plymouth school system for 18 years. Was a past president of the Education Association of Plymouth & Carver and served on the MTA Board of Directors for six years. Oct. 24.

Marion E. Snyder, 82, of West-

field. Taught in Northampton for three years and in Westfield for 31 years. Oct. 31.

Patricia M. Stewart, 73, of Woburn. Was an English teacher at Woburn High School for 45 years. Oct. 23.

Jean Stonehouse, 69, of South Weymouth. Was a history professor at Bridgewater State University for more than 40 years. Served as president of the Massachusetts State College

Association's Bridgewater chapter. Nov. 24.

Ann R. Talbot, 79, of Holliston. Taught for four decades, most of that time in the Holliston Public Schools. Sept. 30.

Sheila N. Walsh, 79, of Dracut. Was a teacher in the Tewksbury Public Schools for more than 30 years and had served as president of the Tewksbury Teachers Association. Dec. 7.

Anne E. Wojtkowski, 79, of Pittsfield. A professor of engineering and mathematics at Berkshire Community College for 35 years, she initiated a sex bias suit against BCC that was joined by the MTA. The settlement was a major step nationally in the battle for equal treatment in the workplace. Was Pittsfield's first woman mayor (1988-1992) and a School Committee member. Oct. 13.

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Assessments draw negative reactions from members

Continued from Page 9

The BEA also bargained a release day for teachers to enter the data. In addition, district leaders agreed to communicate concerns to state education officials.

The district was not prepared to jettison TS GOLD, however, because that would mean losing \$600,000 in state Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grant money. Brockton relies on those funds to pay the salaries of the district's kindergarten paraprofessionals. Although the MKEA money doesn't pay for any school staff salaries directly, tying the assessment to the state grant program is an offer many cash-strapped districts feel they can't refuse.

At least one has, however.

After teachers in Amherst let school officials know how they felt about the MKEA, the district administration did an analysis and presented findings to the School Committee that included the following quotes from teachers:

- "GOLD does not inform my practice at all."
- "It has taken me out of the classroom more often than is good for kids."
- "It makes me not want to teach kindergarten."

The School Committee voted in November to support the district's recommendation to turn down Quality Full-Day Kindergarten funds if they continue to be tied to the assessment requirement.

'I have a child going into kindergarten next fall, and as a parent I am upset about this. I don't want all of this assessing to be interfering with his learning.'

— Brockton teacher DeeAnndra Hurte-Jones



Despite the objections that many have expressed, some educators like TS GOLD.

"I've heard from teachers who feel overwhelmed with the tool, but it works for me," said Deanna Rosa, a Marlborough teacher in her third year. "I got over the computer part of it quickly. A lot of teachers use the expression, 'I know my kids already.' I know my kids, too, but TS GOLD helps me to look at the objectives and see where my kids are falling relative to the expectations.

"It's a lot of work — there's no doubt about it," she acknowledged.

Rosa carries around a clipboard to take notes, and she focuses on a number of objectives for two students each day. She then carves out time from

her prep period, her lunch period and at the end of the day, spending a total of 20 to 30 minutes a day — or up to 90 hours a year — entering data into the system. She believes it is worth the effort.

That's the minority view, however, based on the overwhelmingly negative reaction of teachers speaking out at MTA forums and other venues.

Bonnie Page, a Malden kindergarten teacher and member of the MTA Board of Directors, minces no words in describing how she feels about TS GOLD.

"It's a ridiculous waste of time," Page said. "We don't find the information useful. It's certainly not going to parents. As far as I can tell, it's just going to the stratosphere."

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For further information, please e-mail Mary Gilgallon, director of the Division of Governance and Administration, at mgilgallon@massteacher.org.

NOMINATIONS ARE DUE MARCH 27
Forms are available at massteacher.org/hcr

Workshop leader advises new teachers to be open to diverse partnerships

Continued from Page 16

see themselves and how they see others.

Stubblefield-Tave, a principal in the Center for Culturally Fluent Leadership, emphasized how broad the idea of diversity really is.

“If you are going to change the face of education, you can’t do it alone. You’ll need partnerships with folks who sometimes appear to be opponents. You’ll always need to be asking yourself about what you know and do not know about other groups,” he said.

Stubblefield-Tave also led a workshop that further explored ways to increase self-awareness and awareness of others’ points of view. The well-attended workshop, “The Skin That We Speak,” served as a bridge event linking the Just for New Teachers conference to the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee’s annual conference, which began in the same location on Dec. 5 and continued through Dec. 6.

Summing up their conference, the new teachers said they were heartened

“I got a real sense of solidarity coming here. We are all in similar situations,” said Kristen Sandstrom, a first-year teacher in Arlington.

to find as much camaraderie as professional development.

“I got a real sense of solidarity coming here. We are all in similar situations,” said Kristen Sandstrom, a first-year teacher in Arlington.

Members of the Student Education Association of Massachusetts also found the conference to be a valuable experience.

“Everyone here is just so positive about teaching,” said Nicole Akin, who is studying education at Bridgewater State University. “It’s very encouraging.”

More photos from the Just for New Teachers conference can be viewed at www.flickr.com/mtacommunications.

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The MTA provides individual 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, except in the Boston office, which is staffed during the summer and school vacations.***

AUBURN — Louise Gaskins: first Saturday (by appointment only) and second Saturday 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 4 p.m., MTA, 20 Ashburton Place, Boston; 617.878.8240 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 (by appointment only), 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.

FITCHBURG — Robert Zbikowski: second Saturday of each month (by appointment only), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Fitchburg Teachers Association office, 21 Culley St., Fitchburg; 978.790.8864, or at home, 978.297.0123; e-mail: zibstar702@verizon.net.

HOLYOKE — Ron Lech: 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, 413.893.9173.

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 — Edward Nelson: third Saturday of each month (walk in), 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 756 Orchard Street, third floor, Raynham; 508.822.5371, or at home, 774.239.7823.

HIGHER EDUCATION AT-LARGE — Edward McCourt, Wellesley; 781.325.2553; e-mail: emccourt.mccc@gmail.com (by appointment only).

Note: If your association would like to schedule 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 consultants do not have records of your service, so members are advised to bring that information along to meetings.



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MTA sells Boston HQ, plans move to Quincy

The MTA has sold its longtime Beacon Hill headquarters and is planning to move to Quincy in late 2015.

The current 48,580-square-foot headquarters at 20 Ashburton Place in Boston was sold to Faros Properties, a commercial real estate firm, for \$9.85 million on Oct. 14.

Ashburton Place has been the headquarters for the association since 1968, when the MTA purchased land near the State House and constructed its current building.

Ann Clarke, the MTA's executive director-treasurer, said that during the deep recession that began in 2007, the Board of Directors had put on hold any decision regarding the building. But in the past couple of years, she said, the high level of investor activity in Boston's commercial real estate market reopened the possibility of a sale.

The Board voted in June 2014 to negotiate the sale, which includes a leaseback option for office space in the building.

The MTA has entered into a long-term lease agreement with the Campanelli Cos., a commercial real estate developer, for 46,382 square feet of office space at 2 Heritage Drive in Quincy.

The move will be completed by December, Clarke said.



The MTA will leave its current headquarters on Ashburton Place in Boston, pictured at left, and move to leased space in a building in Quincy, shown at right, by December.

Clarke said that the sale of the building allows the association "to improve the functionality of our

work space and to provide accessibility for more MTA members for meetings and training."

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TRAVEL/STUDY

SEMINAR: EDUCATION IN IRELAND (six graduate credits), July 2-25. National University of Ireland, Galway. Study aspects of the Irish education system and the history, literature and culture of Ireland. Write Barney Keenan, NUI coordinator, 127 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581; call 603.466.2972; or e-mail lilysky@ncia.net. The Trip of a Lifetime!

SUMMER 2015 STUDY AND TRAVEL INSTITUTE TO GERMANY! Join Salem State University faculty for a 12-day educational journey to Germany, including historical sites, tours and museums in Worms, Heidelberg, Augsburg,

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Higher ed advocacy day set for March 4

MTA members working in higher education are encouraged to join students and colleagues from the UMass system, state universities and community colleges for Public Higher Education Advocacy Day on March 4 to urge the Legislature and Governor Charlie Baker to sufficiently fund the Commonwealth's public colleges and universities.

Advocacy Day activities will begin at 10 a.m. at the State House.

"Our members have always played an active role in making sure state colleges and universities are properly funded to maintain quality and to maximize accessibility," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "After years of declining funding, public higher education saw two straight years of funding increases. That trend needs to continue just to make up for lost ground."

The event will feature student speakers. Students, faculty and staff will then have the opportunity to discuss higher education funding needs with state representatives and senators.

Additional details will be available soon on the MTA website, www.massteacher.org.

MTA Chorus seeks singers



Delegates who can carry a tune should consider joining the MTA Chorus, which will perform at the Annual Meeting on May 8 and 9.

The chorus performs before the Call to Order. It will also sing the national anthem and a selection written by Choral Director Bob Lague honoring MTA members who have passed away.

Rehearsals are tentatively scheduled for 7 p.m. on April 6, April 13 and May 4 at Lague's home in Woburn.

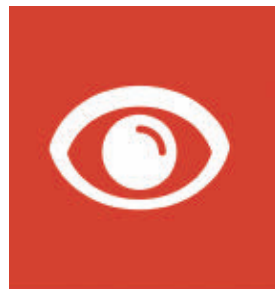
If you are interested, please contact Lague by e-mailing neaorgan@aol.com. Please indicate whether you are a new or returning chorus member, identify your district and state whether you sing soprano, alto, tenor or bass.



MTA hosts reception for newly elected legislators

Newly elected state legislators attended a reception with MTA leaders and staff on Jan. 20, shortly after the current session convened. The reception gave representatives and senators a chance to learn about the MTA's legislative agenda. State Senator Barbara L'Italien (D-Andover), a former state representative, left, spent some time talking to MTA President Barbara Madeloni during the event.

Photo by Scott McLennan



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Did you know?

- Every 10 minutes, 700 Americans suffer an injury requiring medical attention.
- The Social Security Administration estimates that three out of 10 Americans entering the workforce today will become disabled before they retire.
- Nearly 90% of disabilities aren't work-related and therefore don't qualify for workers' compensation benefits.¹
- More than 10% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 have a disability.²
- You may not have enough sick days to cover an extended absence from work.
- **Teachers in Massachusetts are not eligible to collect Social Security disability benefits.**



¹ National Safety Council, Injury Facts, 2008 edition.

² U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Social Characteristics in the United States, 2009.



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Massachusetts Teachers Association

MTA Today

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'Stand Up' event helps prevent bullying

By Bob Duffy

More than 400 middle and high school students from public schools across the Commonwealth gathered at Fenway Park on a blustery day in November to learn the best ways to prevent bullying in all of its forms — at school, online and in communities.

The fourth annual Stand Up to Bullying event, co-sponsored by the MTA, was designed to engage student leaders in spearheading bullying prevention efforts at their schools.

MTA Vice President Janet Anderson welcomed the participants and lauded them for the work they are doing to eliminate bullying.

“As a teacher and as a student, I’ve seen countless examples of bullying,” she said. “But even though I’ve seen a lot over the years, it still breaks my heart.”

Anderson, who has taught in the Taunton Public Schools since 1988, told the students that they are the ones most likely to know who is being bullied or who is being a bully.

“You are the ones who influence your fellow classmates, much more than adults do,” she added. “You have the power to turn your classmates away from a culture that protects bullies and toward a culture that accepts others just the way they are.”

Bullying is widespread. All told, 83 percent of girls and 79 percent of boys report experiencing some type of harassment during their school years, according to figures from the National Education Association.

During the first three years of the Stand Up initiative, large rallies drew thousands of students to daylong events filled with music, speeches and workshops intended to raise awareness and help address the problem. In 2014, Stand Up coalition members decided to develop a smaller, more focused event so that educator-led teams of students could take the action steps they learned at the Nov. 21 event right back to their schools and communities. At the end of the sessions, each of the students received certification as a peer leader in bullying prevention.



Photo by Bob Duffy

Meghan McCoy, program coordinator for Bridgewater State University’s Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, led a discussion for middle and high school students during the conference.

In 2014, Stand Up coalition members decided to develop a smaller, more focused event so that students could take the action steps they learned at the Nov. 21 event right back to their schools and communities. At the end of the sessions, each of the students received certification as a peer leader in bullying prevention.

Teams participated in breakout sessions facilitated by experts from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University and the Browne Center for Innovative

Learning at the University of New Hampshire, which also sponsored the event. The sessions focused on brainstorming, building skills and creating school-specific action plans.

“The focus is on not just talking about the issues and how they impact students — it’s about how to combat them,” said Meghan McCoy, program coordinator for the MARC. “It’s also about inspiring students and making them see that they have the power to make a difference.”

McCoy said that Stand Up and other anti-bullying initiatives have proven to be effective in raising awareness beyond the school level.

“We are approaching this as a community issue and a public health issue that can only be addressed if we all work together and do our part. Awareness, education, listening to the students and supporting student-led initiatives are all vital in our efforts.”

THE MTA Advantage

The MTA Advantage is a publication of MTA Benefits, a subsidiary of the Massachusetts Teachers Association

Making the right decisions before you buy a home

Second in a three-part series for first-time homebuyers

The first article in the series, "Start early to meet stricter lending standards," explains to first-time buyers how to get lower interest rates and determine the price and monthly payments they can afford. To read the article, visit www.mtabenefits.com/mortgage-program.htm.

"Many things drive the decision to buy a specific home," said Paul Gershkowitz, first vice president of retail lending for Berkshire Bank Home Lending, a partner in the MTA Mortgage Program. "Commuting distance, schools, lifestyle, tax rates and real estate values are some of the most important."

How can first-time buyers make the *right* decision – selecting the right home in the location they want at a price they can afford?

"The answer is to start early and develop a plan – before even looking for a house," said Gershkowitz. "Using a checklist as a guide, buyers should gather information on the marketplace by doing extensive online research, getting referrals from other homebuyers and talking to real estate professionals. The final step is narrowing down the search to a specific home type, locations and Realtor."

Gershkowitz noted, "According to a recent survey by Discover Home Loans, more and more buyers are using online technology to help with the homebuying process. It saves time and makes buyers more knowledgeable and comfortable with decisions they make."

continued on page 4



Photo by Scott McLennan

MTAB Annual Meeting

MTA Benefits welcomed three new members to its Board of Directors and thanked one outgoing director at MTAB's annual meeting on Nov. 13.

Standing from left to right are MTAB President Maryann Robinson; Directors Robert Travers Jr., Richard Liston and Gerard Ruane; and MTA Vice President Janet Anderson.

Seated from left to right are Directors Bonnie Page and Kathleen Meltsakos and outgoing Director Lynn Howard.

Not pictured are MTA President Barbara Madeloni, MTA Executive Director-Treasurer Ann Clarke and Director Donna Johnson.

Why buy disability insurance?

An injury can happen anytime, and disability is more common than you think.

Consider these statistics:

- ▶ Every 10 minutes, 700 Americans suffer an injury severe enough to require medical help.¹
- ▶ Three out of 10 workers between the ages of 35 and 65 will be out of work for three months or longer due to an accident or illness.²

You insure your house, your car, your health and your life. Why not insure your paycheck? After all, your paycheck allows you to live in your house, drive your car, maintain your well-being and take care of loved ones in the event of your death. What would you do if you didn't receive that income for an extended period of time? If you don't have enough sick days or money in savings to cover your full absence, you may be among the 75 percent of workers for whom missing work for three months or longer would create a financial hardship.³

If you're unable to work due to a covered illness or injury, disability insurance replaces a portion of your income. Covered circumstances might include a back disorder, cancer, hip replacement, broken leg or foot surgery, for example. The best time to get disability coverage is before you need it, when coverage is guaranteed and you are not required to answer medical questions. For MTA members, that time is **now through May 15**.

Are you aware that as a teacher in Massachusetts, you are not eligible to collect disability benefits from Social Security? Therefore, you may not have disability protection.

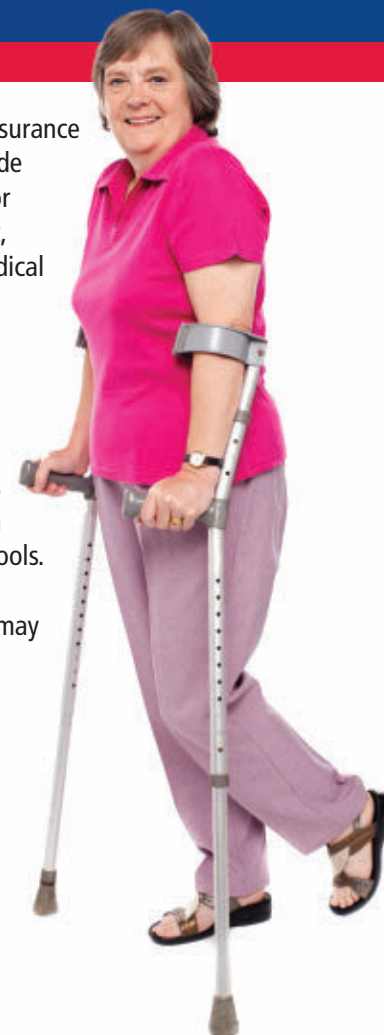
Enrollment counselors will be holding on-site meetings with members of participating locals during the open-enrollment period. Members in those districts should watch for an MTA benefit counselor in their schools. Local presidents who would like to learn how easy it is to offer the program to their members – either by bank draft or via payroll slot – may call Tom Colbert at 774.551.0013, ext.104.

Details of the plans can also be found at mtabenefits.com/disability-insurance.htm.

¹ National Safety Council, Injury Facts (2013)

² Society of Actuaries, Commissioners Individual Disability Table A (1985)

³ Consumer Federation of America and Unum, Employee Knowledge and Attitudes about Employer-Provided Disability Insurance (2012)



Have you planned for long-term care?

Planning for your long-term care needs is a very important personal and financial issue. It's particularly significant if you're approaching retirement. You've worked hard to retire comfortably, but long-term care expenses could quickly cost you everything you have.

Seventy percent of people turning 65 will need some type of long-term care during their lifetime. Moreover, women typically outlive men by about five years and are therefore more likely to live alone, increasing their need for outside assistance.

What is long-term care?

Long-term care can mean many things. The most common type is "custodial care." This includes services that are not typically medical. Rather, they include help with personal tasks or activities of daily living such as bathing and dressing. Other services include assistance with taking

medications and preparing meals. Though these services may seem minimal, they can be very expensive if you need to pay someone for them.

What does it cost?

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, the daily cost for homemaker services in Massachusetts in 2013 was \$144.18; an assisted-living, one-bedroom residence cost \$162.70 per day; and a semiprivate nursing home room cost \$365 per day. When you add it all up, you can see that your retirement nest egg could quickly be absorbed by these costs.

Limitations of Medicare and Medicaid

Medicare provides benefits only for "skilled care" in a nursing home. It does not cover the "custodial care" that you may receive at home or in a nursing

home. On the other hand, Medicaid will pay for both skilled and custodial care, but only in a nursing home. To become eligible for Medicaid, you must first exhaust nearly all of your assets.

The need to plan is real, and it is your responsibility. Only by planning can you protect your ability to choose how you will receive care and how best to pay for it. Purchasing a quality long-term care insurance policy is one way to protect yourself. The MTA offers a premium discount to members who purchase coverage through Mutual of Omaha. To learn more, call the specialists at Vista Financial Group at 774.551.0013, extension 104.



Editor: Elizabeth A. Bejoian
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No dues dollars are ever used to market MTA Benefits programs.

Tip Sheet

All discounts listed in the Tip Sheet can be found at mtabenefits.com.



Escape the cold with last-minute travel deals

Spring is approaching, and with it will come warmer weather. If you just can't wait another minute for it to arrive, however, we have the solution for you. Take advantage of these last-minute vacation deals – and bring some of that warm weather back with you.

Fun in the sun with TNT Powered by Funjet

Procrastination pays off every once in a while. That is certainly the case with last-minute deals from TNT Powered by Funjet. With destinations including Cancun, Jamaica, Cozumel, St. Croix, Puerto Vallarta and Los Cabos, a fun-in-the-sun vacation awaits you. Relax at a four- or five-star resort such as El Dorado Casitas Royale in Cancun, IBEROSTAR Rose Hall Suites in Jamaica or The

Buccaneer in St. Croix. Choose deals that include both flights and lodging at all-inclusive resorts or book hotel-only deals. The last-minute-deal destinations and prices are constantly changing and depend on your travel dates.

Sail away with CruisesOnly

If a cruise is your preferred vacation, be sure to check out the last-minute sailings offered by CruisesOnly. Cruise lengths range from three to eight nights, and destinations include the Bahamas, the Caribbean and more. With departures from more than 25 cities, the most difficult task will be choosing your destination! Many of the last-minute cruise deals include bonuses such as discounted shore excursions, onboard spending money or cash back.

Skiing discounts across New England

Maine. Head to Dayton and visit **Harris Farm Cross-Country Skiing**, where you can ski or rent snowshoes. MTA members and one adult family member receive \$2 off a cross-country trail or snowshoe pass. **Lost Valley Ski Area** in Auburn offers a \$5 discount on the regular price of an eight-hour lift ticket, good for MTA members and one family member. The discount is valid seven days a week and includes holidays and school vacations. Your MTA member card is required to receive the discount.

Massachusetts. Save \$5 on a full-day adult lift ticket for you and your family members at **Berkshire East Ski Area** in Charlemont. In Great Barrington, visit **Ski Butternut**, where members and their families receive savings of up to \$20. Most weekends and holidays are included. Receive a \$1 discount on cross-country skiing or a snowshoe pass at **Maple Corner Farm Cross-Country Ski Center** in Granville. Just over the border in New York, **Catamount Ski Area** offers a \$15 discount on lift tickets for members and their families. **Wachusett Mountain Ski Area** in Princeton offers members and their families \$5 off each lift ticket, as well as a \$10 discount on Learn to Turn programs. At the **Weston Ski Track**, your member card will get you a 10 percent discount, valid anytime, on the Trail Pass.

New Hampshire. Appreciate the beauty of the White Mountains as you ski **Bretton Woods**. Members and immediate family members receive a \$10 discount on adult any-day lift tickets. In Henniker, you'll find **Pats Peak**, with 18 trails and four lifts; you will enjoy a \$5 discount on weekend/holiday adult all-day all-mountain tickets and a \$10 discount on non-holiday weekdays. Experience the new Spear Mountain Quad at **Ragged Mountain Resort** in Danbury, where members and one immediate family member receive a 15 percent discount on lift tickets.

Vermont. Popular **Killington Resort/Pico Mountain** offers a \$69 one-day lift ticket valid any day during the season. Members may purchase discounted tickets for family members and friends. **Okemo Mountain** in Ludlow is the newest ski resort to offer MTA members a discount, with a \$76 adult one-day lift ticket. Additional discounts are available on young adult, junior, senior and super-senior lift tickets.



Tax season brings an increase in identity theft

Imagine sitting down to file your tax returns and finding out that someone else has filed – and collected a refund – as you. It happens more often than you may think. In fact, in 2011, the Internal Revenue Service paid \$5.2 billion in tax refunds that were from fraudulent filers. Are you protected from identity thieves? LifeLock, the leader in identity theft protection, helps protect your identity, especially when your information falls into the wrong hands. LifeLock offers three layers of protection: detecting potential threats, alerting you if something suspicious is discovered, and handling of your case every step of the way by a certified resolution specialist if you are victimized. As an MTA member, you will receive a 10 percent discount on membership and 30 days of free service.

Making the right decisions before you buy a home

continued from page 1

Developing a simple checklist

The following checklist can help buyers determine what type of home, commute and location they want and which Realtor to use. The websites noted in this article are some of the resources available to help in making decisions. Buyers should be aware, however, that the accuracy of information on these sites cannot be verified.



TYPE OF HOME

Condo

- Do you want someone else to handle maintenance and repairs?
- Are you prepared to pay monthly association fees?
- Will you have funds available for any special assessment costs?
- Do you want the amenities offered in a condo community?



If you answered "yes" above, a condo may be the right choice for you. Find out more about condo living and costs at www.allaboutcondoliving.com.

Single-family home

- Do you want privacy and space for a growing family?
- Are you willing to take care of maintenance and repairs?



You are among the majority who prefer single-family homes if you answered "yes" to these questions. Visit <http://revnyou.com/Multifamily-vs-Single-Family-Real-Estate-Investing/> for more information on the pros and cons of multifamily and single-family homes.

Multifamily home

- Do you want to offset some costs of homeownership by renting out part of the property?
- Are you prepared to cover total mortgage payments if some rent payments stop?

If you responded "yes" to the questions above, you are a candidate for a multifamily home.



COMMUTE

You may be willing to have a longer commute if you can get the right home at a lower price. But commuting farther comes with a price of its own.

- What will be the additional costs each year for gas, maintenance and car depreciation? How does this compare with the money you save with a lower-priced home?
- What about the wear and tear on you?

Determine driving costs with a commute calculator found on www.icommutesd.com/Commuters/Calculator.aspx.

LOCATION

Which of the following environments most appeals to you?

- City
- Town
- Suburb
- Country setting

Once you decide, select which areas within that environment are the best choices for you.

Websites such as www.Zillow.com and www.Trulia.com can help you with an overview of real estate in these areas, and www.City-Data.com provides geographical data and statistics on crime, cost of living, climate, hospitals, schools, air pollution and other quality-of-life issues.

REALTOR

Ask for referrals from people who have had good experiences with a local Realtor. As a rule, choose a buyer's broker – whose allegiance is to you – rather than a traditional broker, who represents the seller.

"Whatever you do, never let on that you've fallen in love with a home," said Gershkowitz. "You lose all your bargaining power."

For more information on the homebuying process and all the benefits you receive as an MTA member from Berkshire Bank, please contact 866.475.HOME (4663) or e-mail HomeLending@BerkshireBank.com.