

# **MTA Today**

*A publication of the Massachusetts Teachers Association  
Volume 46, No. 3/Winter 2016*



## **PUSHING BACK ON HIGH-STAKES TESTING**

*Movement gains traction in communities*



# “HONOR OUR OWN” AWARD NOMINATIONS



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

Completed nomination forms must be received by the MTA no later than June 3.

# MTA Today

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

## 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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Barbara Madeloni

### MTA Vice President

Janet Anderson

### Executive Director-Treasurer

Ann Clarke

### Publisher

Ann Clarke

### Communications Director/Editor

James Sacks

### Staff Assistant

Janice Morrissey

### Graphic Designer

Joshua Degregorio

## ON THE COVER

The push against high-stakes testing is gaining traction in communities throughout Massachusetts. In Sharon, educators and parents are on a mission to bring less testing and more learning to their schools. High school biology teacher Zach Snow, who is active in the campaign, is pictured with some of his Sharon teaching colleagues, including, clockwise from left, Sharon Teachers Association President Bernadette Murphy, Courtney Malcolm, Dorothy Macoritto, Tom Sanborn, Lori Leveckis, Kathleen Turner and Lori Ayotte. Coverage begins on Page 6. Meanwhile, the MTA is committing resources and working with a diverse group of educator, parent, student, labor and social justice organizations to fight attempts to lift the charter school cap. A story appears on Page 5.



Cover photo by Chris Christo  
Cover design by Joshua Degregorio

## Quote-Unquote

**“Instead of leaving us struggling to continue our good work by draining our budgets, support the efforts we make daily and do not raise the cap on charter schools.”**

— Beth Duplessis, Marlborough special education teacher, in testimony submitted to the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Education



The Massachusetts Teachers Association  
2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor  
Quincy, MA 02171-2119  
800.392.6175 or 617.878.8000  
FAX: 617.742.7046  
[www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)



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# Friedrichs may tarnish scales of justice

By Ira Fader

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in a controversial case that has the real potential and ideological purpose of harming public-sector labor unions. The case is *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, and it has gained national attention. It is also a watershed moment for the Supreme Court's legacy, for the continued strength of public-sector unions, and even for the outcome of the 2016 national and state elections. Why is this case so important?

The MTA is made up of more than 110,000 public education employees, active and retired. We represent you because public employees in Massachusetts, as in California and many other states, have the right to join a union in order to bargain collectively with their government employer. By joining a union, employees also gain firepower to publicly advocate in political, legal and media forums for their economic and professional interests. When a majority of employees in a bargaining unit vote for a union, the union they choose becomes the "exclusive representative" of all employees. Unions increase wages, protect health insurance and other benefits, and enforce the rights of everyone in the unit.

Some employees do not wish to join a union or pay for the costs of the representation from which they directly benefit. Indeed, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution forbids the state from passing a law that would compel such membership. The problem is that the union still has a legal duty to deliver services to the non-members who pay no dues at all. Non-payers are thus commonly referred to as "free riders" because they get the benefits of collective bargaining but share in none of the costs.

In 1977, the Supreme Court balanced the interests of the employee majority who chose unionization and the constitutional rights of objectors. In *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, the court held that non-members can be charged a "fair share" or "agency" fee to pay for the bargaining-related costs that the union incurs on behalf of everyone. The court expressly rejected the argument that an agency fee arrangement — authorized by state law — intruded upon a non-member's protected rights of association or speech. And it rejected the assertion that collective bargaining with a government employer is a political act that non-members cannot be compelled to subsidize.

Thus, *Abood* affirmed the right of a union to collect a fee from non-members for the costs of collective bargaining, though it required the union to remove the costs of non-bargaining political activity. The scales of justice were balanced: Non-members could be required to pay for the benefits of bargaining, but not for the union's political activities. To have held otherwise would have compelled "free ridership" and forced union members to subsidize the cost of the services that the non-payers are legally entitled to receive.

In 1977, the Supreme Court balanced the interests of the employee majority who chose unionization and the constitutional rights of objectors. ... The court expressly rejected the argument that an agency fee arrangement — authorized by state law — intruded upon a non-member's protected rights of association or speech.

Indeed, Justice Antonin Scalia later referred to non-paying non-members as "free riders whom the law requires the union to carry — indeed, requires the union to go *out of its way* to benefit, even at the expense of its other interests."

Over the next 35 years, the *Abood* decision became deeply embedded in constitutional jurisprudence. As recently as six years ago, a unanimous Supreme Court upheld *Abood's* "general First Amendment principle" permitting the imposition of a fair-share fee on non-members. It has been cited with unquestioning acceptance in hundreds of legal cases upholding fair-share agreements. It has been cited in cases involving bar association dues, university student activity fees, and other contexts. Tens of thousands of public-sector bargaining agreements contain agency fee provisions. *Abood* has been a bedrock principle of public-sector labor law for nearly four decades.

Now the *Friedrichs* plaintiffs seek to overturn *Abood*.

So what changed?

Several things changed. First, a right-wing public-interest law organization called the Center for Individual Rights emerged several years ago to battle affirmative action, voting rights, gay rights and public-sector unions. Its benefactors are a veritable *Who's Who* of right-wing foundations and billionaires who perceive public-sector unions as an obstacle to conservative domination of the political system. Think Koch brothers.

Second, in 2006 Justice Samuel Alito was appointed to the top court. He was a controversial selection who was seen as a far-right nominee from the Republican Party's reactionary wing. He survived a Democratic filibuster and was narrowly approved in the Senate. His views have hardened, and he has pulled the court sharply rightward.

Third, these developments came together in 2012 and 2014 when two public-sector labor cases came before the Supreme Court. Although the legitimacy of *Abood* was not raised in those cases, Justice Alito openly announced his antagonistic view of *Abood's* reasoning. In those cases, Alito all but solicited the legal attack that the Center

for Individual Rights was primed to bring. Cases ordinarily take years to arrive at the Supreme Court through the federal judicial system. Not *Friedrichs*, which sped through the lower courts without any evidentiary record to slow it down.

What did not change is the constitutional issue. The arguments now advanced in *Friedrichs* are the same as the arguments that were made in *Abood*. The court must answer once again the questions answered in *Abood*: whether an agency fee arrangement — authorized by state law — intrudes upon a non-member's protected rights of association or speech, as well as whether anything collectively bargained with the government is inherently within a political sphere so that non-members cannot be compelled to subsidize it.

The Supreme Court is supposed to be guided and governed by what is called *stare decisis*, a legal doctrine that counsels against overturning established legal precedent absent powerful reasons for doing so. *Stare decisis* provides stability and predictability in the law and minimizes judicial idiosyncrasy. Established constitutional pronouncements are not supposed to change with the composition of the court.

Many commentators in legal and media circles have suggested that *Friedrichs* is a companion to *Citizens United*, a politically charged decision that opened the floodgates for corporate cash into our national campaign and electoral system. Supporters of *Citizens United* like to note that union political contributions are the counterweight to corporate political contributions. Setting aside the obvious fact that union money is a fraction of the corporate money flushing through the system, *Friedrichs* threatens now to remove that political counterweight and with it a justification for *Citizens United's* result.

Are there five judges on the Supreme Court ready to overturn a carefully rendered 39-year-old decision of their own respected predecessors? Will they be willing to overturn countless lower-court decisions that have relied on *Abood*? Will they abandon their federalist principles to overturn the power of states to determine their own collective bargaining laws? Are they prepared to issue a decision that is nakedly and unabashedly political, right in the middle of the 2016 presidential campaign? (Bear in mind that the next president may have the opportunity to make several Supreme Court appointments.)

Some members of the court may despise public-sector unions and the role they play in the political and economic life of this country. One can only hope that the court's high regard for its own reputation and legacy will stop it not just from tipping the scales of justice but from tarnishing them beyond recognition.

*Ira Fader is the general counsel of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. For information on MTA legal services, please visit [massteacher.org/legal](http://massteacher.org/legal).*

# MTA members are stronger together

A member recently told me a story about reclaiming voice and power in her school. The principal had targeted certain teachers because their grade level had the lowest standardized test scores in the building. Taking teachers from that grade level aside one at a time, observing their classrooms and micromanaging their practice, she was creating fear, uncertainty and a sense of helplessness — until, that is, the educators started to share stories with each other about how they were being treated.

The conversation strengthened their connections and allowed them to develop a common understanding of what was being done to them. The next time the principal contacted them individually for meetings, they spoke to each other, made a plan and went together to speak to her about their demands. The balance of power, this teacher told me, shifted as soon as they walked as one into the principal's office.



Barbara Madeloni  
MTA President

As I speak to local leaders and members, I hear over and over that we are being stripped of our professional autonomy and forced to comply with practices — especially in terms of test preparation and “data-driven instruction” — that are hurting our students and crushing our souls. But the story of grade-level teachers going together to talk to that principal tells us that we can fight back — if we communicate, connect and act as one.

In another conversation, the talk turned to the impact of the *Friedrichs* case, which is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. An adverse decision in *Friedrichs* would require public-sector unions to provide collective bargaining and grievance



representation to everyone in a unit regardless of whether they paid any dues. It would, simply stated, allow for freeloaders — and it could subsequently put the viability of our union at risk.

In the course of the discussion, we talked about the kind of fellowship that firefighters bring to their union. I have been reflecting on that, thinking about the isolation educators often feel in their work and how it is exacerbated as a result of our accountability system and the sheer magnitude of the work we are asked to do.

We need to break through that isolation and, in doing so, break through our fear. We need to connect with each other in our workspaces and grow the kind of fellowship that comes with shared stories and shared actions — with feeling our power when we act together for the hopes and ideals we care about.

How do we do this? Just as those teachers did — by talking to each other.

The MTA has invited local leaders to work with their members and field representatives to design communication systems that support member conversations in order to identify the immediate issues that matter most, build plans for action, and organize to win at the local level. We are asking each of you to start these conversations and develop the connections that will make us stronger together.

One conversation at a time. One building at a time. One local at a time.

This is how movements grow. It is how unions have traditionally built their power. It is how we will rebuild our power. And we are going to need the full strength of our membership and our relationships with our students, parents, brothers and sisters in labor, and communities if we hope to preserve public education in Massachusetts.

We are the targets of an all-out assault on our unions and our public schools. From the national attack being waged by the Koch brothers-funded *Friedrichs* case to the Wall Street-funded ballot initiative seeking to raise the cap on Commonwealth charter schools, this is a critical year for the MTA and for public education.

Great Schools Massachusetts and Families for Excellent Schools, two organizations funded by billionaires, many from out of state, are eager to lift the cap on charters here in Massachusetts. They hope to undermine public education in the state where it began as part of a larger plan to take down public-sector unions and privatize the public good.

Ours is a critically important mission. We need to recall the values and ideals that brought us to this work and that keep us in it every day — providing the care, the interest and the meaningful hope needed to help our students enter the world and make it theirs. We need to act together to make these ideals real and reclaim the schools educators and our communities deserve. We need to access our strength: our knowledge, our relationships, our collective bargaining rights and our rights as citizens to vote, speak out, gather and petition the government. We are and will be Stronger Together.

Talk to your local leadership about what this can mean in your local.

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

Barbara

## Letters to the Editor

### MTA should take action to organize educators working in charter schools

To the Editor:

The Fall edition of *MTA Today* was right to focus on the pernicious impact of charter schools on our students and educators, and on the fight to preserve the charter cap.

However, our union of 110,000 professionals can do more than one thing at a time.

At the 2013 MTA Annual Meeting, we voted to make active MTA membership available to those who work in public charter schools. Members knew that improved conditions for charter educators

would target the profit motive and hurt the charters' bottom line. In one act, the MTA would be adding a new tool to the fight, disrupting charter profiteering, supporting educators and strengthening our union.

Yet that vote has simply not been translated into action. Charter teachers from Fall River to Worcester have risked their jobs to approach the MTA for help.

They want to organize, to grow our ranks, to pry charters from profit.

The MTA said no, so these educators are going to other unions for the help that the MTA promises to give to educators.

The MTA needs to respect its members' wishes, recognize this lever against the charter industry

and fully join the fight. And it needs to start now.

Brian Fitzgerald  
Wareham 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*, 2 Heritage Drive, 8th floor, Quincy, MA 02171-2119, or e-mail it to [mtatodayletters@massteacher.org](mailto:mtatodayletters@massteacher.org). For additional information, please refer to the guidelines posted on [www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org).



# MTA backs campaign to fight lifting of charter school cap

The MTA is committing resources to fight any proposals to lift the cap on charter schools and to support strong, well-funded, democratically controlled district public schools for all students.

The efforts will involve intensive opposition to any legislation that would expand Commonwealth charter schools as well as to a planned ballot initiative.

The association is fighting the cap lift as part of a coalition called the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance. The alliance includes educator, parent, student, labor and social justice organizations that are working together to support the schools that students, educators and communities deserve.

“The very possibility of quality public schools for all is under threat on multiple fronts,” said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. “We are fighting for our students, for our rights and for the future of public education.”

“Public funds should go to schools that are staffed by educators who have a voice in policy through their union — and who are able to speak out on behalf of their working conditions and their students’ learning conditions,” she added. “They must not be further diverted from local community control to private interests that are seeking to enlarge a two-track system that undermines public education and the common good.”

On Jan. 30, MTA Board members heard a presentation on the proposed campaign, as well as on widespread member opposition to lifting the cap on Commonwealth charter schools. The proposal called for an extensive grassroots, media and get-out-the-vote campaign. Executive Director-Treasurer Ann Clarke highlighted the dangerous destabilizing impact of any cap lift on districts and, eventually, on all public schools in Massachusetts.

Board members then voted to go into executive session to discuss a new business item proposed by members of the MTA Executive Committee concerning the campaign.

By a vote of the Board, the MTA will now enter into conversations with state legislators as they formulate a reform bill for charter schools speaking specifically to accountability measures. At the same time, using funds that the Public Relations/Organizing Campaign Committee had already committed, the MTA will begin to support a grassroots effort to fight any lifting of the charter cap.

“The MTA did not seek out the charter school fight,” Madeloni said. “It has been forced on us by pro-charter forces, as well as by Governor Charlie Baker and his allies in the State House. But now that it is before us, we must take it on.”

Great Schools Massachusetts, the group spearheading the campaign to lift the cap, announced recently that it is prepared to spend a record-

## Reasons to oppose lifting the cap

**LOST FUNDING:** Charter schools siphon hundreds of millions of dollars a year from public schools. This year alone, Commonwealth charters will divert more than \$408 million from district public schools after reimbursements are taken into account. This means larger class sizes and less enrichment for students in district public schools.

**NO LOCAL CONTROL:** Charter schools are not accountable to their local communities. They are approved by the state, often over the objections of a large majority of local residents — the people who have to pay for them. Local school committees have no authority over these charter schools and no recourse if a charter school’s practices have a negative impact on students who attend the district’s public schools.

**STUDENTS PUSHED OUT:** Charter schools create a two-track system of public schools, described by the national NAACP as “separate and unequal.” Charters typically underserve special needs students, English language learners and economically disadvantaged students. Many use harsh discipline policies to push out the students they don’t want.

**POOR TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS:** Rather than innovate, most charters focus on test prep and drill. In addition, they have high teacher turnover rates as a result of poor working conditions, long hours and lack of teacher autonomy. This undermines school stability and students’ learning conditions.

breaking \$18 million in 2016 to pass a bill in the Legislature or a measure on the ballot. Much of the organization’s funding comes from Families for Excellent Schools, a New York-based group with strong ties to Wall Street.

The stakes are high. Today, district public schools lose more than \$408 million a year to charter schools. Several big districts, including Boston and Springfield, are nearing their spending caps, which top out at 18 percent of net school spending. The leading cap-lift proposals would blow the lid off current limits. In a worst-case scenario, public schools could lose more than \$3 billion a year to charter schools in 20 years.

The first stop is the Legislature, where several cap-lift bills have been filed, including one by Baker. Like the ballot question, Baker’s measure would allow up to 12 new Commonwealth charter schools per year in addition to the number allowed under current law. Both measures would allow these schools to enroll up to 1 percent of the total school-age population each year — about 9,500 students.

Baker’s bill would abolish the current spending limits in the 73 school districts whose students score in the bottom 25 percent on standardized tests. Those districts include most large urban communities in Massachusetts and educate about 40 percent of all students.

Under the ballot initiative, the schools could be opened anywhere. Under either measure, entire

districts could be turned over to private charter school operators in a single year.

Adding insult to injury, Baker’s fiscal 2017 budget proposal would slash reimbursements to school districts that are dislocated by the sudden loss of students and funding to charter schools. Most districts would receive reimbursements for just one year instead of the current six.

“The governor and his friends on Wall Street are intent on starving public schools of needed resources in order to ‘prove’ they are failing and ultimately privatize our system,” Madeloni said. “We must not cave in to their threats in any way. We must not allow any cap-lift bill that would ultimately siphon billions of dollars from our public schools.”

On another front, MEJA members are also fighting a lawsuit seeking to abolish all caps on charter schools.

The New England Area Conference of the NAACP, a member of the coalition, has intervened in opposition to the suit along with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice and seven public school students. The intervenors cite evidence that charter schools “divert millions of dollars from traditional public schools each year, yet serve proportionately far fewer students with disabilities and English language learners and impose harsher discipline on students of color,” the Lawyers’ Committee said.

*For more information and updates, visit [massteacher.org/charterschools](http://massteacher.org/charterschools).*

# Push against high-stakes testing is gaining traction in communities

By Laura Barrett

Sharon High School biology teacher Zach Snow is on a mission to support public schools that excite students about learning. To him, that means reducing the emphasis on standardized tests and restoring play, exploration, creativity and a whole range of content-rich subjects to the curriculum, especially in the early grades.

“Education is rapidly becoming a \$1 trillion industry,” Snow said in testimony to the Sharon School Committee last June. “Yet public schools are not the schools that billionaires are sending *their* kids to. They send their kids to schools with low class sizes, schools with teachers who write their own tests, schools with diverse, enriching curricula, field trips and recess — schools that we deserve in Sharon! — not to schools that are beholden to these tests.”

Snow is just one of many MTA members pushing back against high-stakes testing and finding a lot of common ground with administrators, parents and students. A PDK/Gallup poll released in August found that 67 percent of public school parents agreed that there is “too much emphasis on standardized testing in the public schools” in their communities. Only 8 percent said there is “not enough,” while 20 percent said the amount is “about right.” Five percent said they didn’t know.

The numbers are even more striking among educators. In a poll of MTA members in January, 86 percent said there is “too much” emphasis on such tests, while only 1 percent said there is “not enough.”

Now the struggle is to get policies to mirror what most parents and educators want: less testing, more learning. Local efforts to that end have been sprouting up across the state and country.

In Fall River, the local association persuaded the School Committee in January to join other school committees by passing a resolution in support of an MTA-backed bill calling for a three-year moratorium on high-stakes testing.

In Westborough, the local association and administration are doing as little as legally possible to implement District-Determined Measures created for the purpose of evaluating educators.

In Cambridge, the local association urged the School Committee to reject switching to PARCC tests this year, knowing that would mean subjecting students to three different tests in three years: MCAS, PARCC and MCAS 2.0. The association lost by one vote but continues to make the case that students are more than a score.

In Franklin, the local association pushed back against Teaching Strategies GOLD and successfully reduced how much time teachers must spend on this kindergarten assessment. Now, local association



Photo by Chris Christo

Sharon teachers Dorothy Macoritto, Lori Leveckis and Kathleen Turner, from left to right, gathered recently at Sharon High School to share their perspectives on high-stakes testing.

President Donna Grady is planning to opt her own children out of any tests that she doesn’t believe will benefit them directly.

In New York State, 240,000 students opted out of standardized tests last year. The opt-out movement is going strong in other states as well, and some would like to see it take off in Massachusetts.

Snow’s efforts in Sharon are a good example of organizing to broaden the conversation about testing. His involvement began when his oldest child entered kindergarten last year.

“It felt like the pressure to do well on tests had trickled down to kindergarten,” Snow said. The curriculum, he said, “was a lot more didactic than I had expected. And there was a large focus on drilling math and sight words at the expense of learning about science and social studies. As for experiential learning through play and socialization, it seemed to reflect the recent studies suggesting that kindergarten is the new first grade.

“Obviously, I want my kids to read and do math,” Snow continued, “but it all seemed so disconnected from content.”

Snow started reading about the issue and talking to other parents.

“I would talk to parents at soccer games and birthday parties,” he said. “I was ‘that guy’ at the party who would ask other parents about their own kids’ experiences in school. Almost everyone I talked to said, ‘Yeah, tell me about it.’ And I thought that,

well, if everyone agrees, why are we doing education this way?”

The focus on testing was relatively new to Snow since he teaches high school biology, which is not an MCAS-tested subject in Sharon; most students take the introductory physics test to fulfill the graduation requirement.

“I have a huge amount of freedom to teach the way I believe is best,” Snow said.

Snow started a Facebook group called Sharon Parents & Teachers for Less Testing & More Learning, and in June, he and his group asked the School Committee to support the moratorium bill and engage in a larger discussion about the role of testing.

While the Sharon School Committee declined to pass a resolution backing the moratorium bill, the members did ask the state to delay using PARCC results to make high-stakes decisions. They also formed an advisory committee of teachers, parents and administrators to analyze the role of testing in the district and to make recommendations on how to strike a better balance.

Several teacher-members of the advisory committee and Bernadette Murphy, president of the Sharon Teachers Association, gathered at Sharon High School in December to share their perspectives. The views they expressed are similar to the ones that MTA members have expressed at forums,

Continued on next page



# 'DDMs, honestly, are crazy'

By Laura Barrett

Starting next fall, some districts will be required to issue Student Impact Ratings for teachers and administrators based on District-Determined Measures and state standardized test scores. And in the fall of 2017, more districts will fall under this mandate, which is part of the educator evaluation system.

There is one big problem: No one has figured out how to use student test score data to fairly, accurately and reliably determine a given teacher's contribution to a particular student's performance.

Bill Parsons, president of the Westborough Education Association, put it this way in describing a test he had given to his engineering students: "The scores ranged from 95 to 27. They all got the same lesson and the same materials from the same teacher. Some students obviously studied harder than others. Should I be judged by the 27 any more than I should get all the credit for the 95?"

Parsons said his members opposed the requirement from the start.

"We felt it would create competition among teachers," he said, "and we felt it would reduce incentives to take the kids who needed the most work. It would break down the good collaboration we have among our colleagues and wouldn't give administrators useful information about teachers."

Local associations and district administrators across the state are grappling with ways to implement — or quietly downplay — the Student Impact Rating requirement.

"Teachers develop and administer tests all the time to find out what our students know and to improve instruction," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "But making up new student tests simply to evaluate teachers is a fool's errand.

The results will be useless and the time spent on this bureaucratic mandate will be time lost to real teaching.

"We encourage members who oppose this mandate to let local and state education officials know what they think about it and to organize to change it," she added.

Under the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal government no longer requires tying student test scores to educator evaluations. However, the requirement is now embedded in state regulations. To get rid of it, either the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education must vote to amend the regulations or the state Legislature must pass a law banning the requirement.

The rating is supposed to provide an objective measure of whether a teacher's impact on student performance is high, moderate or low. There must be at least two measures for every educator. For those who teach a subject tested by MCAS or PARCC, one rating must be based on the Student Growth Percentiles assigned to students in that teacher's class.

The impact rating is to be used to inform the length and content of the Educator Plan.

An added complexity is that this mandate remains even as the state is transitioning from MCAS and PARCC to MCAS 2.0.

At the time the mandate was passed, Massachusetts was considered to be among

the more enlightened states, since the test scores didn't count for that much. But now that implementation has begun, many are questioning the time and energy it is taking away from the classroom, along with the legitimacy of the results.

To get enough data to look at, many districts and teachers have had to create new growth measures, such as a pre-test at the beginning of the year and a post-test at the end.

Parsons described the system bluntly. "DDMs, honestly, are crazy," he said.

Tom Scott, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, told *MTA Today* that his association "is a strong supporter of common assessments." But he added, "We have a problem with the rating system. How do you create a rating system with any validity, reliability and consistency?"

Westborough Assistant Superintendent Daniel Mayer also voiced concerns.

"While we all agree it would be invaluable to determine each teacher's exact impact on student learning, few believe local districts have the capacity to create a DDM system that will do this in a meaningful and fair way," he said.

In Westborough, the WEA and the School Committee bargained language that gives teachers a lot of say over choosing their DDMs and determining how much student performance has grown. Other districts have put off bargaining over the mandate as long as possible or are exploring other ways to reduce its impact.

Educators who question the accuracy of measures like DDMs are in good company. The American Educational Research Association

Please turn to **DDMs**/Page 16



## 'The kids are tested out. There is a lot of anxiety and burnout.'

Continued from previous page

during listening tours and in educator lunchrooms throughout the state.

Murphy said that the STA fully supports the efforts of the parent and teacher group and the advisory committee. "My kids go to the Boston Public Schools," she said. "The kids are tested out. There is a lot of anxiety and burnout.

"They are spending millions of dollars on the test, but meanwhile my son's school budget is being cut," she added. "In Boston they don't have a lot of the extras that Sharon has. And now it looks like his class size is going to get bigger."

Kathleen Turner, a Sharon High School French teacher who was named the 2013 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, spoke for colleagues in tested grades and subjects when she noted, "They tell us to differentiate instruction, but then measure performance by making kids take the same test. It doesn't make sense."

Teacher Dorothy Macoritto questioned how useful the test results are in measuring growth. Speaking about her own children, who attend the nearby Canton Public Schools, she said, "It seems like my kids are taking tests constantly, but how are evaluators going to use the results to measure growth? If a kid gets 100 on the pretest and 100 at the end of the year, you won't show growth. Does that mean the teacher is bad? What if she gets a 50 on the pretest and a 60 at the end of the year? What does it all mean?"

Snow said that his research has helped him understand why the testing regimen is so hard to change. "There is a lot of money going into private pockets," he said.

He believes that educators can make changes in their own practice now, even while continuing to push for new laws.

"In a place like Sharon, where the students do very well, we have more flexibility than we might

think," he said. "The amount of time students spend actually taking state tests is small — maybe 2 to 3 percent of the time. It's the high stakes attached to the results that lead to so much time being spent preparing for these tests instead of fostering a love of learning. But we do have some control over the other 98 percent of our time. We need to exercise that control."

Snow has a strong personal interest in the outcome of the debate, since his second child will soon be in the public schools.

"Some people suggested that I start saving up money to send our sons to a private school," Snow said. "That didn't sit well with me. I'm a proud public school teacher. I'm not going to do that until I really give this my best effort — to see what we can do about it."

For more information and updates, please visit [massteacher.org/testing](http://massteacher.org/testing).

# Conference focuses on the power of activism

## EMAC speakers address need to organize and build community coalitions

By Jean Conley

**S**tories of wisdom acquired through struggle highlighted the 2015 MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference.

The event, held Dec. 4 and 5 at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel and Conference Center, also featured an array of workshops.

The keynote speakers — Jitu Brown, a Dyett High School hunger striker from Chicago who is the national director of the Journey for Justice Alliance, and Clayola Brown, a former textile industry organizer who is president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute — addressed the enthusiastic conference audience about the need to organize, build coalitions and focus on the big picture.

EMAC Chair Christine Boseman welcomed the crowd at the opening dinner and recognized the work of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. She also asked how many members were attending their first EMAC conference, and a dozen hands shot up.

Boseman introduced MTA Vice President Janet Anderson, who thanked participants for attending and reminded them of their “ability to create a lot of positive change.”

Every day, there are approximately 1 million students in Massachusetts classrooms, Anderson noted. “That means that every day, we impact the lives of 1 million children,” she said. “But we don’t impact just their lives, we impact the lives of their parents, their families and their communities. That’s a lot of activism.”

MTA President Barbara Madeloni introduced Jitu Brown and said she first came to know about Brown through his work on the hunger strike, which lasted more than a month. She called the fight to save Dyett a “profound action that was the culmination of many years of relationship building, of strengthening alliances, of working through and coming to know each other in struggle.” Madeloni said she was touched by the story of those who understood “that saving public schools was so critical that people would put their lives on the line and refuse food.” She noted that movements are driven by a shared vision to be kept in sight as small victories are won along the way.

**B**rown told conferees that he had been a youth organizer for most of his adult life, but that issues of equality and justice eventually drove him to work on behalf of public schools.

“We did not come to the idea of a hunger strike on a whim,” he said of the strikers at Dyett. “We were at a place of desperation.”

A veteran of Chicago’s school councils, Brown had seen investments that improved many schools throughout the city. But he said he also saw that a “gradual disinvestment” in predominantly African-American Bronzeville, driven by racism and a push to gentrify the area where Dyett is located, had left families and educators demoralized.



MTA Retired member and presenter Julia Monteiro Johnson, at left in photo above, and Classified Staff Union member Shaleah Rather, right, looked on as Julia Hammond Cradle made a point during one of the workshops at the MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference. At left, Brookline Educators Union member Jeanette Lindor, right, talked to BEU President Jessica Wender-Shubow during a break in a session. The conference, held in early December, drew an enthusiastic crowd to the Sheraton Framingham Hotel.

Photos by Jean Conley

Eventually, he and other community activists decided to act on the lack of equity for all children. Schools in some parts of the city, he said, offer classes in Arabic, Chinese and Spanish and have fully stocked libraries. But in Bronzeville, Brown said, one elementary school is so crowded that 53 kindergartners are jammed into a single classroom.

In 2009, educators and community activists formed a coalition to revitalize Dyett, the last open-enrollment high school in the black community. By that time things had gotten so bad that students took art and physical education classes online. No AP classes were offered. The city marked the school for closure.



Jitu Brown

Brown said that advocates “met with every bureaucrat, went to every bogus school council hearing, met with every spineless politician” in an effort to work with the city to avoid closure. But the city wouldn’t budge.

By last summer, Brown said, “12 men and women decided to go on a hunger strike.” The struggle for Dyett struck a nerve, he said, both across his “hypersegregated city” and across the nation.

“We fought for this school,” Brown said. “We got commitment from thousands of people in the city — and not just token commitment. What came out of it was that for the first time, perhaps the first time in this country, a closed school was reopened as a neighborhood school.”

He reminded the audience of the threat of so-called education reformers. “The privatizers are hunting your profession and they are destroying our communities,” he said.

He urged educators to “work with parents, with communities and, as labor leaders, be committed to transforming the culture.”

“Those against us have built a structure for our destruction,” he said. “So let’s build a structure for our salvation.”

After the speech, entertainment was provided by the Eastern Medicine Singers, a Native American group that shared its traditions through drumming and song.

Continued on next page



# BESE places Southbridge schools in receivership

By Scott McLennan

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has voted to place the Southbridge Public Schools into receivership.

The vote, taken on Jan. 26, was nine in favor, with board member Ed Doherty abstaining. Doherty, who represents labor on the board, said he could not support the receivership process as long as it removed workers' collective bargaining rights.

As *MTA Today* went to press, Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester had not yet named a receiver for the district and was serving in that role in an interim capacity. The Southbridge School Committee has been relieved of its duties.

At a public hearing in Southbridge the night before the vote, no consensus emerged on whether receivership would be the best option, though there was general agreement that leadership of the district had broken down.

Southbridge Education Association President Joan Sullivan spoke at the hearing and delivered a petition signed by union members.

The petition read in part, "As noted in the DESE's district review, leadership of the schools is in disarray. With the district's persistent lack of a vision or coherent plan, educators have been working with minimal guidance from the central administration. Southbridge educators want to share their expertise to benefit the district, and that will only occur when there is stable leadership that views educators as equal partners."

Sullivan told the BESE that the district needs more enrichment programs and wraparound services for all students and that standardized tests should not be the only measure of student progress.

Several SEA members spoke, making the point



Photo by Scott McLennan

The night before the vote, Southbridge Education Association President Joan Sullivan told the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that an improvement plan for the district must include educator input and provide more resources for students.

that educators are frustrated and want to be partners in moving the district forward. "We feel like we are rowing very hard, but without direction we don't get anywhere," said SEA Vice President David Williams.

As noted in a district report by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Southbridge has had seven superintendents over the past seven years, with similar turnover in high school principals. The district is also lacking key positions. It does not have an ELL director, even though the district has approximately 350 English language learners.

Susan Grant, one of the district's few ELL instructors, echoed other SEA members in telling

the BESE that despite the challenges, she chooses to teach in Southbridge.

The DESE will next begin to assemble a local stakeholder group that will discuss what should be included in a turnaround plan that will be developed. The SEA will have representation in the group.

Southbridge is the third Massachusetts district to be placed into receivership, following state takeovers of the Lawrence and Holyoke public schools.

The SEA and the MTA are working to ensure that educators in the district will have a strong voice in whatever plans emerge — and that members' rights are respected in the process.

## Randolph Institute leader urges listeners to 'expand relationships'

Continued from previous page

On Saturday, workshop presenters delved into topics such as destroying the school-to-prison pipeline, talking about immigration status in schools, grassroots organizing, and diversity challenges in the labor movement.

Luncheon speaker Clayola Brown recalled her own activist background as a teenager working alongside her mother to organize a textile factory in South Carolina. Since then, Brown has committed herself to working for labor and civil rights. In 2004 she became the first woman president of the Randolph Institute, which is located in Washington, D.C., and named for Asa Philip Randolph, who organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first predominantly African-American labor union, in 1925. Decades later, Randolph was a key figure in organizing the 1963 March on Washington.

In the 1920s, porters slept in baggage cars and sometimes worked for three or four months

without a day off. Though their working conditions were deplorable, Brown said, what finally drove the porters to overcome their fear of organizing was the tremendous level of disrespect shown by their employer, George Pullman.

Pullman insisted that all porters be called George, based on his own first name. Pullman "didn't even see the need to call these men by their own names," she said.

The union eventually signed a collective bargaining agreement with Pullman in 1937, providing porters with a living wage that made the job one of the most desirable in the African-American community.

Through Randolph's vision, the union grew more powerful over the decades. But still, Brown



Clayola Brown

said, 50 years after the founding of the institute, Randolph's premise — that labor's fight is indeed a fight for social and economic justice — "is just as much needed now."

She urged participants to be activists, to build honest relationships that help develop trust, and then "expand relationships beyond your circle."

Priscilla Bartley, a second-grade teacher at the Horace Mann School in Newton and a member of the Newton Teachers Association, said she felt motivated by the "really powerful" keynote speeches at the conference, as well as by a workshop she had just attended called *The Mindful Classroom*. She said the techniques she learned during the session taught her to "be present in the moment — not just in teaching, but in life."

To see more photos of the EMAC Conference, visit [massteacher.org/emacphotos](http://massteacher.org/emacphotos).



# NCLB is history — and now the hard work begins

By Laura Barrett

Congress finally buried No Child Left Behind in December, replacing it with the Every Student Succeeds Act. Now what?

Most educators and students won't experience dramatic changes based on the new law — at least not right away. While the 1,000-page law abolishes several significant federal education mandates, most of those mandates are now baked into Massachusetts laws and regulations. State education officials have not publicly expressed an interest in rolling any of them back.

"The only real solution continues to be organizing for the schools our students deserve," said MTA President Barbara Madeloni. "At least now state education officials can't hide behind the claim that 'Arne Duncan is making us do this to you.' They have to own their policies, including the ones that so many teachers, students and parents say are hurting our students and undermining the quality of education in our schools."

Passage of ESSA strengthens arguments for H. 340, an MTA-backed bill that would establish a three-year moratorium on the high-stakes use of standardized tests, since most — though not all — of the stakes associated with test scores are now left to states to determine.

One area ripe for reform is educator evaluation: The federal government no longer requires Massachusetts to use student test scores in the evaluation system. That mandate is contained in state education regulations but not in state law.

"Congress finally heard that using test scores in this way was destructive, time-consuming and invalid," said Madeloni. "We need to deliver the same message to Governor Charlie Baker and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Districts have wasted enough time already creating District-Determined Measures solely for the purpose of evaluating teachers, stealing even more time away from actual teaching and learning."

The following are highlights of portions of the new law that affect testing and accountability, comparing current requirements under the state's NCLB waiver to ESSA.

■ **Testing:** As is the case under current law, ESSA requires students to take standardized tests in mathematics

and English language arts every year in grades three to eight and once in high school and to take science tests at least once in each of the three grade spans: elementary, middle and high school.

One exception: Up to seven states may apply to let districts try out local assessments with permission from the U.S. Department of Education.

■ **Testing Participation:** Under the NCLB waiver, schools with less than 90 percent participation can be ranked no higher than Level

3 regardless of student scores, while those with 90 to 95 percent participation can be ranked no higher than Level 2. ESSA calls for a 95 percent participation rate, with states deciding how to factor lower rates into the accountability system. The default position is for the state to continue its current requirements.

■ **Testing Goal:** The wildly unrealistic NCLB goal that all students score "proficient" in English language arts and math by 2014 has long since

gone by the boards. Instead, the state's NCLB waiver requires schools to achieve a 50 percent reduction in "proficiency gaps" for all subgroups by 2017. Under ESSA, states determine their own goals. However, since Massachusetts created the "proficiency gaps" goal in applying for the waiver, the DESE may not want to change that metric.

■ **Identification of Schools:** Currently, schools in the lowest 20

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# Statements by candidates for NEA Director seats

The MTA is holding an election for two seats on the NEA Board of Directors.

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, 2016, and expiring Aug. 31, 2019, in accordance with the NEA's fiscal year.

Ballots will be sent to all MTA/NEA members eligible to vote.

Candidates were given the opportunity to submit biographical statements and photos. Submissions received in compliance with the

MTA's deadlines are printed on this page.

*For further information on MTA nominations and elections, please contact John Connelly of the MTA Division of Governance and Administration by calling 617.878.8305 or e-mailing [jconnelly@massteacher.org](mailto:jconnelly@massteacher.org).*

## **Diana (Donnie) McGee — Massachusetts Community College Council**

I am seeking re-election to the position of NEA Director because I believe my nearly 20 years of union leadership, professional experience and statewide activism will enable me to defend public education and represent MTA locals effectively. I am an English professor at Bristol Community College, where I have worked for 33 years as writing specialist, program coordinator and/or faculty member.

As the statewide vice president of the Massachusetts



Diana (Donnie) McGee

Community College Council, I chair its Strategic Action and ORP Ad Hoc Committees. My MTA union experience includes nearly eight years on the Board of Directors and service on these committees: State Revenue Enhancement, Full Capacity Local Training, Public Relations/Organizing, and Government Relations. I have been an MTA Annual Meeting delegate since 2002, an NEA RA delegate since 2006 and a Higher Education Leadership Council member since 2008.

As a State House lobbyist and union activist, I led multiple campaigns that resulted in the enactment of laws that currently promote retirement security for thousands of MTA members. Twice I was sent by MTA to D.C. to lobby for the repeal of the GPO/WEP (Social Security) offsets. I have testified before dozens of legislative committees and authored many

op-ed pieces in support of public education and the related resources needed to fund our schools and colleges.

As NEA Director, I lobbied Congress to support the Every Student Succeeds Act and reauthorize the Higher Education Act. I currently serve on NEA's Member Rights, Compensation and Benefits Committee.

In summary, I am very concerned about the attacks on collective bargaining, the privatization of public education, the emphasis on performance-based funding and related educator evaluations, and the retirement insecurity of part-time employees. I want to continue to address these issues with the NEA Board and Congress. Please consider me when you vote.

Thank you.

## **Timothy J. Sheehan — Amherst-Pelham Education Association**

It would be a privilege to continue to represent MTA members on the NEA Board of Directors. During my first term, I have used my experience as a teacher and local leader to bring issues of concern to the leadership of the NEA and to engage in debate and discussion about important national matters impacting public education and organized labor. I have worked to forge partnerships with others on the



Timothy J. Sheehan

Board to try to influence their thinking and gain their support on matters that are of concern to members in Massachusetts.

In addition to my service directly on the NEA Board, I have served for the last two years on the NEA's Professional Standards and Practice Committee.

This has been educational, as well as important in allowing me to help shape the NEA's positions on matters related to education policy. I have raised concerns about excessive testing, cumbersome methods of educator evaluation, and how we should use our collective voice to influence education policy decisions.

As a union and as the primary defenders of

public education, we continue to face challenges at every level. It is as important as ever that we are represented by a strong delegation on the NEA Board.

I have worked with our other NEA Directors from Massachusetts for the past three years to bring forward our interests, both within the union and in our role as lobbyists on Capitol Hill.

I intend to continue to speak with a powerful voice to represent the concerns of all educators, preK-graduate school, in my second term.

I would appreciate your continued support and your vote to re-elect me as an NEA Director.

Thank you.

## **Lamikco (Meka) T. Magee — Springfield Education Association**

I am running for NEA Director to be a part of the effort to reclaim public education. The progressive actions of the MTA led by Barbara Madeloni and our new leadership must be brought to our national union. In Massachusetts, we are listening to our members and taking action.

We are fighting to end high-stakes testing, helping to organize an opt-out movement,



Lamikco (Meka) T. Magee

and working to stop the expansion of charter schools. We are committed to ending institutional racism and discrimination in our schools to improve the quality of education for students of color and LGBTQ students. I want to take the progressive vision of our current leadership to the national level.

I grew up in Massachusetts and graduated from Springfield Public Schools. After high school I served in the Air Force. All of my children attend public schools. Two now attend UMass Amherst.

My mother was a special education teacher in Massachusetts and so am I. I serve on the MTA's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, Task Force on Race, and Strategic Action Plan Committee. I am also a commissioner for the Council for the

Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

Massachusetts has always been a leader in public education. I will bring our progressive vision and decisive action to the NEA. I am committed to public education, higher education and the teaching profession.

Now more than ever, we must come together to halt the privatization of our schools, stop excessive testing that reduces instruction time, and create the schools our students deserve. We must demand that adjunct professors earn a living wage. We must insist on the working conditions our members need to help our students reach their greatest potential. We face a formidable challenge, yet we are the key to sustainable progress in this nation. WE are educators.

# Organizing yields results for MCCC

By Scott McLennan

Members of the Massachusetts Community College Council organized across the state during the fall to push back against several contract proposals from the state Board of Higher Education that would have weakened professional autonomy, increased workloads and provided substandard pay increases.

Their actions have yielded results: As *MTA Today* went to press, the MCCC bargaining team reported that it had reached a tentative agreement to bring back to members.

MCCC leaders described the negotiations for a three-year successor contract as some of the most difficult the union has encountered. The agreement is the first public higher education contract to be negotiated since Governor Charlie Baker took office and appointed Jim Peyser as secretary of education.

“These negotiations were long and drawn out, and I am proud that our team and so many of our members stood up to defend their rights and preserve the quality of education that community colleges provide,” said MCCC President Joe LeBlanc.

LeBlanc said the agreement protects members from efforts by state education officials to tie pay increases to graduation rates and closing of the achievement gap. The MCCC argued that the measure was patently unfair, holding faculty and staff pay hostage to outcomes that are largely outside of their control. Members said the effort was particularly unjust because it did not take into account the wide variety of students who attend community colleges.

After the actions, the MCCC successfully negotiated improvements to the original financial offers by achieving raises for items such as rank changes for faculty, post-tenure evaluation for full professors, tenure for professional staff and new academic credentials — items that are often valued in higher education compensation.

The agreement covers more than 2,500 full- and part-time employees working at the state’s community colleges. MCCC leaders will spend several weeks bringing the contract to members for ratification votes.



Photo by Scott McLennan

MCCC members held signs during a meeting of community college trustees at Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner on Dec. 8. The demonstration was part of a statewide Day of Action for a fair contract.

When negotiations appeared stalled last November, a year after the MCCC first requested to bargain with the Board of Higher Education and community college presidents, faculty and staff at campuses across the state moved decisively.

MCCC chapters on every campus voted to begin work-to-rule actions, shutting down meetings and ending voluntary tasks requested by campus administrations. MCCC members also held stand-outs on campuses and in other public venues and penned letters to the editor that appeared in numerous newspapers.

On Dec. 8, MCCC members staged a successful Day of Action. They demonstrated on their campuses, at a BHE meeting at Framingham State University and at a community colleges trustees’ meeting at Mount Wachusett Community College.

MCCC leaders and activists told board members and trustees that the progress of negotiations was unacceptable and that members deserved a contract that reflected the contributions they make to the success of community college students and public higher education in Massachusetts.

“I’m really proud of this bargaining team and MCCC members,” said Claudine Barnes, chair of the MCCC’s negotiating team and chapter president at Cape Cod Community College. “The team met close to 50 times with management.

I believe that the team’s tenacity, along with MCCC member efforts, empowered us to achieve the best tentative agreement possible in the

current environment. This is an agreement that we believe protects the long-term interests of the community colleges and the students we serve.”

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# Forums focus on how to advocate for education

By Jean Conley

Telling personal stories, holding stand-outs and visiting legislators' offices were among the tactics that MTA members discussed at recent political forums on how to advocate successfully for public education.

At the five forums held across the state in December and January, members talked about the political and legislative issues they see as being crucial to their roles as educators. They then had the opportunity to come up with steps for putting their words into action.

"If we can get people committed to the understanding that what happens in their classrooms is directly connected to the political process, then we can get more people being active in ways that make sense for them," MTA President Barbara Madeloni said as she welcomed members to the forum held at MTA Headquarters in Quincy on Dec. 16. "That's part of who we are."

The forums arose out of discussion at an All Presidents' Meeting in September. During that event, MTA local leaders were told that the NEA Board would be voting soon on making a recommendation in the Democratic presidential primary.

When they went to Washington, D.C., to vote on Oct. 3, NEA directors from Massachusetts supported holding off on an early recommendation,

'I'm tired of the teacher-bashing, the excessive testing. Teachers and support staff are leaving because they are not respected and valued.'

— Teacher Maura Hooper

but the NEA Board ultimately voted to support Hillary Clinton. A decision to endorse in the General Election will be made at the NEA's Representative Assembly this summer.

The idea for the statewide forums evolved as planning proceeded, becoming less about the presidential election and more about the political context in which educators do their work.

Much of the talk at the forums — held in Holyoke, Framingham, Woburn and Worcester in addition to Quincy — centered on issues such as unfair education outcomes wrought by economic inequality, decreased school funding, and educating communities about the influence of big money on elections. High-stakes standardized testing and reduced learning time for students were also among the key topics.

At each forum, participants were divided up among tables. The conversations, which were facilitated by staff from the MTA Grassroots

Campaigns and Government Relations divisions, ran the gamut — from global issues about human rights to local concerns such as making sure students are fed and have the school supplies they need.

Each table was asked to focus on a few key questions:

- In light of the presidential election, what are the two issues that you care most about and why?
- What steps are you willing to take to engage other MTA members in the national elections?
- How can we hold our elected officials accountable for supporting our legislative priorities, and how can we best use our collective power to influence policy?

At the Woburn forum on Dec. 10, first-grade teacher Maura Hooper said she was eager to talk to fellow educators because "something has to change."

"I'm tired of the teacher-bashing, the excessive testing," she said. "Teachers and support staff are leaving because they are not respected and valued."

Hooper, a member of the Woburn Teachers Association, has taught for more than 22 years. She said the increasing corporate control of public schools has made her more willing to fight.

"I want to teach to the whole child," she said. "Children are not numbers."

When the time came for her table to report to the whole group, Hooper said the biggest issue was

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## Singers invited to join MTA Chorus



The MTA Chorus will perform at this year's Annual Meeting, which will be held May 13 and 14 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston.

The chorus performs before the Call to Order. It will also sing the national anthem and a piece based on the poem etched at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

No audition is necessary. Rehearsals will be held at 7 p.m. at the home of Choral Director Robert Lague, 9 Cronin Way, Woburn, on April 4, April 11 and May 9. A dress rehearsal and sound check will be held on the morning of May 13 in the convention hall.

If you are interested, please notify Lague by e-mail at [rlague88@gmail.com](mailto:rlague88@gmail.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. Returning members should bring folders from past performances.

# A seaside opportunity for ESPs to learn and network

By Jean Conley

Workshops on subjects that range from engaging in difficult conversations to designing websites and blogs will highlight this year's Education Support Professionals Conference on Cape Cod.

Registration is underway. The two-day conference will be held April 8 and 9 at the oceanfront Sea Crest Beach Hotel in Falmouth.

The ESP Conference has become one of the MTA's most popular events, with more than 400 participants from around the state attending last year.

New workshops will be offered this year, as will a few favorites from past years. ESPs will present several of the workshops.

Tricia DiPasquale, chair of the MTA ESP Committee, said the conference "is a great opportunity for Massachusetts education support professionals to network with other ESPs from across the state and to obtain some quality professional development."

Presentation of the MTA ESP of the Year Award — an annual highlight — will take place during the conference.

Each year, the award goes to an MTA ESP nominated by his or her local association who

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Participants can check in at the hotel starting at 3 p.m. on Friday, pick up conference materials and peruse the exhibits of MTA Benefits vendors.

Following afternoon workshops and before dinner on Friday, participants are invited to a welcome reception.

On Saturday, an extensive breakfast buffet will be followed by 12 workshops.

The following are among the many topics: team-building, behavior change strategies for students, and understanding diversity.

A full listing of workshop offerings is available at [massteacher.org/esp](http://massteacher.org/esp).

The conference will conclude about 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 9.

*Early bird registration ends Friday, Feb. 26. The final date to register for the conference is March 25. For information on costs, hotel charges and registration, please visit [massteacher.org/esp](http://massteacher.org/esp). A grant application for those seeking financial assistance to attend is also available at [massteacher.org/esp](http://massteacher.org/esp). Grant requests must be received by March 4. Other questions can be e-mailed to Jessica Parlon in the Division of Training and Professional Learning at [jparlon@massteacher.org](mailto:jparlon@massteacher.org). Her phone number is 617.878.8153.*

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# Jim Peyser: Secretary of the one percent?

You might think that a public official with the title “secretary of education” would care deeply about, well, public education.

But when Jim Peyser was asked recently by reporters whether he supports the Fair Share Amendment, his response was an unequivocal “definitely not.”

The amendment would raise more than \$1.5 billion a year for public schools, public higher education and transportation by adding 4 percentage

points to the state income tax on annual income above \$1 million.

The measure is strongly backed by the MTA and other members of Raise Up Massachusetts, the coalition that collected signatures to place it on the ballot for the 2018 election.

Peyser, who was named Massachusetts secretary of education by Governor Charlie Baker in December 2014, contended in an interview with *State House News Service* on Jan. 21 that such a



When Peyser was asked recently by reporters whether he supports the Fair Share Amendment, his response was an unequivocal “definitely not.”

constitutional amendment would damage the state’s economy.

Raise Up Massachusetts quickly issued a statement in response that quoted education leaders and others.

MTA President Barbara Madeloni said she found it shocking that Peyser “is more concerned about keeping taxes low for millionaires than he is about providing our schools with the resources they need to give all students an excellent education.”

AFT Massachusetts President Tom Gosnell also criticized the remarks.

“It’s not surprising that the former executive director of the Pioneer Institute opposes a tax on

millionaires, but it’s incredibly disappointing that the state’s top education official doesn’t acknowledge our Commonwealth’s urgent need for new revenue to invest in education,” he said.

Madeloni served on the nonpartisan Foundation Budget Review Commission, which found that public schools need an additional \$1 billion a year in funding to guarantee all students a quality education.

*For more information on the Raise Up Massachusetts amendment, visit [www.massteacher.org/revenue](http://www.massteacher.org/revenue) or [www.raiseupma.org](http://www.raiseupma.org).*

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## REGIONAL RETIREMENT CONSULTATIONS AVAILABLE

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 at MTA’s Quincy headquarters, which is staffed during the summer and school vacations.*

### PLEASE NOTE:

*All consultations are now by appointment only during the hours listed.*

**AUBURN** — Louise Gaskins: first Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Central Office, 48 Sword St., Auburn; 508.791.2121, or at home, 978.448.5351.

**QUINCY** — Harold Crowley: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., MTA, 2 Heritage Drive, 9th Floor, Quincy; 617.878.8240 or 800.392.6175, ext. 8240.

**CAPE COD** — Lawrence Abbruzzi: second Saturday of each month, 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, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Fitchburg Teachers Association office, 78 Franklin Rd., Fitchburg; Call 978.297.0123 or e-mail: [zibstar702@verizon.net](mailto:zibstar702@verizon.net).

**HOLYOKE** — Ron Lech: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Western Office, 55

Bobala Road, Suite 3, Holyoke; 413.537.2335, or at home, 413.893.9173.

**LYNNFIELD** — Mary Parry: third and fourth Saturdays of each month, 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.

**PITTSFIELD** — Ward F. Johnson: second Saturday of each month, 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](mailto:wardman33@aol.com).

**RAYNHAM** — Mary Hanna or Edward Nelson: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 756 Orchard Street, third floor, Raynham; 508.822.5371. Call Nelson at home, 774.239.7823, or Hanna at home, 781.545.2069.

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**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.

## Naughton and Gorrie elected to MTRB

**D**ennis Naughton and Jacqueline Gorrie, the two MTA-endorsed candidates for seats on the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement Board, were elected to four-year terms in December.

Naughton and Gorrie are MTA/NEA Retired members.

Two of the seven members of the board are elected by members of the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System, which provides retirement, disability and survivor benefits to Massachusetts teachers and

administrators and their families.

Naughton taught in the Millis Public Schools for 36 years before retiring. He was first elected to the MTRB in 2011.

Gorrie retired after 36 years of teaching kindergarten in Taunton. She will serve her first term on the board. Naughton received 11,784 votes and Gorrie received 11,109.

In addition, MTA/NEA Retired member Richard Liston, an MTRB incumbent, was reappointed by fellow board members to another term.

## DDMs draw criticism from educators

Continued from Page 7

issued a report in November that described "the formidable statistical and methodological issues involved in isolating either the effects of educators or teacher preparation programs from a complex set of factors that shape student performance." That report cautions against the use of such measures "for high-stakes decisions regarding educators."

"It's time for policymakers to

stop trying to reduce education to a number," Madeloni said. "We need to put the heart and soul back into our classrooms."

*To take action against DDMs, visit [massteacher.org/noDDMs](http://massteacher.org/noDDMs). Hit the "Take Action" button to go to a Baker administration Web page set up to identify regulations that are "confusing, unnecessary, inconsistent and redundant."*

## NEA RA coming to Boston in 2017

**T**he NEA Representative Assembly will take place in Boston in 2017, and the MTA will have the honor of hosting the event.

The MTA will be recruiting hundreds of volunteers to serve on the RA Host Committee. The event, scheduled for June 30 to July 5, is the world's largest democratic deliberative assembly. Those interested in filling leadership positions on the committee — either as chair, treasurer or one of five subcommittee chairs — should contact Mary Gilgallon, director of the Division of Governance and Administration, at [mgilgallon@massteacher.org](mailto:mgilgallon@massteacher.org).

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# Town gets into spirit of Read Across America

By Jean Conley

At the Loella F. Dewing Elementary School in Tewksbury, celebrating Dr. Seuss is a two-week event that involves the whole community.

Pre-reading and reading are a welcome part of the daily routine for students at the preK-2 school, first-grade teacher Kathy Carleton noted. But Read Across America — which will be formally celebrated this year on March 2 — is even more special, as are the days that follow.

“We celebrate Read Across America for a lot of reasons,” said Carleton, who has taught at the school for nine years and been a teacher for 20. “Number one is to promote reading. Second, Dr. Seuss was a Massachusetts resident; we like to celebrate people from Massachusetts and all of the great things they have done.”

The third reason is simple, she said: “What student doesn’t love Dr. Seuss?”

The idea for a national day dedicated to literacy was hatched

‘What student doesn’t love Dr. Seuss?’

— Kathy Carleton  
First-grade teacher

in 1997 at the National Education Association, which chose the birthday of Theodor Seuss Geisel — known by readers around the world as Dr. Seuss — as the date.

Some Read Across America events are woven into tradition at Dewing and some have come and gone. One year, educators brought in bubble wrap. As Dr. Seuss’s “Hop on Pop” was being read aloud, the students stomped on the wrap in the hallways. “That was fun — but very loud,” said Carleton.

Smaller wrap was brought in for any students sensitive to loud noises so they could step on the bubbles in the relative quiet of their classrooms.



Brightly colored artwork in the hallways helps students at the Dewing Elementary School in Tewksbury become excited about Read Across America events. RAA Day will be celebrated on March 2.

Photo courtesy of Dewing Elementary School

This year, educators will honor another tradition — keeping a tally of books read as a schoolwide challenge.

The students will visit the “Dewing School Museum,” featuring posters of famous artists on the walls along with representations of their work. As each class meets certain goals, it will be introduced to the next famous artist.

This year’s chosen book — “The Ant and the Grasshopper” — will be read to students on the last day of the

challenge at an all-school assembly. Then the students, wearing bright colors to celebrate the arrival of spring, will enjoy a memorable “dance party” arranged by a local disc jockey.

Bringing in the community impresses on the children that no matter what they become in life, reading plays a major part.

Two years ago, Tewksbury’s first responders were invited. Fire and police officers and EMTs were on hand, as were members of the military services and the School Committee. In past years, the town manager and other municipal officers have been invited — and Boston Marathon runners were on hand for one RAA celebration.

One of the most popular events has been “Read Across the Dewing,” with the students sitting in the hallway enjoying sustained silent reading.

“Everyone just dropped everything and read,” Carleton said. “The kids loved it.”

With all the activities surrounding Read Across America Day, students and their families get the message about the importance of reading. In 2015, the students impressed educators, parents, and their community with a total of 3,100 books read over the two-week span.

Suggestions, resources and reading lists are available on the NEA website, [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org), under “Grants and Events.” The site features a poster; the Read Across America song, oath and poem; and a link to the Dr. Seuss “Cat-a-log.” NEA’s Read Across America Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/neareadacrossamerica](http://www.facebook.com/neareadacrossamerica), offers even more ideas.

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# New teachers are urged to 'enjoy the moment'

By Scott McLennan

A large banquet room buzzed with conversations about how to not just survive — but thrive — in the early years of a teaching career.

One teacher asked colleagues sitting at a table with her how they handled challenging special education plans. Teachers at another table focused on the best ways to spark a love of reading in students. Others swapped their “embarrassing teacher moments” and “best teaching moments.”

This was the revamped look of the MTA’s annual Just For New Teachers conference, which was held Dec. 4 at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel and Conference Center.

The MTA New Member Committee, which organizes the event, did away this year with traditional plenary and keynote-speaker formats. Instead, the committee opened the conference with a lively question-and-answer session with members that was moderated by Michael Milton, who used his time at the microphone to quiz panelists Rose Bell, Andrea Pires, Gene Reiber and Melanie Levine.

The panelists tried to highlight “the stuff you don’t learn in college.” Pires, for example, described the unexpected bonds that teachers form with students. Reiber reflected on how rapidly educators progress in their careers and advised the approximately 200 attendees to “enjoy the moment.”

The conference did offer its traditional array of workshops aimed at meeting the needs of educators within their first five years of practice. Participants delved into classroom management techniques and student-engagement strategies with peers from across the state.

The lunch between workshop sessions was all about conversations and connections, a practical demonstration of New Member Committee Chair Laura Vago’s reminder that “we’ve got your back.”

“We will listen to your successes and frustrations, answer your questions, hug you, share our best strategies, tell you the stories of the times



Photos by Scott McLennan

April Allegrezza, a music educator and mentor to new teachers in the Milton Public Schools, commented during a question-and-answer session at the Just For New Teachers conference.



As they ate lunch, educators heard words of advice and inspiration from their colleagues.

things went really well, and tell you the stories of the complete disasters we survived,” Vago said in remarks during the luncheon.

MTA leaders acknowledged the challenges that new educators face and reminded them how important their work is.

MTA President Barbara Madeloni spoke about the joy of teaching and how it is under assault from the campaign to standardize and privatize public education.

“You’re here because you are driven by something that is possible,” Madeloni said. “Don’t let anybody tell you that a vision is not essential.”

MTA Vice President Janet Anderson told the audience that she has never regretted her decision to become a teacher. She quoted from the novel “The Prince of Tides,” written by Pat Conroy, saying, “There’s no word in the language I revere more than ‘teacher.’ My heart sings when a kid refers to me as his teacher, and it always has. I’ve honored myself and the entire family of man by becoming a teacher.”

Even as a number of new teachers opened up about challenges presented by everything from lesson planning to finding the right mentor, Vago and other members of the New Member Committee assured them that everything tends to work out.

“We know that you are going to be the excellent future leaders of our profession,” Vago said. “We know that you will prove to the world why it is that teaching is the noblest of professions, worthy of care, support and defense within an increasingly hostile public sphere.”

To view more photos of the 2015 JFNT conference, visit [massteacher.org/jfntphotos](http://massteacher.org/jfntphotos).

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# Listening tour aims to build ESPs' power

By Bob Duffy

Developing ways to help education support professionals realize and increase their power — and make sure their concerns and contributions are recognized — were the key goals of a recent MTA ESP Listening Tour.

“This is a great start to creating a better vision for what ESP members want to do to improve their power,” said Donna Johnson, the at-large ESP representative on the MTA Board and a member of the MTA ESP Committee.

Two listening tour events were held — at the MTA’s Auburn regional office on Nov. 4 and at Quincy headquarters on Nov. 18, National ESP Day.

“Everyone has something to offer,” Johnson said. “The ESP Committee established these forums to brainstorm with ESP members about their thoughts and concerns — and hear directly from them — to see what they need from the MTA and their locals to help them get their jobs done.”

The forums started with a welcome from the MTA ESP Committee. Afterward, there were dinners during which participants introduced themselves and talked about their working conditions. Then the ESPs broke into smaller brainstorming groups to discuss their most pressing issues.



Judy Provencher, president of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional Secretaries and Assistants Association, Maureen Clark of the Rockland Education Association and Deborah Heath of the Pembroke Teachers Association, left to right, attended a session of the MTA ESP Listening Tour at the association’s Quincy headquarters.

Photo by Bob Duffy

Deborah Heath, a paraprofessional at North Pembroke Elementary School and a member of the Pembroke Teachers Association, was struck by the fact that ESPs from all over the state face similar challenges.

“A lot of us experience the same issues, no matter what district you are in,” she said.

Nicole Sapienza, a paraeducator at the Cunniff Elementary School in Watertown and a member of the Watertown Educators Association, said the forum she attended marked her first MTA

meeting. She said she found the listening tour “very enlightening.”

ESP Committee member Janelle Quarles, who helped facilitate at the events, said that some common concerns included ESPs being forced to act as substitute teachers without proper compensation, a lack of professional days and very little district-provided training. “We are going to try to get members to organize around these types of issues and to begin to develop allies in their districts who can help address the problems,” Quarles went on to say.

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Here in New England, winter driving conditions can be difficult and dangerous. With a little extra preparation and awareness, however, we can overcome almost anything Mother Nature sends our way.

Traveling on icy roads or in snowstorms can be risky — and everyone is advised to stay home whenever possible if the roads are dangerous. But staying home isn't always an option. That's why it's critical for you to know your vehicle and make sure it is prepared for the season.

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It's very important that your vehicle be stocked with items that will help you handle the inevitable: You need a shovel and a broom to dig your car out of a snowbank, sand or kitty litter to give you traction when you get stuck, and an ice scraper for clearing your windows. It's also important to have jumper cables, a flashlight and a blanket in case your vehicle breaks down.

Checking your battery regularly is essential when the temperature drops. In electric and hybrid vehicles, batteries work better when they warm up, so starting your car a couple of minutes before you are ready to drive is encouraged. It takes more battery power to start your vehicle when you have a gasoline-powered engine, so you should check your battery for sufficient voltage.

Safe winter driving also requires maintaining good visibility. Check your windshield wipers and defroster. Make sure your wipers work, replace any worn wiper blades and make sure that you have plenty of antifreeze wiper fluid. If you want to be extra cautious, consider installing heavy-duty winter wipers to handle snow and ice.

Inspecting your tires before snowstorms begin is also important, and installing snow tires is highly recommended. If you plan to use the existing tires



on your vehicle, check to ensure that the tread has no uneven wear and that the tires are properly inflated.

Checking the age of your tires is also important. The older the tire, the more prone it is to failure. Tire rubber tends to degrade after several years, so check for this and replace the tires if they are degraded. The manufacturing date is listed on the sidewall of the tire. Look for the last four digits next to "DOT."

No matter what the weather may be, make sure your floor mats do not create a driving hazard. Did you ever try to put your foot on the brake pedal, accelerator or clutch only to find the floor mat was preventing you from doing so because it was installed incorrectly? This increases the risk of a crash.

It is crucial that you replace old mats and never stack them on top of each other. Be sure that the mats are the correct size and that they are installed properly to prevent them from sliding forward.

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The margins are as follows: For a line amount of \$15,000-\$24,999 is +0.00%; for a line amount of \$25,000-\$250,000 is -.50%; for a line amount \$250,001+ is 0.00%. Your APR will vary based on your final loan amount and actual finance charges. Stated margins require a Berkshire Bank checking account and \$15,000 minimum draw into the Berkshire Bank checking account at closing. +.50% will be added to the margin for an approved bank policy exception. The annual fee of \$50 will be waived for MTA members for the life of the loan; a minimum advance fee of \$15 is charged for advances of less than \$250; stop-payment fee of \$25; return check charge of \$25. If the line is paid in full within the first 36 months, the bona fide third-party charges paid by Berkshire Bank in connection with the transaction will be recaptured. This fee will be the lesser of \$500 or the actual amount paid by the lender on behalf of the borrower. For NY properties, the recapture fee is the lesser of \$500 or the actual amount paid by the lender on behalf of the borrower, together with the total amount of lender-paid borrower mortgage tax. The Bank pays all standard fees for loans of \$250,000 or less. Non-standard third-party charges are paid by the customer and include: third-party lender's subordination fee, subordination recording fees, condo/HOA document fees, overnight mailing fees, appraisal upgrade fee, title insurance (if required), and attorney fees over \$250. For lines exceeding \$250,000, the customer pays the cost of lender's title insurance, attorney's fee over \$250, and the portion of the NYS mortgage tax on the line amount exceeding \$250,000. Loan approval is subject to underwriting criteria. First or second lien on 1-4 family owner-occupied residences and qualified second homes only. Offer does not apply to non-owner-occupied properties, rehabilitation loans, manufactured housing or homes currently offered for sale. Homeowners insurance is required. Flood insurance may be required. Offer subject to change without notice. Interest may be tax-deductible; check with your tax advisor. **Home Equity Loan:** Payment chosen must amortize over five-, 10-, 15- or 20-year term. <sup>3</sup>The APR .25% discount is available on second lien home equity loans for qualifying properties in Berkshire Bank's footprint with a loan-to-value (LTV) of 80% or less for loans of \$15,000-\$250,000. An equity loan of \$75,000 with a five-year term at 3.990% APR results in 60 monthly payments of \$1,381.01 for second lien. An equity loan of \$75,000 with a 10-year term at 4.250% APR results in 120 monthly payments of \$768.40 for second lien. An equity loan of \$75,000 with a 15-year term at 4.490% APR results in 180 monthly payments of \$573.49 for second lien. An equity loan of \$75,000 with a 20-year term at 4.875% APR results in 240 monthly payments of \$489.95 for second lien. To obtain the APRs above, a Berkshire Bank Checking Account is required. Minimum loan amount is \$15,000 and maximum loan amount is \$250,000. +.50% will be added to the APR for an approved bank policy exception. If the loan is paid in full within the first 36 months, the bona fide third-party charges paid by Berkshire Bank in connection with the transaction will be recaptured. This fee will be the lesser of \$500 or the actual amount paid by the lender on behalf of the borrower. For NY properties, the recapture fee is the lesser of \$500 or the actual amount paid by the lender on behalf of the borrower, together with the total amount of lender-paid borrower mortgage tax. The Bank pays all standard fees for loans of \$250,000 or less. Non-standard third-party charges are paid by the customer and include: third-party lender's subordination fee, subordination recording fees, condo/HOA document fees, overnight mailing fees, appraisal upgrade fee, title insurance (if required) and attorney fees over \$250. For loans exceeding \$250,000, the customer pays the cost of lender's title insurance, attorney's fee over \$250, and the portion of the NYS mortgage tax on the line amount exceeding \$250,000. Loan approval is subject to underwriting criteria. First or second lien on 1-4 family owner-occupied residences and qualified second homes only. Offer does not apply to non-owner-occupied properties, rehabilitation loans, manufactured housing or homes currently offered for sale. Homeowners insurance is required. Flood insurance may be required. Offer subject to change without notice. Interest may be tax-deductible; check with your tax advisor. **Consumer Loan:** Consumer loans qualifying for the .50% APR (Annual Percentage Rate) discount are limited to secure personal, auto, boat, motorcycle, ATV, snowmobile, or watercraft and require automatic payment from a Berkshire Bank checking account. Other fees may apply.



# ESSA is seen as an opportunity to seek productive changes

Continued from Page 10

percent on state standardized tests and/or those with low participation rates and/or high schools with low graduation rates for subgroups are rated Level 3 or lower. Level 1 and 2 designations are based on progress toward reducing proficiency gaps. Designations of Levels 4 and 5 are at the discretion of the commissioner of education. Under ESSA, the state must identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools at least every three years and identify schools with low-scoring subgroups. At this time, it is unclear how this change will affect the state's rating system.

■ **Accountability Indicators:** This is one area where the state must modify its regulations.

Currently, the accountability system is heavily weighted to test-score-related measures, though graduation and dropout rates and English language proficiency are also part of the formula in some schools. Under ESSA, at least one indicator of school quality — such as measures of student engagement or access to advanced coursework — must be included. However, all such measures of school quality must account for less than half of the accountability rating.

■ **School Improvement Grants.** Funds for this program will be consolidated into a bigger Title I pot. Overall, states are expected to receive about the same amount of resources for school improvement

that they do now. Federal intervention models such as transformation or restart are no longer required. States will establish their own models.

“The new law doesn't reduce testing and by itself it doesn't lower the stakes on tests that must be given,” said Madeloni. “It does shift the locus of some decision-making back to the states. We need to work together to shift it even further — back to districts, schools and classrooms. Teachers know a lot more about what our students need than policymakers in Washington, on Beacon Hill or in Malden do. We shouldn't be running victory laps just yet, but we should see this as an opportunity to accelerate our efforts to reclaim public education.”

## MTA PRECONVENTION MEETINGS SET FOR APRIL

**R**egional preconvention meetings have been set for elected delegates to the 2016 MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates. At these preconventions, the delegates will receive information and materials critical to their decision-making on organizational matters.

Each meeting is scheduled to begin at 4:30 p.m., with registration starting at 4.

The following is a list of locations and dates for the 2016 preconventions:

■ Thursday, April 7: Central Region, Best Western Royal Plaza, Marlborough.

■ Tuesday, April 12: Northeast and Metro Regions, Crowne Plaza Boston-Woburn, Woburn.

■ Thursday, April 14: Western Region, Hadley Farms Meeting House, Hadley.

■ Tuesday, April 26: Southeast Region, Holiday Inn Taunton-Foxboro, Taunton.

■ Thursday, April 28: Cape Cod and Islands Region, Cape Codder Resort, Hyannis.

The Annual Meeting of Delegates will be held May 13 and 14 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. Further information will be provided to delegates as it becomes available.

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## Obituaries

**Mary E. Anderson, 76**, of Warren, Ohio, formerly of Brockton. Taught fourth grade for 32 years in the Brockton Public Schools before retiring in 1998. Nov. 18.

**Stephen M. Clark, 66**, of Jamaica Plain. Served as a project manager in the Department of Professional and Continuing Education at Massachusetts College of Art and Design and coordinated partner relationships with cooperating institutions. Aug. 2.

**Gerald E. Dlouhy, 84**, of Dartmouth. Was a history and economics teacher at New Bedford High School for several years and then served as Southeastern regional manager for the MTA. Nov. 13.

**Carmella P. Farina, 95**, of Braintree. Was an elementary school teacher for the Braintree Public Schools for 40 years. Oct. 29.

**Morrison G. Ferrier, 79**, of Ludlow. Taught for four years at South

Hadley High School and then taught at Longmeadow High School for 31 years. Nov. 21.

**Sheila F. Johnson, 74**, of West Boylston. Taught in the Worcester Public Schools for many years. Oct. 27.

**James F. Rice, 74**, of Worcester. Was professor emeritus of English at Quinsigamond Community College, retiring in 2013 after 44 years. Was active in a number of

organizations including the MTA, NEA, Massachusetts Community College Council and National Council for Higher Education. Served as president of the MCCC and NCHE. Dec. 16.

**Michael Williamson, 71**, of Hall County, Georgia, formerly of Brockton. Was a teacher and counselor for the North Middlesex Regional School District in Townsend until his retirement in 2001. Nov. 2.



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## Community involvement seen as crucial

Continued from Page 13

“quality education and support for all — teachers and students, prekindergarten through age 21.”

At another table, the discussion turned to the types of actions that get a community's attention.

Norene Gachignard, who teaches nursing at North Shore Community College, noted that her neighbors and students had let her know they supported Massachusetts Community College Council members struggling to win a fair contract. Their consciousness was raised when MCCC members decided to stand along the side of Route 1 holding signs on chilly November days, she said.

Deborah Gesualdo of the Malden Education Association said that due to a budget crisis, her district almost lost a music program. When students became aware that their teachers were making picket signs, they were moved to advocacy. The program was saved largely because of the students' involvement, Gesualdo said.

Lisa Donovan, a member of the Melrose Education Association, agreed that combined efforts are crucial. “If you get the students involved, ultimately the parents get involved,” she said. The first priority at Donovan's table was economic inequality. Members discussed health care, funding for public education and pensions for public-sector workers.

Donovan said the participants agreed that “you need to make the message more personal.”

“We also need to teach colleagues about labor history,” she said. “That knowledge will help them to be more engaged.”

# Classifieds

## BOOK SALE

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## EMPLOYMENT

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## TRAVEL STUDY

2016 SALEM STATE TRAVEL INSTITUTES: Join us for two travel institutes. April 16-24 (Massachusetts school vacation): War and Memory in Former Yugoslavia (Bosnia — Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Mostar; Croatia — Split, Dubrovnik). July 7-18: Battle for Europe in WWII (Netherlands — Rotterdam, Kinderdijk, Antwerp, Amsterdam; Belgium — Bastogne, Bruges, Brussels). E-mail [cmauriello@salemstate.edu](mailto:cmauriello@salemstate.edu) or visit <http://salemstate.edu/chgs>.

SEMINAR — Education in Ireland (six graduate credits) June 30-July 23. National University of Ireland, Galway. Study aspects of the Irish education system and the history, literature and culture of Ireland. Call or write Barney Keenan, NUI coordinator, 127 Glen Road, Gorham, N.H. 03581; call 603.466.2972, or e-mail [Lilysky@ncia.net](mailto:Lilysky@ncia.net). The Trip of a Lifetime!

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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.<sup>1</sup>
- More than 10% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 have a disability.<sup>2</sup>
- Teachers in Massachusetts are not eligible to collect Social Security disability benefits.

<sup>1</sup> National Safety Council, Injury Facts, 2008 edition.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Social Characteristics in the United States, 2009.





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# Fair Share Amendment moves forward

By Scott McLennan

A proposed constitutional amendment that would raise revenue for greater investment in public education and transportation has received the endorsement of a key legislative panel.

The Joint Committee on Revenue, which held a hearing Jan. 19 on the Fair Share Amendment, reported the measure out of committee favorably on Jan. 29. The amendment will now be presented to the House and Senate, meeting jointly in a constitutional convention.

The amendment, which would generate more than \$1.5 billion a year, calls for an additional tax of four percentage points on annual income over \$1 million.

At the State House hearing, a steady stream of advocates voiced support for the proposal.

Economists and business leaders argued that more support for public education and transportation would help the state's economy grow and provide more opportunities for everyone in the Commonwealth.

Educators and parents told legislators about the results of shrinking budgets, describing inadequate classroom resources and insufficient early education opportunities.

Public higher education faculty and staff — and other higher education supporters — testified that students are taking on greater amounts of debt to cover higher tuition and fees.

Meanwhile, they said, public college and university campuses are privatizing services, deferring maintenance and allocating more



Photo by Scott McLennan

Cambridge teacher Betsy Preval, right, testified in support of the Fair Share Amendment along with Rodney Mohammed, a Brockton parent, center, and Clare Higgins, executive director of Community Action of the Franklin, Hampshire and North Quabbin Regions.

admission slots to out-of-state students simply because they pay more to attend.

"It doesn't take courage to support this measure — it only takes common sense," said Tom Goodkind, president of the Professional Staff Union at UMass Boston.

MTA President Barbara Madeloni also testified in favor of passage of the amendment.

"In recent years, we have seen the divide between rich and poor grow to historic levels. Let's be clear what this divide means: It means the long-held dream of college education is eroding for many. It means working parents must hold multiple jobs just to make ends meet. And it means that schools, especially urban schools, are consistently underfunded," she said. "We think it is fair to ask those

At the State House hearing, a steady stream of advocates voiced support for the proposal. Economists and business leaders argued that more support for public education and transportation would help the state's economy grow and provide more opportunities for everyone in the Commonwealth. Educators and parents told legislators about the results of shrinking budgets, describing inadequate classroom resources and insufficient early education opportunities.

who have reaped the biggest rewards from our economy to pay a fair share toward reversing these barriers for Massachusetts families."

Because the initiative would amend the state Constitution, it must pass through the Legislature's constitutional convention process, which means the question could not appear on the ballot before 2018.

The measure needs the approval of 50 or more legislators this session and at a constitutional convention during the 2017-18 session.

The Raise Up Massachusetts coalition, which includes the MTA, gathered more than 157,000 signatures on petitions supporting the ballot measure.

*For more information and updates, visit [www.massteacher.org/revenue](http://www.massteacher.org/revenue) or [www.raiseupma.org](http://www.raiseupma.org).*



# THE MTA Advantage

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

## Considering a home equity loan?

### Here's what you should know about new regulations

Home equity loans and lines of credit can be viable options when you need funds for home improvements, a down payment on another home or another major purchase. If you use the equity in your home to receive secured credit<sup>1</sup>, financing options with low interest rates and potential tax benefits<sup>2</sup> become available. You need to be informed so that you will make the decision that is best for you and your situation.

#### A home equity loan versus a home equity line of credit

"We help customers with the loan process, reviewing their financial needs and expectations while working in accordance with compliance regulations," said Stephanie Reusswig, vice president and retail loan manager at Berkshire Bank. "Our team is trained to help each individual customer achieve short- and long-term goals."

Berkshire Bank offers home equity loans and lines of credit of up to 80 percent of the value<sup>3</sup> of your home, and in some cases up to 85 percent, depending on a range of credit factors. Knowing what each home equity product offers allows you to determine which option best meets your needs.

#### ▶ Home Equity Loan

The borrower receives a lump-sum disbursement from the lender, minus any costs. The payment and interest rate are fixed, with a variety of terms available.

#### ▶ Home Equity Line of Credit

The borrower receives a revolving line of credit to use as needed. The monthly interest rate is variable, and payments are calculated on the current balance. This option includes a "draw" period with a minimum interest-only payment, followed by an amortized (principal and interest) repayment period.

#### 'Know before you owe' home equity loans

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's "know before you owe" regulations are now in effect. These rules affect how loans on residential

properties are disclosed. The regulations are designed to safeguard consumers by providing disclosures that are clear and easy to understand. This enables consumers to shop and compare lender rates and conditions easily.

#### A simpler process

Within three business days of your application for a home equity loan, you will receive a loan estimate that includes the interest rate, term, conditions, payment information and comparable cost information. Each lender is required to use the same form, so the information can be readily reviewed and compared. If you decide to proceed with the loan, you submit your intention to proceed to the bank and the loan process begins. At that time, any required verifying documentation — such as pay stubs, tax returns and insurance — will be requested.

*"We help customers with the loan process, reviewing their financial needs and expectations while working in accordance with compliance regulations. Our team is trained to help each individual customer achieve short- and long-term goals."*

— Stephanie Reusswig, vice president and retail loan manager, Berkshire Bank



Once your loan application has been evaluated and approved, you will receive a copy of the closing disclosure at least three full business days before closing. This allows you to review final closing costs and loan information. Once you have completed the scheduled closing and signed all of the required closing documents, the loan is funded and your funds are disbursed<sup>4</sup>.

#### Special benefits for MTA members

As an MTA partner, Berkshire Bank offers special savings to MTA members when they take out a home equity loan or line of credit. Please contact Berkshire Bank for details. MTA members are also eligible for an Elite Relationship Checking account with no monthly maintenance fees, and they have access to My Banker, a free concierge service providing 24-hour access to a specialized banking representative who responds to MTA members' questions.

<sup>1</sup> A lien is placed against your property as collateral.

<sup>2</sup> Consult with a tax specialist regarding tax benefits.

<sup>3</sup> An inspection by a licensed appraiser is required.

<sup>4</sup> If the subject property is a primary residence, the loan is subject to a three-day rescission period prior to funding. This gives the borrower three days to rescind the loan for any reason.

MTA members can apply for a home equity loan or line of credit in person at any Berkshire Bank office. Call **866.475.HOME (4663)** or apply online at **[www.berkshire.com](http://www.berkshire.com)**.

## Great retailers have joined the Access discount program this year

MTA Benefits offers members a wide variety of discounts. The primary goal of offering such a diverse selection of benefits is so that you can save money — and lots of it!

If you're interested in real deals, look no further than the Access discount program. Access is an MTA member benefit providing significant savings that help offset the cost of your annual dues. The Access savings network offers a multitude of exclusive, value-packed, easily redeemable and convenient savings. Access provides the largest private discount network of its kind, with more than 350,000 participating merchants and deals around the country.

From popular national brands to local favorites, you can enjoy savings of up to 50 percent at premier retailers, restaurants, hotels and more.

Access savings can be redeemed three ways — in stores, online or by phone. Save in stores by finding the merchant offer you'd like on the Access/MTA Benefits shopping website. Follow the specific redemption instructions provided,



print out a coupon and watch the savings add up! Save online by clicking the link from the Access page to the offer you want to redeem. Many offers feature hotels, car rentals and online merchants. Other discount offers are redeemable by phone. The Access website is intuitive and easy to use, with features such as keyword search, filters that help you search for specific discounts, and maps that show discount locations.

The My Deals Mobile® app is a convenient way to save right from your smartphone. You can search more than 300 brands in more than 165,000 locations. Simply show your mobile device at the

point of sale to get your discount. You can also track your savings each time you redeem an offer. There's no computer and no printer — just your phone. It's *that* easy!

Stay in the know about offers! Sign up to receive exclusive Access e-mail updates to get information about seasonal discounts, limited-time offers, newly added merchants and more so that you'll never miss an opportunity to save.

MTA favorites such as Walt Disney World, dressbarn and Dunkin' Donuts are still featured. In addition, we are excited to introduce many new merchants and fantastic new savings. Here are some discounts to celebrate: The Limited, Reebok, Fila, Ford and Lincoln motor companies, Chuck E. Cheese's, Jockey, PPG Paints, Crazy 8, Talbots, Puma Outlets and PacSun.

What are you waiting for?  
Log on to [mtabenefits.com](http://mtabenefits.com) to see how you can save money with Access today!

## MTA's annual disability enrollment gets underway

Beginning in the first week of March, members will see some familiar faces in their schools. They're not fellow members — they are our MTA disability enrollment counselors, who will be conducting on-site enrollment meetings. Many counselors return each year for open enrollment, bringing with them a real understanding of our members' needs. Members trust the counselors to offer sound guidance and help them understand the need for short- and long-term disability coverage.



Disability insurance is one of the most important benefits offered to MTA members. The need for it is clear. An illness or accident can come out of nowhere, leaving you unable to work and receive a paycheck. Coverage is inexpensive, and it provides members with a source of income when sick pay and sick banks are not enough to cover the full period of an injury or illness.

During the open-enrollment period through May 13, coverage is guaranteed. No medical questions are asked. The best time to get this coverage is before you need it. Benefits of the plan include:

- Benefit payment equaling 60 percent of salary
- Tax-free benefit payment
- Bank draft and payroll-slot options
- Benefit payment not offset by sick pay or sick bank
- Group rates for MTA members

Members in participating districts who aren't currently covered under the plan are encouraged to take a few minutes to meet with a disability enrollment counselor who will show you how the plan's benefits help.

Locals that don't currently offer the insurance in their districts can find out in just a few minutes how easy it is to provide interested members the opportunity to obtain coverage and protect their families. Call Tom Colbert at 774.551.0013, ext. 104.

Make 2016 a year of security and peace of mind as well as happiness and good health.



**Editor:** Elizabeth A. Bejoian  
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2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor, Quincy, MA 02171-2119  
Tel: 800.336.0990 • Fax: 617.557.6687  
Website: [www.mtabenefits.com](http://www.mtabenefits.com)

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

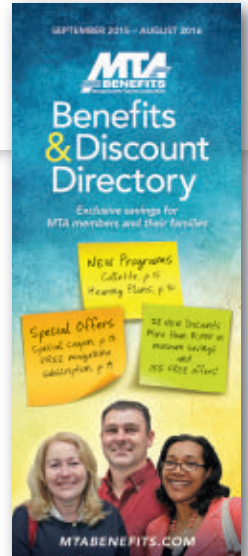


# Tip Sheet

All discounts listed in the Tip Sheet can be found at [mtabenefits.com](http://mtabenefits.com)

## The ABCs of saving with the *MTA Benefits & Discount Directory*

While you're searching for ways to pass these cold winter days, make sure you begin by checking your *MTA Benefits & Discount Directory*. You'll find thousands of dollars in savings at hundreds of local businesses — and a few national ones. Carrying your MTA member card could save you a fortune!



### Attractions

While New England's zoos and water parks may be out of the question at this time of year, there are still some discounts to take advantage of in the attractions category. **LEGOLAND® Discovery Center Boston** is a popular destination for children. Members save \$5 per ticket (limit of five) on admission. **The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate** offers \$2 off your admission.

### Car Care

Whether it's winter, spring, summer or fall, you should always be sure your car is in tiptop shape. **Mal's Servicer Tire and Towing Company**, with locations in Arlington and Lexington, offers a 5 percent discount on parts and service. **Affordable Auto Glass** in West Springfield provides free windshield wiper blades with a windshield replacement. Head to **Valvoline Instant Oil Change** locations throughout Massachusetts for your next service and receive a 15 percent discount on goods and services.

### Entertainment

Theater and music lovers — this category is for you! The **Berkshire Bach Society** celebrates the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and offers a \$5 discount to members and their family members. The newest entertainment addition to the Discount Directory is **The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts** in Worcester. Tickets are available at group rates for a select number of shows throughout the year; visit [mtabenefits.com](http://mtabenefits.com) for details. If you prefer the big screen, head to **Sunbrella IMAX® 3D Theater at Jordan's Furniture** to catch the latest blockbuster at half price.



### Fitness

Stay fit in the new year with a variety of discounts. Save 10 percent on a membership to the **American Kempo Karate Academy**, which has six locations. The **Woman's Workout Company** in Hyannis will waive the signup fee — a \$49 value — for MTA members. **YogaAnita**, a new member-owned business in Leominster, is offering members their first class for free. Additional discounts on class packs are available.



### Bookstores

There are a number of local bookstores offering MTA members discounts from 8 percent to 50 percent. Try **Booklovers' Gourmet** in Webster for a 10 percent discount or **Eight Cousins Children's Books** in Falmouth for a \$10 coupon. The publisher **Haymarket Books** is offering MTA members a 50 percent discount on "More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing."

### Learning

Several types of learning discounts are available to MTA members through the Discount Directory. **Commonwealth Learning Centers** in Danvers and Needham offer discounts on tutorial sessions, and the **Commonwealth Learning Online Institute** offers professional development. Have you considered taking up a new language? Save 15 percent on classes in French, Spanish, German and other languages at **Fluent City** in Boston.

### Member Authors

Support your fellow members by purchasing a member-authored book. A few suggestions: "Cold Case to Case Closed: Lizbeth Borden, My Story," by Rich Little; "Dinogirl: The Story of a Girl and a Dinosaur," by Denise Porcello; "Snōshoo the Stowaway Bunny," by Alice Schellhorn Magrane, and books by Arthur Richmond, Dorothy Stephens, Raymond Fell and Shirley Ann Howard.

### Museums

Our largest discount category provides more than \$960 in savings at more than 150 museums. Try the **Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art** for a 50 percent discount on admission. The world-famous **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum** offers two-for-one admission or half off a single admission. Free admission is available to MTA members at the **Berkshire Museum** in Pittsfield, the **Essex Shipbuilding Museum** in Essex and the **Whydah Pirate Museum** in Provincetown. *Continued on page 4*



# YOUR ULTIMATE TRAVEL HANDBOOK

All travel discounts can be booked online at [mtabenefits.com](http://mtabenefits.com).

## Car Rentals

- Alamo** – Save up to 20 percent, code 372109
- Avis** – Save up to 20 percent, code B291014
- Budget** – Save up to 25 percent, code R198114
- Hertz** – Save up to 20 percent, code 1859659
- National Car Rental** – Save up to 20 percent, code 5001097
- Zipcar** – \$35 membership, [www.zipcar.com/mta](http://www.zipcar.com/mta)

## Hotels

- Red Roof Inn** – Save 15 percent, code 615247
- Wyndham Hotel Group** – Save up to 20 percent, code 1000007604

## Vacations

- Collette** – Save up to \$400 per person, [gocollette.com/mta](http://gocollette.com/mta)
- CruisesOnly** – 100 percent Best Price Guarantee, [MTAVacations.com](http://MTAVacations.com)
- Endless Vacation Rentals** – Save 25 percent, [MTAVacations.com](http://MTAVacations.com)
- TNT Vacations Powered by Funjet** – 5 percent member discount, [MTAVacations.com](http://MTAVacations.com), code MTA
- Orlando Vacation** – Save up to 35 percent, [MTAVacations.com](http://MTAVacations.com), code MTA

## Don't forget the travel insurance

Travel Insured International provides superior travel insurance services to each customer. As an MTA member, you receive a group rate on coverage. We're hoping you won't need to take advantage of school year extension coverage, but it's available if you do!

Visit [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com) for plan options.



# Tip Sheet

The ABCs of saving with the *MTA Benefits & Discount Directory*

Continued from page 3



## Recreation

Whether you prefer to be out in the cold or warm inside, recreation awaits. Visit **Black Mountain** in Jackson, N.H., and receive \$10 off a full-price lift ticket. At **Wachusett Mountain** in Princeton, you'll save \$5 per lift ticket. If you're a beginner, save on a learn-to-ski/

snowboard package. New this year is **Rock Spot Climbing**, with two locations in Boston, offering members a \$7 discount on a day pass with gear.

## Retail

From jewelry to flowers and sweet treats, this category is a great resource for your next shopping trip. New retailers include **Chryssie's Bridal** in Canton, offering a 15 percent discount, and **Merrimack Premium Outlets** in Merrimack, N.H., offering a free VIP coupon book. Save 20 percent on custom picture framing at **Frantic Framers** in Quincy. If you're visiting **Hancock Shaker Village** in Pittsfield, stop at the museum store and receive 5 percent off your purchase.

## Services

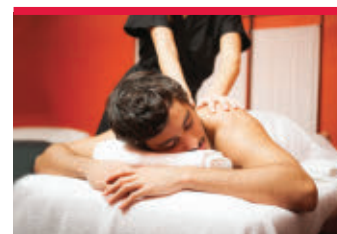
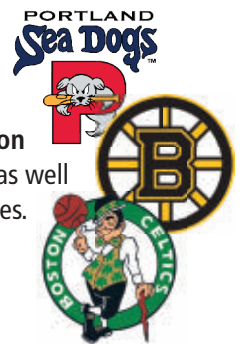
When you're in need of airport transportation, computer services or a storage location, look for savings in the Discount Directory. Receive discounted rates when you park at **Executive Valet Airport Parking** and save 10 percent using **Knights Airport Limousine Service**. Support a member-owned business and save \$25 with **Geek Handyman Computer Services** in Framingham. **Stor-U-Self Storage**, with locations around the state, offers a 5 percent discount.

## Sightseeing

This is the perfect time of year to explore a historic ice house and see ice sculptures. Save 50 percent on admission to **Cape Pond Ice Co.** in Gloucester. The **Freedom Trail Foundation** offers MTA members a \$3 discount per adult ticket on Colonial guided walking tours. The **Skywalk Observatory** at the Prudential Center provides an incredible view of Boston — and free admission for MTA members.

## Sports

Calling all sports fans! You are eligible for discounted sports tickets throughout the year. Get your tickets to **Boston Bruins**, **Boston Celtics** and **Portland Sea Dogs** games, as well as to sporting events at **Boston College** and other colleges. To learn about these offers, be sure you're registered so you'll receive our e-newsletter!



## Well-Being

Stress can take a toll on your body, so take the time to relax. Better yet, treat yourself to a massage. **Advanced Massage Therapy** in Brookline is a member-owned business. MTA members and their families receive a 20 percent discount. **Restoration**

**Massage** in Assonet offers an \$8 discount on a one-hour massage, and the price is cut in half if you're a new client! **Denise Patnod**, a licensed acupuncturist in Cambridge, is also new to the Discount Directory. She will provide a free health assessment.

All program and pricing information was current at the time of publication (February 2016) and is subject to change without notice. To find out what may have changed, please call MTA Benefits at 800.336.0990.