

## **Summary of Work -Election Bylaw Review Task Force**

The 2019 Annual Meeting of Delegates called for the formation of a group to study 2019 Bylaw Amendment Proposal #5, which would change those elections held at Annual Meeting (President, Vice President, Executive Committee, and Board of Directors) to be held as member-wide online elections.

The group identified key areas of concern and exploration relative to the proposed Bylaw amendment:

- **Campaign Funding/Fundraising**
- **MTA Expenses**
- **Election Security**
- **Experiences of other State Affiliates**
- **Policy Implications**
- **New way of Campaigning – Cultural impacts of this Shift**
- **Impact of proposal on Annual Meeting of Delegates**
- **Logistics Impacts**

### **Overall conclusions**

The group was very grateful for the opportunity to address this vital and weighty issue. There was agreement as to the need for this work to occur, and that the process was appropriate and constructive.

Taking a step back from all of its exploratory work, the group looked at the concepts of benefit and necessity. The intended benefit of a shift from the current election-by-delegate structure to an all-member voting structure is to enable greater electoral democracy. One question the group asked is whether there is a problem that needs to be fixed: what exactly are the problems with the current system of electing leaders through a system of representative democracy? Are MTA's current mechanisms and processes hampering democratic outcomes? Is it disenfranchising members? If members are not currently voting in local delegate elections, why not?

The group concluded that replacing or changing the current system was not a necessity, that is, the processes and manner in which MTA leaders are currently elected are not blocking or lacking in democracy, nor are there such obvious flaws that changes must or should be undertaken for either legal or political reasons.

Representative democracies are best when the greatest number of eligible members participate in selecting at the local level the colleagues who will represent them at the statewide meeting. Many local affiliates do not send delegates, and some districts send more representation than

others. Fostering greater participation – to close the gap between very engaged and non-engaged constituencies – could provide a greater focus for electoral reforms.

For perspective, the group compared MTA's Annual Meeting with the NEA-RA, another representative democracy, that is acclaimed as the world's largest democratic deliberative body.

NEA-RA: 7000 delegates represent 3 million NEA members = 0.24% of the membership attend the RA.

MTA Annual Meeting: 1500 delegates represent 110,000 MTA members = 1.4% of the membership attend Annual Meeting.

### **Will greater democracy be enabled and achieved by adopting the proposed change?**

The group was not able to conclude in the affirmative to this question.

Concerns about what would be lost and the introduction of new risks - the loss of a direct dialogue with the voting constituency (campaigning to delegates in the variety of ways currently enabled) and the risks of inviting outside money and undue influence of large donors - weighed heavily on the group. These concerns fall into the category of diminishing the democratic process, exactly the opposite of the stated intent, and outweighed the possible benefits of the proposal.

The potential for a corrupting influence around campaign fundraising and advertising was a recurring item the group addressed. Would this proposal result in a shift to what would become a "fundraising contest?" The potential destructive impact was fleshed out as a significant impediment to the proposal's success – an unintended consequence that would diminish democracy, the opposite of the desired goal.

### **Greater Participation = Greater Democracy?**

The group agreed that the overall number of voters in a statewide election would easily exceed the current number of voting delegates at Annual Meeting. Recent Annual Meetings average 1,500 delegates, and membership participation in a state-wide election would exceed that figure. But this numerical increase is misleading and overly simplistic. What is unknown is the number of members in total who participate in local delegate elections. It is reasonable to assume that this total numbers in the tens of thousands. The group did not believe that changing to a statewide election instead of a representative election would necessarily result in greater democracy.

Data provided by other NEA state affiliates indicates that an 8% to 10% voter participation level might be achieved. The group did not believe that such a low participation rate would be representative in all of the various categories desired: geographically, by position, and by other demographic groups.

The group struggled with the concept of an educated and engaged electorate. It was agreed that simply increasing the quantity of participants does not counter the many other factors

identified. Currently delegates take on a responsibility to be informed because they are going to vote at Annual Meeting. Individual members don't have that same level of responsibility; currently, it's not something every member is expected to do. The bylaws speak to this "duty" for the delegates, but there is no corresponding duty of membership.

Furthermore, the Task Force saw significant hurdles for full candidate-constituent outreach and campaigning and shared a concern that many voters would be uninformed or under-informed.

In the process of its work, the group ultimately identified significant concerns and issues – the eight bullets listed above – which came to light in the exploration and consideration of the new system approach being proposed.

By unanimous vote, the Task Force members voted to approve the contents of this report, February 13, 2020.

*Members:*

Karen Albano, Agawam

Ben Eisen, Chicopee

Jim Kaplan, Retired

Pete Schoonmaker, Sharon

Pam Skinner, Malden

Adam Snodgrass, Groton-Dunstable

**Any member who would like to receive a copy of the Task Force's full report on its work may request it by emailing [MTAGovernance@massteacher.org](mailto:MTAGovernance@massteacher.org).**