

MTA

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Association

TODAY



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**Paid Parental
& Family Leave**
Educators Demand Fairness

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Nancy Tynan Cederholm, a Wareham Education Association member, will see increased retirement benefits under the Social Security Fairness Act.

MTA TODAY

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC HAYNES



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Take Stock of Our Victories and Gain Strength For the Fights Ahead



“**Your union, and our 400 locals, will defend our schools and colleges, which are the bedrock of our democracy.”**

MAX PAGE

I am writing this editorial in late January, yet it already feels as if the new administration in Washington has been in for a year, wreaking havoc on our values, our institutions, our unions and our public schools and colleges.

The historian Timothy Snyder, in his book “On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century,” says that the first lesson in fighting back against an authoritarian regime is “Do Not Obey in Advance.” The second is “Defend Institutions.” Your union, and our 400 locals, will defend our schools and colleges, which are the bedrock of our democracy. But the wave of Trump administration actions, intended to generate fear and chaos, are enough to breed a sense of despair.

That’s why this issue of MTA Today could not come soon enough. The articles in this issue highlight union victories at three different levels – federal, state and local. They should give us all some additional strength for the fights ahead.

At the federal level, we won a battle that some of you have been waging for more than three decades – repealing the “steal” of the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision, two laws that denied our members the Social Security benefits they had earned. By finally passing the Social Security Fairness Act, we have won for our members a greater measure of retirement dignity. I am especially taken with the justice finally achieved for our ESP members, many of whom can now rely on spousal benefits which they were previously denied. The difference of hundreds of dollars a month will be life changing for them. I was pleased to join U.S. Sen. Ed Markey and labor leaders from Massachusetts and across the country at the White House for one of President Biden’s final bill-signing ceremonies.

Last November we won passage of Question 2, ending the use of the MCAS as a high-stakes test, which denied 700 or more students a year the diploma they earned through successful coursework. While the opponents have not given up, and we will be fighting efforts at the local and state levels to impose new, onerous, one-size-fits-all assessments, we have pushed off the worst threats to our victory. More importantly, more and more people – including those who might have opposed Question 2 – are coming out of the woodwork to say what you, our members, have been saying for years: There are better ways to assess students than a high-stakes test. And there are broader goals we have for our students than performance in a limited number of subjects on a bubble test. Quietly, many naysayers are thanking us for opening up a true public conversation on the mission of our public schools.

Finally, at the local level, one by one, we have been winning paid parental leave for our members. At virtually every bargaining table, the issue of parental leave is near or at the top of the agenda. Having helped win excellent paid family and medical leave for every other worker in the state, it is long, long past time for our members to get access to the state’s program. We believe this basic right should not have to be won local by local, but until the state acts on the legislation we have filed this session, our members will lead robust bargaining campaigns to demand this basic human right.

Please take a moment to celebrate these victories. We don’t do that enough because, as educators and unionists, you always know that there is more to be done to make change so that the world we live in now more closely matches the world we want to live in. **■**

Max Page, MTA President

Educators are Prioritizing PAID PARENTAL AND FAMILY LEAVE

By **Mary MacDonald**



Brittany McGrail, center, was one of the Gloucester educators who participated in a rally for parental leave last spring. Shown with her are, at left, Mary Beth Quinn and Jessica Haskell.

Kris Melanson remembers what parental leave looked like for him with his first son. Using his accumulated sick days, capped at three weeks, he tried to stretch out that last week by using half-days instead.

He found himself up all night with a newborn, while trying to create plans for substitutes and grade papers. “It was extremely difficult,” he said. “We got through it, but it was hard.”

Four years later, Melanson has a second leave with his second son. This time, he and other educators in Beverly are entitled to more modern parental leave – 12 weeks off, with six paid by the district and the remainder with sick days. This winter he’s at home, not worrying about his students, not grading middle school writing, and focused on his child.

It didn’t come without a fight. In Beverly, educators went out on strike as part of their bargaining campaign for parental leave and other benefits in a new contract. Across the state, locals are trying to negotiate for improved leave benefits that their members desperately want and need, including family leave that

would allow educators to take time to care for sick spouses, parents or children. All the while, most private employees in Massachusetts are entitled, under state law, to generous paid leave.

Exempted from that state law, public educators are fighting for fairness at the local level as well as statewide.

Rhonda Hall-Reynolds, a member of the Springfield Education Association, was a teacher of autistic children in 2020 when her husband suffered cardiac arrest. Initially hospitalized in Springfield, then transferred to Worcester, then to a rehabilitation hospital in Cambridge, her husband needed her help, but she couldn’t take leave from work without forgoing her salary.

She learned the city had not opted into the state’s Paid Family and Medical Leave only after emailing the district’s human resources office and inquiring about paid leave. The federal law of a similar name, which she’s entitled to take, is unpaid. “You’re doomed,” Hall-Reynolds said. “You can’t take that and pay your bills.”

She was left in an impossible position, having to drive between Springfield and Boston multiple times a week, while balancing her full-time job.

“While you’re in crisis,” she said. “And your loved one is in crisis. And you’re trying your best to be there for your husband who is sick in a hospital, and for your students who need you.”

Hall-Reynolds, whose husband died two years ago, is among those in Springfield now advocating for the city to join the state’s program for parental and family leave.

Parental leave, in particular, has become a driving issue in local campaigns in Massachusetts, in part because infant daycare has become so prohibitively expensive, said Melanson, who is on the bargaining committee for the Beverly Teachers Association.

The fact that preK-12 public education remains a female-dominated profession is factoring into the demand for strengthened parental leave. And

supporters say it also informs the opposition. Would educators have to fight so hard for this if it wasn’t primarily a workforce of women?

“There is this fundamental disrespect for this profession that is historically and still largely female,” said Julia Brotherton, co-president of the Beverly Teachers Association. “You have to be back and caring for the children. Even though you’re saying, ‘I’d like to be caring for my own child’.”

In its contract, Beverly secured six weeks of parental leave for educators who are birth parents, non-birth parents and adoptive parents. Teachers and

paraprofessionals all got the same benefit, Brotherton said. Before the contract, birth parents could take up to eight weeks, using their own sick time, and their partners could use their sick leave for three weeks. None of that was paid by the district.

If the educator giving birth hadn’t accumulated eight weeks of sick leave, they could take that time with their baby, but it would be unpaid leave, which many couldn’t afford. “We had people who came back after a few weeks, really,” Brotherton said. “People have said publicly, ‘I was still bleeding when I came back’.”

Brittany McGrail, who had her son, Henry, in early May, was lucky. After

“ There is this fundamental disrespect for this profession that is historically and still largely female.”

JULIA BROThERTON Co-president of the Beverly Teachers Association

Rhonda Hall-Reynolds, a teacher with the Springfield Education Association, is among those advocating for strengthened family leave for educators.





Stephanie Andrews, center, and fellow members of the Beverly Teachers Association rallied last summer for paid parental leave.

his birth, the Gloucester educator had enough sick and personal days accrued to last until the last two days of school, which she took off as unpaid leave. “I would have been going back at the five-and-a-half-week mark, if not for [giving birth in] May,” she said.

Gloucester educators went on strike in the fall. Their contract now provides more generous leave than what McGrail was afforded with Henry.

“It shouldn’t come down to luck,” she said. Local districts need to think about how life with a newborn can impact educators, she said. “Teaching is hard. It is not an easy job. It requires a lot of mental strength to do what we do every single day, that you don’t have when you’re trying to recover from giving birth, when you’re trying to take care of a baby.”

These personal stories are being shared and amplified in contract campaigns.

Over the past two years, 48 locals of the MTA have secured standalone, paid parental leave, according to data as of Jan. 18. (See page 8 for full details.) Those gains include eight weeks, or 40 workdays, in Andover, Cambridge, Hingham and Stoughton, and at Masconomet Regional.

In January, the Fall River Educators Association reached a contract creating four weeks of paid parental leave for birth and non-birth parents. In the past, the district allowed birth parents to take 12 to 14 weeks off as paid days if they had the sick time. But the district paid for no parental leave.

The new contract, which was ratified by the local, is expected to be approved in February by the School Committee.

Negotiations centered around issues of pay, not the leave, said Keith Michon, association president.

“The district was in agreement about the need for more modern parental leave,” he

said. “And they knew what was going on around the rest of the state.”

The move for family leave, a more expansive definition that would allow educators to care for their elderly parents, or spouses, or older children, is a fight that is ongoing. As a statewide solution, the MTA has introduced legislation that would remove the exemption for public educators in the existing state Paid Family and Medical Leave law. Enacted in 2021, the law provides paid leave for private employees who need time off from work to care for family, or themselves.

Covered through a combination of employee and employer payroll deductions, it provides up to 20 weeks for an employee’s own serious health issue, and up to 12 weeks for parents caring for a newborn, or newly adopted child, or a family member with a serious health condition. It covers a maximum weekly amount, which varies based on one’s pay.

Public educators, as well as other municipal employees, are not included under the law unless the local community opts in. To date, none have. TECCA, a virtual public school, is the only district that has opted into the program.

Max Page, MTA’s president, said it’s long past time for public educators to be included under the law. The union was among the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition that advocated for the creation of the family leave law.

“This is a basic human right enjoyed by workers in most industrialized nations. Educators should not be penalized when they have a serious illness or need to recuperate at home, or to care for their family members and children.” **T**



For more information on the state’s Paid Family Medical Leave, visit mass.gov/pfml.



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IN MASSACHUSETTS

How many workdays can educators take for parental leave? Over the past two years, many locals have successfully gained standalone parental leave in their contracts. These days can also be combined with sick leave in many cases.

By **Mary MacDonald**

60 DAYS

TECCA (K-12 virtual school)

45 DAYS

Andover, Cambridge, Hingham, Masconomet, Stoughton

35 DAYS

Gloucester

30 DAYS

Beverly, Greater Lawrence, Malden, Salem, Somerville

20 DAYS

Arlington, Blue Hills, Bridgewater-Raynham, Burlington, Canton, Hanover, Hampshire Regional, Ipswich, Lenox, Lexington, Lunenburg, North Andover, Newton, Randolph, Sharon, Wakefield, Watertown

15 DAYS

Marblehead

10 DAYS

Adams, Cheshire, Amesbury, Barnstable, Bedford, Danvers, Georgetown, Hamilton-Wenham, Mendon-Upton, Mt. Greylock, Nauset, North Adams, Norwood, Sandwich, Tewksbury, Wellesley

5 DAYS

Framingham, North Middlesex, Wareham



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MTA's Fight for Fully Funded **EDUCATION**

Public schools and colleges in Massachusetts are at a critical juncture. Rising costs and urgent needs threaten the quality of education across the state, but the Massachusetts Teachers Association is mobilizing its 117,000 members to drive transformative investments in public education from preK-16.

By **Jonathan Ng**



SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF MTA's 2025-26 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Fixing the Chapter 70 inflation glitch to ensure that funding keeps pace with real costs, fully funding the Special Education Circuit Breaker program, which supports districts that educate children with profound needs, increasing support for rural school districts, addressing skyrocketing transportation expenses and supporting investments to ensure the well-being of students and educators.

Reuniting a coalition of education allies to address inflation, special education costs, and transportation expenses that strain even affluent districts. The coalition is composed of unions, school committees, superintendents and grassroots allies.

Winning high-quality, debt-free public higher education. Having achieved a longstanding goal of free community college, focusing our efforts to expand that victory for students to four-year public colleges and universities and raising the

pay of staff and faculty. Advocating for fair pay and benefits for adjunct faculty and investing state funds in building green campuses.

Advocating for legislation that protects the will of Massachusetts voters responsible for the YES on 2 victory, including making MassCore a required program of study for high school students and establishing a commission to study and make recommendations on more holistic and accurate methods of assessing students.

Continuing advocacy to make legal public educators' right to strike if they have not been able to reach a contract after six months of negotiations.

Seeking a minimum \$70,000 salary for all Massachusetts teachers and a \$55,000 statewide minimum for Education Support Professionals. Include educators

under the state's Paid Family and Medical Leave law, with the state paying the employer's share of the cost.

Ensuring a dignified retirement for educators, including raising the base on which the annual state pension COLA is calculated. It has not been increased in a decade.

Allowing teachers hired before July 1, 2001, who did not provide a written election to participate in RetirementPlus, to have a second chance to do so. **T**

For more information, visit massteacher.org/legislation.





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With Passage of Question 2, Educators Look to More

AUTHENTIC EVALUATIONS

By **Scott McLennan** Photographs by **Jonathan Ng**

On Nov. 6, Danielle Seltzer’s first-period English class at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School was buzzing about the results of the presidential election.

One student finally asked, “Hey, what happened with the MCAS thing?”

“I said it passed, MCAS is no longer a graduation requirement,” Seltzer recalled recently. “They all cheered.”

That particular class, Seltzer noted, was for students with special education plans. She said the students are all capable of passing grade-level work, but doing so requires extra effort.

“One young woman — a ninth-grade student — said, ‘I’m so glad I don’t have to worry about MCAS anymore because I can actually focus on school,’” Seltzer said. “What I didn’t fully realize until that moment, was that at age 14 because of the MCAS and because of who these students were, they already came into

high school thinking that they didn’t have a chance. I am so inspired and reinvigorated by the fact that they now have that chance.”

Voters decisively passed Question 2 in November, ending the use of the 10th-grade MCAS exams as a state-mandated high school graduation requirement. Supporters of the ballot initiative driven by MTA members successfully argued that the high stakes of the MCAS exam narrowed learning and unfairly penalized students who just don’t perform well on standardized tests. In passing Question 2, Massachusetts joined the vast majority of states that have abandoned standardized tests as high school graduation requirements. Just six states continue to use standardized tests for graduation requirements, down from 27 states in 2012.

Massachusetts school districts must now certify that students have successfully completed coursework aligned with the state’s academic standards. And while opponents of Question 2 have been lobbying the state Legislature to delay implementation of the new law, Governor Maura Healey instead filed an executive order calling for the establishment of a Graduation Council tasked with making recommendations for statewide high school graduation requirements.



MTA President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy speak at one of numerous rallies held prior to the statewide vote on Question 2. The measure passed on Nov. 5 with 59 percent of voters in favor.

The MTA — as well as the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts and the Boston Teachers Union — will have a seat on the council. It is expected to deliver a report to the governor in 18 months.

MTA President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy urged Healey to seek a wealth of public input and noted that a goal of Question 2 was to open a statewide conversation about educating the state’s young people to become future citizens, neighbors, parents and workers.

“During the ballot campaign, we heard valuable insights from across the state about what residents want from our schools and how to best resource schools and evaluate their success, Page

“ Deeper conversations are now emerging about the value of multiple assessment methods ...”

CYNTHIA ROY
Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School

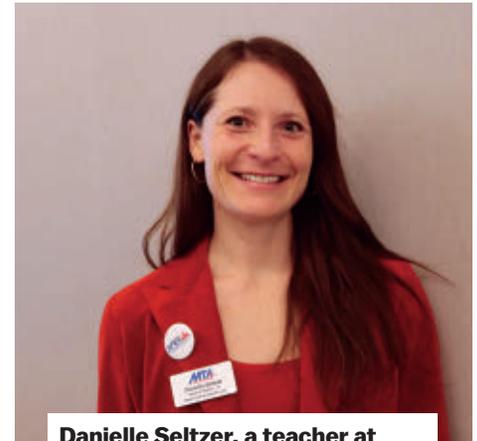
and McCarthy said, in a joint statement. “We look forward to participating in a council that intends to take seriously public involvement. With students and educators freed from the constraints of a high-stakes standardized test, now is the time to ensure that every student is able to have a rich and rewarding high school experience grounded in our

state’s high academic standards.” In moving away from the use of high-stakes standardized tests, education advocates need to envision — in McCarthy’s words — a “portrait of a graduate in the 21st century.”

“Now is the time to transition toward an approach that addresses the depth



Educators with the Melrose Education Association canvassed in September for YES on 2.



Danielle Seltzer, a teacher at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, said students can now earn their diplomas through enriching, relevant learning.

and breadth of the individualized educational choices and career interests of our students,” McCarthy said. “I imagine graduation pathways that maintain our academic rigor, that expand high-quality learning experiences and internships, and that make the high school experience more learner-centric and invigorating.”

As part of its legislative priorities, the MTA is recommending making MassCore a required program of study for high school students.

Cynthia Roy, who teaches science at Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School and is active in the New Bedford Coalition to Save Our Schools, vigorously campaigned for passage of Question 2. With the MCAS graduation requirement gone, districts are beginning to discuss grading policies and to look at assessment tools that acknowledge the limitations of standardized tests.

“Fortunately, deeper conversations are now emerging about the value of multiple assessment methods and the

Question 2 was placed before voters after the MTA led a statewide effort to collect 130,000 signatures.

shortcomings of tools like multiple-choice tests,” she said.

Roy, however, does caution against districts embracing pre-packaged curriculum which can in some cases be as undermining of educator autonomy as high-stakes testing.

“As an experienced educator, I can attest that some curricula labeled as ‘high quality’ do not meet the needs of students as effectively as materials developed by my colleagues,” she said. “In many cases, educators create superior curriculum resources aligned with state standards that are more rigorous, relevant and engaging. Professional educators must always adapt any curriculum to best serve their students’ unique needs.”

Another benefit of passing Question 2 is that it prompted the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to direct districts to provide a diploma to anyone who was denied one solely on the basis of their MCAS scores.

“I’m so grateful for the work of our union and work of our students and work of parents and community members all across the commonwealth,” Seltzer, of Amherst-Pelham, said. “Passing Question 2 allows students to earn a diploma the way it should be earned — through enriching, relevant, deep learning that is so much more than a test score.”

Urge state legislators to support MTA-backed legislation, which builds on our Question 2 victory, by expanding access to the rigorous MassCore program of study, and more. Please visit massteacher.org/testing.



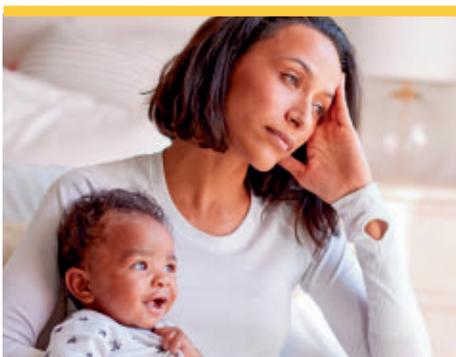
THE MTA Advantage

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

Balancing a Teaching Career and Family Life – A National Concern

By Mary Ferrara, LCSW-R CASAC of MTA Benefits partner MyRosalie

There is growing concern about the limited attention given to the vital importance of paid family leave. The United States is the only country of 41 higher-income countries that does not mandate paid leave for new parents or those with extended caregiving responsibilities. The burnout, stress and work-life balance challenges faced by educators have received renewed interest due to the many disruptions and changes to preK-12 schooling brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.



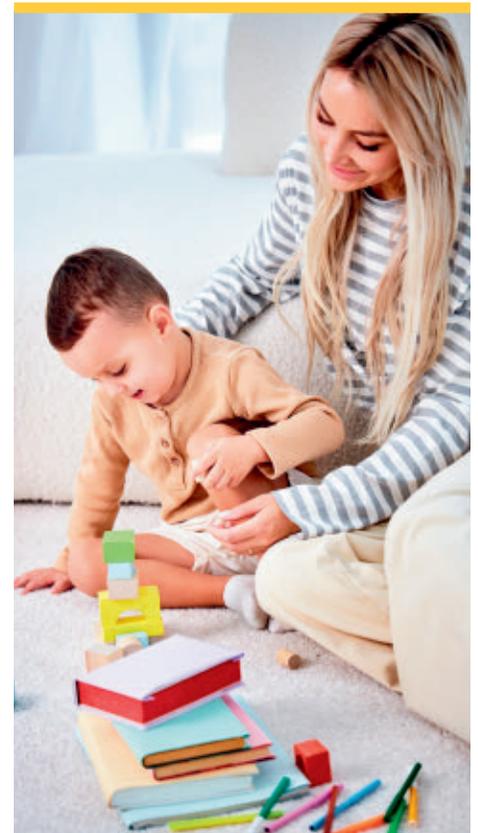
Post-COVID-19 mental health disorders in new parents

According to the American Psychological Association, research conducted over the past two years shows the urgent necessity for paid parental leave. The transition and changes experienced

by new parents can be both exciting and stressful. They are forced to juggle caretaking responsibilities, financial insecurities, and face career uncertainty. This elevated stress can lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and substance use disorders. An estimated one of every five new mothers experiences mental health disorders in the postpartum period and as many as one in 10 new fathers also may be affected, according to a 2021 study in Translational Psychiatry.

The return-to-work dilemma

Most educators employed by school districts without paid family medical leave (PFML) cannot afford to miss out on months of salary, so, if they have not purchased a disability insurance policy that covers maternity leave, (see page 16) they often must leave their own children to care for other children. Many mothers are forced to return to work, in many cases only weeks after childbirth to maintain financial security. Upon their return they are often anxious and resentful, which is only compounded by used up sick time and worry as to what to do if they or their child becomes sick.



This “patchwork” system of leave is an undeniable burden to the heavily stressed school system. In my work with several educators, I frequently hear their expressions of guilt over missing work to make medical appointments or calling out sick for themselves or a child; adding more

continued on page 18



Do You Need Disability Insurance If You Have Paid Parental Leave?

Parental leave offers wonderful benefits to people who are thinking of starting a family. How these programs work varies by district. Some districts structure their programs by allowing members to use a combination of days paid by the district and their sick days with an optional, additional unpaid period of leave. Other districts limit the number of accumulated sick days that can be used for parental leave. As more school districts across the state approve parental leave plans, both paid and unpaid, people may begin to wonder — do I still need short-term disability insurance?



Disability insurance is not a paid leave program, but its maternity benefits can dovetail nicely with parental leave. Whereas parental leave only accounts for the period of time after you have a child, disability insurance is a form of income protection designed to help you pay your bills if you're unable to work due to illness or injury. Under this bigger umbrella, MTA's Disability Plan can complement parental leave.

MTA's Short-Term Disability Plan is distinct in that it can provide benefits on top of maternity leave. After giving birth,

a mother can accumulate the funds from her disability plan at the beginning of her leave, which can be especially helpful in covering the expenses of an unpaid period away under her district's parental leave program. In addition, if prior to giving birth a member develops a medical condition that requires bedrest, disability insurance could pay benefits and replace a portion of their income before a parental leave plan begins.

Disability insurance benefits families beyond the initial "new parent" stage

Beyond parental leave, there are many other circumstances that might keep MTA members out of work. Any number of things can cause someone to become disabled: a car accident, postpartum depression, or even falling on the ice and suffering a head injury. If you are concerned about losing income while you're out of work on parental leave, you also need to consider how you'll protect your income if you can't work due to other causes.

The reality is that disability insurance has importance beyond maternity leave, and if you have children your paycheck becomes that much more essential to meeting your family's needs. You need to protect the financial security of your growing family in the event that you cannot work for an extended period of time. How will you pay your bills if you are out of work beyond a paid parental leave period? Disability insurance can help not only for maternity leave but also for the other causes that could keep you out of work, providing you and your loved ones with greater peace of mind so you can focus on the things that matter.

To learn more about the MTA Disability Plan, visit www.mtabenefits.com/disability.



Editor: **Carolyn Cassiani**
The *MTA Advantage* is published three times a year as a supplement to *MTA Today* by MTA Benefits, Inc.

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By NEA Member Benefits

The NEA Life Insurance Guide for Parents

No matter what your family looks like, life insurance can play a powerful role in helping to provide for your children in the event of your death. But your family's makeup can play a role in determining the types and amounts of coverage you might need. Here are the answers to a few things that parents might be wondering.

Why should parents have life insurance?

Life insurance helps cover the loss of income your family would suffer if you were to pass away. It's a way to help protect your kids after you're gone and provides you with options to secure your wishes for their future.

This insurance can be used to cover basic expenses, such as groceries or child care, but it can also be used to pay your rent or mortgage, your child's school tuition, end-of-life expenses and any debts you may leave behind.

Experts recommend that you carry at least 10 times your annual income in life insurance, according to a 2024 article published by CNN, "How much life insurance do you need?" While members might get some coverage through their district, it's important to look carefully at the numbers — you may need additional coverage to reach the recommended amount and secure your children's future.

What should I know about life insurance as my family's primary or secondary earner?

As the family's "breadwinner," you are likely the first person who comes to mind when people consider the need for life insurance. And they're not wrong — the loss of your income could significantly impact your children's way of life if you were to pass away. Basic needs aside, a gap in life insurance coverage could result in the need to cut back on your children's extracurriculars, narrow their secondary school options and make it difficult to manage the costs of services like tutoring and daycare.

Secondary earners are not to be overlooked, however. This income provides a critical segment of your family's

earnings and losing it, along with you, could also impact your family's ability to fund basic needs. Losing you without sufficient financial protection could very well have the same impact on your children's future opportunities as the loss of a primary earner.

Who should I name as my life insurance beneficiary?

It is common to name your partner as the beneficiary of your life insurance. This would provide them with the payout and help them provide for your children after you've died. If you do not have a partner, or you'd like to be more explicit in your wishes for the division of the money, you may want to name your children as beneficiaries. Depending on their age, that can be complicated.

Depending on the state, children under 18, or survivors under 21, are not allowed to receive life insurance payouts. It is, however, often possible to set up a life insurance trust in your child's name and name that trust as the beneficiary. A trustee, perhaps a spouse or another trusted adult, is then named to manage it until they reach the legal age. An attorney can set this up.

Life insurance options for NEA/MTA parents

The recommended level of 10 times your annual income in coverage might sound expensive, but NEA and MTA members have exclusive access to a suite of affordable life insurance options, such as NEA Group Term Life Insurance. Combined with any coverage provided by your district, these options can help you round out your family's protection without placing you under undue financial burden.

Explore life insurance options to help protect your family today at www.neamb.com/products/life-accident-insurance.



Balancing a Teaching Career and Family Life – A National Concern

continued from page 15

burden to their exhausted colleagues who often share similar concerns. This shame would not exist if the system was more resilient.

Widespread benefits of paid family leave

As more formal research has been conducted around the risks and benefits of paid vs. unpaid family leave, there is increasing evidence that paid leave is beneficial for the overall health of the family system. “Studies show that having 26 weeks of paid leave after childbirth benefits both the mother and child and is associated with decreases in postpartum depression, longer durations of breastfeeding and stronger infant attachment and development,” as referenced in a 2021 article on hechingerreport.org. It’s proven to reduce financial stress and allow adequate parenting and caregiving. More specifically, the health benefits of paid family leave support proper adaptation in new families, show better recovery outcomes after childbirth and reduce psychological stress and marital problems. New research also shows the value of this bonding time in the developing “fathering brain,” as fathers have the time and



financial means to properly bond with their infant child. Parental benefits of paid leave also correlate with better child development outcomes. In 2022, a study titled “Baby’s First Years” showed that monetary support can positively influence early brain development, which includes language development and fewer behavioral problems.

The struggle to win PFML for Massachusetts educators

There are clear inconsistencies in school districts that offer paid family medical leave throughout Massachusetts, as discussed in a 2023 article from WGBH.com titled “Paid Parental Leave for Mass.

Teachers Gains Traction.” Very few school districts in Massachusetts offer PFML. School departments, districts and municipalities are excluded from PFML unless their governing body votes to opt-in. Educator unions are strong advocates for PFML and can use the contract bargaining process to establish paid leave. In addition, it is no secret that there is nearly equal bipartisan support for paid family leave, which is rare to see in our current socio-political climate.

So, the question is, why hasn’t national paid family leave occurred yet? According to a 2023 CBS News article titled “Teachers Say Lack of Paid Parental Leave Makes it Hard to Start a Family: ‘Should I Even be Working Here?’,” the actual conflict relates to funding; should it be the federal or state government or the employer? MTA members must continue to advocate and bargain accordingly to enhance their benefits package and continue the push for necessary resources that support overall balance and wellness for educators.



Members Can Benefit from Family-Focused Services

By **Diamond Coleman**



Being a parent or expecting a child can be a joyous yet often overwhelming time. From managing the day-to-day routines to preparing for the future, it's essential for parents to have access to reliable resources. Fortunately, MTA members can tap into a variety of services designed to make life a little easier as they navigate parenthood and plan for the future.

GET PEACE OF MIND FOR LIFE'S UNCERTAINTIES WITH LEGALSHIELD

Preparing for the future is crucial, especially as your family grows. Creating a will is one of the most important tasks delayed by many parents. LegalShield offers MTA members a convenient solution. For \$20.95 per month, members can access experienced attorneys who will help guide them through the process of creating a will and provide advice on a variety of legal issues.

Having a plan in place for legal matters ensures that you're prepared for the unexpected, whether it's something minor or more serious. LegalShield provides affordable, reliable legal assistance that can be accessed 24/7, helping parents

navigate both the mundane and critical legal challenges of life.

STREAMLINE ESTATE PLANNING WITH GENTREO

Estate planning is another important aspect of preparing for the future. Gentreo helps families create, store, share and instantly access essential estate planning documents such as wills, health care proxies, powers of attorney and more. For \$85 per year, MTA members can take advantage of this service which includes expert coaching to ensure documents are properly completed.

Gentreo also offers the ability to securely share and update documents at any time, ensuring that your family's plans are always up to date. In an emergency, these documents are instantly available, providing peace of mind that your family's needs will be met, no matter the circumstances.

RECEIVE QUALITY CHILD CARE AT A DISCOUNT WITH KINDERCARE EDUCATION

For MTA members with young children, KinderCare Education offers a fantastic benefit. With a 10 percent discount on

full-time, part-time and drop-in tuition for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years, parents can access quality child care that fits their family's needs. KinderCare has over 70 locations throughout Massachusetts, ensuring convenient access for families.

KinderCare's early learning programs prioritize education and development, even for infants, and their expert teachers create a nurturing environment. With flexible scheduling options and a strong focus on health and safety, KinderCare is an excellent choice for MTA members seeking reliable, high-quality child care.

These resources, from legal assistance to child care, provide essential support for parents during a time when planning and preparation are more important than ever. By using these services, MTA members can ease the burden of family life and ensure a secure future for their growing families. ▮



For more information, visit mtabenefits.com.

2025 NEA Director Elections

This year, the MTA is electing three members to seats on the NEA Board of Directors.

Two seats are for three-year terms beginning Sept. 1, 2025, and expiring Aug. 31, 2028, in accordance with the NEA fiscal year. The third seat is to fill an unexpired term, beginning Sept. 1, 2025, and expiring Aug. 31, 2026.

For the seat to fill the remainder of an unexpired term, one member presented the requisite nomination papers with member signatures by the deadline and has been declared elected to the NEA Board. Cherian Armstrong, of the Monomoy Regional Education Association, has been elected to fill the remainder of an unexpired term, beginning this year on Sept. 1 and ending Aug. 31, 2026.

Per NEA Bylaws and MTA election policy, if the number of candidates does not exceed the number of seats to be filled, the election is waived, and the candidate declared elected.



Cherian Armstrong, a member of the Monomoy Regional Education Association, has been elected to the NEA Board of Directors.

For the two seats for a full, three-year term, four members have been nominated by presenting the requisite papers. The candidates are: Julia Norman, of the Waltham Educators Association; Conner Bourgojn, of the Tewksbury Teachers Association; Brian Fitzgerald, of the Wareham Education Association; and Kyle Gekopi, of the Wellesley Educators Association. These seats will be filled by direct vote of the active membership in March and April, in tandem with NEA state and regional delegate elections. Ballots will be provided to all MTA/NEA active members who are eligible to vote. Members may vote for up to two of the listed candidates.

For the contested seats, candidates' biographical statements and photos are on Page 21 and 22 of this issue of MTA Today.

MTA's NEA Directors also serve as members of the MTA Board of Directors, as MTA Annual Meeting Delegates and as delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly during their terms. ¶

For further information, please contact John Connelly of the Division of Governance and Administration by calling 617-878-8305 or emailing jconnelly@massteacher.org.

ANNUAL MEETING & PRECONVENTION INFORMATION

Each year, Annual Meeting delegates receive information and materials at preconvention sessions that are critical to their decision-making on organizational matters.

This year's preconvention meetings will be held virtually on Thursday, April 10, and Tuesday, April 15, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., in advance of the 2025 Annual Meeting of Delegates.

The Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, May 2, and Saturday, May 3, at the MassMutual Center in Springfield. Delegates will receive preconvention information and registration materials as soon as they become available. ¶

MTA CHORUS TO OPEN ANNUAL MEETING

MTA members who are interested in joining the MTA Chorus this year may contact Chorus Director Tim Sullivan at tsull10334@aol.com.

Two rehearsals will be held at Brockton High School. Rehearsals start at 6 p.m. on April 21 and April 28.

The chorus will perform at the 2025 Annual Meeting of Delegates, which will begin May 2 in Springfield. It is not necessary to be a delegate to participate in the MTA Chorus. ¶

Statements by Candidates for NEA Director Seat for Three-Year Term

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

JULIA NORMAN

Waltham Educators Association



Educators have been winning elections, groundbreaking contract campaigns, and organizing

initiatives that are changing the future of our profession. I am running for the NEA Board of Directors to continue this momentum.

I have stood in solidarity with MTA locals in the fight to win strong contracts, including the right to strike. We must continue to pave the way in demanding revolutionary collective bargaining agreements and harnessing our collective power.

Leadership opportunities in the Waltham Educators Association and the MTA have given me extensive experience in organizing our members. During our MTA campaign to eliminate the MCAS graduation requirement, I facilitated the gathering of thousands of signatures, recruited students and educators to appear in MTA statewide commercials, and spearheaded the MTA Grassroots' effort to support local associations to organize tables at community days. I also participated in canvasses, voted yes to campaign funding at the Board, and spoke at MTA rallies in Springfield and Waltham. Showing up and speaking up matter.

On the NEA and MTA Board, I will continue our fight for:

- Fully funding preK-16 Public Schools – Advocating for public schools and fighting privatization efforts.
- Fair Pay and Benefits – Advocating and bargaining for better compensation and mental health resources for educators.
- Dignified Retirement – Protecting educator pensions and securing regular COLA increases.
- High-Stakes Testing – Overhaul biased, high-stakes testing.

I have served on the MTA Board of Directors, as an MTA Political Action Leader, and on the Waltham Educators Association Executive Committee. My service to the MTA also includes 20 years of working on numerous committees. More information can be found at <https://sites.google.com/view/julianormanforneadirector>.

I would be honored to have your support as we work together to create an education system that truly works for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to the MTA. **T**

CONNER BOURGOIN

Tewksbury Teachers Association



If there's one thing I've been inspired by in the past few years in Massachusetts, it is how we

educators have found our collective voices. From fighting together against unsafe working conditions during a pandemic to seeing educators, together, taking back their dignity in the workplace in this current Massachusetts educators' labor movement, I am inspired by the bright future of public education in Massachusetts. While we are seeing solidarity and leadership on the local level, we need that same leadership on our NEA Board of

Directors to build on a national level.

Being an English teacher and union president, I have seen firsthand what coalition building and solidarity look like. I have been inspired to be a founding member of the first educators' bargaining coalition (Merrimack Valley Educators Bargaining Council) in Massachusetts, which has led to some of the most consequential contract wins in recent history. Through this council, I have learned that being together is not only within one local union, but throughout the state. I believe we can find power in coalitions to bring dignity and respect to educators throughout the country.

We have a tumultuous road ahead with public education and unions on a national level. If elected to the NEA Board of Directors, I will continue to bolster the 21st century labor movement by advocating for fair funding for every public district both in Massachusetts and our country. I will fight against the privatization of public education, and I will continue to bolster the rank-and-file driven mandate that commands what we need for both us public educators and our students. Such things as the Living Wage Campaign and paid parental leave didn't happen behind closed doors; they happened by us all coming together. I plan to keep this momentum going. **T**



BRIAN FITZGERALD Wareham Education Association

I ask for your vote to continue the important work of making our NEA a modern union that empowers

every member.

We need to build a union that finds strength with every member in every local throughout the state, that is unified across all natures of location, wealth, religion, and all that our opponents use to try to divide. An NEA that reaches out to the 10,000 educators who have chosen to turn down the chance to join our union.

Throughout my service on the Board of the NEA and the MTA, as MTA senate district coordinator, president of the Plymouth County Education Association, and as president of my own local in Wareham, I've been in the classroom all day, every day of my 20

years as an educator. I nurture allies among fellow public-school parents and guardians, and elected town meeting representatives in Plymouth. From the streets to the State House, I've spoken up for public education.

My values are expressed in my MTA and NEA Board votes. For years, I've voluntarily recorded those votes in the name of transparency and accountability. My record is available via <http://tinyurl.com/MTAregion41C>.

I'm proud to have undertaken the following:

- Authored the NEA Resolution text explicitly recognizing members' rights to strike.
- Led a fight to push the MTA into leading an information campaign about opting out of MCAS.
- Shared research at NEA Board meetings about partnering with

questionable organizations.

- Demanded we listen to members before spending millions of dues dollars.
- Co-wrote an NEA business item on religion-based attacks on educators.
- Focused on the threat and opportunity of AI in education.

I seek re-election to continue representing all members at all levels, statewide, no matter your local's size or wealth. I ask for your vote, and welcome your thoughts at weabrian@gmail.com. **τ**



KYLE GEKOPI Wellesley Educators Association

I am a passionate advocate for democratic unionism and building the power of rank-

and-file locals. As an incumbent NEA Director, I do not always see these values reflected in our national union. I have attended five Representative Assemblies sponsored by corporations who are hostile to unionism, to small-town America, and to consumer health. If elected to continue my service on the NEA Board, I will continue to work collectively with my Board siblings who demand transparency, member voice, and equity of access to build a vision and strategy for public education that supports all students and the labor movement. We must re-invest our time, energy, and hard-earned money into the

social systems that genuinely expand racial, social, financial, and educational justice.

I have been a proud union rank-and-file member, leader, and educator for 15 years. In 2023, my local successfully concluded a contract campaign that increased ESP salaries by 27%, expanded prep time, won Just Cause for our ESP staff, and expanded parental leave to 12 weeks for all parents and union members, regardless of gender.

I wish to replicate these wins at the national level. Member education, solidarity, and collective action were the only tools that worked. If good working conditions are good learning conditions, we must start learning more from our members, allocating resources effectively, and working together to support each other across state lines.

On the NEA Board, I work tirelessly to build solidarity alliances and educate members on how to exercise their collective power to further breathe life into our collective education workers' movement. If you'd like to connect, please email me at GekopiWEA@gmail.com or text me at 407-797-1354! I thank you for reading and ask you to send me back to the NEA to keep working for us! **τ**

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All MTA members receive a \$100 discount off program fees.

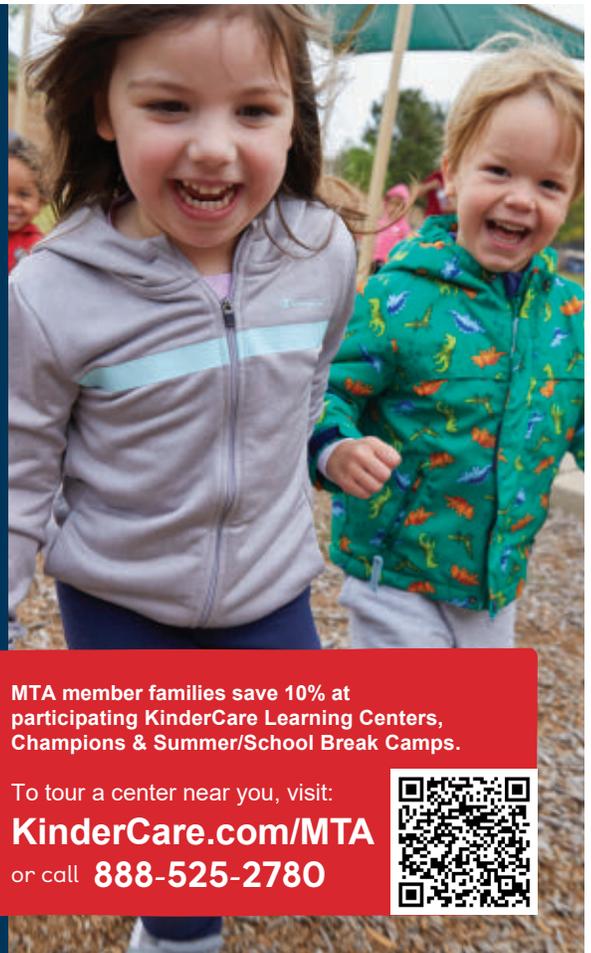
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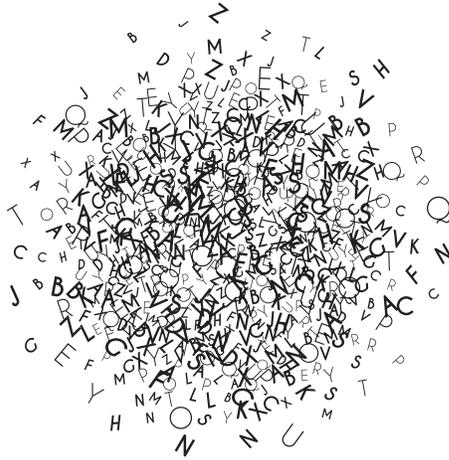
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MTA member families save 10% at participating KinderCare Learning Centers, Champions & Summer/School Break Camps.

To tour a center near you, visit:
KinderCare.com/MTA
or call **888-525-2780**





REVOLUTIONIZING education

Announcing the Launch of REVOLUTIONIZING EDUCATION: a Journal of Education Policy and Practice

The MTA is excited to announce the launch of this pioneering open-access journal dedicated to challenging entrenched inequities within education. The journal is dedicated to advancing education policy and practice in Massachusetts. Our journal prioritizes innovative research that challenges entrenched inequities within education, amplifies voices often marginalized, advocates for transformative practices that dismantle power hierarchies, and understands education as a tool for liberation rather than the reproduction of inequality. We welcome scholarship from diverse disciplines, multiple methodologies, and topics covering prekindergarten to higher education.

Our mission is to provide a platform for researchers, scholars and practitioners to share their groundbreaking work, free from financial barriers and accessible to all.

Submissions will open March 1, and we invite researchers from all fields to contribute their work.

Revolutionizing Education: a Journal of Education Policy & Practice is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal covering issues related to prekindergarten through higher education from a labor and anti-oppression lens.

Topics will include:

- The organizing history of educational unions.
- Labor education practices and approaches.
- The charter school movement.
- High-stakes testing and alternatives.
- Educator labor, political trends and the evolving economy.
- Political, economic and social context of education in the state.
- The politics of school finance and the economics of education.
- Participatory budgeting.
- Full-service community schools.
- Public policy and its intersection with educational policy and practice.
- Curriculum and instruction.
- Trends in education privatization.
- Governance and finance of public schools and higher education.
- Privatization in public higher education.

For more information visit
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Educators Celebrate the Repeal of WEP-GPO

Retirement: The federal government will recalculate the Social Security benefits of nearly 3 million Americans.

By **Mary MacDonald**

Photograph by **Eric Haynes**

Nancy Tynan Cederholm has worked in the Wareham schools since the late 1990s, after a two-decade career in private industry.



Nancy Tynan Cederholm was only a few years into her career in public education when she heard about the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset. Back then, in the late 1990s, she wasn't thinking about retirement and didn't dwell on it.

But now, at 70, she's ready. And thanks to the recent repeal of those laws, she can retire next year without losing any of the Social Security benefits she earned while working for about 25 years in a variety of private-sector jobs. She's still working in Wareham as a clerical employee and

Education Support Professional and plans to retire next year when her husband reaches his retirement age.

Like many MTA members, Tynan Cederholm tuned in to C-SPAN and watched President Biden on Jan. 5 as he signed the Social Security Fairness Act into law.

Suddenly, after years of worrying about their finances, or delaying retirement to save more money to compensate for what they expected to lose, educators who had paid into Social Security for years feel a weight lifted.

“There are so many people I've talked to, in this district, where an additional \$400 a month takes them out of hardship.”

THOMAS ROY Berkshire Hills Education Association

“It’s not going to affect me,” Tynan Cederholm said. “When I retire, I won’t have the two-thirds taken off.” She estimates that loss would have reduced her gross Social Security by about \$9,000 annually.

John Selfridge, a teacher who works in Western Massachusetts, said he’d delayed his retirement to try to make up the anticipated shortfall. He worked in private companies for about half of his career before switching to teaching 20 years ago.

“I am still working at 68, because the WEP has been hanging over me, but now I’m planning to retire fairly comfortably at 69,” he wrote, in an email.

A few years after she started in Wareham, as a member of the Wareham Education Association, Tynan Cederholm was warned by colleagues to leave within 10 years or her Social Security would be reduced.

She needed and liked the job and stayed put. WEP and GPO, signed into law during the Reagan administration, never made sense to her. “Why should we have to be reduced when the private sector doesn’t?” she said.

The Windfall Elimination Provision affected educators and other public service employees, including firefighters and police officers, who have earned both a public pension and Social Security benefits in private employment. The Government Pension Offset related to survivor benefits, for spouses whose partners had earned a public pension. It reduced Social Security survivor amounts

by two-thirds of the amount of the pension.

Many educators were impacted by both – losing Social Security earnings through their own education careers and then survivor benefits from spouses who had died.

Like Tynan Cederholm, and many other educators, Thomas Roy didn’t know about WEP-GPO when he started his career in education, after switching over from private industry. He had worked in data conversion in a company with his brother and sister-in-law. He switched to teaching after about 15 years, and only a few years ago heard about WEP-GPO.

“If I had known about that, I’m not sure I would have gone into teaching,” said Roy, who teaches computer science at Monument Mountain Regional High School.

A self-described “numbers guy,” Roy created a spreadsheet of his and his wife’s likely retirement income. He started taking on more work, through stipends, to bolster his savings and compensate for what he expected to lose in retirement. As president of his local, the Berkshire Hills Education Association, he regularly started updating all members with information about the two laws, and the movement toward repeal.

Younger educators, Roy said, often didn’t connect with the concerns. But anyone approaching retirement followed closely. As district director for career and vocational technical education, Roy works with people who have all switched to public education from

private careers, as carpenters, mechanics or horticulturalists. He promoted the calls to email U.S. Congress members, encouraging his members to send their own messages.

He estimated that the two provisions would have cost him and his wife between \$25,000 and \$35,000 annually.

Now, Roy and many other colleagues are relieved. “If it didn’t go through, I would be OK. My retired life will be OK. But there are so many people I’ve talked to, in this district, where an additional \$400 a month takes them out of hardship.”

Nationally, the repeal of WEP and GPO is anticipated to provide educators with an average of \$360 more per month in Social Security, but the exact amount will depend on employment history. The Social Security Administration, which will recalculate the payments for those affected who are now retired, is posting updates on its website.

Educators and others affected by the two laws, who already are retired and collecting Social Security, are expected to receive a lump sum payment for the amounts they didn’t receive under WEP-GPO going back to January 2024. People who haven’t retired will receive their full earnings under Social Security once they do so.

The Massachusetts congressional delegation fully supported the repeal. MTA members were among those who emailed and called their representatives. Selfridge sent letters and placed a phone call to U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer’s office. “When I received the news that Biden had signed, I felt great relief, as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders,” he wrote. **T**

For a look back at the 40-year fight to overturn WEP-GPO, please visit massteacher.org/wepgpo.



AN IMPORTANT STEP

Why Indigenous Tribal Land and Waterways Acknowledgements Matter

By **Claudia A. Fox Tree, Ph.D.** Photographs by **Eric Haynes**

The purpose and significance of Indigenous Tribal Land and Waterways Acknowledgments (TLA) have evolved over the nine years I've been ensuring they take place at MTA meetings and educational gatherings.

Initially, I incorporated them into my introductions. Over time, I began reaching out to conference organizers, before sessions began and during mingling periods, to ask if someone was prepared to deliver the TLA. If no one was, I would volunteer to do it myself.

I begin by introducing myself and sharing my ancestral lineage on both my biological mother's and father's sides, which reflects my multiracial identity and includes my first language, German, as well as my Indigenous affiliations.

As someone who is three generations removed from my Caribbean ancestors, a first-generation German, and not Indigenous to the lands where I live and work, I view TLAs as a meaningful way to be a "good relative," ally and activist

who supports Indigenous communities generally, and local nations specifically. Acknowledgments are an important step in making visible the Indigenous nations that colonization has sought to erase. TLAs honor the Indigenous peoples who have been stewards of these lands for thousands of years and who continue to maintain their deep connections to the land, waterways, plants and animals of these territories.

I am a retired special education teacher and have worked with educators for over 30 years through the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and Initiatives for Developing Equity & Achievement for Students (IDEAS). As part of any self-introduction, I believe we should not only share our names and pronouns but also acknowledge the tribal lands where we live or work. For me, this means recognizing that I reside and work on Pawtucket, Agawam, and Massachusetts lands in what is now called the MetroWest area of Boston.

TLAs provide an opportunity to publicly express gratitude to Indigenous nations. For those of us who are not Indigenous to this land, even if we are Indigenous to other lands, it is important to recognize that we have benefited from colonial violence that displaced Indigenous peoples, exploited both them and their land, and continues to disregard political agreements, such as treaties, among other injustices. Acknowledging the land we are on must go beyond simply "checking a box." To make TLAs meaningful, we need to share our personal learning journeys, provide accurate information



Claudia Fox Tree is a member of the MTA Ethnically Marginalized Affairs Committee and a retired teacher of special education.

about Indigenous nations, and commit to accountability and action.

Most of us were never taught about treaties, including their names or the year when they happened. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, for example, is one of the most significant. Briefly, it established the Great Sioux Reservation, including the Black Hills, and guaranteed the Sioux Nation exclusive use of this land in exchange for their agreement to live on a reservation and refrain from attacking settlers. Today, this area is where Mount Rushmore is carved, a stark reminder of the continued disregard for these agreements and the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty.

We stand on the ancestral homelands and traditional territories of Indigenous peoples who continue to fight for human rights, tribal sovereignty, and access to the resources needed to build self-sustaining communities. The name “Massachusetts” originates from the Algonquin word *Massa-adchu-es-et*, meaning “large hill place” or “at the great hill,” specifically referring to the Great Blue Hill. This hill is part of a landscape shaped by an ancient volcano that was last active over 400 million years ago. Much of the Massachusetts Bay area lies within the ancestral homeland of the Massachusett and also the Nipmuc, who are Indigenous to central and western Massachusetts, as well as parts of Connecticut and Rhode Island. The Wampanoag span the areas of Rhode Island and Cape Cod, including Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket.

“We stand on the ancestral homelands and traditional territories of Indigenous peoples who continue to fight for human rights...”

CLAUDIA FOX TREE

“ To make TLAs meaningful, we need to share our personal learning journey...”

CLAUDIA FOX TREE



"Indigenous peoples know who they are. Colonization, however, has worked to erase their history and identities..."

“Wampanoag” means “People of the First Light.” In the 1600s, the Wampanoag Nation numbered as many as 40,000 people across 67 villages. Today, there are about 5,000 enrolled members, although many more identify as Wampanoag. Historically, the Wampanoag Nation comprised several tribes or clans that formed a larger confederacy. Some of the principal groups within today’s Wampanoag Nation include Sakonnet (along the eastern shore of Rhode Island), Aquinnah, Assawompset, Herring Pond, Mashpee and Pokanoket.

The Pokanoket were the Wampanoag group who greeted the Pilgrims in 1620. Their sachem, Massasoit, led the nation in forming a peace treaty with the new settlers. The Mashpee Wampanoag gained federal recognition in 2007 after more than 30 years of effort. In November 2024, Governor Healey signed an executive order granting state recognition to the Herring Pond Wampanoag. It is important to note that state and federal recognition are colonial constructs imposed on sovereign nations that have governed and cared for this land for thousands of years. Indigenous peoples know who they are. Colonization, however, has worked to erase their history and identities, making recognition processes necessary in the eyes of settler governments.

One of the region’s key waterways was originally known as Quinobequin, meaning “meandering” in reference to its winding path. In 1614, English explorer John Smith renamed it the Charles River after Prince Charles, who later became King Charles I of England, even though the prince had never seen it. Another relevant memorable moment happened when John Smith (of “Pocahontas” fame)

left Thomas Hunt in charge of further “exploration” in New England. During this time, Hunt captured Tisquantum, a Patuxet Wampanoag man, and took him to Europe. Tisquantum eventually escaped enslavement and returned to New England 14 years later. Fluent in multiple European languages, he is better known by the English name “Squanto,” under which he famously encountered the Pilgrims in 1620.

A Tribal Land and Waterways Acknowledgment (TLA) is an opportunity to express our commitment to accountability. As daily classes, conferences, and workshops unfold, it is important to reflect on the intersectionality of Indigenous nations within discussions about racial discrimination, ongoing colonial violence, and oppression on the lands they have always inhabited.

Unlike other groups, Native people never migrated to another part of the world in large numbers. These are their only homelands, and it is essential to ensure their stories are told. Efforts must focus on making them visible, rather than invisible, while engaging with these issues on their ancestral and current lands. †

This commentary was written by Claudia Fox Tree, Ph.D., a Retired member who taught special education for 37 years. She is a member of the MTA Ethnically Marginalized Affairs Committee. For more information on tribal land acknowledgments and EMAC, please visit massteacher.org/EMAC.



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LAST WORD

Janelle Lacy

Watertown Educators Association

“I am glad the MTA is advocating for increased state funding for student mental health support in schools. The mental health of students should be a top priority for all educators. As a second-grade teacher, I see students who are 7 years old struggle with anxiety. My district has increased mental health support for educators in all schools, but it still isn't enough. As a union I hope we can get behind this priority and do whatever we can to support the mental health of our students.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT MCLENNAN

