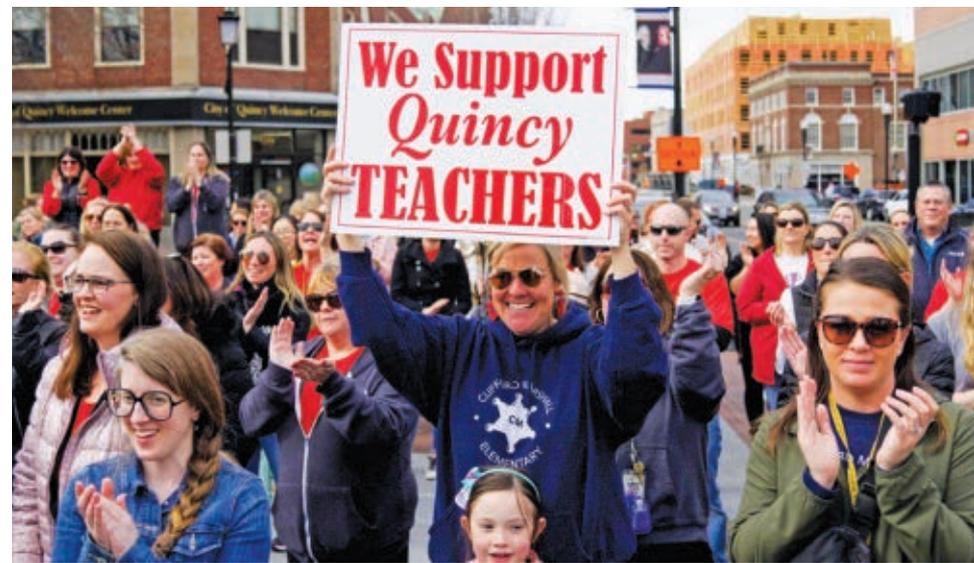


# MTA Today

## Activist Unions Fight For Stronger Schools, Colleges





# Paula Higgins is 2023 MTA ESP of the Year

By Mary MacDonald

Paula Higgins thought she was going to a celebration on March 9 for her union, the Malden Education Association, and for several community organizations that had rallied around them as they fought for a new contract.

Instead, she was the star, the newly named MTA 2023 Education Support Professional of the Year. A genuinely startled Higgins was visibly moved to tears by the surprise. “I love what I do,” she said. “I’ve met so many beautiful people through the almost 30 years I’ve been doing this. It’s a joy to come to school every day.”

Higgins, who lives in Malden, has long been active in her local and served for many years as a building representative and a bargaining team member. She now works at the Forestdale School in its Intensive Learning Program. She’s worked with students in the elementary and middle grades, at schools throughout the district. They call her “Mama Higgins,” according to colleagues.

After receiving a bouquet of flowers and hugs from close friends and colleagues, she spoke briefly to *MTA Today*.

Her specialty, working with students who have emotional and behavioral disorders and significant educational needs, is one that often experiences turnover in schools and districts. But Higgins has been on the job for 29 years. She is eligible for retirement but hasn’t considered it.

“I love the kids. I love the teachers I work with. I enjoy doing what I’m doing.”



Paula Higgins named MTA 2023 Education Support Professional of the Year.

Photos by Jonathan Ng



Paula Higgins shares a hug with Malden Education Association President Deb Gesualdo.



Malden teacher Suzanne Millett congratulates Paula Higgins.



Paula Higgins is shown with MTA Vice President Deb McCarthy and MTA President Max Page.

# Building a stronger union through solidarity

A friend of mine once helped me understand the size of our union by noting that in Massachusetts the list of the largest cities goes like this: Boston, Worcester, Springfield ... and the MTA! Yes, if we were a city, the 115,000 members who make up the MTA would be the fourth-largest city in the Commonwealth.



MTA President  
Max Page

Like a big city, we have so much going on at any given time. We support our 400 locals and chapters in their efforts to negotiate and enforce strong contracts; advocate at the state level for our priorities (such as ending punitive high-stakes testing and reinvesting in high-quality, debt-free public higher education);

manage roughly 200 staff members; run professional development workshops and union conferences; deepen our membership's political education about the right-wing attacks against us; and, always, seek ways large and small to build our power to win the public schools and colleges we all deserve.

While some of this work can be frustrating and exhausting, it is all meaningful when we keep our fundamental commitments in mind. Much of it is truly inspiring and joyful.

The greatest pleasure and honor of this job, and the times when I most feel the power of our membership, is when Deb and I are invited to show up to support members standing up for themselves and their schools – for a living wage for essential Education Support Professionals, for prep time so educators can better serve their students, for paid parental leave and for smaller class sizes.

Recently, we joined almost the full membership of the Gloucester Association of Educational Support Paraprofessionals at their first bargaining session, surrounding the bargaining teams in the high school library, remaining respectful but also appropriately intimidating. The Gloucester paras demanded a \$40,000 starting salary, which matches what state Representative Erika Uytterhoeven has laid out in legislation recently endorsed by the MTA Board of Directors.

I had the pleasure of marching through my old middle school (which my three children also attended) in Amherst, insisting that this allegedly progressive town live up to those values and pay ESPs more than \$18,000 a year, and pay all educators fairly. Parents and students joined us in force.



Photo by Jonathan Ng

The Quincy Education Association reached a contract agreement in March after several months of bargaining.

We also joined Stoneham paraprofessionals for a standout before they won their best contract in years. We were proud to join the righteous Quincy Education Association members as they stood up to a stubborn mayor and won better pay and parental leave benefits.

And, of course, we have had the honor of standing with our locals who chose to take strike votes this past fall and winter. They bravely said with their actions: “Enough is enough.” And they won tremendous advances for their members. Your contributions – by showing up or sending funds to support these members – were part of this deeply moving experience.

Sometimes we may forget that the fundamental basis of our power as a union begins with the solidarity we show with one another, one local at a time, one action after another.

In this union, the simple action of standing beside each other – at a school committee meeting, in bargaining, for your local members or for those in other communities – is the muscle that builds our collective power.

This is what we mean by solidarity. We are ready to show up anywhere and everywhere to support our members currently engaged in local struggles.

Soon, we'll distribute specifics about an event in June we will host with Heather McGhee, author of “The Sum of Us.” She is a brilliant writer and policy expert, whose work shows how we can reap what she calls a “solidarity dividend” – a better, fairer society for all – by learning to build connections across lines that have been deliberately set up to divide working people.

Unlike other writers from the left side of the political spectrum, McGhee embraces unions (while fully recognizing the failures, including

around race, in our history) as crucial actors in the economy and our political system, without whom we cannot achieve our goals.

Recently, I had the chance to again visit the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, a museum that holds some of the finest Impressionist paintings in the world. One especially grabbed me this time – an unfinished painting by Paul Cézanne. Much of the canvas was untouched, even as others were gloriously complete in his revolutionary style.

We have a 178-year history in the MTA, and so much is established and solid in the work we do.

But like the unfinished painting, the beauty of this moment in our history is that we are in the process of becoming something more. We are becoming a union that leads in defining what a quality public education is, and insisting it is a right, in preK through higher ed, for every resident. We are becoming a union that makes “good trouble,” in the words of the late U.S. Representative John Lewis, a union that leads in fighting for the “solidarity dividend,” and that is clear about its mission to represent our members, the workers, who every day nurture and fight for our students, our collective future.

## 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 email 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).

# Locals take action on contracts, job cuts

By Jonathan Ng and Scott McLennan

MTA educators in Quincy and Weymouth emerged with strong contracts in recent weeks as major job actions and concerted activities, including the specter of a credible strike, compelled politicians and school committee members to settle with fair terms.

From Wellesley to Amherst, union educators have been organizing standouts, votes of no confidence, and work-to-rule actions as they work under expired contracts or fight off privatization efforts.

In March, both the Quincy Education Association and the Weymouth Educators' Association settled their contracts after months-long negotiations.

After reaching tentative agreements, both locals said publicly that their members were willing to go on picket lines for the contracts that best served their students, families, educators and community.

"We were prepared to go on strike for the contract that Quincy educators and our students deserve," QEA President Gayle Carvalho told a crowd of more than 300 members from 19 school buildings. "For the first time in nearly 16 years, the members of this union were prepared to make one of the hardest decisions of their professional careers, many for a second time, to walk off the job."

In June 2007, the QEA had gone on strike. "Let me make this very clear: no educator ever wants to be put in this position but when we see day after day, week after week, and year after year that our colleagues are struggling and the 10,000 students we serve are not receiving the individual support and time that they need – we cannot stand idly by," Carvalho said.

***"Educators across the Commonwealth are rising up and saying enough is enough: We need strong contracts with living wages for education support specialists, decent parental leave and the conditions necessary to provide our students with the education they deserve."***

— Max Page, Massachusetts Teachers Association president

In Wellesley, educators have been working for a year without a contract. The local developed a platform dubbed the "Fair Five" aimed at boosting paraeducator wages, making parental leave accessible to all educators, staffing every school with art and physical education teachers and librarians, providing sufficient prep time, and ensuring that just cause extends to all educators facing disciplinary actions.

After the district elected to use mediation to settle the contract, the Wellesley Educators Association overwhelmingly passed a vote of no confidence in the School Committee and Superintendent David Lussier. Following a fruitless session with a mediator, the WEA



Photos by Jonathan Ng, Bob Duffy and Scott McLennan

Locals in Weymouth, Wellesley, Quincy and at UMass Amherst, clockwise from upper left, have held large rallies and standouts in recent months.

membership voted to begin work-to-rule actions starting in April.

Meanwhile, the Amherst-Pelham Education Association is in mediation after negotiation talks stalled. APEA educators have proposed reasonable offers on wages and working conditions that are needed to attract and retain teachers and paraprofessionals. They're calling on elected school committee members to return to the bargaining table to get a fair contract settled with urgency.

In public higher education, bargaining units at UMass Amherst quickly mobilized to fight a privatization scheme that could affect about 100 workers. The administration is attempting to move employees now represented by the Professional Staff Union and University Staff Association out of the public sector, claiming their jobs need to be under the umbrella of the privately run UMass Advancement Foundation.

The affected workers could lose their jobs or see damaging reductions to their pay and benefits. The unions have gained the support of state Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Cindy Domb, who issued a joint statement telling UMass Amherst that they were gravely concerned the university intended to privatize those jobs.

Central to many of the contracts in recent months is modern, paid parental leave that reflects

an inclusive approach to family care. Among many locals, the issue has become a flashpoint in negotiations. It's on the table throughout the state, as local leaders are pushing for paid leave – not only for birth parents, but also their partners and for new adoptive parents.

Without it, educators use sick days to cobble together a leave to care for and bond with a newborn or a newly adopted child. New career educators – who may not have deep reserves of accrued sick leave – often make do with less.

The Somerville Educators Union (SEU) in September set off the wave of new contracts – winning 12 weeks of paid leave for birth and nonbirth parents – using eight weeks from the district that can be supplemented with four weeks of leave from members' sick time.

The new benefit covers 60 workdays, and can be tapped by parents within four months of the birth or adoption of a child. "It did not exist beforehand. It was something we fought for and won," said SEU President Rami Bridge.

Over the past several months, similar parental leave benefits have been successfully bargained in locals including Malden, Watertown, Canton and Dartmouth.

"If there is a contract negotiation going on right now, chances are there is a discussion of parental leave," Bridge said.

# Higher ed coalition demands higher wages

By Scott McLennan

Union members at public colleges and universities are joining with other state workers in demanding that the Healey administration greatly improve the financial parameters for upcoming contracts compared to those that have been used in previous rounds of negotiations conducted under Governor Charlie Baker.

A coalition of MTA union members working at community colleges, state universities and the UMass campuses has insisted that Governor Maura Healey's administration and finance office – which establishes financial ground rules for bargaining contracts with state employees – must consider at least a 20 percent cost-of-living increase over the three-year span.

More than 8,000 unionized public higher education workers signed a letter that was delivered to Healey in February, explaining the need to drastically improve bargaining parameters.

Members have since followed up with emails explaining how their depressed wages have affected them, as well as their campuses. Many point to the high number of vacant positions – more than 430 at UMass Amherst alone – and the commensurate increase in workloads for those doing the jobs.

The Massachusetts Association of State Colleges and Massachusetts Community College Council further pushed to get individual campus presidents to sign a letter to Healey explaining that parameters need to be well above the annual 2 percent to 3.5 percent wage increases seen during the Baker years.

“We cannot attract and retain high-quality educators as we don't pay them enough to stay around,” said MCCC Vice President Joe Nardoni, a professor at Middlesex Community College. “Poor parameters prevent our full-time faculty and professional staff members from keeping up with inflation. Furthermore, parameters that don't address inflation depress starting salaries across the system.”

Nardoni pointed to a case in which a Middlesex graduate went on to earn a master's degree in fine arts and returned to teach writing at the community college as an adjunct faculty member. This uniquely qualified educator wanted a full-time job, but none was being offered, and even if a full-time position had opened, the pay was less than what she ended up earning writing for a nonprofit agency.

MTA's higher education chapters and locals are coordinating with unionized state employees in other areas to push the Healey administration

into setting parameters that value the work of public employees and allow them to stay ahead of inflation.

Healey's initial budget does boost spending on public colleges and universities, which may be a good sign.

The governor allocated about \$370 million in additional money raised from the Fair Share Amendment for public higher education. These funds are above and beyond a 3 percent increase in campus operating budgets.

In keeping with the goals of the MTA-backed Cherish Act and the Higher Ed For All campaign, the proposed funding will mean more financial aid for students, additional funding for student services support and much-needed capital investment in the maintenance of public college and university campuses.

In written messages to Healey, union members cited the state's willingness to raise salaries for legislators by 37 percent since 2017, and the governor's salary by 20 percent this year.

“Public higher ed employees deserve the same consideration and treatment,” the messages said. “We need parameters that don't make a mockery of collective bargaining, or the work we do for our students across the Commonwealth.”

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**H**ave children who are applying to college? Thinking of going back to school for an advanced degree? Either way, before you make any decisions, you'll want to carefully consider how you'll cover your education costs.

If you don't have enough in savings or scholarships, there are many ways to finance an education, including credit cards or home equity lines of credit. Student loans, however, are the most common: According to the Federal Reserve, 94 percent of students who borrow use this type of financing.

Today's college borrowers graduate with an average debt of \$28,500, with monthly payments of between \$200 and \$300, according to The College Board. What's more, 14 percent of graduates owe \$60,000 or more, resulting in even higher monthly payments. This kind of debt load can compromise your, or your child's, ability to buy a house, save for retirement, or pay for everyday living and emergency expenses.

And if you're toying with the idea of taking out loans to finance a master's degree, you need to crunch the numbers to see whether you'll get a return on that investment. For example, NEA's most recent Rankings & Estimates report shows average classroom teacher salaries actually declining by 4 percent over the past decade, after accounting for inflation.

Given the lasting ramifications of taking on student loan debt, it's important to get it right from the get-go. In general, the two most important factors to consider are 1) how much you need to borrow and 2) your income prospects after graduating. Still, those factors alone won't tell the whole story. Other variables may not seem important, but they could play a key role in your decision.

Here are five questions to ask before committing to sizable debts, for your child or yourself.

### 1. What are my salary prospects?

It's important to know how much young students might make in a chosen profession, even before they decide where to go to school or how much money to borrow. Nobody can predict precisely where they'll work or their exact salary, but there are plenty of online salary tools that provide a general idea, based on national salary data.

Some experts suggest students borrow no more than their projected first-year salary. The idea is that will make it easier to pay off those loans within about 10 years. For example, the average training salary for a civil engineer is \$55,700, according to the salary comparison tool, *Payscale.com*. Graduates in that field should be able to manage more debt than, say, an elementary education major.

Is your child unsure of what career to pursue? Keep a debt cap in mind to prevent overborrowing. For example, you could restrict student debt to the total limit allowed for federal student loans (\$31,000 for dependent undergraduate students).

### 2. What will my cash flow look like with student loan payments?

Once you know how much you need or want to borrow, plug those numbers into a student debt calculator, such as College Ave Student Loans, to get an idea of what the monthly payments might be. Conventional wisdom suggests that graduates should ideally put roughly 10 percent of their take-home pay toward paying off debt. Example: If a recent graduate earns \$36,000 per year, she would spend no more than \$360 per month paying off student loans.

If you're not sure how much that will leave for rent, fun, food and so on, you can use online budgeting tools, such as *iGrad.com*, to get a better sense of how loans will fit into your student's lifestyle.

### 3. Would an advanced degree be worth the student loan debt incurred?

Understanding how much you can borrow to finance a graduate degree involves a slightly different analysis. Thankfully, there are many generous grants and fellowships for educators, particularly in states that suffer teacher shortages. That said, the cost of graduate school may not be worth it if you can't use it to grow your career prospects and income, either through a new job or a raise.

Your needs and finances are unique, but you can try an online tool, such as a graduate school calculator, to get a sense of what your overall cash flow might look like, depending on how long you expect to stay in school, your income while you're in school, student loan assumptions and so on.

In general, you want to determine whether or not graduate school will grow your income enough to cover additional monthly payments on student loans.

### 4. Will I be eligible for loan forgiveness or income-driven repayment plans?

The good news for educators is that great financial aid options and loan forgiveness programs are available in most states. However, it's not an easy or intuitive system to navigate. Finding the right financing or program requires a certain amount of legwork.

And if you already have student loans and you're planning to go back to school to get an advanced degree, it may be helpful to determine if you qualify for any forgiveness or repayment programs before you take on more debt.

To simplify the process, NEA Member Benefits, in conjunction with Savi, launched the NEA Student Debt Navigator tool. Here's how it works: Visit the student loan forgiveness page at *NEAMB.com*. Plug in your student loan, family and income information, and the tool shows you which programs you qualify for and how much you will save. There's no cost for NEA members to use the interactive tool to find out this information.

If you want to e-file your paperwork or talk to a student loan expert, you can pay a member-discounted fee of \$29.95 to sign up for the Savi Essential service.

There are several forgiveness programs that teachers may be eligible for. Under the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, borrowers who work in the public sector (which could include educators) may qualify for loan forgiveness after they've made 120 on-time, full, monthly payments toward a federal direct loan. Also, teachers in a Title 1 school can eliminate \$5,000 or even up to \$17,500 of their student loans through the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program, depending on individual eligibility.

Typically borrowers will first apply for an income-driven repayment plan to lower their monthly payments and maximize their potential forgiveness. There are several income-driven repayment plans that can take much of the stress out of paying off federal student loans. The Department of Education offers a number of different income-based repayment options, which include:

- Pay as You Earn (PAYE) repayment;
- Revised Pay as You Earn repayment plan (REPAYE)
- Income-Based Repayment (IBR)
- Income-Contingent Repayment plan (ICR)

The plans have different rules and will differ for each individual depending on family size or household income, but the basic idea is to ease the monthly burden of debt repayment and to make sure you have a plan that's manageable. If your income is low enough and your family is large enough, you may not have to make any monthly payments on your loans at all.

Check out the NEA Student Debt Navigator to see all of your options.

### 5. How will I pay education expenses that aren't covered by traditional funding sources?

If you're not covered by scholarships, grants or federal loans, you can check out several NEA student loan programs: one for undergraduate students, one for grad students and one for parents. All programs offer discounted rates to NEA members and can cover up to 100 percent of school-certified costs. It's easy to apply, and you can choose the repayment option that works best for you.

The bottom line: Make a plan you can live with. In the end, debt is always a personal decision. Before you commit, make sure you're borrowing a sum you can realistically repay. Ideally, student loans should be a tool you use to enhance your future opportunities. They shouldn't dictate the economic terms of your child's life, or your life, by sinking you so deeply into debt that you have significant difficulty digging yourself back out.

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# MTA Annual Meeting set for Springfield

By Mary MacDonald

For the second consecutive year, the 2023 MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates will be held in person with virtual participation for those who choose to do so because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The two-day event will be held on Friday, April 28, and Saturday, April 29, at the MassMutual Center in Springfield. This marks the first time the Annual Meeting has been held in Western Massachusetts, after many years in Boston, and the event will return to Springfield in 2024.

The Annual Meeting is where essential MTA business takes place each year, including union elections and approval of the association's operating budget. The new budget year for fiscal 2023-2024 begins July 1. The meeting is also an occasion for educators to get together and recognize leaders in education, labor and professional practice. The awards section will highlight the agenda on Saturday.

The opening session will begin at noon on Friday, April 28. The following day, the meeting will resume at 9 a.m. The election of candidates is scheduled to start at 11 a.m., after action on the proposed annual budget. If action on the budget goes beyond 11 a.m., elections will begin immediately afterward.

All delegates will vote to decide At-Large races; Region F will vote to elect its Executive Committee member, and District 21G will vote to elect its Board of Directors member. Retired delegates will vote to elect members of the Retired Members Committee.

New this year at Annual Meeting is a child care stipend of up to \$100 for members who have children age 12 or under and who need child care to attend the meeting. The application deadline is April 18.

For detailed information on the two-day agenda, please visit [massteacher.org/annualmeeting](https://massteacher.org/annualmeeting).

The awards recognition portion of the meeting will include presentations on Saturday.

The Debt Collective, a union of debtors that has led a national effort to cancel student debt and advocate for free college education, will receive the MTA Friend of Education Award. The organization, which originated in the Occupy Wall Street movement, is committed to public funding of college education, universal health care and guaranteed housing. It has used organizing and innovative digital tools to change the narrative on student debt.



Senator Bernie Sanders

U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont will receive the MTA Friend of Labor Award. A civil rights activist and labor supporter, Senator Sanders recently introduced federal legislation that would set a minimum public school salary of \$60,000 for teachers. A proponent of workplace democracy, union organization and worker cooperatives, he has long advocated for tuition-free higher education.

Two recipients will be recognized with the MTA President's Award. The honors will go to the nonprofits City Life/Vida Urbana and Springfield No One Leaves.

City Life/Vida Urbana is a grassroots organization, based in Boston, that fights for racial, social, economic and gender justice by building working-class power.



Among other principles, the organization believes in housing as a human right and enabling people to develop their own understanding of their situation and tell their own stories.

Springfield No One Leaves, a grassroots organization based in Springfield, is dedicated to organizing residents who have been most impacted by the housing crisis and economic inequality to build collective power. Its direct-action campaigns are building community solidarity and empowering residents to become leaders and organizers in social justice movements.



Paula Higgins, the 2023 MTA Education Support Professional of the Year, also will be recognized. Higgins, an ESP and member of the Malden Education Association, has worked with students with significant educational needs for 29 years. She received the honor at a celebration in March.



Paula Higgins

Dani Charbonneau, the 2023 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, will receive an award from MTA, as well, recognizing her contributions to education. Charbonneau is a member of the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association.



Dani Charbonneau

The delegates will consider a proposed MTA operating budget of \$52,221,525 for the coming fiscal year, which begins July 1.

A vote is scheduled for Saturday morning, April 29. The Advisory Budget Committee, the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors have proposed annual dues of \$503 for full-time active members, which is a \$20 increase over this year. Dues for clerical staff and custodians would be \$302 under the proposal, an increase of \$12, while dues for Education Support Professionals, including food service personnel and paraeducators, would be \$151, an increase of \$6. Annual retiree dues would remain unchanged at \$30.

In addition, the proposed Public Relations/Organizing Campaign budget of \$1,822,200 will be considered.

The recommended general dues assessment for the PR/Organizing budget is \$20. For clerical staff and custodians, the assessment would be \$12. Paraeducators, food service personnel and other ESPs would be assessed \$6. These assessments are the same amounts as this year.

## CANDIDATES FOR MTA RETIRED MEMBERS COMMITTEE

### Four vacancies for two-year terms commencing July 1.

The election will be held at the 2023 Annual Meeting of Delegates. The delegates representing the Statewide Retired District will vote in the Retired Members Committee election. Candidates are listed in ballot order. Their biographical statements will be printed in the *MTA Reporter*.

Helen C. Dooner  
Bonnie M. Page  
Maureen Colgan Posner

Daisy Monsalve  
Phyllis Neufeld

Dale Melcher  
Amy S. Wolpin

## Candidates vie for posts at MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates

Positions on the MTA Board of Directors and Executive Committee, as well as seats on the Retired Members Committee will be determined at the upcoming 2023 Annual Meeting of Delegates.

Statements by candidates for the contested Executive Committee and Board seats are on Page 10. Information on the Retired Members Committee contest is on page 8. In all cases, the names of candidates and statements are printed in ballot order.

### *The contested races for Executive Committee are as follows:*

Candace Shivers of the Massachusetts Community College Council and Elizabeth (Wright) Tyrell of the Andover Education Association are running for the At-Large Ethnic Minority Executive Committee Member seat on the Executive Committee.

Barry Davis of the Haverhill Education Association and Adam Snodgrass of the Groton Dunstable Educators Association are competing for the Region F seat on the Executive Committee.

### *The contested races for Board seats are as follows:*

Holly Currier of the Andover Education Association and Amy Morin of the Lexington Education Association are running for the At-Large Director for Education Support Professionals seat.

Kerri Scott of the Melrose Education Association and William Karvouniaris of the Wakefield Education Association are competing for the District 21G seat.

Seven people are vying for four vacancies on the MTA Retired Members Committee. They are Helen C. Dooner, Bonnie M. Page, Maureen Colgan Posner, Daisy Monsalve, Phyllis Neufeld, Dale Melcher and Amy S. Wolpin.

All other candidates for the Executive Committee and the Board have been declared elected under the election waiver in the MTA Bylaws. The provision states that if there is only one candidate for an open position, the election will be waived and the candidate is declared elected. Terms on the Board and the Executive Committee begin on July 1 and continue for three years.

*The candidates declared elected because of the waiver are as follows:*

### Executive Committee

**At-Large ESP Executive Committee Member:** Yahaira Rodriguez, Educational Association of Worcester

**Statewide Retired Executive Committee Member:** Andrei Joseph, MTA Retired member

**Region C:** Katuska (Katie) Lecaro, Education Association of Plymouth and Carver

**Region G:** John Sullivan, Belmont Education Association

### Board of Directors

**District 1A:** Howard Marshall, Pittsfield Educational Administrators Association

**District 2A:** Kristy Dyer, Agawam Education Association

**District 4A:** Danielle J. Seltzer, Amherst-Pelham Education Association

**District 5A:** Tracy Little-Sasanecki, Springfield Education Association

**District 6A:** Jennifer Silva, Monson Teachers Association

**District 34C:** Mary Pat Dodge, Kingston Teachers Association

**District 43C:** Kiely Rigali, Martha's Vineyard Educators Association

**District 15D:** Shelly Fraser, Wayland Teachers Association

**District 27D:** Justin Brown, Brookline Educators Union

**District 37E:** Naomi Akan, Canton Teachers Association

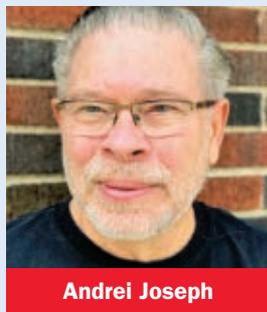
**District 38E:** Joe Spremulli, Norton Teachers Association

**District 22F:** Matthew Bach, Andover Education Association

**District 18G:** Sandra Kasabian Hoffman, Watertown Educators Association

**District 44H:** NT Izuchi, Massachusetts Community College Council

## CANDIDATES DECLARED ELECTED



*Candidates who have been declared elected who provided photos are pictured with this article. Photos of candidates in contested races appear with their biographical statements.*

## Biographical statements of candidates for **Executive Committee**

### At-Large Ethnic Minority Executive Committee Member



**Candace Shivers, Massachusetts Community College Council**

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.” – Angela Davis. Six years ago, you gave me the opportunity to be an NEA Director. During that time, through a pandemic, the stain of racial injustice has become more entrenched.

I’m running for At-Large Ethnic Minority Executive Committee Member so I can continue doing the work I’ve been doing for over 10 years at the local, state and national level. Thank you for the work you do so that we may continue the quest for racial justice for students, members and community.



**Elizabeth (Wright) Tyrell, Andover**

I will bring a unique perspective to the board as a member of the Tsimshian First Nations tribe. There is considerable overlap between native values and union values, not the least of which is an understanding and responsibility toward our mutual well-being. To reverse decades of underfunding and undermining within public schools, we need determined, capable union

leaders. I will support locals when they choose to take collective action. I am able to work with people of different backgrounds, find common ground and channel that into action. When we fight, we win!

### Region F



**Barry Davis, Haverhill**

I am Barry Davis, the current 1st Vice President of the Haverhill Education Association. I have spent the last seven years building strong rank-and-file unionism in the HEA. In that time, I have helped lead a successful strike, win a living wage campaign contract for our ESPs, organize a new unit, fight for better learning conditions for our students and hold

the administration responsible for their actions. As the Executive Committee Region F Representative, I will bring my experience in the HEA to the MTA and fight for the schools we and our students deserve.



**Adam Snodgrass, Groton Dunstable**

I work for unity. When we bring together educators from every community and every program in our region, we have unmatched strength, and we accomplish great things. I’m concerned about the low level of participation in union activity in so many of our local associations both statewide and here in Region F. We can do better. Let’s listen to

the needs and concerns of members in the local associations where there is less involvement in order to strengthen our union. I ask for your vote so that I can engage in that outreach as a member of the Executive Committee.

## Biographical statements of candidates for **Board of Directors**

### At-Large Director for Education Support Professionals



**Holly Currier, Andover**

I am an instructional assistant in Andover Public Schools and have worked in nearly every PreK-12 classroom setting. Across the MTA, ESPs are demanding respect and fair wages. As ESP At-Large, I commit to growing this movement, building our collective power and winning dignity and economic justice for all ESPs.



**Amy Morin, Lexington**

Current Vice President of Lexington Education Association. Serving on MTA ESP, Resolutions, PR&O Committees and Name Change Task Force. Co-founder of BESPAN and lead mentor for ESP Mentoring Program. Committed to uplifting ESPs and being an agent of change. You deserve a strong ESP At-Large! Vote for me!

### District 21G



**Kerri Scott, Melrose**

As educators find the courage to stand together and fight for our schools, it is crucial that we connect across locals to support each other. My goal as board representative will be to provide opportunities for rank-and-file members to help each other do the work of our union and win!



**William Karvouniaris, Wakefield**

As a co-founder of GBEAN and past local president in Wakefield, I will be a strong voice on the Board for workers’ rights and great public schools for all. I’m asking for your vote to represent the rank-and-file members of District 21G.

## Amendments to Bylaws are proposed

The following is Proposed Bylaw Amendment #1. It would revise Article VI, Governance: Executive Committee and Board of Directors, Section 1. Executive Committee, Subsection A, Composition and Article VII, Nominations, Elections and Terms of Office; Section 3, Regional, Statewide, Retired and At-Large Executive Committee Members. The present text is in the left column. Proposed revisions are indicated by underlined text in the right column.

Article VI, Governance: Executive Committee and Board of Directors, Section 1. Executive Committee

Subsection A, Composition.

(1) The Executive Committee shall consist of the President, the Vice President, the Executive Director-Treasurer, eight (8) Regional Executive Committee members, one (1) Statewide Retired Region Executive Committee member, one (1) At-Large ESP Executive Committee member, and one (1) At-Large Ethnic Minority Executive Committee member.

Article VI, Governance: Executive Committee and Board of Directors, Section 1. Executive Committee Subsection A, Composition.

(1) The Executive Committee shall consist of the President, the Vice President, the Executive Director-Treasurer, eight (8) Regional Executive Committee members, one (1) Statewide Retired Region Executive Committee member, one (1) At-Large ESP Executive Committee member, and one (1) At-Large Ethnic Minority Executive Committee member, and one (1) NEA Director.

Article VII, Section 3

Add new Subsection (D):

(D) NEA Director on the Executive Committee

(1) Eligibility

Any of MTA's NEA Directors duly elected by direct vote of the MTA active membership is eligible to be a candidate for and serve as "NEA Director on the Executive Committee."

(2) Nomination, Election and Term of Office

A. The seat for one (1) "NEA Director on the Executive Committee" shall be elected at the Annual Meeting of Delegates by all delegates.

B. The procedures for the nomination and election of, and term of office for, the NEA Director on the MTA Executive Committee shall be established by the Board of Directors.

### Impact Statement

This proposal would add a seat for one of the MTA's existing NEA Directors on the MTA Executive Committee, to be elected by Annual Meeting delegates.

**Submitted by:** Candace Shivers, Massachusetts Community College Council

### Bylaws and Rules Committee:

Recommends Rejection (7-0)

### Board of Directors

Recommends Adoption (41-15)



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## Amendments to Resolutions are recommended

**M**TA Resolutions are the association's statements of principle on issues relating to members, public education, the welfare of students, and human and civil rights.

Resolutions may be submitted by any member to the Resolutions Committee by the second Friday in January. The committee may also propose resolutions.

All resolutions submitted are considered by the committee, and those approved by a majority vote of the committee are recommended to the Annual

Meeting delegates after having been presented to the Board of Directors. To become an official position of the MTA, a resolution must be adopted by the delegates at the Annual Meeting. As a result of a change to the MTA Standing Rules that was approved in 2021, proposed resolutions may no longer be submitted for the first time at the Annual Meeting of Delegates.

The proposed revisions printed in this edition of MTA Today have been recommended by the Resolutions Committee. The Board voted on

Saturday, March 18, to recommend passage by the delegates.

A section of the current resolution that has a line through it is proposed for elimination; a section that is underlined is a proposed addition.

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All current resolutions are posted on the MTA website.

To review the Resolutions and MTA Bylaws, please visit [massteacher.org/resolutions](https://www.massteacher.org/resolutions).

### Proposed revised Resolution C-6

#### Healthy and Safe Schools

The Massachusetts Teachers Association believes that staff and students deserve to be in a healthy and safe learning environment. The MTA believes that measures should be taken to guarantee that physical conditions of buildings are maintained so as to conform to the highest possible standards for health and safety, in full compliance with all building codes and safety regulations of the state.

The MTA urges that school committees and boards of trustees must improve school mechanical ventilation systems to assure that school spaces' air quality is sufficient to diminish as much as possible the risk of airborne infections from indoor pathogen from any source (viral, bacterial and molds), and bring them in line with best practices and current scientific recommendations. As of 2023, this would require mechanical ventilation systems (Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning, HVAC), which must be mechanically driven from Air Handling Units (AHU) that provide a supply of clean outside air. At least five Air Changes per Hour (5 ACH) must be achieved in each school space. The outside air could be complemented by recycled air filtered through at least MERV 13-rated filters to achieve the minimum 5 ACH. Appropriate exhaust flows out of each school space must be balanced with the supply of air into the rooms. Portable HEPA ventilation units could also be provided to complement and maximize air cleansing.

The MTA recommends that contract bargaining language require formation of Health and Safety Committees composed of school personnel, parents, and school committee members and that they have regularly scheduled meetings designated to improve the health and safety of the school environment.

The MTA further urges that school committees provide for safe usage, proper storage and transfer and disposal of all toxic and/or hazardous substances used in school buildings and on school grounds.

The MTA strongly supports the enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) on behalf of all employees in the public sector.

The MTA believes that all educational facilities must be safe from all environmental and chemical hazards, including lead from water pipe systems within schools, inadequate ventilation and climate control, particulate pollution, mold and sick-building syndrome.

The MTA urges that dangerous asbestos be removed immediately from the schools and that the Commonwealth provide funds for its removal and other related expenses.

The MTA also strongly supports the state's school immunization requirements. These requirements exist to protect students, staff and members of the wider community from serious diseases that can be prevented by vaccines. (75, 77, 79, 82, 84, 85, 88, 01, 03, 07, 19, 23)

### Proposed revised Resolution C-7

#### School Facilities: Design, Construction and Function

The Massachusetts Teachers Association believes that school facilities must be conducive to teaching and learning. The physical environment must allow for a variety of needs, including the number of students, physical characteristics of students, changes in teaching methods, presentation of instruction, and an increased use of school facilities. The MTA also believes that all school facilities must be well constructed, safe, energy-efficient, aesthetically pleasing, accessible, functional and adaptable to persons with disabilities.

The MTA supports ecologically conservative facility designs including heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems.

The MTA believes that the community, parents/guardians and education employees should play an advisory role in designing these facilities.

The MTA also believes that stable and sufficient funding must be

provided for the design, construction, maintenance and operation of the school facility.

The MTA believes that one of the most effective means to prevent the risk of airborne infections to students and educators (viral, bacterial and molds) is a well-designed mechanical ventilation system that is in line with best practices and current scientific recommendations. As of 2023, this would require a system that provides for at least five Air Changes per Hour (5 ACH) based on outside clean air. Well-tempered outdoor supply air should be designed-in for every school indoor space. Temperature and relative humidity extremes should be avoided – by design – in new schools while conforming with at least 5 ACH ventilation rates as a design criterion, as described in MTA Resolution C-6, Healthy and Safe Schools.

These principles should apply equally to preK-12 schools and buildings used by public higher education institutions. (11, 23)



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# Obituaries

**Daniel T. Adams, 78**, of Brockton. Was a math teacher and Math Department head at Brockton High School, retiring in 2004. Jan. 5.

**Donald P. Ayer, 80**, of Chelmsford. Taught business technology at Shawsheen Valley Technical High School for 30 years. Oct. 28.

**Nancy M. Ballantyne, 91**, of Peabody, formerly of Reading. Was a social worker for Arlington Public Schools. Nov. 4.

**William L. Beando, 79**, of Leicester. Taught middle school English and was a guidance counselor for many years in Spencer. Nov. 5.

**John P. Borci, 81**, of Holden. Was a science teacher for Worcester Public Schools for over 30 years, retiring in 2002. Oct. 17.

**Lynne F. Bougas, 74**, of Raynham. Taught fourth grade in Mansfield for 35 years until her retirement in 2006. Jan. 4.

**William B. Brouwer, 83**, of Douglas. Taught middle school science in the Northbridge Public Schools from 1965 to 2001, remaining active in various capacities until 2011. Oct. 22.

**Thelma D. Burns, 86**, of Dorchester. Served in two Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program communities, first in Cohasset, later in Belmont. Nov. 18.

**Franz Cahoon, 86**, of Key West, Florida. Taught history at Dennis-Yarmouth High School, then became chair of the Social Studies Department, retiring in 1995. Oct. 23.

**John P. Capuano, 86**, of Worcester. Taught industrial arts in Grafton and Worcester for many years. Dec. 5.

**Mary R. Cinelli, 80**, of North Attleborough, formerly of Mansfield. Retired in 2006 after a long teaching career in the Attleboro school system. Oct. 20.

**Charles J. Cinto, 87**, of East Walpole. Was a science teacher in Holliston, then a science teacher and coach for various athletic programs in the Walpole Public Schools. He retired in 1996. Oct. 18.

**Ruth I. Clark, 94**, of Scituate. Taught for many years in the Cohasset Public Schools. Oct. 6.

**Anne W. Codman, 77**, of Naples, Florida. Was a music teacher for Arlington Public Schools for 35 years. Nov. 16.

**Gail M. Curnow, 76**, of Agawam. Taught for 34 years in Agawam at James Clark Elementary School. Dec. 2.

**Catherine F. Donahue, 84**, of Westford, formerly of Falmouth. Taught in the Lexington Public Schools for many years. Oct. 14.

**Ronald A. Ducharme, 88**, of Beverly. Taught at Beverly High School for over 30 years, teaching business courses and administering the work study program. Nov. 21.

**Phyllis J. Ferlinz, 84**, of Lexington. Taught French and Spanish for the Lexington Public Schools for nearly 45 years, retiring in 2005. Nov. 16.

**Madeline A. Figueras, 82**, of Shrewsbury. Worked for the Shrewsbury Public Schools, first as a tutor, then as the town's first ESL teacher, retiring in 2006. Dec. 17.

**Richard G. Foley, 75**, of Ipswich. Worked for 39 years for the Beverly school system as a seventh-grade math teacher. Dec. 22.

**Margaret Frost, 95**, of Barre. Was a special education teacher at Eagle Hill, Ruggles Lane, Roger Langley and Oakham Center schools, until retiring at 76. Dec. 9.

**Kathleen C. Gagnon, 85**, of Natick, formerly of Lynnfield. Taught in Marblehead, Peabody, Lynn, and finally in Somerville for 13 years. Oct. 23.

**John S. Germaine Jr., 87**, of Foxborough. Was a high school business teacher in the Sharon Public Schools. Nov. 6.

**Elinor E. Gibson, 91**, of Pittsfield. Taught English at Berkshire Community College and Wahconah Regional High School for many years. Dec. 2.

**Natalie C. Goodman, 94**, of Redwood City, California, formerly of Lexington. Was a school psychologist in the Lexington Public Schools from 1987 until her retirement. Oct. 23.

**John T. Grady, 84**, of Northborough. Taught elementary and middle school students in Upton and then social studies in Westborough for many years, until his retirement in 2001. Nov. 15.

**Marie D. Granlund, 70**, of Rutland. Taught in the Worcester Public Schools. Oct. 14.

**Herman F. Greene, 91**, of Roxbury. Taught music in the Winchester Public Schools. Dec. 12.

**Barbara A. Growhoski, 61**, of Easthampton. Taught for 38 years, most recently in math and special education at Forest Park Middle School in Springfield, until her retirement in June 2022. Dec. 31.

**Roger A. Hardy, 80**, of Pelham, New Hampshire. Was a physical education teacher in Dracut for over 25 years. Oct. 22.

**Lloyd A. Henke, 88**, of Oak Bluffs. Taught across the country and overseas, most recently at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, until retiring in 2005. Oct. 7.

**Rita Hindman, 83**, of Mansfield. Taught kindergarten in the Mansfield Public Schools for 30 years. Nov. 22.

**Clare A. Kelleher, 81**, of Quincy, formerly of West Falmouth and Canton. Taught mathematics at a number of schools, including Attleboro High School, as well as Bristol Community College. Jan. 21.

**Jeremiah J. Kellett, 89**, of East Dennis and Vero Beach, Florida, formerly of Wellesley. Worked in Weston for over 40 years as a coach, teacher and administrator. Jan. 26.

**Richard T. King, 75**, of Norwood. Taught social studies in the Norwood Public Schools for 38 years. Dec. 27.

**Cassandra Kloumann, 75**, of Orleans. Taught middle school in the Chatham Public Schools. Received multiple honors for programs related to environmental conservation. Oct. 8.

**Miriam Kramer, 86**, of Framingham. Taught biology and anatomy and physiology at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School for over 30 years. Nov. 19.

**Helen A. Kudlic, 94**, of Ludlow. Was a physical education teacher and girls' basketball coach at Ludlow High School. Dec. 29.

**Nancy C. Lankford, 80**, of Needham. Was an educational psychologist for the Needham Public Schools until her retirement. Oct. 25.

**Virginia R. Latham, 83**, of Rehoboth. Was a preschool special education teacher in Middleborough. Nov. 30.

**David R. Littlewood, 81**, of Templeton. Taught at Mahar High School for 17 years, then worked for Agawam schools for 17 years until his retirement in 2004. Oct. 23.

**Cheryl A. Liston, 77**, of Chelsea, formerly of Everett. Was a special education teacher in Everett until her retirement. Dec. 26.

**James H. Lutat Sr.**, of Montgomery. Was a teacher and administrator in various school systems including Westfield, Gateway Regional, and Longmeadow. Jan. 1.

**Kerin E. Lyons, 86**, of Sandwich. Was a teacher at Hanson Elementary School in Stoughton until her retirement. Nov. 15.

**Martin Manoogian, 88**, of Springfield. Was a science teacher for Springfield Public Schools. Taught at Forest Park, Van Sickle and Kiley middle schools. Oct. 17.

**Patricia Mayer, 75**, of Kingston. Was an elementary and middle school teacher in West Bridgewater for 32 years. Oct. 18.

**Elvoid C. Mayers, 95**, of Norwell. Was a teacher and chair of the Social Studies Department in Rockland, where she worked for over 40 years. Also served on MTA's Executive Committee, was past president of Plymouth County Educational Association, and was a recipient of MTA's Martin Luther King Jr. Award in Human Relations. Feb. 5.

# Obituaries

**Christine M. McEnaney, 74**, of North Dartmouth. Taught physical education and coached multiple athletic teams in the West Bridgewater school system for nearly 30 years. Oct. 6.

**John E. Morrissey, 81**, of Taunton. Worked his entire career in the Taunton schools, as a physical education teacher, districtwide physical education coordinator, and finally as athletic director. Oct. 1.

**Margaret M. Munns, 100**, of North Brookfield. Was a high school foreign language teacher in Worcester, first at Classical High School then at Doherty Memorial High School. Oct. 7.

**Robert J. Murphy, 79**, of Gloucester. Taught fifth grade, art and computer science in Somerville for 25 years. Also was a past president of Somerville Teachers Association, now the Somerville Educators Union, and then served as president of the MTA. Feb. 6.

**Lisa P. Nazzaro, 62**, of Roslindale. Longtime MTA field representative and organizer. A dedicated unionist, she had advocated passionately for public schools and MTA members since 2006. Dec. 3.

**Mary D. Neylon, 93**, of Lowell. Taught English and Latin in Waltham and Lowell. Nov. 11.

**Ruth S. Nijiri, 93**, of Springfield. Taught in the Springfield Public Schools from the late 1980s until her retirement in 2003. Nov. 29.

**James F. O'Hara, 79**, of East Longmeadow. Taught for 41 years in East Longmeadow. Oct. 3.

**Cynthia E. Hepburn Parentela, 67**, of Agawam. Worked in roles including art teacher, special education teacher, counselor and psychologist within school systems including Longmeadow and Southwick, as well as at Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School and Holyoke Community College. Served on MTA's Board of Directors and Executive Committee. Oct. 21.

**Margaret M. Pecoraro, 77**, of Plymouth. Was a teacher at Silver Lake Middle School in Kingston for 35 years. Dec. 7.

**Richard F. Raczkowski, 90**, of Hingham. Taught chemistry and biology in the Lexington Public Schools for 30 years. Nov. 24.

**Jill M. Ramey, 55**, of Methuen. Taught sixth-grade English and social studies in the Methuen Public Schools and was an adjunct faculty member at UMass Lowell. Nov. 3.

**John Reed, 72**, of West Yarmouth. Taught history at Barnstable High School. Was a past president of Barnstable Teachers Association, and on the MTA and NEA Board of Directors. Received the MTA's Human and Civil Rights Award and the NEA's H. Council Trenholm Memorial Award. Feb. 10.

**Sally T. Richardson, 67**, of Greenfield. Taught home economics and life sciences in the Greenfield school system. Nov. 12.

**Beverly A. Saccocia**, of Dennis, formerly of Bridgewater. Was a paraprofessional in the Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School and district, retiring after 37 years. She was a longtime member of the MTA Retired Members Committee. Nov. 11.

**Paul B. Scagnelli, 87**, of Kittery, Maine, formerly of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Cape Neddick, Maine. Was a 30-year educator in the Millis, Milford and Malden schools, having served as teacher, department head and coach. Oct. 30.

**Peter Stackpole, 74**, of Beverly. Worked in the Beverly school system for over 50 years, teaching the third and sixth grades, and most recently as a special education paraprofessional. Sept. 28.

**Kathleen N. Walcott, 93**, of Somerville. Taught English at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and later transitioned to guidance counselor. Was advisor to the Black Student Union and co-founded the Massachusetts Pre-Engineering Program. Dec. 31.

**Franklin K. Williams Jr., 91**, of East Granville, Vermont, formerly of Blackstone. Taught junior high school science in the Blackstone-Millville Regional district from 1974 to 1996. Dec. 3.

**Barbara A. Yablonski, 77**, of Gardner. Was a teacher at Baldwinville Elementary, Elm Street and Prospect schools in Gardner, as well as at Gardner Middle School. Oct. 22.

## REGIONAL RETIREMENT CONSULTATIONS AVAILABLE

The MTA provides individual retirement consultations 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.

**All consultations are held by appointment only during the hours listed. Members are advised to call selected MTA consultants in advance to schedule an appointment.**

**WORCESTER** – Edward Nelson: first Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and Karen Melanson: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; MTA Central Office, 12 East Worcester St., second floor, Worcester. Contact Nelson at 774.239.7823 or [enelson@massteacher.org](mailto:enelson@massteacher.org); or contact Melanson at 978.660.4359 or [kmelanson@massteacher.org](mailto:kmelanson@massteacher.org).

**QUINCY** – Harold Crowley, Peter Mili and Raymond Thompson: 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, or email [hcrowley@massteacher.org](mailto:hcrowley@massteacher.org).

**HOLYOKE** – Ron Lech: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Western Office, 55 Bobala Road, Suite 3, Holyoke; call 413.537.2335 or email [rlech@massteacher.org](mailto:rlech@massteacher.org).

**LYNNFIELD** – Barbara Callaghan: third and fourth Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Northeast Office, 50 Salem St., Building B, Lynnfield; call 978.660.4171 or email [bcallaghan@massteacher.org](mailto:bcallaghan@massteacher.org).

**PITTSFIELD** – Ward Johnson: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Berkshire Office, 188 East St., Pittsfield; call 413.443.1722 or email [wjohnson@massteacher.org](mailto:wjohnson@massteacher.org).

**RAYNHAM** – Raymond Thompson: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and Lawrence Abbruzzi: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; MTA Southeast Office, 756 Orchard St., third floor, Raynham. Contact Thompson at 617.347.4425 or [rtompson@massteacher.org](mailto:rtompson@massteacher.org); or contact Abbruzzi at 508.824.9194 or [labbruzzi@massteacher.org](mailto:labbruzzi@massteacher.org).

**HIGHER EDUCATION AT-LARGE** – Edward McCourt, call 781.325.2553 or email [emccourt@massteacher.org](mailto:emccourt@massteacher.org).

**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.**

## CLASSIFIEDS

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**Watch for registration information at [massteacher.org/summer](https://massteacher.org/summer).**

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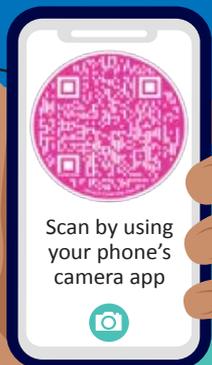
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# Educators organize around the *Thrive Act*

By Jonathan Ng

The fight over high-stakes testing is coming to a head this spring as MTA educators organize over legislation that would remove the punitive aspects of the MCAS exams and end a state receivership model that has plagued several Massachusetts cities, including communities with racial and ethnic diversity.

Educators' unions – from Greater New Bedford to Belmont to Tewksbury – are organizing to inform residents and galvanize support for *An Act Empowering Students and Schools to Thrive*.

The MTA-backed legislation, known as the *Thrive Act*, proposes to end the state's high school competency determination based on MCAS, eliminate state receiverships and establish a commission to study and recommend a better accountability system.

The high-stakes test has been a hot-button issue for students and educators since the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993*, which created the MCAS accountability system.

MTA locals over the past several months have started organizing around the issue and are talking to co-workers, friends and family, neighbors and local elected officials about the issue.

The fight to pass the *Thrive Act* is a critical step toward ending the harmful impacts of high-stakes testing on students and communities across Massachusetts, said Malden Education Association President Deb Gesualdo.

"MCAS is toxic, high-stakes testing and does not actually measure what is going on in a school and it doesn't measure a student's success academically," Gesualdo said in an interview, adding that MCAS takes at least 10 percent of a student's school year. "That's time that could be spent teaching and learning," she said.

The MEA has been distributing to its members anti-MCAS stickers and T-shirts that read: "In Massachusetts, we resist the MCAS." MEA educators wear the T-shirts on MCAS testing days.

"We are bringing awareness to the fact that parents and caregivers have the right to refuse

to have their child take the MCAS if their child is in grades three through eight," Gesualdo said. "We are posting on social media, we're talking to friends, family, and neighbors across the Malden community and educating them on their rights around MCAS and giving them resources to help write opt-out letters and educate people on the language of the *Thrive Act*."

The MEA is also working on passing a resolution to take a stance against high-stakes testing and will bring it forward to the Malden School Committee, so that local officials can take an official stance as well.

Conner Bourgoin, president of the Tewksbury Teachers Association, said local members are signing a petition to stop the MCAS from "creating a false sense of our students' and schools' aptitude."

The MCAS, Bourgoin said, "measures our students' academic and intellectual worth in a one-size-fits-all standardized test, and our school resources and cultures depend on those problematic testing results."

A key component of the *Thrive Act* would end receivership, which is a central pain point for educators in this fight.

Massachusetts has placed three school districts in state receivership since 2011, including Lawrence in 2011, Holyoke in 2015 and Southbridge in 2016, which has eroded the voice of communities in school policy. In Southbridge, the administration of the state-appointed receiver recently failed to lock down Southbridge High

School, or alert the staff, after a student was seen in a social media post showing him with a gun in the building.

"To see so many other districts go under receivership – which is not good for any educator, student or community member – and to see that happen to districts that have higher poverty rates and/or higher numbers of students of color attending is disheartening and simply wrong," said Bourgoin. "Our students deserve better from the state, and ending the MCAS requirements, which target certain communities, is a major first step."

Tewksbury educators are planning to host future actions and discussions within their membership to showcase their support for the *Thrive Act* being passed and signed into law.

The legislation was introduced and sponsored by state Senator Jo Comerford (D-Northampton), Senator Adam Gomez (D-Springfield), Senator Liz Miranda (D-Boston), Representative Jim Hawkins (D-Attleboro) and Representative Sam Montañó (D-Boston).

MTA Vice President Deb McCarthy, who as a teacher in Hull became a "conscientious objector" and refused to administer the MCAS for two years, said the damage of the accountability system is clear.

The focus on testing has detoured school districts from educating the whole child, McCarthy said, replacing best practices and pedagogy with a narrowed and linear curriculum that is centered on the answers to a high-stakes assessment. The state needs an authentic system that is relevant and centered on students, she said.

"Every student should be allowed to thrive," she said. "Public education should not be a system that ranks, sorts, punishes and shames. We must end the harm and replace the punitive, high-stakes accountability system. Our students are much more than a score."

**"MCAS is toxic, high-stakes testing and does not actually measure what is going on in a school and it doesn't measure a student's success academically."**

— Deb Gesualdo, president of the Malden Education Association

For more information on the *Thrive Act*, please visit [massteacher.org/highstakes](http://massteacher.org/highstakes).

# THE MTA Advantage

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

## The importance of a hearing exam

**M**ay is Better Hearing and Speech Month, which makes it a good time to check in on your hearing health. Your hearing is critical to your overall physical, emotional and social well-being. For example, hearing loss has been associated with a wide variety of mental and physical health conditions such as diabetes, anxiety and depression, according to the American Diabetes Association and the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Treating hearing loss is a very personalized experience and varies from person to person and ear to ear. Getting a hearing exam is a great step toward taking care of your health.

A thorough hearing evaluation performed by an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist results in valuable, in-depth information about your individual hearing capabilities. The exam allows providers to determine whether you have hearing loss, the type and degree of loss and the treatment options to recommend, if needed.

A hearing evaluation typically contains multiple parts. Here's what each can tell you about your hearing health:

- ❖ **Case history:** Covers things like your medical history, current medications and noise exposure, which can give clues as to what may be expected on the tests.
- ❖ **Otoscopy:** Determines if there's anything blocking your ear canal, like earwax or a foreign object and whether your eardrum looks healthy.
- ❖ **Tympanometry:** Measures the health of the middle ear and how well your eardrum moves.
- ❖ **Air and bone conduction testing:** Determines the softest sounds you can hear at different frequencies, giving your provider an idea of your hearing ability.
- ❖ **Speech testing:** Helps the provider understand how loud speech needs to be so you can hear it and how well you understand without visual or contextual cues.

These tests, in addition to your case history, give your provider a complete picture of your hearing health. Altogether, this information helps ensure that you get the individual recommendations and care you need.



Hearing loss can often mean missing out on the sounds that matter most. These sounds can range from important conversations with your doctor and safety alarms to more joyful sounds like talking with loved ones and being out in nature. Treating hearing loss can help you live a fuller life.

As an MTA member, you have access to hearing care through Hear In America, enabling you to save on the average retail price of high-quality hearing aids.

Now is a fantastic time to take advantage of your hearing program. Call Hear In America at 855.252.7639 to schedule a hearing exam with a provider near you.

## Why the MTA Disability Program Has Important Protections

MTA Benefits spoke with Thomas Colbert of Vista Financial Group about disability benefits available to MTA members. Open enrollment for the insurance program ends on May 13.

### Q. How long have you been working with MTA Benefits on this program?

**A.** We started working with MTA Benefits in 2000 on the current disability insurance program and designed it in a way that is specific to the needs of MTA members. The plan has paid more than \$30 million in benefits to members since 2001.

### Q. Why is this plan so important for members?

**A.** Disability insurance is particularly important for MTA members. In Massachusetts, educators are not eligible for Social Security disability benefits, so they have no long-term financial foundation underneath them in the event they suffer a prolonged illness or injury that keeps them from working. It is something everyone needs to account for in their own financial plan. What would happen if you did not have income coming in for a long period of time? Disability insurance is designed to protect you against that.

(continued on page 4)

# Learn the Signs of Identity Theft So You Can Prevent Fraud

**W**hen you hear the phrase “identity theft,” what is your first reaction? If you’re not bothered by or educated about identity theft, you could easily be the next victim.

In 2020, the Federal Trade Commission received 4.7 million reports of fraud, a 45 percent increase over 2019. Identity theft accounted for 29 percent of those reports, according to Experian, a financial information services company.

Understanding the signs of identity theft is the first step toward protecting yourself and your family against often-devastating effects.

## Signs that you may be a victim of identity theft

Identity theft requires illegal access to your personal or financial information in the form of your name, address, credit cards, account numbers, Social Security number or even medical identification numbers. Consequently, signs of identity theft can vary, but they can include:

- ❖ No longer receiving bills for your accounts.
- ❖ Beginning to receive bills for accounts that aren’t yours.
- ❖ A surprise denial of credit.
- ❖ Reviewing your credit report and finding accounts in your name that you don’t recognize.
- ❖ Activity on your bank statements that you don’t remember initiating.
- ❖ Learning that you supposedly filed your tax return when you did not.

## Do you suspect that your identity has been stolen?

First of all, don’t panic. There are helpful resources available to you that can help stop additional unauthorized use of your sensitive information.



1. Start by contacting companies that are affected by the fraud, such as credit card companies, local banks and your health insurance company. Explain that you believe you are a victim of identity theft and, if it’s card-related, ask them to cancel the card. Change all usernames, PIN numbers and passwords and ask companies which next steps they recommend. They should already have protocols in place for this situation.
2. File an identity theft report with the FTC at [identitytheft.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/identitytheft) and receive additional information that may be helpful as you navigate through the process. This report will prompt an investigation into the fraud by law enforcement agencies.
3. Review your credit report to see if the fraud has negatively impacted your credit score. Check periodically since it can take a few months for new credit-related activity to appear.
4. Consider issuing a fraud alert or freezing your credit.

A fraud alert notifies lenders that someone may have stolen your identity and prompts them to request additional proof of identity from anyone who tries to take out credit in your name. It expires in one year and can be extended if necessary.

A credit freeze is more stringent than a fraud alert. It prohibits lenders from viewing your credit reports and no one, not even you, can take out credit in your name. If you wish to take out credit when there is a freeze on your account, you must “thaw” your credit first which can take a few hours to a few days.

Remember, a little knowledge goes a long way. Consider taking identity protection to the next level with a monthly identity protection plan from Securus ID.

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View the plans and learn more at [mtabenefits.securusid.com](https://mtabenefits.securusid.com).

# Tip Sheet

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

## Make Time for Enjoyment This Spring

### Sightseeing

Sightseeing is a wonderful way to explore the outdoors and enjoy warmer weather. The **Freedom Trail Foundation in Boston** offers MTA members \$2 off their adult ticket. Just present your MTA member card at the Boston Common Visitor Information Center for a discount. Discover the iconic Freedom Trail, which consists of an outstanding collection of museums, churches, meeting houses, parks and historic markers that tell the story of the American Revolution.

For those who prefer unconventional tours, **RideAway Adventures** is a great sightseeing option. Save 15 percent on all activities at their Sandwich, East Sandwich and Mashpee locations. Activities include biking, paddle boarding, kayaking, classes and kids' camps. Enjoy an immersive, nature-based experience while touring the breathtaking peninsula of Cape Cod.



### Recreation

**Boundless Adventures** in Berlin is the perfect place to get the body moving. Grab a couple of friends, purchase two general admission tickets and receive 50 percent off the third ticket as an MTA member. Visitors can choose from a variety of thrill-seeking activities, such as the aerial adventure park, high rope obstacle courses, ziplining and more.

Make way to Boylston for free general admission to **New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill**. Bask in lovely garden views, trail walking and exhibitions while becoming one with nature. Keep in mind that New England Botanic Garden also offers educational resources for those who take an interest in the fascinating science of horticulture.

**Jam Time** is a premier children's indoor playground and enrichment facility. Jam Time features state-of-the-art climbing structures, playhouses and kiddie gym equipment, along with various classes, such as Family Jam Time, Jammin' Science, Tiny Toes Ballet and much more. The indoor recreation area and energetic classes encourage imagination, learning through play, socializing and motor skills. MTA members receive \$2 off open play at Jam Time locations in Maynard, Natick and Norwood. Join in on the fun with the little ones or sit back and relax with comfortable seating, coffee, snacks and free Wi-Fi.

Members who are longing to make lasting memories should head over to **Agawam Boat and Fishing Charters** in Essex. For more than 25 years,

Agawam Boat and Fishing Charters has offered private fishing and sightseeing excursions in the Essex River and the waters surrounding Cape Ann. MTA members and their adult family members save 10 percent on boat charters, sightseeing and sport fishing parties. Just be sure to make a reservation first.



We have something for the laid-back folks as well. **Hestia Creations** in Marblehead is a crafter's haven. Hestia Creations offers MTA members 10 percent off the Paint Your Own Pottery Studio, miniature building, gifts and unique handcrafted ornaments.

### Museums

Connect with your cultural side at **Worcester Art Museum**, where MTA members receive 2-for-1 admission. Since 1896, the museum has assembled a collection of 38,000 sculptures and paintings from around the world. In addition to exhibitions, Worcester Art Museum has a variety of programs and events for children and adults, such as hands-on classes, tours and scavenger hunts.

**Spellman Museum of Stamps and Postal History** in Weston was selected as one of Nickelodeon's top museums for children in the MetroWest area, and adults have been known to enjoy this exceptionally unique space as well. The museum features an expansive gallery, library, museum store and Post Office. MTA members exclusively receive \$3 off admission.

**Martha's Vineyard Museum** offers MTA members 50 percent off admission and an additional 10 percent off gift shop purchases. The museum's mission is to inspire visitors to discover, explore, and strengthen their connections to the island's diverse heritage. With rare collections, exhibits, and educational resources, visitors are sure to learn the ins and outs of Martha's Vineyard's historical society.

### Entertainment

We couldn't end this Tip Sheet without mentioning a couple of great entertainment discounts. One of MTA Benefits' newest discounts is with **New Repertory Theatre** in Watertown. They are offering MTA members \$5 off each ticket purchase, so theater lovers are truly going to enjoy this one.



For those who have an affinity for other types of performance art, such as concerts or sports, **Premium Seats USA** is an amazing discount to take advantage of. MTA members exclusively save 10 percent on hard-to-get theater, concert and sports tickets nationwide.

Visit [mtabenefits.com](http://mtabenefits.com) for details and a full list of discounts.

# Why the MTA Disability Program Has Important Protections

(continued from page 1)

## Q. What makes this disability insurance plan special?

**A.** There are a few factors of the MTA program that are truly unique. Benefits are paid in addition to accumulated sick days or sick bank payments. We do advise members that even though they could collect on both, it probably makes sense to not use up all of their sick days because they'll want to save some in case illness or injury occurs again.

The other distinctive feature about the plan is that we have an open enrollment period every year, and coverage is guaranteed during that period. That's important because if somebody didn't elect to enroll at their first opportunity and was subsequently diagnosed with a medical problem, they could still get coverage.



## Q. Could you give an example of when the MTA disability plan helped a member?

**A.** Recently, I received a call from a member who had been having some problems and was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Under normal circumstances that person would not be able to buy disability insurance, but I explained to them that they could get coverage in the next open enrollment period. Then, if their condition becomes a problem in the future, they'd be covered by the plan.

## Q. Can disability insurance help somebody who's planning a family?

**A.** Absolutely. That's one of the most common reasons members enroll in the short-term disability plan. They'll receive a few weeks' worth of income while they're out on maternity leave.

## Q. MTA members can accumulate sick days and participate in sick banks, which will pay income when they can't work. Why should someone elect to participate in the disability plan, as well?

**A.** That's true, but sick days and sick banks were never designed to be a long-term solution. They're really just a bridge that will help someone for a short period of time, and not all members have a lot of accumulated sick days. Everyone should have long-term disability insurance, because there's nothing that's going to pay you after the first few months of being out of work. If you need your income to pay your bills, then you really do need to have long-term disability insurance to protect that income.

## Q. Isn't disability insurance expensive? Is the MTA plan more affordable?

**A.** Disability insurance is expensive in the individual marketplace because of the higher likelihood that one could become disabled and need to collect on the plan. Rates in the MTA program are negotiated based on the total size of the membership of the MTA. This group program offers heavily discounted rates. It's very affordable, and the ability to layer-in short- and/or long-term disability coverage allows the applicant to control the cost based on their individual circumstances.

## Q. What are the eligibility requirements?

**A.** There are two requirements. The individual who is covered needs to be an MTA member, and their school district needs to have opted to participate in the MTA program. Not every school district in the state offers this plan, and we are continually trying to introduce it to new districts. If a district doesn't currently participate, the local president should contact MTA Benefits and we can work with them to make the plan available. We've also introduced an option to have premiums taken from members' checking accounts instead of from their payroll deductions, which has made it easier to introduce the plan in several districts.

## Q. How do you enroll?

**A.** It's really simple. Every year during the enrollment period, members can meet with a benefits counselor in school during on-site enrollment. We also have a call center; members can schedule an appointment with a benefits counselor over the phone and sign up.

For more information, members can visit [myenrollmentschedule.com/mta](https://myenrollmentschedule.com/mta), or call 866.998.2915 to schedule an appointment with a counselor.