

MTA Today

A publication of the Massachusetts Teachers Association
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DEMANDING SAFETY AND FULL STAFFING





Honoring Education Support Professionals

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MTA Today

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**This edition also includes the 2020
MTA Primary Election Guide**

MTA'S MISSION STATEMENT

The Massachusetts Teachers Association is a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles, that accepts and supports the interdependence of professionalism and unionism. The MTA promotes the use of its members' collective power to advance their professional and economic interests. The MTA is committed to human and civil rights and advocates for quality public education in an environment in which lifelong learning and innovation flourish.

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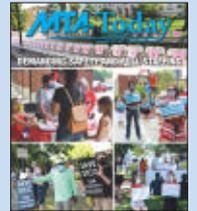
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ON THE COVER

MTA members spent countless hours over the summer — working together but socially distanced — as they rallied, bargained, organized, met over Zoom and took part in professional development sessions. Educators were consistent in their message: We are essential, not expendable. You'll find coverage of MTA member activism amid the pandemic throughout this edition. A story on the challenges for preK-12 educators begins on Page 6, and coverage of higher education activism begins on Page 7. You'll also find coverage of local associations taking on structural racism on Page 3 and the launch of the PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights campaign on Page 9. The second in a series of stories celebrating MTA's 175th anniversary begins on Page 5. This edition also includes the 2020 MTA Primary Election Guide.



Cover photos by Bob Duffy, Chris Christo, Laura Barrett and Scott McLennan
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Quote-Unquote

"You point to a private sector that has put profits over people and claimed the lives of thousands of essential workers. I wouldn't trust you to care for a house plant let alone my child."

— U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley, responding to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' push for students to return to school

Educators take lead in antiracism actions

By Scott McLennan

As educators across the state joined in demonstrations this spring calling for racial justice after the brutal killing of George Floyd by police officers, a Black teacher in Milton found herself threatened with discipline for addressing the role of race in the slaying of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Georgia man.

What transpired ended up drawing hundreds of people to a Juneteenth march and rally organized by the Milton Educators Association and community groups.

The episode involving middle school English teacher Zakia Jarrett's remark attracted widespread media attention to the issue of structural racism in public education.

Arbery was shot to death while jogging not far from his home, and his killing has led to charges against three white men who were allegedly involved in pursuing and assaulting him before his death. Jarrett was placed on leave after a remark she made about racism was disseminated by a parent in a short video clip showing part of a remote classroom lesson.

The leave was quickly rescinded by the district after officials were confronted by the MEA, but the handling of the matter was seen as clumsy and damaging — and it took weeks for the district to craft an apology and conclude an investigation into the source of the complaint against Jarrett.

Educators and many other people in the community concluded that the incident — in which an unauthorized and prohibited recording of a small portion of Jarrett's lesson was used against her — amounted to another example of structural racism.

Leading up to the Milton rally, several local associations and the MTA had issued strong statements in support of Black and brown educators and students that condemned the injustice of the killing of Floyd — who died at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis — as an example of deep-seated structural racism.

MTA President Merrie Najimy said that for the past several years the union has been actively engaged in antiracism, from demonstrating against the negative impact that charter schools have on communities of color to calling out the implicit and explicit racism inherent in high-stakes standardized tests such as the MCAS.

"We need to talk about how racism manifests itself and gets reproduced in public education," Najimy said, noting that antiracism extends well beyond the fight for equitable education funding and the need to hire more educators of color. The work of antiracism must dig into students' day-to-day lessons, she and other advocates believe.

"If you start talking about Black lives at the moment of slavery, you have humiliated and disempowered Black youth," Najimy said.

Local actions in support of racial justice in education have created spaces for students to speak out alongside educators. Several events have included students expressing their frustration with



Photos by Scott McLennan

A Juneteenth rally and march for racial justice in Milton drew hundreds of educators and community allies. Many voiced their strong support for teacher Zakia Jarrett, left, who was facing discipline for addressing racism in one of her courses until the Milton Educators Association stepped in to challenge the school district's actions. The rally began at Kelly Field — and many participants brought handmade signs. After a speaking program, members of the crowd marched to Milton High School.



feeling they need to conform to an identity that is not true to themselves and a curriculum in their school that lacks cultural diversity.

The critiques have been echoed by educators. At a recent rally in Brookline that drew hundreds of people demanding the funding necessary to avert layoffs and to diversify the teaching ranks, physics teacher Graciela Mohamedi said she spent years going by "Grace" before demanding that others learn how to pronounce her name correctly.

The Brookline chapter of ALANA — African, Latinx, Asian and Native American educators — blasted the district administration for slashing its budget and sending out layoff notices. The move substantially affected educators of color, who were more recently hired and therefore less likely to have attained Professional Teacher Status.

The ALANA group took the lead in organizing the June 15 rally in Brookline and assembled a program that featured only speakers of color. From kindergarten educators to music teachers, they made the point that students need to see themselves reflected in their educators. That is not the case now in most communities with diverse populations.

Brookline Educators Union member and ALANA activist Jason Moran told reporters that the district undermined all of the work that had been taking place to diversify the staff. The layoff notices paved the way for affected educators to take jobs elsewhere, even before Brookline rescinded some of the pink slips.

As Jarrett's story spread nationally, her passion and dedication became as compelling to others as the situation she found herself in. Comedian Sarah Silverman, known for her biting social satire, sent out a tweet expressing her admiration for Jarrett's work in introducing middle school students to important Black writers and getting them to grapple with difficult topics.

At the Milton rally on June 19, Jarrett read a letter she had received from one of her students. In it, a young girl thanks her teacher for inspiring her to think more deeply about how to make things better in her community.

"That letter showed me that our students are always watching," Jarrett said. "If you speak up about injustice, they will speak up about injustice. If you remain silent, they will remain silent."

The MTA has stepped up to lead in this crisis

#OnlyWhenItsSafe

We have been very clear. Schools should reopen for in-person learning #OnlyWhenItsSafe — safe for students, families, educators, individual communities and the Commonwealth as a whole.

Educators are the experts on what it takes to keep our students safe while giving them the education they deserve. Unions are the experts on keeping our members safe. And because the state is failing to protect school communities, the MTA has stepped up to lead.



Merrie Najimy
MTA President

Our incredible Environmental Health and Safety Committee, made up of rank-and-file members, set safe reopening criteria in consultation with health and safety experts.

- Indoor air quality and ventilation must be brought up to appropriate regulatory and industry standards.

- Rapid COVID-19 testing must be made accessible, routine and free for students and staff.

- Appropriate community and public health benchmarks must be set and met.

The MTA Board of Directors adopted a policy that concludes: “Until the point when districts and the state can meet these [health and safety] criteria, we will refuse to return to unsafe school buildings and we will use the 10 additional days at the start of the 2020-2021 school year before instruction of students begins to redesign learning.” Locals across the state have enthusiastically endorsed this position and are organizing to make it happen.

We know that you are longing to get back to in-person learning with your students — and that they are longing to get back to school with you and their friends. We also know that for some of our students, school is the safest place in their lives.

As an elementary school teacher of 30 years, I know there is no substitute for settling in side by side with my students and connecting with them personally. I know how central playing with one another and sharing books, toys and even hugs is to their social and emotional wellness and academic development. There is no replacement for in-person learning in non-crisis times. But even if we were back in school using a hybrid model, none of that would happen until the pandemic is over.

Crisis education under COVID-19 has been a hardship for everyone: for families who need schools to serve as child care so they can work; for our members who are caring for other people’s children while tending to their own needs and families; and for our students themselves. But we also know that the alternative is far worse.

Being back in school right now would mean having to decide what to do every time someone develops a cough. COVID-19 can spread like wildfire. Just look at the summer camp in Georgia where 260 campers and staff tested positive out of 344 results.

Inevitably, it would mean some student or staff member would test positive, requiring close contacts to quarantine for 14 days and requiring overextended educators to figure out how to make sure students in quarantine are still being educated.

The harsh reality is that a student, a staff member or one of their relatives will likely become very ill — or worse. The emotional trauma of such an outcome would be dire. Black and brown communities are at greater risk of this happening, which is why most parents of color support remote learning at this time.

These risks aren’t just theoretical. Evidence about the risks of reopening schools too soon is mounting. Two weeks after Israel reopened its schools in late May, cases skyrocketed. In July, a large study out of South Korea showed that children over age 10 transmit the virus as easily as adults. Right here in Massachusetts, more than 8 percent of children living in Department of Children & Families facilities contracted the virus. In states where schools have opened, many are already having to close.

Experts from institutions such as Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health have pointed to the conditions that don’t yet exist in Massachusetts, including making sure that well-maintained ventilation systems are circulating air properly in schools. These conditions helped inform our reopening criteria. But our governor and education commissioner haven’t acted on them as of this writing.

What now?

It’s through the union that we are going to win the conditions that we need to resume education safely and bring back joy in the year of COVID-19 learning. We have built a statewide campaign that has brought local affiliates together to coordinate demands, bargain and hold actions across the state. We have 12 active regional solidarity networks, an Educators of Color affinity group and county teachers’ associations, all engaging in the campaign. We are hosting membership meetings with nearly 10,000 members, while 22,000 of you are talking on Facebook through Massachusetts Educators United.

While negotiating with the state, we asked you to act. You flooded Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley’s voicemail and email inboxes, demanding 10 days of planning time before instruction resumes. Mission accomplished.

Your activism is why we see a growing number of school committees voting to start the school year virtually.

Once we win a virtual start to the year, we must redesign education to make remote learning

The harsh reality is that a student, a staff member or one of their relatives will likely become very ill — or worse. The emotional trauma of such an outcome would be dire. Black and brown communities are at greater risk of this happening, which is why most parents of color support remote learning at this time.

meaningful and safe. We must connect with at-risk students, including those who lack the technology, internet capacity or quiet home environment needed to stay engaged.

During a call with more than 7,500 members on July 29, we asked for your ideas about how to make remote learning better. We received more than 1,900 ideas in just three minutes. Let’s use the 10 days at the start of school to harness your collective best ideas and insist that districts include all Education Support Professionals in planning and implementing them.

For the last six years we have been fighting for the public schools and colleges our communities deserve. We must now fight for the public schools and colleges that communities demand — where Black and brown lives matter in policy, in practice and in curriculum. While the details are different in higher education than they are in preK-12, it is the same struggle. Among our demands are recalling the 2,000 educators who have been laid off in our preK-12 schools and rescinding the furloughs and layoffs and the closing of programs in higher education.

We must show our strength as a union and stand together for the most vulnerable members in our own locals and for the most vulnerable locals in our state. The virus knows no boundaries. If your neighboring district opens too soon, it is only a matter of time until COVID-19 spreads to yours.

This fall, let’s stand together as one and declare: #OnlyWhenItsSafe.

To learn more about the MTA’s #OnlyWhenItsSafe campaign, follow our social media, read my member emails and check our website, massteacher.org, on a regular basis.

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. For additional information, please refer to the guidelines posted on www.massteacher.org.

'By the turn of the century, MTA was a firmly entrenched member of the education establishment'

By Laura Barrett

This November, the MTA celebrates the 175th anniversary of the association's founding. The Spring edition of *MTA Today* featured highlights of the MTA's first 50 years. In this issue, we explore the period from 1900 to the early 1930s, when the organization went through several transformations and there was a heightened focus on wages, benefits and working conditions. All quotations in italics are from *The Faces and Voices of the Massachusetts Teachers Association: Celebrating 150 Years of History*, written in 1995 by now-retired MTA Communications Specialist Jerry Spindel. Other information is from *Common Ground*, the association's periodical during the early 1900s.

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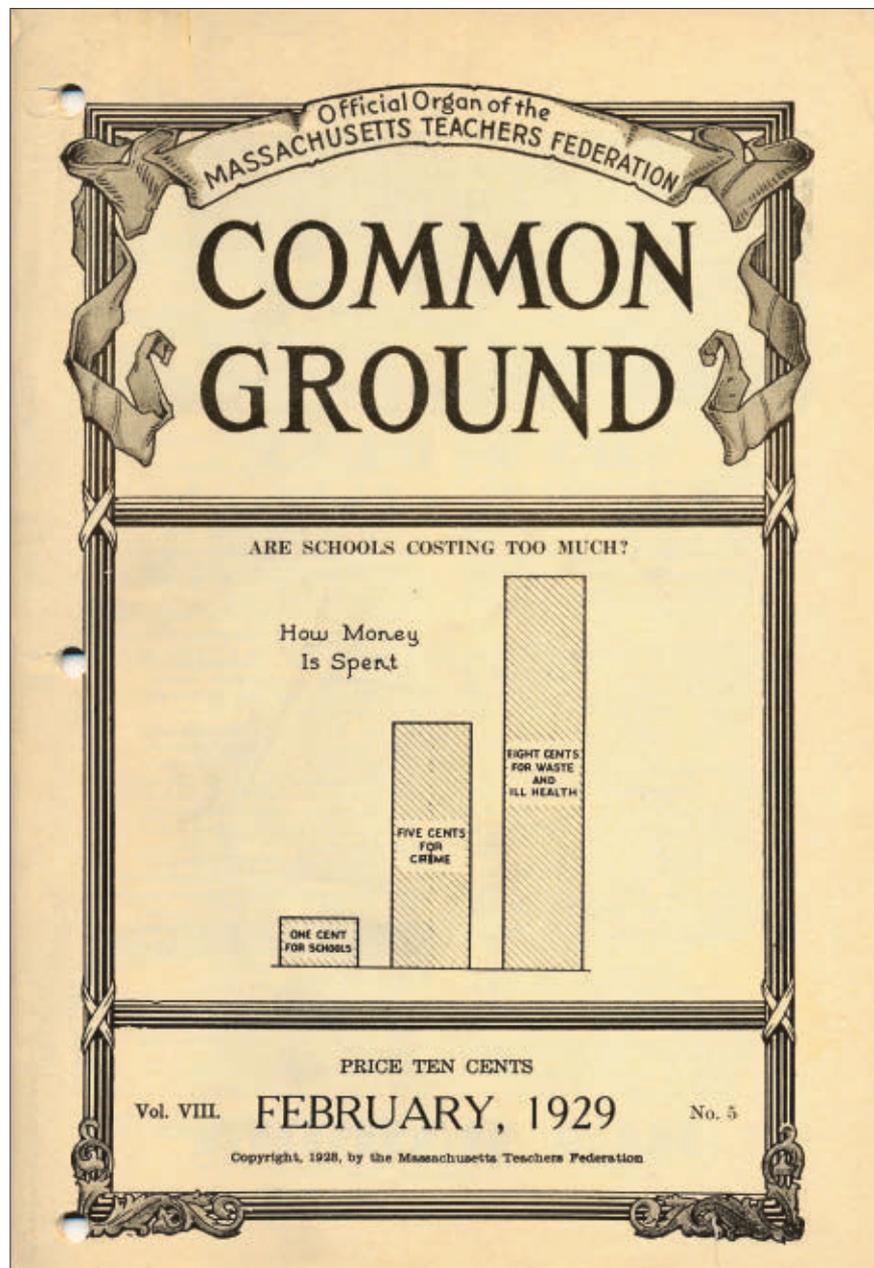
By the turn of the century, MTA was a firmly entrenched member of the education establishment. Its members included such world famous scholars as the naturalist Louis Agassiz and psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Its conferences were attended by such notables as educator and author Booker T. Washington, and Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot.

But membership in the establishment came at a price. Many felt MTA had ceased to focus on the problems and concerns of rank-and-file educators. Thus, on February 8, 1911, Ernest McKechnie, of Somerville, gathered with fellow educators from Attleboro, Leominster, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, New Bedford and Newburyport, and founded the Massachusetts Teachers Federation (MTF).

Eight years later, in 1919, the MTF merged with the MTA. This revitalized MTA now organized its members by local associations, and encouraged its members to be active not only in the educational arena, but in the political arena as well.

■ ■ ■

Many issues addressed in the early 20th century have parallels today, including coping with a pandemic. The influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919 — known as the Spanish flu — hit Massachusetts hard. Fort Devens, in the towns of Ayer, Shirley and



Harvard, was a major source of the outbreak in the U.S., with one 1918 report noting, "On Sept. 1, its barracks were jammed with 45,000 soldiers waiting to be shipped to France. By the end of that month, Fort Devens was a charnel house filled with the dead and dying."

By the time the pandemic was over, the virus had killed at least 50 million people worldwide — 675,000 of them Americans.

Most urban schools across the country closed after the second wave hit in 1919, according to the journal *Health Affairs*, including those in Boston, Fall River, Lowell and Brookline. There is one big difference within the association in the chronicling of the crises then and now.

Despite the magnitude of the problem, there appears to have been only passing reference to the earlier pandemic in the MTA's publications from those years. Issues of merit pay, whether "child-centered" education was the right approach, and the routine activities of local associations — many of which were called "clubs" — are described at length. The war in Europe, which was still going on when the first wave hit, was discussed in several essays. But the lack of any mention of the pandemic or school closures in the MTA's publications is in sharp contrast to today's intense focus on COVID-19. Media coverage of the pandemic was also minimal by today's standards.

What *Common Ground* did focus on during those years was

a robust platform of improving teaching conditions. In the April 1918 publication, that platform included support for:

1. Equitable salaries for teachers.
2. The enactment of a retirement law.
3. The enactment of a tenure law.
4. More democratic control of schools in —
 - (a) making rules for the conduct of the schools.
 - (b) choosing the textbooks.
 - (c) arranging the courses of study.
5. Vocational education.
6. The appointment of a teacher as a member of the State Board of Education.

The last item in the 12-point platform was support for the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, prohibiting the manufacture, transportation or sale of alcohol. Prohibition was ratified in January 1919.

■ ■ ■

By the 1920s, MTA had scored some impressive victories:

- A retirement law that offered educators pensions for the first time;
- A tenure law that offered some minimal job security;
- A minimum salary law that put a floor under teacher earnings; and
- A state aid law that diverted a portion of state income taxes to poorer schools to equalize educational opportunity. ...

On equalizing educational opportunity, the principles described in *Common Ground* are nearly identical to the requirements for public school funding laid out in the 1993 *McDuffy* case and codified in the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act* of that year. Paul R. Mort, the 1931 author of "The Financing of American-Level Schools," wrote:

"The principle of equalization of educational opportunity demands that the state shall define a satisfactory program of education below which no community in the state shall be permitted to go." In today's terms, that's the foundation budget.

"It then follows that the state must provide a system of financing this program of education, either

Please turn to **Then as now**/Page 16

'Our moment of truth as union members'

Educators demand protection for students, schools and communities

By Laura Barrett

We are facing the worst public education crisis in living memory. It didn't have to be this bad. A mismanaged and chaotic response to the pandemic at the national level has been made worse by delayed and vague guidance from the state. Coupled with decades of disinvestment in public education, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, these conditions mean that we trail the world in being able to reopen schools safely.

"This is our moment of truth as union members and as educators," said MTA President Merrie Najimy. "We will continue to be hit with crises if we as a society don't address the underlying issues that have made the U.S. a world leader — a leader in disparities, division, dysfunction and death."

Among all of the bad options, the MTA is backing the least harmful one — a remote start to the school year for everyone and a gradual return to in-person instruction only when health and safety conditions have been met. Although educators want nothing more than to be back in school with their students, safety has to be the priority.

On Aug. 8, the MTA Board of Directors adopted a motion spelling out what "safe" means: Indoor air quality in schools must meet appropriate standards; free, rapid and reliable COVID-19 testing and contact tracing must be made available to students and staff; and appropriate public health benchmarks must be met.

These standards are needed to protect the wider community as well as students and staff.

Orman Beckles, the parent of a student at the Linden School in Malden, said at a rally in his community on July 30 that he worries about what will happen if buildings reopen too early.

"I'm a Black male," Beckles said. "I have diabetes and I have high blood pressure. I love my son.

"They talk about the psychological effects if he stays home," he continued. "What about the psychological effect if he brings something home and it kills his father? Kills his mother? Kills his grandmother, who is 89 years old? And that's a real possibility. Maybe he doesn't get sick, but if he kills all of us, how is that going to affect him for the rest of his life?"

For many MTA members, this is the summer break that wasn't. Thousands spent their "vacation" taking part in local and statewide meetings, holding signs saying their lives are "not expendable," sending messages to elected leaders, bargaining, organizing and taking part in professional development.

Member activism led to a big victory on July 27. Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley agreed to delay the return of students by 10 days, giving educators a chance to collaborate and redesign teaching and learning.



Photo by Laura Barrett

More than 100 educators and other community members turned out for a rally on July 30 in Malden. Orman Beckles, left, the parent of a student at the Linden School, said he was worried that his son could bring the coronavirus home and infect vulnerable members of their family.

The MTA is encouraging members to include current events in their curricula, including the coronavirus pandemic itself and racial justice issues propelled by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and others across the nation. ALANA Educators — an MTA network of African, Latinx, Asian and Native American educators — made this point in a statement released this summer. "Surprisingly, COVID-19 has given us a chance to reimagine what education looks like, as well as how and what we teach," the statement said.

MTA field staff and members have been working nonstop since schools closed in the spring. In late June, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education told districts to create three plans — full-time in-person, hybrid and full-time remote — while pushing them to open with the in-person model. Governor Charlie Baker asked districts not to commit to a final plan until Aug. 14, not long before the start of the new school year.

The stress has been tremendous on members. They have gone all summer not knowing what their jobs will look like, what their own children's schedules will be, and whether they and their families will be protected from infection.

Activities are ongoing, with plans underway for larger actions in the days ahead. Here are just a few:

- The Malden Education Association organized two socially distanced rallies in front of DESE's

headquarters, the second on July 30. Deb Gesualdo, president of the MEA, said at that rally, "We will not allow our students, educators, families and communities to be put at risk of getting sick and dying from the premature return to in-person learning." Similar rallies have been held in Springfield, Pittsfield and elsewhere.

- In Southbridge, a school district in receivership, local President Jocelyn Tallis and other MTA Summer Member Organizers set up a table outside the Big Bunny Market to talk to parents and hear their concerns. One of the SMOs helped translate for parents who don't speak English. The district receiver said he was so impressed that he planned to hire more school staff to go door to door.

- The Amherst-Pelham Education Association was one of the first locals to come out strongly for a remote opening. A July 7 letter to the School Committee stated, "We request that you not allow any excuse to justify risks that may threaten the health or life of even one person, as together, we fight COVID-19. Let us continue to *live*, to *teach*, and to *learn* in the safest possible way, remotely." Many more locals have now sent similar messages.

- Watertown Educators Association member surveys showed that support for in-person instruction dropped dramatically between July 16, when about half favored being fully back or the hybrid model,

Please turn to **Standing together**/Page 17



Photos by Scott McLennan

In the photo at left, Salem State professor Joanna Gonsalves was one of several faculty members, students and staff who recently demonstrated the impact of budget cuts with a “missing people” protest. At right, members of UMass Unions United and several other unions converged on UMass Lowell and outside the home of UML Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney on May 15 to protest layoffs and the lack of safety protections.

Higher ed members lead fight for safety

By Scott McLennan

MTA members and other unionized workers on public higher education campuses are in the forefront of fighting for funding to save jobs and programs — and they are working furiously to help protect the health and safety of students, staff and faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public higher education campuses moved to remote learning models last spring, around the same time that public preK-12 schools did. The transition was chaotic, as those teaching courses worked hard to stay connected to their students while staff members crucial to campus operations were increasingly targeted for layoffs and furloughs. Many of the employees still working in person on campuses were asked to fulfill their responsibilities with insufficient personal protective equipment amid a lack of clear health guidelines.

During the summer months, MTA members devoted extensive time and energy to advocating for the resources necessary to prevent job losses and ensure needed protections. A petition sent to University of Massachusetts President Marty Meehan and state Higher Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago demanding job security, funding and safe working conditions amassed thousands of signatures.

The MTA also took the lead on setting up Massachusetts Agrees, a media campaign in support of public higher education.

“Clearly, some campus and state leaders exploited the pandemic to unleash damaging budget cuts,” said MTA Vice President Max Page, who is a UMass Amherst professor.

Bristol Community College and UMass Lowell, for example, rolled out layoff and furlough plans affecting hundreds of employees well before there were definitive budget numbers from the state or full knowledge of how much federal assistance would be available. In early August, the Legislature

committed to funding public higher education at its pre-pandemic level through October.

The MTA immediately demanded that all furloughs and layoffs be halted, especially given the likelihood of additional federal funding.

As the fall semester approached, however, the MTA’s higher education members remained on edge. Many of their concerns were aired at an emergency virtual hearing on Aug. 3. More than 700 higher education members and 12 state legislators joined the webinar.

Tiffany Gayle Chenault, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council chapter at Salem State University, told the educators on the teleconference that she is worried that widespread staff cuts and furloughs are setting students up for failure — in addition to future debt. She pointed out that students of color make up 40 percent of the Salem State student population, and 50 percent of the students at the university are eligible for Pell Grants. Making it more difficult for students to succeed at Salem State will only deepen racial inequality, she said.

Salem State students joined faculty and staff in demonstrating the impact of budget cuts with a protest that dramatized the impact of “missing people” on students. Students on a campus green tried to have questions about their work answered — but instead of finding a real person who could help, they were met silently by life-sized silhouettes. “Missing people” are also having an effect on faculty and staff, who cannot meet with colleagues to plan curriculum or find out about child care options on campus.

Community colleges have seen a rash of harmful cuts. Springfield Technical Community College is cutting seven programs that will eliminate at least 21 jobs, along with career and educational opportunities available to area residents. Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester closed its Children’s School, which has trained students in the education program

and provided early education for the children of QCC students, staff and faculty, as well as area residents.

The MCCC has been fighting the various cuts throughout the spring and summer, and MCCC President Margaret Wong accused community college presidents of living in a “COVID bubble, talking only among themselves.”

The community colleges and state universities, overseen by the state Department of Higher Education, have adopted a patchwork of campus reopening plans.

The UMass system announced a budget in July that would lead to furloughs for more than 3,000 workers and the loss of 2,000 positions. Plans were changing as late as August, with the Amherst campus announcing that students should not plan to live in dormitories or take up residence in the area if all of their courses are being taught remotely.

While that proved to be a significant victory for workers concerned about the lack of health and safety measures at UMass, MTA members immediately started organizing to save jobs.

MTA President Merrie Najimy called the UMass budget plan misguided.

“The members of the MTA will fight these cuts and demand from the federal and state governments the funding that our public schools and colleges need,” she said. “Our members are the protectors of our campuses. We will not allow a disconnected Board of Trustees to do irreparable harm to the essential institutions that are our public colleges and universities.”

The funding issue may seem daunting given the state’s narrative about the amount of tax revenue that is being lost during the coronavirus crisis. But the Legislature has avoided taking a stand on adopting progressive revenue options that could help fund public education by increasing taxes on corporations, their wealthy shareholders and the 19

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Virtual conference helps members 'connect the dots'

By Jean Conley

The 2020 MTA Summer Conference — the first ever held virtually — was a tremendous success, with participants filling sessions focused on professional development and union leadership, learning about the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and exploring ways to bring social justice into the curriculum.

As programming kicked off, MTA President Merrie Najimy encouraged all members to take advantage of as many sessions and special events as they could. All of the programming was free for MTA members.

“This year’s Summer Conference helps our members connect the dots between what is happening nationally and what they care most about,” Najimy said as the events began. “Educating our young people in ways that address racism is incredibly important, as is pushing back against a narrative of austerity at a time when full funding and proper staffing are absolutely vital.”

A Speaker Series event on issues related to the coronavirus crisis attracted more than 900 MTA educators, who heard from members of the MTA Environmental Health and Safety Committee about the complications facing school districts and campuses in planning for the resumption of learning in the new academic year.

Listening circles on antiracism attracted members eager to learn more about racial and social justice and then put what they learned into practice.

Members heard Erica Smiley, executive director of Jobs With Justice, lead a discussion about unions’ responsibility in seeking to dismantle white supremacy, and a series of workshops titled “Courageous Conversations: A Pilot Project in Racial Justice and Critical Pedagogy” explored historical events in the United States and helped educators develop a critical analysis for antiracist teaching. Another workshop helped educators learn about gender-inclusive practices.

Higher education workshops such as “Fall Return? Considering Safety and Educational Quality



in a Global Pandemic” offered participants up-to-the-minute information and resources. Others, such as “College Affordability and Student Debt,” “The Economic Value of Investing in Higher Education” and “Now More Than Ever: Progressive Revenues,” focused on organizing for a debt-free future and served as counterweights to the austerity narrative that has led to thousands of layoffs and furloughs on public higher education campuses across the state.

A full slate of workshops was offered for Education Support Professionals. One session involved the MTA PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights campaign. Meanwhile, professional development workshops focused on issues such as helping students improve executive functioning skills and building strategies for working with those on the autism spectrum.

A two-day track for new members — developed by the New Member Committee — introduced preK-12 MTA members in their first five years of practice to what a union is, what their union does, and why unions are especially important during the pandemic.

One participant in the New Member Program was Corinne Sherwood, an ESP at Carver Middle/High School and a member of the Education Association of Plymouth and Carver. She had just completed her first year as the academic coordinator of the school’s transition assistance program.

Sherwood said she has “gone gung-ho” into the work of her local this past year, including serving a stint this summer working in the MTA Summer Member Organizing Program.

In addition to participating in the New Member Program, Sherwood attended several Summer Conference programs and events. She said the sessions more than met her expectations.

“Today we talked about the social-emotional well-being of educators. Usually educators focus on students’ well-being, but we never really take the time to think of ourselves. So it was nice to have a workshop about our own social and emotional health,” Sherwood said.

Several special events were sprinkled throughout the conference.

“Spoken Word: Celebrating Our Students” showcased former students and MTA members from the Worcester area sharing their perspectives about current events through spoken word.

Movie Nights were hosted by ALANA Educators and co-sponsored by the MTA Task Force on Race, the MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee and the MTA Training and Professional Learning Committee.

A musical that aired on June 19, Juneteenth, kicked off the Movie Night series. *The Moment Was Now*, a film based on a stage play, deals with racial justice and worker solidarity immediately after the Civil War. Other Movie Night sessions featured the powerful documentary *13th*, which explores the intersection of race, justice and mass incarceration in the United States, and *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. The film takes a deep dive into the lives of Black girls and the practices, cultural beliefs and policies that disrupt one of the most important factors in their lives — education.

While moving the Summer Conference entirely online in a short time span felt to organizers a bit like performing a high-wire act, it largely went off without a hitch. The content of the sessions was “incredibly relevant to our members,” said Najimy. “Well-informed members build powerful unions.”

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Escalating the fight for ESP rights

By Jean Conley

The vast majority of MTA preK-12 Education Support Professionals are women.

Although more than half of them have at least a bachelor's degree, 85 percent make \$30,000 a year or less. One in three is paying off student loans. Many need to hold a second or even a third job just to make ends meet. Many households led by ESPs qualify for MassHealth. And as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, economic prospects grow dimmer for those most vulnerable to layoffs.

This was the picture paraeducator Cindy Gushee of the Monomoy Regional Education Association painted on July 20 during a virtual training for ESPs that was part of the 2020 MTA Summer Conference, which was held virtually because of the coronavirus crisis. Gushee is a member of the MTA ESP Standards Task Force, which developed a survey over the past year that gathered information from almost 3,000 preK-12 MTA members.

The result of the task force's efforts is the MTA PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights, a document that will serve as the foundation for local associations statewide as they focus on negotiations to bring measurable progress to preK-12 ESP contracts — and a sense of fairness and respect to ESPs.

"We are ESPs for a reason," said task force Chair Joni Cederholm, a clerical paraprofessional in Weymouth and the 2019 MTA ESP of the Year. "Because we are compassionate, caring people, we always put others first. And because of that, we tend to fall behind. But now it's our time."

Other members of the task force are Erin Burlingame, a member of the Monomoy Regional Education Association, Sonia Fortin of the Sudbury Education Association, Naomi Adagboyi of the Canton Teachers Association, and Sumayya Ghalaini of the West Springfield Education Association.

The MTA Board of Directors voted to endorse the MTA ESP Bill of Rights Campaign during its meeting on Aug. 8.

PreK-12 ESPs plan to roll out the Bill of Rights to all local associations around the state, including those without ESP members, for endorsement. "Remember, we're all in this together," said Cederholm.



Fortin, the 2020 MTA ESP of the Year, and other task force members also worked to develop a calculator that ESPs can use to determine what a living wage means in their city, town or county.

"Every day, Education Support Professionals are on the front lines in our schools and on our campuses," said MTA President Merrie Najimy. "ESPs have been underpaid and underappreciated for far too long. This PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights is a first step toward strengthening our bargaining position and uniting ESPs across all districts as we fight for a living wage and respect for these essential educators."

During the virtual training, members brought up examples from their own experiences of the challenges that ESPs face. Those experiences often reflected the survey results:

ESP wages: PreK-12 ESPs are paid by cities and towns, so they are exempt from the state's minimum wage law. Cederholm described her appearance before a State House panel last summer, when she and other ESPs testified in favor of legislation that would ensure the state's minimum wage and paid family and medical leave apply to municipal workers. "Honestly," she told the training group, "their faces were shocked" when they found out how poorly ESPs are paid. "I shared with them that I have worked for almost 25 years and that I am just over the minimum wage," Cederholm added.

Affordable health insurance: Sixty-one percent of ESPs have district-provided health coverage for themselves and family members. But when the cost of insurance is too high, it can wipe out an ESP's entire

paycheck, resulting in what too many ESPs are familiar with: the zero-dollar check.

Health and safety: One-quarter of ESPs report being hurt on the job. Physical and verbal assaults are not uncommon.

Education to strengthen careers: ESPs deserve an affordable way of climbing the career ladder, as well as a way of paying off career-related debt.

Recognition as educators: ESPs are often the first people to see their students in the morning and the last

to see them at the end of the day. ESPs deserve relevant professional development and a role on every education-related committee in every district.

After breakout sessions, members reported back for their groups on what they could push for right away — even before financial considerations.

Cementing professional development days and prep time into contracts is a priority, said Jessica McDonough, a paraprofessional in Weymouth.

"Building parent-community solidarity networks," said Stephanie Joyce, a teacher in the Amherst-Pelham district who is an ardent supporter of ESPs.

"Respect and adequate training," reported Ghalaini, a paraeducator in West Springfield.

"A feeling of being valued," added Gushee.

To see a copy of the PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights and find other resources for ESPs, go to massteacher.org/esp.

REGIONAL RETIREMENT CONSULTATIONS AVAILABLE

The MTA provides individual retirement consultations throughout the state to assist members. **Proof of membership must be submitted when requesting retirement services. This schedule is in effect from September to June except at MTA's Quincy headquarters, which is staffed during the summer and school vacations.**

PLEASE NOTE: All consultations are now held virtually and by appointment only during the hours listed.

WORCESTER — Edward Nelson: first Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Central Office, 12 East Worcester St., second floor, Worcester; 508.791.2121, or at home, 774.239.7823.

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.

CAPE COD — Lawrence Abbruzzi: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Barnstable Teachers Association (BTA), 100 West Main St., Suite #7, Hyannis; 508.775.8625, or at home, 508.824.9194.

FITCHBURG — Karen Melanson: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Fitchburg Teachers Association office, 245 River St., Fitchburg. Call 978.660.4359.

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

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

LYNNFIELD — Peter Mili: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Northeast Office, 50 Salem St., Building B, Lynnfield; call 617.460.6589. Barbara Callaghan: 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.

PITTSFIELD — Ward F. Johnson: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Berkshire Office, 188 East St., Pittsfield; 413.499.0257, or at home, 413.443.1722.

RAYNHAM — Raymond Thompson: third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 756 Orchard St., third floor, Raynham. Call Thompson at 617.347.4425.

HIGHER EDUCATION AT-LARGE — Edward McCourt, 781.325.2553.

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.

Study shows investment in public higher education will boost the economy

A recently completed study urges state leaders to increase spending on public higher education to address the immediate financial crisis accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic and to build a more just and equitable economy in the Commonwealth.

“It would be difficult to identify investment, public or private, that offers greater short-run and long-run benefits,” writes University of

Massachusetts Amherst professor Michael Ash in “An Economic Analysis of Investment in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts: Recovering from the COVID-19 Crisis and Laying Foundations for the Future.” Ash, a professor of economics and public policy, and Shouvik Chakraborty of

the Political Economy Research Institute at UMass Amherst, prepared the report with support from the Massachusetts Society of Professors and the MTA. The study’s key findings include:

- Increasing investment in public higher education will create more jobs in the short term

Please turn to **Study**/Page 21



Newly organized local fights to save programs



Photo by Scott McLennan

The Greater New Bedford Educators Union, organized over the past year and granted state recognition in May, is bargaining its first contract with Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School. The new MTA local — which represents teachers, guidance counselors, adjustment counselors, nurses, school psychologists and librarians — recently elected Serge Moniz and Heather Pimental as co-presidents. The GNBEU hit the ground running, organizing a campaign to save three popular shops that the high school administration wants to eliminate. In the photo above, GNBEU members and supporters set up one of their frequent standouts in New Bedford.

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Winners of Human and Civil Rights Awards announced

By Jean Conley

A longtime activist and two student-led groups are recipients of the 2020 MTA Human and Civil Rights Awards.

The awards will be presented at the next MTA Human and Civil Rights Awards celebration, which is scheduled for June 18, 2021.

Because the 2020 award presentations had to be postponed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the MTA Human Relations Committee



Candace Shivers

decided to combine the 2020 and 2021 ceremonies into one. It will be the 38th such event.

The recipient of the 2020 Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award is Candace Shivers, an associate professor of sociology and human services at Mount Wachusett

Community College. Shivers currently serves as president of the Mount Wachusett chapter of the Massachusetts Community College Council and as a Massachusetts director on the National Education Association Board of Directors.

Recipients of the 2020 Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Awards are the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School Black Student Union and the Sutton High School Connections Program.

Denise LaPolla, chair of the HRC, said members of the committee “felt terrible that we were not able to honor the 2020 winners in person.” Committee members are looking forward to honoring them along with the 2021 award winners next June, she said. “This year’s awardees include someone who has served her students, her fellow educators and the cause of public higher education for years as well as two groups of idealistic students who are already making the world a better place,” LaPolla said. “We are thrilled to add them to the MTA’s long list of Human and Civil Rights Award recipients.”



The Connections Program in Sutton is active in promoting social justice.

Shivers was nominated by the MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee and the MTA Task Force on Race.

Sharmese Gunn, chair of EMAC and a member of the Race Task Force, wrote in support of the nomination that Shivers has “instilled unionship” in many budding MTA leaders.

Gunn said that Shivers “is a staunch advocate for social justice, labor laws, and fair practice. In simpler terms, she believes in doing what’s right for the world and all its people.” She continually encourages fellow professionals and students of color, women and people who are LGBTQ to get involved in the decision-making process, Gunn added.

Yan Yii, an incoming Massachusetts director on the NEA Board and former EMAC chair, said that “there is no other person I see as more fitting for the 2020 Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award” than Shivers.



“Her tireless commitment to unionism and civil rights is unparalleled,” Yii said, adding that Shivers “consistently advocates for racial and social justice. She is a role model to so many unionists.”

Please turn to **Honorees**/Page 19

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MTAB announces partnership with Liberty Mutual

MTA Benefits is excited to announce a new partnership with Boston-based Liberty Mutual to offer MTA members significant savings on their personal insurance needs. The Liberty Mutual program will include automobile, motorcycle, homeowners, renters, condominium, boat, trailer, liability and pet insurance for members. The Liberty Mutual Educator's Endorsement will be included on all applicable automobile policies under the program. In addition to offering personal insurance for members, Liberty Mutual will work with local associations in need of workers' compensation coverage for their officers and employees.

"We are honored to have been selected as a carrier to work with the members of the MTA for



their personal insurance needs," said Paul Hackley, senior sales specialist.

"It's MTAB's mission to help members achieve greater personal financial security and economic savings through member benefits programs," said MTA Benefits President Maryann Robinson. "Securing Liberty Mutual as a partner is a great step toward advancing that mission. Members now have a choice for their auto and home insurance coverage, with the Liberty program being offered alongside

that of longtime MTAB partner Hanover Insurance." Visit mtabenefits.com for program details.

About Liberty Mutual Insurance

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Liberty Mutual also ranked 75th on the Fortune 100 list of largest corporations in the U.S. based on 2018 revenue.

Benefit partners are here for you during the pandemic

As COVID-19 continues to affect our lives, MTA Benefits has the programs that members need to help navigate the pandemic, as well as resources to provide assistance when it's needed.

- **Access Nationwide Discounts** can help you save on thousands of useful products and services including Shipt, Adobe, Cost Plus World Market and Kohl's.

- The new **financial planning program** couldn't have come at a better time. You'll be able to evaluate your financial well-being and receive guidance on everything from creating a budget to planning your estate.

- **Mortgage and real estate services** are available — whether you're refinancing due to low rates or realizing that your home no longer meets your needs. Save up to \$3,000 with Mid-Island Mortgage and get a cash-back rebate with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices/Commonwealth Real Estate.

- **Office Depot/OfficeMax** has everything you need, from pens and highlighters to printers and ergonomic chairs. Members save on thousands of products and get free next-day delivery on orders of more than \$50.

- **Student loan debt** has been a topic of concern since well before the pandemic began. If you're in need of guidance, Cambridge Credit Counseling's advisers can help you understand everything from repayment plans to forgiveness options.

- Don't forget that your **family members** are eligible for many of these programs when they sign up for an MTA family membership, available at no cost. Visit www.mtabenefits.com for the membership application.

Programs providing assistance

Several of MTAB's benefit programs have offered financial assistance to members during the pandemic. This is a testament to the quality, compassion and loyalty shown by MTA Benefits' partners. Hanover Insurance provided its customers with auto insurance coverage a 15 percent premium return in April and May due to the fact that fewer cars were on the road. MetLife Dental's fully insured PPO customers received a 25 percent premium credit because non-emergency services were not available during the shutdown.

NEA Member Benefits' credit card, personal loan and online banking programs all encouraged members who needed financial assistance to contact



them directly. The NEA AD&D/Life Insurance program allowed for premium extensions if members had difficulty paying during the pandemic. In addition, the NEA Complimentary Life Insurance program modified its coverage so that any member who died or dies between March 1, 2020, and Dec. 31, 2020, receives the full \$1,000 benefit.

For updated information on all programs, discounts and assistance available as a result of the pandemic, visit www.mtabenefits.com/COVID-19-member-assistance.

Benefits & Discount Directory is delayed

MTA Benefits typically announces the release of the new *Benefits & Discount Directory* in the summer issue of *MTA Today*. Of course, these are not typical times.

Eighty percent of MTA Benefits' discount vendors are small Massachusetts-based businesses that have been shuttered during the coronavirus pandemic. With a phased-in

approach to the reopening of retail stores, gyms, museums and attractions, the updating of the 2020-2021 directory had to be put on hold.

MTAB's thoughts and concerns continue to be with participating vendors as they struggle to survive. While MTAB awaits the appropriate time to reach out to these vendors, it asks that all members keep them in mind as the reopening

process continues. Vendors have supported MTA members over the years, some for decades, and MTAB believes that members should be there to support them — regardless of whether they're currently able to offer an MTA discount.

Please visit mtabenefits.com for updates on the status of the 2020-2021 *Benefits & Discount Directory*.

Delegates re-elect MTA president and vice president

By Jean Conley

President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page were re-elected as leaders of the association at the 2020 MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates on May 2.

The meeting, held amid the coronavirus crisis, marked the MTA's 175th anniversary — and it was the first such event to be held virtually. The delegates, participating remotely via video, voted to fill seats for MTA offices, passed a budget for fiscal 2020-2021, and honored award winners. More than 1,200 members took part.

Najimy, who ran unopposed for a second two-year term, was re-elected with 1,121 votes. She is a longtime Concord elementary school teacher and a past president of the Concord Teachers Association.

Page, a professor of architecture at UMass Amherst and former president of the Massachusetts Society of Professors chapter there, also ran unopposed for a second term. He received 1,128 votes.

The delegates represented about 117,000 MTA preK-12, higher education and Retired members from across Massachusetts.

Najimy and Page — who initially won office in 2018 — began their new terms on July 15.

Najimy said she was honored to have been re-elected, describing the meeting as “an affirmation

that our members believe in the agenda of the MTA.”

“In this time of profound distress,” she continued, “we are trying to cope in the moment. We are all experiencing personal loss. Our retirees are feeling more vulnerable than ever. We are also trying to understand how the pandemic will change our future.” The challenges ahead will bring additional needs, she noted.

“Now more than ever, we need full funding for our schools and colleges,” Najimy said. “Now more than ever, the MTA must lead the fight to reimagine and rebuild public education — and for racial and economic justice for our schools, colleges and society.”

“The task ahead is enormous,” she added. “But I have great confidence that we will overcome. When we fight, we win!”

Page expressed similar sentiments.

“Even as we all are deeply worried about the health of our friends, families and students, and worry about the future of the economy, I know that the MTA will emerge stronger and be an even more powerful advocate for just public schools and colleges and a just Commonwealth,” he said. “I have never felt so proud and impressed with the strength of this union.”

The delegates elected new members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. Those who are part of the Statewide Retired District



Merrie Najimy



Max Page

filled four seats on the MTA Retired Members Committee.

An operating budget of \$48,486,926 was adopted, and the delegates passed a general dues assessment of \$20 to fund the association's Public Relations/Organizing Campaign.

The MTA Board had voted earlier this spring to scale back the 2020 session from two days to one and to reduce the agenda, so consideration of proposed changes to the association's Bylaws, Standing Rules and Resolutions was deferred to the 2021 Annual Meeting. At an Issues Forum during the meeting, Najimy led a discussion of the association's All In Blueprint Project, a major MTA initiative aimed at building the union's power in the post-Janus era.

For information about the award winners, please go to massteacher.org/2020AMawards.

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Higher ed members fight devastating cuts

Continued from Page 7

billionaires who reside in the state. The MTA is part of the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition, which is fighting for state investment in communities rather than deep budget cuts.

The MTA once again ran a Summer Member Organizing Program, in which members engaged their union colleagues and potential union members on joining and being active in the MTA and local associations. Twenty summer member organizers worked with higher education locals.

Within the first three weeks of the organizing effort, the organizers held more than 150 one-to-one conversations, made more than 800 phone calls and sent 1,200 personalized messages to members and potential members.

The strength of public higher education in Massachusetts will largely align with the strength of the unions on public college and university campuses.

“The response by public higher education administrators and leaders to both the health and financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis has been terrible,” Najimy said. “People have been put in unsafe situations, potentially thousands of dedicated public employees will lose jobs, campuses are letting hundreds of positions go unfilled, and vital programs that support students and provide opportunities are being scrapped.



Photo by Bob Duffy

In June, MTA public higher education members, along with students and members of the community, demonstrated against program cuts at Springfield Technical Community College.

“The impact will be devastating and put the Commonwealth at risk of losing higher education as a public good,” Najimy continued. “Now more than ever, we need our public higher education system to live up to its mission to serve working and middle-class people and people of color, as well as to be

ready to meet the demands of an evolving economy — and to do it safely. Public higher education is as much a right as preK-12 education is.”

For updates, visit massteacher.org/highered and massachusettsagrees.org.

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This organization receives financial support for offering this auto and home benefits program.

Then as now, the MTA was willing to take on monied interests

Continued from Page 5

from state sources or from a combination of state and local sources so devised that the burden of the minimum program shall fall upon the people in all localities according to their taxpaying ability. In this principle will be noted both the promise of adequate educational opportunities for boys and girls and the trend toward equity in taxation.”

■ ■ ■

Women continued to be second-class citizens in education, as in society as a whole. They were routinely paid less than men. For example, in 1918 — two years before women won the right to vote — the maximum annual salary for a female high school teacher in Saugus was \$750, while for a man it was \$900. Top salaries for elementary school teachers, disproportionately female, were even lower: \$650. In addition, the state Supreme Judicial Court codified discrimination against married female teachers.

An MTA survey of 1926 found that almost 30 percent of cities and towns did not permit married women to teach. In Chicopee, the School Committee summarily fired all married women teachers, except those protected by tenure. And when the Hopedale School Committee’s dismissal of a married female teacher was challenged, the Massachusetts Supreme



The influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919 — known as the Spanish flu — hit Massachusetts hard. Boston Red Cross volunteers assembled gauze masks for use at Fort Devens, which was a major source of the outbreak. Most urban schools across the country closed after the second wave hit in 1919.

Photo courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Judicial Court came down against the teacher. Its ruling stated:

“The School Committee acted in good faith, without animosity, and for what it considered to be in the best interests of the schools.”

■ ■ ■

Financial concerns were paramount after the stock market crashed on Oct. 29, 1929. In the ensuing years, teacher pay was reduced by anywhere from 5 percent to 20 percent, and many educators lost their jobs.

Despite the hardships that teachers were facing, the association supported the greater good during the Great Depression. Hugh Nixon, the MTA’s first full-time executive secretary, wrote:

“We must not allow the present economic depression to lead to an educational depression. Let

us help mitigate the sufferings of those less fortunate than ourselves, especially the children for whom we are responsible because we are teachers.”

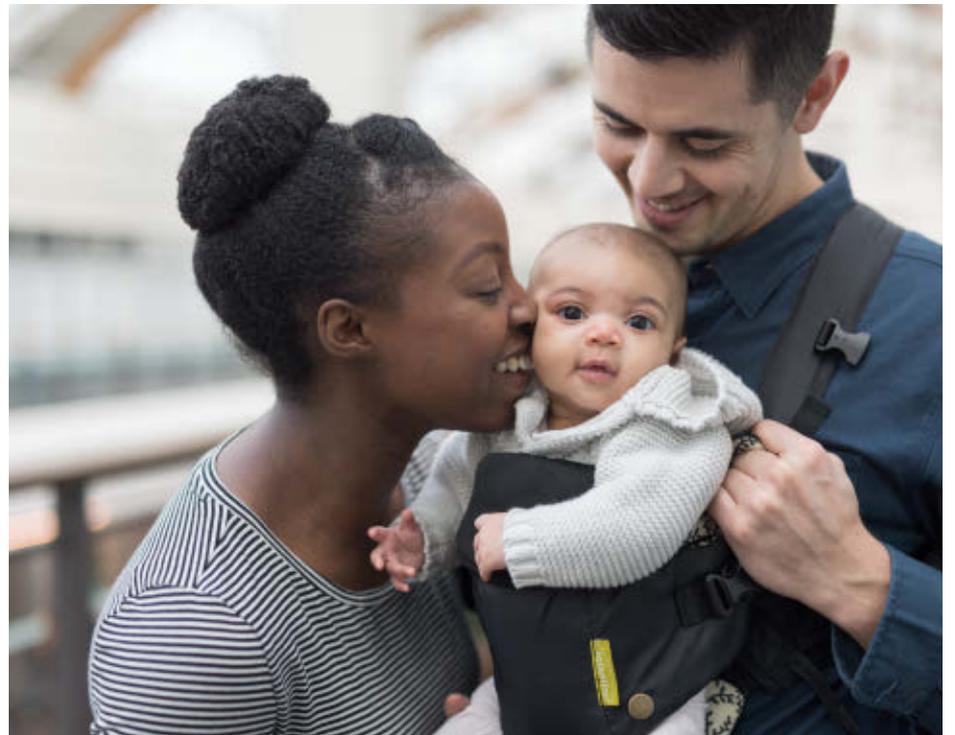
Then as now, the MTA was willing to take on monied interests to make sure public schools were properly funded. When critics complained that the MTA was applying too much pressure in support of members’ interests, the association responded: “We should not be frightened off by the tactics of vested interests who fulminate about the ‘selfish lobbies’ of teachers. When tax-dodgers begin to call us names, it is a sign that our programs are getting results.”

In future issues of MTA Today, we will write about highlights from the periods following the one covered here and leading up to the present day.



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Standing together: 'That's how we show our power'

Continued from Page 6

and July 27, when more than 80 percent supported either full-time remote learning or starting remotely. After the second survey, WEA members flooded the School Committee with emails and phone calls. On Aug. 6, the committee voted to start the school year remotely. WEA President Deb King said, "Without the collective action of our members, we would be starting school in a hybrid model rather than a remote model."

■ Several locals have joined together in regional Massachusetts Educator Action Networks to issue statements and support one another. These included WeMEAN in Western Massachusetts, NoBEAN near and north of Boston, and one comprising 13 locals on the Cape and islands. The latter group released a statement in July that called for adequate funding. "Returning to learning requires more money and more staff: smaller classes, more bus capacity to enable physical distancing, more nurses and counselors and Education Support Professionals to address student needs, and an unwavering commitment to using the appropriate PPE and following health and safety protocols," it said.

■ Thousands of members took part in professional development, including Miriam Kranz, a Southbridge theater teacher. Kranz said her activities in the spring and summer included building an interactive website, "upping my tech game" and



Photo by Chris Christo

MTA Summer Member Organizers talked to parents about reopening concerns outside a supermarket in Southbridge. From left to right are SEA President Jocelyn Tallis, Wendy Thompson and Elizabeth McNeil, all ESPs.

participating in a lot of self-funded professional development. Understanding that struggling districts such as Southbridge need more than the three R's to keep students engaged in remote learning, she has been exploring creative alternatives to live theater, such as filmmaking and podcast production. Many other MTA members spent time this summer learning new skills for educating during a pandemic.

The MTA's positions have been informed by numerous meetings with local presidents and other members, including a Zoom teleconference on July

29 that drew 7,500 members — the largest meeting in the MTA's 175-year history.

During these meetings, participants responded to instant polls, asked questions and shared ideas. Answers are being provided through guidance and legal advice, including a memo on rights afforded to members who are at high risk from the virus.

The MTA has been amplifying the voices of members extensively through the media and social media. Najimy has been interviewed by nearly every major newspaper, television station and news radio program in the state, many of them several times. She also has been featured in national media such as *Matter of Fact* with Soledad O'Brien.

The message has been consistent. Schools must be safe. High-need students should be prioritized. Adequate funding is necessary. Educators must play the central role in making and implementing policies, including curriculum that intentionally fights structural racism. Now more than ever, educators' unions are needed to make all of this happen.

Graciela Mohamedi, a Brookline Educators Union member and the ethnic minority representative on the MTA Executive Committee, said on one of the caucus calls, "What's going on right now around reopening is frightening, but this is why we have a union. There are more of us than there are of them. They can't drown us all out. We need to stand together. That's how we show our power."

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Honorees are active in the fight for social and racial justice

Continued from Page 11

In a letter supporting the nomination, EMAC member Rosa Lopez-Whitehill said that Shivers “embodies the spirit of the MTA.”

“Candace has touched many union members by inspiring them to get involved” and she patiently helps anyone who comes to her for advice, Lopez-Whitehill noted.

Julie Capozzi, a fellow professor at Mount Wachusett, said that Shivers is beloved by her students and “has many students taking her for as many courses as she teaches.”

The groups receiving the 2020 Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Awards also have a record of fighting for public education — and for equity.

The Black students who brought back the dormant Black Student Union at Cambridge Rindge and Latin in 2017 faced significant obstacles as they sought to revive an extracurricular student club in a city still struggling with racism, wrote Kevin Dua, a history teacher at the school and adviser to the group, in his letter of nomination.

Dua, a past recipient of the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award himself and the 2017 Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, wrote that the group epitomizes “the cores of volunteerism and leadership that characterized Roberts’ selfless contributions via political action, community organizing and mentoring.”

“These Black student leaders have made an overwhelmingly positive impact and legacy on the lives of others,” teacher Kevin Dua wrote.

While past and current members of the BSU have faced “ongoing discrimination, harassment, prejudice, ageism and racism” within their own community, he wrote, the students have persisted in the belief that creating a “safe, brave space for Black youth, in and out of their school building,” was worth it. In social justice and antiracism work, he added, “These Black student leaders have made an overwhelmingly positive impact and legacy on the lives of others.”

Juliette Low Fleury, a co-founder of the group and a graduate of Cambridge Rindge and Latin, wrote in support of the nomination, “What this group has evolved into has become an empowering, direct source for Black students, and, indirectly, for white students and students of color to recognize their privilege and support to ensure an equitable environment for their classmates.”

The Sutton High School Connections Program is a student, staff and community initiative that addresses social justice issues.

Forty students and seven educators make up the program, which works with others in the community

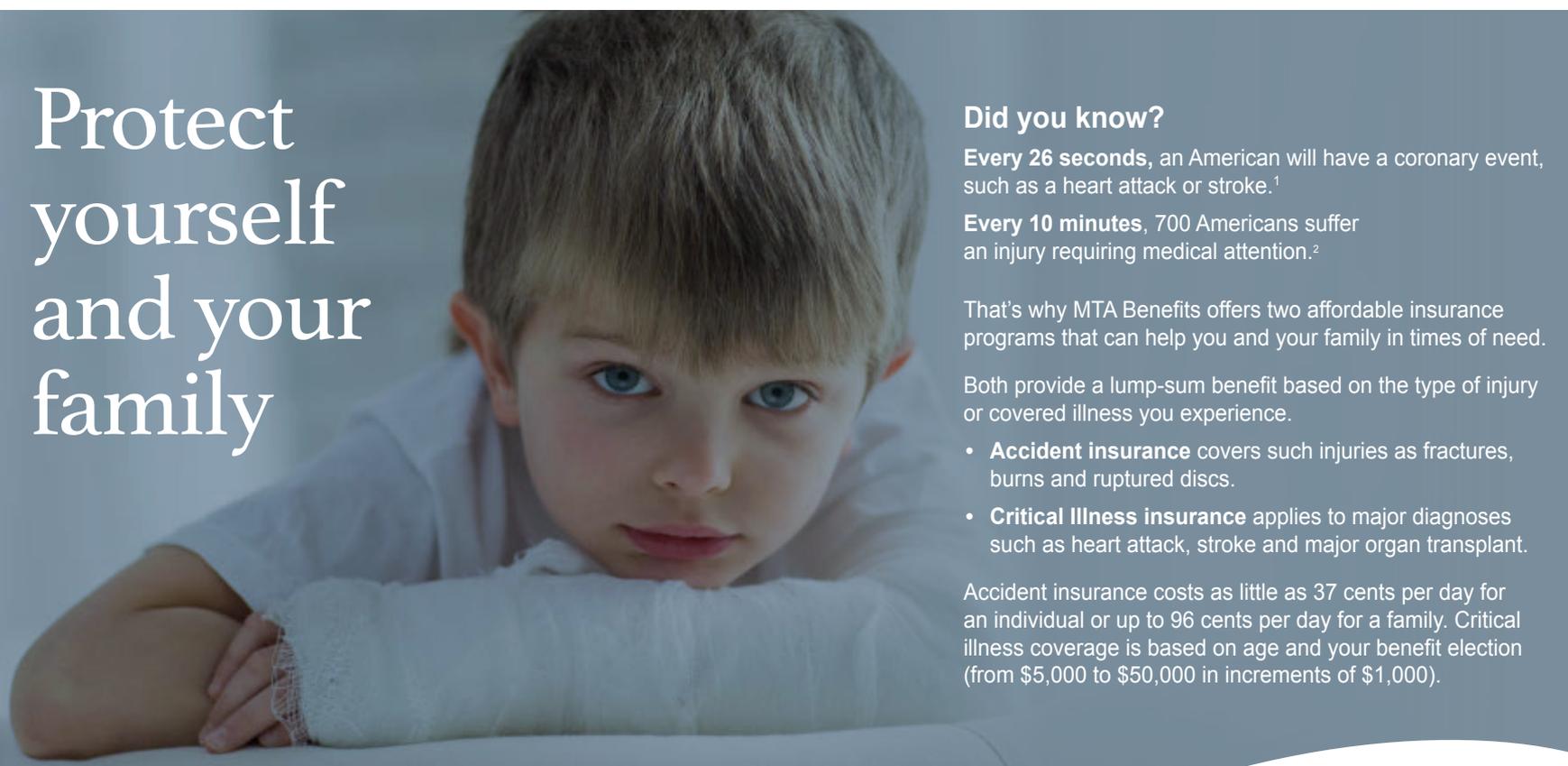
to learn, confront issues of social injustice and teach about acceptance, tolerance, diversity, and privilege.

Michael Whittier, co-president of the Sutton Teachers Association, nominated the group. He wrote as an educator at the high school, but also as a member of the community and the father of a student whose world view has been shaped by the program.

“Ours is a community of privilege,” Whittier wrote, and “a very conservative community by Massachusetts standards.” Sutton is “the last place that such a program might exist,” he wrote, “but most certainly a place that it is needed.” He added that the program fostered his daughter’s engagement in social justice efforts and developed her leadership skills while she was a student.

Over the last couple of years, the group has expanded its powerful social justice mission, initiating the Connections Conference, known as the “ConCon.” In 2019 the ConCon brought in more than 500 students and educators from 37 schools around New England. The 2020 ConCon, scheduled for March, had grown to include more than 800 participants from 50 schools.

The students were devastated when the event had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But Connections participants continued meeting remotely after in-person instruction ended — and the group is planning for either an in-person or virtual ConCon this year.



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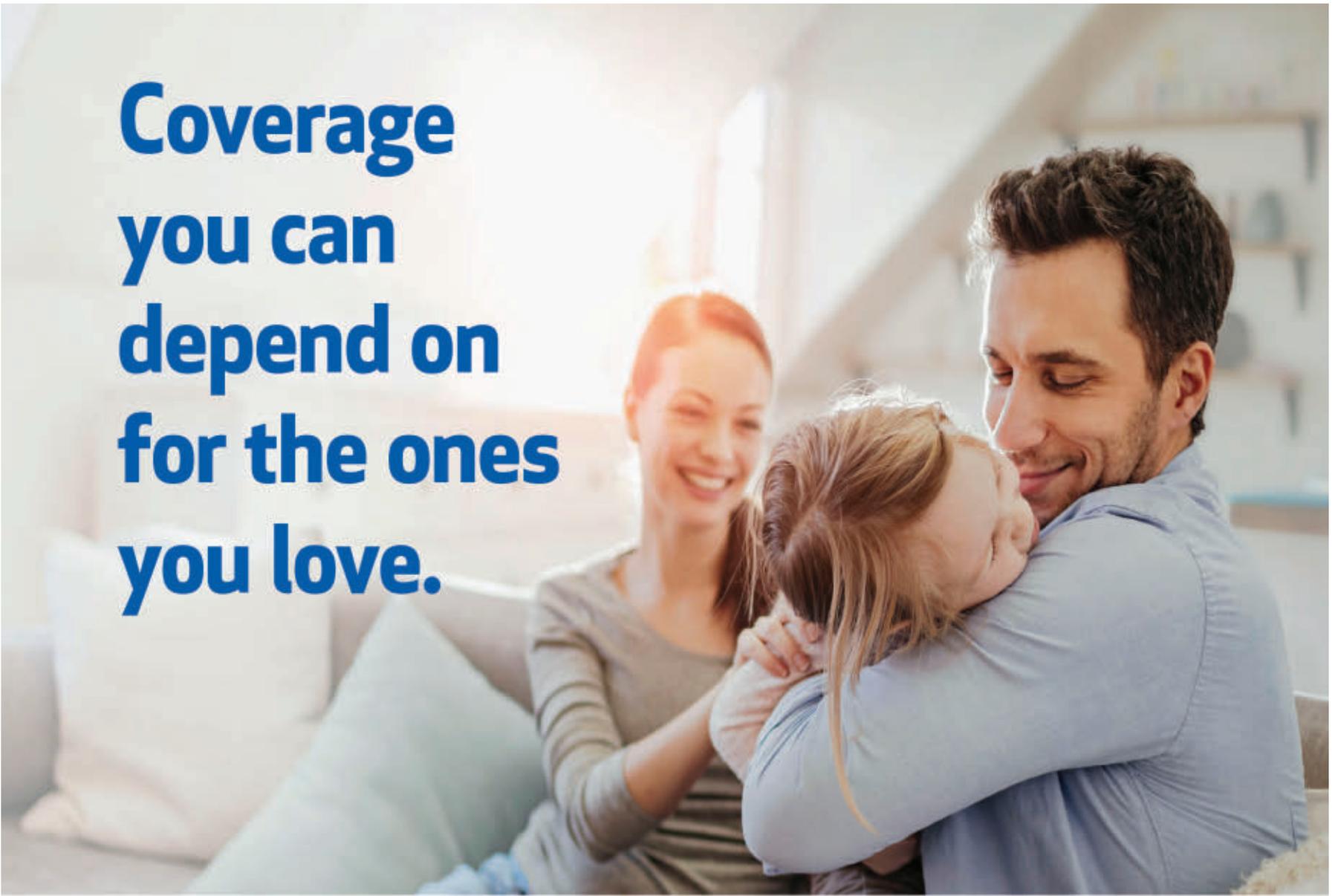
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¹ The American Heart Association, “Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2008 Update,” January 29, 2008.

² National Safety Council, “Injury Facts” (2015).



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Study shows investment in public higher ed will boost economy

Continued from Page 10

compared to other sectors with comparable levels of spending such as casino construction and public road construction.

■ In the absence of significant federal stimulus, a progressive tax plan in Massachusetts will equitably fund the greater investment in public higher education, and that investment will yield better returns than other types of spending.

■ By making public education more accessible and increasing enrollment, the state will have a

larger tax base of people with better-paying jobs.

■ When wealth is more equitably spread across the Commonwealth, there will be a reduction in the need for spending on public welfare, Medicaid and other social safety net programs.

“As we face down the effects of a global pandemic and the convulsions of systemic racism, it is time to recognize the vital role that public education plays in creating a more just society,” said MTA President Merrie Najimy. “Any state leader who suggests that now is the time to cut spending

on public education is acting irresponsibly.”

“This study should convince policymakers and the public that investment in public higher education is precisely the medicine we need to help cure the economic crisis that has followed the COVID-19 health crisis,” said MTA Vice President Max Page. “Support for public higher education is the ladder out of this terrible economic collapse.”

To read the full report on the impact of higher ed spending, please visit massteacher.org/HEstudy.

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Obituaries

Harry Blaisdell Jr., 78, of East Brookfield. Taught in the Leicester Public Schools for 39 years. April 9.

Joan F. Bowler, 83, of Northampton. Was an elementary school educator in Northampton for many years, retiring in 2002. May 10.

Judith A. Brock, 78, of Hanson. Was a social studies teacher at the Williams Intermediate School in Bridgewater for 30 years. May 9.

Dr. Daniel A. Cabral, 77, of North Dartmouth, formerly of Somerset. Taught for many years before serving as superintendent of the North Middlesex Regional School District and then superintendent of the Somerset Public Schools. May 6.

Joseph A. Camara, 92, of Lowell. Was a music teacher at the Daley School in Lowell for more than 40 years, retiring in 1995. July 17.

Louise A. Carberry, 71, of Middleborough. Was a special educator for 38 years in the Middleborough Public Schools, retiring in 2011. April 16.

William Dooling, 77, of Holliston. Was a teacher at Millis High School for 30 years. July 23.

Jean Ferrier, 83, of Ludlow. Served as an educator for 40 years in the Ludlow Public Schools. April 7.

Marjorie L. Goolsby, 89, of Marblehead. Worked for 43 years at the Glover School in Marblehead, first as a teacher and then for several years as principal. May 1.

Jean M. Groves, 91, of Lowell. Taught music in the Holyoke Public Schools for two years before moving to the Cambridge Public Schools, where she taught for 40 years. April 3.

Thomas H. Hottleman Jr., 79, of Mansfield. Taught science in the Mansfield school system and for 20 years in the Norwood Public Schools. March 13.

Thomas E. Joyce Jr., 91, of Yarmouth Port. Taught in Boston and Holliston before moving to the Sudbury Public Schools, where he was a math teacher for many years. May 6.

Ann S. Levin, 68, of Scituate. Taught for more than 30 years at Hingham Middle School. April 5.

Dorothy A. McGauley, 89, of Worcester. Served as head of the Worcester Public Schools' Speech and Hearing Department. April 11.

Laurie Melchionda, 59, of Braintree. Was a school nurse in the Braintree school system for 25 years before serving as the director of nursing for the Weston Public Schools for two years. June 21.

Albert J. Nuttall Jr., 84, of Norton. Was a teacher and coach in the Norton Public Schools for 37 years. April 11.

Harry Rogan, 93, of Auburn. Taught physical education at Forest Grove Junior High School in Worcester for over 40 years, retiring in 1989. April 5.

Robert Trott, 87, of Weymouth. Taught welding for more than 30 years at Quincy Vocational Technical High School. April 25.

Felix Zollo, 88, of Watertown. Was employed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association as director of research, retiring in 1992. June 19.



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MTA retirees offer a soundtrack full of wisdom

By Scott McLennan

The Wisdom Warriors stand ready to fight, whether the opposition is a bullying principal, a chauvinistic superintendent or a whole building of legislators waffling on public education funding.

These MTA retirees bring not only spirit and experience to the challenges that educators face — they also bring song.

The Wisdom Warriors have become a familiar presence at MTA member actions since forming a little more than three years ago. The activist group came together after retiree Elaine Koury heard a member from Everett speak out at the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates, describing how women educators had been told to wear dresses, nylons and heels to work.

“I said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding me,’” Koury recalled. “I went back to my seat and started doodling. The words Wisdom Warriors came out. And I started thinking that MTA Retired members can say anything, whereas active members can’t always say what they want to because they may get into trouble.”

The Wisdom Warriors put a twist on their activism, performing songs and leading singalongs wherever they showed up. Rather than stick to the classic protest song canon, they wrote humorous parodies to fit the situation at hand.

“The issues we address are serious, but there is always a side of ridiculousness to it,” Koury said. “Our job is to find the ridiculousness and to sing about it.”

So administrators in Andover heard the Wisdom Warriors sing about “silenced staff,” set to the tune of “Silent Night,” when the retirees joined protest actions in the district last December.

One of the group’s first “hits” was a recasting of Queen’s “We Will Rock You” — with the lyrics changed to “Fund Our Future.”

“We try to choose songs everyone knows the tune to, and then we pass out lyrics we’ve written,” explained Koury, who taught theater and English in Cambridge.



Photo by Scott McLennan

The Wisdom Warriors attended a caravan protesting layoffs at UMass Lowell in May. From left to right are Rafael Moure-Eraso, retired nurse Maria Wilkens and her partner, Patrick Patterson, and Elaine Koury. “Our job is to find the ridiculousness and to sing about it,” Koury said.

The Wisdom Warriors have participated in actions at the State House and in several districts aside from Andover, including Dedham, where educators went on strike last fall, and Somerville, where Education Support Professionals engaged in a successful — though at times contentious — fight for better pay.

“It was so combative there, we hoped we could get people to listen. The School Committee let us into a meeting, and we started singing, and they looked like deer in the headlights. I think the singing led people to listen more,” Koury said.

Patrick Patterson, the newly appointed chair of the MTA Retired Members Committee, is a Wisdom Warrior.

“I’m a musical kind of guy,” Patterson said. “I like the way we can relate to the political issues with a sense of humor.”

It was particularly rewarding for him to return to Andover, where he taught high school social studies, to support elementary school educators protesting unfair treatment.

These days, Patterson is faced with the challenge of encouraging retirees’ activism and engagement while keeping members of the group safe during the pandemic.

“We’re strategizing now how to work through the COVID-19 crisis,” he said, mentioning webinars and online book club discussions that will temporarily take the place of most in-person events.

More than 50 MTA Retired members are signed up to be Wisdom Warriors, but Koury noted that most are located in Eastern Massachusetts. The hope is to have robust branches in Central Massachusetts and Western Massachusetts as well.

“Our purpose is first to support the actions of members in need, second to support the MTA’s legislative agenda, and third to have fun with our friends,” Koury said.

To alert the Wisdom Warriors about actions or to volunteer to join the group, send messages to wisdomwarriors@massteacher.org.

2020 Primary Election Guide



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— MTA President Merrie Najimy



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U.S. HOUSE – 4TH DISTRICT



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MASSACHUSETTS SENATE



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Jim Welch
(D-West Springfield)
Hampden

HOW THE MTA RECOMMENDS CANDIDATES

MTA's member-elected Candidate Recommendation Committee establishes policies and procedures for recommendations in elections, which are reviewed by MTA's Board of Directors for final approval.

Evaluations of incumbent legislators in contested races are based on support for MTA's legislative agenda, voting records and access to MTA lobbyists and activists. Candidates running for open seats, and in some legislative races with contested incumbents, fill out questionnaires developed by the CRC and are interviewed by CRC members, MTA local presidents and their appointees, members of the MTA Board and Executive Committee, and Senate district coordinators.

The recommendations in this Primary Election Guide are the result of that process. We hope you will take the guide with you to the polls on Sept. 1 and help elect MTA-recommended candidates. These candidates will listen to educators and act in the best interests of students and public education.

The MTA also urges you to join our Legislative and Political Action Teams and participate in campaigns.

An Election Guide in the Fall edition of *MTA Today* will make recommendations for the General Election on Nov. 3.



MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Christine Barber
(D-Somerville)
34th Middlesex



Michelle DuBois
(D-Brockton)
10th Plymouth



Pat Duffy
(D-Holyoke)
5th Hampden



Brandy Fluker Oakley
(D-Boston)
12th Suffolk



Joe Gravellese
(D-Revere)
16th Suffolk



Vanna Howard
(D-Lowell)
17th Middlesex



James Murphy
(D-Weymouth)
4th Norfolk



Jerry Parisella
(D-Beverly)
6th Essex



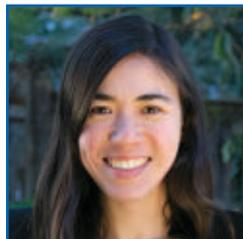
Ted Philips
(D-Sharon)
8th Norfolk



Marianela Rivera
(D-Lawrence)
17th Essex



Dave Rogers
(D-Cambridge)
24th Middlesex



Erika Uyterhoeven
(D-Somerville)
27th Middlesex



DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

The Massachusetts Primary Election will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 1. The MTA recommends candidates who appear in this Primary Election Guide.

If you haven't already voted by mail and if you cannot or do not want to vote in person on Sept. 1, please consider early voting, which runs from Aug. 22 to 28. You may vote at any early voting location in the city or town where you are registered to vote. See all early voting options at www.MassEarlyVote.com.