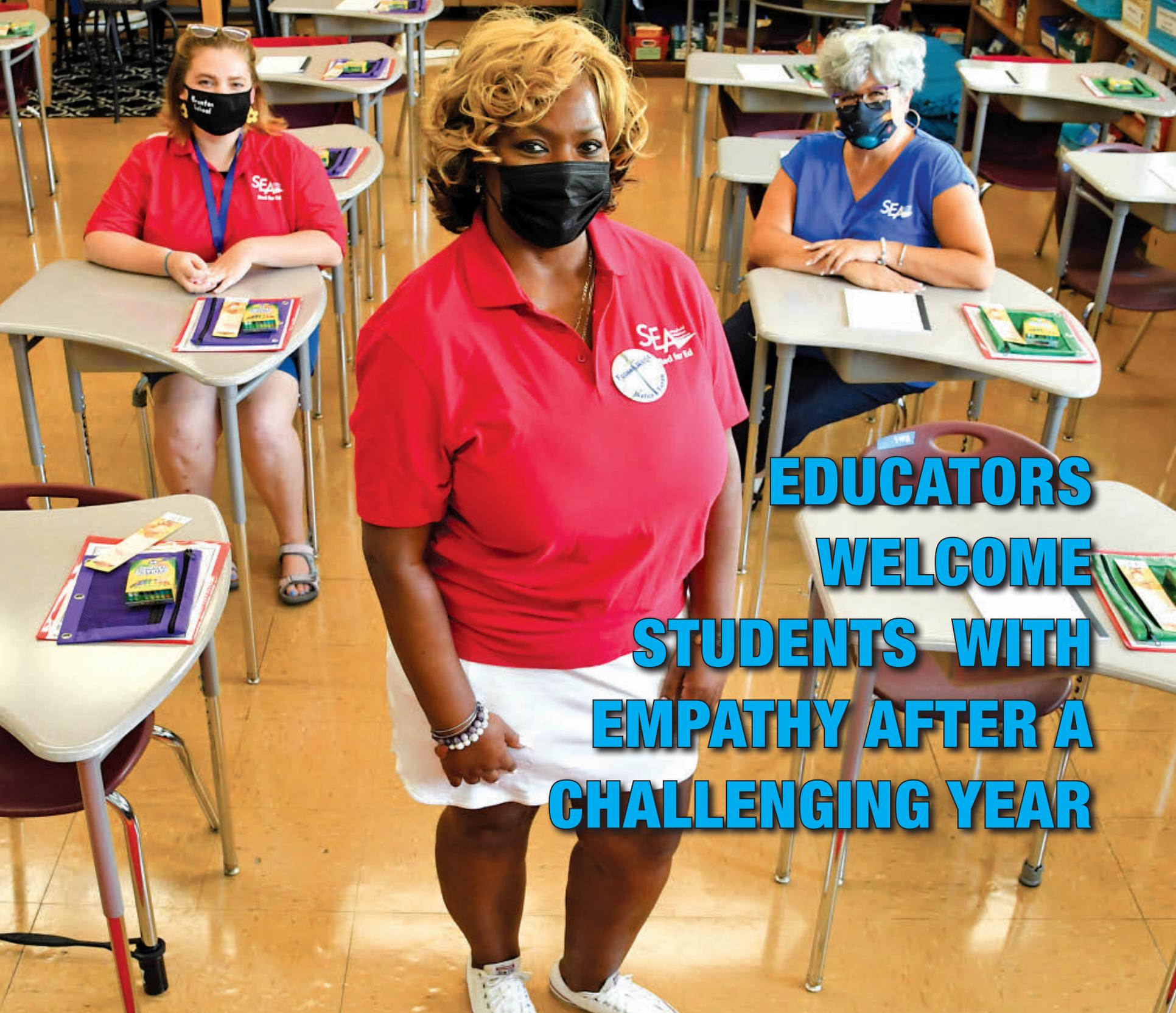


UNIONS TAKE THE LEAD ON CAMPUS SAFETY

# MTA Today

A publication of the Massachusetts Teachers Association  
Volume 52, No. 1/Summer 2021



**EDUCATORS  
WELCOME  
STUDENTS WITH  
EMPATHY AFTER A  
CHALLENGING YEAR**



# Honoring Education Support Professionals

Do you know an Education Support Professional who is creative and innovative, a tireless worker who stands up for union rights? If so, nominate a deserving individual for the 2022 MTA ESP Award. The award will be presented at the MTA ESP Conference, which will be held April 1-2, 2022. If you have questions, please email [mtaesp@massteacher.org](mailto:mtaesp@massteacher.org).



**NOMINATIONS ARE DUE DECEMBER 10**

The nomination form can be found at:

[www.massteacher.org/espnominees](http://www.massteacher.org/espnominees)

## MTA Today

### IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Nominations for 2022 ESP Award are due on December 10</i>	2
<i>Human and Civil Rights honorees offer inspiration for the future</i>	3
<i>Editorial: Winning the big fights for public education</i>	4
<i>Push for MTA PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights gains momentum</i>	5
<i>Unions take the lead on safety for public higher education workers</i>	6
<i>Educators greet students with empathy as new school year begins</i>	7
<i>MTA Summer Conference gives members a chance to recharge</i>	8
<i>Early career educators to network and learn on November 6</i>	8
<i>Commentary: New resources can help achieve MTA's vision</i>	9
<i>Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference is set for December</i>	10
<i>Two MTA Retired members to be honored for their activism</i>	11
<i>Full speed ahead for the Fair Share Amendment campaign</i>	12
<i>MTA Benefits: Now is the time to prepare for heating season</i>	13
<i>Mark your calendar for MTAB gift card giveaways</i>	13
<i>Webinars offer info on student loan forgiveness and refinancing</i>	13
<i>Members and leaders call for passage of early retirement bill</i>	15
<i>Regional retirement consultations available</i>	19
<i>Obituaries</i>	21
<i>Classifieds</i>	22
<i>Solidarity brings positive results in Falmouth</i>	24

### 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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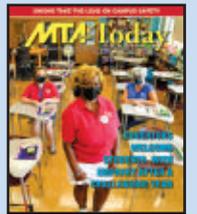
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### ON THE COVER

The new school year has given educators a chance to reunite with their students and colleagues. This issue is filled with information about MTA members fighting to ensure that learning would resume in schools and on campuses as safely as possible and continue amid the ongoing presence of the COVID-19 virus. Pictured on the cover are Tracy Little-Sasanecki, center, the recently elected president of the Springfield Education Association; special education teacher Olivia Baker, left; and SEA Vice President Brenda Dunn. A story about the resumption of preK-12 classes begins on Page 7, while the efforts of higher ed unions to keep campuses safe starts on Page 6. A commentary on what federal funding could mean for schools and colleges appears on Page 9. For coverage of the MTA Human and Civil Rights honorees, see Page 3. And on Page 11, read about MTA Retired members Craig Slatin and Richard Liston, each of whom will soon receive the "Honor Our Own" Award.



Cover photo by Chris Christo



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## Quote-Unquote

**"It's so easy to get vaccinated. Viruses don't mutate if they can't replicate, and you can prevent them from replicating by vaccinating enough people so that the virus has nowhere to go. If you give the virus free rein to circulate in the community, sooner or later it's going to mutate."**

**— Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, speaking to NPR on July 8**

# Carrying on the quest for social justice

*Winners of Human and Civil Rights Awards offer inspiration for the future*

By Scott McLennan

The 2021 Human and Civil Rights Awards ceremony, held on the eve of Juneteenth, was a celebration of how work that inspires people to advocate for fair treatment and justice is a continuum. One generation influences the next, and younger activists inspire pride among veterans of the fight for civil rights and social justice.

The event, held virtually, featured longtime activists such as Louise Gaskins, who recently turned 91 and who lends her name to one of the event's signature awards, as well as students committed to fighting racial, ethnic and gender prejudice in their schools.

Gaskins' influence as a teacher in encouraging a more just society illustrates how generations can inspire future activism. Consider this: When Gaskins was a classroom teacher in Ayer, one of her students was the future mother of Mareatha Wallace, a winner of this year's Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award.

"I thank all of my ancestors — parents and grandparents — who walked a road I did not have to, with people yelling at them just for who they were," Wallace said.

This year's HCR Awards ceremony had to be held remotely due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The event honored the 2020 recipients of the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award as well as the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award, along with this year's winners, because last year's ceremony was canceled.

The MTA's Human Relations Committee, which presents the HCR Awards, featured several student performances that highlighted diversity in our public schools, along with a reading by the poet Ashley Alafberg, who is a member of the Educational Association of Worcester and is active in the poetry slam community.

Wallace, a member of the Northampton Association of School Employees, and her 2020 Gaskins Award winner counterpart, Candace Shivers, president of the Mount Wachusett Community College Chapter of the Massachusetts Community College Council, participated in a panel discussion on the challenges they face in the fight for social and racial justice. The panel was moderated by HRC Chair Denise LaPolla.

Speaking truth to power is a necessity, Shivers said.

"My philosophy is that when there is something to say, silence becomes a lie," she said. "If I can add to a situation that needs to be addressed, it is important for me to say something."

Wallace concurred. "There is never a wrong time to do the right thing," she said.

"When there is an imbalance of power or someone is being picked on, you need to speak out. In Northampton, the students were sick of the



Clockwise from top left are the logos of the CRLS Black Student Union, the NBCSOS and the CEA's Educators of Color Coalition, then photos of Connections Program members, Candace Shivers, Mareatha Wallace, Alice Arena, and the AHS Asian American Coalition.

curriculum, so I decided to speak up," she continued. Her speaking up led to a more inclusive curriculum, which contributed to Wallace receiving her award.

In addition to Wallace, the leadership team of the Cambridge Education Association's Educators of Color Coalition won a 2021 Gaskins Award. The EOCC organized employee resource groups that created affinity spaces for people whose identities are often marginalized. The structure helped the union build solidarity and amplify the voices of ethnic, racial and gender groups within the union.

The 2021 Roberts Award winners are the Arlington High School Asian American Coalition, the New Bedford Coalition to Save Our Schools, and Alice Arena.

The Arlington coalition was recognized for its work to highlight the concerns of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, particularly in the aftermath of the March shootings in the Atlanta area that targeted women of Asian descent.

The NBCSOS has become a powerful force in the Southcoast, advocating for more culturally responsive public education and an end to high-stakes standardized testing. It is teaching students how to lead on social justice issues.

Arena is a longtime environmental activist and a leader in the fight against the Enbridge natural gas compressor station near Weymouth's Fore River Bridge.

The 2020 Gaskins Award went to Shivers for her

years of union activism and leadership centered on issues of equity and fairness for all educators.

The 2020 Roberts Award went to the Sutton High School Connections Program and the Black Student Union of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School.

The Connections program was recognized for bringing together hundreds of students — prior to the pandemic — from dozens of districts to attend annual conferences on social justice.

The Cambridge-based BSU revived a dormant organization in its school and has become a source of empowerment for Black students, as well as for other students of color and white students who have become allies in the work to create a more equitable environment in the school.

MTA Vice President Max Page opened the June 18 ceremony by acknowledging the vital role that public education plays in advancing social justice.

MTA President Merrie Najimy noted that for 30 years, the MTA has been recognizing the work of educators and community activists trying to make the world a more fair and safer place for all.

"The range of award winners has been broad," she said. "But they have all shared a passion and a commitment to enriching the lives of those they serve."

*For more information on the winners of the Human and Civil Rights Awards and the MTA Human Relations Committee, and to watch a video on the origins of Juneteenth, please visit [massteacher.org/hcr](https://massteacher.org/hcr).*

# Winning the big fights for public education

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MTA has been a statewide leader not only on advocating for health and safety in our schools and colleges, but also on fighting for policies that advance the common good. We do not plan to let up now.

Our locals learned what health and safety measures to fight for, thanks to MTA members and public health experts who brought their deep understanding to bear through the union's Environmental Health and Safety Committee. Because of their work, we were able to give our locals and chapters the tools they needed to achieve the most vital COVID-19 mitigation strategies throughout the Commonwealth. You



Merrie Najimy  
MTA President

fought hard and made significant gains.

You and your co-workers have laid the groundwork for returning to schools and higher education campuses that are far healthier and safer than they would have been without your activism.

As the year begins, despite some trepidation about the threat of the delta variant, I know that you are joyful about getting back to in-person learning with your students. I also know they feel excited to be together again — with you and with their peers. Moreover, we are fully aware that for some students, school is the safest place in their lives.

Tremendous challenges — but also incredible opportunities — lie ahead as the new year moves forward. Our continued rank-and-file organizing and collective action for public education and for our communities are key to our victories.

You have been heroes since the start of the pandemic, and the public's appreciation of that fact is clear. Though it sometimes didn't feel this way, the MTA's polling of the public shows that educators are widely appreciated, with eight in 10 Massachusetts residents having a favorable or very favorable impression of their work. And 64 percent of those surveyed believe your jobs have become even harder because of the COVID-19 crisis.

Over the summer, MTA Vice President Max Page and I held a Listening Tour covering each of the MTA regions of the state so that we could hear directly from you and your colleagues about what you have experienced and what you need for your students and yourselves.

MTA members told us of the challenges they faced, working harder than ever before with insufficient support and resources and little empathy shown by school and college administrators. They were constantly trying to overcome the struggle of supporting students who — for a variety of reasons — weren't connected or engaged. Some educators

Tremendous challenges — but also incredible opportunities — lie ahead as the new year moves forward.

said they remain anxious and feel like they're always in a state of emergency.

At the same time, members talked about the joy of finding new and creative education tools and techniques, learning from each other, and having opportunities for more one-to-one and small-group contact. They also discussed the resilience and compassion that their students demonstrated.

Crucially, they said that the pandemic has reinforced the importance of being active at all levels of the union. And it has redoubled your sense of urgency about the need to end the structural racism that has always hit Massachusetts communities of color so hard.

Here are just a few of the victories we have achieved over the last year:

- In coalition with other public-sector unions and allies, the MTA went to Beacon Hill and called for investments in communities of color and low-income communities; now our challenge is to ensure that ARPA funding will supplement the resources promised by the *Student Opportunity Act*.

- Locals continued to move forward on open, coordinated and coalition bargaining, with a new model emerging across MTA and AFT Massachusetts locals in the Merrimack Valley.

- MTA members organized to bring back full in-person learning by making strategic and specific demands — for vaccinations, for ventilation systems that meet appropriate standards and produce better indoor air quality, and for adherence to CDC guidelines on masking.

- For the first time, more than 50 “conscientious objectors,” clustered in Cambridge and on the South Shore, refused to proctor the high-stakes MCAS tests, while hundreds upon hundreds of families opted their children out — a scale we haven't seen before in Massachusetts.

But we still have plenty of work in front of us. The fights ahead — from passing the Fair Share Amendment to winning funding for public higher education and playing a key role in the upcoming gubernatorial race — will be tough. Yet they are winnable.

One critical issue the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed is how systemic racism is linked to decades of wholesale austerity and disinvestment in the public good. All communities are harmed by such policies, but communities of color are hurt by far the most. Affordable housing is in impossibly short supply. Public transportation is starved for funds. Quality health care and child care are inaccessible to huge numbers of people. Our students bring

the stress and trauma from these living conditions into the classroom, which impacts their learning conditions.

And many students — especially students of color — are being pushed out of public higher education, in part because of the rising debt loads they must take on. Climate change brings the specter of a dystopian future.

And so, we need to fight forward!

We need to help our students, from preK through college, find their way through the trauma they have experienced as a result of racism and poverty, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must build empathy toward each other, our students and their families, and we must ensure that the need for the common good is the foundation of our activism on all fronts, including our bargaining and political campaigns.

We must ensure that the Fair Share Amendment passes, re-engaging with families along the way about a vision for how public funding should be used.

Local by local, we must continue to endorse and bring to the bargaining table the PreK-12 Bill of Rights for Education Support Professionals and ensure that *all* ESPs gain better pay, respect and educational opportunities. Then we must move on to lobby cities and towns to endorse the Bill of Rights and act on it.

We need to support longtime teachers through legislation allowing those who want to retire early to do so with economic security and dignity.

We need to win the *Cherish Act* or a substantially similar measure that will greatly increase funding for our public colleges and universities, help achieve fairness for adjunct faculty, and reduce student debt.

And now is the time to transform education so that our curriculum, pedagogy, instruction and practice uplift students of all races and ethnicities while teaching history through a more truthful, diverse and critical lens. With that also comes the continued organizing to end high-stakes testing.

All of these things and more are within our reach through organizing, union and community solidarity, and collective action.

Continue your activism and stay safe, and let's keep winning the big fights for students, educators and public education.

## Letters policy

**M**TA 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).

# Push for fairness gains momentum

By Mary MacDonald

Within every Massachusetts public school, educators are working one-on-one or in small groups with students who have learning disabilities, preparing nutritious meals, and making sure students attend classes in a clean, secure building.

Known collectively as Education Support Professionals, they include paraprofessionals, bus drivers, food service and front office employees, maintenance workers, and others. And today they are becoming ever more visible and more active outside of the settings where their work is key to the success of public education.

This fall, many MTA members should expect to get a phone call or a knock on the door as the association's ESPs advance a campaign begun last year to build momentum for the MTA PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights. Launched in the spring of 2020, the effort supports seven essential policies and rights, including a salary that reflects the value of the work that ESPs do. In April, the document was approved as a new business item at the Annual Meeting of Delegates.

Joni Cederholm, the 2019 MTA ESP of the Year, said the measure speaks not only to benefits and salaries, but also to mutual respect.

"It acknowledges that we're all educators regardless of your position or what your title is," she said. "When you're working in public education and you're working with students, and you're a part of their lives, we are all educators."

Over the summer, members of a core team of ESPs focused their energies on advocacy and organization. They will move forward to inform other ESPs and other fellow MTA members about the essential elements



of the Bill of Rights, including the need for a living wage, affordable health insurance, and paid family and medical leave.

In August, Weymouth became the first Massachusetts community whose school committee adopted a resolution supporting the Bill of Rights.

Momentum is also growing among MTA locals. By late August, more than a quarter of them had voted to support the seven rights.

Cederholm, a clerical ESP who is a member of the Weymouth Educators' Association, said she is hopeful that the increasing support will lead to better benefits and salaries in the months and years ahead.

"In a profession so critical to school and students, we need a living wage that reflects the value of our work, affordable health care, paid medical leave and affordable education to strengthen our education and support public education for all," Cederholm said.

One of the major thrusts of the upcoming months is to encourage ESPs to share their personal stories. A link on the MTA website is set up to help ESPs create and share videos of their personal stories. Teachers and others who work closely with ESPs are urged to take part.

ESPs make up almost 20 percent of the MTA membership. The PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights addresses their most critical professional needs.

Sumayya Ghalaini, a paraprofessional who is a member of the West Springfield Education Association, was among the task force members who drafted the Bill of Rights. A one-on-one paraprofessional who works with high school students with autism, Ghalaini has served in that role for five years — but she still doesn't earn enough money to afford the district's health insurance.

"I can't even afford regular insurance provided by the school," she said. "I'm on MassHealth."

Many paraprofessionals and other ESPs have to hold multiple jobs at once just to earn enough income to pay their monthly bills.

One of the major platforms of the Bill of Rights is ensuring all districts pay ESPs a livable wage. Across Massachusetts, most ESPs earn less than \$30,000 annually, although more than three-quarters of them have college degrees.

ESPs also are seeking mutual respect and recognition as educators. They want access to professional development opportunities and inclusion in education meetings.

Many paraprofessionals and other ESPs have to hold multiple jobs at once just to earn enough income to pay their monthly bills.

For the next several months, the goal is to educate fellow ESPs about the Bill of Rights and its potential to influence future contract negotiations. Through online storytelling and sharing, emails, texts and door-to-door canvassing, members are talking to other members and trying to build momentum for strategic gains after a year of pandemic isolation.

So far, the reception has been welcoming, Ghalaini said. Most people she's met during her recent organizing visits are happy to talk with another union member. In addition to having local associations adopt the PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights, the campaign is intended to spread the word that the time has come for significant change.

MTA President Merrie Najimy noted recently that 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," she said.

*Members are encouraged to share their personal stories about the essential impact of ESPs on public education, as well as learn more about the campaign for the PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights, by visiting [massteacher.org/esp](http://massteacher.org/esp).*

[www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)

Your Web link to news, member advocacy and educational resources



# Unions take lead on campus safety

By Scott McLennan

The surge in COVID-19 cases sparked by the virus' delta variant has made the fall semester at public colleges and universities more precarious — and unions have taken the lead on addressing elevated health and safety concerns.

Several higher education chapters and locals have voiced support for vaccine requirements for students. In some cases, they also have successfully bargained vaccine requirements for staff and faculty, ensuring that workers' rights are protected.

In addition to health and safety, staffing levels and the lingering effects of job cuts and furloughs that campus executives imposed early in the pandemic remain a problem for many union members. Often there's a confluence of both issues. Maintenance and Trades Union members at UMass Lowell, for example, were not properly protected as they worked on campus throughout the pandemic and were subjected to furloughs and staff reductions that paved the way for campus administrators to try to privatize some bargaining unit work.

"Our higher ed unions have been relentless in fighting for students, workers and communities," said MTA President Merrie Najimy. "Across the public higher education system, MTA members have been leaders in the areas of health and safety and student support.

"Without both financial support for students and programming to aid first-generation and nontraditional students, our public colleges and universities fail in their mission," Najimy continued. "And we know this failure is most harmful to students of color, who have left public colleges at an alarming rate over the past year."

Campus activists, with statewide support from the MTA, have been advocating for the use of federal pandemic relief funds to restore cut positions and programs as well as address health and safety concerns such as ensuring that buildings have adequate and up-to-date ventilation systems.

"The federal government has provided hundreds of millions of dollars to public colleges and universities," said MTA Vice President Max Page. "We know how this money should be spent: Some of it must be used to bring back all of the faculty and staff positions that were egregiously cut throughout the pandemic. The state must also step up and use federal money it received to address the disparity in pay and benefits between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty and put an end to the exploitation of part-time faculty."

"In addition, Massachusetts has to address the crushing student debt problem and finally make public higher education debt-free for all of our working-class students," Page added. "We also need the state to use these funds to make our public higher education campuses healthy, safe, and green. We have never had greater urgency to address



Photo by Jonathan Ng

Joanna Gonsalves, a member of the MSCA chapter at Salem State University, represented the MTA at a rally organized by the Greater Boston Labor Council in July. Speakers called on the Legislature to use federal COVID-19 relief funds to immediately address the financial and health impacts of the pandemic on working families.

Steve Striffler, president of the Faculty Staff Union at UMass Boston, said that even though agreements have been reached on requiring vaccines and the use of masks, the pandemic's surge demands more.

these fundamental weaknesses of our public higher education system. Let's not miss the chance."

Even given the availability of federal support and state funding that was not reduced from the previous year, many union members are voicing concerns over the plans laid out for the fall semester.

Trevor Kearns, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council chapter at Greenfield Community College, said it was disheartening to see the presidents of community colleges across the state refuse to require COVID-19 vaccines for students — something that is happening at state universities and in the UMass system, as well as at most of the state's private colleges.

"Them not doing what every other college is doing reinforces a marginalized status for community colleges, and that is frustrating," Kearns said.

Kearns also pointed to a disconnect between campus-level discussions and statewide administrative decisions.

Prior to the abrupt departure of GCC's president, the union and management had been working out a policy concerning vaccines. But the unexpected leadership change scuttled much of the reopening planning for the campus.

A similar unwillingness to address the rapidly changing landscape presented by the delta variant can be seen on the UMass Boston campus, according to Steve Striffler, president of the Faculty Staff Union.

Striffler said that even though agreements have been reached on requiring vaccines and the use of masks, the pandemic's surge demands more. The FSU has been pushing for the university to reduce student density and to establish a routine coronavirus testing program.

Packed shuttle buses and other areas where there is little or no physical distancing seem unsafe, and there has not been an effort on the part of campus executives to explore the use of some remote learning to lessen population density at UMB, he said. Faculty members also want a more effective and comprehensive contact-tracing procedure — one that informs instructors when someone in their class has tested positive for COVID-19.

Please turn to **Unions**/Page 22

# A welcome filled with empathy

*Students 'know there are people behind these doors with open arms'*

By Jonathan Ng and Scott McLennan

As schools across Massachusetts reopened for in-person learning, newly elected Springfield Education Association President Tracy Little-Sasanecki noted that her fellow educators were dedicating themselves to bringing empathy to their classrooms.

“Students know we are creating and advocating for a safe place for them because some don’t always have a safe place in their own homes,” Little-Sasanecki told MTA Today. “They need to come to a building where they are going to be nurtured and fed with food and knowledge. And they know there are people behind these doors with open arms — as open as we can get them to be — in our classrooms and also in our hearts.”

SEA educators have organized throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure a safe return to in-person learning. Over the last 18 months, Little-Sasanecki said, the union has held regular meetings and experienced a groundswell of active participation among members.

“We made sure that none of us were returning back into the buildings until it was safe for all of us,” she said.

MTA members made great strides in creating engaging curriculum during the pandemic, finding new and creative ways to connect virtually with students. As unionists, educators also have led the charge in ensuring safer and healthier learning and working conditions in school buildings, winning key protections such as access to face coverings for students and staff, adequate room ventilation, surveillance testing for the coronavirus, and other health and safety accommodations.

Getting schools to reopen safely for full in-person learning has been the MTA’s top priority for months, noted MTA President Merrie Najimy. One focus has been the adoption of guidelines set by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Educators, through their local unions supported by the MTA, have worked tirelessly to create safer and healthier learning and working conditions for returning to schools,” Najimy said. “It is because of our members’ advocacy that we have won key victories such as the implementation of CDC guidelines in schools.

“Our efforts have helped ensure that students and educators can resume and continue in-person learning to the safest degree possible — and we plan to keep up the pressure as the year unfolds,” she added.

MTA Vice President Max Page remarked that educators helped win an unprecedented amount of federal funding for school districts to address the inequities in public education that have been exposed by the pandemic.



Photo by Chris Christo

Special education teacher Olivia Baker, right, spent a recent afternoon organizing books with Springfield Education Association Vice President Brenda Dunn at the Daniel B. Brunton School.

“Now is the time for our unions, parents and community leaders to be organizing for our students’ needs,” said Page. “We have the opportunity to take bold action around conditions in our school buildings — and especially the amount of staffing we know that it takes to provide a high-quality, comprehensive education.”

While educators are joyful about being reunited with their students and colleagues, they are also cautious, and they are worried about what may develop as a result of the continued presence of the virus.

“I think every educator who is coming back is excited. It’s a new year and a new beginning. It’s an opportunity to do what we do best and to continue to shine in our passion,” Little-Sasanecki said, adding: “There is, of course, some apprehension because we are still in the middle of a pandemic, and teachers want to make sure that administrators are following all health and safety measures and protocols.”

Even so, the focus remains on the students.

“I hope students can feel the warmth and passion that many of us have in our profession once they see our educators,” Little-Sasanecki said. “That is a joy and will be everlasting.”

Educators in other communities are likewise happy to be back with their students. But many remain critical of the role played in the reopening process by the state and the administration of Governor Charlie Baker.

Chicopee Education Association President Laura Demakis said that although educators have been looking forward to full in-person learning, the surge of the delta variant of the coronavirus has created complications. Demakis stressed that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should be working more closely with educators’ unions and other stakeholders to offer more comprehensive guidance — and that the state must be willing to adjust as the situation changes.

Demakis noted that while union members and city health experts are supportive of the recent mask mandate put in place by the state, there are many unanswered questions concerning how to sort out complex details. She also cited the question of determining what constitutes the “80 percent vaccination rate” and how it will take effect in buildings and districts. “We need real leadership from the state,” Demakis said.

And Demakis said that in-person learning will need to be very closely monitored, with regular meetings that involve educators, the school district, and community members to analyze local health data.

In Springfield, educators have organized and bargained for better learning and working conditions since the onset of the pandemic. They include layered health and safety strategies that will protect students and the community at large.

Please turn to **Educators**/Page 17

# Members recharge after a tough year

By Mary MacDonald

After an incredibly difficult year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, educators had a chance over the summer to reflect on their profession, strengthen their skills and consider what they need to care for themselves as schools reopen for in-person learning.

More than 1,500 members participated in the face-to-face and virtual events that were part of the 2021 MTA Summer Conference, which was held over several weeks in July and August.

Workshops and events largely followed three areas of focus: professional development, union skills and leadership development, and racial and social justice.

New features this summer included a statewide Listening Tour, in which MTA leaders made seven stops across Massachusetts to talk to members about their experiences. The tour was an opportunity for MTA President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page to listen to members. Among the questions that were posed:

- “What was one of the most challenging things you faced during the pandemic?”
- “What have we learned about ourselves, our students and families, our practice and issues that were exposed more deeply?”

Professional development opportunities included training in teaching strategies to support students experiencing trauma, a program to encourage students to overcome their math anxiety, and a workshop that helped teachers to incorporate universal design for learning in classrooms.

A workshop on Islamophobia and Muslim students was part of the four-segment Brave Conversations series, reflecting the MTA’s commitment to addressing the structural racism that has hit communities of color so hard and advancing social justice. The workshop included a historical overview and current research on the targeting of Muslim students, along with strategies for educators. Each session attracted 36 to 48 MTA members.



Photo by Bob Duffy

George Odell, an MTA Retired member who worked as a substitute teacher during the last school year, spoke at the Summer Conference Listening Tour stop in Wakefield. He said it was a “tough year” but that parents were appreciative of educators’ efforts to help students.



Marguerite Foster Franklin, a kindergarten teacher and a member of the Springfield Education Association, was one of the presenters in the Family, Educator, Community series.

She spoke to fellow educators about how to connect with students’ families — and what assumptions to avoid — as they prepared for the new school year.

Many students, for example, live in multigenerational homes, or may have a parent who is not their biological parent.

Providing “strategies on how to meet parents in a way that is comfortable, not just for them as educators, but for the parents” was one of the goals, Foster Franklin said. Foster Franklin is a trainer in a Springfield school program in which teachers visit homes and meet with parents.

“Many of us, including myself, are always looking at different ways we can help the parents,” she said.

The Summer Conference also continued a series of self-care workshops for educators that organizers said was one of the surprise hits of the past year.

Online sessions in yoga and tai chi that began in November 2020 as a temporary program took off among educators, who flocked to livestreamed classes. The MTA plans to resume the yoga program in September, said instructor Jessica Laudati.

“It really was a resource for people to take care of themselves,” Laudati said. “Educating is this constant expelling of energy. You’re giving energy to help others learn. As educators, it really came full force: the importance of honing in some of your own energy and taking care of yourself so you can be of more service to your students.”

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# New resources can help achieve MTA's vision

By Noah Berger

In Massachusetts, we have long had a broadly shared vision that all children in all communities should have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. For far too many of our children, however, there has always been a broad gap between that vision and their lived reality.

Numerous obstacles, often rooted in structural racism, loom in the path of our young people as they strive to succeed. During the COVID-19 crisis, they have become clearer than ever. They include unhealthy school and college buildings in many of our communities, limited access to mental health supports, an inadequate higher education funding system that creates steep barriers and crushing debt for low- and moderate-income students, and working conditions for faculty and staff that often leave them without time to provide their students with the support that is vital for them to receive.

As difficult as this moment is, there is some good news. We have the resources to create a future that centers on equity and meets the needs of all of our students.

The federal government's American Rescue Plan Act — ARPA — is providing the largest investment in education in American history, delivering more than \$2 billion to public schools, colleges and universities in Massachusetts. In addition, ARPA is providing more than \$5 billion to our state government and over \$3 billion to local governments — money that can also be used for education and to meet the other needs of young people so that they can succeed in school and in life.

While these funds will allow us to meet urgent needs and begin to make transformative investments, they are a temporary revenue source that can't be counted on for the long term. Fortunately, Massachusetts will have the opportunity next year to fix our tax system so that the highest-income residents will no longer pay a dramatically smaller portion of their incomes in state and local taxes than the rest of us.

If Massachusetts voters approve the Fair Share Amendment, we will have a permanent revenue source designated specifically to fund Massachusetts public schools, colleges and universities — as well as transportation — that can help us sustain the extraordinary progress that we have the opportunity to achieve.

That's one reason MTA President Merrie Najimy describes the current moment as a unique opportunity for our state, our communities, and our public education system.

"Over the next two years, we have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to create a Commonwealth where the great potential of all of our students is matched by resources that provide every young person the opportunity to flourish," she said. "Massachusetts

"Massachusetts educators are outstanding and do all in their power to provide the best education to our students. But for too long, too many of our children — and particularly young people of color and those from low-income and rural communities — have not had educational resources or opportunities equitable to those of their peers in middle-class, affluent and white communities."

— MTA President Merrie Najimy

educators are outstanding and do all in their power to provide the best education to our students. But for too long, too many of our children — and particularly young people of color and those from low-income and rural communities — have not had educational resources or opportunities equitable to those of their peers in middle-class, affluent and white communities.

"We can begin to change that," Najimy said. "All we need is the political will."

MTA members have developed a policy agenda that calls for state funds to meet the urgent needs of students and educators. Among other things, it includes:

- Emergency financial aid for low-income students in higher education that addresses a dramatic drop in enrollments, particularly among students of color.
- Safe, green and healthy public school and college buildings.
- Pay equity and access to health care for adjunct faculty.
- Paid family and medical leave for municipal workers.

With funding generated by the Fair Share Amendment, we will be able to build on these emergency fixes and reverse decades of systemic underfunding of public higher education and early education so that we can expand on the progress we are making today in preK-12 funding as a result of the enactment of the *Student Opportunity Act*. One dire need is to make public higher education affordable to expand access and address the level of debt now burdening our public college students and graduates.

In addition, MTA locals throughout the state are working with community partners to advocate for distribution of federal pandemic aid for elementary and secondary schools, provided under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund. The ESSER funds could be used to make sure buildings are healthy and safe, expand access to mental health supports for students, make sure schools are able to meet the current needs of all students, and improve compensation for underpaid educators — particularly Education Support Professionals.

Higher education locals are waging similar fights to ensure that federal Higher Education Emergency Relief funds are used to avoid layoffs, retain programs and services for students, provide fair compensation for college staff and faculty, and make sure that students receive all of the supports they need to stay in college and graduate during these challenging times.

Michael Curry, co-chair of the Massachusetts Health Equity Task Force, noted that systemic racism manifests itself in health outcomes, with people of color often having poorer health than white people, regardless of socioeconomic status.

"There is a clear need to address social determinants of health," Curry said. "To address health care disparities, Massachusetts needs to address social inequity."

The same is true of education. We need to provide great education in all of our schools, and we need to make sure young people in every community have access to adequate and nutritious food, quality physical and mental health care, and space to play. And parents must have good jobs, as well as income and work supports that allow them to make ends meet.

"Working with our community partners, MTA members have led and been allies in crucial efforts to fight systemic racism and advance economic and social justice in our communities," said Najimy. "Those partnerships and the energy, passion, and commitment of MTA members will allow our Commonwealth to marshal the resources we need to make the COVID-19 crisis the moment when we begin to dismantle barriers rooted in racism that hold back our students and to build systems of caring, empathy and support that reflect the work that educators do every day."

*Noah Berger is an education research and policy specialist for the MTA Center for Education Policy and Practice. Further information on the subjects discussed in this article, including federal ARPA, HERF and ESSER resources, can be found on the MTA website, [massteacher.org](http://massteacher.org). A story on the Fair Share Amendment campaign begins on Page 12 of this issue of MTA Today.*



# SAVE THE DATES



## 2021 MTA ETHNIC MINORITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CONFERENCE

Friday-Saturday, Dec. 3-4  
and Saturday, Dec. 11

**\*\*This year's conference will be held as a virtual event\*\***

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# Two MTA retirees to be honored for their activism

By Jonathan Ng

Two MTA Retired members have been selected to receive the “Honor Our Own” Award for their outstanding influence on students, new educators and other association members.

Craig Slatin, a retired professor of public health at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and Richard Liston, a retired special education teacher and former president of the Everett Teachers Association, are dedicated unionists — and both have been busy activists in their retirement.

Slatin and Liston will be celebrated for their accomplishments at the 2021 Virtual Retired Members Gathering, which will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 19. As is true each year, the honorees are nominated by fellow educators.

Rafael Moure-Eraso, who serves on the MTA Retired Members Committee, nominated Slatin for the award. He praised Slatin’s advocacy as an organizer for public education.

Moure-Eraso went on to note that he has found Slatin “in the middle of many good fights,” among them the effort to stop the trend of austerity that has harmed Massachusetts public colleges and universities, as well as preK-12 schools.

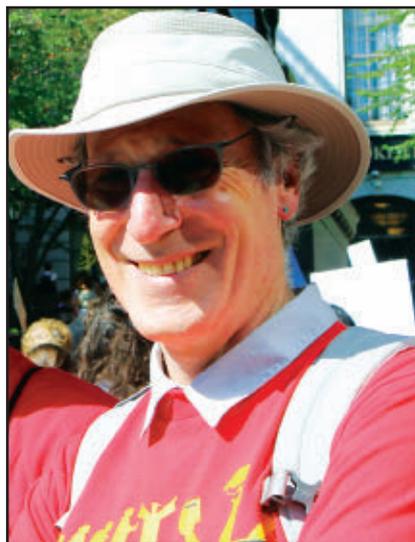
“Craig Slatin is an example of the politically engaged educator who can show results for his years of organizing and advocating for an effective

public education,” Moure-Eraso wrote. “He has educated a generation of students to address those challenges and been an effective activist in public education policy.”

Everett Teachers Association President Kimberly Auger, who nominated Liston, said that even though he is retired, he remains a mentor to many teachers and students.

Liston, an MTA activist for decades, led two Everett strikes in the late 1980s to win fair and equitable working conditions for present and future educators. Even after retirement, Auger said, Liston regularly works to help fellow educators and lift up public education.

In addition to volunteering at schools and remaining an activist, Liston serves as a board member of the ETA and until June 30 was on the Retired Members Committee. “The impact he made on his students still resonates today, as many



Craig Slatin, left, and Richard Liston will be honored for their activism and their accomplishments at the Virtual Retired Members Gathering.

reach out to express their appreciation for all of his encouragement and support, long after they were students in his classroom,” Auger wrote in Liston’s nomination form.

Further information on registering for the 2021 Virtual Retired Members Gathering will be posted soon on [massteacher.org/retired](https://massteacher.org/retired).

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# Full speed ahead for Fair Share Amendment campaign

By Mary MacDonald

After a circuitous history, a constitutional amendment that could dedicate as much as \$2 billion annually to public education and transportation in Massachusetts will reach voters in November of 2022.

MTA members are taking action now to share information about the Fair Share Amendment — and to ask what fellow educators need across their school districts and college campuses.

They are working with Raise Up Massachusetts, a grassroots coalition that helped get the question on the ballot after a multi-year process.

The coalition includes the MTA and other unions as well as education, faith-based and community organizations. Raise Up Massachusetts initially focused on a petition-driven ballot initiative, but the effort was blocked by a legal challenge. Over the summer, the Legislature gave final approval to putting the amendment before voters on Nov. 8, 2022.

The Fair Share Amendment is a proposed change to the Massachusetts Constitution. Unlike the federal income tax, which is graduated, the Commonwealth has a flat income tax of 5 percent. The Fair Share Amendment would add 4 percentage points to the tax on annual income above \$1 million.

Significant amounts of the funding generated by the amendment would be directed to public schools,



colleges and universities, providing an opportunity to make progress on issues such as reducing class sizes in elementary grades and strengthening higher education programs and staffing.

Imagining what those changes would look like is not hard for educators who are volunteering on the campaign as it ramps up.

Deb Gesualdo, president of the Malden Education Association and a longtime music teacher, said the one-time federal funds that were directed to states as part of COVID-19 relief have allowed educators to see a different future for public education after many years of austerity budgets. But the Fair Share Amendment would secure funds for schools and colleges in an ongoing manner, said Gesualdo, who serves as an MTA Senate District Coordinator.

Until recently, Gesualdo was the only music teacher for nine grade levels of students in her K-8 school. She taught about 1,000 students each year. Some had access to music classes for half the year, if that. Only recently has the Malden system been able to bring on more educators.

“If the Fair Share Amendment passes, this would help not only sustain these positions we’re adding, but we could actually add more,” Gesualdo said. “People are starting to visualize what this could look like because now they have a frame of reference.”

Activists spreading awareness about the amendment will focus initially on member-to-member conversations through phone calls and visits — while remaining vigilant about COVID-19 safety. MTA members will collect pledge cards as part of this effort, but they’re not just going to be asking for political support. After 18 months of a pandemic, members will check in on other members and ask what they need the most.

An important part of the process is to speak with members, find out what their pandemic experiences were like, and learn how their needs can be met through the consistent funding that the Fair Share Amendment would provide, noted MTA President Merrie Najimy.

“Passing the Fair Share Amendment can provide the resources for schools that educators and students are so desperately in need of,” Najimy said. “Winning the *Student Opportunity Act* began to address the needs of our communities — in particular in communities with low incomes or communities of color — but the needs go far beyond that.”

Please turn to **Fair Share**/Page 19



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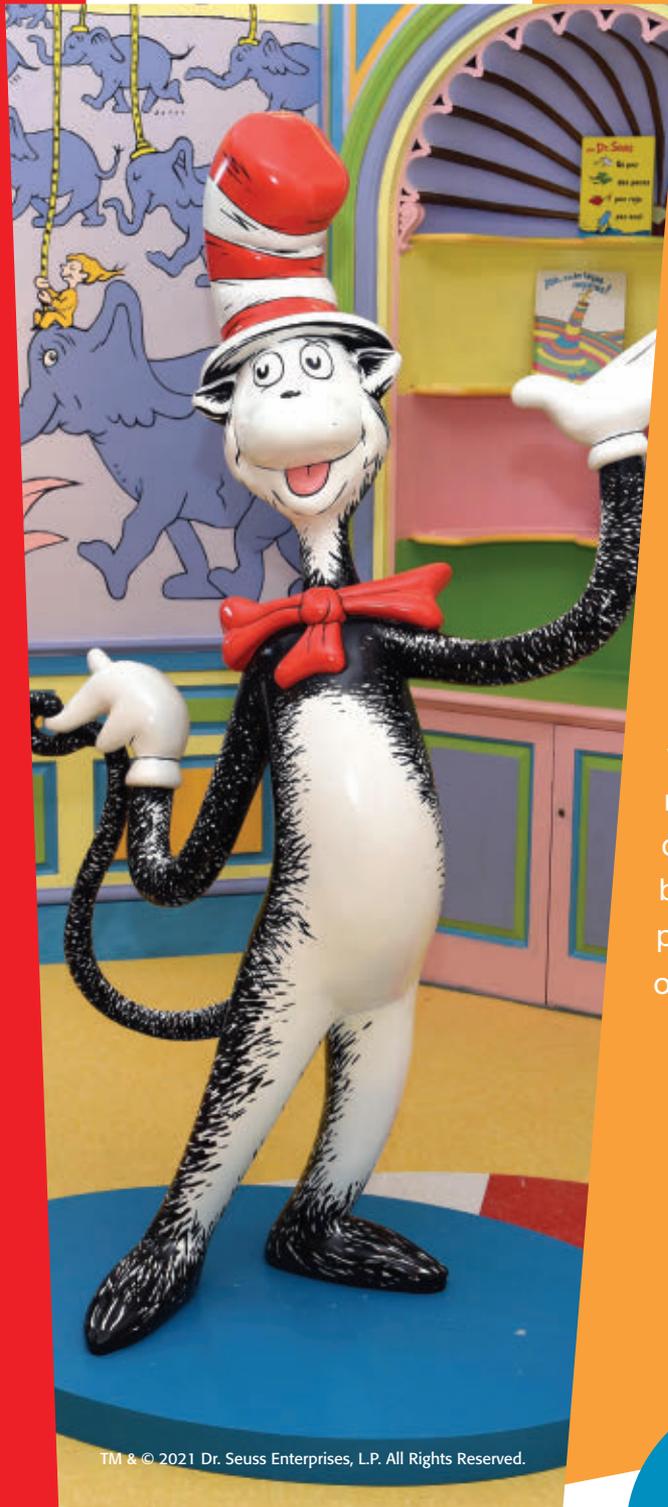


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# Members call for passage of early retirement bill

By Scott McLennan

**M**TA members and leaders recently urged the Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Service to favorably report out a bill that would allow eligible teachers the opportunity to retire early without jeopardizing their financial security.

The bill, *An Act to provide a retirement enhancement opportunity for certain members of the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System*, allows eligible teachers who want to retire early to purchase years of service or "age" in order to strengthen their retirement benefits.

During a public hearing held virtually on Sept. 1, MTA President Merrie Najimy explained that the coronavirus pandemic brings added urgency to the legislation.

"Throughout the pandemic — and continuing to this day — educators have been expected to put their lives on the line. For some, it is simply not a viable

option, given the status of their own health or that of family members they care for," she said.

She praised educators for meeting the demands of their increasingly more difficult profession, adding that the pandemic has simply pushed some educators into untenable positions.

A number of MTA members have shared stories about how their health issues or those of loved ones made full-time in-person learning a dangerous option, she noted.

"They are facing an impossible choice: put themselves or vulnerable family members at risk or jeopardize a dignified and financially secure retirement," Najimy told the committee. "Dedicated public servants who have committed their lives to the children of the

Commonwealth should not be forced to make that choice."

MTA Vice President Max Page testified largely on the mechanics of the bill, explaining that it is financially viable and addresses the concerns of school districts.

"For school districts, the potential savings would equal the difference between current and new teachers' salaries less any additional health insurance costs, but total payroll savings will offset any ancillary costs. The bill's voluntary local adoption provision eliminates any unfunded mandates," Page said.

The bill — House 2620 and Senate 1791 — also calls for teaching positions opened by an early retirement to be backfilled with qualified teachers.

*For updates, visit [massteacher.org/news](http://massteacher.org/news) and [massteacher.org/legislation](http://massteacher.org/legislation). To record a personal video encouraging passage of the legislation, go to [massteacher.org/earlyretirementbill](http://massteacher.org/earlyretirementbill).*



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# Educators work together to address crucial issues

Continued from Page 7

Little-Sasanecki noted that most of the district's school buildings are old, and many do not have air conditioning, let alone upgraded ventilation systems that can properly circulate air — a proven mitigation strategy that health experts say can minimize indoor spread of the coronavirus.

SEA members fought for those improvements. Little-Sasanecki said a company that specializes in HVAC systems assessed every Springfield public school building and presented a report to the superintendent, the school district and the School Committee.

Some of the district's oldest buildings have been closed. And administrators have assured educators that all Springfield buildings now meet standards because of completed improvements, said Brenda Dunn, a fifth-grade teacher who serves as the SEA's vice president.

The union also partnered with a company to purchase face shields for every educator. Little-Sasanecki said teachers will make sure that hand-sanitizer stations are adequately filled and that students are keeping a safe physical distance when possible. Educators will also ensure students are wearing masks indoors — though experience has shown that is unlikely to be a problem.

"I didn't have a single child that gave me a hard time about it," Dunn noted. "The kids understand



Photo by Chris Christo

"It's our agenda — it's not theirs," Springfield Education Association President Tracy Little-Sasanecki noted in a recent interview.

it's about protecting themselves and that we're protecting each other. They are so responsible."

Both educators said the school district seems to be working with the union to rectify COVID-19 concerns brought forth by SEA members. At the

same time, union members remain actively engaged in the process to ensure safety.

"It's because all of our educators are in the building working together; if one person has experienced an issue, then somebody else has experienced it, and then we build capacity and voices," said Little-Sasanecki. "When we bring concerns to the administration, educators know that they will have people behind them who are supporting their concerns with one voice. There are just so many things that we wouldn't see in our union office unless members bring it to our attention."

During the pandemic, virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom have expanded access for members who sometimes were not able to attend in-person meetings in the past.

"We've had over 100 people Zoom," Little-Sasanecki said. "We listened, took notes, and wrote down every question asked."

Little-Sasanecki said the union has responded rapidly, presenting the district with more than 600 questions that reflected issues raised by educators. SEA members, along with other allies, meet with the superintendent weekly.

"It's our agenda — it's not theirs," Little-Sasanecki said. "The SEA and the Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals get together and talk about what concerns our members have, and we bring them to the table."

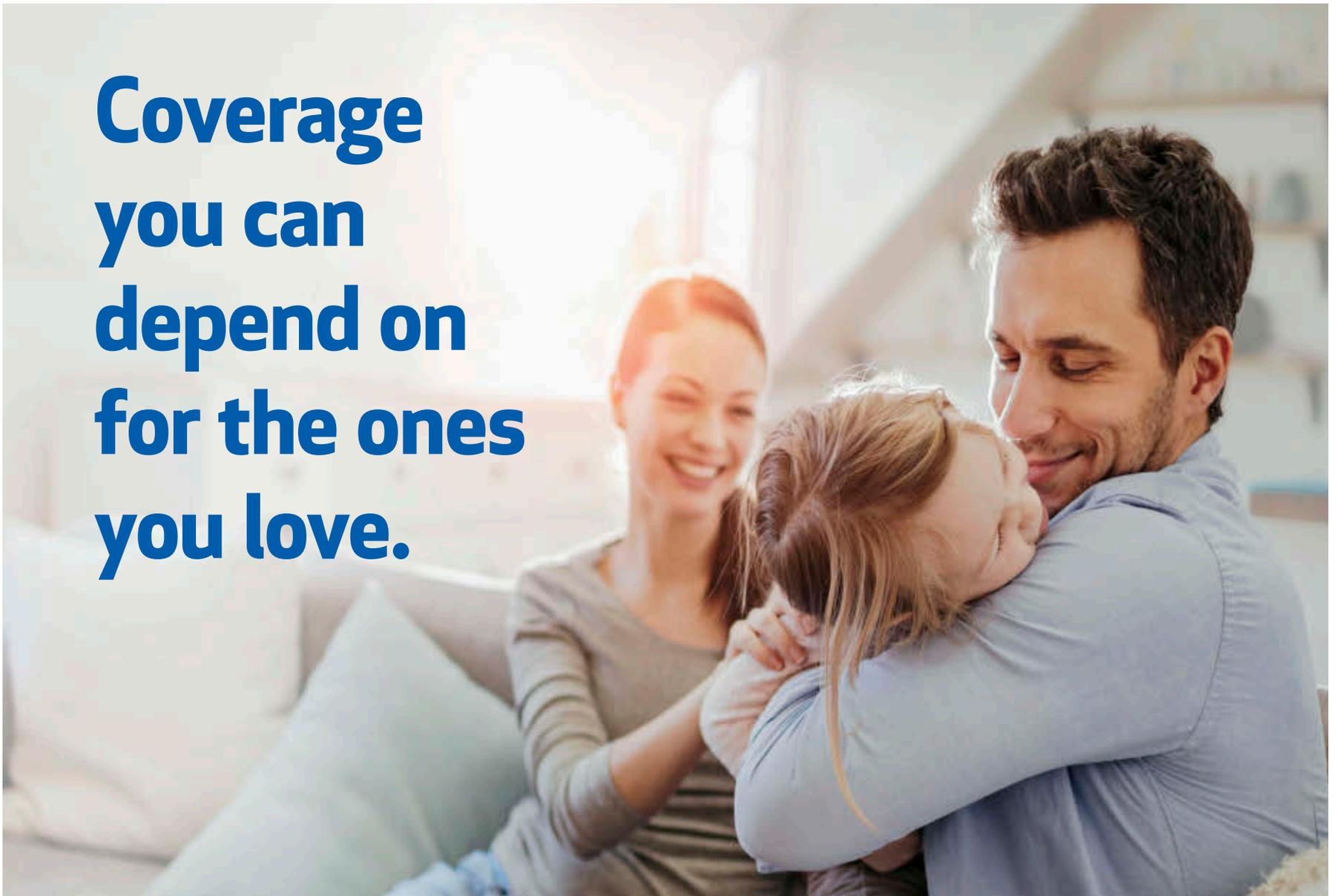
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## REGIONAL RETIREMENT CONSULTATIONS AVAILABLE

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 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; call 774.239.7823 or email enelson@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.

**CAPE COD** — Lawrence Abbuzzi: second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., MTA Southeast Office, 756 Orchard St., third floor, Raynham; call 508.824.9194 or email labbuzzi@massteacher.org.

**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 or email kmelanson@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 413.893.9173 or email 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.

**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.

**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 617.347.4425 or email rthompson@massteacher.org.

**HIGHER EDUCATION AT-LARGE** — Edward McCourt, call 781.325.2553 or email 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.

## Fair Share effort gains steam

Continued from Page 12

Laurie Guiel-Ashe, a paraprofessional who works at the West Springfield Middle School, is a veteran of many summer campaigns for the MTA. She is ready to spread the word about the Fair Share Amendment and hopes that dedicated state funds will create more options for her students.

The state has many families who can't afford college, she noted. And other students may not want to pursue a degree but should be assured of a high-quality education.

"I would love for all students to get equal shares of an education," she said. "There are so many kids out there who are brilliant with their hands. They can think on their feet."

Guie-Ashe has seen the successes of grassroots campaigns in the past. She said she was ready to speak to other members as school reopened — "letting our administration, our towns, and our parents know that we are out there, working on behalf of our students."

Gesualdo also has seen the success of member-driven grassroots

If five MTA members talk to five other people about the Fair Share Amendment and ask them to do the same, the effort will grow organically.

efforts in the past, including the "No on 2" campaign in 2016 to prevent the unfettered expansion of privately run charter schools across the state. If five MTA members talk to five other people about the Fair Share Amendment and ask them to do the same, the effort will grow organically, she said.

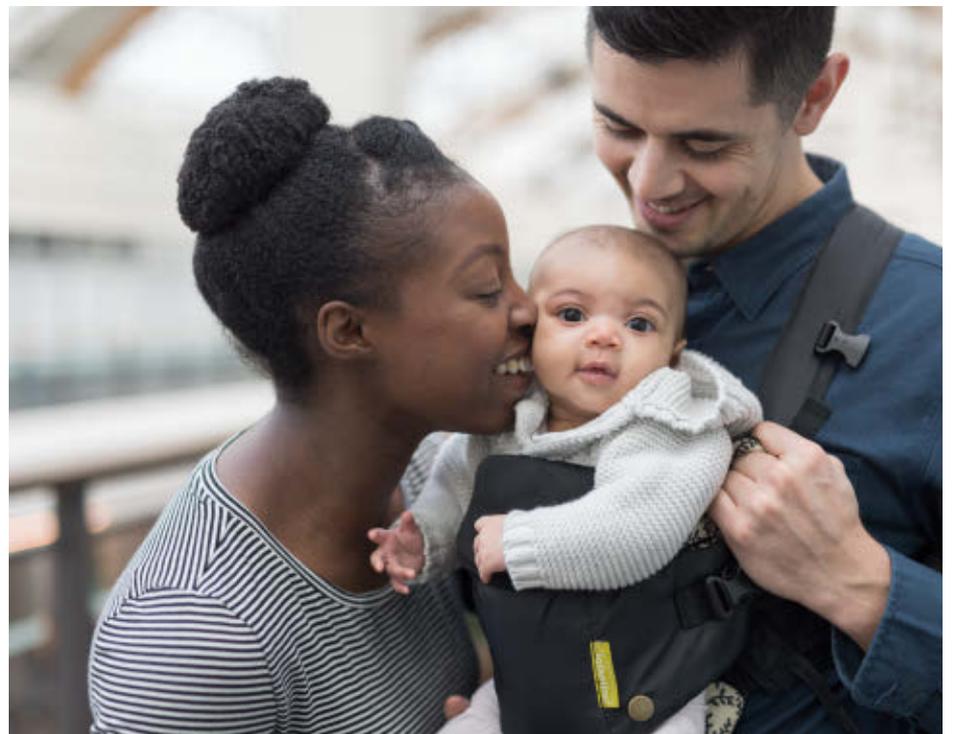
"We know historically that this kind of grassroots organization, this kind of relational organizing, works. We saw it with the 'No on 2' campaign. We saw it when we put a lot of pressure on the State House with the *Student Opportunity Act*. And we'll see it with this."

For more information, visit [raiseupma.org](http://raiseupma.org) and watch for updates on [massteacher.org](http://massteacher.org).



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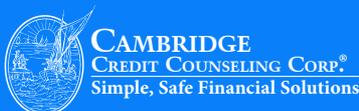
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## Obituaries

**Arthur C. Barry, 86**, of Plymouth. Was a language instructor at Marshfield High School for 39 years, retiring as an assistant principal in 2009. He also taught at Fisher College, Curry College, Cape Cod Community College and UMass Boston. July 1.

**Yvonne R. Boucher, 91**, of Northampton. Taught in the Northampton Public Schools, mostly at the John F. Kennedy Middle School, for 35 years. June 29.

**Virginia F. Bowman, 78**, of Newport, Vermont. Was a teacher at the Blueberry Hill Elementary School in Longmeadow. June 24.

**Florence M. Ely, 77**, of Scituate. Was a special education teacher at Cohasset High School for more than 30 years. July 12.

**William H. Estes, 74**, of Bridgewater. Was a biology and chemistry teacher at Randolph High School for 35 years. June 25.

**Marie A. Fitzgerald, 83**, of Framingham. Was an elementary school teacher in the Framingham Public Schools for more than 30 years. July 3.

**Maria Luisa Gilman, 77**, of Gardner. Was the director of health and physical education in the Gardner Public Schools for 31 years. June 8.

**Lydia T. Gonsalves, 72**, of Fall River. Taught

at the Davol Elementary School in Fall River for many years. June 29.

**Susan J. Gordon, 78**, of Natick. Taught first grade for nearly 40 years in the Lexington Public Schools. June 8.

**Esther Henken, 89**, of Hanover, N.H. Was an early childhood educator in the Newton, Lynnfield and North Reading school systems for 40 years. June 27.

**Richard W. Kiberd, 79**, of Andover. Was a teacher at North Andover High School for more than 35 years before retiring in 2002. He also was a tutor at Northern Essex Community College. July 13.

**Marilyn R. Lange, 82**, of Buzzards Bay. Was an early childhood educator for more than 30 years in the Wareham Public Schools. July 13.

**Mary L. Pottle, 95**, of North Weymouth. Was a teacher in the Braintree Public Schools. June 22.

**Andrew J. Power, 87**, of Worcester. Was an English teacher, a department head and an assistant principal at South High Community School. He also taught at North High School in Worcester and Lake Street School in Spencer. June 8.

**Anne Marie Rosberg, 65**, of Blandford. Was an elementary teacher in the Springfield Public Schools. June 6.

**Richard A. Rose, 84**, of Derry, N.H., formerly of North Reading. Taught carpentry for 30 years at Greater Lowell Technical High School. July 11.

**Marie T. Sheehy, 96**, of Danvers and Oak Bluffs. Was an elementary teacher at the Lafayette School in Everett for more than 30 years. June 23.

**Edward M. Shoenig, 81**, of Randolph. Taught at Hanover High School for 39 years. June 22.

**Patricia A. Smith, 88**, of Brockton. Taught physical education in the Weymouth and Newton school systems for many years. June 3.

**John M. Sullivan, 95**, of Wellesley. Was a science teacher for the Wayland Public Schools. Also was employed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association as a field representative and served as the associate executive director of political and legislative strategies and operations. March 31.

**Joan A. Sweeney, 84**, of Wrentham. Was a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher for 34 years in the Foxborough Public Schools. June 24.

**Brian L. Walsh, 82**, of West Yarmouth. Taught English and history in the Abington Public Schools for 34 years. He also served as vice president of the Abington Education Association. June 8.

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# Unions call for action on higher ed needs

Continued from Page 6

“We can’t understand why the campus is so committed to the idea of being full capacity when our economic model isn’t relying on it the way other campuses do,” Striffler said.

Union members note that it is not unusual for management to ignore frontline workers’ concerns about the pandemic and its health and economic impacts.

In July, the Greater Boston Labor Council held a rally near the State House, calling on legislators to use federal American Rescue Plan Act money to address the financial and health needs of workers affected by the pandemic.

Joanna Gonsalves, a member of the Massachusetts State College Association chapter at Salem State University, addressed the crowd,

“The federal funds can allow Massachusetts to fix what is broken in public higher education and lay the foundation for long-term solutions.”

— MSCA member Joanna Gonsalves

advocating for financial support for students, better working conditions for adjunct faculty and safer campus buildings.

Long before the pandemic began, colleges and universities such as Salem State were suffering from decades of underfunding that led to buildings being poorly maintained and a mounting financial burden on students who were forced to shoulder campus debt with ever-growing tuition and fees.

“Having students pay capital debt is unacceptable,” Gonsalves said.

“And the pandemic has taught us how many college and university buildings are just not healthy.”

Gonsalves also raised the important issue of how part-time and adjunct faculty members are exploited — often paid much less than their full-time counterparts and denied access to health care benefits.

“The federal funds can allow Massachusetts to fix what is broken in public higher education and lay the foundation for long-term solutions,” Gonsalves said.



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

<sup>2</sup> National Safety Council, “Injury Facts” (2015).





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## Solidarity brings positive results in Falmouth

By Scott McLennan

Educators from across the Cape and Islands region came out in force to support their colleagues in the Falmouth Educators' Association as the local union withstood a sustained attack on protected activity arising from contentious bargaining over the conditions of in-person learning last spring.

The conflict came to a head over the summer when the district placed FEA President Lori Andrade on leave and then terminated the veteran educator, both without cause.

MTA leadership and surrounding local associations — along with other labor unions in the region — saw these actions as bold attempts at union busting. Many parents and community members were likewise upset with the way educators were being treated and spoke out at School Committee meetings, defending educators and the FEA.

The FEA's organizing extended to a series of standouts and public demonstrations outside of School Committee meetings. It became a common sight in the spring and summer to see streets lined with hundreds of educators and their supporters, many holding signs emblazoned with slogans such as "Union Busting Is Disgusting" and "No Guff," a jab at the district's own anti-bullying messaging.

Keeping the pressure on proved to be successful, as Andrade was returned to the staff and outstanding issues with the district have been resolved.

MTA President Merrie Najimy praised the Cape and Islands regional associations for forming a tight network of mutual support.

"This took shape three years ago," Najimy said at a May rally that drew active and retired educators from 15 local associations. "Locals were working without contracts — and you all started showing up for each other.

"This is what it means to be in the MTA," she continued. "We stand in solidarity in our buildings, across our district, across our regions and across the state."

Monomoy educator Cheri Armstrong is chair of the Cape and Islands Area Massachusetts Educator



Photos by Bob Duffy

Kristina Woods, left, and Celeste Cruise were among the members supporting the Falmouth Educators' Association's fight for fairness at high-visibility events in the spring and summer.

"Locals across the Cape and Islands continue in solidarity to address local, regional, and state issues important to our members," said Monomoy educator Cheri Armstrong, who serves as chair of the Cape and Islands Area Massachusetts Educator Action Network. "Together, we stand for positive, affirming school environments."

Action Network. The collective, she said, will continue its work to strengthen all of the region's local associations.

"Locals across the Cape and Islands continue in solidarity to address local, regional, and state

issues important to our members," Armstrong said. "Together, we stand for positive, affirming school environments."

But the Falmouth fight proved especially threatening as it forced educators to consider the impact of retaliation for participating in normal union activities.

Michelle Dunn, president of the Dennis-Yarmouth Educators Association, described the Falmouth situation as having the potential for both a chilling effect and a ripple effect.

"Going after a local president is a scare tactic, something to stop union activity," she said. "I encouraged my members to support the FEA because if Falmouth was successful, it would encourage other superintendents and districts to try the same tactics."