

MEMBERS REFLECT ON 'ASSAULT ON OUR DEMOCRACY'

MTA Today

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DEFEND PUBLIC HIGHER ED

FIGHTING FOR SAFETY AND FAIRNESS



“HONOR OUR OWN” AWARD NOMINATIONS



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MTA Today

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This edition also includes the Winter issue of *The MTA Advantage*

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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ON THE COVER

MTA activists continue their battle for health and safety, respect, and fair working conditions in schools and on campuses as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been some brighter spots, including the launch of pooled virus testing in schools, as the wait goes on for an effective vaccine program. In the photo behind the masthead, the State House served as a canvas for a projected image supporting public higher education. Below that, proceeding clockwise from above left, Bianca Jones participated in conducting a surveillance testing program in Watertown; Brookline educator Graciela Mohamedi spoke at a “Safer at 6 Feet” rally; higher ed members on Beacon Hill decried needless cuts; and demonstrators in Northampton made their views known about MCAS testing. Coverage begins on Page 6. In this edition you’ll also find a story about Teacher of the Year Jennifer Hedrington on Page 3; an article about race-related stress among educators of color on Page 5; coverage of the EMAC Conference on Page 8; and the fourth installment in our series celebrating the MTA’s 175th anniversary on Page 9.



Cover photos by Bob Duffy and Scott McLennan
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Quote-Unquote

“Good riddance, Betsy. You were the worst Secretary of Education ever.”

— U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, reacting to the resignation of U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos

Centering students — first and foremost

Teacher of the Year approaches her work 'through the lenses of love'

By Jean Conley

“At first it was a nightmare — a nightmare. But we’re getting the hang of it. It’s getting better. We have a routine now.”

Jennifer Hedrington, a member of the Malden Education Association, was speaking not just as a seventh-grade math teacher at the Ferryway School, but also as the mother of two sons — 8-year-old Isaiiah and 10-year-old Ethan — with whom she and her husband, Jamaal, have been meeting the technological and logistical challenges of remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Lancaster, where Hedrington was born and where she and her family live, internet connectivity isn’t always a sure thing.

Like many of her colleagues throughout Massachusetts, Hedrington had been teaching remotely since last March when she spoke to *MTA Today* — and she was still adapting to this highly unusual school year.

But dealing with the unexpected is one of Hedrington’s many strengths. In October, when she was named the 2021 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, the panel that selected her noted that Hedrington’s core commitment to always center her work around the student-teacher relationship had captured their attention.

Takeru Nagayoshi, the 2020 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, was a member of the panel. Nagayoshi said that Hedrington “stood out because she was very relationship-oriented in her leadership.”

“Every vision, call to action, or reasoning behind her leadership decisions or education philosophy was grounded in an anecdote that centered her students first and foremost,” he added.

The three finalists, all women of color, “brought a passion to change the profession for their students from their unique perspectives as women of color,” Nagayoshi said. “She had a contagious enthusiasm for the profession, but also a vulnerability that resonated with me as a teacher struggling through and looking for inspiration in a time of pandemic.”

Hedrington’s early years undoubtedly provided her with some of the skills she developed to master teaching in an uncertain world. During her childhood, Hedrington moved with her parents, both missionaries, to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Rwanda, and then to Florida and Michigan, before returning to Massachusetts. In those years, Hedrington said, “There wasn’t always a school that I could go to.” As a result, she was sent to live with a great aunt and uncle back in the U.S. while her parents continued their work.

The family was back together by the time Hedrington was in seventh grade. She entered a private school but then transferred to the public schools. In ninth grade she began going to Nashoba Regional High School, where she excelled academically. She finished in three years.



Photo by Bob Duffy

Jennifer Hedrington, the 2021 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, is a member of the Malden Education Association. She was honored during a meeting on Oct. 20 at the headquarters of the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

‘Life isn’t black and white, whether we’re talking about race, gender, religion or politics. So I acknowledge that in my teaching. I see and validate all the colors that are in front of me. And I believe that when you approach students’ different colors through the lenses of love, barriers can be broken and a relationship can be formed, which allows information and education to be a little easier to digest.’

— Teacher Jennifer Hedrington

The swift passage through high school wasn’t fueled by boundless confidence, however.

“At Nashoba, I was one of a handful of Black students,” Hedrington recalled. “I used to sit in the front of the bus every day by myself. No one saw me — no one except for the school bus driver. She was the only one who saw me. I remember that at graduation, the bus driver gave me a card. And I just started crying. ...

“I felt invisible when I was a kid,” she said. “And as teachers, we have the power of making people feel invisible.”

Those experiences have shaped Hedrington’s philosophy.

“I teach in color through the lenses of love,” she said, breaking that line down: “Life isn’t black and white, whether we’re talking about race, gender, religion or politics. So I acknowledge that in my teaching. I see and validate all the colors that are in front of me. And I believe that when you approach students’ different colors through the lenses of love, barriers can be broken and a relationship can be formed, which allows information and education to be a little easier to digest.”

After graduating from Atlantic Union College with a degree in psychology, Hedrington headed immediately to the Massachusetts School of Law, where she earned her law degree.

In need of employment during her studies, she noticed an opening at SeaCoast, a public high school in Revere geared to students for whom traditional schools are not a good fit.

Hedrington left SeaCoast two years later, when her Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure results missed the school’s hiring deadline. But by that time, Hedrington said, “I decided that I definitely wanted to be the teacher that I needed when I was a kid — but never had.”

After a few years of teaching in Houston and Baltimore, she saw an ad for the position in Malden. Hedrington went in for the interview, she said, “and that was that.”

Please turn to **For the state’s**/Page 23

A return to empathy and the common good

We achieved a major victory for the common good on Election Day. Together, we held our breath in the weeks that followed as then-President Donald Trump and his co-conspirators sought to overturn the results — and as we witnessed the shocking insurrection at the Capitol on the day the results were to be certified.

But two weeks later, democracy re-emerged ever so fragile under a brilliant blue sky — on the same steps that had been overrun by an out-of-control mob dominated by white supremacists and adherents of various right-wing conspiracy theories. Joe Biden became the nation's 46th president, and Kamala Harris proudly became the first woman and the first person of color to serve as vice president. Several times on Inauguration Day, I went online and replayed the seconds when Harris stood up, straightened her back, raised her hand and smiled, preparing to be sworn in. It was a moment of pure pride and power.

The inauguration brought at least a little peace to millions of Americans amid this time of pandemic and political chaos. The new president called for an end to “this uncivil war,” and the ceremonies held out the promise of a return to the public good as a guiding principle.

With the Biden-Harris administration in place, we dare to dream that we can make progress toward a society that recognizes the value of advancing social, racial, economic and gender justice for all. But we are under no illusion: The challenges we face are momentous and complex. We will need to fight hard to achieve the victories that can make our vision a reality — and then we will need to fight to hold on to them.

Biden and Harris represent a sea change. But no matter who is in the White House, the only way to bring about progress throughout our society is through a strong social movement — a movement in which MTA educators and our fellow unionists are already engaged.

The battles ahead will be tough, but they are winnable. In order to build a citizenry that will cherish and protect democracy, we need to provide a full and rich educational experience for each student, from prekindergarten through college. That means funding our future as well as our present. It means leaving behind the madness of high-stakes testing. It means transforming our curriculum to reflect and affirm the rich and complex identities of our students. And it means continuing our rank-and-file organizing so that schools and colleges can safely return to in-person learning.

Biden and Harris represent a sea change. But no matter who is in the White House, the only way to bring about progress throughout our society is through a strong social movement — a movement in which MTA educators and our fellow unionists are already engaged.

We are now emerging from a bleak period in which the public discourse — strongly influenced by a president known for his vitriolic late-night Twitter rants, misogyny and appeals to racism — became raw. Many people whose needs were not being met had turned to disengagement and despair. Still others turned to groups seeking to uphold systemic racism, vilify people of color and immigrants, and advance the privatization of the public good, including our schools and colleges.

In short, a country in need of leadership characterized by integrity — a nation reeling from violent attacks on Black and brown people — was intentionally beset by unceasing turmoil. Feelings of vulnerability brought on by the spiraling pandemic only exacerbated tensions and pain.

So where do we go from here? First, we must all take a step toward acting more generously toward one another. We need to rebuild empathy. Rather than turning *on* each other, we need to turn *to* one another.

We as a nation must also turn toward both fortifying the labor movement and uniting community and labor, which can be the very heart and soul of modeling economic and social justice. For it is through the labor and community movements that we will build up justice and equality for everyone and disassemble the structures, policies and practices of racism that keep the pillars of oppression in place.

Long-term disinvestment in public education is one of these pillars. Following the status quo in curriculum, instruction and assessment is another. The ideology personified by Betsy DeVos — that education is a private good and not a public one — is a third.

The labor movement shows us a new way.

On the national level, we need a stimulus package that *urgently and sufficiently* aids small businesses and communities made more vulnerable by the pandemic. We need help for all Americans who are out of work, including young people, as well as those at risk of being evicted and those who have little to no access to child care or health care. And we need to ensure relief from student loan debt

while maintaining quality on our college campuses — which can only be achieved through full staffing. We need to win a Bill of Rights for Education Support Professionals and ensure the economic security and dignity of adjunct faculty members and retired workers.

On the state and local levels, we need to build on the steps forward we have advocated during the pandemic. Last March, the MTA and the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts fought to close school buildings and have classes taught remotely. Since then we have used our power to make significant gains in health and safety for educators and students, including COVID-19 surveillance testing for those who have returned to their school buildings. Now a vaccination program appears to be within reach, but it will not fulfill its goals without the MTA organizing to ensure the development of an efficient, effective and timely local distribution plan.

Early on in the pandemic, MTA Vice President Max Page and I issued *Facing the Coronavirus as a Just Community: An Agenda for Our Public Schools and Colleges and for the Common Good*. The document takes a stand on what public education and our communities need, both in the short term and as we begin to recover from the devastation the coronavirus has caused. In its pages, we stated: “We are entering a dangerous and unknown peak period of this pandemic. The way we respond will determine the way we fare in the end. We must turn toward each other and create communities of mutual aid and support. Through collective action by our members, other workers, families, and communities, we can organize local, statewide, and national common good campaigns.”

With an improved national discourse that prioritizes understanding and is supported by our activism and solidarity as union members, we will uphold the values that the MTA has stood for during its more than 175 years of inspired and determined advocacy. By fighting hard and leading toward a common purpose in the days ahead, we will help put our nation on a course that leads to a recognition of the public good and that places at its center the schools and colleges our students and communities deserve. We cannot settle for anything less.

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.

Race-related stress for educators of color

The Statewide ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) Network and the MTA Environmental Health and Safety Committee have undertaken a collaborative effort to better understand the impact of race-related stress on educators of color. The research will better prepare local unions to address this important issue within our school districts and colleges, support recruitment and retention of educators of color, and foster discussion and shared language within our workplaces. The group's initial findings are summarized here by Dr. Audrey Murph-Brown, MTA's director of training and professional learning; Dr. Scott Fulmer, a project manager at UMass Lowell and chair of the EH&S Committee; and Khafayat Kadiri, a research assistant in epidemiology at UMass Lowell. Kadiri's work was funded by a grant from the UMass Lowell Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace.

■ ■ ■

Self-reported educators of color, or EOC, represent between 6 percent and 7 percent of the membership of the MTA, making them a particularly vulnerable workplace population. In addition to job duties, educators of color play a huge role in supporting students of color as they navigate racial and social injustices. As much as students of color improve working conditions for educators of color,¹ research shows that there is an improvement in the outcomes for students of color due to the presence of educators of color.^{2,3}

Educators in general are leaving the field for a variety of reasons. They cite a lack of instructional resources and classroom materials, a reliance on high-stakes testing, and professional disrespect as some of the greatest sources of stress.⁴ For educators of color, racism is a social determinant of health that contributes to elevated stress within the educational environment.⁵

At the 2019 MTA Summer Conference, ALANA members conducted focus group discussions in which educators of color described their experiences with race-related stress in the workplace. One goal was to use the collected data to organize bargaining for the common good — providing a way for local associations to make transparent, and to disrupt, the racist structures that negatively impact educators of color.

The facilitators used five prompts to guide the discussions. Qualitative data analysis of the focus group results was conducted with NVivo software, including a word frequency analysis whose results are pictured with this article. The findings reaffirmed similar studies that have focused on challenges for educators of color.^{3,6}

#1: Describe what race-related stress means to you.

The following quotes are taken from participants' responses:

"In my home country, it feels different, not stressful. Here, it feels like you have to work double to be even."



"White people. They believe the color of the skin is an issue" and "White entitlement."

"Having to do all the roles to support students of color because nobody else steps up."

"Checking up on or excluded from work meetings."

#2: What contributes to race-related stress at work?

"Power is based on favoritism and nepotism within the local, so power shifts between and among white members."

Even in racially diverse communities, one participant noted, white parents hold more socioeconomic power: *"White students and parents have greater socioeconomic influence. Whites question grades, books."*

As shown in prior studies, having to tacitly support policies they disagreed with was stressful. (See the footnoted references to Kohli (2016), Partee (2014), Jackson, I., and Knight-Manuel, M. (2018).)

"Having to uphold the policies that you know are racist."

#3: How does race-related stress you experience at work affect you?

"Depression. Weekly therapy. Vomiting every day. Crying, insomnia, Sunday anxiety about Monday. I only want to do a good job."

"Children see how their white parents act toward people of color. The same conversations occur from generation to generation."

#4: What helps you to manage your race-related stress at work?

Participants responded:

"We have weekly conversations around race. In those conversations, we look at systems of racism."

"There is a group of Black women at work that I can huddle with."

"The bonds with students help me manage."

#5: What would alleviate race-related stress at work?

Participants responded:

"A common language so I can use the words 'white supremacy' and 'microaggression' without dealing with white fragility. If only the white people

Educators in general are leaving the field for a variety of reasons. They cite a lack of instructional resources and classroom materials, a reliance on high-stakes testing, and professional disrespect as some of the greatest sources of stress. For educators of color, racism is a social determinant of health that contributes to elevated stress within the educational environment.

around me and all of us had a shared common language."

"Monthly meetings, diversity dialogues. It's slow going, and there's a lot of work to do."

"Holding administrators accountable. Having a chance to confront and raise the realities, rather than them just transferring me out. Being able to speak up."

Seeking out mentors, identified in previous studies,^{2,3,7} was also mentioned:

"Finding mentors outside of my own college. Could the union help to identify mentors so you can talk to others when you are the only person of color in your role?"

The initial findings of this study show that many educators of color encounter workplace race-related stress and its adverse effects. These outcomes contribute to higher turnover for educators of color. It is also important to note that existing workplace policies affect race-related stress. Participants discussed how local associations should be able to move forward on policies that address work-related racial stress. With proper management and implementation, these suggestions have the potential to improve EOC experiences in the workplace and reduce turnover.

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Keeping up the pressure for safety

Organizing, bargaining and testing move forward amid vaccine slowdown

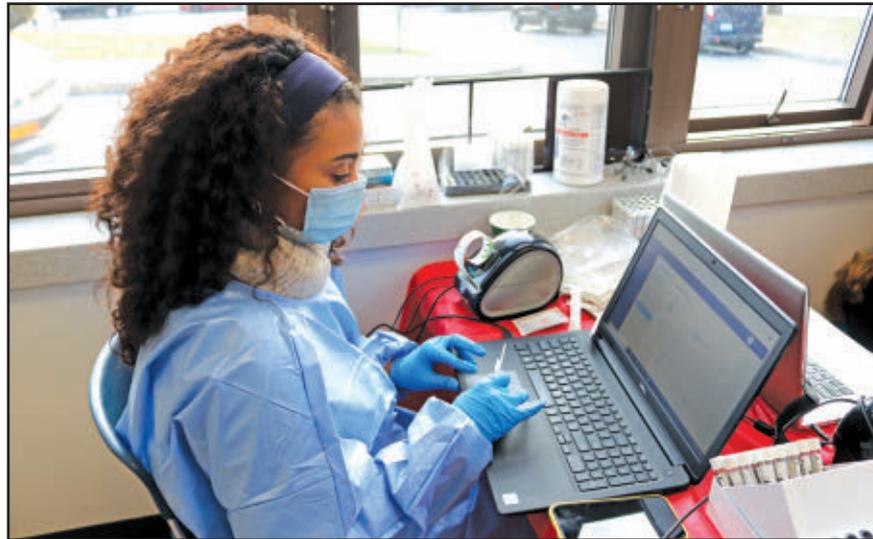
By Laura Barrett

A new COVID-19 testing program that MTA members have been advocating for since July is finally being put in place, but members are advised to not let their guard down. Testing needs to be coupled with a continuation of safe practices and vaccine injections for staff — now delayed — before the time will be right to significantly increase in-person learning.

“Our insistence on masks, hand-washing, distancing and — when needed — remote learning has kept schools from becoming superspreader sites,” said MTA President Merrie Najimy. “Nationally, more than 440,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 and many more are suffering from the long-term effects of the disease. This is no time to take down the guardrails that have kept us from going over the cliff.”

Organizing and bargaining with guidance developed by the MTA Environmental Health and Safety Committee continue to be critically important.

While agreements have been reached collegially with some school administrations, members in other locals are still having to protest through standouts and other means.



Watertown school nurse Bianca Jones, above, kept notes during pooled surveillance testing for COVID-19. At right, members of the Middleton Educators' Association held signs during a rally on Main Street in January over educators' concerns about health and safety issues. Members also demonstrated outside their schools during non-work hours.

Photos by Bob Duffy and Kevin Tierney

One example is in Middleton, where health concerns motivated a normally quiet local to take action. In January, Middleton Educators' Association members stood outside



their schools during non-work hours to protest the resumption of in-person learning after the holidays even though the community has had one of the highest coronavirus transmission rates

in the state. Members were also upset about the district's refusal to bargain over key safety protocols.

“We're asking for more transparency and for having honest conversations about what's best,” said Carrie Windmiller, co-president of the MEA. “We need them to step it up a notch with testing, with protocols for when we go remote, with a vaccine plan and with a quarantine plan.”

One of the MEA's demands may soon be met as the new COVID-19 testing program is rolled out across the state. Under a program unveiled in January, the state will fund weekly pooled testing of all students and staff through March 28 in districts that have applied to take part. After that, districts that want to continue the program must pick up the costs using federal COVID-19 relief funds. More than 200 districts have expressed interest in the program to the state, but a smaller number had completed the full application process by the end of January.

“Testing is so important for understanding where the virus is and taking steps to stop it from spreading,” said Scott Fulmer, chair of the EH&S Committee.

Several school districts, including Watertown and Medford, have already

Please turn to **Watertown**/Page 17

Unions offer proposal to get vital shots to educators

By Laura Barrett

Frustration has been mounting over the slow pace and lack of information about the state's COVID-19 vaccination plans for educators, so the MTA, AFT Massachusetts and the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts are taking the reins by proposing a public-sector collaboration to administer the vaccines locally.

“We are excited that the firefighters, who are trained in administering the vaccine, want to work with us to vaccinate educators across the state using their mobile units,” said MTA President Merrie Najimy. “We envision a multiunion effort involving EMTs, cities and towns, districts, and school nurses and other frontline workers who can make this happen.”

“Our plan is to start with a pilot program and then cover the whole state,” she added.

The MTA is also urging the state to follow the lead of 32 other states by including higher education

faculty and staff in Phase 2, along with educators in preK through grade 12.

As *MTA Today* went to press, the unions were planning to take their proposal to Health and Human Services Secretary Mary Lou Sudders and Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley during the first week of February.

“Communities are being forced to compete with one another for a life-saving resource,” Najimy said. “The governor should be working with all of the state's unions to roll out an efficient and effective program that will get the vaccine into people's arms instead of having unused doses sitting in freezers.”

“We need the state to give us the green light to move forward and set a timeline,” she added.

Others in Phase 2 include those age 65 and over, adults with two comorbidities, and other essential workers, such as transit, grocery, utility, food and agriculture, sanitation, public works and public health employees.

“Everyone in Phase 2 has good reason to be prioritized,” said Najimy. “When the state protects educators, it is also protecting students and families. Vaccinating educators allows more students to be taught in person, reducing the stress and burden on families to manage remote learning and helping more parents and caregivers to return to work. It's a win-win on so many levels.”

Vaccinating staff doesn't eliminate the risk for students.

“The CDC's latest guidance has been clear,” Najimy noted. “Preventing transmission in school means the spread must be controlled in the community.”

“Other mitigation strategies must include frequent, rapid in-school testing, ventilation systems that control infection, increasing distancing by reducing in-building density, masking and handwashing,” she continued. “Couple these with the vaccine and the risks can be minimized.”

Please turn to **MTA**/Page 15

Higher ed members keep up the fight

By Scott McLennan

The MTA's higher education members have been fighting hard against draconian staff and program cuts at public colleges and universities since the start of the coronavirus pandemic — and they aren't letting up now.

"We have been confronted by an array of outrageous actions — from the laying off and furloughing of thousands of workers to the elimination of career programs and support services that students rely on to the shuttering of child care centers that provide affordable options for students and workers, as well as practical experience for students," said MTA Vice President Max Page. "Given the federal aid coming into public colleges and universities plus the state's level funding of public higher education through June, none of these cuts are necessary.

"They are doing damage to our members, our campuses and our communities," Page added. "These executives are using the pandemic as an excuse to get rid of workers."

Higher education staff and faculty have also been placed at risk of contracting COVID-19 in their workplaces. Workers on various campuses report insufficient access to personal protective equipment and a lack of practical safety measures, such as adequate ventilation in buildings.

Making the situation worse is the fact that under the state's current schedule, higher education workers will receive COVID-19 vaccinations during Phase 3 of the rollout, behind their colleagues in preK-12 schools. MTA members have been lobbying Governor Charlie Baker's administration to move higher education workers into the second phase.

While MTA members have been relentless in demanding fair and just treatment, responses have run the gamut; at one point, UMass Trustee Michael O'Brien declared that the university system's substantial reserves could only be tapped for a crisis on the order of a giant asteroid striking Earth.

Several campus demonstrations in the fall led to a coordinated statewide action with the arts-activist group The Illuminator. The group worked with MTA members in November, visiting community college and university campuses as well as key locations in downtown Springfield and Boston. During their travels, the activists projected pro-education messages on numerous buildings.

Renae Gorman, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council chapter at Springfield Technical Community College, used the group's tour as part of her union's campaign to prevent the college from cutting seven popular career-path programs.

The MCCC chapter brought its fight to the college's Board of Trustees and to the public. Members demonstrated that the college had the funding to maintain the programs and that the students were benefiting greatly from them.

"These programs allowed students to go out and



Photos by Bob Duffy

MTA members teamed up with projectionists from The Illuminator, an arts-activist group, to display messages on campus and municipal buildings. Above, Brandi Dewar, a lead teacher at the now-shuttered Quinsigamond Community College Children's School, stood in front of an image of herself that was shown at Worcester State University. Below, Springfield's campanile served as a canvas for words of support for public higher education in Western Massachusetts.

get good jobs with a two-year degree," Gorman said. "These programs were valuable for Springfield."

In mid-January, the trustees overturned the administration's decision and restored five of the targeted programs. Gorman said that the union will keep fighting to win back the other two.

Salem State University, where union members have been in a pitched battle with President John Keenan, was another Illuminator site. Students, staff and faculty circulated petitions, reached out to state legislators, and wrote columns for local newspapers to emphasize the damage that Keenan's austerity plan — which included furloughs and other personnel reductions for all campus staff — was doing.

Massachusetts State College Association chapter President Tiffany Chenault decried the cuts as harmful to students and demoralizing to faculty and staff. Perhaps worst of all, she said, is that they are completely unnecessary.

Chenault pointed out that Keenan did not pull

back from his austerity measures even after the Legislature provided level funding to the university in the current year's state budget and the campus received \$10.7 million in federal COVID-19 stimulus aid.

University of Massachusetts campuses are facing similar challenges. Hundreds of workers are still on furlough even though the system received more than \$74 million in the most recent round of stimulus aid and enrollment figures did not plunge, as campus executives had predicted.

Several unions representing UMass staff and faculty are working together on a "Bring Them Back" campaign. Bolstering the coalition's argument that there is plenty of work to do, even with fewer students on campus, is the fact that UMass has retained and added to the number of non-unionized, unbenefited temporary employees at the same time that it is keeping full-time workers out of their jobs. "The university is exploiting low-paid workers and harming hundreds of families whose livelihoods have been connected to the campus," said Leslie Marsland, president of the University Staff Association.

UMass union members are also organizing around health and safety issues. Many workers who are on the campuses report a lack of access to personal protective equipment and up-to-date information on COVID-19 infections at their job sites.

The MTA is spearheading the Massachusetts Agrees campaign, an effort to raise public awareness about the harmful impacts on students and communities being unleashed by the unnecessary budget cuts. For more information about the campaign, visit massachusettsagrees.org.



'Get involved — have your voice be heard'

EMAC Conference focuses on fighting systemic racism and empowering members

By Jean Conley

Renowned antiracism scholar Dr. Ibram X. Kendi and NEA President Becky Pringle challenged MTA members to keep up the fight for racial and social justice during the recent Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Conference.

The conference, whose theme was “Overcoming 400 Years of Struggle — and Still We Rise,” featured uplifting presentations, a panel discussion and workshops to help meet educators’ need for self-discovery and empowerment.

It was held virtually over two weekends so the demand for workshops could be addressed. Offerings also included a morning session hosted by empowerment expert Maria Milagros, a panel Milagros moderated on ethnic minority leadership within the MTA, and entertainment by comedian and former Worcester educator Orlando Baxter.

The conference opened on Friday, Dec. 4, with EMAC members and MTA leaders greeting the audience in diverse languages. EMAC member Shauna Lee Manning, the Northeast director of the NEA American Indian/Alaskan Native Caucus, invited participants to learn more about ethnic minority activism in the NEA.

Workshops the following day and on Dec. 12 focused on helping educators fight back against systemic racism in the U.S., as well as on the challenges that educators face as they seek to push back.

“Two thousand twenty has been one hell of a year,” said EMAC Chair Sharmese Gunn, addressing an audience of more than 500 people over Zoom. Gunn said the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis and political turbulence made the year “twice as daunting” for people of color. She named the victims of high-profile racial killings — Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd — and noted the passing of Black heroes such as U.S. Representative John Lewis.

“Four hundred years of struggle — we have seen this before,” Gunn said. But as an antidote to despair, she called for action. “We lead by example,” she said. “Get involved — have your voice be heard.”

Pringle quoted from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s final speech: “Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days of challenge, to make America what it ought to be.”

The speech resonates today, the NEA president said. “In a year when individual and collective crises rocked the nation, public school educators have been called to rise, even while we continue to do our most important work, holding open the doors of opportunity for every single one of our students,” she said.

Educators “continued to stand in the gap for students when COVID-19 closed our schools,” she said, and the pandemic forced America to see students “caught in the digital divide.”



Dr. Ibram X. Kendi



Becky Pringle



Maria Milagros



Orlando Baxter

Photo of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi by Stephen Voss



The pandemic has forced the nation to face the truth, Pringle continued. The nation “saw students and families who don’t have enough to eat” and families “living in marginalized communities for whom those inequities are a reality,” she said. She urged fellow educators to keep up the fight and get others involved so that students “get what they need, when they need it.”

MTA Vice President Max Page thanked Pringle and said the MTA “looks forward to years of battling right alongside you.” He noted that the MTA had just celebrated its 175th anniversary. With 117,000 members working in Massachusetts public schools, colleges and universities, he added, the MTA “is a union of education workers committed to the proposition that we have an obligation and the capacity to build a more just Commonwealth.”

Then Page introduced Kendi, whom he described as “one of the leading public intellectuals of our time.”

Kendi is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University and the founding director of the BU Center for Antiracist Research. He is a contributing writer at *The Atlantic*, a CBS News contributor, the 2020-2021 Frances B. Cashin Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and the author of several best-selling books, including *How to Be an Antiracist*. One of his earlier books, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, won the National Book Award for Nonfiction, making him the award’s youngest winner ever.

In a wide-ranging conversation, MTA President Merrie Najimy and Kendi discussed the essential work of educators in creating antiracist curricula, safe spaces for all students, and antiracist unions.

Kendi’s central message in *How to Be an Antiracist*, Najimy noted, is that the opposite of being racist is not in simply being not racist, which allows people to hide behind neutrality, but rather to actively push back against racism, making someone antiracist. “We must become co-conspirators,” she said.

“There is an all-out attack on public education right now,” Kendi responded. “When someone does nothing, then the status quo persists.”

He pointed out that “there was a time when slaveholders wanted people to do nothing — because to do nothing in the face of the status quo of inequality is to allow that status quo to persist.”

Further, he said, we have to recognize that our society of racial inequities and disparities “is not because there is something wrong with Black or brown or Indigenous people. It’s because there is something wrong with policies and power.”

Najimy said that to become antiracists, educators have to question “our pedagogy, our discipline, our practices that set up our students of color to feel alienated.”

Kendi added that systemic racism is embedded in funding models for schools and campuses, as well as in standardized testing, reflecting the historical policies and practices of the “conjoined twins”: racism and capitalism.

Standardized tests in the U.S. were created and popularized by eugenicists to “prove” that Black people, women, poor people, and other oppressed groups were of inferior intelligence, he explained.

“By the 1960s, eugenics had become politically and academically unsound,” Kendi said, so the messaging had to switch. He said that the assertions of genetic inferiority were replaced by: “These kids are scoring at a lower level because they are coming from broken homes. They are taught in broken schools, with broken teachers, and they have broken parents.” The fault, he stated, was still being placed on individuals.

“All the while,” he continued, “what if the tests, created by the eugenicists, were the problem?”

Please turn to “We have to believe ...”/Page 18

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the MTA was at the center of activism and social change

By Laura Barrett

The MTA celebrated its 175th anniversary in November. The past three issues of *MTA Today* have featured stories from our history between 1845 and 1965, the year that the MTA won collective bargaining rights for teachers. In this edition we explore the period from 1965 to 1990, when the MTA became both a union and a professional association. It was a time of activism and strife that included the dawn of teacher strikes in the state, strong support for social change, and the devastating impact of Proposition 2½. 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 MTA publications during the period and an interview with former MTA Executive Director-Treasurer Edward Sullivan, who worked for the MTA in several different capacities from 1971 to 2008.

■ ■ ■

The late 1960s through the 1970s was a period of powerful social change, including the rise of public-sector labor activism, the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, and the drive for women's liberation.

In 1966, the American Teachers Association, a national African-American teachers' group with 60,000 members, voted overwhelmingly to merge with the NEA. The ratification vote, which took place at the NEA Representative Assembly, was described by a witness:

"Every state association demanded the privilege of seconding the motion for merger. The Unification Certificate was signed by the presidents and executive secretaries of both organizations while delegates sang 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.'"

In 1968, the MTA opened its Boston headquarters, and a few years later it added regional offices and hired more staff. A strike for economic justice by the New Bedford Educators Association in 1969 was quickly followed by teacher strikes in Woburn, Brockton, Somerville, Burlington, Fall River, Grafton and Franklin.

During the two-week Franklin strike, in 1977, Superior Court Judge John M. Greaney jailed more than 80 teachers and fined the association \$350,000.

One Franklin teacher who went to jail described her ordeal to MTA:

"We explained to the kids that their mother was going to jail. But try telling that to an eight-year-old. The first thing he wanted to know was, 'How long? For a year?'"

"I couldn't even answer him. And then there are the fines and lost salary ... I don't know what it will mean. But we'll manage. I did something I believe in very strongly, and I'd do it again — no matter what it cost."



Brearley Collection, Boston Public Library

Striking teachers marched in a picket line outside Woburn High School in 1970. Dozens of such actions took place in the 1970s and 1980s as teachers fought for social and economic justice.



MTA Today photo

Ginny McCabe, standing at a polling place in Cambridge on Election Day in 1980, was one of many MTA members who urged voters to reject Proposition 2½. Its passage was devastating.

Another jailed teacher shared his memories: *"I was settling down to sleep when another inmate yelled up from a lower tier: 'Hey, Teach, is this what you call collective bargaining?'"*

Sullivan, then an MTA attorney, recalled those heady days.

"You could feel the electricity," he said. *"A new type of activist leader was emerging. It was still a professional association, but we were on the move."*

Speaking of the Franklin strike, he said, *"Teachers from other locals came out in droves to support them."*

The MTA, whose members were then and still are predominantly women, also fought against continued discriminatory practices.

In 1973, the MTA established the Committee on the Advancement of Women in Education. Six years later it celebrated a major victory when the state Supreme Judicial Court ruled that it was unlawful sex discrimination to exclude pregnancy from sick-leave coverage.

The fight for ethnic minority rights gained new momentum in the 1970s, first at the NEA and then in state affiliates.

In 1979, the MTA established its Minority Affairs Committee. Today, the MTA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee is one of several association groups fighting for racial justice.

Louise Gaskins, a leading spokesperson for minority affairs at the MTA and the NEA, said that Black educators had struggled for equal treatment for years. She concluded, *"Until you let people in power know that you are interested in changing how things are, things will remain the same. Our goal is simple: We intend to catch up."*

The MTA also expanded its membership base to include public higher education.

In 1974, with the passage of collective bargaining legislation, employees of public higher education were finally able to enjoy the same rights as their K-12 colleagues. One campus activist told MTA:

"What existed [before] was basically a weak system of reaction — some faculty member would get fired, and the others would get together and hire a lawyer to defend him. Or a committee would be elected to handle the problem. But this is changing"

Please turn to **Passage**/Page 21

Statements by candidates for NEA Director seats

The MTA is holding an election for two seats on the NEA Board of Directors. The Massachusetts seats will be filled by a vote of the active membership in March and April, in tandem with NEA Representative Assembly state and regional delegate elections. All seats are for three-year terms

beginning Sept. 1, 2021, and expiring Aug. 31, 2024, in accordance with the NEA's fiscal year.

Ballots will be provided to all MTA/NEA active members who are eligible to vote.

Candidates were given the opportunity to submit biographical statements and photos. Submissions

received in compliance with the MTA's deadlines are printed on this page.

For more information, contact John Connelly of the Division of Governance and Administration at 617.878.8305 or jconnelly@massteacher.org.

Alexizendria (Zena) Link — Newton Teachers Association

My name is Zena Link. I am honored to be running for reelection for a second term as an NEA Director. I've been a public school educator teaching middle and high school English in urban and suburban school



Zena Link

districts for over a decade. During that time, I had the opportunity to participate in various MTA initiatives including No on 2 and the Fund Our Future campaign. In addition, I've served the MTA in various capacities on the local, state and national levels for the past six years and currently chair the Professional Standards and Practices Committee for the NEA.

I'm respectfully asking for your vote so I may continue my commitment to promoting educators' voice through collective power, advocating for

policy reforms and fighting for equitable schools for students, families and educators.

If you are a proponent of educators reclaiming their ability to be transformative agents rather than keepers of policies and practices designed to harm vulnerable students and maintaining the integrity of public education, please consider voting for me.

A vote for Zena Link is a vote for

- Collective Power
- Policy Reforms
- Equitable Schools

John Bracey — Belmont Education Association

I come from a long line of educators, union members and activists who have instilled in me a respect for union work, solidarity, and fighting the hard fights for justice. My work as a unionist is heavily informed by this upbringing.



John Bracey

As a public school educator in Massachusetts,

I've spent the past decade teaching Latin to middle and high school students. During this time, I have served as a union building representative, a delegate to multiple MTA Annual Meetings, and a member of several union committees and action teams. I am a proud member of the progressive group Educators for a Democratic Union. I also present workshops on racial justice and equity for educators around the country.

Here in Massachusetts, I first came to understand the power of our unions through the No on 2 campaign. Through phone banking, testifying at the State House and marching in the streets, I came to

know the strength and passion of our rank and file. That level of solidarity won us decisive victories against powerful opponents and is the key to winning the battles that lie ahead.

I advocate for social justice and equity in education. I promote policies that will lead to substantive, systemic, and material improvements to the lives of educators, students, families and communities. I fight against the authoritarian forces who place profits ahead of our health and safety.

It would truly be an honor to serve on the NEA's Board of Directors. I humbly request your vote.

Christine L. Mulrone — Framingham Teachers Association

My name is Christine Mulrone, and I ask for your vote for NEA Director. I have witnessed the amazing power of our union and collective voices as a delegate to both the NEA Representative Assembly and the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates over the past 15 years. I wholeheartedly believe in the work our union does in fighting for social, racial and educational justice for our communities as well as



Christine Mulrone

safe working conditions for all educators.

I am currently in my 22nd year in public education, working as an educator in Title I, middle school math, and severe special needs education. I'm the president of the Framingham Teachers Association (almost 1,300 strong) and serve on several committees including NEA Planning, Massachusetts Child, and LGBTQ+. Additionally, I am the past president of The Massachusetts Child and past chair of the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee.

I believe that the MTA/NEA should be a member-driven organization and passionately advocate for transparency in decision-making at the local, state and national levels. I support a

moratorium on high-stakes testing, fair wages, and educational equity for our community. We are stronger together, especially when we speak out in unity! I know how important it is to have a voice that represents all members such as higher ed, teachers, ESPs, and retirees when decisions are being made that affect educators across the Commonwealth. I believe that as an NEA Director, I will be that voice.

These passions and beliefs are why I am running for NEA Director for Massachusetts. I have fought, and will continue to fight, for the schools our communities deserve. I will work tirelessly to challenge threats to public education and for the equity our students need to be successful. Please support Christine Mulrone for NEA Director.

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Reflecting on 'assault on our democracy'

The shock of what happened on Jan. 6 “will linger — and it should,” MTA President Merrie Najimy wrote to members two days after the insurrection in Washington, D.C.

“The storming of the Capitol by a violent mob spurred on by President Donald Trump is the disastrous climax of an orchestrated effort to dismantle democracy via denigrating public institutions, undermining the common good, and stoking the most despicable white supremacist flames of racism and hate,” she continued. “What unfolded in the waning days of the Trump administration had nothing to do with differing political points of view. Instead, we saw an assault on our democracy by extremists who do not share the values we aspire to instill in our students.”

People all over the country — and around the world — were left speechless, but educators pivoted immediately to their gravest concern: What would the rampage mean for their students and students’ families? And how could they put the events of that day into context?

MTA Today talked to three educators about how they helped their school and college communities process what they had witnessed.

Stephanie Hunt

Hunt is the program coordinator for Brookline High School’s African American and Latino Scholars Program. What follows is a shortened version of a letter she sent to colleagues the day after the insurrection.

Our Senior Scholars are struggling right now. Deeply. They are shaken by what they witnessed take place in the Capitol yesterday and are having real difficulty making sense of it and seeing a way through it. Many of these students participated in social justice demonstrations over the summer and cannot understand the difference between the responses to



Stephanie Hunt

them and to those who rioted in D.C. yesterday.

I know we are all struggling with this. But it is important to note that our students of color are struggling in different ways. More than one student cried during seminar today. One said, amongst tears, “How can I focus on my problem set when my very existence feels under attack?” Others agreed.

I know that many teachers took time out of today’s class to have conversations (thank you!), but I ask that we take it a step further and truly give students, especially our students of color, the time and space to take care of themselves without fear of late credit/penalty.

Amel Ahmed

Ahmed is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at UMass Amherst.

I always encourage my students to think about events comparatively — across both political and historical contexts. I think this is especially important for understanding the events of Jan. 6. Discussions of democracy backsliding in the United States over the past several years have often looked to examples in other countries, such as Hungary, Turkey or Venezuela.

These are all places where a democratically elected leader corroded democratic institutions in the quest for executive aggrandizement.

These examples, while instructive, are limited in the U.S. context for many reasons, the most important of which is that the political class in the United States is deeply invested in elections as the means of gaining power. This does not mean that democratic backsliding cannot happen, but that it will probably look different.

Historically, the way that democracy has expanded and contracted in the United States has been through the franchise and through voting rights. And this is likely what we are going to



Amel Ahmed

see moving forward: universal condemnation of violence, but a fierce fight over voting rights and specifically the restoration of the *Voting Rights Act*.

Saul Ramos

Ramos is a one-to-one paraeducator and Brailleist who is in his 22nd year of working for the Worcester Public Schools. He currently works at the Roosevelt Elementary School.

Ramos was astonished at the scenes of brutality and the blatant racism on display at the Capitol. “There were zip ties. Was this going to turn into a hostage situation? And there was a noose set up outside the Capitol. That by itself it such a symbol of hate.”

And yet, Ramos said, some elected officials “didn’t get this until they themselves felt endangered — until they were in the middle of it.”

“We’ve gone through many scary moments recently in our history in the United States, but this was a real eye-opener,” Ramos said.

The next day, before having the students begin their day remotely, Ramos said he and the staff members he works with directly — teachers, ESPs and specialists — decided that they wouldn’t bring up the riot in classes because “these students are very young.”

If a child asked directly, he or she would be brought to a breakout room and the parents would be invited to join the discussion. Middle and high school educators were prepared to address the incident with their students more directly.

Ramos said the event is an important reminder that students, no matter how young or old, are always watching.

“To me, that’s the important thing,” he said. “The kids are always watching. They learn from us. They may not talk about it, but we always need to set a good example for them.”



Saul Ramos

MTA activism helped Biden and Harris in swing states

By Scott McLennan

MTA Retired activist Neil Clarke has learned that nothing in politics is a slam dunk.

“In the first election I could cast a ballot for president, I voted for McGovern. I came out proud as punch. I *knew* he was going to win,” Clarke recalled. History, of course, told a different story in 1972. The incumbent president, Richard Nixon, trounced George McGovern.

Saying he no longer relies on instincts, Clarke puts in a lot of work to support pro-public-education

candidates as one of the MTA’s Senate District Coordinators and political activists. In the 2020 election, that included working for Joe Biden.

When Biden won the Democratic Primary in Massachusetts, there was little fear that incumbent President Donald Trump would take the state in November. But so much of the rest of the country was in play that Clarke joined dozens of MTA members — and a legion of NEA members across the nation — in making calls to fellow educators in states where the race was tight.

He urged them to vote for Biden and Democratic vice presidential candidate Kamala

Harris — and he made sure they had firm plans to cast their ballots.

“You don’t want to wake up the next morning saying ‘woulda, coulda, shoulda,’” Clarke said.

The NEA and the MTA backed the Biden-Harris ticket, which was not surprising given the hostile anti-student, anti-educator and anti-union policies put forth by Trump and his education secretary, Betsy DeVos.

Following Biden’s victory, NEA President Becky Pringle said that educators are encouraged “in knowing that there is finally a true partner in

Please turn to **Member activism**/Page 15

ESPs to discuss advancing preK-12 and higher ed goals

By Jean Conley

Advancing the MTA PreK-12 ESP Bill of Rights and higher education bargaining goals will both be major subjects at this year's MTA Education Support Professionals Conference.

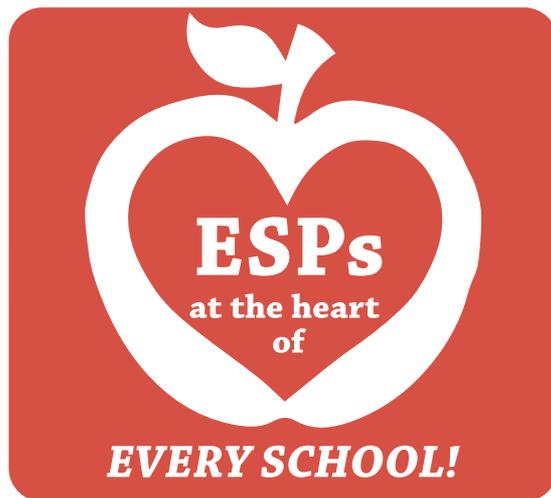
The event will be held virtually on Friday and Saturday, April 9 and 10. Registration will begin early in March. All conference presentations and workshops will be free for MTA preK-12 and higher education ESPs.

"The committee is developing an event that will allow ESPs to find their voices — and use them," said ESP Committee Co-Chair Yahaira Rodriguez.

Events on Friday will focus on individual appointments for members and local unions to connect with experts about licensure, retirement and membership data. Signup will be available when registration begins.

On Saturday morning, a "welcome session" will allow ESPs to share their challenges and successes of the past year. The session will be followed by a number of workshops and a separate breakout session for local treasurers.

During the welcome session, participants will



be treated to a favorite annual conference event — presentation of the MTA ESP of the Year award.

The statewide award honors an ESP who has been nominated by their local association as one who stands up for workers' rights and stands out for making a difference in the lives of students.

MTA President Merrie Najimy, Vice President Max Page, 2020 ESP of the Year Sonia Fortin and the recipient of the 2021 ESP of the Year award will address the audience.

Large-group workshop sessions will follow, covering subjects of universal interest to all ESPs, whether they work in higher education or preK-12 schools. Specific topics were still being finalized as *MTA Today* went to press.

Advancing the goals of the MTA ESP PreK-12 Bill of Rights will be a significant topic of discussion throughout the conference.

The Bill of Rights, written last year by the MTA ESP Standards Task Force, was created after a survey of all preK-12 ESPs across the state.

It encompasses pay and benefits, job security, professional development and recognition, and affordable educational opportunities for ESPs to help strengthen their careers. The document is being used to help develop future bargaining and legislative priorities for the MTA.

Before the close of the conference on Saturday, attendees will have a chance to learn about the MTA ESP Leadership program and other opportunities for union involvement at the state and national levels.

The conference is expected to conclude by 1 p.m. on Saturday.

Watch [massteacher.org/esp](https://www.massteacher.org/esp) for more information about this year's conference.

BESPAN works to build connections and union solidarity

By Audra Makuch

The connection between Education Support Professionals and teachers must be stronger than ever to help everyone attain better contracts and working conditions.

That's the philosophy behind the Boston Area ESP and Accomplices Network, or BESPAN, a new group numbering a few dozen people in preK-12 locals that has grown to include MTA members from Belmont, Lexington, Malden, Somerville and Sudbury.

The goal is to build genuine solidarity between all members in a local so that, for example, everyone understands that the work of the union isn't finished if ESPs are left to fight for basic dignity and a living wage on their own.

Members of the network meet monthly for trainings and strategy sessions — and to hold conversations aimed at raising up the voices of ESPs in each local as they work together with teachers toward shared goals.

Amy Morin, a specialized instructional assistant in Lexington and a Lexington Education Association Executive Board member, said that as a founding member of BESPAN, she worked with fellow ESPs and a few teachers "to put together a group that wouldn't just hold meetings, but would really help non-ESPs understand the challenges facing us in and out of the schools."

Recent meetings of BESPAN have included

trainings for building representatives and discussions about ways to make locals more ESP-friendly. They have also focused on rewriting bylaws to make them more inclusive of all members, developing bargaining strategy and expanding negotiating teams.

"As members of the same union, we need to foster ESP leadership and partner in support of contracts that reflect ESPs' importance to our community," said John Sullivan, a special education teacher and president of the Belmont Education Association. Sullivan is also a founding member of BESPAN.

Typical conversations at meetings might cover sharing of concerns and experiences — as well as ideas for solutions — when locals fight for stronger ESP contracts. ESPs are free to talk about ways in which they feel disrespected or undermined by administrators or teachers, and teachers can discuss how they feel disconnected from ESPs. The conversations are aimed at helping everyone involved see how school and union structures can keep people apart, to their shared detriment.

"If we really understand each other and have a real conversation, we can face these challenges together," said Morin.

If you are interested in learning more about BESPAN or planning a similar group in your area of the state, please contact mtaesp@massteacher.org or call 617.878.8260.



Amy Morin said she worked with fellow ESPs and a few teachers "to put together a group that wouldn't just hold meetings, but would really help non-ESPs understand the challenges facing us in and out of the schools."

Early career educators discuss key issues

By Scott McLennan

In so-called “normal times,” new educators face countless challenges. This school year — with COVID-19 upending teaching practices at every level and concerted efforts being made across the country to address the impact of systemic racism — educators just embarking on their careers have even more on their plates.

The MTA Early Career Educators Conference, held virtually on Saturday, Nov. 14, provided space for those who have been on the job for five years or less to air their concerns and receive guidance — both from their peers and from colleagues who have spent more time in the field.

Organized by the MTA New Member Committee, the ECEC drew more than 100 participants, from prekindergarten through higher education. Via Zoom, they attended workshops and panel discussions on topics ranging from student trauma caused by racism to burnout on the job.

MTA President Merrie Najimy and Vice President Max Page welcomed the group and acknowledged how difficult serving as an educator has become — especially now.

Educators have a variety of viewpoints on the best ways to meet their students’ needs when it comes to remote and in-person learning models, Najimy said, adding that there are no simple solutions.

“The risk assessment is a personal decision. Not everyone faces the same circumstances,” she said. “Now is the time to turn *to* each other and not turn *on* each other. Let’s build back empathy for each other and for families struggling to make the right choices.”

Najimy, Page and conference keynote speaker Zena Link, an English language arts teacher and

EARLY CAREER EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

Newton Teachers Association member, pointed to the pressures caused by factors such as the state’s failure to equitably and fully fund public education and uniformly provide racial justice training.

“Educators are historically asked to go into classrooms unprepared to deal with all of the issues that we are asked to deal with,” said Link, who formerly served on the New Member Committee.

Link, who is now a member of the NEA Board of Directors, has been a leader in speaking out on the need for equitable funding for public schools, colleges and universities, as well as for racial justice.

During her ECEC presentation, she referenced a series of surveys and noted that few educators are given meaningful training on ending racial inequities in public education as part of the teacher certification process. She urged the audience to recognize that belonging to a union opens up pathways to advocate for change and provides a forum to work with colleagues in assessing the needs of educators, students and communities.

Link ended her address with the proverb, “None of us is as smart as all of us.”

“The *us* here is the union,” she said.

Following two workshop sessions, educators gathered for panel discussions according to levels taught, from prekindergarten through grade 5 through the college level. Educators from the New

“Let’s build back empathy for each other and for families struggling to make the right choices,” said MTA President Merrie Najimy.

Member Committee were panelists and moderators, feeding the conversation on a broad array of topics.

The high school panel featured a discussion on remote learning.

“I want to do all of these things but can only do some of what I want, given what we can do with remote learning. I’m learning to be really flexible,” said Agawam teacher Kathryn Procter.

The preK-5 discussion turned to the practical challenges of lesson preparation, with Stoughton teacher Jessica Kumar describing how she has had to rework her planning process to accommodate the demands of hybrid learning.

The middle school panel broke down the differences between middle school and junior high school models. Though many participants expressed a preference for middle schools’ signature team approach to teaching, they acknowledged that the realities of scheduling to keep students safe during the coronavirus pandemic have “messed up” the practices that educators have been used to.

The higher education panel focused heavily on union participation. Bridgewater State University professor Jenna Mendell explained how she became more active in her Massachusetts State College Association chapter after she was able to challenge an unjust performance review that was ultimately rescinded.

“I came to understand the value of the union,” she said, noting that she is now her local’s grievance chair. “I wanted to pay it forward.”



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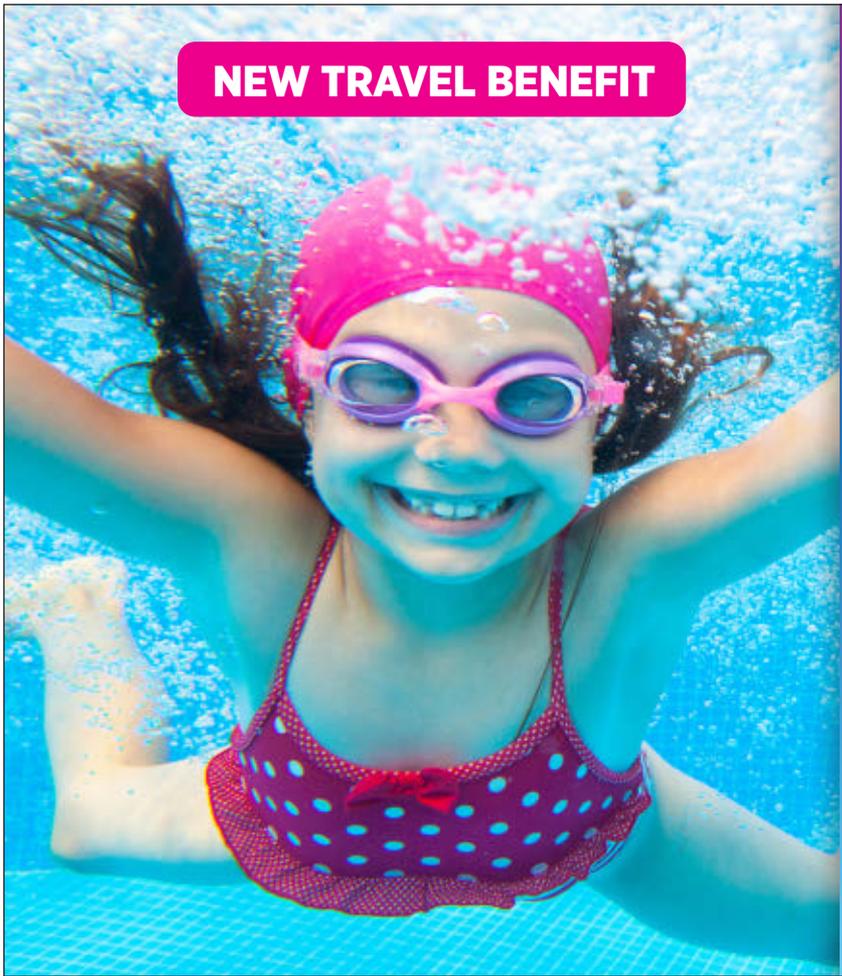
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Member activism helped ensure victory

Continued from Page 11

the White House who will listen, value the ideas, and act in the best interest of students, educators and families.”

MTA President Merrie Najimy said that the defeat of Trump is crucial to the union’s work in promoting education equity and racial justice.

“We know our power comes from our members and not from elected officials,” Najimy said. “But it’s great that we will not have to endure another four years of such disgraceful rejection of the values that unionists and public education advocates hold dear.”

Hatfield reading specialist Sarah Woodward, also an MTA SDC who made phone calls for Biden, said that whenever she reached someone who felt that voting didn’t matter, she would spark a conversation by saying something like, “I’m an educator, too, and this is how the election affects me.”

Woodward said she was able to connect with other educators around issues such as health and safety and that she listened to the concerns of educators in many other states where schools are requiring more in-person learning despite the continuing coronavirus pandemic.

The election victory signals a brighter future to Woodward, who noted the historic moment of having the country’s first woman — and the first



President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are bringing educators a sense of hope.

Black American and the first South Asian American — become the nation’s vice president.

“This election really affected the lives of people who value public education, and I was scared of the outcome because the country felt so divided,” Woodward said. “But I watched the Inauguration and saw so many women up there and saw so many ‘firsts’ that I felt a lot of hope and a lot of promise.”

MTA and locals take action to expedite shots for educators

Continued from Page 6

The MTA’s efforts to expedite the educator vaccinations have been bolstered by local actions. Dozens of locals and school superintendents in the Northeast, Metro and Cape regions have sent letters to the governor urging him to vaccinate school staff quickly. Nearly 4,000 MTA members, using the Action Network tool linked to from the MTA website, have made a similar case for both school and higher education employees. The state took notice. “Until we have an approved plan, members should keep sending those messages,” said Najimy.

Once a plan is approved, the unions will run an education and social media campaign to generate enthusiasm and solidarity among members and encourage them to participate. The MTA will be producing a button that will let people know that an educator has been vaccinated.

“With member activism and support from other unions and the state, we believe that we can soon make this goal a reality,” Najimy concluded.

For updates, visit massteacher.org.

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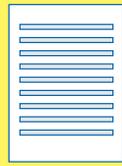
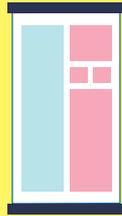
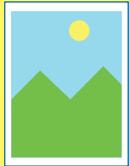
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Watertown testing program provides key lessons

Continued from Page 6

implemented testing on their own. *MTA Today* visited Watertown on Jan. 21 to see how it works.

In the gray light of early morning, cars rolled into the parking lot at Watertown Middle School and pulled up to two windows at the front of the building. Above the windows, someone had affixed a giant yellow “M” since the scene looked like a McDonald’s drive-through.

One by one, staff members drove up to the windows, got out of their cars, swabbed their own nostrils and deposited their swabs into a tube handled by the two school nurses running the program, Michelle Laracy and Bianca Jones. The whole process took a matter of seconds.

“I won’t lie to you — it was a lot of work to set it up,” Laracy said. However, now that they have worked out the logistics, she said, it is busy but manageable — and well worth the effort.

Laracy and Jones typically test 150 to 170 staff members an hour, or more than 300 a week, using a PCR — polymerase chain reaction — system. In Watertown, each staff member receives individual results in about 24 hours.

The nurses also developed protocols for pooled testing of students, which began in late October. In the elementary schools, a school nurse comes to each classroom with a cart and tests all of the students in less than five minutes. Middle school students are tested during their mask breaks, and high school students line up at stations during their lunch hour or during gym class.

In addition to doing the tests, the nurses have to take care of logistics, such as making sure the tubes are labeled properly and shipped to the right places, and that supplies are ordered. Learning the software programs to keep track of everything also took work.

Staff members receive their own results. Where students are concerned, when a pooled result comes back positive, Laracy and Jones call everyone in the group and have them quarantine until they return — usually the next day — for a second test.

In Watertown, the second test is also a PCR test that takes about 24 hours to process, so everyone retested must remain in a brief quarantine until the results are received.

As of Jan. 25, 600 pooled tests had been conducted, and nine had come back positive. Thirteen staff members also tested positive.

Although the district’s positivity rate has been well under 1 percent, the information has been invaluable for identifying and quarantining asymptomatic students and staff.

“There has been no spread in schools,” said Laracy.

The process will be even faster for districts taking part in the new state program. They will have access to the Abbott BinaxNOW antigen test for the second test. Results are available in about 15 minutes, which means fewer people having to quarantine while awaiting word. Staff tests also will be pooled rather than done individually.



“I feel better knowing the school is taking an active role in testing as many people as possible,” said Amy Hantson, a first-grade teacher in Watertown. Her community has moved forward with a pooled testing program that uses the same approach as efforts currently being rolled out in school districts across the state.

Photo by Bob Duffy

Although the district’s positivity rate has been well under 1 percent, the information has been invaluable for identifying and quarantining asymptomatic students and staff.

On the day *MTA Today* visited Watertown, three middle school students demonstrated the process. Middle and high school students can swab their own noses, while adults swab the noses of elementary school students. Sixth-grader Declan Chapron matter of factly blew his nose, disinfected his hands, and then quickly swabbed each nostril before depositing the swab in a glass tube.

Declan said that the testing program makes it easier to visit family and enables him to learn in school more safely.

“If they didn’t do testing and someone in school didn’t know they had it, then maybe they’d take their mask off to get a drink of water and it could spread the germs,” he said. “It’s comforting that there’s testing.”

That sense of comfort is widespread. Watertown Superintendent Dede Galdston said in a state-produced webinar that only 14 percent of the parents and staff surveyed said they were comfortable with in-person learning without testing, but that number rose to 78 percent with testing.

Galdston and the superintendents from Medford and Salem had advice for other districts planning to start a program.

Have a strong team in place. That could include school nurses, Education Support Professionals and parents. Parent-teacher organizations and parent volunteers can be enlisted to help encourage caregivers to sign their children up. Salem made testing mandatory for students participating in sports.

Universal staff participation. The unions in these districts played a key role in getting members

on board and negotiated protocols, as well as stipends for those who have to administer the testing program.

Do not commingle your pools. Keep student and staff tests within their cohorts as much as possible, since mixing pools could mean quarantining many people unnecessarily.

Make sure parent consent forms are translated into languages other than English and reach out to communities of color. Frequent communication to parents is necessary, especially to marginalized communities. In Medford, for example, Superintendent Dr. Marice Edouard-Vincent produced a public service announcement of herself being tested to encourage communities of color to participate.

Additional staff may have to be brought on to do the testing, and/or existing staff may have to be paid stipends to work additional hours. In Watertown, school nurses receive stipends for their extra work on testing. Some districts may have to hire staff or contract with a testing service. The state program is designed to make those services available.

Set up student testing in a way that is least disruptive to education. In Watertown, testing from a cart works well. In Medford, testing is also fast as classes of students are brought to a testing station within the schools.

The best advocates for the program are staff and students who have participated already. After depositing her swab in Watertown, Amy Hantson said that word-of-mouth among students had resulted in nearly all of her first-grade class participating. Students just needed to hear from other students that swabbing doesn’t hurt.

The program has given her greater peace of mind. “I have a young son and elderly parents,” Hantson said. “Coming back to work at first was a bit nerve-racking for me. I feel better knowing the school is taking an active role in testing as many people as possible. It makes me feel a little safer coming to school at this time.”

“We have to believe that the ‘impossible’ is possible”

Continued from Page 8

Najimy noted that in Massachusetts, score disparities on tests are used to justify privatizing public resources. “Charterization, takeovers, MCAS,” she said. But she told the audience that she often hears that high-stakes tests can’t be eliminated until there is a replacement. She went on to pose the question, “Should we just replace the MCAS with something else — or do something different?”

Kendi responded that standardized testing is based on something that has never been proven: the theory of general intelligence.

Intelligence can’t be measured the same way as a person’s weight, he said, adding, “What I’ve been arguing is that intelligence is as subjective as beauty.”

As to the question of providing a replacement, Kendi offered up an alternative: “Instead of trying to test students based on how much they know, why can’t we test students based on how much they have a desire to know? That’s not bound by class, or race, or gender. In my college classroom, I want the kids who have the greatest *desire* to know.”

Bringing back joy and hope is central to the fight

for equity in public education, Kendi and Najimy agreed.

“I just believe — and know — that in order to bring about systemic change, we have to believe that the ‘impossible’ is possible,” Kendi said. “And the ‘impossible’ has happened time and time again — particularly when people have organized together in this country.”

For more information about the 2020 EMAC Conference, visit massteacher.org/emacprogram. To view videos, visit massteacher.org/tpl.

MTA RETIRED VIRTUAL SPRING Brunch

Let your voice be heard! Join your colleagues, representatives of the MTA Retired Members Committee and guest presenters for the 2021 MTA Retired Spring Brunch. Due to uncertainties regarding the timing of the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, the annual Retired spring brunches are being combined into one virtual event this year. Watch massteacher.org/retired for the date of the event and more information.

With morning and afternoon sessions, the 2021 Spring Brunch will follow the format of the highly successful 2020 MTA Retired Gathering. Participants will learn about issues of interest, including MTA-backed legislation to ensure a fair and dignified retirement and the state budget. A panel discussion will focus on the COVID-19 vaccine, its effect on our senior population, and our progress in the fight for a safe return to schools and colleges.

Registration begins soon at massteacher.org/retired



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Student loans: Will there be changes ahead?

Any changes to student loan repayment being considered by the Biden-Harris administration were far from concrete as this edition of *MTA Today* went to press. A lot could happen regarding student loans in the months ahead — but that doesn't mean that you should just wait and see. Borrowers need to have a plan of action, so please read on.

Payment forbearance was set to expire on Jan. 31, but on his first day in office, **President Joe Biden extended that payment holiday to Sept. 30.** Even though you won't be required to make payments on Direct loans, you will be credited as having made a payment if you are a candidate for Public Service Loan Forgiveness. The payment suspension doesn't apply to commercially held Federal Family Education Loans, Perkins loans or any private loans. Anyone holding these types of loans should contact the servicer or lender directly to see if any relief options are available.

The next steps depend on several factors, including whether another federal stimulus package is offered. The stimulus package that was passed in December — which was smaller than many had hoped for — could cause the administration to take aggressive action on student loans, and this could involve some measure of federal student loan forgiveness.

Members of the new administration have been outspoken in the past about forgiving up to \$10,000 in student loan debt, which would effectively wipe out the balances of roughly 15 million loan holders. About two-thirds



of borrowers owe more than \$10,000, but a reduction of their balances would still make monthly payments more affordable. The American Rescue Plan, which the incoming president announced on Jan. 14, didn't include any of the sweeping debt forgiveness measures that had been discussed, but that doesn't mean those options are off the table.

Opinions vary, however, on whether it would be legal to forgive student debt by executive order, so counting on this happening would not be prudent. **Plan to repay your current balances.** If your debt is canceled or reduced, you will be pleasantly surprised.

Finally, what changes, if any, *might* we see in regard to loan forgiveness? Here's a quick summary of what has been discussed. But please bear in mind that these changes would have to be enacted by Congress, and they could be changed significantly or dropped from any bill that makes it to the president's desk.

- The \$10,000 in loan forgiveness would probably apply to undergraduate loan balances only, not to loans used for graduate school, and would likely phase out for people earning \$125,000 or more.

- Income-based repayment plans would be revised. Borrowers would pay 5 percent of discretionary income

rather than the current 10 percent to 20 percent.

- Forgiveness of undergraduate loans for borrowers who provide a public service would be capped at \$50,000, with \$10,000 forgiven after each year of qualifying employment.

- Public Service Loan Forgiveness would not be replaced, but it would be overhauled to include more loan types and repayment plans. Half of the borrower's debt would be wiped out after five years, and any remaining balance could be forgiven after 120 payments.

Those with Federal Family Education Loans, and especially those who also have Direct loans, should create a specific strategy for their *current* situation. Assistance is available to MTA members from Cambridge Credit Counseling. If you are unsure which factors to consider, please contact Todd Friedhaber by emailing tfriedhaber@cambridge-credit.org or calling 800.527.7595, ext. 5373, or contact Martin Lynch at mlynch@cambridge-credit.org or 413.883.3390.

Also consider attending one of the free webinars that MTA Benefits produces with Friedhaber and Lynch every month. They are available to help members at no cost, and Cambridge Credit Counseling representatives are ready to discuss the impact of whatever changes are made by the new administration.

Visit mtabenefits.com/student-loan-counseling for more information and to register for a webinar.



Merrie Najimy



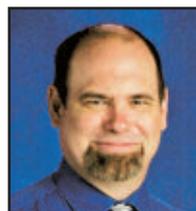
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Maryann C. Robinson



Dale Forest



Jacqueline Gorrie



Ryan Hoyt



Peter Lahey



Jacquelyn Lawrence



Yahaira Rodriguez

MTAB Annual Meeting

The MTA Benefits Annual Meeting was held virtually on Nov. 18. From left to right in the top row are MTA President Merrie Najimy, MTA Vice President Max Page, MTA Executive Director-Treasurer Lisa Gallatin, MTA Benefits President Maryann C. Robinson and MTA Benefits Director Dale Forest. From left to right in the bottom row are MTA Benefits Directors Jacqueline Gorrie, Ryan Hoyt, Peter Lahey, Jacquelyn Lawrence and Yahaira Rodriguez.



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Passage of Proposition 2½ hit public education hard

Continued from Page 9

today. *Faculties are winning genuine authority in matters which affect them. The agent for this change is collective bargaining.*"

The MTA also helped pass important legislation to improve public education for students, including:

- Chapter 622, which assured students access to all programs without regard to sex, race, religion or national origin.

- The *Transitional Bilingual Education Act*, guaranteeing bilingual education to students from myriad language backgrounds.

- Chapter 766, guaranteeing appropriate services to the state's more than 100,000 special needs students.

■ ■ ■

The promise of the 1970s gave way to despair in 1980 with passage of Proposition 2½, a statewide ballot question that strictly limited local property tax collections and eliminated fiscal autonomy for school committees. The MTA had fought the ballot measure and even put a competing, more moderate question on the ballot — but those efforts did not prevail.

The impact was devastating. It was many years before increases in state aid began to replace lost local property tax funds. In 1981, the MTA reported:

"These are among the signs of our times: The City of Cambridge proposes to cut 439 school employees. ... The School Committee in Watertown

approves a recommendation that could result in the loss of a third of the town's 310 teachers. ... The Quincy School Committee votes to close five schools and lay off 226 teachers. ... The Boston Globe reports that large numbers of parents are considering enrolling their children in private schools because of the effects of Proposition 2½."

One 25-year veteran from the Berkshires wrote: "Like an invisible thief, Proposition 2½ has stolen one of my irreplaceable possessions: my career. It might have stolen my car; I could have replaced it. It might have taken my wallet; I could have found compensation. But it has taken that which I have nurtured and loved for a quarter century. I have not burned out. My zest for teaching holds energy enough for countless more years. I was put out."

New teachers were laid off in droves and positions were left unfilled. Years later the impact could still be felt, as many schools had large cohorts of older and younger teachers, but few in the middle.

The challenges to public education were not only financial. In 1983, "A Nation at Risk" was published. The report contributed to growing claims that public schools were failing.

A year later, almost 700 MTA members gathered at a special delegate assembly at Burlington High School to hammer out reform proposals based on their own experiences. Member voices informed the MTA's advocacy in the debate over Chapter 188, the

education reform law signed by Governor Michael Dukakis in 1985. The MTA praised the new law for funding equal opportunity grants and early childhood learning incentives but faulted it for not doing enough to limit class sizes or raise teacher salaries.

Also in the 1980s, wall-to-wall organizing opened the union to participation by every member of the family of Massachusetts public education, including school secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, teacher aides, food service personnel, library aides, laboratory technicians, telephone operators, medical records personnel, accountants, book-keepers, mail room clerks, computer programmers, library and reference assistants, audio-visual technicians, and others.

What didn't change was the MTA's struggle for members' rights, benefits and professional dignity, leading to strikes in nearly two dozen locals in the 1980s.

When asked about teacher strikes by reporters, MTA President Nancy Finkelstein explained:

"Teachers are frustrated because in the midst of the Massachusetts Miracle, they have been left behind. If it is true that a rising tide lifts all ships, too many teachers are still waiting at the dock."

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



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For the state's 2021 Teacher of the Year, it's 'all about educating the entire child'

Continued from Page 3

She hasn't moved since and is now in her 11th year in the Malden Public Schools.

Deb Gesualdo, president of the Malden Education Association, said that Hedrington "really walks her talk."

Hedrington "cares deeply about students and the people around her," Gesualdo said. "And she just continues to push for inclusion and equity in our schools — not just the recognition of diversity."

Educating the whole student is essential to Hedrington.

Despite not being a big fan of social media, she often uses it to converse with students.

"That is how they get hold of me," she said.

Through social media, she watches how students relate to one another.

She said that especially in the current atmosphere of racial hostility, political turbulence and economic crisis brought on by the pandemic, she sees among her students "the

divisions" that can develop among young people — "and they start early."

As an example, she pointed to exchanges that occurred during the presidential election.

"Some students wrote, 'If you don't believe Black Lives Matter, we can't be friends,'" Hedrington said. "Others wrote, 'If you don't believe Blue Lives Matter, we can't be friends.'"

"That bothered me," she said. "So today in class, I did not teach math. Instead, we had a heart-to-heart talk about how not to repeat the mistakes that we adults have made — and how we can learn to agree to disagree — to learn to talk, you know?"

"It's about educating the entire child, who will then be an adult," she added. "And how many adults are going to remember the Pythagorean theorem?"

To view a video of 2021 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Jennifer Hedrington, please go to massteacher.org/2021teacherofyear.

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; 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.

Don't wait until it's too late

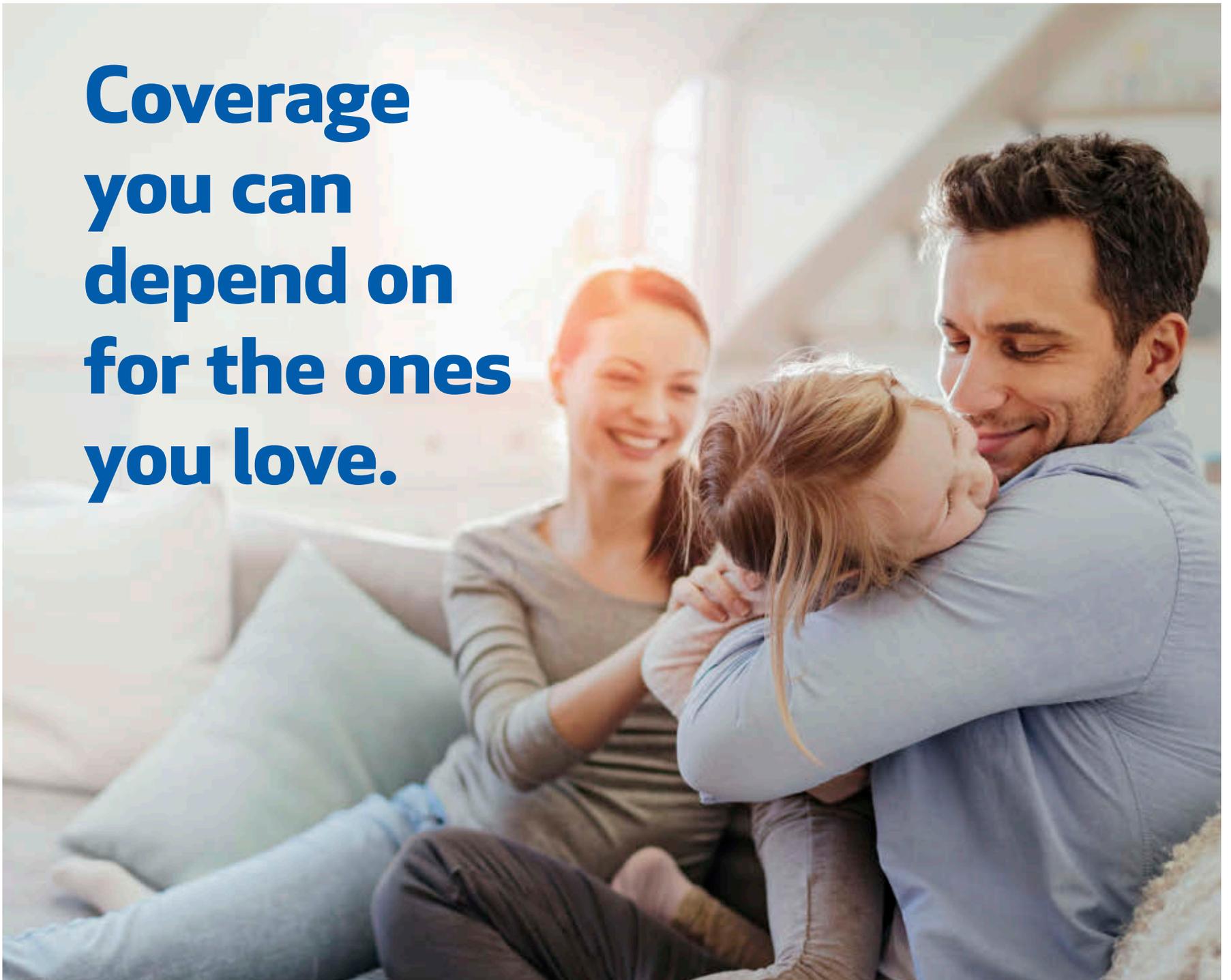
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Obituaries

Robert J. Aldrich, 89, of Hernando, Florida, formerly of Milford and Brewster. Was a business education teacher for 30 years at Wellesley High School, where he served as department chair. Oct. 31.

Judith Cherry, 79, of Wakefield. Taught at the Galvin Middle School in Wakefield, retiring in 2002. Nov. 20.

Michael Ciccarelli, 86, of Dover, Delaware. Was a vocational education teacher at Minuteman Technical High School in Lexington for 17 years, retiring in 1995. Nov. 7.

Peter F. Colleary, 86, of Medford, formerly of Somerville and Cambridge. Was a teacher and administrator in the Cambridge Public Schools. Nov. 14.

Marianne Desmond, 65, of Wilbraham. Was a speech and language pathologist for 31 years in the Springfield Public Schools. She also served as a School Committee member for 10 years for the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District. Oct. 4.

Janice Ducharme, 68, of Thompson, Connecticut. Taught psychology and English at Bartlett High School in Webster for 30 years, retiring in 2013. Nov. 14.

Richard D. Elander, 72, of Merrimac. Was a teacher and administrator at Danvers High School for 36 years. Nov. 14.

Jean M. Flannery, 77, of Spencer. Was a longtime educator at North Brookfield Elementary School before retiring in 2003. Dec. 11.

Carole Fotino, 84, of Reading. Was a school nurse and a teacher for many years at Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School. Oct. 8.

Eugene A. Franciosi, 89, of Bridgewater, formerly of Brockton. Taught at the Winthrop and North schools in Brockton and served as assistant principal at East Junior High School before becoming principal of West Junior High School. He retired in 1993. Oct. 23.

Esther Garland, 92, of Dracut. Was a first-grade teacher in the Goodhue and Brookside Elementary Schools in Dracut for 40 years. Nov. 6.

Roland J. Goulet, 75, of Chicopee. Taught business and computing for 40 years at Chicopee Comprehensive High School, retiring in 2006. After retiring, he worked as an adjunct professor of business at Westfield State University. Oct. 27.

Julia A. Guertin, 91, of Oxford. Began her teaching career at the Thomas Street School in Worcester and then worked for 24 years in the Oxford school system. Dec. 12.

Leo Hill, 92, of Acton. Was a sixth-grade teacher at the former Warren School in Waltham. He served as assistant principal at the Warren and Warrendale elementary schools, then as a principal of three schools for 14 years, retiring as principal of the Warrendale School in 1988. Nov. 10.

Gilbert O. Lamarre, 90, of Kennebunkport, Maine, formerly of Longmeadow. Served as principal of the U.S. Air Force School in Misawa, Japan, a consultant for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and as principal and director of reading for the Longmeadow school system. Nov. 9.

Thomas C. Linton, 91, of Lee. Taught elementary school art in the South Berkshire school district and then for 23 years in the Berkshire Hills Regional School District, mainly at the Bryant and Housatonic Schools, retiring in 1989. Dec. 10.

Mary E. McAuliffe, 89, of Westborough. Was a teacher for the Worcester Public Schools for more than 30 years and retired in 1993 from Forest Grove Middle School as a guidance counselor. Dec. 8.

Donald W. Metcalf, 78, of Rockland. Was a sixth-grade teacher and vice principal of the North School (now the Dawe School) in Stoughton for many years. Nov. 15.

Maureen F. Moorehouse, 77, of Shrewsbury. Was a school psychologist for 35 years in Westford, Tewksbury and Worcester. She was also the supervisor of pupil personnel services for the Worcester Public Schools. Oct. 25.

James F. Moynihan, 89, of Taunton. Was a business teacher at Taunton High School for 25 years and a former president of the Taunton Education Association. Also taught in the evening division of Massasoit Community College. Oct. 19.

David C. O'Connor, 76, of West Boylston. Worked in the Worcester Public Schools for 35 years as both an English teacher and an administrator. Nov. 11.

William F. O'Neil, 87, of Holbrook. Was a junior high school teacher in Randolph for 35 years. Oct. 21.

William O'Rourke, 93, of Sudbury. Was a math teacher at Weston Middle School for 36 years. Nov. 5.

Mary Jane Reece, 85, of Sun City Center, Florida. Was a school psychologist for the East Longmeadow school system. Oct. 26.

James Savicki, 72, of Duxbury. Taught mathematics at Middleborough High School for 34 years before retiring in 2006. He had also served as a football and track coach at the high school. Nov. 24.

Nancy R. Sears, 91, of Bow, New Hampshire, formerly of Bedford. Was a reading specialist in Cambridge and later in the Westford Public Schools for many years. Nov. 23.

Elliot M. Small, 74, of Newton and Monterey. He devoted his 40-year career to the labor movement, retiring as an MTA field representative for the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Oct. 10.

Robert J. Walmsey, 84, of Meredith, New Hampshire, formerly of North Andover. Taught industrial arts at middle schools in Andover for 41 years and worked with special needs children. Oct. 29.



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CALLING HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ALL

SUBJECTS: The Climate Action Through Education project, based at MIT, aims to create standards-aligned climate change curricula for high school teachers in all major disciplines, including the humanities. Please fill out our brief survey to help inform our work: bit.ly/CATEsurvey.

Virtual preconvention (or preconventions) to be held in April

Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, a preconvention meeting or meetings will be held virtually this year in advance of the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates.

The meeting or meetings will take place in early April. Each year, Annual Meeting delegates receive information and materials critical to their decision-making on organizational matters at preconvention sessions.

The 2021 Annual Meeting will also be held

virtually, on Friday, April 30, and Saturday, May 1.

As this edition of *MTA Today* went to press, special rules for the meeting and the preconventions were being developed. Delegates will receive preconvention information and registration materials as soon as they become available.

Watch massteacher.org/annualmeeting and the Spring edition of *MTA Today* for more on the 2021 MTA Annual Meeting.

Nominations are open for 2022 NEA Foundation awards

Nominations are open for the 2022 NEA Foundation Awards for Teaching Excellence. All current members of an NEA local affiliate or bargaining unit are eligible, including teachers, Education Support Professionals, and higher education faculty and staff. The MTA Executive Committee will choose the MTA nominee for the awards from applications received by Friday, Feb. 28. Awardees are honored each year at the NEA Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala. Applicants should email mtagovernance@massteacher.org for information and application materials.

For information, call 800.392.6175, Ext. 8265
or visit massteacher.org/masschild



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Member organizing is key to campaign agenda

By Laura Barrett

The MTA has an ambitious 2021 campaign agenda that includes both legislative and non-legislative goals — all of which depend on member organizing for their success.

Non-legislative priorities include implementation of the universal pooled testing program in public schools; expediting vaccines for all educators, from prekindergarten through higher education; and launching a first-ever MTA statewide coordinated bargaining campaign.

On the legislative front, funding for schools and colleges, canceling the MCAS, an early retirement bill, workplace benefits for employees and progressive revenues are among the key priorities.

Here are some details.

Funding for preK-16 education. Governor Charlie Baker's budget proposal, released on Jan. 27, falls woefully short of meeting the funding needs of public schools and colleges. His plan allocates only one-seventh of the amount needed to fully implement the *Student Opportunity Act* rather than the two-sevenths needed to meet the law's deadline of full implementation by 2027.

Public higher education would fare even worse. The proposal reduces funding for community colleges and state universities, cuts state scholarship aid, and freezes the University of Massachusetts budget for two straight years.

Baker's budget "fails to meet the urgency of this moment," the MTA said in a media statement, adding: "Communities across the Commonwealth — especially those with high concentrations of poverty and communities of color — have been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. This deepening crisis has affected students in every corner of the state, from preschool through higher education. While the federal government has provided short-term COVID-19 relief funds to address immediate needs, our students will need social, emotional and academic support over the long term to recover from pandemic education."

The MTA supports fully funding the *SOA* and passing the *Cherish Act*, which would provide \$120



million annually over the next five years to bring state spending on public higher education back to where it was two decades ago.

Canceling the MCAS. Now more than ever, the MTA is urging the state to cancel the MCAS graduation requirement and to require Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley to apply for a federal waiver to suspend administering the MCAS altogether in this tremendously disrupted year.

Meanwhile, Riley has rolled out a plan under which this year's seniors would not be required to pass the MCAS in order to graduate, but students in grades 10 and 11 would still have to take the tests this spring since they will be expected to have passed the MCAS by the time they are seniors. In addition, the state's plan calls for requiring students in grades three through eight to take half of each test, raising massive logistical and educational hurdles. The MTA is opposed to the plan.

Ensuring a dignified retirement. The MTA is backing several retirement-related bills, including a new measure that would give Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System members an option to purchase additional years in age or years of service, or a combination of both.

Now more than ever, the MTA is urging the state to cancel the MCAS graduation requirement and to require Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley to apply for a federal waiver to suspend administering the MCAS altogether in this tremendously disrupted year.

Fairness for adjunct faculty, staff and higher ed students. The MTA is once again backing bills to provide greater pay, benefits and fairness to adjunct faculty, establish a debt-free public higher education system and restore or improve various benefits for faculty and staff.

Public school safety. An MTA-backed bill would require districts to assess and improve their ventilation systems and to stock adequate personal protective equipment.

Dignity and protection for public employees. The MTA supports allowing municipal employees to take part in the state's new Paid Family and Medical Leave system and receive at least the same minimum wage as required for most private-sector employees.

Progressive revenue to Fund Our Future. During the pandemic, the very rich have gotten much richer, while so many others are out of work or underpaid. The MTA is backing a package of progressive tax policies targeting corporations and high-income earners. It is also working with the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition to make sure that the proposed Fair Share Amendment, which would increase taxes on annual income over \$1 million, makes it to the ballot in the fall of 2022 with strong public support.

More information will be provided on the MTA website, massteacher.org, as it becomes available.

THE MTA Advantage

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

Difficult but worthwhile work: A few observations on planning for retirement

(Hint: Don't procrastinate!)

Under the best of circumstances, the profile of a retiring Tier 1 Massachusetts educator looks like this: age 58, in terrific health, with ideas and energy for trips and activities, time for family and friends, comfortable savings and a pension that replaces 80 percent of the educator's final salary.

With early planning, discipline (and, yes, a healthy dose of good fortune along the way), a dream result like this is possible. But is it likely? In many cases, the answer is no. Even when most of the pieces seem to be falling into place, obstacles such as delayed or suboptimal investment decisions, a divorce or an unexpected contingency can become a roadblock to early retirement, creating the need for retirement plan adjustments. These include working longer, saving more aggressively, or modifying expectations.

Contrary to what many believe, early retirement is not the norm. If you cannot retire early you have not failed, and you are in good company. For many good reasons, working longer than one originally anticipated is becoming a fact of life. A passion for what educators do — teaching others — is a frequent motivator to keep working.

Reasons to work longer can also be precautionary. Examples include a fear of lower future investment returns, the possibility of a very long life and the potential for uncontrollable wealth-depleting factors such as health care costs, taxes and inflation. These factors can fuel the decision to continue working, even into one's 70s, to build a cushion of extra wealth.



The question of whether retirement is financially feasible is a complex one, and it takes time to evaluate. Many people procrastinate because the analysis can be daunting and anxiety producing, especially if one starts with questions that only raise more questions: By how much will my income drop? Will a mortgage and other debts be paid off? Do children require cash for school or early career needs? Does an elderly parent need assistance? Is my asset allocation appropriate, too conservative or too risky? When was the last time I looked? Will downsizing or relocation be desirable or imperative? Might I outlive my money?

The key to the analysis is to be proactive and systematic, using what is desired as a starting point. Ask yourself: In retirement, where would I like to live? What do I love doing, or what have I always wanted the time to do? What amount of travel or hobby expenses will I incur? What does my spouse or partner want in retirement? What level of support do I want to provide for children and parents? Finally, I am retiring from a job, but maybe not from a career. Might I use my experience and qualifications to work part time as a tutor or as a trainer of educators?

Once a vision has been developed, an experienced adviser can help by sizing up your starting point and then identifying the components and sequencing of an action plan to help you realize that vision. The adviser will be familiar with the technical details of mandatory retirement plan withdrawals, tax strategies and ways to protect wealth. The adviser can help with techniques and tactics successfully used by other clients. With this type of assistance, alternatives can be evaluated and a plan to support the vision comes into focus.

(continued on page 2)



New on the scene



Cash back for hotel stays

When you make your next hotel reservation, you'll want to use the Access hotel booking engine to earn **cash back**. That's right. Not only will you find the lowest price available, you'll also get a credit on your credit or debit card after booking! mtabenefits.accessdevelopment.com/travel.

Getting your affairs in order

Whether it's a will, health care proxy or power of attorney for a pet, you can prepare, execute, notarize, store and share your important legal documents with family members for just \$8.49 a month when you create them through **Gentreo**. Sound too good to be true? See for yourself. gentreo.com/mta.

Protecting yourself from identity theft

This crime has been on the rise for years, but the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a surge. The good news is that you don't have to spend hundreds of dollars a month to protect yourself. **Securus ID**, a new MTAB partner, offers a variety of protection plans, with the least expensive starting at just \$3 per month. It doesn't make sense to put off the decision any longer. mtabenefits.securusid.com.

Travel insurance for your rental car

You're probably already familiar with collision damage waiver coverage, which is offered when you rent a car. If so, you're also aware that the daily charge averages \$30 or more. Sometimes that can be more than the cost of the rental. If you have relied on purchasing coverage at the rental counter, you now have another option through MTAB's Travel Savings Center. Best of all, the daily cost starts at just \$6.25. savings.travel/mta.

A few observations on planning for retirement

(continued from page 1)

Alternative-sifting and planning sometimes reveal that an immediate action plan is needed to lay the foundation for the day retirement arrives. This plan can include shoring up a cash emergency fund that was depleted in paying for college, attacking credit card debt, increasing the amount of retirement plan contributions, consolidating retirement accounts from prior employment, or trimming expenses for things that are no longer essential. However, and this is critical, not everything that can be envisioned and desired can be funded. An analysis can sometimes produce a roadmap for action that makes one's goals 100 percent attainable. But even in situations where this is not possible, an analysis conducted in advance will generate the time needed to begin prioritizing goals.

Of course, in retirement any plan will be affected by factors such as actual investment returns, unanticipated needs for cash or the introduction of a new goal — anything that changes the assumptions baked into the plan

at the outset. Even a fundamentally sound plan will require periodic review, correction and revision. But the investment of time spent framing one's goals, taking stock of current circumstances and making planning inroads always yields a result better than one produced by procrastination.



Stacey Braun Associates, Inc., is the MTAB-endorsed provider of an optional financial planning service. For an annual fee of \$140, a member can obtain up to three (3) hours of telephone or videoconferencing time with an adviser to discuss almost any financial matter in confidence. Because the advisers do not sell any financial products, the environment is free from sales pressure. The goal of every session is to provide ideas, suggestions or information that a member will find useful, constructive and empowering. Visit mtabenefits.com/staceybraun for more information.



Editor: Elizabeth A. Bejoian
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Tip Sheet

All discounts listed in the Tip Sheet can be found at mtabenefits.com.

Give yourself a mental boost this winter

We hope that we are in the final stretch of one of the most difficult periods for our country and the world in recent memory. As we keep our distance from one another and wait for life to return to some semblance of normalcy, here are a few ways to lift our spirits.



Plan a dream getaway

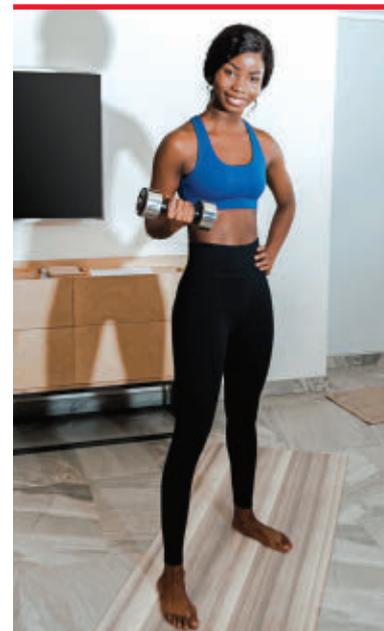
Travel is still considered riskier than other activities, but if you just can't wait to get away — to warmer weather, to visit family members or simply to experience a change of scenery — we have some good news for you. Studies show that planning and anticipating your trip can make you even happier than actually taking it. So plan the details of your next vacation, even if you aren't going to book it right away. First, choose your destination. Would you like to be somewhere on a beach or do you want to head to the mountains out West? Next, decide on your lodging. A beachfront property overlooking the ocean or a mountain lodge with a breathtaking view? Then, plan your itinerary. Which activities have you always dreamed about? Snorkeling in Key West, kayaking on Lake Tahoe or hiking in Zion National Park? Remember that as an MTA member, you have several travel discounts available. The **Travel Savings Center** offers discounts on hotels, car rentals and group travel. And a new travel rewards program from Access offers up to 50 percent cash back at more than 800,000 hotels.

Showcase your favorite memories

Digital photography is a wonderful invention, allowing us to take unlimited numbers of photos at any time. The downside is that we tend to take the pictures and then forget about them. If you aren't in the habit of printing your digital photos, you can start now, saving memories from an incredible vacation or your child's most recent cute moment. If you have saved concert tickets or mementos from a trip, you can have those framed, too. Several local framers offer MTA member discounts, including 20 percent off at **Gastonart & Frame** in Northborough and Shrewsbury and 10 percent off at **Big Picture Framing** (with eight locations in Massachusetts) and **Post Road Framers** in Rowley. Relive those happy moments each time you walk by your framed pieces.

Meet your fitness goals safely

Keeping up with fitness can be a challenge, even without a pandemic. But in the past year, local fitness centers have begun offering online classes and memberships. So whether you're back in the gym already, you're planning to return in a few months, or you prefer to work out at home, you can find discounts on classes that you can take right from your living room. New this year is a discount at **DanceFIT Studio** in Natick. Members save 15 percent on all full-priced adult fitness packages, including virtual classes. **A Mom's Village** in Peabody offers a supportive environment for moms with a wide variety of fitness classes, as well as children's programming. MTA members save 15 percent on a fitness pack, including virtual classes. If you're thinking of purchasing some home gym equipment such as a treadmill, bike, rower or strength trainer, you as an MTA member can save 15 percent at **Total Fitness Equipment** and 10 percent at **Precision Fitness Equipment**.



Learn a new skill

How many times have you told yourself you would take up a hobby or learn something new? Now is the perfect time for doing just that. Support a fellow MTA member and learn to play the guitar, with lessons from **Israel Saldana**. He's offering 10 percent off remote or in-person lessons for all new students for the first six months. If you already know how to sew, **American Folk Art & Craft Supply** offers members and their immediate family members a 10 percent discount on sewing, quilting, sergers and embroidery machines.



For more information on these and other discounts, visit mtabenefits.com.

Password privacy reduces risks of financial theft and account takeover

When was the last time you used a password?

Was it four or five minutes ago? That sounds about right. In the digital world, consumers are bombarded by demands for passwords. These combinations are essential for everything from Pinterest and Instagram to the veterinarian's account for your dog, so it's tempting to use the same password over and over. Don't! Reuse and other password goofs often backfire. It's vital to do all you can to boost privacy for these basic security tools.

The typical person has several dozen accounts requiring credential logins. Some have more than 100. Sheer volume is at the root of the reuse problem. A 2018 research study at Virginia Tech documented that 52 percent of all account holders reuse their passwords¹. Even worse: A considerable percentage of users — when alerted that their credentials had been compromised — continued to use them!



Don't get stuffed!

When thieves grab login credentials in one data breach, those credentials can be tested on other websites to catch users. The term for this automated trial-and-error approach is "credential stuffing." It's rapid and highly successful. More than 50 million attempts were predicted for 2020. When successful, the intruder takes the next step, changing the password to commandeer the account and lock out the real owner. Account takeover is a devastating event that you don't ever want to endure. The results range from loyalty points being stolen to financial accounts being emptied.

You're overdue for 2FA

Activate two-factor authorization on your key accounts. If you own a debit card, you already use 2FA. It's a combination of something you have (the card) and something you know (the PIN). However, acceptance of this added security layer, also called Multi-Factor Authentication, or MFA, has been slow, with less than 50 percent of users selecting 2FA as an option.

Check for vulnerabilities

Want to check your own password vulnerabilities? Email addresses — which are common usernames — can be evaluated for exposure at the nonprofit site haveibeenpwned.com. This free service sometimes even pinpoints the data breach that exposed your details. If your cherished email address or password pops up on this website it will rattle you, but there's no better way to grasp the risks. HIBP also offers an optional email compromise alert if your data is exposed in the future.

Additional risks and protections

Most humans' memories can't recall all of the passwords they use. Most important are the accounts that you cannot afford to lose. Your mental vault is ideal for banking or investment passcodes. Once you decide which codes are critical and store them in your head, follow these suggestions for less sensitive codes to boost security:

- Post-it notes have got to go! In Hawaii, for example, state emergency management officials were caught using Post-it notes on computer monitors for password storage. This is a big mistake.
- Don't use the cat's name or your birthday as a code. Try a phrase if that is easier to remember. Simply choose a letter to represent each word and add some numbers.
- Ditch the concept that longer passwords are superior. Go for unique instead. Even a 20-digit code is dangerous if it has already been hacked.
- Decline website offers to store your passwords for faster checkout. If they're hacked, you're hacked.
- It's tempting to pay someone else to hold all your passwords, and password managers have proliferated. They promise that all you have to memorize is one master code. But before you leap, consider how codes are stored. Are they encrypted? Evaluate how the provider handles hacks, both past and future. Even firms that utilize a zero-knowledge basis need robust scrutiny. Zero knowledge means the company won't store users' individual codes so a hacker can't grab them from corporate files. Individual passwords are stored on your personal device and the manager only controls that vault's front door. If you opt for a manager, definitely select a unique passcode.
- Install and use browser extensions that tap into HIBP's database to check for stolen credentials when you establish new online accounts.

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¹ Department of Computer Science, Virginia Tech (2018). <https://people.cs.vt.edu/gangwang/pass>.