

MTA

A publication of the
Massachusetts Teachers
Association

TODAY



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**Safe
Schools
for All**
Understanding
Aggression
Against
Educators



Eric Simard, co-chair of the Safe Schools for All Task Force, said educators want districts to provide real assistance for the issues they're facing in schools.



MTA TODAY

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC HAYNES

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Leading the Way in Defense of Public Education



“Everything we do related to public education is watched and emulated around the country.”

MAX PAGE

At the end of January, the MTA — along with the NEA, State Revenue Alliance, other NEA affiliates and the AFT — organized a convening to help unions and community groups from other states strategize on how to be more like Massachusetts. That is, we shared how our members won the Fair Share Amendment in 2022, and what it has done since for our Commonwealth.

We were able to share how the MTA played a pivotal role in the victory — from the tens of thousands of signatures gathered by all of you, to the campaigning you did, door to door and phone to phone, not to mention the millions of dollars we and the NEA contributed to make sure voters heard our message. And we shared what it has meant to the state — free community college for all, universal school meals in preK-12, free regional transit, better roads and bridges, an improving (truly!) T, significant new funds for vocational school construction, early education and child care, and an increase to school aid. While none of this is enough, Fair Share has allowed for life-changing investments and insulated us, to a degree, from federal government cuts.

And because we are the MTA and this is Massachusetts, everything we do related to public education is watched and emulated around the country. Washington state may pass a “millionaire’s tax” this spring, very similar to ours. Zohran Mamdani, the new mayor of New York City, pointed to Massachusetts as an example of how New York can and must tax the very rich to fund public education and transportation. Maryland has raised taxes on the very rich. California is contemplating two ballot initiatives to fund public education and health care by taxing the billionaire class. Overall, 18 NEA state affiliates attended our gathering — not to mention NEA President Becky Pringle — all hungry for strategies to bring home.

The day after the tax convening, Taylor Rehmet, a moderate Democrat, won a state Senate seat in a Texas district that President Trump won by nearly 20 percent 18 months ago. What was the most popular plank on Rehmet’s platform? Protecting public education, including investing in vocational education. As we were reminded in our 2016 Question 2 fight against the billionaires who wanted to privatize public education with an unlimited number of charter schools, we could turn what looked to be a loss into a nearly 2-to-1 victory over the Walton Foundation, Koch Brothers and charter industry.

It is worth remembering these salient facts:

- In Kentucky, a state that voted for Trump by 20 points, voters also voted by the same margin to kill a proposal to create a private school voucher system. Voters knew the proposal would decimate funding for the public schools that 90 percent of their students attend.
- Across the country, ballot initiatives to increase the minimum wage have won almost every time. Of 30 minimum-wage ballots from 2000 to 2024, only four have lost. Victorious measures passed in conservative states such as Florida, Montana, Arkansas, South Dakota, Alaska and Arizona.
- Poll after poll shows a majority of Americans — including almost half of Republicans — believe that taxes should be raised on very wealthy Americans and corporations. “Tax the Rich” is not a lefty slogan. It is commonsense to most Americans.

We live in terrifying times. But they also are clarifying times. What is as clear as a sunny winter day in New England is that the way forward starts with educators and their unions — you and your locals and our statewide MTA — defending public education and arguing for the right of all of our students and their families to lead dignified lives as members of our communities. **T**

Max Page, MTA President

Educators Advocate for More SAFETY PROTECTION

By **Mary MacDonald**

Photographs by **Eric Haynes**

Should educators expect to have students yell at them routinely, or throw chairs or push or spit on them? Has endurance of assaults or threats become just another part of the job?

Educators increasingly are saying “no,” and are organizing and calling on the state and local districts to provide more mental health resources for students, so educators can support them in their needs, and be assured of a safe and healthy workplace.

Donna Grady, president of the Franklin Education Association, said educators want the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to back them up. “As employees, I think they want DESE to say, ‘You have a right to be safe in your workplace.’”

At the same time MTA members are organizing, a year-old task force is trying to define the problems, identify solutions and advocate for more support.

The Safe Schools for All Task Force was created in October 2024 by the MTA Board of Directors, after several New Business Items were introduced by delegates at the previous Annual Meeting. Its members represent educators working throughout the state, at all grade levels and in varying roles. One of its first decisions was to survey members statewide about their experiences.

In a three-week span, more than 1,500 members had responded to the April 2025 survey, representing 120 locals. Individual comments provided by more than 150 members shared incidents of verbal and

physical assaults, as well as various types of threats and harassment. The numbers seemed to indicate that incidents are concentrated in the earliest grades, with 54 percent of respondents saying they worked with preK through fifth-grade students.

When asked whether they felt their school provided sufficient resources, staffing, financial support and wraparound services for students in need of mental, behavioral or physical health resources, most respondents said they either “somewhat” or “strongly” disagreed.

The task force is now creating a digital app that would allow educators to document physical injuries in a way that would be easier for the task force to analyze, and which would create more consistency in reporting. The task force is working alongside the Massachusetts Nurses Association, which is supporting our work in creating the app, said Melissa Alvarez, an adjustment counselor and task force member, who is helping to lead the effort.

“The overall goal is to be assured of a safe and healthy workplace where injuries are decreasing and educators are welcomed into a productive environment,” said Alvarez, a member of the Revere Teachers Association.

“Our app is here to support educators by tracking injuries and data. Here is what is occurring in our schools across the Commonwealth. We need additional funding. We need educators back in the workforce. We need resources not only

for our students but the caregivers who are searching for the support that they cannot find.”

Through the fall of 2025, MTA members shared their stories and suggestions for safety improvements at a series of regional meetings. The task force is taking this information into account. It maintains a website, massteacher.org/safeschools, which provides resources for educators, including a guidebook and contract language for locals that are trying to strengthen safety through bargaining, including by obligating districts to provide a safe workplace.

Grady, a co-chair of the task force, said educators want support and a consistent process when something happens. “So there is a process not necessarily for getting a student out, but a process for addressing what has happened, not only with the student, but the students who have observed what is going on, with the educator who has been directly involved and with the educator who has been indirectly involved, either by being in the room or watching their colleague



Eric Simard, interim vice president of the Pathfinder Education Association, said districts have to stop the cycle of educators being injured over and over again.



Denise McGuirk, president of the Taunton Education Association, said classrooms in its schools have been evacuated for safety reasons 58 times so far this school year.



Patti Donahue, an Education Support Professional in the Plymouth and Carver schools, said ESPs are getting assaulted routinely, and it's not something that should be normalized.

“ We've got to just keep applying the pressure.”

PATTI DONAHUE Safe Schools for All Task Force member

being hurt or having to evacuate the other children,” she said. “Aggression or behavioral concerns have been treated like a ‘one and done’ and it only involves one person, generally the student. And it’s never the case.”

In 2018, Massachusetts extended workplace protections under the Occupational Safety and Health Act to all public employees, including those who work in public schools. The state Department of Labor Standards has guidance on safe school environments, including a worksheet that evaluates whether a district is taking sufficient steps to protect its workers. This can be added to labor contracts. The Somerville Educators Union, for example, recently negotiated a requirement that its employer use the worksheet to inform the development of violence-prevention protocols.

Eric Simard, a co-chair of the task force and interim vice president of the Pathfinder Education Association, said educators want real assistance for issues they’re facing, and want the state to come up with solutions for what districts can do. “If a student is dysregulated, teachers are many times chastised, ‘Well, why don’t you teach something more interesting?’ So, their classroom management skills are being called into question as the reason why a student is becoming dysregulated,” he said. “That fosters a feeling of not being supported by your employer.”

Local health and safety committees also are an option for increasing focus on the issue. Several locals throughout Massachusetts have established these committees, which allow educators

to analyze and collect data and take steps to address ongoing safety issues.

This could include schedule changes that give students appropriate recess and lunch periods or bolstering staffing. The task force is supporting state legislation that would require at least 30 minutes a day of free-play recess for all K-8 students. It also supports legislation to establish a Whole Child Grant Program, which would provide per-pupil funding to districts to hire more school counselors, social workers, psychologists and ESPs.

Grady, who teaches kindergarten, said providing at least 30 minutes daily for unstructured recess is critical. “We need to take the devices out of the classroom, at least in preK, K and 1,” Grady said. “They do not need to be tested. They need to have a meaningful social structure. They need to be able to interact with their materials. We need to be able to teach the way children learn.”

Educators in Taunton were among the first in the state to identify the problem of student dysregulation and launched a campaign several years ago, Support Our Students, to identify solutions. This included establishing health and safety committees in every school, said Denise McGuirk, president of the Taunton Education Association. Over time, however, structured programs in schools shifted due to staffing changes and resource constraints, she said.

Educators don’t want students to be blamed, she said. “What we are asking for is not harsher discipline or increased policing, but predictable safety, adequate staffing and systems designed to prevent crises rather than simply react to them,” McGuirk said. “We need more mental health specialists and de-escalation professionals, ongoing professional development for educators that is supported and focused on de-escalation, smaller caseloads for special educators and specialists, and the resources

necessary to make these supports effective.”

Patti Donahue, a paraprofessional member of the Education Association of Plymouth and Carver, with 14 years of experience in the Plymouth schools, said her school has improved thanks to stronger leadership. But she said she often has to convince ESPs in other buildings that violence is not an expectation of the job.

Often, educators don't want to report or get the child in trouble, she said. The issues run the gamut, from hitting to biting to breaking eyeglasses. “I keep telling them, it's not OK. That's something we have to let administration know and know that it's not OK,” Donahue said.

The problem of educator safety goes well beyond Massachusetts.

The NEA in November 2025 released a report with the American Psychological

Association based on two national surveys. It found violence and aggression toward educators were prevalent even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty-three percent of respondents to the APA survey said they wanted to quit the teaching profession based on their experiences.

The report contains several recommendations for promoting a safe work culture, including providing training and support for educators and school leaders that cover how to foster positive relationships with students and between students and their peers.

Massachusetts, meanwhile, recently announced \$3 million in grants to expand mental health services in school, an amount that would provide funding for 58 school districts, according to a report in the Boston Globe. The governor, in her recent budget proposal, suggests \$6

million for mental health support and wraparound services. But her budget also cuts minimum aid in the school funding formula from \$150 to \$75 per pupil.

The task force is trying to keep the pressure up, said Donahue, who is one of its members. It met with Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler last spring and wants to follow up with another meeting. “What are we doing next?” Donahue said. “We've got to just keep applying the pressure and doing what we're doing.”

For more information on resources provided by the NEA, visit nea.org/resource-library/educator-safety.



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SPRING PRIORITIES

The Legislation, Policy and Political Action Division has outlined key campaign actions to advance MTA priorities. Active participation from locals and chapters is essential to this effort. Board members are asked to connect with local leaders and help identify groups ready to get involved.

Increasing state funding to address the fiscal crisis caused by inadequate state funding. Because of federal cuts to health care, food and other essential supports, this will be an extremely difficult budget year that likely will start with a budget that makes significant cuts across state government. Fighting for funding for preK-12 and higher education and building a strong, ongoing campaign infrastructure will be more important than ever, even if real progress will take more than one year.

Defending our Question 2 victory. Even though two million voters called for the end of high-stakes testing as part of our graduation requirements, the governor and House and Senate leadership want to include standardized end-of-course assessments in new graduation requirements. We need to fight to create a graduation system based on coursework requirements and assessments by educators — including authentic assessments like capstone projects, portfolios and project-based assessments.

Fight for a \$55,000 minimum salary for ESPs and \$70,000 for teachers, PFML for educators, RetirementPlus, and retiree COLA. The fight over wages will focus on building public will to address these critical issues in bargaining and other efforts (including increasing state funding to support raises). The first-year cost of the wages legislation is approximately \$1 billion, and over four years that cost will be shifted to local school districts. We want to use this legislation, as well as federal Education Support Professionals legislation filed by U.S. Senator Ed Markey, to draw attention to the underpayment of educators, and particularly how the compensation of so many ESPs who provide essential services to our students is far below a living wage. In addition to these proactive campaigns, we expect to need to fight against efforts to shift health care costs onto our members as premiums increase at the GIC.

OTHER PRIORITY BILLS MOVING IN THE LEGISLATURE

Adjunct Justice Bill – Reported favorably to the Senate

Recess – Reported favorably to the House

Cell Phone Ban – Approved by the Senate

RetirementPlus – Approved by the House

Higher Education Wages – Reported favorably to the Senate

BRIGHT Act – Approved by the House

Regulating Privatization – Reported favorably to the Senate

The **harmful curriculum mandate reading bill** is heading to a conference committee.

Protecting Library Books – Approved by the Senate

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

The Legislation, Policy and Political Action Division has developed a specific set of campaign actions to help advance these priorities, and the active involvement of members is critical. If you would like to get involved, please email GovernmentRelations@massteacher.org about the issues you want to help on, and someone will follow up directly.



massteacher.org/legislation



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HEALTH COVERAGE AT RISK

as Costs Shift to Public Employees

By **Scott McLennan**



Brookline Educators Union President Justin Brown, left, and Somerville Educators Union President Dayshawn Simmons discuss their members' concerns about the potential for high health care costs.

Gov. Maura Healey is proposing to slash more than \$100 million from the Group Insurance Commission, which provides health care plans for nearly 500,000 public employees, including more than 30,000 MTA members working in public higher education and those in preK-12 districts that participate in commission plans.

In response, MTA members quickly began mobilizing in January, ahead of a planned Feb. 12 vote by the GIC to change insurance plan designs that would shift costs to workers. Some of the significant changes brought up for consideration include:

- Increasing medical deductibles by \$250 for a single plan and \$500 for a family plan.

- A 50 percent increase in copays for visits to emergency rooms, urgent care centers and other services.
- Eliminating coverage for GLP-1 drugs when used for weight loss.

These and other cost shifts under consideration will mean workers and retirees receiving their insurance through the GIC will be paying hundreds of dollars — even thousands of dollars — more every year for health care.

Rosa Taormina, who works at Salem State University and is president of the statewide Association of Professional Administrators, said these proposed increases in out-of-pocket costs will hike health care spending by roughly \$2,800 annually for her family.

“That just does not align with the small cost-of-living adjustments we get as public employees; we don’t even keep up with inflation,” she said.

Taormina also has benefited from coverage for GLP-1 drugs for weight loss and said she has eliminated some existing health concerns and reduced her risk for other illnesses.

“The GLP-1s have changed my life for the better,” Taormina said. “But there is no way I can afford them without insurance coverage.”

The GIC was scheduled to vote Feb. 12 on plan design changes that reflected the governor’s underfunding of the commission. The commission also was expected to meet on Feb. 26, which is after the print edition of MTA Today was scheduled to be published. An update to this story will be posted on the MTA’s website at massteacher.org. In 2018, after public sector unions, including the MTA, fought proposals to eliminate insurance carriers used by the GIC that would have resulted in major disruptions to health care for thousands of families, workers successfully prompted the commission to reverse a vote it had previously taken to adopt the changes.

Dean Robinson, a member of the Massachusetts Society of Professors at UMass Amherst, represents the MTA on the GIC. He and other labor representatives on the commission are leading opposition to the plan design changes.

MTA leaders have urged every union member to join the fight to have the state fully fund the GIC. Its decisions have significant ramifications, because cities and towns that do not belong to the GIC typically use its plan designs as benchmarks for their own health care offerings for municipal employees.

MTA members across the state have questioned why Healey is willing to raise costs for health care for public employees at the same time she is touting her plan to use state reserve funds to protect private sector workers who face sharp insurance premium hikes, following the expiration of federal subsidies for health care.



“There is no way I can afford them without insurance coverage.”

ROSA TAORMINA
President of Association of
Professional Administrators

“We applaud Governor Healey’s attempts to hold down health care costs with newly announced guidelines for insurers,” said MTA President Max Page. “And we recognize that the Trump administration and the Republican-dominated Congress have made immoral cuts to Medicaid that are causing budget strains. But the governor cannot balance the state budget on the backs of dedicated public employees by forcing them to pay significantly more for their health care.”

Higher health care costs open the door to people cutting back on seeking medical care – which could lead to even more expensive treatments.

“I know I am being set up to think about getting the care I need or protecting my financial well-being,” said Dayshawn Simmons, president of the Somerville Educators Union, who said he needs to frequently access health care services. Justin Brown, president of the Brookline Educators Union, said his members are worried

about the price hikes they face for doctor visits and higher out-of-pocket costs.

“We all know that health insurance is broken and costs are escalating, but the solution is not to pass more costs onto workers,” Brown said. “Governor Healey needs to fully fund the GIC.”

For more information about the fight to fully fund the GIC and for updates to this story, please visit massteacher.org/current-initiatives/gic.



Maria Louise Baldwin

THE FIGHT FOR EQUITY

By Laura Barrett



Cambridge School Principal Maria L. Baldwin was elected assistant secretary of the MTA in 1900.

Artwork by Veronica Sosa from a photograph held by the Moorland Spingarn Research Clinic, Howard University Archives.

When the MTA was founded in 1845, membership was open to male educators, while women were not allowed to join for another two decades. Educators of color were not barred from joining, but did they?

The evidence is sparse, since there were so few educators of color at that time and old membership records no longer exist. Although the MTA took a stand for “equal rights to all men irrespective of race or color” as early as 1866, educators of color were not featured prominently in MTA’s publications for another century.

There is one story that suggests the MTA was ahead of its time, and ahead of many states that had segregated education associations until 1966. The MTA History Project has identified an illustrious teacher and principal from Cambridge, Maria Louise Baldwin, as the first verified Black member. She was more than just a member. On Nov. 30, 1900, Baldwin was elected assistant secretary of the MTA at the association’s Annual Meeting.

Baldwin’s extraordinary story is well known in Cambridge. It deserves to be known throughout the state. Unless otherwise noted, information about Baldwin for this article came from “Maria Baldwin’s Worlds: A Story of

Black New England and the Fight for Racial Justice,” by Kathleen Weiler.

Born in 1856, Baldwin was the first of three children of Peter and Mary (Blake) Baldwin. Her father, a former mariner, landed a coveted job as a postal worker in Cambridge and her mother was a homemaker. The number of Black residents in the city was tiny: 140 out of a population of 15,215 in 1850.

Baldwin was born on the cusp of the Civil War in a deeply divided country. If you were Black in America at that time, Massachusetts was among the better places to live. A year before her birth, Massachusetts was the first state in the country to outlaw segregated schools, enabling Baldwin and her two siblings to attend integrated public schools.

Baldwin graduated from Cambridge High School in 1874 at a time when few students of any race made it past the eighth grade. She immediately enrolled in Cambridge’s teacher education program and applied for a teaching job in 1875. Despite her stellar record, she couldn’t get a job in her home city. Reluctantly, she left home and taught for a while in a segregated school in Maryland.

After her father died in 1880, Baldwin returned to Cambridge in need of work to support her family. In response to pressure from the city’s Black

community, the district finally hired her in 1881 to teach at the Agassiz School, an elementary school serving the children of Harvard professors and other elite white residents. She was the only Black teacher in Cambridge, and one of the first Black teachers in any integrated school in Massachusetts. She thrived at the Agassiz.

When the principal of the school retired in 1889, a former school committee member later reflected on the decision to offer the job to Baldwin. According to Weiler's biography, the committee member wrote, "the superintendent [Francis Cogswell] told me it would be my duty to appoint a new principal. 'Why' I said, 'you know as well as I do there is only one suitable person, Miss Baldwin.' 'I think so too,' he said, 'but I was not sure about the color.' 'It is not a question of color,' I said, 'it is a question of the best.'"

Baldwin told biographer Pauline Hopkins that she initially declined the offer, telling the superintendent, "If I failed in the position you mention it would be a conspicuous failure." Nonetheless, she took the job and remained at the Agassiz as a principal and then master until her death in 1922. W.E.B. Du Bois said in 1917 that hers was "the most distinguished position achieved by a person of negro descent in the teaching world of America."

Baldwin, a pioneering Black educator and MTA leader, helped lay the groundwork for a more inclusive profession and a more just union.

One of Baldwin's students was 10-year-old Edward Cummings, later known as the poet e.e. cummings. She wrote of him, "He is a most lovable little boy and we are glad that he is part of our little community." He was equally appreciative of her, describing her in a memorial message as "blessed with a delicious voice, charming manners, and a deep understanding of children. ... From her I marvellingly learned that the truest power is gentleness."

Her gift as a teacher was matched by the contributions she made to broader social and educational movements of her time. She hosted discussion sessions with Black students at Harvard and was active in many groups promoting the rights of women and racial minorities.

Her friendships included Alice Longfellow, Harvard President Charles Eliot and prominent Black intellectuals, including Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter and Flora Ruffin, one of the first Black teachers in Boston and a leading suffragist.

Baldwin was in high demand as a speaker, giving lectures on Harriet Beecher Stowe, Presidents Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln and the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, as well as on a wide range of education issues.

The first reference that connected her to the MTA was that she spoke at the 54th Annual Meeting in Springfield in 1898. Will S. Monroe wrote in the *Journal of Education* that Baldwin "gave an address on the working ideals of the teacher that was clear-cut, bright, and abounded in great philosophic sense."

“From her I marvellingly learned that the truest power is gentleness.”

EDWARD E. CUMMINGS

The poet was a student of Baldwin's

Then, on Dec. 1, 1900, the *Boston Globe* reported that Baldwin had been elected assistant secretary of the MTA the previous day. Three years later, she was once again a featured speaker at MTA's Annual Meeting.

Baldwin never married nor had children. If she had, she would have been barred from teaching, as was her close friend, Flora (Ruffin) Ridley. Instead, Baldwin helped to educate, nurture and inspire thousands of students, both in her lifetime and beyond. **T**

In 2000, Nathaniel Vogel, an Agassiz School eighth grader, launched a campaign to change the school's name after reading that its namesake, scientist Louis Agassiz, propounded the theory that white people were genetically superior to people of other races. "Let's have a name that lives up to the school," Vogel said, according to *The Harvard Crimson*. The Cambridge School Committee voted unanimously on May 21, 2002, to change the name of the Agassiz School to the Baldwin School in honor of Maria Louise Baldwin.

Laura Barrett is a former MTA communications specialist who now manages the MTA History Project under a Public Relations & Organizing grant.



Portrait of Maria L. Baldwin taken in 1885 (above). Baldwin lived in the northern half of this two-family home at 196 Prospect St., Cambridge, from 1888 to 1905.

Photos courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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Contract Campaign Highlights

Across the state, MTA members are organizing for fair contracts that support educators and strengthen schools. Learn more about recent highlights from local campaigns and actions.

By **Mary MacDonald**



Belmont Education Association members packed into a December Select Board meeting.

MTA locals in preK-12 and higher education are fighting for living wages, safe staffing levels, improved safety in schools and paid parental leave. These are among the issues that educators are demanding be addressed in fair contracts. A sample of recent highlights provided by the MTA Field & Organizing Division follows:

Professional Staff Union members at UMass Boston and UMass Amherst are engaged in a contract campaign for a living wage, anti-privatization provisions and safeguards against excessive workloads, and are fighting against COLAs that turn into merit pay. At UMass Amherst, members have a median pay that is \$20,000 below the living wage for families in Hampshire County. The state Department of Labor Relations in December rejected the UMass Amherst administration's premature petition for mediation and directed the employer back to the table.

Wareham Education Association members are fighting for safe staffing levels and a living wage for Education

Support Professionals, who make less per hour than ESPs in neighboring districts. Members turned out at a December school committee meeting to make their demands.

The Holyoke Teachers Association in December took a vote of no confidence in the school committee's bargaining team. Ninety-seven percent of the members voted to support this vote and more than 86 percent of the membership participated. Their fight for a fair contract continues.

The Taunton Educational Secretaries and Assistants in December held a rally to demand a fair contract that addresses school safety.

The Belmont Education Association in December jammed into the select board meeting to demand that they take responsibility for chronic underfunding that is impacting schools.

Haverhill Education Association members are fighting for a fair contract for safe schools and just compensation. In late November, silent representatives and

bargaining team members walked out of a session with the school committee after it said it was not authorized to present an economic offer “on the record.” In December, at a City Council meeting, members explained the economic proposal differences and clarified school committee misinformation.

More than 30 members from nine locals in the Berkshire Educator Action Network convened and listened to a presentation by the Southern Berkshire Regional Education Association on its experiences with democratized bargaining, silent representatives and a contract action campaign that energized membership and resulted in a fair contract.

Brockton Education Association members won a contract settlement that includes a 12 percent salary increase over four years, with 13 percent for educators at the top step. The contract also includes 25 paid parental leave days, and members are able to use another 60 days using sick days. Unused retiree sick days will be used to fund these days. ▮



Haverhill Education Association members rallied in November.



The Professional Staff Union at UMass Boston and Amherst is engaged in a contract campaign.



Members of the Brockton Education Support Professionals Association are still fighting for a livable wage.

2026 NEA Director Elections

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

The seats are for three-year terms beginning Sept. 1, 2026, and expiring Aug. 31, 2029, in accordance with the NEA fiscal year.

Three members have been nominated by presenting the requisite papers. The candidates are: **Cherian Armstrong**, of the Monomoy Regional Education Association; **Yahaira Rodriguez Figueroa**, of the Educational Association of Worcester; and **Rachel M. Rex**, of the Gloucester Teachers Association. These seats will be filled by direct vote of the active membership in March and April, in tandem with NEA statewide and regional delegate

elections. Ballots will be provided to all MTA/NEA active members who are eligible to vote. Members may vote for up to two of the listed candidates.

Candidates' biographical statements and photos are published beginning on this page.

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

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



- Able to appreciate differences, work collaboratively and find common ground.

Equity is everything! I am:

- Committed to policies that protect access to public education and opportunities for all students, especially for those who have been marginalized because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability and religion.

I have been a preK-12 educator for 27 years!

- Early childhood and elementary classroom ESP and teacher.
- Early childhood and elementary Reading Specialist.
- Elementary and middle school Librarian.
- Middle school Health and Wellness teacher.
- High school Career Education and Community Service Coordinator.
- **NEA Board of Directors, Massachusetts**
- **MTA Board of Directors, 42C:** Anti- Oppression Facilitator, Bargaining Negotiations Committee, Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, Equal Opportunity Council, Mass Child, Personnel Selection Team
- **Chairperson, Greater Cape and Islands MEAN**
- **Monomoy Regional Ed. Assn.:** PAST POSITIONS: President, Vice President, Building Representative, Membership Coordinator, Political Action Leader. **†**

Statements by Candidates for NEA Director

CHERIAN ARMSTRONG

Monomoy Regional Education Association

Vote incumbent Cheri Armstrong for NEA Director! Now, more than ever, we need PIE: PASSION * INCLUSIVITY * EQUITY

I am passionate about public education and the power it has to change lives for the better.

I am an advocate for:

- Salaries greater than a living wage that reflect members' qualifications, experience and the vital role they play in society.
- Comprehensive and affordable health care insurance and greater retirement benefits.
- Supportive and safe work environments that value staff and

educators' contributions, provide resources, maintain healthy buildings, champion smaller class sizes and eliminate unnecessary paperwork.

- Mental health support and stress management resources for the well-being of school personnel.
- Academic freedom and First Amendment rights.
- The respect, dignity and equity deserved by all people.

I am inclusive in my outlook. I am:

- Open to opposing ideas and look forward to hearing multiple perspectives in a setting that allows everyone to speak their truth with kindness and to be heard with respect.

YAHAIRA RODRIGUEZ FIGUEROA Educational Association of Worcester

Together, we are stronger. Together, we lead.

Let's lead together.

My name is Yahaira Rodriguez, and I am honored to run for NEA Director. As a proud Puerto Rican educator, bilingual advocate and ESP leader, my work has always centered on uplifting immigrant students, supporting families and ensuring that every educator — from preK to higher ed — has a powerful voice in our union. My commitment is simple and unwavering: My voice is our voice. I do not lead alone; we do this together.

In my role as the MTA ESP At-Large Executive Committee member and the Ethnic Minority Chair for my local, I have focused on creating spaces where all educators feel represented, respected and truly seen. I helped lead efforts to make

our organization more inclusive, including adding a member acknowledgment at every meeting and establishing a new tagline to honor and recognize all educators. Even when change was challenging or slow, we continued moving forward together — with the shared goal of building a union that reflects the diversity and brilliance of our communities.

Supporting immigrant students has been at the heart of my work. Whether advocating for language access, creating safe havens for students and families or mentoring colleagues to better serve multilingual learners, I believe representation is essential for a just and equitable education system. I've collaborated with educators statewide and nationally to bring bilingual workshops, mentorship and hands-on support wherever it is needed.



I am running for NEA Director because I believe in the collective strength of our members — ESPs, teachers and higher ed professionals alike. I will continue working for equity, livable wages for ESPs, inclusive practices and schools where every student and educator can thrive.

Together, we are stronger. Together, we lead. **▮**

RACHEL M. REX Gloucester Teachers Association

My name is Rachel Rex. I am an educator, union member and organizer who believes deeply that **strong unions build strong workplaces, strong schools and strong communities.** That belief has guided my work throughout my career, and it is why I am seeking the opportunity to serve as your statewide NEA Director.

Centering Rank-and-File Members

I am committed to empowering the collective voice of the MTA's rank-and-file members. Our union is strongest when decisions are shaped by the lived experiences of preK through higher education workers in **classrooms, worksites and communities across the Commonwealth.** As NEA Director, I will work to **ensure that those voices are not only heard, but centered** in national conversations and **decision making** that impacts our professions and our students.

Leadership Rooted in Organizing and Solidarity

My leadership is rooted in **organizing, collaboration and democratized unionism.** I believe in **transparent leadership** that shares information openly, invites engagement and **builds trust** among members. I believe our strength comes not from hierarchy, but from **solidarity across locals, roles and regions.** When we act collectively, we are better positioned to win **improved working conditions, fully funded public education, racial and economic justice and dignity for every education worker.**

Advocacy at the National Level

At the national level, I will **advocate fiercely** for MTA members while remaining **grounded in the priorities of the rank and file.** I am committed to bringing **Massachusetts educators' experiences, challenges and vision**



directly into the work of the NEA and to ensuring that our union remains **member-led and accountable.**

A Call to Action

I respectfully ask for **your support and your vote.** Together, we can **build the power necessary** to protect public education, **strengthen our union** and **stand up for one another.** **▮**



HUMAN & CIVIL RIGHTS

A W A R D S

2026 NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN

Please nominate an individual or group for the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award or the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award. The deadline for nominations is **April 20**.

massteacher.org/hcr



A DIVERSE UNION
of EDUCATION
WORKERS

ANNUAL MEETING & PRECONVENTION INFORMATION

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

This year's preconvention meetings will be held virtually on Tuesday, April 14, and Wednesday, April 15, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., in advance of the 2026 Annual Meeting of Delegates.

The Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, May 8, and Saturday, May 9, at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. Delegates will receive preconvention information and registration materials as soon as they become available. †

MTA CHORUS TO OPEN ANNUAL MEETING

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

Two rehearsals will be held at Brockton High School, on April 23 and 30, and one rehearsal will be held at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, on May 8. The Brockton rehearsals will be from 6-8 p.m. and the Hynes rehearsal will begin at 10 a.m.

The chorus will perform at the 2026 Annual Meeting of Delegates, which will begin on Friday, May 8 in Boston. It is not necessary to be a delegate to participate in the MTA Chorus. †

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*\$3,000 in discounts for conventional loan as compared with standard Massachusetts conventional mortgage fees and closing costs. Loan Origination Fee is inclusive of the following fees: Origination, Processing, Commitment, Application and Underwriting. Borrower shall not pay any other fees that go directly to lender for processing a mortgage/loan. Does not include Title Exam fee savings. Certain loans that may be arranged through a third-party lender are excluded from MTA savings.

a poem for michelle

people are real
and we are not alone.

its a bad time for workers,
wealth concentrates itself
toward authoritarian reality,
but it is a good time to be
alive and to be fighting
these bastards for real.

i know why i fight.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR SUMMER CONFERENCE

July 26-29, 2026 | UMASS Amherst

To learn more, visit massteacher.org/summer.

This poem and dozens of others like it were created during the 2025 MTA Summer Conference. Poets from dpict. conducted interviews with participants then typed them live on classic typewriters. You don't want to miss what we'll have to offer for the 2026 Summer Conference - save the dates! Registration will open in May.

Write for MTA Today

MTA Today invites members to submit first-person articles, or perspectives, on issues relating to public education. We publish these articles under the heading “More Than Words” and they are clearly labeled as a contributor’s opinion. To be considered for publication, articles must be written by the author and must be original work. The author must be a current member of the MTA. The length should be no more than 1,000 words. A photograph of the author will be scheduled prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions, including for uniformity with union goals, clarity, length and style. The editor will work with writers who submit for publication, but not all submissions will be accepted for publication. **T**

If interested, please submit your writing, as well as contact information, to mtatoday@massteacher.org.

New MTA Website

The MTA will launch an updated website at massteacher.org on Friday, Feb. 27. The new site will include dedicated pages for all of our membership groups, including Education Support Professionals, teachers, Retired and higher education members. The new site is hosted by the NEA and will allow the MTA to post more photos and videos.

More information about the changes will be emailed closer to the date.

Resources for Educators on Immigration Rights

Educators throughout Massachusetts are concerned for their communities, and that includes many students and their families who are worried and fearful about coming to school because of aggressive immigration enforcement. The MTA has assembled a variety of resources for educators to help support our immigrant students and their families.

Read more at massteacher.org/protect.





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Empower students to lead and serve their community by fighting food insecurity while using the program’s Project-based learning lessons.

Service projects fighting food insecurity may receive grants from \$5,000 to \$500 in the Explore. Act. Tell. Challenge.

Annual Challenge Deadline: May 15, 2026

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MTA Benefits Access to Savings offers members the opportunity to save up to 50 percent at more than 1 million locations worldwide. Whether you're managing day-to-day expenses or planning a well-deserved getaway, this powerful savings program is designed to support your lifestyle and your budget.

Dining out with family or friends? Enjoy exclusive discounts at local restaurants and popular national chains, such as Auntie Anne's, Papa Gino's and Shake Shack. Planning a vacation or business trip? Save big on hotels, rental cars and travel-related expenses, whether you're headed far from home or looking for an overnight stay close to home. Looking ahead to a theme park adventure or special outing? Reduced ticket prices to member favorites such as Disney World,

LEGOLAND California, Story Land or Six Flags New England help turn exciting plans into affordable realities. With MTA Benefits Access to Savings, you don't have to choose between fun and financial responsibility — you can have both.

The program also makes it easier to save on everyday necessities. MTA members can access discounts on health and beauty products, fitness services, vision care and wellness solutions, helping support both your physical well-being and your financial health at retailers including Costco and Dick's Sporting Goods. Automotive services such as repairs, maintenance and parts also are available, offering peace of mind when unexpected expenses arise.

Shopping for essentials or gifts is another area where savings add up fast. From online retailers to in-store purchases, MTA Benefits Access to Savings ensures that your money stretches further every time you shop at MTA member favorites such as Macy's, Home Depot and Kohl's. These everyday discounts may seem small at first, but over time they can result in significant annual savings —

money that can be redirected toward goals, emergencies, or simply enjoying life.

What truly sets this program apart is its convenience. Savings are easy to access, easy to use and available when you need them most. With just a few clicks, members can browse offers, find nearby deals and start saving immediately.

Take advantage of a benefit that works as hard as you do. **T**

To explore available discounts and start maximizing your savings today, visit mtabenefits.com/access.





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FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS

Less screen time, more books.



Use a Mass Child grant to put books in students' hands.

Every MTA preK–12 local association is eligible to apply for a Mass Child voucher to purchase books for students. Through a partnership with First Book, a national nonprofit that provides high-quality, low-cost educational materials, approved locals will receive \$5 per student to use in the First Book Marketplace, where thousands of titles are available at deeply discounted prices.

Locals choose how many students to support, which grades or schools to serve, and how the books will be distributed. We encourage book giveaways to be joyful, community-building events that celebrate reading.

Districts with high economic need will be prioritized, but all preK–12 locals are encouraged to apply. Funds are limited, and applications will be reviewed at the March 12 Mass Child board meeting.

Apply now to make a meaningful impact — one book at a time.

massteacher.org/masschildbooks



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Retirement Planning

You only retire once. You should not be expected to be an expert in something you will never do again. Take advantage of the valuable services provided by our retirement consultants, who are available to MTA members without charge.

Consultations

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

Proof of membership must be submitted when requesting retirement services. This schedule is in effect from September to June except at MTA's Quincy headquarters, which is staffed during the summer and school vacations. Please be aware that the MTA consultants do not have records of your service, so members are advised to bring that information along to meetings.

Consultants are able to provide retirement advice to members in all segments of the MTA membership, including K-12, higher education and Education Support Professionals.

Quincy Office

Peter Mili - virtual on weekdays.
Contact: pmili@massteacher.org or 617-878-8256.

Patricia Thompson - virtual on weekdays
Contact: pthompson@massteacher.org or 617-878-8766.

Ray Thompson - in person on weekdays
Contact: rthompson@massteacher.org or 617-878-8255.

Holyoke Office

Ron Lech - in person third Saturday of each month. Contact: rlech@massteacher.org or 617-878-8763.

Middleton Office

Barbara Callaghan - in person second Saturday of each month.

Contact: bcallaghan@massteacher.org or 617-878-8760.

Billy McDonald - in person third Saturday of each month. Contact: wmcdonald@massteacher.org or 617-878-8764.

Raynham Office

Larry Abbruzzi - by phone second Saturday of each month.

Contact: labbruzzi@massteacher.org or 508-824-9194.

Nancy Mikels - in person third Saturday of each month. Contact: nmikels@massteacher.org or 617-878-8765.

Pittsfield Office

Cathy Grady - in person second Saturday of each month. Contact: cgrady@massteacher.org or 617-878-8762.

Worcester Office

Mike Whittier - in person first and third Saturday of each month.

Contact: mwhittier@massteacher.org or 617-878-8516

Higher Ed Members

JoAnne Martone. Contact: jmartone@massteacher.org or 617-878-8055

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LAST WORD

Shanna Landry

Framingham Teachers Association

“What’s been on my mind is how this immigration crisis is impacting the classroom, impacting students, educators, families who are just trying to come to school to learn, to be safe, to feel like they are in a safe place and protected. And what we can do to help support these students and families and create an even safer community for them. It impacts our community at the school, and it also impacts funding for the schools.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY MACDONALD

