

Early Childhood Educators Seek Union

Early childhood educators in Massachusetts have moved one step closer to their goal of forming a union. Last month, educators, center directors and parents of children who attend the centers descended upon the Statehouse for a hearing on legislation that would allow the new union to bargain directly with the state over compensation, benefits and professional development. The Joint Committee on Public Service is expected to release to a recommendation on the bill later this fall. The Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Union or MECEU would include the 10,000 teachers who work at more than 1,000 early childhood centers that have state-funded contracts or serve children who receive state subsidies.

The organizing effort is a groundbreaking one. MECEU members are quick to point out is that theirs is a “non-traditional” union, including not just early childhood teachers but center directors too. That’s because both see the woefully low wages earned by early education workers as a major problem, says Tracy Sheerin, who directs KidZone in Pittsfield. “The teachers who work at our center put their all into this work with the children and they’re not receiving fair compensation,” says Sheerin. She hopes that forming a union will help early childhood workers advocate



ALL TOGETHER NOW Members of Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators United rally before a hearing at the Statehouse last month. The educators, who teach at childcare centers across the Commonwealth, want more of a say in the decisions that affect early childhood education.

more effectively to make early childhood education a priority on par with public education in the state.

In recent years, study after study has confirmed the importance of high-quality early childhood education. Children who have access to good early learning programs are significantly more likely to enter school with the skills needed to succeed. They are also far more likely to graduate and to enter the workforce as successful citizens, less likely to require special needs accommodations in the classroom or the support of social programs as

adults. Yet despite their clear benefit—economists maintain that every dollar invested in early-childhood education generates returns of up to \$17—the programs have fared poorly through the recession. Since 2009, funding for early education in Massachusetts has dropped by nearly 20 percent when adjusted for inflation. Today the average hourly rate for early childhood educators in the Commonwealth is just \$9.25 per hour. “The work is too important for the level of compensation these teachers are receiving,” says Sheerin.

Continued on page 3

Occupy Wall Street Protests Strike a Chord

In Boston teachers held a symbolic “grade-in” to demonstrate that they put in hours far beyond the school day—then marched together to the Occupy Boston encampment in Dewey Square. In New York, teachers and parents are marching on the governor’s mansion on election day, fed up with the worst classroom overcrowding in a decade, even as the governor resists calls to extend a tax on New Yorkers earning more than \$1 million.

In cities large and small, teachers, nurses, librarians and other public employees are participating in the now two-month-old ‘Occupy’ movement. While the protests, which began on Wall Street and have since spread to more than 600 US cities and 900 cities worldwide, have often been criticized for lacking specific demands, at their heart is a concern about rising income inequality in the US.

How real is that concern? A recent report by the Social Security Administration found that 50 percent of workers made less than \$26,364 last

year, while the number of Americans earning \$1 million or more jumping 18 percent from 2009. The SSA report reached a stark conclusion: “The distribution of workers by wage level is highly skewed.”

Wanted: accountability

On a recent warm fall Friday, Lynnfield librarian Patricia Kelly joined a march of thousands through the winding streets of the Financial District, culminating in a rally at Boston’s Bank of America building. In the crowd were many Massachusetts residents who’d lost their homes to foreclosure and their jobs to recession. Asked why she’d chosen to participate, Kelly was quick to identify a reason: fairness. “The large corporations and financial institutions like Bank of America that played a huge role in the financial meltdown still haven’t been held accountable for their actions,” says Kelly. “The game seems rigged in favor of these groups at the expense of the poor and the middle class.”

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UP IN ARMS Lynnfield librarian Patricia Kelly (foreground) participates in a recent march through the financial district in Boston against corporate greed. “For me it’s an issue of fairness,” says Kelly.

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THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

A Major Threat Looms

Adozen or so years ago any one of us would have been proud to support “Stand for Children,” a grassroots organization founded in the late 1990’s in Portland, Oregon. At that time Stand for Children’s agenda mirrored its name. The group fought for health coverage for uninsured children, money for affordable quality child care, child abuse prevention programs, safe and productive after school programs; and many other programs aimed at improving the lives of children.

Now Stand for Children has chapters in nine states, including Massachusetts, and has an agenda that is totally different from its original mission. Today’s Stand for Children is much more pro-business than pro-children. Having received millions of dollars in grants from The Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation (i.e. Walmart), New Profit Inc., and locally from the Boston Foundation, this once child-focused group has become a major proponent for the corporate-driven “educational reforms” that attack teachers and their unions. A name that would more accurately reflect their goals today is “Stand Against Teachers.”

Stand for Children lobbied hard for Race to the Top and actively promoted the film “Waiting for

Superman.” In addition, in state after state, Stand for Children has aligned its agenda with those who call for privatization, charter schools, vouchers, and an end to teachers’ unions.

In Massachusetts, Stand for Children has pushed for more charter schools and for a teacher evaluation system that heavily emphasizes student test scores. Going beyond educational issues, Stand for Children actively supported a business-backed bill to restrict collective bargaining on health benefits for teachers and other public employees.

Stand for Children is no friend of teachers. And its attack on Massachusetts teachers is about to get worse.

Stand for Children has now gathered a sufficient number of signatures to place an Initiative Petition on the ballot next fall that will significantly impact the rights of teachers facing layoff or reassignment. The title of the initiative petition is “An Act Promoting Excellence in Public Schools.” This title is just as deceptive as the organization’s name itself. A more apt title would be “An Act to Strip Seniority Rights and Job Security from Teachers in Massachusetts.”

The initiative petition is long and

complex, but in essence it would do two things: 1) eliminate seniority as a determining factor in teacher layoffs; and 2) deprive teachers of any job security in the event that their position in a school is eliminated or their school is closed.

Therefore, if there are layoffs in a district, a more senior teacher with a good evaluation could be laid off before a less senior teacher with a slightly better evaluation. In other words, the decision about who stays and who goes is strictly management’s decision – seniority is out the window!

Further, if a school closes, teachers in that school have no right to an assignment in any other school no matter how many years they have worked or how good their evaluations are. No principal has to accept anyone into his or her school. And, if in the course of a year, these teachers can not find a principal who will accept them, these teachers are simply dismissed from the school system – no hearing, no reason given, no due process, no protection!

Stand for Children is determined to push its anti-teacher agenda. AFT Massachusetts will be fully engaged in this fight, and I am asking all AFT Massachusetts members to become involved. Specifically, I would ask that, at every opportunity, you inform your family members, friends, and neighbors of Stand for Children’s real agenda and expose the business-backed attack on teachers and their unions that is the driving force behind this initiative petition. ■

If you have any questions or comments on this issue, please e-mail me at Tgosnell@aftma.net.

Changes Sought in Charter Process

School officials from across the state are pushing lawmakers to give communities more say over proposed charter schools—and to consider changes to the way that charters are funded. At a hearing at the Massachusetts Statehouse last month, school committee members from Salem, Gloucester, Worcester and beyond urged support of a bill that would require charter school backers to win local approval, either from a school committee or by a referendum of voters. Currently the authority to approve charter schools rests with the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the members of which are political appointees.

Backers of the proposed changes to the charter approval process say that the state’s ability to impose a charter school upon a city or town is undemocratic and hurts traditional public schools by draining away scarce resources. Valerie Gilman, chair of the Gloucester School Committee, pointed to a controversial charter school in that city, approved by the state, despite widespread opposition from local residents, for political reasons.

Gilman told the Committee on Education that Gloucester’s school district stands to lose half of its Chapter 70 funding for a school that services less than 6% of the city’s students population. Said Gilman:

Gloucester’s last hope for surviving the financial devastation and loss of educational programs and services for our 3100 remaining students is to reform charter school funding.

Still other officials charged that under the current system, charter schools are accountable only to Department of Secondary and Elementary Education—not to the communities in which they’re based. “There’s no local accountability for charter schools,” Tracy O’Connell Novick, an member of the Worcester School Committee told legislators. She said that the state’s approval of 16 new charter schools this year is forcing traditional public schools to divvy up a dwindling amount of school funding. There are currently 79 charter schools operating in Massachusetts.

The education reform law passed in 2010 lifted the cap on charter school enrollment in low-performing school districts. Seven additional charter schools have been proposed for Boston, Springfield and Lowell, where SABIS International, a for-profit company, seeks to open a school that would ultimately enroll 1200 students. An existing charter school in that city has been threatened with closure due to chronically low MCAS scores and was forced to shed four grades last year. The Board of Education will make its determination early next year. ■

BOLD PRINT

Para power

Major kudos to five **Lawrence paraprofessionals** who have recently become certified teachers. **Gretchen Ortiz-Arlington, Elizabeth Richardo, Heather Long, David Duncan** and **Genevieve Bard**, all of whom have worked as paraprofessionals in the Lawrence Public Schools, are now teachers in that district. The six teachers have all been selected to teach at that city’s two Level 4 schools, **the Arlington and South Lawrence Middle School**. Look for a story about these outstanding educators in the December issue of the *Advocate*.



Prize pages

Berklee School of Music faculty member **Jan Donley** has been racking up awards for her novel, *The Side Door*. Donley, who teaches in Berklee’s Liberal Arts department, received an honorable mention in the young adult category at this year’s Eric Hoffer Awards. The *Side Door* also received a ‘Goldie’ in dramatic/general fiction from the Golden Crown Literary Society. Last but not least, the novel has been nominated for a Lamda Literary Award. To learn more about Donley’s prize-winning pages, visit www.jandonley.com



All aboard

The **AFT Massachusetts Executive Board** has a new member. Sean Bowker, a biology teacher at Southeastern Regional Vocational Technical High School in Easton. Bowker, who has taught at the school for ten years, replaces outgoing board member Rebecca McInnis. Welcome ‘aboard’ Sean!



Red carpet

“**TEACH: Teachers are Talking— Is the Nation Listening?**”, a documentary by Boston teachers **Robert** and **Yvonne Lamothe** had its New England premier last month at the Boston Teachers Union. If you missed the movie, don’t despair. The filmmakers, who debuted their film in Washington DC this summer at the Save Our Schools rally and conference, plan to show their handiwork at teacher gatherings around the area. For more information about how to see the film for yourself visit www.teachdocumentary.com.



North Attleboro High School has been singled out for special recognition in **Boston Magazine’s** exclusive ranking of the area’s top school district. The school was recognized for its top scores on the 10th grade MCAS science exam and tied with two other districts - Dover-Sherborn High School and Acton-Boxboro High School - as “Most Likely to Win a Nobel Prize.” Congratulations to the science teachers at the school, **Duncan Gray, Genevieve Strang, Geoffrey Burgess** and **Ted Duluk**, for their outstanding work!

The Advocate loves good news. If you’ve got news to share, send us an email at: advocate@aftma.net.

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Early Childhood Educators

Continued from cover

Study after study has confirmed the vital importance of high-quality early childhood education. Yet funding for the programs has dropped and the professionals who teach the youngest learners earn poverty wages.

Speaking out

Educator Susan Rogers, who teaches at the Commonwealth Children’s Center in Boston, has been an early childhood educator for more than two decades. At the hearing on Beacon Hill, Rogers told legislators how proud she is to be the first person who instills learning in children. She also spoke of her frustration regarding the poverty wages that teachers in her profession receive. Rogers urged legislators on the committee to back the bill that would allow her and other educators to bargain directly with the state Department of Early Education and Care. “We want to invest in our future and in the future of our students,” said Rogers.

Her message was reiterated by educators, parents, center directors and advocates for high-quality early childhood programs who testified before the committee. “I love teaching, and I enjoy watching my students grow and learn,” said

Margarita Weinstein, a teacher at Village Preschool in Roslindale. “Early educators are the front line in preparing children for later success in school. But without reasonable compensation, many educators cannot continue their careers, especially with student loans for professional development piling up.”

The turnover problem

Low wages drive talented teachers out of the profession, Weinstein and others told the legislators. Early educators earn roughly \$25,000 per year. Because teaching jobs in the public schools pay much more—nearly three times as much—early childhood teachers often leave their positions as soon as they’ve attained the necessary qualifications to teach in the public schools. Turnover at early childhood centers in Massachusetts averages 30 percent per year.

Jessica Heaton-Mercada, a parent from Whitman who attended the hearing, said that she’s witnessed first hand the problem of high teacher turnover at preschools attended by her three children. “The centers they attended had difficulty retaining staff. They can’t support the well trained educators we need to teach our children,” said Heaton-Mercada

Fierce opposition?

The effort by the teachers to form the state’s very first union of early childhood workers has spurred fierce opposition, primarily from area YMCAs and local Boys and Girls Clubs, both of which operate their own childcare programs. Executives



SPEAKING OUT
Susan Rogers, a teacher at the Commonwealth Children’s Center in Boston, testifies before the Joint Committee on Public Service in support of a bill that would improve the quality of early education throughout Massachusetts. Rogers warned that her center and others can’t afford to pay their staff what they deserve.

from both organizations testified that salaries for early childhood educators can’t be raised without passing on cost increases to parents.

Advocates dispute that claim, however, emphasizing that their goal is to have the state pay any additional cost, not parents. KidZone’s Sheerin, who formerly directed a YMCA early childhood center, says that educators understand that parents can’t afford to pay more, but that Massachusetts can’t afford not to. “Given how important early childhood education is, it’s essential that the state starts to contribute something. We pay to support public education. Why is early childhood different?”

Sheerin and others also note that while YMCA and Boys and Girls Club executives may oppose the right of early educators to form a union, teachers who work at these organizations often feel differently. Says Sheerin: “There were no teachers from the YMCA at the hearing saying ‘we don’t want this.’”

Shining a light

Despite the opposition from some day care providers and centers, members of Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Union believe that they’ve already succeeded in drawing new attention to the problem of low wages and high turnover in the field of early education. Now the challenge remains to pass legislation that will allow early childhood workers to do something about that problem.

Tom Gosnell, president of AFT Massachusetts which is helping to organize the early childhood workers along with the Massachusetts Teachers Association, told legislators that having a union will give teachers a larger voice in educational policy and at individual centers. “The reality is as teachers unionize they become more forceful advocates for resources for their schools.” ■

Learn more about the Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Union at www.meceu.org

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Diary

of a New Teacher

By Robert Tobio,
Math and special education teacher,
Mary Lyon Pilot School,
Boston, MA

Meet the 2011-2012 New Teacher Diarists

Bill Madden-Fuoco

A humanities teacher at the Urban Science Academy in West Roxbury, Bill was also a semi-finalist in the state's 2012 Teacher of the Year contest.

Robert Tobio

Robert teaches math and special education at the Mary Lyon Pilot School in Brighton and previously taught at Monument High in South Boston, which closed last spring.

Melissa McDonald

A fifth grade teacher at the Parthum Elementary School in Lawrence, Melissa is returning to teaching after a year of maternity leave.

Joyce Melker

A paraprofessional at the Watson Elementary School in Fall River, Joyce is a student in the JET teacher training program at UMass Dartmouth.

Matthew Robinson

Matthew is beginning his second year teaching English and journalism at the Burke High School in Dorchester.

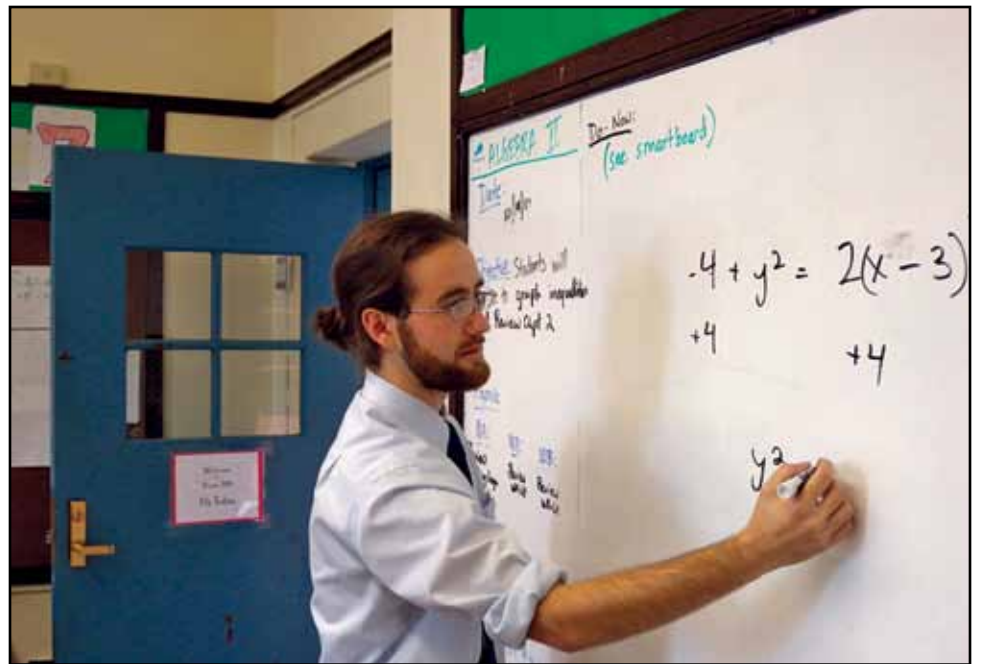
Riana Good

While Riana is technically no longer a new teacher, this Spanish teacher at the Boston Teachers Union School in Jamaica Plain says that she still feels like a 'newby.'

As my first year of teaching wrapped up, so did my first year of being part of a union. Over the summer, I had time to take a breath and reflect upon my new profession. I finally considered what it means to be part of a union. Among most new teachers, the words "teachers union" can carry some negative connotations. Partially this is because we don't know the true extent of the union's work and partially it is because we are not involved. Many young teachers think only: "What does the union do for me?" This is a mistake. Being in a union should raise the question, "what have we done for each other?"

My first year was a success due to my colleagues; some fellow teachers really went above and beyond their regular duties to assist me throughout the year. They helped me to help the kids. To me, they embody what a "union" should be: a group of individuals working together for a common goal. I will not forget this as I transition from a "new teacher" to an "experienced teacher" over the next few years.

Conversely, my biggest challenge was not an obnoxious student or challenging content, but one or two selfish coworkers. If we are a union, we need to consider our fellow members with every action we take. If we care about the other teachers in the school, we should not use all of our sick days and personal days just because we can. It is unfair to burden your coworkers while you sleep in, and it is unjust to leave a class of students without their regular teacher. It is very difficult to teach alongside a teacher who is slacking because it devalues the work the rest of us do. It



PROBLEM SOLVING Robert Tobio recently completed his first year as a math and special education teacher—and his first year as a union member. Says Tobio: "Now I believe in being part of the union—union not just in name but also in action. We need to support each other and to push each other."

is hard to convince kids that we need to work hard 180 days of the year when other teachers send the message that 160 days is good enough.

I am grateful that the vast majority of teachers in my school and in Boston Public schools are supportive, hard working, intelligent and dedicated, but the few outliers need to be addressed. I don't mean by administrator evaluations but by us, the union. We need to hold each other to high standards or the teaching profession will suffer. I want teachers to be held accountable for teaching because I know almost all of us will surpass the expectations, and those of us who do not should be helped to improve. The most important part of teaching is learning.

After my first year, I still believe we have a responsibility to our

students. I still believe education is the single most important variable in many kids' lives. But now I believe in being part of the union—union, not just in name but also in action. We need to support each other and to push each other. We don't need public outcry or district evaluations to improve. We need to share our successes with our colleagues and to improve our weaknesses by learning from colleagues. Every teacher has something to offer and every teacher can improve. We need to continue to improve, as a strong union of professionals.

We are part of a union, we benefit from our fellow union members, and we need to ask if they are benefiting from us. ■

Web Site Gets Teachers Talking

Boston teacher James Liou wants to start a conversation. The peer assistant for the Boston Public Schools has created a new website called The Teaching Pulse that he hopes will get teachers talking about their profession. Says Liou: "The hope is that the site becomes

to turn down the volume and allow classroom educators to focus on what they actually do—and how they can do it better. Each month Liou plans to write a "Teacher Pulse" column for the *Boston Union Teacher* exploring a topic that will then be discussed online. Additional materials, including

www.theteachingpulse.org aims to get teachers talking and sharing ideas.

a forum for teachers from across the Boston Public Schools to share their opinions, learn from dynamic practicing teachers and connect with each other."

And, once teachers get talking, says Liou, he hopes that district and union leaders will listen to what they have to say. "This is an opportunity for district and union leaders to be responsive to the opinions and 'pulse' of what classroom teachers across the city are feeling and saying."

The site, www.theteachingpulse.org, is a direct response to the 'teacher bashing' that seems to be everywhere these days, the harsh rhetoric directed at teachers and their unions that has left many educators feeling dispirited. Liou's solution is

case-study highlights of classroom teachers, will also appear on the site.

One such topic: How can teachers in the Boston Public Schools model, facilitate and practice a collaborative relationship between labor and management that is focused on students, given the current context and climate of fiscal tightening, accountability and national 'anti-teacher' rhetoric?

Says Liou: "Success will depend upon the interest and participation of teachers from classrooms across the city, from art classrooms to AP classrooms, from early childhood to high school classrooms and from the small alternative ed programs to the large comprehensive high schools. I'm excited by the possibilities." ■

Would you like to travel abroad on an inexpensive trip designed specifically for educators?

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Michael Regan, Field Representative

Mike Regan understands exactly the kinds of pressures that educators in Massachusetts are facing these days. Regan, AFT Massachusetts' brand new field representative, spent the past fourteen years as a social studies and history teacher in the Medway schools. And while Regan, who also served as co-president of the Medway Federation of Teachers, is thrilled about his new position, he already misses the students he taught and coached at Medway High. "I got into teaching for the kids and I'm really going to miss having that impact in the classroom," says Regan.

It was Regan's own high school history teacher—in Medway no less—who predicted that Regan would grow up to become a history teacher too. The standout football player wasn't so sure. "My dad was a history teacher in Dover/Sherborne but my goal was to go into law enforcement," recalls Regan. But a stint as a sub after he graduated from Maine's Colby College changed his mind. "I just knew that that was where I wanted to be."

Back in 1995 Massachusetts was mired in recession, much like today, and it would take Regan years to break into his new career. While he scoured the state for history positions he painted houses, worked for the concessions department at Foxboro Stadium as well as for a Budweiser distributor. When a job finally opened at Medway Middle School, an administrator took a chance on him, hiring him to teach 7th and 8th grade social studies. "It was an awesome experience. The kids could be tough but they were just great," says Regan.



NEW FACES New AFT MA field representative Mike Regan, with his wife Jane, has spent the past 14 years as a history and social studies teacher in the Medway Public Schools. That experience, says Regan, has given him a clear perspective on the demands facing teachers today.

In 2003 Regan moved to Medway High School—he already coached the high school football team—where at last he found his dream job. "I taught US history to some of the toughest kids in the school and I loved it," says Regan. He also got increasingly involved in the Medway Federation of Teachers, first as a member of the executive board, then as vice president and finally as co-president with Meg Boland, a 6th grade teacher at Medway Middle School. "Neither of us could have done the job alone," says Regan. "We were both young teachers with busy lives."

Regan's years in the classroom have given him a clear perspective on the demands that teachers are subject to today, including the relentless emphasis on testing. "We're teaching to a test in order to produce a product and that product is a score. You can't quantify education like that without losing sight that these are kids we're talking

about," says Regan. He also worries that the ceaseless attacks on tenure and other workplace protections will hit outspoken teachers hardest. "If there are no seniority protections it's the teachers who speak out who will be the most vulnerable."

Regan's new position will take him all over the state to AFT MA teacher, paraprofessional and library locals but Medway remains his home base. His three children all attend Medway schools, while his wife Jane formerly ran a daycare in the community and now provides elder care for local residents. And while his coaching duties at Medway High School are over, Regan is more than happy to lend a hand at his kids' sporting events. "I still help out with softball, baseball, flag football—whatever they need me for."

Welcome aboard Mike! ■

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On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



Established Order Meets 'Generation Why'

“The young are the losers in today’s political economy. More of this group goes without health insurance than any other group and student loan debt recently surpassed credit card debt.”



including immediate hand and voice signals from participants at the meeting. Google hand signals for Occupy Wall Street for some lessons.

For the most part, the national TV and print media has presented a picture of the occupations as disorganized and unfocused protests. The opposite seems true to me. The occupiers have challenged the political system with some simple questions.

Why are there no loans for people who need them but plenty for high rollers, no health care for people who need it with pre-existing conditions, no jobs for people who need them while there is plenty of work to be done, no financial aid for students who need it, no housing for people who need it while homes stand empty, and why do millions starve to death when there is plenty of food for everyone?

(These questions come from my grandson, a member of Occupy College Hill in Providence)

Answers are more difficult to come

KEY QUESTIONS

By asking a series of deceptively simple questions young people are challenging the political system. While answers may prove more difficult to come by, and solutions even more so, these questions seem a good place to start.

by than questions, and solutions even more so. But these questions seem a good place to start.

TV and newspapers have drifted away from the politics of the occupiers. TV news presents famous people like Alec Baldwin defending banks to the Wall Street occupiers. Soon TV and print media will turn its attention to effects of cold weather on the occupiers. Political issues have little place in the mainstream media.

The difference between the mostly young occupiers and the old people (including me) who attend political functions is striking. Traditional political action has become old people’s turf, fought over by both parties, who ignore the young because they don’t vote. The occupiers argue that there is no difference between Republicans and Democrats, which is difficult to argue against these days.

But the young are the losers in today’s political economy. Unemployment is high among the young. According to the Bureau

of Labor Statistics, nineteen million 16-24 year olds are unemployed. More of this group goes without health insurance than any other group, and student loan debt has recently passed credit card debt in the U.S.

Unemployment rates are still lower for college graduates than for people with less education. In the current recession, however, unemployment has risen sharply among recent college graduates. College graduates who take jobs that don’t require a college degree bump high school graduates out of employment. Andrew Sum from Northeastern University reports that almost half of college graduates under 25 are unemployed or working in jobs that do not require college degrees. Unemployment has

always been the weapon of choice in class warfare.

With their slogan of representing the 99 percent, the occupiers have turned the absurd claims of taxing the richest 1% in the nation as class warfare right-side-up. They have made obvious the nature of class warfare as the powerful 1% controlling everyone else. The usual goal of protests in the U.S. is to attract the media in order to move some issue forward on the political agenda. While protests with social goals such as the right to vote or political goals such as ending an unjust war work better than protests with economic goals, the occupiers may give President Obama some support for his jobs bill or more student financial aid, or even the more ambitious goal of health care for all.

The occupiers want more than this; they want revolution. Their recent calls for a national assembly mirror the demands of young people throughout the world for democratic change. The standard answer is that the U.S. doesn’t need a democratic revolution. I’m not so sure. ■

Send comments to dgeorgianna@umassd.edu

CAMPUS UPDATE

Movie time

PHENOM, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts, is sponsoring showings of a new documentary on the student debt crisis.

The group has shown the film, “Default: the Student Loan Documentary,” at UMass Amherst and is planning other campus screenings in the coming months. Student debt in this country exceeds total credit card debt and recently reached a trillion dollars. That’s \$1,000,000,000,000. Just how much money is that? Explain PHENOM’s experts: “The height of a stack of one trillion one dollar bills would reach more than one quarter of the way from the earth to the moon.” If you’d like to arrange a screening of “Default” write to phenom@phenomonline.org or call 413.461.3300.



Author, Author

Congratulations to UMass Dartmouth history professor and AFT MA member Brian Glyn Williams on the publication of his new book: *Afghanistan Declassified: A Guide to America’s Longest War*. Williams, who has traveled to Afghanistan frequently over the past decade, provides essential background to the war, tracing the rise, fall, and reemergence of the Taliban. Williams was awarded the scholar of the year award in 2007 by the UMass Dartmouth Faculty Federation.

Educator Mentor Corps

Are you an experienced educator who is looking to get involved in mentoring? The Educator Mentor Corps is a program of Wheelock College that mobilizes skilled, experienced educators to help support, inspire and retain the next generation of urban teachers in Greater Boston. Most EMC mentors are retired or working part-time and have 20 or more years of teaching experience.

An AmeriCorps program, EMC offers its members a stipend of \$1500 and an education award of \$1468 in exchange for a commitment of 10 hours per week.



For more information, email

azak@wheelock.edu.

To apply, go to www.wheelock.edu/aspire/emcapp.asp.



Retiree Corner

Marie Ardito, Co-founder
Massachusetts Retirees United
www.retireesunited.org

SENIOR SEMINARS

How to Protect Your Nest Egg and Plan for the Right Outcome for Your Family

This popular seminar, given by elder law attorney Mary Howie, looks at many issues involving probate, trusts, Medicare Trusts, Benefits for veterans and their spouses and much more.

When: Saturday December 3, 10 to noon.

Where: Presidential Park, 314 Main Street, Unit 105, Wilmington, MA (Main St. is Rt. 38. The entrance to the park is across from the Wilmington House of Pizza sign.)

Preparing for Retirement

Currently scheduled for the following dates and locations:

- Amesbury High School library, 5 Highland Street, Amesbury, Monday November 14th, 3:30-5:30.
- Stoneham/Melrose/Wakefield—date, time and location to be determined. Contact Marie Ardito if you'd like more information.

Attention teachers: if you would like one of the above free seminars presented in your school district, ask your union president to contact Marie Ardito.

All the above seminars are free. To register call Marie Ardito at 1-617-482-1568 or e-mail mardito@retireesunited.org. Make sure to specify which seminar you plan to attend and the number of individuals who will be attending.

Hunger a Growing Problem for Seniors

Each time I go to the grocery store these days, I am taken aback by the weekly increases in the price of food. Not only is the cost of food increasing, but the weight of the products is decreasing. What was formerly a pound of coffee is now about twelve ounces. The size of a cereal box has also decreased while the cost has gone up. Even vegetables are being packaged in a way intended to drive up their cost. It is important that we observe the unit pricing on shelves so that we get a true picture of what we are actually paying for the products.

Affordability of food plays a large factor in why seniors are not eating properly.

Even when they can afford food their meals are often not prepared nutritionally. They do not include vegetables regularly as part of their diet. Their diets are often lacking in variety and may not contain enough calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B, protein or iron.

For many people, eating is more than just a way to fulfill nutritional needs, it is also a social event. Eating alone may lessen the desire to eat. Many times meals are skipped because the social atmosphere eating together provides is not available. Hunger is not the motivator! Some people live

to eat; they are not the ones who skip a meal, but it is those who must eat to live who are most vulnerable.

The next time you stop into a Dunkin Donuts or comparable place where a table of retirees sits talking over a cup of coffee, take note. Conversely, a person sitting alone in a restaurant very often is up and out in no time after having consumed a whole meal.

If affordability is why you, or someone you know, is not eating enough you may want to look into the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. Unlike the previous program in which you were given a book of paper stamps to use in the grocery store, the new method uses a card similar to a credit card called an EBT card (Electronic Benefit Transfer.) On a monthly basis money is deposited to this account and one simply transacts business as if it were a credit card. A receipt reflects the balance in the account. As a senior you qualify for this benefit as long as your net monthly income is \$903 or less. If the amount is slightly above this amount you may still qualify for some assistance. The amount one has in savings is one of the only other factors considered.

There are a number of deductions

allowed from one's gross income to get this net. They include medical expenses, dental care, health insurance premiums, deductibles, co-pays (including Medicare), eyeglasses, home health aides, dentures, hearing aides, and just about all medical expenses that are not paid for by insurance or someone else can be deducted. You may also deduct shelter costs including a certain amount of rent, mortgage, condo fees, property insurance and property taxes. There are also deductions made for utility allowances.

To learn more about SNAP call 1-800-221-5689. Those in Massachusetts can call the State Information Hotline: 1-866-950-3663. Massachusetts residents may also call Project Bread at 1-800-645-8333 to learn about sources of food within the state.

Some say that they are embarrassed to take part in these and similar programs. Consider how many years you spent working, paying taxes and taking care of the needs of others with your tax dollars. Now is your turn to be on the receiving end for your lifetime of giving. ■

Send comments and suggestions for future columns to mardito@retireesunited.org

The Golden Apple

By Patricia Delaney, Massachusetts Retirees United, retired teacher, North Reading, MA,

Meet Victor Lister: the oldest living World War II veteran in the Massachusetts retirement system. As a member of the U.S. Army's First Infantry Division he served in North Africa, Sicily and elsewhere in Europe. After his LCVP landing craft hit a mine en route to Omaha Beach, Lister swam tirelessly just to stay alive.

Lister volunteered for the army in 1940, just before the draft was initiated. At the time there was no such thing as Basic Training; he learned the skills he'd need on the job. To this day Lister remains a big fan of the military. "Thank God for the army," were his exact words to me. He credits the army for building his character as well as preparing him for his next career: as a teacher.

At age 30, with the backing of the GI Bill, Lister entered Boston University. A life-long learner, he would go on to earn an MA in history from Northeastern University as well as an MA and a Certificate

On Veteran's Day, A Salute to Service

of Advanced Study from Harvard University. At Boston College Lister took still more college, many of which he credits for helping him to navigate the winding road of collective bargaining.

Lister put all of this knowledge to work as a teacher, with a career that spanned 27 years. When he began teaching in Stockholm, Maine, Lister earned \$2,400 a year. As a classroom teacher, a curriculum coordinator in North Attleboro, a department head in Manchester, New Hampshire, and an administrator in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire, Lister saw teaching evolve into a 21st century profession. His students in the schools where he taught honored him by dedicating their year books to him.

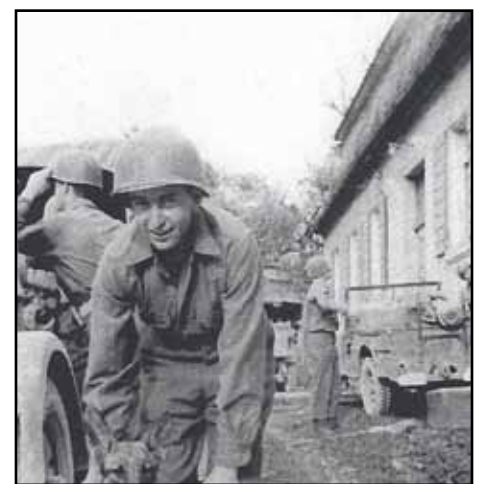
While reviewing his past, Lister also looked to the future. When asked what advice he would give to young people choosing a teaching career today, he quipped: "Be sure not to be eaten alive by the kids." He also expressed concern about threats to seniority and the possible corrupting influence of merit pay. "It's difficult to tell who the best is and who the worst is," says Lister, who warned that teachers that veer from the "beaten path" could be punished. "Is the best [teacher] the quietest and the worst

the noisiest?"

As president of the Leominster Education Association, Lister negotiated their very first contract. Many a teacher who works in that district has Lister to thank for paving the way to a fair and equitable contract.

We thank you Victor for your service to our country and for your service to our beloved teaching profession. ■

Victor Lister lives in Athens, Maine.



SALUTE TO SERVICE World War II veteran and retired North Attleboro history teacher Victor Lister, the oldest living veteran in the Massachusetts retirement system.

'Occupy' Strikes a Chord

Continued from cover

While none of the executives behind the financial crisis has gone to jail as a result of their actions, the effects of the recession—the worst since the Great Depression—linger on. In Massachusetts, cities and towns continue to battle a rising tide of red ink, leading to layoffs and reductions in services. Kelly's own community of public librarians has been especially hard hit, with one library after another losing staff and operating hours. In Franklin, the nation's first public library has lost nearly half of its staff due to budget cuts. And with the financial forecast predicted to be bleak for the foreseeable future, there is little hope that things will get better in the near term. For Kelly, the disconnect between bank bailouts and shuttered libraries is too big to ignore. "I fully expect to be responsible and pay my fair share of taxes; I want corporations and the wealthy to do the same."

Classroom contradictions

In Boston, the members of the newly formed Teacher Activist Group got the idea for their "grade-in" from colleagues in New York and Los Angeles. But their protest, intended to make visible the work that teachers put in outside of the classroom, had a distinctly local target. The Boston Public Schools want teachers to agree to work an additional half hour per day—but with no additional compensation. For months, the BPS has maintained that its teachers work just six hours a day, a claim that has been ceaselessly echoed in the pages of the *Boston Globe*.

Mira Brown, a physics teacher in Boston, joined her colleagues in the symbolic grading of papers and tests. "People think I have an easy deal because I get summers off," Brown told the *Globe*. "But I work 78 hours a week."

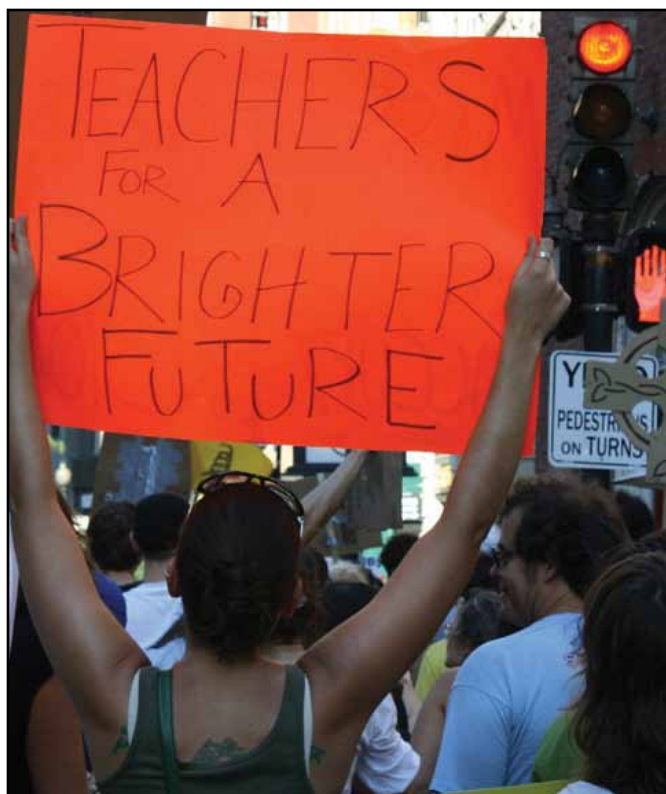
The contract covering some 6,300 teachers and paraprofessionals expired more than a year ago and have stalled over the issue of compensating educators for extra time worked. The BPS has proposed that teachers be paid for the additional time on the basis of student performance but has provided few details about how such a plan would work.

The poverty problem

In addition to their recent "grade-in," members of the Teacher Activist Group have been regular participants in Occupy Boston events. TAG co-founder Jessica Tang says that the issue of income inequality in particular is one that resonates with many teachers. "Teachers are a large part of what's left of the middle class," says Tang. "We really are the 99%," she says, citing a popular protest slogan. Even more important may be the effects of poverty that teachers confront in their classrooms everyday, says Tang, who teaches sixth grade humanities at the Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot School in Mattapan. "The biggest single cause behind the achievement gap is poverty. Teachers can have a huge impact on our students but we have to address just how significant a factor poverty is." For teachers in the urban schools in particular, the extent of the Great Recession's reach is undeniable. Unemployment in Boston's minority neighborhoods is more than 15 percent—a figure that doesn't include people who've given up on the prospect of finding a job. "The parents of our kids don't have jobs," says Tang. "Education suffers as a result."

Blame game

Spanish teacher Riana Good made her first trip to the Occupy Boston encampment for a Yom Kippur service organized by local Jewish community leaders. Since then she's been making regular visits, bringing other teachers with her. For Good, who teaches at the Boston Teachers Union School in Jamaica Plain, the Occupy cause feels deeply personal. She feels that teachers and other public employees have been unfairly blamed for the nation's economic woes. "Teachers relate to Occupy Boston because we've been used as scapegoats to account for this economic crisis." One need not look far to find evidence of Good's claim. As the economy has deteriorated, the harsh rhetoric directed at teachers and their unions has grown ever more pointed. In state after state, teachers, librarians and other public employees have seen their rights curtailed and their benefits slashed.



VIVID STATEMENT

A teacher participates in the growing protest movement against income inequality and corporate greed in the United States. Teachers, nurses and other public sector employees have been regular participants in the protests. "It's hard for teachers to ignore inequality when we see the effects of poverty in our classrooms," says teacher Jessica Tang. "The parents of our students don't have jobs and education suffers as a result."

Teachable moment

The future of the sprawling Occupy movement remains unclear. Protesters in Boston maintain that they plan to continue their 'camp-in' despite winter's looming arrival, while in cities from Chicago to Cincinnati, police have forcibly evicted demonstrators from city centers.

The demands of the protesters should serve as a wake up call, says American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten.

"We need to listen to what the individuals camped out in Liberty Plaza for Occupy Wall Street—and those marching in the streets from Boston to Denver to Los Angeles—

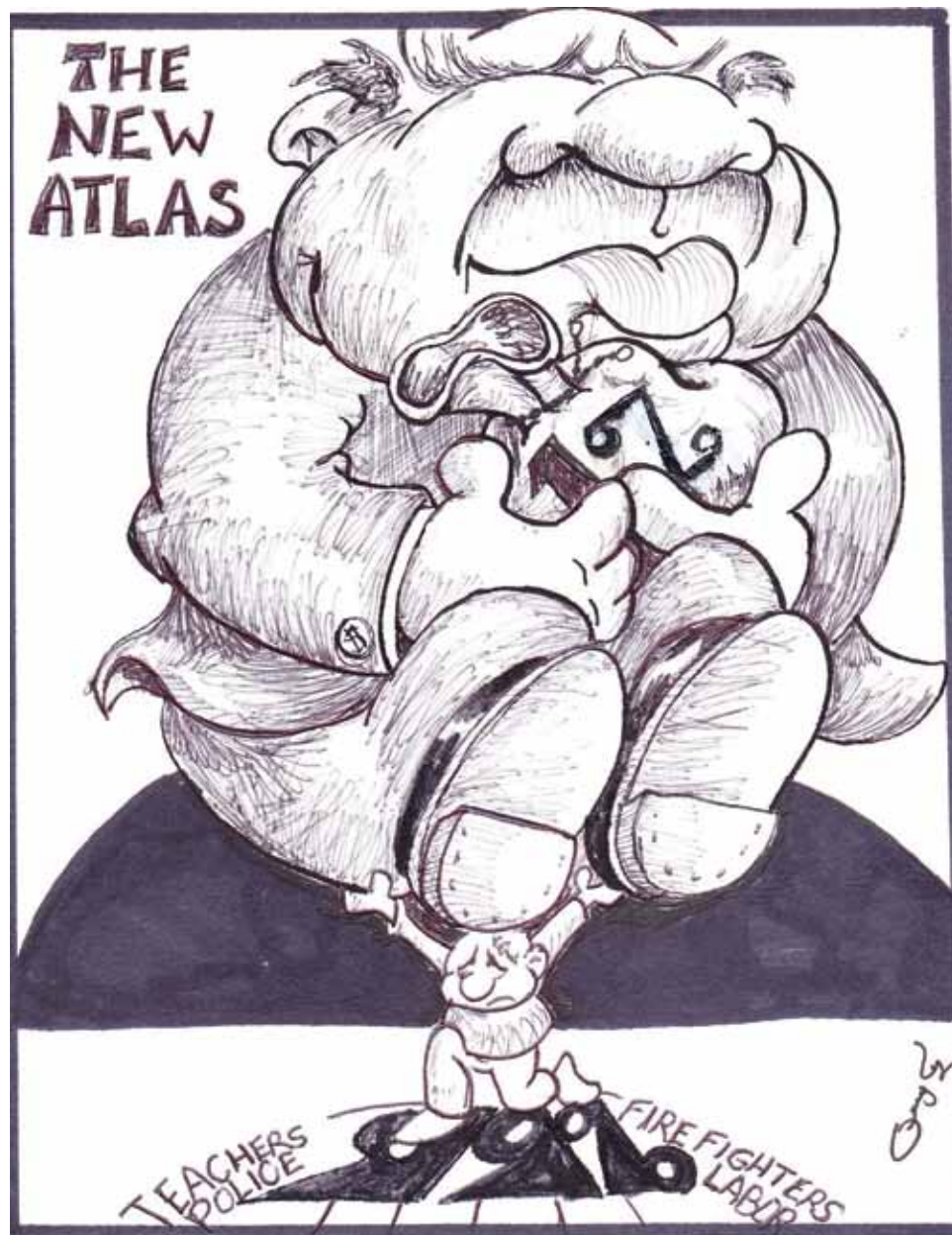
"Teachers relate to Occupy Boston because we've been used as scapegoats to account for this economic crisis."

—Riana Good, Spanish teacher, Boston Teachers Union School, Jamaica Plain, MA

Whatever the long-term outcome of the protests, they have already had an impact. Across the country, income inequality is now a hot topic of conversation, while the national policy debate seems to have shifted, at least for now, from austerity and budget cuts to the desperate need to create new jobs.

have to say. And then we need to get serious as a nation about working together to create economic opportunities for all Americans, including young people, so we can get our country back on the right track." ■

Join the conversation—send comments to advocate@aftma.net



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