

'Level Four No More'

For educators at the state's lowest performing schools, the race is on to boost student achievement and turn the struggling schools around.

On an unseasonably warm fall day a dozen Lynn teachers are gathered for a seminar led by curriculum specialists KnowAtom. The subject is science, specifically a lesson that the teachers can utilize in third and fourth grade classrooms to boost understanding of key concepts, including mass and balance, which will soon show up on the MCAS exam. On this day, the teachers play the role of students, using empty tennis ball containers, dowels and clothes pins to create a pan balance.

Despite the festive atmosphere, however, there is serious business taking place here today. These teachers are all from so-called Level 4 schools, a new designation assigned to the state's lowest performing schools. Two of the thirty five schools to receive the Level 4 classification, the Harrington and the Connory, are in Lynn. Schools in nine districts, including Boston, Springfield,



HANDS ON APPROACH Teacher Christina Colella works with 3rd grade students at the Harrington School in Lynn on a science project. The Harrington is one of 35 so-called 'Level 4' schools in the state, a new designation given to the state's lowest performing schools.

Lawrence and Fall River, were included on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's list.

A controversial process

Teachers at the schools now have three years to significantly increase student achievement—or else. Should they fall short, the teachers will likely lose their jobs and see the schools closed or turned over to outside operators.

The process has its origins in the controversial education reform bill passed in January. The measure was strongly opposed by many educators

who argued that it was unnecessarily punitive and, more importantly, reflected a lack of understanding about the conditions facing teachers in the most challenging schools.

Turn it around

The precise nature of those challenges was on vivid display during a recent visit to the Harrington School. Science teacher Christina Colella, a participant in the professional development session a few weeks before, was now attempting the pan balance experiment in her own third grade classroom.

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For New Union Leaders, Big Challenges

By John Scopelleti

When Brant Duncan recently took over for long-time leader Alice Gunning as president of the Lynn Teachers Union, the eighth grade math teacher at the Breed Middle School faced a difficult climate for a new union officer. In a city with serious budget woes, the prospect of teacher layoffs and school closings looms large, while the share of health insurance costs born by members of the LTU seems certain to increase. And as he weathers these challenges, Duncan must also try to hold together a union membership that is increasingly divided between veteran educators and those just beginning their careers.

"It's not going to be easy," says Duncan, who set as one of his first goals in office more involvement by young teachers, including on the union's bargaining team. "The veteran teachers feel that young teachers don't always appreciate the hard work they

put in to secure the benefits we all enjoy now. It's important to strike a balance."

The situation in Lynn is typical of the current state of teacher unions which are now made up of two large cohorts: members who are new to the profession and veterans who've spent most of their professional lives in public school classrooms. In a recent commentary for *Education Week*, Harvard education professor Susan Moore Johnson, warned that the rift between newer and more experienced teachers is reaching a new tipping point. Union leaders, she writes, "must bridge a deep divide between two generations of teachers, each with a different history and a different set of expectations for their union."

But not everyone agrees with the assessment that teacher unions suffer from deep generational divisions. Kate McLaughlin, a thirty-six year old math coach for the Lowell Public Schools

and the executive vice president of the United Teachers of Lowell says that it's an oversimplification to say, for example, that veteran teachers care more about bread-and-butter issues while younger educators are more concerned with professional matters. "Part of what's happened is that the issues unions face have changed," says McLaughlin. "Whether you're talking about licensure, evaluation, team building in schools or data assessment, these are the issues that confront us today and they're all examples where the union is advocating for the profession. I also think teachers—new and veterans—understand that it's through their unions that they have a voice at the table."

McLaughlin's view is shared by long-time union activist—and soon to be retiree—Michael Sullivan of South Shore Regional Local 1896.

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THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

Abraham Lincoln in Perspective

November 6 was the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the election of Abraham Lincoln as our sixteenth president. He understood how language could motivate, inspire, and inform the citizenry. As a tribute to his skills I shall quote some of his incisive remarks in my column.

The Election of 2010

Lincoln said, "Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world?" While Lincoln was not talking about the electoral decisions of the people, nonetheless his words are relevant.

The defeat of Question 3, an attempt to reduce the sales tax from 6¼ percent to 3 percent does provide justice because its passage would have reduced state revenues by 2.5 billion dollars and led to a huge reduction in services, including schools and libraries. This would have been an injustice inflicted on everyone, not only those who use these services.

AFT MA, in alliance with other unions, fought hard and smart. Initial polls indicated that Question 3 would win easily. The citizenry rejected it by

a vote of 57% to 43%. A just vote. The competent and convincing advertising campaign was decisive.

Our members contributed mightily to the defeat of Question 3. We asked; you responded. Thank you.

However, the Republicans' success in getting the majority in the United States House of Representatives is disturbing. Federal stimulus money has greatly reduced the number of layoffs and reductions in services. Since the Republican majority is not sympathetic to an appropriation of any more stimulus money, and the current economic climate is dismal, we face a major challenge to find revenues to replace the federal revenue.

Of course, the American Federation of Teachers will still vigorously try to get federal assistance. At the state level AFT MA will advocate for increased revenues. Stay tuned.

Performance Evaluation

Lincoln said, "The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject anything, is not whether it have any evil in it; but whether it have more of evil than of good. There are few things wholly evil, or wholly good. Almost everything, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded." So it is with the performance evaluation of teachers.

Performance evaluation of teachers has always been a subject of government policy. The law speaks to it, and of course, it has been a prime, and frequently contentious, subject in negotiations for a collective bargaining agreement. However, the attention given to performance evaluation of teachers is now sky high. Long ago both labor and management realized that performance evaluation is a professional necessity. Who does not want competent teachers in the classroom? Who does not want even outstanding teachers to become even better? A professional system of performance evaluation benefits both the professionals and the students. What needs to be done?

First, a collaborative approach, recognizing that excellent teachers know very well the essence of excellent teaching, is essential. In Toledo, Ohio teachers and administrators are partners in determining whether teachers get professional status (still called tenure in most states). This approach has existed for twenty years.

Of course, both union and management needed to jettison held views. The union no longer accepted that management had the sole responsibility for evaluating new teachers. Management needed to accept the view that it was entering a partnership in which teachers and principals were equals in recognizing effective teachers (more about peer assistance and review in a future

article)

Second, the academic success and growth of our students is vital. Easy to say, but linking them to the evaluation of teachers is not easy.

A huge number of factors external to the school affect the achievement of students. Failure to recognize these factors guarantees that an evaluation system is deficient.

Some advocate that students' scores on MCAS (The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) is a fine way to measure teacher effectiveness. Nonsense. No data exist to show that students' MCAS scores are a legitimate tool for determining a teacher's effectiveness. In addition, MCAS scores were never developed as a means to evaluate teachers.

We need fair and multiple measures to determine whether students are learning, but their MCAS score is not one of them.

Third, resources, support and superior professional development are essential. An evaluation system on paper will stay only on paper unless the necessary resources are supplied.

Fourth, an evaluation system needs to be transparent and fair. If teachers do not believe that evaluations are fair and competent, no evaluation system can succeed. In addition, it is important that teachers understand the evaluation system. If it is incomprehensible, no one will trust it. It will fail.

Performance evaluation of teachers is a complex topic. What I have written touches only the surface. AFT MA will try to advocate the good notions so that the evil ones will not thrive.

Lincoln said, "Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in."

So we are.

Comments are welcome. Tgosnell@aftma.net ■

BOLD PRINT

A Peabody patriot...

Peabody High School teacher **Abbie Gore** received some surprised guests in her US history classroom: two Marines who came to present her with a flag the military had flown in Afghanistan in Gore's own honor. The Marines chose to recognize Gore for her commitment to commemorating the hundreds of men and women who've died in Iraq and Afghanistan. In recent years, Gore and her students have raised hundreds of dollars to help Marines at a burn unit in San Antonio, written messages on miniature American flags to place on the graves of servicemen and sent letters to active duty Marines.



Surprise delivery

Anne Mullett, a fifth grade social studies and English teacher in Lowell, was awarded with \$1000 worth of school supplies by OfficeMax as part of that company's "A Day Made Better" campaign. Mullett, who teaches at the Wang Middle School, was nominated by a parent and was one of 1,000 teachers across the country to get the surprise delivery. The national event celebrates public school teachers for their extraordinary efforts in the classroom.



Record setting...

Daniel Ian Smith, an associate professor of saxophones and flutes at the Berklee College of Music, recently released a CD entitled *Transitions*. The CD features his ensemble called The New World Jazz Composers Octet and features performers and composers who are on faculty here at Berklee as well as composers from New England Conservatory of Music and the University of Veracruz. **Ralph Peterson**, a percussion professor at Berklee, has released a new album entitled *Outer Reaches*. The album is an homage to New Jersey jazz history and was released on Peterson's new record label: Onyx Music.

'Level Four No More'

Continued from cover

"Turning a school around requires a high level of trust. Our union has stepped up to protect our rights as teachers. We feel supported and that makes the process easier."

—**Laura Lamarre Anderson**, the **Charlotte M. Murkland School**, **Lowell**

Turn it around

The precise nature of those challenges is on vivid display during a recent visit to the Harrington School. Science teacher Christina Colella, a participant in the professional development session a few weeks before, is attempting to coach a much tougher audience through the pan balance experiment: a classroom of eight year olds, including many English language learners. As her students struggle to assemble the improvised scales, Colella darts about the room, offering assistance and plenty of words of support. "It's all right—Mrs. Colella will fix it," she calls out. And to one particularly discouraged student: "There's no quitting science."

Colella says that she has no illusions about what it will take to 'fix' the Harrington. Of the seven years she has been teaching in Lynn, six have been spent at the city's Level 4 schools. "I definitely understand how much work needs to go into this process."

Daunting data

The data alone is daunting. The 600 students attending the school speak more than 35 different languages, and there are more English language learners in the third grade than there are native speakers. But despite the odds teachers here succeeded in turning the school around once before. In 2005, students at the Harrington made such progress in English that the school was taken off of the state's watch list. Within a few years, however, those hard won gains were

eroded, lost to administrative turnover and cuts in essential resources.

Geoff King, a third grade teacher and a building representative at the school, says that while the Harrington's stymied progress has been frustrating, he and the rest of the 'turnaround team' can see the way forward. "The important part is that we not only know how to assess how our students are doing but we're able to use that information meaningfully in the classroom," says King. He notes that the scores have begun to improve just since last year. "It wasn't enough but there was growth that was made."

Education for all

At the Arlington Elementary School in Lawrence, teachers are familiar with long odds. More than 96% of the 500 students come from low-income families. And within the huge population of English language learners who attend the school are many students who aren't literate in their native languages. "We're faced with so much that it really can start to feel overwhelming sometimes," says Kym Pizzano, a fourth grade math coach at the school. "Last year we had a major influx of non-English speakers relative to the rest of the school district." But Pizzano says that despite the obvious challenges, she and her colleagues are feeling remarkably upbeat these days. When the Arlington's Level 4 status was announced last year, teachers at the school were given the option to go elsewhere. None left, says Pizzano. "We know that we can be sent to different schools next year, that we can lose our jobs if the scores don't go up. We know all of this and we're all still here."

In addition to working extra hours, for which the Lawrence Teachers Union successfully negotiated additional compensation, teachers at the Arlington are making a major push to reach the parents of their students. Because so many of the parents never completed school themselves, says Pizzano, they're unable to help their children with homework and they're often intimidated about coming into the school at all. "Reaching the parents is key," says Pizzano. She and her colleagues were encouraged by how many parents have been signing up for English classes at the Arlington



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT KnowAtom founder **Francis Vigeant** works with teachers from level four schools in Lynn. Vigeant, a former teacher in the Lynn Public Schools, says that high-quality professional development is essential for educators who are charged with turning schools around.

and by the banner attendance at a recent PTA meeting. "Transforming a school takes everyone. It takes the teachers, the students and the parents. We're all in this together."

Lessons Learned

The 2010 education reform law vastly increased the power of administrators, including principals and superintendents, and stripped key work place protections from teachers who work in struggling schools. Yet in Level 4 schools where turnaround operations are well underway, teachers say that collaboration rather than blame and punishment is proving the key to success.

At the Charlotte M. Murkland School in Lowell, teachers are working harder than ever to ensure that at the end of the school year they are 'Level 4 No More.' From longer days to intensive professional development sessions, changes in the teachers' working conditions have been negotiated through their union contract. The union was also successful in reaching a deal with the school committee on merit pay at the Murkland. If scores rise substantially at the school, everyone who works there—teachers, paraprofessionals, even custodians—will share the reward.

Shared ownership

Teachers at the Murkland say that their union's role has helped to create the climate of a school that is essential to turning a school around. Explains Laura Lamarre Anderson, an English language development teacher for grades one through four: "Our union has stepped up to protect our rights as teachers. We feel supported and that makes the process easier."

While this may be the first year of the Murkland's Level 4 transformation process, the efforts of teachers here to strengthen their school date back several years. What's to say their current turnaround initiative will be any more successful than earlier attempts? Teamwork, says third grade teacher Mary Therese Linehan. "From the top all the way down there's a real feeling of shared ownership here now."

Mixed signals

In school districts with more than nine underperforming schools, there has been far less opportunity for teamwork and collaboration. Federal

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AFT MA 14th Annual Scholarship Program

AFT Massachusetts will be awarding eight \$1500 scholarships to eligible high school seniors who are dependents of AFT Massachusetts members. The Albert Shanker, Sandra Feldman and Jay Porter scholarships are awarded on the basis of a labor history exam administered by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Education.

• To be considered for one of the scholarships, the student must be a dependent of an AFT Massachusetts member, a high school senior, and be a student at a college or other post secondary school in the fall of 2011.

• To take the labor history exam, students should apply directly to their guidance office, social studies teacher, or principal by Monday, December 13th, 2010. A packet including one labor history study guide and one application is sent to each high school in MA in November. To download a study guide, go to the Massachusetts AFL-CIO website: www.massafclcio.org/scholarship-program

• Applications must be submitted to the AFT Massachusetts office by Monday, December 13, 2010. To obtain an application visit www.aftma.net.

• Students must take the labor history exam on Wednesday, February 2, 2011.

• Scholarships are also available through the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. Be sure to visit www.massafclcio.org to see if you might be eligible for additional scholarship money.



CONCENTRATED EFFORT Ariana Quinones, a student in Christina Colello's third grade class at the Harrington, works on a science project. Students at the Harrington saw major gains in achievement five years ago only to fall back amid administrative turnover and significant cuts in resources.

Diary of a New Teacher

By Ellen Francese
Associate professor of English,
Berklee College of Music

Once again I could hear my heart. I felt the same emotions—fear and anticipation—that the first day of classes has inspired in me since childhood. The day was warm, though the early morning air had promised cooler weather. I made my way to an unfamiliar building and classroom. I was a new teacher. Again.

Just six years ago I had entered a class of all sixth graders. Now I was to teach English to first-term students at Berklee College of Music, a job I'd been hired to do just days before. I'd spent the weekend creating a syllabus and I could feel the weight of these in my backpack.

I smiled as I entered the room. My first class was small, quiet, friendly.

Time slipped by quickly. I made my way out and was soon climbing the stairs to my second class. I could still feel my heart but felt less anxious, more hopeful as I greeted the students before me.

"Why are we here?"

"Yeah, we came here for music, not English."

"It's like I'm back in high school!"

"I'd rather be practicing."

Of course, walking out would have been the easiest thing to do; the students would have been happy enough. I breathed deeply and began to explain to them that I understood their feelings. This seemed to temper their frustrations.

Still, over the next weeks, their resentment of the class and the work built up. They would complain, often joining together in the argument. The potential for a riot filled the room.

"I understand your frustration," was my response. "I don't ask you to love what we do, just to keep an open mind." My words were met with quiet. Was I



LESSON LEARNED
Ellen Francese has found many similarities between her new job, teaching English at the Berklee College of Music, and her former career as a sixth-grade teacher. With both groups, Francese has tried to learn from her students and open up their worlds to new experiences.

making sense to them?

I learned so much during my time as a sixth-grade teacher. I learned to attend to different learning styles in the same classroom, to use hands-on learning in an academic setting as well as an interdisciplinary approach, one that incorporated the arts and history into my English classes. Perhaps most importantly, I learned to love all my students—they were all my children in some way. I was there to nurture them and facilitate their education, to support their efforts as they tended to their own gardens of learning. The classroom was a place where they could grow as a whole person.

Here at Berklee, I quickly understood that there was little difference between these students and those sixth graders. My college students were on their own and facing new experiences. So I brought all I could into the class, helping them to see that everything was indeed relevant to them.

They grew excited, began to care. They enjoyed the music I brought

in (especially "Mr. Sandman" by the Chordettes) to use as a springboard for writing thesis statements. They were moved by Jane Elliott's experiment in racism and inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, which broadened their definition of art. In the end, they told me that this was one of their favorite classes at Berklee. I do not say this to collect accolades. I believe that just by loving them and opening up their world they grew in ways new to them. They had learned to go beyond their music life.

I have taught other classes since then. None have been so resistant. In fact, each term seems to bring students more open to experiences beyond music. I try to grow as a teacher by listening to my students, observing them and caring about them as people. My students continue to instruct me. With persistence, imagination, humility, and faith I continue to teach. ■

BEHIND THE SCENES

Maureen Parker Semifinalist, Massachusetts Teacher of the Year

When Maureen Parker was chosen as a semifinalist for Massachusetts Teacher of the Year last spring, she was justifiably proud. After all, Parker, an 8th grade science teacher at Billerica's Locke Middle School, once rejected the idea of a teaching career because it involved getting up early in the morning. "I told my college advisor that I didn't want the children to be sitting there waiting for me if I was late," Parker recalls with a laugh. "At 21, I knew my limitations."

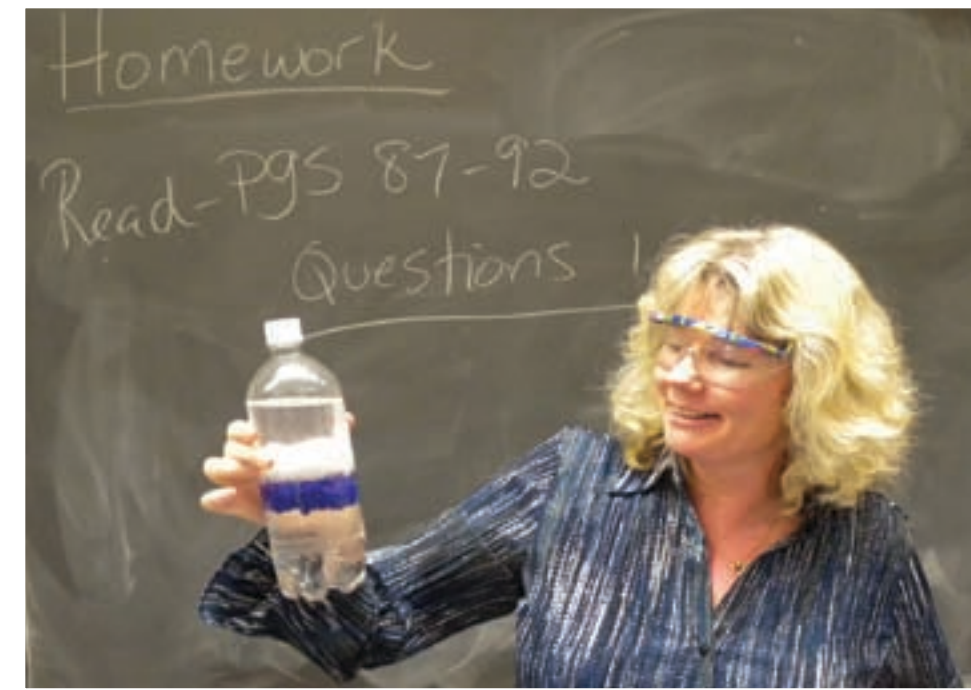
Parker followed her instincts into the chemistry lab; she spent 16 years managing environmental laboratories. But when she happened to see a newspaper article

about the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers, a program that grooms mid-career professionals to enter the classroom, something clicked. "I convinced my husband that I needed to quit my lab job and compete for one of the \$20,000 bonuses that MINT was offering," says Parker.

And while she did win the coveted signing bonus, one of roughly 100 of MINT's 1,000 candidates to do so, that turned out to be the easy part. In the fall of 2001—at age 39—Parker was in her own classroom, standing before 30 8th graders. "There were real discipline issues. I felt inadequate and I thought I was a terrible teacher."

What saved her that first year, says Parker, was a mentor, math teacher Pat Terrasi, who came into her classroom every single day to see how she was doing. "She boosted my confidence when I was down, which was a lot of the time." Her inaugural stint as a physical science teacher—Parker's training was in biology—was plagued by gallstones, walking pneumonia and exhaustion. "I had a first grader at home, a fourth grader, a husband, a dog, and 30 students who looked bored out of their minds."

Although Parker recently marked her 10th year in the classroom, that chaotic debut as a new teacher is never far from her mind.



THE RIGHT BALANCE Billerica science teacher Maureen Parker left a career as a laboratory chemist to become a teacher. "I'm passionate about all things science and I try to convey that enthusiasm in my classroom."

Following in the footsteps of her own now retired mentor, Parker has sought out new teachers to mentor through their first years in the classroom. And while the faces of her students still register the looks of boredom that used to drive her to distraction, she says that years of experience have taught her to interpret their expressions differently. "I learned that how the kids look is not an accurate reflection of how they feel," says Parker. How did she go from quaking novice instructor to a semifinalist in the state's Teacher of the Year contest?

Parker says that learning to harness her own enthusiasm for science was key. "I can't tell you how many times students have come back to see me and said 'you seemed so interested in science, I felt like I had to be interested in it too.'"

Her years as a scientist have also been a boon in the classroom, notes Parker. With her students at an age where they routinely question the real-world utility of anything they're learning, she makes a point of always translating science back into real life. "My message is that I did it, you can do it too." ■

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On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



An Election with Consequences, Even for 'Blue' Mass.

President Obama accurately called the national election a Democratic "shellacking."

According to the *New York Times*, Democrats suffered net losses from both men and women voters to Republicans from all age groups, from all income levels, from all education achievement levels, from all regions of the Country, from cities, suburbs, and rural areas, and from all major religions. Not only did Democrats lose 65 seats and control of the House of Representatives and six seats in the U.S. Senate, they won only nine of the 37 races for state governor and lost control of 15 state legislatures.

Election losses don't get any worse than this.

Massachusetts was an exception to

the most successful in determining academic success, and while I don't know of any studies, I think that free breakfast and lunch programs also deliver net gains in educational success.

That said the election results will almost certainly reduce funding for college access. The candidates supported by the Taxed Enough Already (TEA) party, the new factor in national politics, are obligated to push for tax cuts, although some Tea Party candidates and other Republicans will probably stop short of giving billions of dollars in tax breaks to the richest Americans, if the Democrats steel their resolve behind President Obama.

The hard part will be to resolve the contradictions between tax cuts

"The hard part will be to resolve the contradictions between tax cuts and reducing the federal government deficit and national debt. The cuts in federal government spending to reduce the deficit are simply too large and difficult. There's not much left of the federal budget to cut."

legislature and Republican and Democratic Governors. This decline in state spending on higher education continued under Governor Patrick's administration.

Colleges and university administrations are also to blame for the drop in funding for quality education. The portion of their budgets spent on instruction and support for instruction has fallen continuously for a very long time. At major universities, showcase buildings and sports take a large share of their budgets. Football or basketball

coaches often cost more than whole departments.

Government funding and wise use of this funding will improve only when alumni, students and their families, employers, and the electorate in general decide that quality higher education is worth their attention and their tax dollars. ■

Send your comments to dgeorgianna@umassd.edu

ANNOUNCEMENT

Interested in the state of public higher education here in Massachusetts? For the latest news and views, including reports, publications and updates on campaigns join PHENOM, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts. To find out more, visit www.phenom.org or check out their blog at <http://massphenom.tumblr.com/>.



CUTS COMING
While Massachusetts defied the national Republican wave, funding for higher education is almost certain to decline anyway, warns columnist Dan Georgianna. The state's investment in higher education has dropped steadily over the past decade, a trend that is likely to continue.

the national trend, except for losing 17 seats in the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Republicans.

Teachers' unions, who have long supported Democratic candidates, should consider what this drubbing means for union and educational issues.

The central issues for higher education is access to high quality education for all qualified students and the necessary funding for pre kindergarten (pre-K) through college graduation to make this happen.

Two notes are necessary here to defend the importance of access to college and funding for college access at all levels of education.

The first point is that virtually all studies conclude that universal access to education is a major contributor to economic development. Societies where only the rich can afford good education are doomed to failure sooner or later. The gene pool of the rich is far shallower than the gene pool that includes everyone.

The second point is that no one seriously believes that funding is not necessary for high quality education. Furthermore, values and other personal characteristics that drive access to college in addition to government funding are at least partially driven or co-determined by funding. Pre-K programs are among

and reducing the federal government deficit and national debt. The cuts in federal government spending to reduce the deficit are simply too large and difficult. Reducing interest payments on the debt is legally out of bounds; the odd political coalition that makes up the Republican Party rules out cuts in military spending, and the Democrats wait in ambush for the Republicans to push cuts in Social Security. All elected officials want to cut health care costs, but no one has figured a way to do it. Obamacare worked as political rhetoric but alternatives e.g. private insurance plans that exclude benefits won't work politically and probably are at least as expensive.

There's not much left of the federal budget to cut

These budget realities won't stop cuts in education (currently at 3% of the federal budget). Pell Grants and other needs based funding for college tuition, never Republican issues, will probably be cut or fall in proportion to increases in college costs.

Reduced federal, state, and local revenues will drive further decline in spending for higher education. The share of the state budget that Massachusetts spends on higher education has fallen from 5% to 3 over the last 10 years, under a tightly controlled Democratic state



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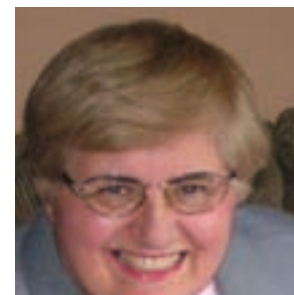
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Retiree Corner

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

For Retirees, Hardly a Level Playing Field

No one likes to be taken advantage of. We prefer to think that we are playing on a level field, but retirees are frequently disadvantaged when government steps onto the field. Rather than being the protector of retirees, they become the opposition, especially when it involves the collection of premiums for health insurance etc. Those still working get so caught up in what affects them now that they fail to realize that many of them have more years ahead in retirement than in the work force. Who will stand firm with retirees to level the playing field?

It is becoming clear that retirees are shouldering the lion's share of the cost in health insurance premiums, as more and more communities resolve their shortfalls on the backs of seniors. It is just too political. When people still in the workforce see their premiums or co-pays go up, they may get a salary increase too. There is no increase for the retiree. Every time a retiree on a fixed income is asked to pay more, that's a little less for them to live on.

Often, legislation that is passed disadvantages retirees. There are a number of bills that Massachusetts Retirees United (MRU) will re-file to address these injustices. Those who elected Option B or Option C prior to 2004, or their survivors

are losing anywhere from two to 18 percent of their pension monthly compared to those who took these options after July 2004. The Commonwealth is taking from the elderly and is getting away with it.

Those who served their country and retired before April 1996 were completely ignored when a bill was passed recognizing the service of veterans. Teachers who were asked to leave the classroom because they were pregnant prior to January 1975 and retired before September 2000 were ignored when the correction of the Act of Discrimination went into effect in 2000.

This treatment is not limited to the state level; the feds are responsible as well. They call us double dippers when it comes to collecting Social Security but are allowed to double and even triple the penalty they place on us. Here's an example: If you were married for at least ten years, you are eligible for Medicare as long as your spouse had at least 40 units in Social Security. Due to the Government Pension Offset (GPO) however, you are probably not eligible for any of your spouse's Social Security. Any year when there isn't a COLA on Social Security, those collecting Social Security do not get an increase in their Medicare B premium. Anyone on Medicare B who does not

collect Social Security will receive an increase in his/her Medicare B premium. Thus those who suffer first the penalty of the GPO and do not collect any of their spouses Social Security now are penalized a second time by paying higher Medicare B premiums because they aren't collecting that Social Security. This is definitely a double penalty!

Often retirees do not realize they are being treated unjustly. This is why MRU is committed, as this next legislative session begins, to get the word out and educate those being affected by many of these unfair practices. We want to help make them aware of what is being done to them. In doing this retirees will be in a better position to plead their case. If you have not taken the MRU survey go to our website www.retireesunited.org and complete it online. If you don't have a computer call 1-617-482-1568 and leave your name and phone number and I will call you and conduct the survey by phone. It takes two minutes. You do not have to be an MRU member to take the survey or receive email information. This is a first step in the process of learning what we can do to keep retirees from being ignored, or worse: letting the Commonwealth take advantage of those who gave the best years of their lives serving this state. ■

ATTENTION

There are more than one million public service retirees who are eligible for Medicare but not eligible for Social Security. Are you one of them? If so, you may know that while your Medicare B premiums went up last year people collecting Social Security had no increase. Because there will be no cost of living adjustments in 2011, your premiums will rise to \$115.40 per month next year while individuals on Social Security will continue to pay the 2008 amount of \$96.40.

Senator John Kerry plans to introduce the "Medicare Premium Fairness Act" when the Senate convenes for the lame-duck session in mid-November. The bill would protect all Medicare beneficiaries from an increase in their Part B premium in 2011. We ask those living in Massachusetts to contact Senator Scott Brown and ask him to support this measure and also call Kerry's office and thank him. If you live in another state, please contact your Senators and ask them to support this important bill. For contact information go to: <http://www.contactingthecongress.org/>

Important legal change pertaining to pensions and credit for time worked

Individuals who worked part-time for a school district between 11/9/1990 and 7/9/2010 received full-time credit towards their pensions for that service. That is no longer the case. Anyone working part-time after 7/9/2010 will be credited only for the percentage of time they work. If you have questions about your part-time service, please contact the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement Systems member services staff at 617-679-6877.

The Golden Apple: Honoring a Father's Love of Teaching

As my 43rd birthday approaches, I am reminded of what else took place in the fall of 1967: my father, Donald Pizzano, began his career as a teacher. This was not the profession he had planned for himself when he graduated from Merrimack College with a degree in marketing. While working for Grant's Department Store, he realized that there was something missing in his life. He wanted more for himself and his family.

With the encouragement from his wife Sandra and his parents, my father went back to school and received his degree in education. He began his thirty-two year teaching career in the Lowell Public School system at the Varnum School, then the Robinson School. My father would ultimately teach for more than two decades at Lowell High School in the business department.

While at LHS, he was also an advisor in the school's DECA program, helping students to prepare for careers in business. He taught hundreds of kids from freshmen through seniors. He advised them, not only with their everyday class work, but focused on helping them become responsible members of society. He helped them find jobs, as well as guiding them in their pursuits of furthering their education. Even after my father retired in 2000, he continued to work as a substitute teacher whenever he

"I can only hope that my career as a teacher will match that of my father's. Not many people can look back on their lives and say that they were responsible for the futures of hundreds of individuals."

was needed.

As I reflect on my father's long career as a teacher, there is one fact that stands out. He never complained about how hard or difficult teaching was. In fact, he never complained about anything. He told me once that he never got bored with teaching because every year brought something new. There were always new courses to teach, and of course, new students. Therefore, teaching was anything but dull.

My name is Kym Pizzano, and I am proud to say that I am a teacher. I teach fourth grade at the Arlington Elementary School in Lawrence, alongside my younger sister Gayl, who is the math coach at our school. My older sister, Lyn, is a first grade teacher at the Parthum Elementary School in Lawrence. Our brother



LEADING BY EXAMPLE Lowell teacher Donald Pizzano (center) has inspired generations of students as well as his daughters, who've followed in his foot steps. Now son Dayl is also considering joining the 'family business.' From left: Dayl, Kym, Donald, Lyn Pizzano Misserville and Gayl.

Dayl, is a whiz in the technology field, and has recently mentioned his interest in possibly joining the "family business."

Our parents made sure that we appreciated our education and this is what we try to pass on to our students every day. There is nothing more important than an education. In saying that, I can't be prouder of my father for taking on such a noble profession, and instilling in his children the same drive and determination to continue in his

footsteps. My father still teaches me things today. I can only hope that my career as a teacher will match that of my father's. Not many people can look back on their lives and say that they were responsible for the futures of hundreds of individuals.

I'm proud to say that my family can make that statement, and it all began with my Dad. ■

Kym Pizzano teaches fourth grade at the Arlington School in Lawrence

For New Leaders, Challenges

Continued from cover

“Unions are not about protecting individual teachers. They are about protecting the terms of the contract, encouraging and supporting sound educational policies.”

— Michael Sullivan, veteran teacher and union activist, South Shore Regional Local 1896.

Sullivan argues that teacher unions are fundamentally about representation, regardless of what the issue is. “Unions are not about protecting individual teachers,” says Sullivan. “They are about protecting the terms of the contract, encouraging and supporting sound educational policies.”

Level of involvement

What about the oft-heard complaint among long-time union members these days that young teachers simply aren't as involved in their unions as their veteran counterparts? Younger leaders take issue with that assumption too. McLaughlin says that what might appear as disinterest—general membership meetings still tend to draw many more veterans than new members—has more to do with busy schedules and the demands of raising young families.

Says McLaughlin: “I have a line outside of my office before every membership meeting with young teachers stopping by to ask questions and raise concerns. Afternoon meetings are hard when so many of us have young children.” That's a reality McLaughlin herself understands all too well. With a two-year-old and a four-year-old, McLaughlin and her husband recently made the difficult decision that he would leave his job to stay home with the kids so that she can play a leadership role in the United Teachers of Lowell.

Despite the often overwhelming pressures on young people, several union locals are making real progress in boosting the involvement of younger educators and bringing them into the leadership. “We're definitely making progress,” says Jeremy

McKeen, a tenth-year English teacher at Lynn's Vocational Technical High School and the new corresponding secretary for the Lynn Teachers Union. “Slowly but surely we're getting more people involved.”

'History versus optimism'

McKeen, who formerly served as a member of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO's Futures Program, which seeks to engage young union members in the work of the larger labor movement, says that even as teacher unions ponder their future, it's essential that they not forget the past. “We've come so far since the '60s and '70s,” says McKeen. “It's easy to become complacent about the things we've won. But they could disappear within one contract cycle, especially in this economy. The fight keeps changing.”

That historical perspective is precisely what many veteran teachers worry that their younger counterparts are missing. Teachers entering the profession today, for example, are far less likely to have a parent who was a member of a union—a consequence of the steep decline in union membership in recent decades. That means that new teachers often arrive on the job with no understanding of what a union is or does, says Kate McLaughlin. “I have it in my blood—my mother was a strike captain—but I understand that makes me an exception. Our challenge is to explain to young members who are being exposed to unions for the first time that ‘this is who we are and this is what we do.’”

In his effort to bring a new generation of educators into the leadership of the Lynn Teachers Union, Brant Duncan says that he has sought to strike a balance between what he describes as history and optimism. “It's important to recognize what our union has been through,” says Duncan. “But we also have to appreciate that we're in a different time now.”

Operation union voice

What virtually everyone seems to be able to agree upon—regardless of how long they've been in the classroom—is that the union voice needs to extend beyond the negotiating table and the campaign trail. It is time, many would say, for teachers' unions to make clear what exactly teachers do and how they do it.

Unions cannot simply be about political advocacy; they must also be about public relations. Many locals

BALANCING ACT

Brant Duncan, the new president of the Lynn Teachers Union, says that the challenge of representing a diverse union membership requires maintaining a balance between history and optimism. History is important, says Duncan, “But we also have to appreciate that we're in a different time now.”



TIME BIND Like many young educators, writer John Scopelleti must balance the demands of work, union and family. He became a union officer last year but stepped down upon learning that his wife is expecting their second child.

already implement a community service component to their union membership. In Lynn, McKeen is working to have every school in his district submit one positive story to the local paper every month of every school year. He notes that because most people only think about teachers' jobs when their town's budget goes bust, it's why incredibly important for locals to promote themselves, their membership, and their mission.

The United Teachers of Lowell recently began conducting a series of Talking Points seminars with the assistance of AFT Massachusetts. The goal, explains UTL president Paul Georges, is to help members better articulate what their union stands for as well as defend themselves from the growing barrage of attacks on teachers. “Let's face it, there is an unbelievable level of hostility being directed at educators right now. It's important for us, not just to be able to correct misperceptions when we encounter them, but to get across that we're proud of who we are and what we do.”

Passionate professionals

Perhaps the divisions we feel within

in teacher unions these days have less to do with generation than with perception: in the eyes of members, leaders, and—most importantly—the public we serve. Being a teacher who truly cares about and works for the educational and emotional welfare of Massachusetts' children is extremely difficult. As Sullivan notes, “Teachers are more qualified now than ever before.”

Ultimately, this is not about being underappreciated; public school teachers are extremely grateful to have their jobs, salaries and benefits funded through tax dollars. This is simply a matter of being understood. To withstand the onslaught of fiscal crises and unfunded mandates, union members and leaders must stand with each other, despite all their differences, to present a voice for our students—one that is not based on the theories of campaigning politicians, but on the the practice of passionate professionals. ■

John Scopelleti teaches English at South Shore Vocational Technical High School. Send comments to johnnyscops@gmail.com.



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