



# The Advocate

April 2011

AFT Massachusetts  
38 Chauncy Street  
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## Up Next: Battleground Massachusetts?

Teachers rallying by the hundreds. Proposed legislation that would curtail collective bargaining rights and sap the strength of unions. Heated political rhetoric. What sounds like a description of Wisconsin is actually taking place right here in Massachusetts. And while teachers and other public employees are unlikely to see the kind of wholesale assault on their rights that's taking place in other states, labor advocates warn that efforts to roll back collective bargaining rights are alive and well in the Bay State.

### State by state

To date, the most draconian attack on workers' rights has occurred in Wisconsin, where the Republican controlled State Assembly recently pushed through a measure that will limit the voice of teachers and other public employees in the workplace. While the future of that law remains in question—a Madison judge recently issued a stay while she determines whether Wisconsin legislators violated the state's open meeting law—similar measures are under consideration in half a dozen other states. In Indiana, where public sector employees lost union rights last year, a proposed right-to-work law now threatens private sector workers. In Florida, the governor is poised to sign into law a measure that will force teachers to reapply for their jobs every year.



**STANDING UP** Paul Gaudet of the Billerica Federation of Teachers shows his support for embattled teachers and other state workers in Wisconsin. Public employees in Massachusetts warn that their rights are also under threat.

And in Ohio, a Republican-backed bill would eliminate the ability of the state's 300,000 public employees, including teachers, to bargain over health care and other benefits.

### Battle in the Bay State?

Think that Massachusetts is too 'blue' to see the rights of educators, librarians, fire fighters and other public servants substantially curtailed? Think again. Proposals that would prohibit public employees from having a say at the bargaining table over the cost and quality of their health insurance, backed by Governor Deval Patrick and other

prominent state democratic leaders as well as by the Massachusetts Municipal Association, could very well be enacted into law this year—unless there is a fight to stop them.

While the cost of health insurance has escalated geometrically, says Tom Gosnell, president of AFT Massachusetts, eliminating the rights of workers is not the answer. "Public sector unions are committed to helping the cities and towns save money in a very tough economic climate," says Gosnell. "This can be done without violating collective bargaining rights."

*Continued on page 3*

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## In This Issue

- 2 President's Column  
Letters to the editor
- 3 Lawrence Teachers at Two  
Struggling Schools Must  
Reapply for Their Jobs
- 4 Diary of a New Union Officer:  
Plenty of challenges await a  
brand new union president
- 5 Behind the Scenes:  
Retired teacher Amika Kem-  
mler Ernst captures student  
learning with a camera lens
- 7 Retiree Corner  
The Golden Apple: A kind  
and compelling mentor sets  
a young scholar on her path

## Q & A: Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz and Rep. Alice Peisch

**The new chairs of the state's Joint Committee on Education discuss charter schools, collaboration and the challenge of boosting parental involvement.**

**Advocate:** I'd guess that the first thing our members would like to know is whether you understand what a tough time it is to be a teacher right now. Some days it feels as though there isn't a problem in the world that isn't being blamed on teachers.

**Chang-Diaz:** One of the things I bring to my job as a legislator is a reality check about what life in the classroom is actually like. I did my student teaching in the Boston Public

Schools and taught 8th grade social studies in the Lynn Public Schools. That background definitely informs my views on education and what it is we're asking of our teachers, especially in this political climate. As a society we're heaping a ton of responsibility on our public schools and on our teachers in particular, and that's something I understand in a very personal way having been a teacher.

**Peisch:** I think that the role that teachers play is incredibly important. I'm very supportive of public education and I've spent six years on the Wellesley School Committee so I have an appreciation of the demands that are being made on our public schools and our teachers. As far as the political climate we're in, for a long time society has looked to the public schools to solve virtually all of our problems and that's terribly unrealistic. I think that generally speaking, in Massachusetts we have good schools that do well and the reason they do well is because we have good people teaching.

**Advocate:** The education policy debate in Massachusetts is overwhelmingly focused on what's wrong with our schools, yet we have the best public schools in the country. Sometimes it seems like this fact gets lost in the heat of the rhetoric.

**Chang-Diaz:** We do extraordinarily well when you look at the statewide average of our students. We're doing something right, in fact we're doing something really, really right in Massachusetts. That's a reflection not just of what's happening in the classroom but the community's level of investment and involvement in the child's life beyond the school. But when you peel back that state average you see that there's this chasm between our highs and our lows. It's been sobering to learn that the achievement gap is bigger in Massachusetts than it is in other states. As far as I'm concerned we have a moral and economic imperative to really look at what we're doing right and figure out how do we deliver that to everyone.

*Continued on page 8*



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An electronic version of the *Advocate* is now available. If you'd like to go green, send an email with your mailing address to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).



Thomas J. Gosnell  
President, AFT Massachusetts

# Attacks on Public Sector Workers

I cannot count the number of times I have written and said that Massachusetts public school students are number one in the USA on national tests and number one in the western world on the international science and math test known as TIMMS. All teachers in the regular public school system work under collective bargaining agreements. In many states where no teachers or very few work under collective bargaining agreements, students rank far below.

I do not doubt that in states where public sector employees have collective bargaining the quality of public services is better than in states where collective bargaining is non-existent or barely exists. After all, collective bargaining permits employees through their unions to be significant advocates for the best services.

Yet in state after state the assault on the right of public sector unions to bargain is like a hurricane and a tornado working in tandem. Wisconsin is the nation's flashpoint,

but in Florida, Michigan, Idaho, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Alabama iniquitous things are happening.

Why? The election of 2010 is the most significant. The victory of so many extremely conservative Republicans, never friendly to labor unions, has had a galvanizing impact on legislatures and governors. Their opportunity is now.

In addition, enough Democrats have taken positions unfriendly to unions that extremist Republicans become more emboldened. For example, in Illinois the reduction in pensions was the work of Democrats. Even in Wisconsin prior to the extremist Republicans taking office it was a Democratic senator who cast the deciding vote against approval of the state employees' collective bargaining agreements.

In the USA approximately thirty-six percent of public employees are unionized while less than seven percent of private sector employees are unionized. The low rate of unionization in the private sector makes it much easier to attack the workers in the public sector. How often have we heard the refrain, "Why should the public sector workers have pension and health insurance benefits far superior to what we have." While public sector benefits are not exorbitant, private sector benefits for the middle class and the poor have declined significantly. This disparity creates great pressure to reduce public employee benefits. Of course, what should happen is that every American receive adequate health insurance and

pension benefits. When will the public wake up?

Although no one in power is proposing anything so draconian as has been proposed in Wisconsin, last year's education bill did weaken the collective bargaining law in some communities, particularly in cities with so-called underperforming schools.

This year some, most notably the Massachusetts Municipal Association, are advocating the removal of health insurance coverage from the collective bargaining process. Unquestionably the cost of health insurance has escalated geometrically while public sector unions are committed to helping the cities and towns save money in a very tough economic climate. This can be done without violating collective bargaining.

AFT MA is working with many other public sector unions to keep health insurance in collective bargaining. We shall need all our members to act at the appropriate time. You will continue to hear from us. ■

*If you have questions or comments, write to me at [tgosnell@aftma.net](mailto:tgosnell@aftma.net).*

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Conviction or caricature?

Dear Editor,  
Please don't use my union newspaper to attack my race, gender or faith. Isn't mutual respect a union principle? So why are you publishing Dan Georgianna's opinion that "religion is based on faith, the antithesis of reason." My Catholic faith celebrates reason as a gift from God. See St. Thomas Aquinas for one example of reason and faith in harmony. Huge numbers of AFT members share similar convictions. We are not like the caricature Georgianna presents of a supposed prehistoric farmer who breaks a tool and must choose between either praying or repairing the tool - not both. I doubt that even prehistoric people were that dumb! Please provide us with a newspaper that reflects the respectful diversity of the membership, not a one-sided, agenda-ridden, derogatory stereotype.

Thank you.  
Colbe Mazzarella

### Georgianna replies

I completely agree that faith & reason don't conflict. As I stated in my article, "This logic seems to lead to the conclusion that belief in God is not rational. But I disagree; reason and faith usually depend on context." The context in this case is that belief that God created the universe is based on faith, which cannot be disproven, and evolutionary biology is based on reason, scientific arguments that can be disproven. Given the separation of church and state, faith should not be taught in public schools, and science should be.

The pejorative tone of my column, however, was both offensive and unnecessary for which I both apologize and regret.

Dan Georgianna

Send your comments to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)



# BOLD PRINT

### Sea Legs

Dan Georgianna, a professor of economics at UMass Dartmouth and a regular contributor to the *Advocate* has been appointed by Governor Deval Patrick to the New England Fishery Management Council. Georgianna, who has done extensive research on the commodification of the New England seafood industry, was one of six individuals nominated to fill four vacancies on the board.



### Tech Talk

The Leahy School in Lawrence is the winner of a \$2500 Comcast in the Classroom Technology award. Earlier this year students and staff at the school were asked to create a five minute video, using a flip phone, telling Comcast why the Leahy should be picked. The video featured 4th and 5th graders speaking about how they use technology today and how they expect technology to impact their futures. What does the Leahy plan to do with the windfall? Purchase more technology of course!



### Team Leader

Jeffrey Scheminger, first-year instructor in Engineering Technology has been named employee of the month at Nashoba Valley Technical High School. His colleagues chose him for the distinction because of his work in leading a robotics team at the school. But Carol Heidenrich and Matt Ricard, who nominated Scheminger, also praised him for establishing a rapport with his students in such a short time. Students who participate on the FIRST Robotics team build a robot of their own design which then competes against other student-designed robots from around the country.



### Scholar of the Year

The UMass Dartmouth Faculty Federation has announced its faculty and staff awards for the year. In addition to their new titles, faculty and staff who win the awards also receive \$1000. Dr. Liudong Xing has been named Scholar of the Year for her outstanding work as an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering. She was nominated by her department chairperson Dr. Dayalan Kasilingam who cited Xing's national and international recognition as a top researcher in the field of reliability sensor networks.

### Teacher of the Year

The Leo M. Sullivan Teacher of the Year is Dr. Anthony J. Miraglia, who was unanimously nominated for the award by the Dept. of Fine Arts, College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA) at UMass Dartmouth. His nomination cited his 35 years of "genuinely committed teaching--a teacher) who 'does' as well as 'teaches.'" A painter of international reputation, he recently exhibited in the Toronto Art Fair in Canada.

### Staff honors

The ESU Service Award was presented to James "Jim" Mullins for his long service to the union membership as an elected member of the executive board, and, most recently, as grievance officer. He was also praised in his nomination for his professional accomplishments to the athletics department since 1994, and to the entire university community.

Got good news? Send it to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net)

## The Advocate

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# After Wisconsin, Is Massachusetts Next?

While teachers and other public employees are unlikely to see a full-scale assault on their rights, efforts to roll back collective bargaining are alive and well in the Bay State.

*Continued from cover*

In fact, as labor advocates point out, the collective bargaining process in cities such as Salem has saved municipalities millions in recent years. “This isn’t about cost savings,” says Gosnell. “This is about cost shifting.”

## Legal limits

Meanwhile, a Massachusetts lawmaker is pushing a bill similar to that recently passed by the Wisconsin legislature. State Representative Dan Winslow, a Republican from Norfolk and a lawyer who serves as Senator Scott Brown’s legal counsel, wants to eliminate collective bargaining for public employees on most issues except for salary.

“We have to unshackle managers’ hands so they can run things responsibly,” Rep. Winslow told the *Boston Herald*. His bill would remove hiring and firing from collective bargaining, allowing managers to hire, fire and promote employees without respect to seniority.

Just how much support Winslow’s bill can muster remains to be seen, but legislation paring back employee rights has found plenty of backing on Beacon Hill in recent years. Last year’s education reform law eliminated many rights of teachers, particularly those who work in the state’s high-need, poverty schools. (See sidebar: “Lawrence Teachers Must Reapply for Jobs.”) In fact, many educators charged that the legislation’s central premise seemed to be that the best way to turn around struggling schools was to take away the rights of their teachers.

## A flawed premise

Like their counterparts in Wisconsin, Ohio and elsewhere, proponents of curtailing union power and collective bargaining here in Massachusetts are quick to point to the state’s budget deficit as a rationale. But labor advocates say the real issues have more to do with union busting than budget balancing. “The important thing is, what’s going on in some of these states has nothing to do with the budget. If you want to take a look at what’s going on out there and what’s going on throughout the country, it’s an attack on the unions and the unions’ ability to get their candidates money, fundraising, support,” Sen. Ken Donnelly of



**SPEAKING OUT** A recent rally on Beacon Hill drew teachers and other public sector workers from across the state. Union members argue that state budget gaps—including here in the Commonwealth—are being used as an excuse to curtail collective bargaining and the right to form and join unions.

Arlington told the Statehouse News Service. “The unions already agreed to make compromises.”

What’s more, claims that worker rights must be pared back for reasons of cost savings have largely failed to withstand public scrutiny. In Wisconsin, for example, where Governor Scott Walker maintained that a gaping hole in the state’s budget was forcing him to curtail collective bargaining rights, critics were quick to point out the source of that hole: more than \$120 million in tax breaks for businesses signed into law by Walker when he came into office.

And while states including Massachusetts are facing budget deficits, economist Dean Baker of the Center for Economic Policy and Research in Washington, DC points out that public employees and their benefits are not the cause. “It’s worth noting that any shortfall is due almost entirely to the recession caused by the collapse of the housing bubble. If revenue had increased in step with normal growth (2.4 percent real growth, plus inflation), state and local governments would have had an additional \$290 billion since the start of the downturn.”

Stephanie Luce, a labor economist at the City University of New York, argues that the crisis confronting most states today isn’t one of economics but of priorities. “The only reason states have budget problems is that we have drastically cut taxes on

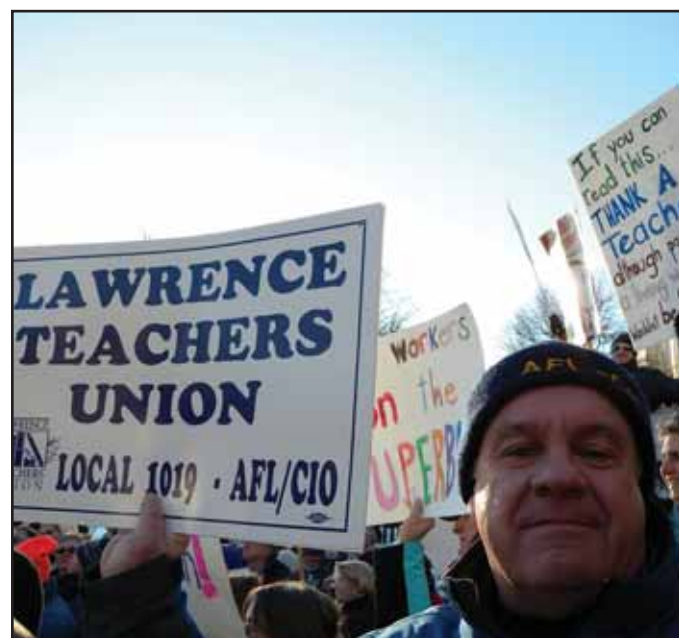
corporations and the wealthy. Two thirds of corporations in Wisconsin pay no taxes at all and the governor’s response is to cut the jobs of teachers? There’s something seriously wrong with this picture,” says Luce, who formerly taught at UMass Amherst.

## Class consciousness

The battles for the future of worker rights in Wisconsin, Ohio, even Massachusetts, have also had an unlikely side effect; they’ve helped to trigger a nationwide conversation about the history of labor unions and their role in giving rise to the American middle class. At a series of recent rallies held at the Massachusetts Statehouse, teachers, firefighters and construction workers spoke passionately about the role of unions in their own families’ ascent to the middle class and their fear for the future.

“We public employees, we union members, we fought for the American dream; to put a roof over our heads, to get some education for our children,” said Ed Kelly, interim president of the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts. “And the avenue, the railroad, that took us there was collective bargaining.”

In the months ahead, it will be up to teachers, librarians and other public employees in Massachusetts to demonstrate that the fundamental right to collective bargaining is worth defending. ■



**UNDER SIEGE** Frank McLaughlin, president of the Lawrence Teachers Union. He criticized last year’s education reform bill on the grounds that it punished teachers who work in struggling schools. Now teachers at two Level Four schools in Lawrence have been forced to reapply for their jobs.

## Teachers at Two Level 4 Schools in Lawrence Must Reapply for Jobs

When Massachusetts legislators were debating the education reform bill last year, teachers and advocates for public education warned that the law would effectively punish the very educators who chose to work in struggling schools. That prediction came to pass in Lawrence last month as teachers in two so-called Level Four schools were forced to reapply for their jobs. The issue: turnaround plans, put into effect at both schools in the fall, have not yet produced the gains in student achievement to satisfy Lawrence Superintendent, Mary Lou Bergeron. The education reform bill gives local superintendents the authority to reassign teachers at struggling schools.

Teachers at the Arlington Elementary and South Lawrence East Middle School say that turnaround plans, including an extended school day, extra professional development and outreach to local parents in an effort to boost their involvement in the life of the high-poverty schools, have shown results. Wrote Superintendent Bergeron in an email to staff members of the two schools: “Although some progress has been noted at both schools this year, the progress has not been consistent in all classrooms and programs.”

A teacher at one of the schools, who asked not to be identified due to concerns over her future employment in the Lawrence Public Schools, described the move as demoralizing. “I want to cry. I’ve had a lump in my throat for days.” She warns that the pressure to show results on standardized tests is rapidly turning the schools into test-taking factories. “I have grave concerns that we’re going to be reduced to just teaching to the test. History and science are mostly gone and that’s a tragedy,” she said.

“It’s very frustrating to put all of your heart and soul into being the best that you can be and be absolutely vilified,” said another teacher who also asked to remain anonymous. “I’m a veteran teacher, I’m as dedicated to these kids as it’s possible to be and yet none of it matters—I’m still considered a sub par teacher.”

Still, the educator says that she thinks she understands why she and her colleagues have come under such harsh attacks by political leaders, not to mention pundits. (A recent *Lawrence Eagle Tribune* editorial called for more teachers who can make a difference, not excuses). “It’s easier to blame one group of people than to really look and say ‘what role do I play in this?’ If you’re going to acknowledge the role that poverty plays in student achievement you have to address immigration, safe neighborhoods, language acquisition, jobs and family relationships. It’s much easier to point the finger at us and say ‘it’s the teachers’ fault.’” ■

# Diary

of a New Union Officer

By Brant Duncan  
President, Lynn Teachers Union

I certainly didn't sleep much the night before my first day as president of the Lynn Teachers Union—maybe two or three hours. It was August 31st, and the next morning would be a challenging one. I had to return to the school where I had taught math for the last four years: Lynn's Breed Middle School. However, I wouldn't be teaching children the wonders of middle school math. Instead I would gather with eighty or so members of the Lynn Teachers Union—some friends, some acquaintances—to ratify an agreement, most of which was mandated by the education reform bill of 2010.

It was my first day on the job and I was already the bearer of bad news. Not only would the new legislation hurt many of my members, it had been proposed by Governor Patrick—the governor I'd voted for and supported. I couldn't help but feel guilty about that. The emotional roller coaster of that first day as the leader of our 1300 member local set the tone for the year ahead.

My new position has also brought with it some personal challenges. Having two young daughters and a wonderful wife, it is not easy to balance my time to meet the needs of both my family and the union. Most of my days are longer than the traditional school day, and just like with teaching, it is difficult to leave my work at the "office." Most of my time these days is spent in meetings with members and management. I also visit Lynn's schools as often as I can in an effort to keep in touch with the needs of our members and the children they're charged with



**FUTURE FOCUSED**  
Former Lynn teacher Brant Duncan is the new president of the 1300 member Lynn Teachers Union. The position, says Duncan, seen here with daughter McKenna, brings with it new challenges every day, especially with the political climate. Says Duncan: "Divided and silent, we will watch as our rights and our children's educations are gutted."

educating.

The issues that the Lynn Teachers Union is currently facing—health insurance, contract negotiations, Level Four agreements, evaluations, suspensions, grievances, local elections, and working conditions—are all extremely important and all vital in their own way. Nevertheless, in the wake of Wisconsin and the evisceration of workers' rights there, the most pressing issue we need to address, is our ability to collectively bargain. This right has an impact on virtually everything we do.

It seems to be currently en vogue with the media (or certain networks at least) to bash unions and collective bargaining, and to present workers' organizations as the reason for the economy stagnating. However, it is often forgotten that unions forged the way forward for all workers' working

conditions, whether unionized or not, and that it wasn't union greed that plunged the world into an economic recession.

Now is the time to stand up and be counted, without collective bargaining there is little of substance that we can do to protect our rights, or, more importantly, to ensure that every child receives the quality education that he or she deserves. As members of a union we need to realize the political power we can harness. Lynn, for example, is a city with 1300 unionized educators and a total of 5000 union members across the city. United and vocal, we can create change and ensure better educational opportunities for the future of our community. Divided and silent, we will watch as our rights and our children's educations are gutted. ■

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## Amika Kemmler Ernst

### 'We're Learning Here'

A retired teacher captures student learning through the lens of her camera

For Amika Kemmler-Ernst, teaching and taking pictures have long gone hand in hand. Since she started as a teacher in Brookline in 1969, a career that would see stints in schools throughout Boston and as far away as Italy and Africa, her camera has been a trusty presence. Kemmler-Ernst, who retired as a new teacher developer for the Boston Public Schools last year and now volunteers at her neighborhood school, the Curley in Jamaica Plain, has a distinctive specialty: capturing students on film as they are engaged in learning.

"I remember watching my students when I was first starting out as a teacher and thinking 'this would make a great picture,'" says Kemmler-Ernst. Before long she had compiled enough pictures to create a sort of yearbook, a photographic record of the school year that featured written commentary supplied by her students. "I started making these books every year and they became a way for the kids to think about everything they'd done during that school year."

When Kemmler-Ernst, who describes herself as a recovering workaholic, went back to school to pursue a doctoral degree at the age of 50, she found herself becoming much more serious about her shutterbug hobby. A course in visual ethnography at the Harvard Graduate School of Education got her thinking seriously about how pictures can be used to tell a story—indeed the history—of a community. "We can learn so much about a culture from its pictures," says Kemmler-Ernst. And while visual ethnographers typically focus on a community's problems, even its pathology, Kemmler-Ernst found herself headed in a very different direction. "I wanted to seek out

Long-time teacher Amika Kemmler Ernst specializes in taking pictures of students who are engaged in learning. In her work, seen at right, the photographs are paired with the students' own words about what they're learning.

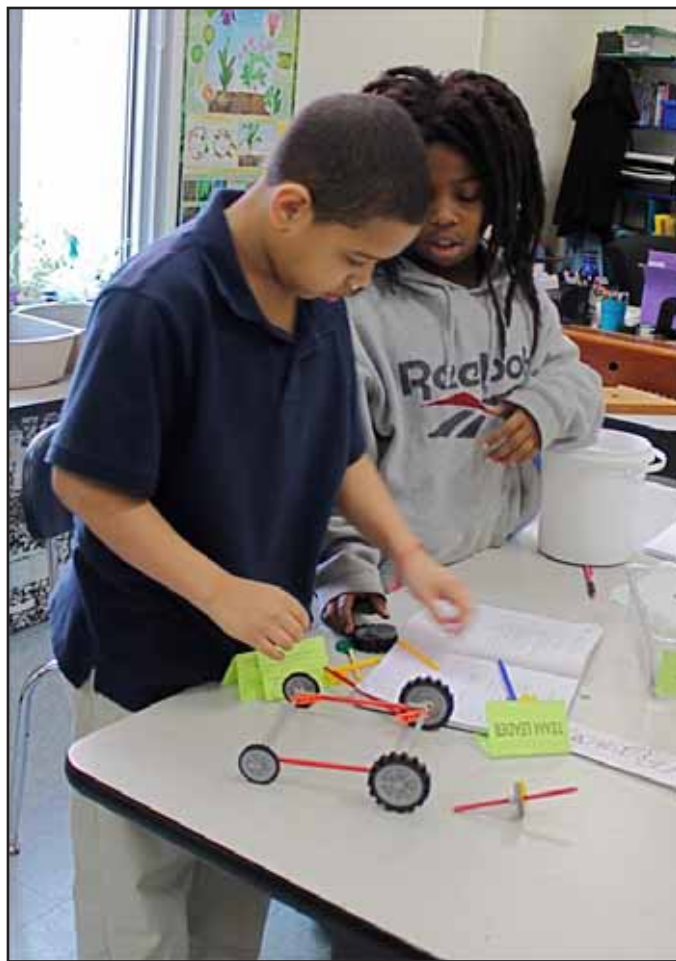
goodness with my camera," she says. "My culture is teaching and there is nothing wrong with looking for goodness."

Kemmler-Ernst quickly settled on a style. During a typical school visit she takes as many as 100 pictures of students engaged in classroom work. On a subsequent trip, Kemmler-Ernst asks the featured students to explain, in their own words, what they're learning. The resulting images are at once simple and striking, a vivid reminder that in the often overheated rhetoric that passes for analysis of the workings of our public school system, students are almost never heard from. "The only time kids get their voices heard is when something bad happens—if someone's got a gun—otherwise they're completing missing from the story of what's going on in our schools," says Kemmler-Ernst.

What's more, by presenting vivid imagery of students at work, Kemmler-Ernst is demonstrating both that public schools are places of learning, and that there are different ways of assessing that learning. "When you think about it we assess kids constantly but a standardized test is only one way, and not necessarily the best way, to show that they're learning," says Kemmler-Ernst. "I'm asking a different question: 'do you see yourself as a learner?' That's key. If our students don't see themselves as learners we're never going to get anywhere."

What began as a school-based project—Kemmler-Ernst often donates poster-sized versions of her photographs to don school hallways—has found a broader audience over the years. In 2000 she began working with the *Jamaica Plain Gazette* which published a different photo from a local school each week. These days she is partnering with the Boston Teachers Union on a new project she calls "We're Learning Here." Her images, of students in schools across the city, appear regularly in the Boston Union Teacher as well as on the BTU's website.

"There's this huge distrust of public education out there and a big part of it is that people who have the most to say know the least about what the lives of teachers and their students are like," says Kemmler-Ernst. "My goal has always been to convey a different picture of what's happening in our public schools. 'We're learning here.' That's a powerful statement." ■



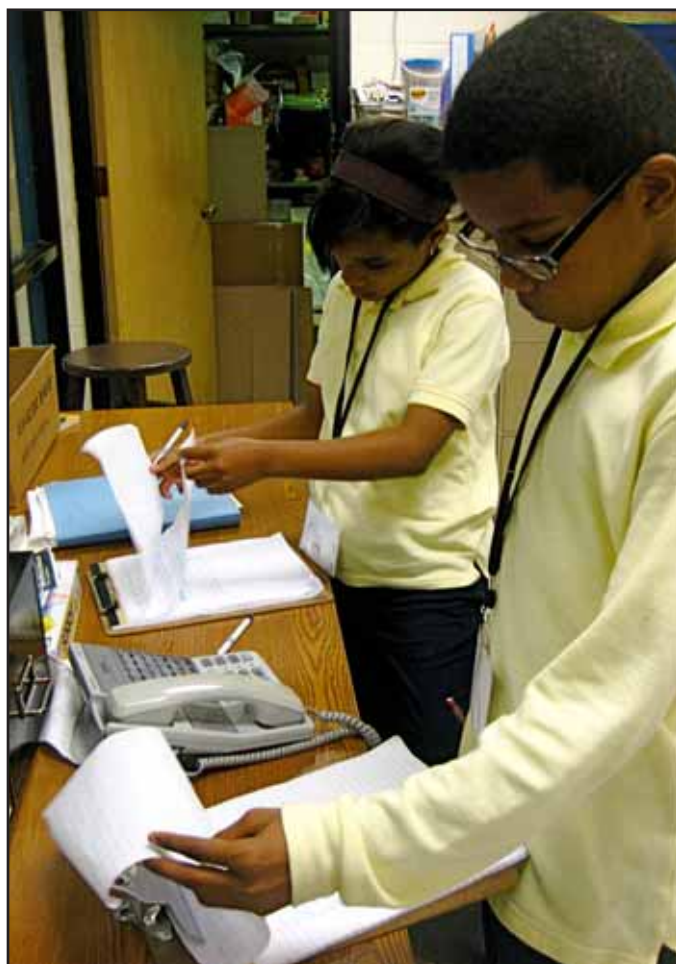
"We were in science class, building a car that could go 100cm. We've learned about things that make vehicles go and stop. For example, the more pieces you put on your vehicle, the slower it will go."

—Camren Duroucher & Desmond Barnett, Grade 4, Agassiz Elementary School, Boston



"We were exercising and I was doing a squat. I also learn math in gym class when we count out how many people are in class and our teacher quizzes us on our times facts."

—Christina Guerrero, Grade 2, Ellis Elementary School



"We were principal and assistant principal of the day. In this picture we were revising our notes from visiting classes all over the school. We observed teachers and students, then met with Ms. Jackson to talk about problems and how to fix them. We've learned that if you write well, using interesting vocabulary, you can succeed. We also learned that being a school principal is a big responsibility!"

— Penelope Soto & Felix Polanco, Grade 5, Marshall K-8 School, Boston



# On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## 'All of America Thanks You, Wisconsin'

As filmmaker Michael Moore said at a recent rally: "All of America thanks you, Wisconsin."

For three weeks massive demonstrations in front of the Wisconsin Statehouse have supported Wisconsin state unions, including AFT-Wisconsin's State Employees Council, against Governor Walker's proposals to strip collective bargaining rights from public service unions. State unions have agreed to give backs in wages and benefits, but Governor Walker wants it all. His bill would also allow his office to cut health coverage for low-income families without the normal legislative

poll showed similar slippage in union influence. Support for state worker health benefits and pensions was shown as weaker than support for collective bargaining rights.

As the last twenty years of orchestrated union bashing has shown, however, neither polls nor public opinion matter much. Attacks like the governors of Ohio and Wisconsin are well funded and shift the center a bit closer to anti-union.

In New Bedford, a local group called The Education Roundtable that calls itself a group of concerned citizens interested in the performance

**Unions and their supporters are holding their own with the American people. Contrary to media reports that portray the conflict as the unions vs. the public, polls show strong support for collective bargaining.**

### CAMPUS UPDATE

#### Settlement Reached at Longy

The Longy Faculty Union and the Longy School of Music have reached a three-year, first-time collective bargaining agreement. The contract, ratified unanimously by members of the faculty union last month, ends a contentious fourteen month period that saw faculty fired and reassigned as Longy administrators embarked on an ambitious plan to restructure the Cambridge music school. "This is really an historic occasion," said Clay Hoener, president of the faculty union. "We now have our first ever collective bargaining agreement."

Faculty at the school voted to form a union last January in order to have more of a voice in how the school is run. Hoener says that while the last year has been both tough and tense he hopes that the school and its new faculty union can move forward—together. "I'm confident that our relationship with the school will continue along a cooperative and constructive path," said Hoener.

Hoener singled out AFT MA staff member Diane Frey and general counsel Haidee Morris for their work with the faculty members. "Their efforts and belief in workers' rights, their negotiating and legal skills, and their commitment to the faculty at Longy during this time, have been inspiring." ■

To learn more about the Longy Faculty Union visit [www.longyfacultyunion.org](http://www.longyfacultyunion.org)



### WORDS OF WISDOM

**In states across the country a pattern is unfolding, writes Dan Georgianna. Taxes are cut for the highest earning Americans and the resulting budget shortfall is used as an excuse to justify deep cuts in programs, wages and benefits, as well as ending rights and protections for workers who still have them.**

process and to sell state-owned facilities without public process and solicitation of bids.

In Ohio, a bill similar to Governor Walker's bill passed by a vote of 17-16 in the Senate. The bill eliminates collective bargaining for health care, sick time, and pensions for state workers, gives elected officials the final say in contract disagreements, and eliminates binding arbitration.

Unions and their supporters are holding their own with the American people. Contrary to the media presentations, TV reports that usually portray the conflict as the unions vs. the public, polls show otherwise.

The New York Times/CBS News survey of adults nationwide found a two to one majority opposed to ending bargaining rights for public unions. Sixty percent oppose taking away some collective bargaining rights from public unions. Sixty percent, including a majority of Republicans, also thought the salaries and benefits of most public employees were either "about right" or "too low."

A poll by the Pew Research Center, no friend of labor, found that a clear majority favoring the Wisconsin unions over Governor Walker by 42% to 31%. Other polls have shown similar results.

Governor Walker seems to have overreached.

Scratching a bit deeper shows more troubling results for unions. Another Pew study showed that support for unions has slipped in recent years and the *New York Times*/CBS News

and outcomes in New Bedford public schools, is pushing to eliminate seniority and base evaluations of teachers on student test scores in the current contract negotiations. An editorial in the local paper gave qualified support to The Education Roundtable, also focusing on union give-backs in contract negotiations.

The largest teachers union in the state, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, seems fractured on these issues with a statement of support for student testing -based assessment of teachers from the president of the MTA and a series of opinions and letters for and against using student tests to evaluate teachers. I was delighted to see a Letter to the Editor in my local paper from AFT Massachusetts President Tom Gosnell stating clearly that "the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts does not support the use of MCAS test scores ... to evaluate teachers. Use of these scores to evaluate teachers was never its purpose. No data support the effectiveness of using MCAS scores as an evaluative tool."

There are three clear lessons from all of this for public sector unions. The first is to work harder on elections. The second is that state worker benefits depend on benefits for private sector workers. As Columnist Joanna Weiss wrote in the *Globe* a few days ago, few working people know the billionaires who support politicians like Governor Walker, but everyone who has lost a pension or health benefits

knows someone with a state pension and health insurance. The U.S. is dangerously close to losing all union representation in the private sector.

The third lesson is to join with community groups, religious organizations, and public service organizations to push hard for tax increases. It is very important to expose the hoax of cutting taxes, especially for the rich, and then claiming that budget shortfalls require budget cuts. The U.S. has one of the lowest tax rates among all economically advanced countries. The U.S. tax rates stand on an equal footing with some off the poorest countries in the world. Among states, Massachusetts ranks 31st in state and local taxes paid as a percentage of income, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. ■

Share your comments with Dan at [dgeorgianna@umassd.edu](mailto:dgeorgianna@umassd.edu)

## Help Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive May 14, 2011



Place boxes and cans of nonperishable food next to your mailbox before your letter carrier delivers mail on May 14, 2011. Your letter carrier will do the rest.

Help those who are facing hunger and joblessness.



Thanks to the National Association of Letter Carriers, the AFL-CIO Community Services network, United Way Worldwide, and the nation's food bank network.



## Retiree Corner

Marie Ardito, Co-founder  
Massachusetts Retirees United  
[www.retireesunited.org](http://www.retireesunited.org)

### SENIOR SEMINARS

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

Given by Elder Law attorney Mary Howie

This popular seminar looks at many issues involving probate, trusts, Medicare Trusts, Benefits for veterans and their spouses and much more.

**When:** April 9, 10 to noon

**Where:** Presidential Park, unit 105, 314 Main Street, Wilmington, MA (Main street is Route 38).



#### Preparing for Retirement

Comprehensive seminar for those within 5 years of retiring from the public sector in MA

**When:** April 25, 3-5PM

**Where:** Somerville High School Auditorium, 81 Highland Ave, Somerville.

All the above seminars are free. To register call Marie Ardito at 781-272-8073 or e-mail her at [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org). Make sure you specify the seminar you wish to attend and the number of people who will be attending. You will only get a call back if the seminar is filled so your call is your verified registration unless you hear differently.

For more information on Massachusetts Retirees United, visit our website: [www.retireesunited.org](http://www.retireesunited.org)

## Honoring Those Who Served Their Country

Most of us know the difference between Memorial Day and Veteran's Day. The former honors those who gave their life for their country, the latter honors those who served their country or are still serving their country in the military.

As youngsters we were taught to feel pride in being American. During World War II not only those in uniform served; all of us did. Youngsters saved their pennies to be able to buy a stamp at school; a book full of stamps got you a Victory Bond as US Savings Bonds were called then. I can even remember riding my bike around town collecting cans with left over fat drippings inside that could be used in the war effort. We all went without so that the servicemen and women could have what they needed. And when V-E Day and V-J Day came we all celebrated because it was a victory for all of us. We stood proud as Americans.

Recently someone sent me a definition of a veteran written by an unknown author that I think crystallizes who and what they are. "A Veteran—whether active duty, retired, national guard or reserve—is someone who at one point in his or her life wrote a blank check made payable to the United States of America for the

amount of 'up to and including his or her life.' This is the very definition of honor and there are far too many people in this country who no longer understand it.

The state's Department of Veterans' Services has a saying: "No veteran left behind in Massachusetts." Sadly this is not an accurate statement. According

**We are proud that we have as a member of Massachusetts Retirees United the oldest retired teacher veteran, Victor Lister, who retired in 1979 and was a veteran of World War II.**

to the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System, there are 671 of these fine men and women, all retired teachers, who were left behind by the legislature when the Veteran's Bill passed in 1996. And no matter how old they are, they are still proud that they served.

We are proud that we have as a member of Massachusetts Retirees United the oldest retired teacher veteran, Victor Lister, who retired in 1979 and was a veteran of World War II. We have twenty-seven of these fine men and women in our organization. We thank them and all those who have served our country.

Now it is time for all of us to stand tall and proud and fight for these veterans. MRU has asked Representative Paul Donato to re-file the Veteran's Bill, enabling veterans who retired prior to 1996 to add up to four of their military years toward their teaching service.

The best way for each of us to show we appreciate the service these veterans unselfishly gave is to call our Representatives and Senators and ask them to support the Veteran's Bill all the way to the Governor's desk. It is a small thing we can do for these fine people who did so much for us. Don't put off making these calls, as they did not put off the call to serve. ■

*If you are a veteran who was left behind and you would like to be kept updated on the progress of this bill and help us in our efforts to get it passed, contact [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org)*

## The Golden Apple



By Patricia Peknik  
Berklee College of Music

I was the town truant. Teachers scolded me, the principal threatened me and the guidance counselor pleaded with me, but I remained an incorrigible delinquent, sitting in detention hall day after day with the slouchy kids who had been caught smoking in the stairwell and the popular kids who had ducked out of school at lunchtime to drive to the lake. Their high school rebelliousness could be dampened with in-school suspension, but I was beyond all appeals to reason or fear, sentenced to summer school as penance for the missed classes and the forged attendance notes, and threatened with failing my senior year. I hated school, but the principal never guessed that I played hooky because I wanted to sit in the big leather chair in the public library and read. He never thought to look for me there, and no librarian at that little brick library in Rome, NY ever called the school and reported a lone child in the big chair reading Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, or wandering around the poetry shelves, hiding out in the stacks.

No one ever suggested to me that

I could teach. The teachers who read my essays on *Jude the Obscure* and my book reports on Lost Generation writers told me that I might become a writer, but no one ever told me I was cut out to stand in front of people and instruct them. That's what they told the friendly girls with good penmanship. They called me Emily Dickinson; I just wanted to be left alone to read and write. It took a very kind and compelling English professor to change those plans.

Dean McWilliams, Professor of Humanities and English at Ohio University, deep in the Appalachian corner of the state, did not lecture from a podium or tell funny, ironic stories. He sat in a chair and spoke quietly. He wore tailored suits. Because his name was Dean, I thought he was the dean. Sitting at the head of the seminar table, he always seemed to be speaking to himself as well as to us, pondering, musing, questioning. In his class on "Paris in Literature, Art and Film," we read Baudelaire and studied the paintings of Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau. We read existential philosophy and listened to Erik Satie and looked at maps of Paris and its monuments. When he asked us to write, he didn't connect the dots for us first. There were a hundred ways of fitting the course materials together by genre or school of thought, but they also fit together because Dean McWilliams loved them, and he hoped we would love them, too, and feel a sense of wonder and fascination.

That's how I figured out the secret. I discovered that college professors got to read whatever they wanted to and then to ask other people to read those same books and talk about them. They got to say: "I have always loved James Joyce, so we are going to read James Joyce." I reckoned that professors were master readers who must have spent many hours in solitude in the library, and they too must have felt like loners and outliers at times. They wanted other people to be transformed by the same books that had transformed them. If that was the job, I wanted in.

That really is the job.

Dean McWilliams told me to go to graduate school, and I did. But first I went to live in Paris to walk the streets we'd seen on the map he'd unfolded on the seminar table, and go to the cemetery at Père Lachaise, which looked just like it did in the slides we saw in his classroom. I went to the Gustave Moreau museum and saw the paintings. I got my first teaching job in Paris, and Professor McWilliams's class remained the inspiration for the life I lived there, and the model for every class I'd ever teach.

I never told him that I became a teacher, or that he was the one who inspired me to become one. I don't think I sent him a postcard, or told him that I lived in Paris for three years, or that, after going on to get graduate degrees in English and history, I ended up teaching classes on American cities,



**LESSON LEARNED** Patricia Peknik, an assistant professor in the liberal arts department at Berklee College of Music, credits a college dean for sending her down her own path.

using literary texts and film, much like he did. But when a student recently said: "You put things together that don't seem like they belong together, and then they do," I thought of Professor McWilliams and the undergraduate seminar that remains the most inspirational educational experience of my life. Only in sitting down to write this did I learn that Dean McWilliams passed away a few years ago. Although he'll never know how many of his ideas and methods I came to think of as my own, every student of mine has also, in that way, had him as their teacher. ■

# Q & A: Sen. Chang-Diaz and Rep. Peisch

*Continued from cover*

**Advocate:** Doesn't it make sense then to take a closer look at what is working well in our public schools and try to do a better job of making those practices systemic? Are there, for example, things that our suburban schools do well that might be useful to struggling urban schools?

**Peisch:** While we have districts that differ in terms of socio-economic background of the students, there are definitely best practices that can be replicated and I don't think we should just dismiss the successes of the suburban schools as happening only because the students are different. Across the Commonwealth you're seeing more and more students who are English language learners. The suburban schools might have something to learn from the urban schools in that situation. But overall, being more collaborative in general should be our goal: between urban and suburban schools, district and charter schools, all across the board. It makes no sense that, because of the various barriers that exist, our schools and are districts are operating in isolation.

**Chang-Diaz:** I think that in general we need to do a much better job of emphasizing the things in our public schools that are working. Yes, we recognize that there are challenges and problems that need to be fixed but there are also impressive, miraculous things that go on every day against incredible odds. This is an area where the state can do much better. We have pockets of innovation and excellence happening, so how do we replicate what's working and at the same time, make sure that we're telling those success stories?

**Advocate:** There's a lot of talk about collaboration these days, between educators and administrators, between charter schools and districts schools, but I think many of our members would tell you that collaboration is very difficult when relationships are set up to be adversarial.

**Peisch:** I'll be interested to see what happens over the next year or so as the most recent legislation is implemented whether the tension between charter and district schools remains. I think the tension came not only from the funding formula but the sense that the playing field was not level. We made a real effort in the legislation to try to ensure that the charter schools are teaching students that mirror the district's students. I'm hopeful that by requiring that there be a more diverse student body and monitoring this that the temperature will begin to come down on this.

**Chang-Diaz:** We plan to watch this very closely as a committee. But I also think that what's important here is that we ask all of the different parties that are involved in a child's life to be responsible. That's parents, teachers, districts, the state, the community-the parochial village. This includes district and charter schools. We have to keep our eye on the end goal which we all share of helping students and realizing proficiency and high achievement for our students, whether they're attending a district school or a charter school.

**Advocate:** What are the big issues on Beacon Hill of which our members should be aware?

**Peisch:** Everyone is extremely concerned about this year's budget and the implications that it's going to have for our schools. For the past several years we've had federal funds that have



**JOINT CHIEFS** State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz (left) and Representative Alice Peisch are the new chairs of the Joint Committee on Education.

effectively protected our schools from the worst of the economic situation and now that money is gone. Chapter 70 money is likely to be cut—the question is how much. Our desire is to keep on top of the implementation of the most recent education reform legislation and really keep an eye on what's happening on the ground. I understand that there are people who are feeling somewhat anxious about how it's playing out, but it will take a cycle to see how it's actually working.

**Advocate:** This is a question from one of our members. Is there anything that can be done at the state level to create a culture of encouraging parent involvement?

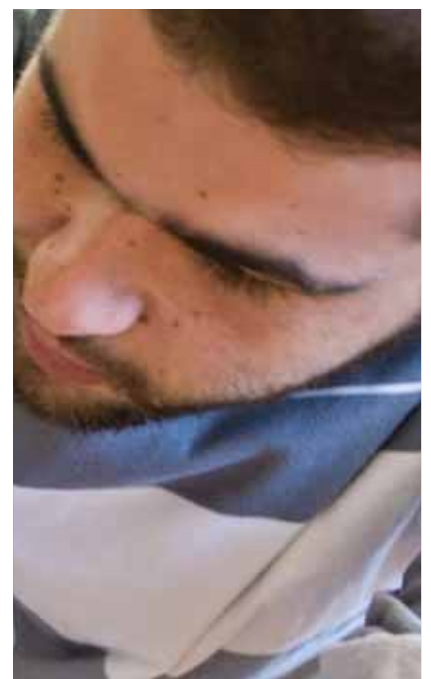
**Peisch:** It's a real challenge. This is a question that has been around for a long time. In the past there have been efforts to almost mandate parental involvement, which is pretty tricky. Frequently the parents are working two and three jobs. They have very little time and the time that they do have isn't consistent with when the teacher is available. Communication is obviously a big issue here as well, especially with

parents for whom English isn't their first language. If the school is having trouble communicating with parents, are there other community institutions that can be called on? I also think we have to recognize that you're not going to be able to have a high level of involvement from every parent and so we have to compensate for that.

**Chang-Diaz:** The education reform law contains several provisions aimed at getting parents more involved. I'm thinking about, for example, the idea of having to pull together stakeholders including parents and having parental involvement be part of any effort to turn around a school. There are a lot of levers that the state can pull to help encourage parental involvement. To the extent that we can address poverty issues and deal with the foreclosure crisis as a state, that's going to help with parent engagement. We can take off the parent's plate this question of 'where am I going to move next month?' When we can help families so that they don't have to move three times in two years, pulling their kids out of schools and districts, that's going to help with parental engagement. ■

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