

## Meet the Teacher of the Year

When math teacher Adam Gray examined the performance data of students at Boston's Monument High School he encountered a puzzle as tricky as any as he might assign in a math class. While MCAS results revealed a student body capable of high achievement, a significant number of students at Monument, weren't passing their classes, attendance was low, suspension rates high. Explains Gray: "The data showed that our kids had the ability to do really well but were low achieving."

In an effort to remedy that Gray began an after school program in 2009 with a simple but elusive goal: to make success at Monument cool. Through his Mu Alpha Theta honor society, the city's first, Gray sought to change his students' attitudes towards academic achievement by giving them something to work for. "I made them a deal: if you have good attendance, grades and behavior, you will get an all expenses paid trip," says Gray.

### Rewarding achievement

Fast forward two eventful years and Mu Alpha Theta has been an unabashed success. Started with just a handful of participants, membership in the group has swelled to include nearly 10% of Monument students. And the trips? There have been three so far, to Washington D.C. and Chicago. (Gray has raised more than



**OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR** Adam Gray, who has taught math at Boston's Monument High School for the past five years, is the 2012 Teacher of the Year. Says Gray: "I've learned more about overcoming adversity and life's obstacles from my students than they've learned about math from me."

\$45,000 from businesses to fund the trips.) "I wanted to demonstrate that these kids can achieve," says Gray.

The students at Monument, a small school located in the fabled former South Boston High School, aren't the only ones who've noticed Gray's dedication. The 26 year-old Gray has just been named the 2012 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. The program, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in partnership with Hannaford Supermarkets, selects a teacher each year who represents the positive

contributions of teachers statewide.

In addition to his new title, Gray also received a check for \$5000 from Hannaford. He will now compete with candidates from across the country for the National Teacher of the Year.

Gray was chosen from among hundreds of nominees, winnowed to four finalists: Ryan King of Masconomet Regional Middle School, Sarah Roberts of the South Shore Charter Public School and William Madden-Fuoco, an English teacher at the Urban Sciences Academy in West Roxbury.

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## Budget Cuts For Nation's First Library

The Franklin Public Library may have a storied history—it is the very first public library in the United States—but these days it is struggling for its very existence thanks to deep budget cuts. The library, which got its start when Benjamin Franklin donated books to the town of Franklin, MA has seen its budget shrink by 40% since 2010. Now town officials have approved the deepest cuts yet. As of July 1st, the Franklin facility will lose nearly half of its staff members including the circulation manager, the young adult librarian and the head of technical services.

### Deep cuts ahead

Librarians and patrons of the Franklin Public Library say that the deep cuts will not only affect the quality of library services but make little fiscal sense for the town given the relatively small size of the library budget. Advocates for the library point out that its budget is less than 1% of the total town budget and that the smallest town department has been targeted for

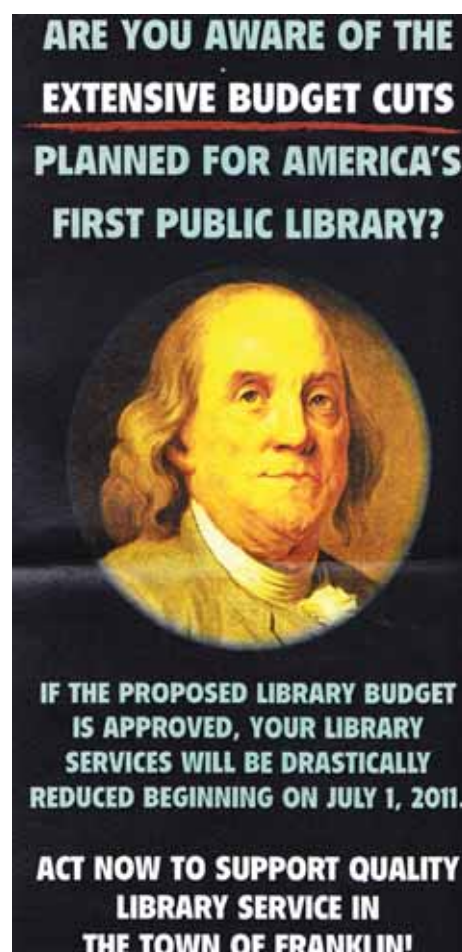
the biggest cuts. While the library will maintain its current operating schedule, a skeleton crew will be responsible for everything from checking out books to providing reference assistance.

"We're very disappointed that the country's first public library has been targeted for such deep cuts," says Wendy Doody, who heads the staff union at the library. The result, notes Doody, is that library employees have been forced to take significant cuts in pay in order to stay at the library. "We're being asked to do the same jobs we used to do but for less. It's like telling a teacher 'I'm going to pay you as though you were a teacher's aide, but you'll still be teaching.'"

### Library a cornerstone

Doody and her colleagues also fear that service will suffer once the library drops to just six staff members. They warn of program cuts including fewer story times, longer waits for service and more self service by library patrons.

*Continued on page 3*



**ARE YOU AWARE OF THE EXTENSIVE BUDGET CUTS PLANNED FOR AMERICA'S FIRST PUBLIC LIBRARY?**

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## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell  
President, AFT Massachusetts

# The School Year Does Not End Quietly

I sit here writing this article one day after the Boston Bruins won their first Stanley Cup thirty-nine years after the last one. The twenty-first century has brought Boston a plethora of sports championships. We can only hope that another one will come in the fall. Cheers for the Bruins. Today we also had the Teacher of the Year awards. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education honored a number of teachers, three of whom are Boston public school teachers and members of the Boston Teachers Union.

Adam William Gray, Monument High School, is Teacher of the Year.

William Madden-Fuoco, Urban Science Academy, is a finalist for Teacher of the Year.

Wai Chin Ng, Quincy School, received a presidential award for excellence in mathematics and science teaching.

Since so many seem too intent on disparaging public schools and public school teachers, public recognition of the achievements of these teachers is a wonderful antidote. AFT MA

congratulates them and all the other teachers honored at the ceremony, who have achieved so greatly. Their success is duplicated every day by hordes of teachers.

Health insurance in the public sector continues to be a major topic at the state house. Through my columns in this newspaper and the emails sent to the leadership of all the locals, I have kept you informed about the twists and turns, and more twists and turns, and even more twists and turns of the ongoing saga. Currently a House-Senate Conference Committee is continuing to develop what it will send to the floor of the State House of Representatives and the State Senate. The bill adopted by the House will severely diminish the quality of health insurance. The Senate bill is much better, but it still has deficiencies.

A very broad coalition of public employee unions representing fire, police, teachers, librarians and multitudes of other municipal employees has been meeting for months developing strategies to maintain the best possible health insurance coverage. All the unions in the coalition are continuing to meet with and talk with the legislators. We'll keep you informed.

Our web site at [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net) continues to have current information.

Health insurance, as exceptionally important as it is, does not command all the attention of AFT MA. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

will overhaul the system of evaluating teachers and administrators. A broad-based task force has wrestled with so many issues that no one can keep a count.

However, two of the prime issues have been the use of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test scores and the use of student learning (apart from MCAS) to evaluate teachers.

AFT MA has consistently opposed the use of MCAS as an evaluation tool for two reasons:

1. The state did not develop MCAS to evaluate teachers.
2. No data exist to show that the exam is a legitimate tool to evaluate teachers.

In addition, only seventeen percent of the teachers throughout the state teach in subjects and grades in which the test is given.

AFT MA has always supported the use of a wide array of factors in the evaluation of teachers. We do believe that student learning, if properly used, can be helpful.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will adopt regulations which will affect all communities. Some aspects will be subject to collective bargaining. In so called underperforming schools, as designated by the state, they are to be in effect for the 2011-12 school year. For all other schools the 2012-13 school year is the goal.

We shall give all locals the support they need in implementing the new regulations.

Once again another challenging year is concluding. The incredible trauma, endured by our colleagues in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and other states dominated the news. Many chapters remain to be written but public education will certainly continue to be of intense interest, to have great battles, and to produce outstanding achievements.

May your summer fulfill your dreams. ■

## Member Alert: Health Insurance Bill Update

At press time a six member conference committee was considering the two health insurance bills passed in recent weeks by the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the Senate. The committee will likely report out a bill by the end of the month. The bill must then be voted on by both branches of the legislature before ultimately reaching the Governor's desk.

What's at stake for AFT MA members? The legislation passed by the House of Representatives earlier this spring would substantially erode the collective bargaining rights of teachers, paraprofessionals, librarians and other public sector employees in Massachusetts. The House version would allow municipalities to force employees into the Group Insurance Commission and make plan design changes, including raising co-pays and deductibles, without employee input. The Senate bill, by contrast, calls for coalition bargaining, a dispute-resolution panel and includes some important protections for retirees and the very sick. (For a side-by-side comparison of the House and Senate versions visit [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)).

In the past two months, thousands of AFT MA members and other public employees in Massachusetts have called, e-mailed and written their legislators to demand a say in the cost and quality of their health insurance plans. Once a bill has been passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor, the battle over public employee benefits is expected to shift to the municipal level.

Says AFT MA President Tom Gosnell: "All of our members need to be aware that their local governing bodies—mayors, city councils, etc—will soon be making very important decisions about health care. We'll do everything we can to keep our members informed about what's happening." ■

For the latest health insurance news visit [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)

### Editor's Note

This is the final issue of the Advocate for the 2010/2011 school year. We will resume publication in September. Have a great summer and we'll see you in the fall. —JCB

# BOLD PRINT

### Presidential Pick

Boston teacher **Wai Chin Ng**, a fifth grade science teacher at **Josiah Quincy Elementary School**, has been named one of the best science teachers in the country. Ng was among 85 educators from across the nation, and one of just two here in Massachusetts, chosen to receive the prestigious **Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching**. Ng and his counterparts received their awards from President Obama at a White House ceremony last month. As for Ng's science students, they weren't surprised that their teacher would be tapped for top honors. "He's the best," one student told NECN. To learn more about Mr. Ng, visit [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net).



### Teachers Rock

Four AFT MA members have been recognized as being among the region's "most outstanding" educators through a "**Teachers Rock Contest**" organized by United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley and Stand for Children. A total of ten winners were recently selected from more than one hundred nominees and will receive \$500 worth of school supplies from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. "The teachers nominated as part of the Teachers Rock Contest have made a difference that has extended well beyond their classroom walls," said Michael Durkin, president of United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley. The AFT MA members selected include **Cate Arnold, Boston Latin School; Chad Harris, Umama Middle School Academy; Karen McCarthy, Brighton High School** and **Melissa Sue McKenzie, Merrimack Special Education Collaborative**. Congratulations to all—you rock!



### Library Drill Team

Watch out when **Middleborough Public Library** technician **Lori Salotto** comes around with a library cart. Salotto was one of three squads of librarians to perform in the **State Book Cart Drill Team Competition** at the state's annual library conference this spring. Each year, groups of librarians perform choreographed routines to music all of which feature a staple of library life: the book cart. Salotto, who is a member of the AFT MA-affiliated Massachusetts Library Staff Association, performed as part of Team Playaway in honor of a digital audio player that many libraries use to play audio books. The contest even has official rules; judging is based on control of the book cart, precision, timing, degree of difficulty and unique moves, as well as artistic impression.



### Chairman of the Board

**Kimberly Wilson**, a labor education coordinator at **UMass Dartmouth**, where she is a member of the Educational Services Unit, has been named chair of the board of directors of the **Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Health** or MassCOSH. The nonprofit organization was founded in 1976 to advocate for safe working conditions for workers in Eastern Massachusetts. Wilson replaces former AFT MA field representative **Phil Katz** as board chair.

The *Advocate* loves good news. If you've got news to share, send us an email at: [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).

## The Advocate

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# Honoring Distinguished Service in 2011

Four educators received this year's AFT Massachusetts Distinguished Service Award. The awards, which were announced at the state convention in Danvers last month, are presented annually to AFT MA members who have demonstrated an outstanding level of service and dedication to their union locals. This year's recipients included Medway Middle School teacher Temma Downing, Medway paraprofessional Susan Lynch, Barbara Ferreira, a paraprofessional at Carney Academy in New Bedford, and retired member Alice Gunning, the long-time president of the Lynn Teachers Union.

AFT MA president Tom Gosnell praised this year's award winners, noting that they set a high standard for the union's future leaders. "These

representative. "She took me aside and said 'you can do this—I'll help you.' That was the beginning, and after that I got more and more involved," says Downing. Her colleagues at the



**Barbara Ferreira, New Bedford Federation of Paraprofessionals**

Medway Federation of Teachers, where Downing has served as a vice president for the past six years, cited that high level of involvement in their decision to nominate her for a Distinguished Service Award. Her commitment to the Medway Federation of Teachers is notable given that her growing role in the union has coincided with the growth of her own family—Downing has three kids, ages six, ten and twelve.

How does she do it all? As part of a team, says Downing. "We have a great union in Medway. We all work together and help each other out." And while she says that she couldn't be prouder of winning the Distinguished Service award this year, Downing hopes that other young teachers will follow her lead and make time for union involvement—not matter how busy they are. "No matter how busy your life is you have to step forward and take it on as best you can."

## In great company

When paraprofessional Barbara Ferreira learned that she'd been selected to receive an award, she thought immediately of her colleagues from the New Bedford Federation of Paraprofessionals who'd previously been recognized. "I was so thrilled to be chosen. Some great leaders from our union have won the award before and to join them is a real honor," says Ferreira. Her colleagues at Carney Academy, where Ferreira works in a preschool class, praise her leadership and devotion to the special needs children with whom she works. "She exemplifies all of the traits needed to be a successful paraprofessional and friend," says co-worker Deborah Gomes.

Ferreira is also a role model, adds



**Susan Lynch, Medway Federation of Teachers**

local president Elaine Safioleas. "She has been a strong leader and role model in tough times and is unafraid to stand up for what's right. Her actions exemplify what a true union leader should be."

## The right stuff

While it is unusual for two paraprofessionals to receive the Distinguished Service Award in the same year, Medway para Susan Lynch says that she isn't surprised by the choice. "Being a para and a union leader require a lot of the same skills," says Lynch, who works in an intensive learning classroom at Medway Middle School. "You have to be very flexible and be willing to step in and help out when you're needed."

Medway Federation of Teachers co-president Megan Boland says that's exactly why Lynch's colleagues in the MFT appreciate her so much. "Susan is an extremely active member of the union and the Medway community."



**Alice Gunning, retired member, Lynn Teachers Union**

She's always willing to offer her assistance wherever it is needed," says Boland. When she's not working with students in the classroom, Lynch tutors special needs students after school. She also volunteers for numerous community organizations that help Medway families in need. As for Lynch herself, she sees nothing extraordinary in her life of service. "My philosophy has always been that I go where I'm needed."

## Lifetime achievement

Every year AFT Massachusetts honors a retired union member whose career has exemplified dedication and service. The 2011 award was received by a brand new retiree: former president of the Lynn Teachers Union Alice Gunning who stepped down last summer. Gunning's inspiring history of union involvement began when she was a brand new elementary school teacher and the Lynn Teachers Union went out on strike. "I remember it so well—it was a scary, dramatic time for all of us but we were striking to protect the contract," recalls Gunning.

During the nine years that she headed up the local, Gunning helped bring an innovative professional development program to Lynn and led a successful effort by unions in the city to provide public employees with quality, affordable health insurance. These days retirement finds her anything but idle. She continues to serve on the AFT MA Executive Board and is also a mentor to Brant Duncan, the new president of the LTU. "With all that's happening in our cities and our schools today I could never just sit on the sidelines," says Gunning.

*AFT MA congratulates all of this year's Distinguished Service Award winners.* ■



**Temma Downing, Medway Federation of Teachers**

individuals really embody what AFT Massachusetts is about. They inspire their colleagues, their students and all of us in the union movement."

## Making the time

Temma Downing can still recall the day when a soon-to-be retiring teacher at Medway Middle School approached her about becoming a building

## For Nation's First Library, Cuts, Cuts, Cuts

*Continued from cover*

Frequent patron Lesley McCaffrey, who visits the Franklin Public Library at least once a week, told the *Milford Daily News*: "It saddens me to see that our library's budget is being cut so drastically. People need to know that the here is an institution that is the cornerstone of our community. The library is the best deal in town."

## Certification threatened

Patrons like McCaffrey may have more to fear from service reductions and cuts in programming once the cuts are implemented on July first. The Franklin Public Library is also in jeopardy of losing its certification, which means that patrons may no longer utilize certified libraries in the area. Certification may be lost when library budgets are cut more than other departments. One of three cities in the state failed to meet library certification requirements last year, due largely to budget slashing that has fallen disproportionately on libraries.

## Holding out hope

Now Wendy Doody and her colleagues are holding out hope that devoted library users will pressure local officials to reverse at least some

of the cuts. Librarians have distributed thousands of fliers in recent weeks to spread the word about the cuts. Says Doody: "When you drive into Franklin the first thing you see is a sign welcoming you to the home of America's first public library. But our local officials don't seem to value the service that we provide."

## What would Franklin say?

Mary Frances Best, president of the Massachusetts Library Staff Association, questions the wisdom of the Franklin officials who have chosen to cut so deeply into the library's budget. "The cuts are completely out of proportion given what a small piece of the budget the library represents." What would Benjamin Franklin himself say? "Franklin liked to say that 'an investment in knowledge pays the best interest,'" says Best. "That's something we all need to remember these days."

The ongoing recession has proved to be a mixed blessing for Massachusetts libraries. While use of resources, including computer access, job search support and free entertainment is way up, libraries are also increasingly vulnerable as cities and town face yet another year of budget deficits. ■



## GOOD GRAD

AFT MA scholarship winner Marysa Angelli, delivering the morning newscast at Lynn English High School. Angelli, who plans to study stage and production management at Emerson this fall, was one of nine high school seniors to win an AFT MA scholarship this year. To learn about the other winners, visit [www.aftma.net](http://www.aftma.net)

# Diary

## of a New Teacher

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

As I end my third year of full-time teaching and transition to permanent status, I still feel new, albeit more seasoned. I'm still learning about myself as a teacher and thankful for learning even more through our goal setting and peer-review processes at the Boston Teachers Union School.

Back in August, Roberta Kelly, Director of Educational Leadership at Simmons College, helped us to frame our goals as specific and measurable. As a result, I went back to the drawing board a few times. I knew that I wanted to address differentiated instruction, since my heterogeneous classroom has an even wider spread than most. A single class contains new students who have never taken Spanish, students who took Spanish with me last year and students who already speak Spanish fluently. I finally settled on this lofty-yet-attainable professional development goal: I would use differentiated instruction at least once a week so that 80% of students report that the class pace is "just right" on the biweekly participation assessment by May 2011.

Because differentiated instruction often gets more lip service than actual implementation, I figured that my students would be the best ones to assess whether the pace of the class was right for them. On the back of biweekly quizzes, students rated whether they found the pace of the class to be "way too slow," "too slow," "just right," "too fast," or "way too fast."

To make my goal achievable, I broke the process down into measurable components. For example:

- Rearranging furniture to better accommodate varied groupings by October 2010. Check!
- Completing a distance learning class on differentiation by November 2010. Check!
- Creating two units with differentiation and implementing by November 2010. Check!
- Developing a curriculum compact for heritage and native speakers by December 2010. Still waiting on that one...

This is where my strategy started to break down. I wasn't able to create curricula and prep for all of my classes grades K1 - 7 while simultaneously creating enough material to provide those who tested out of the standard curriculum to work on their own curriculum compact. Not to be deterred by this bump in the road, I re-framed my strategy to include differentiated learning within a project-based structure. The 7th graders are currently investigating school food



**GOAL SETTING**  
Third year teacher Riana Good set big goals for herself this past year. But translating her vision of differentiated instruction into practice proved more difficult than Good anticipated. Still, Good is looking on the bright side: "The possibility for new beginnings next year continues."

through a participatory action research project, which provides opportunities for differing interests and skill levels.

Students who are fluent and near fluent interviewed our Spanish-speaking cafeteria workers and other invited guests in Spanish, while other students gathered data by administering simple surveys in Spanish to the younger grades. Some students are doing additional research in Spanish, while others are gathering background information in English. To address their varying interests, students are choosing to work on data analysis, visual art, spoken-word, PowerPoint slides and/or video-creation for the final project and presentation. Now, students remain in heterogeneous groupings that still allow for differentiation.

An average of 63.7% of middle-

school students reported that the pace of class was "just right" throughout the year, reaching a peak of 77% at the end of the semester. Still, most of the remaining students are reporting that class was "too slow" or "way too slow," indicating that the needs of many heritage and native Spanish speakers are still not being met. Where my ability to always meet the needs of all students with differentiated instruction ends, the possibility for new beginnings next year continues. And so, if all goes as planned, there will be the option of separate classes for heritage and native Spanish speaker for each middle school grade next year. Sometimes, personal growth goals are helped along by logistics! ■

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# Teachers at Cape Cod Charter School Vote to Form Union

Teachers and staff at the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School in Orleans recently became the second charter school in Massachusetts to unionize. Teachers at the middle school, which serves 200 6th, 7th and 8th graders, say that they were motivated by a simple desire: to strengthen the 17 year old institution. Teachers at the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Brighton became the first charter school educators to unionize in 2009.

## A stronger school

Explains sixth grade teacher Josh Stewart: “I firmly believe that organizing will result in a stronger school in all regards, with the students, the staff, and the administration sharing in the benefits.” Teachers at the Cape Cod charter school are now working with school administrators to shape a contract that they hope will afford them the benefits and rights they deserve, including provisions for class-size, child care leave and standardized performance evaluations.

## Wanted: a voice

Nearly 3,000 teachers are currently employed by charter schools in Massachusetts, a number that will increase significantly this fall with the opening of 16 new schools, 10 in Boston alone. Unlike traditional public school teachers, educators at charter schools cannot negotiate with administrators over how the schools are run; nor are their rights and working conditions spelled out by the contracts that protect every other public school teacher in the state. Massachusetts, which consistently leads the nation—and ranks near the top of the world—in academic performance, also has the highest concentration of unionized public school faculty in the country.

## A state of insecurity

Unlike educators at district schools, charter school teachers are typically employed on one year contracts, meaning that they never know whether they'll have a job in the coming school

year. The arrangement, says Scott, produces tremendous insecurity and anxiety among the teaching staff at many charter schools in addition to far higher rates of staff turnover than at district schools. “The most common complaint we hear is that when all of the power rests in the hands of a principal teachers no longer have the opportunity to lead,” says Glenn Scott, who heads up AFT MA’s charter school organizing project.

## The innovation challenge

Charter advocates argue that it is the absence of negotiated contracts between teachers and administrators that makes the schools laboratories for innovation. But a growing number of charter school teachers say that the opposite is the case—that putting too much power in the hands of a single principal or director makes innovation harder, not easier. One such teacher, who spoke to the *Advocate* on the condition that neither his name nor the name of the school where he teaches be identified, described a culture in which teachers fear that they could lose their jobs at any time, where the principal challenges sick days and recently cut teachers’ prep time in half—with no explanation. “We want to do these great things with the kids. But I also want to know that I’m making a fair wage, that I’m going to have a job next year and that procedures aren’t suddenly going to change.”

## Decision time

For teachers at the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, it was the desire for more input in the way their school is run that ultimately convinced them that forming a union was the appropriate step. Explains David Agnew, the school’s network coordinator: “I believe that unionization will provide staff the opportunity for a recognized democratic process to reach agreement on matters of common interest, allowing us to speak to our community with a stronger, more unified voice.” ■



## QUESTION TIME

A teacher asks a question during a recent public forum on a proposed overhaul of the state’s teacher evaluation system. At the forums, which were held across the state, educators expressed concern about a plan to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores. The Board of Education is expected to vote on the proposal at the end of June.

## Evaluation Debate Heats Up

At a recent public hearing on proposed new statewide regulations governing teacher and administrator evaluation in Massachusetts, veteran educator Brendan Walsh had a tough question for state commissioner of education, Mitchell Chester. “How much consideration is going to be taken of the kinds of situations teachers are dealing with?” asked Walsh, a long-time social studies teacher at Salem High School who now serves on that city’s school committee. “If we’re going to compare teachers, we have to compare students as well.”

Iterations of Walsh’s question have been heard again and again in recent weeks at six different public hearings sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. At the hearings, held in Wilmington, Westborough, Agawam, Middleborough, Quincy and Pittsfield, representatives of the department provided an overview of proposed changes to educator evaluation regulations and solicited feedback from teachers, administrators and other stakeholders. The state Board of Education is expected to vote on the final regulations at a meeting on June 28th.

## Three principles

Over the last year, AFT Massachusetts has been advocating for a teacher evaluation system that satisfies three core principles: good for students; fair to educators; and collaboratively done, explains Dan Murphy, AFT MA’s director of education policy and programs. Murphy notes that he’s hopeful that the final regulations will reflect all three of these, thanks largely to educator input. “We remain concerned about the role of student test scores, as well as other components of the framework. But where there is good will and trust between teachers and administrators, and where teachers have a significant voice in system design through collective bargaining, we’re hopeful that this framework can be used to create local evaluation systems that are truly about professional growth, not ‘gotcha,’” says Murphy.

## Designing a new system

The Board’s vote will mark the culmination of months of often contentious debate over the best way to evaluate teachers and administrators

**Educators ask tough questions about a plan that would tie teacher evaluations to student test scores.**

in Massachusetts. In March a 40-person Task Force representing the full range of education and community stakeholders released a long-awaited report on how to redesign the state’s evaluation system. The Task Force’s report recommended that all school districts adopt a four-point rating scale—unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient, and exemplary—with educators rated against standards and indicators in four domains: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; teaching all students; professional culture; and family and community engagement.

## Role of MCAS?

While the proposed framework allows for a limited use of student MCAS scores in informing ratings, Commissioner Chester has pushed for a more expansive use of test scores. In a recent interview with WBUR, Chester stated that “[MCAS] is the only measure we have that will give our teachers and administrators a sense of how the year-to-year progression of students compares to what we’re seeing across the state.”

For Brendan Walsh and hundreds of educators who turned out in recent weeks to learn more about the changes ahead, the prospect of an evaluation system based on student test scores raises serious concerns. “I think back to my own teaching career and wonder what would have happened to me if I’d been evaluated based on the test scores of the students I taught,” says Walsh, who taught some of Salem High’s most challenging students through the school’s career education program. “The real question we want to ask is ‘how is the teacher doing given what he or she is dealing with?’” ■

*For the latest information, visit our teacher evaluation web page, available at <http://aftma.net/educator-resources/teacher-evaluation/>*

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# On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## On College Campuses, Academically Adrift

A new book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, has attracted much attention recently for its critique of learning in U.S. colleges. Using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a timed test that asks students to write essays based on readings during the test, the authors tracked 2,300 students at a broad range of schools over four years starting when they were freshmen in 2005.

They found that more than one third of the students showed no significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills. They also found large variation in individual gains among institutions and even larger variation among students in the same institutions but persistent, systematic inequalities across students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In separate surveys, the students who took the test reported an average of 12 hours per week on their studies and most avoided classes that required even moderate reading and writing assignments.

The authors end their book with a impassioned plea for higher education reform based on curriculum and standards that challenges faculty to expect more from students.

This short summary of findings doesn't do justice to this careful statistical analysis of the failures of learning on college campuses. The book is worth a read and has been widely summarized in the academic media over the web. It matches my experience and conversations with my colleagues over 40 years of teaching. For example, their conclusion that students who study alone do better on the learning assessment test than students who study in groups, a finding widely criticized by some reviewers, has been my experience. I have seen patterns of wildly wrong answers from groups of students swayed by the most talkative among them.

I think, however, that the authors' "Mandate for Reform" does not account for the backwards incentives in higher education. The goal of most students and their parents is not learning but a college diploma, informed by the worth of a college



**QUESTIONABLE COURSE**  
A new study finds that most college students fail to gain critical thinking, writing or complex reasoning skills while on campus. These troubling findings come even as the cost of a college degree soars ever skyward.

degree as an asset, widely reported as over \$1 million in the graduates' lifetime. This goal is also enforced by metrics of rating colleges by graduation rates. Both make sense in a world of scarce resources faced by most students and most colleges, but both have perverse incentives for learning.

Learning is extremely difficult to measure, and the production of learning is even more unpredictable. I think it likely that small classes of students with highly qualified and experienced teachers studying subjects that interest both teachers and students will probably produce learning. This is what schools do with the highest budgets per student, such as the Ivy League schools, but is out of reach for almost all students.

Neal Olitsky, a colleague of mine in the Economics Department who studies the effect of college on lifetime earnings, argues that college degrees signal to prospective employers the quality of the job applicant. A signal of high quality and effort is rewarded in the labor market, which represents the primary value of a college degree—not the learning done in college per se, because employers can not directly measure learning.

Almost all colleges and universities need students to make ends meet. In order to attract students who must pay more due to cuts in government funding and reductions in financial aid, schools must increase the probability of graduation, often by weakening standards. Otherwise, students and their parents will not take the risk of funding college degrees.

The business model of students as buyers of college degrees causes other effects that weaken standards. Graduation rates are used as performance measures for prospective students and for state legislatures. Non tenure-track faculty, who reduce college costs and have little choice but to service higher graduation rates, now make up 70% of all faculty.

Not all students fit into the model of buyers of college degrees. Many students seek learning for learning's sake. Music and fine arts attract plenty of students, often against their parents' wishes. Many other students focus on studies that they choose, but most high school graduates have not made careful decisions about what they want.

I agree with Arum's and Roska's conclusion that higher learning begins with quality teaching challenging students to do their best in their studies. But it will take lots more state and federal funding for public institutions and for need-based financial aid for students in both public and private schools. It will also take tenured faculty demanding better education for their students and academic freedom for all faculty before their numbers become too small to matter. ■

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### CAMPUS UPDATE

#### Fees Climb again

Members of the UMass board of trustees have voted to hike tuition and fees—again. According to the recently approved plan, the average in-state undergraduate student in the University of Massachusetts system will pay \$800 more in tuition and fees next academic year. The new plan will increase tuition and fees by 7.5 percent, meaning the average in-state undergrad will pay \$11,838, an \$826 increase from the academic year that recently ended. The decision is expected to bring in an additional \$26 million to the university system, which will help close a \$54 million budget gap, according to the news release. The remaining \$28 million gap will be closed with budget cuts.



#### WI Faculty, Staff Say 'Yes' to Organizing Efforts

The controversial Wisconsin law that would eliminate the collective bargaining rights of public employees remains tied up in that state's courts. But faculty and staff throughout the University of Wisconsin system continue to sign up for union representation. Earlier this spring faculty at UW Green Bay voted overwhelmingly to join AFT, while academic staff at UW Superior formed the first staff union in Wisconsin history. Members of the brand new union told reporters that the decision was spurred by their desire to protect the integrity of higher education in Wisconsin.



## Retiree Corner

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

### SENIOR SEMINARS

#### To Move or Not to Move

A comprehensive 2 hour seminar on the pros and cons of various housing choices and the legal ramifications for these choices.

**When:** June 18, from ten to noon

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

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

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

**When:** September 24, 10 to noon

**Where:** Presidential Park in Wilmington, unit 105 (see above).

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

#### Your Input is Needed

Massachusetts Retirees United is conducting a legislative survey to determine the needs and interests of retired teachers and other public sector employees in the Commonwealth. The results of the survey will help us to determine our legislative agenda for next year and beyond. To take the survey, visit [www.retireesunited.org](http://www.retireesunited.org). If you'd like to fill out the survey and return it by mail, call the MRU office at 781-272-8073.

## What You Don't Know *Can Hurt You*

How do you get people who are still working to care about what's happening to retirees?" That was a question asked of me today by a fellow who retired from a public sector job in 1997. His follow up question was: "Don't they know they are going to be here someday?"

Maybe it is a case of feeling that 'ignorance is bliss' or 'what I don't know can't hurt me.' A few years ago an active teacher had an idea for creating a bridge between active and retired teachers that became the Golden Apple column (see below). We hoped that by encouraging active teachers to look back at the person or people who inspired them they would realize the contributions made by the older generation for their success. This in turn would make them more conscious of the plight of the retirees and willing to help in passing legislation and improving the lot of those retired. Has it worked?

People are caught up in the here and now. For too many the only problems that exist are the ones that affect them in the present. Their attitude is 'I'll worry about what goes on in retirement when I get there. In the meantime I have enough on my plate to take care of.'

For many of you reading this column you have more years ahead of you in retirement than you have left in the classroom. For others, you have resisted getting involved in issues because there were always enough other people in the system to fight the battles for you. So being uninvolved worked fine for you. Those days are over, however. We can't keep living in denial, indifference or isolation.

Today, we are the enemy. It does not matter if you are actively working in the public sector or retired from it—you are the target. You are the drain on the finances of the system or the health care costs of the community. You are the overpaid group of people who only work 180 days a year and not even full days at that. You are the folks who have been able to retire on great pensions with superior health care benefits that the taxpayers are paying.

No one remembers that for years we received no raises, or very low raises, to get some of the benefits we have today. Some of us have even forgotten that fact. We have forgotten what collective bargaining did to the pay scale, working conditions and benefits. And if we do not remember the history or know the history how can we expect the general public to remember it?

We cannot continue to live in our own isolated chrysalis. If we do, it will not be a beautiful butterfly that emerges but a badly beaten, well-worn one. We must work together for the betterment of all. It is time we all realized that we must drop the mentality that if it does not adversely or positively affect me it can be ignored. We must realize that what we allow to be done today will affect us as well as generations to come.

Maybe it is time to refresh our memories on something most of us learned a long time ago and to start living it anew. I'm reminded of these poignant words of this Joan Baez song:

No man is an island  
No man stands alone  
Each man's joy is joy to me  
Each man's grief is my own.  
We need one another  
So I will defend  
Each man as my brother  
Each man as my friend.

It is time that we all, whether we're active or retired, begin to work together to protect our rightfully earned benefits. ■

## The Golden Apple



By Jan Donley, associate professor of liberal arts, Berklee College of Music

## The Best Boss I Ever Had

*Author's note: I wrote the following piece in 2006, the year that Nancy Walker died. Nancy directed the First Year Writing Program at Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU), now Missouri State University (MSU). I am 54 now and teach in the Liberal Arts Department at Berklee College of Music. Nancy Walker continues to inform my teaching.*

Nancy Walker was the best boss ever. I mean it. I am 50 years old now—I'm guessing around the same age Nancy was when I met her in 1988. I have had many bosses since her, and none match. She intimidated the hell out of me at first. She hired me for my first real teaching gig at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, and I was scared. She looked so serious and stern and important. And her clothes, her glasses, her hair: she was the boss. Only years later did I learn of her affection for Bruce Springsteen songs. Of course. The boss would love the boss.

She got me right away—my fear, my anxiety, my passion, my desire to teach. And she taught me how to teach. She didn't teach me by lecture. She didn't teach me by looking over my shoulder. In fact, she was deceptively hands-off. Some people might have thought she was soft or easy. But those people are wrong. She was

In one of my last e-mails to Nancy, I wrote: "I always refer to you as my teaching mentor, and I just wish there were more heads of programs with your sensibility, philosophy, and style. In my experience, you are rare."

compassionate, yes, but never easy. She had standards and expectations, and the funny thing is, she seldom said them out loud. Those of us who worked for her just knew. We wanted to please her. It mattered to please her.

Nancy was not just about teaching, and I soon learned that her sense of humor and her love of popular culture made her incredibly and delightfully approachable. We both shared a love for the television show Northern Exposure, and we would compare notes the day after it aired.

During my time at Southwest Missouri State University, I began writing letters to students and requiring them to write letters to me. This idea grew out of weekly meetings Nancy held with those of us who taught first year writing. I teach at Boston University now, and in one of



Writer and teacher Jan Donley.

my most recent letters to my students, I told them about Nancy. I wrote, "Nancy Walker is the reason for the letter writing that we do in class. In fact, Nancy Walker is the reason I'm a teacher at all."

After I left my five-year teaching post at SMSU in 1993, I kept up a written correspondence with Nancy, and of late, we had an email correspondence, cut painfully short by her illness. In one of my last emails to Nancy, I wrote: "I always refer to you as my teaching mentor, and I just wish there were more heads of programs with your sensibility, philosophy, and style. In my experience, you are rare."

Nancy gave me confidence when I had very little. She instilled in me the good sense and courage to pursue teaching. She is and ever will be, the boss. ■

# Meet the Teacher of the Year

Continued from cover

## Life lessons

**Teacher of the Year Adam Gray sees himself as a proud advocate for urban educators. "Education policy experts don't get how tough it is. They don't understand the obstacles that students face or that teachers face."**

The event, billed as a celebration honoring excellence in teaching, also recognized four Teacher of the Year semifinalists along with the 2011 Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, Jessica Kodys, of the Stacy Middle School in Milford. The recipients of the 2010 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, Michael Flynn of William E. Norris Elementary School in South Hampton and Wai Chin Ng of the Josiah Quincy Elementary School in Boston, were honored as well.

Just 21 years old when he began teaching at Monument, Gray, who grew up in South Carolina and received his teacher training at the University of Georgia before moving to Boston, says that the demands of being an urban educator nearly overwhelmed during those first months. "You have to be confident and resilient. You have to have a thick skin, be reflective and be willing to grow. You have to be able to through the day *and* be really good."

To survive that first year Gray drew on the experience of other teachers at Monument and set about establishing a culture in his own classroom whereby his students would embrace the challenges he put before them. Gray also began to form strong bonds with his individual students, something he believes has been key to his success as a teacher. "I've put lots of hours, energy and emotion into my students," notes Gray. "I've benefited too. I've learned more about overcoming adversity and life's obstacles from my students than they've learned about math from me."

At the end of each school year Gray writes lengthy hand-written letters to his students, summing up their successes—and the work they must still do. One ever present theme: Gray's constant imploring of his students to recognize their potential and live up to it. In one such letter Gray makes his point by painting a picture instantly familiar to a high school student: a party, music, dancing, and across the room, a pretty girl. "In this metaphor," writes Gray, "the girl standing on the other side of the room is your long term goals or dreams...what you want to do with your life. It's time to smile back, get your swag on and start walking towards her."

## Urban advocate

As Teacher of the Year, Gray will be the teaching profession's highest profile representative in Massachusetts, a position he plans to use to advocate for urban educators. One goal: to convey to policy leaders just how challenging the job of a teacher in an urban school really is. "Education policy experts don't get



**DEDICATED**  
Bill Madden-Fuoco, an English teacher at Boston's Urban Sciences Academy, was a finalist for Teacher of the Year. Says Madden-Fuoco: "What I do in my classroom matters. I'm constantly thinking about how a lesson went or how a unit went and how I can make it better. If my students are struggling, I want to know what I can do that will be helpful or supportive."

how tough it is. They don't understand the obstacles that students face or that teachers face." Gray also hopes to make the case for more collaboration between struggling schools that educate similar populations of students, as well as between teachers within those schools.

And at a time when teachers unions are caricatured as anathema to innovation and excellence Gray is an unabashed union supporter. As a Teach Plus policy fellow, Gray has worked to foster greater union involvement among early career and second-stage teachers working in the Boston Public Schools. He was also recently elected as a Boston Teachers Union delegate.

## Bittersweet

Gray's selection as Teacher of the Year for his work at Monument High School is not without irony. Monument, designated a failing school by the state, will close at the end of this school year. Excel High School, also located in the South Boston Education Complex, will expand to include some of Monument's students and teachers—but not all.

Starting this fall Gray will be

teaching 9th and 10th grade math at Boston Latin. "It's going to be a completely different experience for me," says Gray. He concedes that Monument's struggles and closure have prompted him to grapple with some major questions. Among them: how much impact can a single teacher have given all of the factors and structures that are outside of his or her control? "Once that bell rings, it's chaos," says Gray.

In the meantime Gray is preparing to say farewell to the students whom he has taught about quadratic equations and probability and who, in turn, have taught him so much about life. This year, in addition to his customary letters, Gray gave several students copies of his very favorite book: *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho. "I gave it to them because it's about realizing your dreams and never settling. It's about finding your personal legend and that's what I hope they'll do." ■

*AFT Massachusetts congratulates Adam and all of this year's finalists and semi-finalists.*

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