

## Officials: Slashing Sales Tax Too Drastic for Struggling Cities, Towns

Years of budget cuts are reshaping the education landscape and thinning the ranks of new teachers. Slashing the sales tax will leave cities and towns with even more red ink, and the prospect of the deepest layoffs to date.



**CODE RED** Connie Clauson recently returned to her former career in nursing after losing her job as an elementary school teacher. “Teaching turned out to be far less secure as a profession than I’d realized,” says Clauson.

### Taking a toll

The ‘Great Recession’ hit Massachusetts hard. As job losses soared, tax revenue plummeted. The result: the state has already cut some \$3 billion in spending, including Chapter 70 funds, the money that goes to public education. Even with an economic recovery on the horizon, the state’s financial forecast remains grim. Subtract \$2.5 billion from a budget

splattered with red ink and a basic question must be asked: From where will the money for education and other vital state and local services come?

In some of the state’s hardest hit cities, that question already looms large for local leaders. In Lawrence, teacher layoffs have been averted—for now—but the city has been forced to lay off 23 firefighters.

*Continued on page 8*

Supporters of an effort to slash the state’s sales tax—on the ballot this November—are quick to point to the estimated \$630 you’ll save if their measure passes. But how much will it cost you? Mayors and other public officials in Massachusetts are warning that after years of recession, draining an estimated \$2.5 billion from cities and towns is the very last thing they can afford. And while federal aid, including a recent jobs bill for which teachers and education advocates across the country pushed hard, has helped to avert deep layoffs in the state’s teaching force, that money is temporary. Should voters pass Question 3, cities and towns will likely have no choice but to lay off teachers and shutter schools.

## Boston Teachers Win Innovation Grant

BOSTON—When Kevin Qazilbash worked as a New Teacher Developer in the Boston Public Schools he was struck by how often brand new educators were overwhelmed by one of the most basic classroom tasks: lesson planning. “New teachers typically feel like they have to create their plans from scratch,” says Qazilbash, who now teaches math at the Edwards Middle School in Charlestown.

That’s about to change, thanks to the work of Qazilbash and a team of Boston educators who recently won a grant from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to support the creation of world-class lesson plans for use in Massachusetts public schools. While the team’s goal is ambitious it’s also straightforward, says social studies teacher Ted Chambers, a member of the Professional Issues Committee at the Boston Teachers Union that conceived of the idea.

“We want to help deliver the highest quality instruction into every classroom, in every school, everyday,” says Chambers. “It makes no sense at all to have 2,000 math teachers, or science teachers or social studies teachers in Massachusetts working alone to try to create the best lessons they can.”

The AFT agreed with Chambers and his fellow collaborators: Qazilbash, Tracy Young, a math teacher at the Edwards Middle School, New Teacher Developer Kathy Aldred and Lesley Ryan-Miller, Director of Teacher Advancement and Development for the Boston Public Schools. The Boston group submitted one of eight union-led proposals to receive funding through the AFT’s Innovation Fund. Other projects chosen this year included an Alaska initiative to boost graduation rates by providing graduation “coaches,” an

early literacy campaign in New York City, and an effort in Tampa, FL to use social networking to help connect and support educators. This year’s grants from the Innovation Fund totaled more than \$2.1 million dollars.

### Lesson learned

When members of the BTUs Professional Issues Committee met to discuss their priorities, quality lesson planning quickly rose to the top of the list. They even coined a name for their project: the 21st Century Lessons Initiative. The name immediately struck a chord with the teachers and teacher advocates who gathered for those early planning sessions, says Chambers.

“Here we are in 2010 and yet the common approach to lesson planning doesn’t reflect all of the technological advances that have been made.”

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## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

**Thomas J. Gosnell**  
President, AFT Massachusetts

# The Past, the Present and the Future

This fall is the fiftieth anniversary of the election of John F. Kennedy as the President of the USA and the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the election of Abraham Lincoln. Both 1860 and 1960 were decades of transformative change for the nation.

In 1860 very few Americans had much education. President Lincoln himself had perhaps a couple of years of formal schooling. In 1960 we were just a few years beyond a time when less than half of Americans had a high school diploma.

The extraordinary economic, social, and technological development of the past fifty years have produced a much more educated population and a view that our citizens must make even greater gains in their education. This decade will be one of great change for public education. We don't yet know where that change will bring us, but we do know that the voice of classroom educators, those who are most knowledgeable about the needs of

our students, must be eloquent and robust.

Let's look at two of the issues about which the voice of educators must immediately be eloquent and robust.

### Question 3

Despite this widely held view that education is very important, there are those who believe that government must be smaller and that taxes, which provide far and away the greatest amount of support for the schools must be less.

Question 3 wants to reduce the sales tax from 6-1/4 percent to 3 percent. This will cut 2.5 billion dollars in services. If passed this November, public schools, and do not forget public libraries, will suffer enormously. Smaller government and lower taxes guarantee less education. How can anyone believe the average citizen will benefit when public education gets less resources?

Bob Herbert, writing in the New York Times on Saturday, September 11, 2010 stated that "the self-serving conservative belief that the way to help ordinary people is to shower money on the rich and wait for the blessings to trickle down to the great unwashed below..... was a bogus concept..... in 1980, and it remains bogus today..." Well written.

The command is clear. All of us who belong to the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts need to belong to the campaign to defeat this nefarious proposal. Two years ago we overwhelmed the attempt to repeal the income tax. The political

and economic atmosphere is much tougher this time, but the command is clear. Defeat Question 3.

### Race to the Top

This is a most significant challenge in front of us. Massachusetts finished first in the second round of the Race to the Top Marathon. Consequently, the federal government will grant two hundred fifty million dollars to the state at a time when money is not abundant. The state and local districts cannot use it for operational costs, such as a reduction in class size because the federal government has produced a prescriptive list of items for which the money can be spent.

For example, the development of evaluation systems which include in a teacher's evaluation how students do on standardized test scores is one item. Another is that a so called underperforming school can be closed or half the staff in the school can be fired as was initially done in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

AFT Massachusetts did not support this application by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education because of these flaws and the example of Central Falls and the passage of the Massachusetts Education Bill which seriously compromised collective bargaining rights and unfairly blamed teachers for the failure of some students to achieve at a higher level.

Nonetheless, Race to the Top is here and our interaction with it is unavoidable. We must express our views about what is best for our students and expose the flaws in it. AFT Massachusetts will provide extensive support and much information to all locals who need them.

The 2010-2011 school year will be even more challenging than the last one. I am proud of the professionalism exhibited by all members during the past year. Those who work in the schools continued educating our students at such a high

# BOLD PRINT

### New faces...

The Lynn Teachers Union has a new president. **Brant Duncan** is taking over for **Alice Gunning**, a long-time Lynn teacher who recently retired after heading up the 700 member LTU for nine years. Duncan, an 8th grade math teacher at the Breed Middle School, is not the only new face among AFT MA leaders. Also coming aboard are **Matthew J. McGuinness**, president of the **Holliston Federation of Teachers**; **Vivian Bonet**, **City of Lawrence Administrative Support Staff Association**; **Sara Aserr**, **Pittsfield Federation of School Employees** and **Deborah Collins**, **South Shore Regional Vocational Teachers Association**. Congratulations to all and welcome aboard!



### Well read...

Jennifer Berkshire, editor of the AFT Massachusetts **Advocate**, is the recipient of the 2010 Max Steinbock award granted by the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA). The award, named after a longtime ILCA president, honors the best labor story written in the previous year. Berkshire was honored for a story that appeared in the November 2009 of the *Advocate*: "We Wanted a Voice," chronicling the challenges facing charter school teachers in the Commonwealth. Berkshire also brought home a third place prize for a labor history story entitled "Whatever Happened to Teacher Strikes?"

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level that they are still the highest achieving students in America. Those who work in the libraries continue to serve their communities even though libraries are in acute financial distress.

Your contributions are impressive. Congratulations to everyone. ■

## The Advocate

The official publication of  
AFT Massachusetts, AFL-CIO

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Editor's note: writer John Scopelleti's column last June, "Diary of a New Union Officer" in which the author wrote of the challenges of helping to lead his local at a time when teacher unions are under attack, prompted a flood of reader mail. Here's a sample of what readers had to say.*

Dear editor:

I completely agree with the position taken in the "Diary of New Union Officer" (June 2010), and wish the author the best in making teachers' unions less vilified and more worthy of respect. In many ways, the vitriol directed at teachers' unions is jealousy: what other job offers such cushy time off and still provides such excellent health care coverage and a pension? At the same time, however, some of the petty squabbling between union leadership and administrations has earned the bad reputation. Sometimes, the principal and union reps seem to make each others' lives difficult in ways that can only charitably be called immature. With

each new year comes a new beginning—for teachers and administrators as well as students—and with a new principal in place, I am hopeful that our school can start a new, positive and productive chapter in teacher-administrator relations, for the good of our students and our community. More than just idle hope, we all must work together to make it so.

Richard Freed  
Boston Latin Academy

Dear editor:

I read the Diary of New Union Officer (June 2010) and found it typical. I served as president of the Millis Teachers Association for about 11 years in the days when collective bargaining became the law of the land. In those days, we had one sheet of paper and were subservient to the school board when we were invited to come before them. They told us what we would receive, we thanked them, and humbly backed out of their board room.

That was then!

I encourage you to look forward, keep on trying to make things better, a little at a time. Keep on chipping away towards improved educational standards and watch your backs for the few who may try to undermine the hard-working teacher's confidence. Good leadership is tested all of the time by the jealous few who will never be leaders, but like traitors who plant little trip wires along the path in order to make themselves look good to the communities anti-teacher faction groups which still exist in many places.

I wish you well, and from a retired pro-teacher activist and retired proud member of the education community, know with your zeal and enthusiasm, you will make a fine officer for your group.

Frank Gubala  
*The writer retired in 1995 after 34 wonderful years of being a music educator.*



# Boston Teachers Win Innovation Grant

Continued from cover

**Beginning teachers are often overwhelmed by the demands of creating lesson plans. A group of Boston teachers and union members want to make high-quality lesson plans available to all teachers via the Internet. The goal: world-class lessons that engage today's students.**

Continues Chambers: "Collaboration is easier than it has ever been and yet educators are basically going home at night to work by themselves."

And while there are already any number of websites that offer lesson planning and other forms of assistance for educators, the Boston teachers were far from convinced that any of these offered the quality of instruction they sought. Before long they were deep in conversation about the nuts and bolts of effective lesson planning. "We started thinking about how to structure lessons around the way that students actually learn," says Qazilbash.

## Time management

If student engagement and reinforcement was one obvious goal, saving teachers time—particularly new teachers—was another. For his part, Qazilbash was inspired by a math teacher whom he'd assisted in his days

as a New Teacher Developer.

"He'd taught this incredible lesson in his algebra class. The only problem was that he'd spent four hours working on it and had nothing at all planned for his geometry class," recalls Qazilbash. "I really believe that with technology we can make high-quality lessons more manageable to deliver in a reasonable amount of time."

## Next steps

The planning grant that the group received from the AFT's Innovation Fund will enable the teachers to delve more deeply into the question of how best to distribute classroom lessons utilizing new technology. In addition to conducting research, group members will spend the next year developing a prototype in order to show just what a high-quality lesson plan might look like. The process will start with what Chambers insists is the most obvious ingredient: highly-effective teachers. "Ultimately we'd like to be able to offer video of these teachers delivering the lessons," says Chambers, who, with Kathy Aldred serves as co-chair of the Professional Issues Committee.

## Union led

The AFT's Innovation Fund was launched in 2009 and is based on the premise that classroom teachers are uniquely qualified to improve public schools. The fund was meant as an alternative to most reform efforts which almost always come from



**READY, SET, INNOVATE** Members of 'Team Innovation,' from left: Lesley Ryan-Miller, Director of Teacher Advancement and Development for the Boston Public Schools, Tracy Young, math teacher at the Edwards Middle School, Kathy Aldred, New Teacher Developer, Kevin Qazilbash, math teacher at the Edwards, and Ted Chambers, a social studies teacher at the Edwards.

outside the classroom with little if any input from those with the most knowledge of schools and students: educators themselves. By supporting union-led reform efforts, the AFT seeks to give members the opportunity to create new ways to solve the challenges facing the country's public schools. The fund is financed by the AFT along with grants from five philanthropic foundations.

The members of the Boston Teachers Union Professional Issues Committee hope that their plan to create world-class lessons won't just make teachers' lives easier but will change the way they think about their own union.

Says Chambers: "Think about the impact it's going to have on young members when they know that they can turn to their union for support in day-to-day lesson planning? This is a way—a potentially really powerful way—for us to demonstrate that teacher unions can take the lead in supporting teachers as we work towards mastery in our classrooms."

To learn more about the AFT's Innovation Fund including information about how to apply for funding for your great idea, visit [www.aft.org/about/innovate/](http://www.aft.org/about/innovate/) ■

## 2010 Endorsements by AFT Massachusetts

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James P. McGovern  
Richard Neal  
John Olver  
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### Massachusetts Senate

Katherine Clark: Middlesex & Essex, D-Melrose  
Sal DiDomenico: Middlesex, Suffolk & Essex, D-Everett  
Kenneth Donnelly: 4th Middlesex, D-Arlington  
Eileen Donoghue: 1st Middlesex, D-Lowell  
James Eldridge: Middlesex & Worcester, D-Acton  
Patricia Jehlen: 2nd Middlesex, D-Somerville  
Thomas McGee: 3rd Essex & Middlesex, D-Lynn  
Michael Rush: Suffolk & Norfolk, D-West Roxbury  
James Timilty: Bristol & Norfolk, D-Walpole  
Steven Tolman: 2nd Suffolk & Middlesex, D-Brighton  
Daniel Wolf: Cape & Islands, D-Centerville

### Massachusetts House of Representatives

Michael Brady: 9th Plymouth, D-Brockton  
Christine E. Canavan: 10th Plymouth, D-Brockton  
Tackey Chan: 2nd Norfolk, D-Quincy  
Geraldine M. Creedon: 11th Plymouth, D-Brockton  
Steve D'Amico: 4th Bristol, D-Seekonk  
Paul J. Donato: 35th Middlesex, D-Medford  
James Dwyer: 30th Middlesex, D-Woburn  
Lori Ehrlich: 8th Essex, D-Marblehead  
James Fagan: 3rd Bristol, D-Taunton  
Mark V. Falzone: 9th Essex, D-Saugus  
Robert Fennell: 10th Essex, D-Lynn  
John Keenan: 7th Essex, D-Salem  
Paul Mark: 2nd Berkshire, D-Hancock  
Denise Provost: 27th Middlesex, D-Somerville  
Angelo Puppolo, Jr.: 12th Hampden, D-Springfield  
John Rogers: 12th Norfolk, D-Norwood  
Rosemary Sandlin: 3rd Hampden, D-Feeding Hills  
Carl Sciortino: 34th Middlesex, D-Medford  
Frank I. Smizik: 15th Norfolk, D-Brookline  
Joyce A. Spiliotis: 12th Essex, D-Peabody  
Thomas M. Stanley: 9th Middlesex, D-Waltham  
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# Diary

## of a New Teacher

By Amanda Perez  
Special education teacher, the Sarah Greenwood School, Boston

**“It dawned on me that for years these kids have known they were ‘different,’ and yet they had no idea of what exactly it was that was ‘different’ about them. The discussion became intense and as a first-year teacher it made me feel uncomfortable.”**

Last year was my first year as a special education teacher in what’s known as a substantially separate classroom. I was faced with the challenge of teaching all subjects to three different grades of middle school students and it quickly became apparent that my ten students had their own opinions about what it meant to be separated from the rest of the school.

On my very first day, one student raised his hand and said: “Um... Ms. Perez, I just want you to know I am not supposed to be here.” He went on to explain that he was supposed to be with the “rest” of the middle school kids, in “their” classes.

In my second week of teaching another student raised his hand. He asked: “Ms. Perez why do other people

call us speds?” There it was. I knew it had to happen at some point, but I wasn’t prepared to deal with the topic so soon.

I started to explain that in the teacher world SPED simply means ‘special education.’ Another hand quickly shot up. “Ms. Perez, what’s an IEP?” Oh boy—I was having a classic first-year teacher moment. I knew I had to choose my words wisely as what I said would influence how my students view themselves. “Well, IEP stands for Individualized Education Plan. It’s a document that has a plan made especially for you and it talks about what your teachers will do to make sure you get the best education, one that fits you.” I had rehearsed these lines in my head before the beginning of the school year just in case this topic came up. More hands went up, more questions followed.

I took a deep breath—I knew I had to choose my words wisely as what I said would influence how my students viewed themselves. It dawned on me that for years these kids have known they were “different,” and yet they had no idea of what exactly it was that was “different” about them. The discussion became intense and as a first-year teacher it was uncomfortable.

As I drove home that day I played the conversation over in my head, hoping that I had provided decent answers and that I hadn’t hurt anyone’s feelings. I began thinking about the whole idea of substantially separate classrooms. While I was convinced that the setting benefited my students I also knew that I had to think of creative and unobtrusive ways to normalize my classroom.

My room, although large and beautifully equipped, was located on a different floor from the rest of the



**WORDS MATTER** During her first year as a special education teacher in a ‘substantially separate’ classroom, Amanda Perez often found herself on the receiving end of uncomfortable questions from her students such as: ‘What does ‘SPED’ mean?’ and ‘What’s an IEP?’ Perez’ students also wanted to know why their classroom was separated from the rest of the middle school.

middle school. In the coming days I set out to make my classroom as visible and as much a part of the school as any other. I looked for ways to collaborate with other teachers. If the school had a special event coming up, we walked with the rest of the students. If we finished a special project, we invited other classrooms in to share the experience with us. I started an after school homework club and decided to open it up to other students as well. I did anything and everything I could think of to help my students feel less isolated than they had in the past.

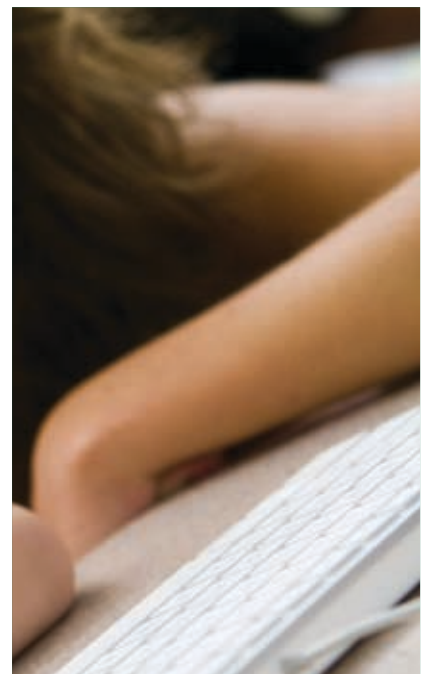
Nothing I did was genius or anything more than good practice and over the years I am sure I will come up with other ways to normalize my classroom setting. But what I did do

seemed to validate my students and make our classroom seem more like any other middle school classroom and still uniquely ours. At various times throughout the year other middle school students would ask what I taught, why my group was so small and why my classroom was on the second floor instead of the third, but by the end of the year I no longer had to answer those questions. My students would take on these once awkward questions and say, “we just learn better in a smaller group,” or “our classroom is just like yours except it’s a lot cooler in the summer.” ■

Share your comments with Amanda at [amariaperez@gmail.com](mailto:amariaperez@gmail.com)

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## Tony Cerra, Artist

*Carpentry and Cabinetry instructor, Nashoba Valley Technical High School*

For the past twenty five years, Tony Cerra has been an unmistakable presence in the carpentry shop at Nashoba Valley Technical High School. The carpentry and cabinetry instructor spends his days teaching vocational students the art of woodworking. But when his time is his own, Cerra turns his attention to a different kind of art. Meet Tony Cerra, painter, whose renditions of the north shore landscape fetch upwards of \$5000 and grace the walls of galleries in Newburyport and beyond.

Cerra, who grew up in Charlestown, enjoyed drawing even as a child, although he admits that his perspective may have been slightly limited. "Since I grew up in a row house, the pictures of houses I drew all looked like little boxes." In the 1970's his interest in the arts moved to a different level. Using charcoal and pencil he tried to capture the ever changing landscape of Saugus' Breakheart Reservation.

Cerra eventually left Saugus behind and turned his attention instead to the vivid backdrops of Cape Ann. He also exchanged his pencils and charcoals for oil paints which he applies to his canvas using a palate knife. "It's a different way of painting," says Cerra, who shows his work at the Bridge Gallery in Newburyport and recently did a show in that same city. "To me it just feels like the paint goes on cleaner than it does with a brush, but I get a nice textured effect too." That unique texture is part of what makes Cerra's work stand out. His paintings of Plum Island—one of his favorite subjects—convey lifelike lushness and



**STILL LIFE** Painter Tony Cerra showing off the brush work that makes his oil paintings so unique. Cerra, who teaches carpentry and cabinet making at Nashoba Valley Technical High School, is entirely self taught as a painter.

a fascination with the dance of air and water. "I like to try to capture the contrast of light and dark," says the painter.

Cerra is quick to point out that he's mostly self taught as an artist. The oil paints with which he's so comfortable now he learned about from books taken out of the public library. "I really didn't know anything about oils," Cerra says. In 1998 he began working with painter Evelyn Wheeler who became his mentor.

When he retires from his teaching job at Nashoba Valley Tech—Cerra hasn't picked a date yet—he hopes to be able to devote more of his time to painting and working at the Bridge

Gallery, a cooperative of 16 artists of which Cerra is a member.

While Cerra never lacks for inspiration for his paintings, finding time is often a challenge. In addition to teaching, he is an active member of the Nashoba Valley Teacher's Federation including serving on the bargaining team. And in what's left of his spare time Cerra even plays the drums in a jazz band. But it's painting that he lives for, says Cerra. "I just love it." ■

To see more of Cerra's work visit [www.tonycerra-artist.com](http://www.tonycerra-artist.com). To contact the artist directly write to [agldrummer@yahoo.com](mailto:agldrummer@yahoo.com)



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# On Campus

Dan Georgianna, Political Director  
UMass Faculty Federation, Local 1895



## Disturbing Signals on Higher Education Funding, Access

No matter how exhausted I was and relieved when the year ended three months ago, the start of the school year brings renewal and hope. The heat and humidity of August has come to an end, punctuated this year with Hurricane Earl, and the start of the school year signals better times, especially in the beauty of autumn in New England.

The colder light of reason, however, sends disturbing signals this year, as it has for the last few years, for long-term quality and accessibility of public higher education in Massachusetts. And in the nation.

the U.S. ranked first.

Drop-out rates are rising due to rising college costs and falling income. Rising student loans make the financial situation worse. Student loans now exceed credit card debt in the U.S., which threaten the U.S. financial structure in the same way as housing loans did at the start of the current recession. Students who drop out have few resources and less incentive to repay student loans.

These data have had little effect on public funding for higher education. President Obama made health care and education keystones of his domes-

**“The slow-moving decline in access to quality higher education doesn’t lend itself to media coverage and political attention. No crumbling seawalls and crashing waves show that higher education is increasing rather than reducing inequality. There is only reason and history.”**

entitlement program,” code words for people who don’t deserve federal funding. Political response to immigration shows the same class distinctions.

The slow-moving decline in access to quality higher education doesn’t lend itself to media coverage and political attention. No crumbling seawalls and crashing waves show that higher education is increasing rather than reducing inequality. There is only reason and history.

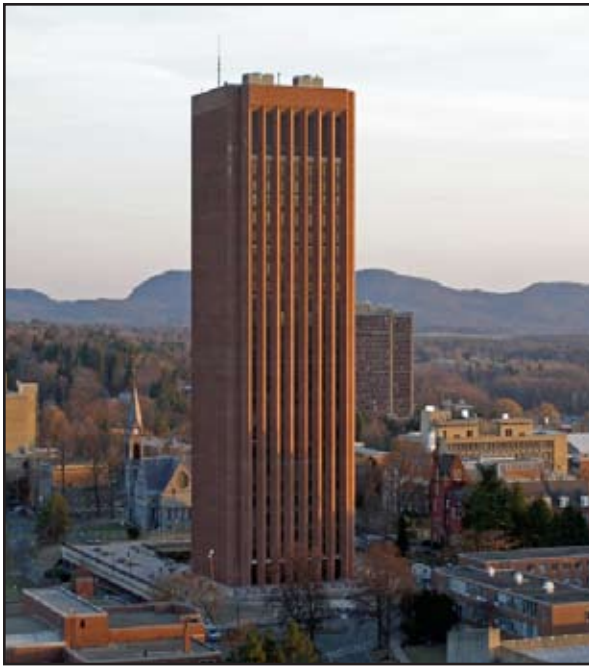
Horace Mann and the other founders of public education promoted access to quality education as the basis for a long-lasting Republic. Two hundred years of history since then have shown that wider access to college leads to economic prosperity and political stability while reserving high quality education for the wealthy leads to economic and political downfall. ■

*Dan Georgianna teaches in the Department of Economics at UMass Dartmouth. Send your comments to [dgeorgianna@umassd.edu](mailto:dgeorgianna@umassd.edu)*

Political support for funding programs for the lower class has slipped almost continuously since the 1970s. We now have code words for such funding. *Inside Higher Ed*, for example, reported that Rep. John Kline of Minnesota, the ranking Republican on the House Committee on Education and Labor, called President Obama’s proposal for increased funding for community colleges “another massive

### OMINOUS LANDSCAPE

Infrastructure spending at the state’s flagship campus in Amherst lagged even during more prosperous times. What lies ahead for public education in Massachusetts now that deficits are high and the appetite for public spending is on the wane? Columnist Georgianna sees few signs that problems of funding and access in the state will ease when the recession finally ends.



A few statistics from the Public Higher Education Network in Massachusetts (PHENOM) website ([www.phenomonline.org](http://www.phenomonline.org)) illuminate the financial problems for higher education in the Commonwealth. In short, Massachusetts ranks among the lowest in state appropriation for higher education. The share of state budget used for higher education ranks next to last among states, and the state appropriation for higher education suffered the largest decline of all states over the past 5 years.

Tuition and fees at Massachusetts’ state universities and colleges rank among the highest in the country with financial aid per student half the national average. Sharply increasing tuition at other public and private schools and falling family income has trumped these financial declines, however. Enrollment at UMass and the state colleges increased by 11% and at MA community colleges by 31% over the last ten years; only four states had higher enrollment increases in 2009.

National trends also show troubling prospects for higher education quality and accessibility. The U.S. is falling behind other countries in college graduation rates. A recent College Board study shows that the U.S. ranks 12th among developed countries in the percentage of 25- to 34-year olds who have associate’s degrees or higher. Ten years ago,

tic policy. A bruising political battle funded health care, but he has neither the funds nor the political will to fund higher education. I think that the general response to underfunding higher education among the most favorable lawmakers in Congress and state legislatures is that the problem will disappear when the recession ends.

It’s true that the recession knits together reduced state spending, rising tuition and fees, higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and rising enrollments in public colleges and universities. For example, the recession caused some students to borrow more (and work more hours) and caused other students to drop out.

But I think that opposition to public funding and access to higher education won’t end with the recession.

Through both the recession and the economic boom that preceded it, income inequality in the U.S. has increased with most of the increase in income going to the top 5% and even the top 1%. The U.S. now has the highest income inequality of any economically advanced country. Inequality in the U.S. is not simply a matter of income. While masked by the ideology of a classless society, the U.S. clearly exhibits an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class, with increasing numbers of middle class households slipping into the lower class.

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## Retiree Corner

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

# Time to Repeal GPO/WEP is Now

The federal issue that holds the most interest to public employees in Massachusetts is the repeal of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). I've dealt with this issue in great detail in previous articles, but it is the topic of this article because this is the 75th anniversary of Social Security, and in December the Congress will be looking at Social Security.

In the past you have been asked to help with the repeal by getting co-sponsors or writing testimony. Many members wrote very compelling testimony, but the input of ALL is still needed.

According to the Social Security Fairness Group, an organization committed to the repeal of the WEP/GPO, "AARP in 2006 was the #2 overall spender for federal lobbying (a major force, only behind the US Chamber of Commerce). AARP spent more than \$23 million on federal lobbying efforts in that year." How much of it was directed toward the repeal of the WEP/GPO? Zero! Many of you belong to AARP. We must influence this organization.

The Fairness Group goes on to say that this organization, which is

supposed to represent senior America, "to date has NOT taken a position to support the repeal of the WEP/GPO provisions. AARP staff has NOT acknowledged in their publications on Social Security issues or on their website the serious financial harm these unfair and unwarranted provisions have on large numbers of retirees and their families. The result is a unique situation where AARP states the importance of Social Security income to the financial well-being of the nation's retirees and yet has taken NO action to protect the earned Social Security benefits that are being taken from large numbers of their current and future members." They certainly are not protecting the members who retired from federal or public sector jobs, yet they solicit their membership.

There are some 300,000 retired teachers who are experiencing these penalties and many more will join this number in the near future. ALL WHO ARE MEMBERS OF AARP SHOULD MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD ON THESE ISSUES even if you are not affected by the penalties. On principle, they are supposed to represent the best interests of ALL retired people.

Massachusetts Retirees United

continues with its commitment to get passage of this repeal. We urge all to contact Senator Scott Brown either by phone or email: 1-617-723-7325; <http://scottbrown.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/emailscttobrown>

At the site click "Comment on an Issue." Ask Senator Brown to sign on to S484. When I emailed him, the response was that he would consider this when it came to the floor of the Senate. That is not good enough—we want him signed on to the repeal. This affects his constituents in MA and that is who he is supposed to be representing in Washington DC.

MRU continues with its educational seminars. There will be one offered on "Understanding Social Security and Medicare" (see seminar column). This seminar is a must for any who entered the public service profession late and are thinking of leaving because of the reduction they would receive in Social Security, or for any who could earn their forty Social Security units after age sixty-five. Social Security and Medicare are not two areas in which you use the term "I thought." Be informed so that "You know." ■

## SENIOR SEMINARS

**To Move or Not to Move**  
Tuesday, October 2, 10-noon

Comprehensive look at the pros and cons of the different types of housing, legal ramifications for some of these choices, red flags to watch for and much more. Presenters: Marie Ardito and others.

**Understanding Social Security and Medicare**  
Saturday, October 16, 10-noon

**How to Protect Your Nest Egg and Plan for the Right Outcome for Your Family**  
Saturday, October 23, 10-noon

Two hour seminar deals with important information on trusts, Medicare Qualifying Trusts, probate, joint tenancy, benefits for veterans and their spouses, and much more. Presenter: Elder Law Attorney Mary Howie

*The above seminars will be held at Presidential Park 314 Main St., Wilmington, MA Unit 105. Rt. 38 and Main St. are one in the same. Presidential Park entrance is located across from Wilmington House of Pizza sign.*

**Preparing for Retirement**  
Thursday Oct. 21, 2010 4-6 p.m  
Butler Middle School 1140 Gorham St., Lowell, MA

*For more information about any of the above seminars or events contact Marie Ardito at [mardito@retireesunited.org](mailto:mardito@retireesunited.org) or call 1-617-482-1568 and leave a message and a phone number.*

# A Lasting Legacy of Inspiration

Unlike the larger-than-life hero Hercules who had to prove his courage, intelligence and strength by accomplishing the twelve labors, among them obtaining the golden apples, teachers seem only to go about their drab daily routines of teaching, assessing student work, and making lesson plans. Few outsiders would characterize teachers as heroes. Sometimes as the opposite. Still, whether we are educators, carpenters or computer technicians, we can all recall someone who has influenced our lives in some positive way. Often, that person is a teacher.

I grew up witnessing and later helping to teach art classes that my mother taught at home. In high school I volunteered to teach art in the Cambridge neighborhoods, and later in various towns. I was living out what my mother had taught me: the beauty of visual art, the therapeutic and redemptive nature of the imagination, the encouragement to go beyond the outlines, and the need to be generous. My mother continues to live in me.

High school brought me face to face with Rafe Jenanyan. Flamboyant, dashing, dressed, his dark wavy hair bounced as he gestured dramatically while talking about Camus or Becket. His classes were small. He demanded that everyone speak and had no patience for shyness. My parents



### LIFE LESSONS

**Ellen Francese, who teaches English at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, credits many teachers for inspiring the energy, creativity and love that she brings to her own style of teaching. "Each of my teachers has left a legacy like footprints in the sand," writes Francese. "These rest in me, and I am forever grateful."**

approached him about this but flatly refused to empathize. He said simply: "It is her problem." I did begin to emerge, cautiously, as does a rabbit from his hole. Only then was I able to share my views in class and begin to write poetry in French. He called me the resident poet, celebrating who I was, and his faith and strong demands released me from my self-imposed prison of shyness.

In college I had many wonderful teachers, particularly strong and creative women like my dance teacher, Sabina Nordoff and the poet Noemi Escandell who taught me Spanish and showed me that teachers can care about their students beyond the walls of the classroom.

In graduate school, I had teachers

who guided me in my writing and in life as well. Wylie Sypher was the professor who impacted me the most. Already in his seventies, he walked the halls, his body upright and strong, his shirt sleeves rolled and his head high. He taught me that learning is a process and that everything in our world is connected, that one thing can be the key to something seemingly completely different. He brought us the writings of scientists, psychologists, visual artists, poets, philosophers, and historians. I began to break down the boxes we are taught to build, and later recalled this as I began to construct my own classes.

I have now taught professionally for over twenty-six years. All of my energy, creativity and love go into my lesson plans, my classroom teaching, and

my student meetings. My classes are interdisciplinary and student driven. I have days when I dance about the room and others when I remain quietly in the background. I ask my students to take risks in the safety of our classroom. I revel in their growth and support them in their struggles. Each of my teachers has left a legacy like footprints in the sand. While time seemingly washes these away, the imprint in the mind and the heart stays indelibly secure. These rest in me, and I am forever grateful. ■

*Ellen Francese teaches English at the Berklee College of Music.*

## The Golden Apples

**Who inspired you to enter the field of education? Throughout the school year, the Advocate will be paying tribute to the 'Golden Apples,' the men and women who have motivated generations of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, union activists, college faculty and others to aspire to be top-notch educators. If you'd like to pay tribute to your own Golden Apple, write to [advocate@aftma.net](mailto:advocate@aftma.net).**

# Officials: Slashing Sales Tax Too Drastic

Continued from cover

In Lynn the toll of the downturn can be measured in shuttered schools; the city has closed two buildings along with two alternative programs that target at-risk kids, while some 175 teachers and paraprofessionals have been let go.

Brant Duncan, the president of the Lynn Teachers Union, spends much of his time these days reviewing the operating budget of the Lynn Public Schools—and wondering how the city can endure yet another round of deep cuts. “I visited a kindergarten last week where there were 30 kids in the class—30 kindergartners. When you have to keep closing schools and laying off teachers, you’re going to feel the effect in class sizes,” says Duncan. “The temporary money we’ve gotten from the federal government has helped us avert disaster, but it’s temporary. We’re looking at what’s going to happen when that money runs out.”

## Beginning teachers hit hardest

For veteran teachers, the prospect that a tax slashing ballot measure would lead to layoffs and school closings brings up vivid—and unpleasant—memories of Proposition 2 ½, which limited the ability of communities to raise property taxes. Prop 2 ½, as it’s known, was passed by voters in 1980 and resulted in the layoffs of thousands of teachers around the state when it went into effect two years later. Deep cuts in public schools were particularly punishing to new teachers, those who’d only just begun their careers.

Fast forward three decades and the outlook for beginning educators could scarcely seem less promising. Not only do the newest educators face a grim financial forecast with layoffs forever threatening, they are coming of age amid an education policy that emphasizes ‘churn’ and firings as measures of progress.

## No security

Connie Clauson made the major decision to transition from her career as a pediatric ICU nurse into education three years ago because she relished the prospect of teaching children. The job change wasn’t easy. She took a substantial pay cut—she supplemented her earnings with a second job—even as her new job proved far more challenging than what she’d expected. When she wasn’t rehired at the end of last year, Clauson took a hard look at the teaching profession and decided to return to nursing. The reason: job security. “I have to look ahead and think about my family and in the current climate teaching jobs are really uncertain. Teaching is far less secure as a profession than I realized,” says Clauson.

## Uncertain prospects

Scott Jaracz lost his teaching job in Lowell to the budget axe in 2009 just as he was about to secure professional status. After spending a long, fearful summer sending out resumes, Jaracz finally landed a position as a seventh grade geography teacher in Lynn—just two days before the job was to begin. While Jaracz still considers himself fortunate to have found any teaching job, the fact that he came into Lynn without professional status meant that he was essentially starting from scratch. “It’s frustrating because I’d already taught for three years but had to start over because of budgetary reasons.” While he’s back at the Breed Middle School again this year, Jaracz says he feels anything but secure about the future. “Teaching isn’t stable at all right now because of the economy.”

## Will teach for food

While pink slips and shuttered schools are the most visible symbols of local economies in turmoil, there’s another indicator that’s harder to see: the number of aspiring teachers who long to join the ranks of the state’s public educators but can’t find jobs.



**HELP WANTED** John Fitzgerald did his student teaching in 2009 and estimates that he has applied for more more than 30 positions in recent months and has landed a single interview. “The problem is that the longer you go without teaching, the harder it is to find a teaching position.”

Mass layoffs in the teaching profession may have been avoided so far but local school districts are increasingly reluctant to hire new teachers.

Count John Fitzgerald among the legions of job seekers. Since completing his student teaching at Arlington High School in 2009, Fitzgerald has applied for more than 30 jobs and been called for a single interview. The high point of his professional career so far was the seven weeks he spent working at a Lowell charter school last spring. As his goal remains elusive—he wants to be a history teacher in an urban school—Fitzgerald can’t help but wonder whether he has future in the teaching profession. “I was told that this was the perfect time to go into teaching because all of the baby boomers were going to be retiring. There were supposed to be something like a million job openings.” These days, as he combs the Internet for job listings, Fitzgerald fears that the career he hasn’t even begun is already slipping away. “The problem is that the longer you go without teaching, the harder it is to find a teaching job.”

## Budget buster

On November 2nd Massachusetts voters will go to the polls and decide whether the state’s sales tax is to be slashed to three percent. All four candidates running for governor, along with three aspiring state treasurers, are in agreement that the Commonwealth cannot sustain a cut of \$2.5 billion at a time when cities and towns are already struggling to provide basic services.

Public opinion, however, appears to be on the opposite side of the issue. At press time, polls indicated that some 54 percent of voters in

## What can you do to protect your future?

Get the facts. Go to <http://votenoquestion3.com/> to find out how slashing the sales tax could affect your community.

Vote no on Question 3, the proposal to slash the state sales tax.

Talk to your colleagues, friends and neighbors. Tell them that slashing the sales tax will mean drastic cuts in services.

‘Friend’ Vote no on Question 3 on Facebook and urge others to do the same

Don’t believe the hype. The recession has forced cuts throughout the Commonwealth. Slashing the sales tax could do lasting harm to our schools and vital public services.



## SHUTTERED SCHOOLS

In Lynn, the toll of the economic downturn can be measured in shuttered schools, a shrinking teaching force and larger class sizes. In the past three years the city has closed two schools, cut programs for at risk kids and laid off 175 educators.

# Vote No 3

# Question 3.com