

MTA Today

*A publication of the Massachusetts Teachers Association
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EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS ASK COURT TO BAR STAND PETITION FROM BALLOT



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MTA's Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner is



New Date

June 22

New Location

Crowne Plaza Hotel
Natick

Nominations are being sought for the MTA's 2012 Human and Civil Rights Awards, which will be presented on a new timetable this year.

Instead of taking place at the start of the MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates in May, the Human and Civil Rights Awards Banquet will be held on June 22 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Natick.

The HCR Awards honor MTA members and others who work in the areas of human and/or civil rights and whose activities have had a community and/or organizational impact. Nominees may be individuals, students, teachers, administrators or agencies.

Nominations and supporting data must be received no later than March 16. Criteria, guidelines and forms have been mailed to local association presidents. Forms are also available at www.massteacher.org/hcr and from the MTA Center for Education Policy and Practice, which can be reached by calling 800.392.6175 or 617.878.8000, ext. 8232.

Further details, including registration information, will be posted on the MTA website and published in the April-May edition of *MTA Today*.

MTA Today

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This issue also includes the winter edition of the *MTA Advantage*

MTA's Mission Statement

The Massachusetts Teachers Association is a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles, that accepts and supports the interdependence of professionalism and unionism. The MTA promotes the use of its members' collective power to advance their professional and economic interests. The MTA is committed to human and civil rights and advocates for quality public education in an environment in which lifelong learning and innovation flourish.

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On the cover

MTA attorney Sandra Quinn, center, stands with former Teacher of the Year Michael Flynn and Boston parent Geju Brown, both of whom are plaintiffs in a Supreme Judicial Court suit filed to overturn the attorney general's certification of a complicated ballot initiative that would undermine the state's new teacher evaluation system. Coverage of the case, which is currently pending, begins on page 6. On page 3, readers will find a feature story about a vocational-technical program in Westfield that is preparing students for complex manufacturing jobs — and for success in today's economy. Interested in an easy link to the MTA website on your smartphone? Just scan the blue QR code or visit the link shown on the lower right portion of the front page.



Photos by Christine Peterson



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Quote-Unquote

"And all Americans would do well to read the law's preamble, which says that it is the policy of the United States to encourage collective bargaining and to protect 'the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection.' "

— Excerpt from a January 15 New York Times editorial concerning a ruling by the National Labor Relations Board on employees' rights under federal law to engage in concerted action

Manufacturing program readies students for 21st-century jobs

By Laura Barrett

Help Wanted. That's the message to Westfield-area students who are wondering if there is work for them in their community. Indeed there is, in the manufacturing sector.

"The demand for workers is higher than ever," said Paul Mazut, one of four shop teachers in the manufacturing program at Westfield Vocational Technical High School. "We don't have enough kids for the jobs out there."

Clement Fucci, a 1974 graduate of the program who is now its director, agreed.

"We're supplying a work force to local companies," said Fucci. "That was the original reason for setting up these schools. Our students become immediate taxpayers in the city. The demand is even greater than in recent years."

So much for the conventional wisdom that there are no precision manufacturing jobs left in the U.S. — that they have all gone overseas, mostly to China. Precision manufacturing is still here, and most of it requires a high level of skill.

Gone are the days when Westfield — known as Whip City — was a center of low-tech manufacturing of buggy whips, bricks and cigars. Now, Westfield is a hub of precision manufacturing services for nearby aerospace, defense and biomedical industries in central Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Fortunately for students in and near Westfield, there is a public high school where they can receive the training and job placement support they need to land jobs in these companies.

Westfield is one of 63 vocational-technical education programs in the state. Massachusetts, known for many firsts in education, was the first state to pass a law providing publicly funded industrial education. The Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School in Northampton was the first to open, in 1908. Westfield opened three years later, offering carpentry and manufacturing instruction to 30 boys.

Today, 101 years later, the school occupies three buildings and educates about 450 students a year, 160 of them female, in 11 trades.

In Massachusetts, all students must have access to a VTE program, either through a comprehensive high school, a district school or a regional school.

In most VTE schools, students alternate each week between academic subjects and shop. Standards for admission have gone up now that students must pass the same three MCAS tests that other high school students must pass in order to graduate, as well as achieve competency in their trades. Some VTE schools and programs have waiting lists.

During their shop week, students both work with their hands and receive instruction in related



Photos by Christine Peterson

Teacher Paul Mazut, above, talks about the operation of a vertical milling machine. At right, students Kaitlin Lafreniere and Jeremy Blackwelder work together on getting precise measurements.

academic subjects, such as acquiring computer-assisted design software skills.

A 2008 Pioneer Institute white paper on the state's vocational education system notes: "The commonwealth's system, consisting of full-service schools, where the career and technical learning of the shop is given the same emphasis as the traditional academic work, has been called 'the Cadillac of vocational education.'"

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education noted in a 2006 study that the participating professionals "felt that vocational school graduates are more job-ready than general education or college preparatory high school graduates. In fact, a number of participants felt that vocational high school graduates are often more job-ready than college graduates."

Students in Westfield's manufacturing program seemed very focused and industrious during a visit in January by *MTA Today*. Some were working with sophisticated high-tech machines and others with more traditional milling machines and metal lathes. Most worked independently, while some worked in pairs. There was no idle chatter. Students and visitors alike have to wear protective goggles and pay close attention when around powerful machines cutting through metal.

"We are given a problem and we have to find a solution," explained Jordan Kornacki, who was operating a computer numerical control machine — an expensive piece of equipment that has revolutionized the machining process.

"We're supposed to try to figure out solutions ourselves," he said. "If we're stuck, we can ask a teacher or another student. In manufacturing, you have to work in teams so it is OK to ask, but we are encouraged to do projects independently so we learn how to do it better."



Kornacki, a junior, said he worked on the programming for the CNC machine in class and was now setting up the operation on the control panel. "I mostly like doing the engineering part of the process and the CNC machine," he said, adding that his goal is to become a mechanical engineer.

Like many in the program, Kornacki wants to go to college after he graduates while working in manufacturing part time. The demand for skilled employees is so high that some area employers will pay their college costs.

About half of all VTE graduates statewide pursue postsecondary education in Massachusetts, many of them at community colleges, but some at four-year institutions or beyond. Mazut said that about 10 percent to 15 percent of the Westfield manufacturing program's graduates seek a four-year degree to become engineers.

"I like this better than regular school," Kornacki said. "You get one week of academics and one week of shop. I like going back and forth between them."

Several other students cited similar reasons for enrolling in the program. They like working with their hands and they like knowing they are almost certainly going to be employable when they graduate.

"I love this program," said Kaitlin Lafreniere, also a junior. "It's always interesting and fast-paced. As soon as I heard about this program in sixth grade I knew I wanted to do it." She said she has no qualms about being one of just a few females in manufacturing.

Her shop partner, Jeremy Blackwelder, said the program is a good fit for him, as well. "I've always been good with my hands," he said.

Blackwelder works 15 hours a week after school for Advanced Manufacturing. He makes \$10 an hour,

Please turn to **Program**/Page 14

It's time to fix our skewed tax system

Thank you, Newt. By hounding Mitt Romney to release his tax returns, Newt Gingrich has inadvertently helped organizations like ours make the case that the tax system is skewed in favor of the wealthy.

As many people now recognize, the very rich have benefited the most from the Bush-era tax cuts. Now that our country and our state face budget

deficits, we believe it is fair to ask the wealthy to do more to support the education system and infrastructure on which their businesses and investments depend.

At the federal level, this means the NEA supports President Obama's call for a surtax on incomes over \$1 million — the so-called "Buffett Rule," named after billionaire investor Warren Buffett. A

column by Buffett in *The*

New York Times last August about unfairness in the tax code began like this: "Our leaders have asked for 'shared sacrifice.' But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched. While the poor and middle class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks."

In Massachusetts, the wealthy also do better than the rest of us. That is not because of unusual twists in the state tax code — we have a "flat" income tax

It's not about "soaking the rich" — it's about establishing a fair system that raises enough revenues to fund the services we rely on for public education, health, safety and the overall quality of life in our communities.

here — but because higher-income people spend less of their money on goods and property that are taxed and allocate more to savings and investments that are taxed less, if at all.

Why do we care about taxes? It's not about "soaking the rich" — it's about establishing a fair system that raises enough revenues to fund the services we rely on for public education, health, safety and the overall quality of life in our communities. As Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren said so well at an August event, the wealthy also rely on publicly funded services for their success, which is why they should "pay it forward."

In a videotape of that event that has gone viral, she said, "You built a factory out there? Good for you. But I want to be clear: You moved your goods to market on the roads the rest of us paid for; you hired workers the rest of us paid to educate; you were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for. You didn't have to worry that marauding bands would come and seize everything at your factory, and hire someone to protect against this, because of the work the rest of us did."

Like the federal government, the state government is also facing hard times and needs new revenues.

Governor Deval Patrick has consistently protected education throughout his time in office. He does so again in his fiscal year 2013 proposal. He calls for a small increase in Chapter 70 aid for public schools, a \$10 million increase for community

colleges and a set-aside for higher education contractual raises. We appreciate these proposals in these difficult economic times.

However, funding for education is lower than it was a decade ago, when adjusted for inflation, and austerity budgets have slowed progress on helping more low-income students achieve at high levels.

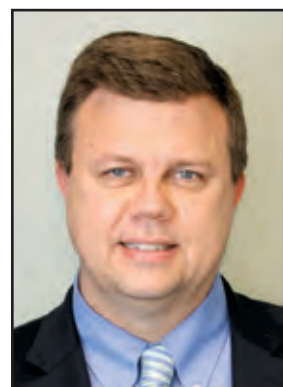
Furthermore, the governor's proposal depends in part on the Legislature approving his \$260 million revenue plan to eliminate the sales tax exemption on candy and soda and increase tobacco taxes. These policies are put forth on the grounds that junk food and cigarettes are not "necessities," especially given the obesity epidemic. Meanwhile, the proposal to extend the deposit law to bottled water and sports drinks is both a revenue-raiser and a way to cut waste.

These measures would help the bottom line, but not enough to restore fiscal stability and protect public schools, public higher education and our communities.

To that end, the MTA is part of a coalition called the Campaign for Our Communities that is supporting *An Act to Invest in Our Communities*. This bill would increase the state income rate, but also increase the personal exemption so that those with the highest incomes would pay the most.

The MTA is asking local associations and higher education chapters to endorse the campaign and become actively involved. More information and endorsement forms are available in the Revenue Toolkit on our website, www.massteacher.org.

We thank Newt for raising the tax issue, even if we disagree on so much else. For example, rather than spend scarce tax dollars on establishing a colony on the moon — as he has pledged to do if he becomes president — we would like that money spent right here at home on educating our students.



Paul Toner
MTA President

New law may give members chance to transfer out of ORP

By Sarah Nathan

Higher education members enrolled in the Optional Retirement Program may soon have a one-time opportunity to transfer and buy back into the state retirement system, under the terms of a new law.

The ORP bill was among several amendments supported by the MTA that were included in a pension overhaul passed by the Legislature in November.

While the legislation will officially become law on Feb. 18, there is still a pending technical issue related to the tax code. The MTA and Massachusetts Community College Council Vice President Diana "Donnie" McGee, who led the grassroots lobbying effort to get the ORP bill passed, are working with staff members at the Department of Higher Education to resolve the issue with the Internal Revenue Service.

Unless the IRS rules favorably, McGee said, no transfers can take place. The ruling itself could take up to two years.

The ORP bill was first filed in 2009 by the MCCC after a significant number of higher education faculty members said that they weren't given adequate or accurate information at the time they enrolled. Many reported that they had serious financial concerns and wondered if they would ever be able to retire.

The Optional Retirement Program is a defined-contribution pension plan. That means the plan provides participants with retirement income that, for the most part, is based on the account balance at the time of retirement. This is substantially different from a defined-benefit pension plan, which gives participants a specific amount of money at retirement based on a set of variables including length of creditable service, job classification and the

employee's average annual compensation.

Since 2009, McGee estimated that between 400 and 500 MTA members have lobbied legislators, written letters of support and testified at the State House in support of the ORP legislation. Many of these members, she added, revealed very personal stories about their financial concerns and struggles.

"It's been an amazing journey," McGee said. "Our grassroots efforts combined with the experience of MTA and MCCC leadership and lobbyists and the perseverance of union activists really prove that when we all work together, we can effect positive political change."

MTA President Paul Toner also offered praise for those involved in the effort.

"I commend the MTA members who stepped out of their comfort zone to tell their stories," Toner said. "That's not easy to do, but it is incredibly effective and, hopefully, personally rewarding as well."

Tight budget proposal prioritizes education

By Laura Barrett

Governor Deval Patrick's proposed fiscal year 2013 budget calls for an increase in Chapter 70 school aid, funding to pay state employee raises and more money for community colleges, despite an overall reduction in state spending of \$200 million.

"We are fortunate to have a leader who recognizes the importance of education, especially during these difficult financial times," said MTA President Paul Toner. "He is genuinely committed to creating new and better opportunities for all of our students."

Increases in education spending in the proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, known as House 2, depend heavily on the state receiving \$260 million in revenue from proposed new taxes on cigarettes, candy and soda; the elimination of 300 government jobs; cuts in other state services; and using \$400 million from the state's rainy day fund.

State budget director Jay Gonzalez warned that spending on state and local services will be tight. Although the economy is slowly improving and revenues are on the uptick, so are fixed costs. "It is still raining," he told reporters after House 2 was released on Jan. 25.

Toner reminded MTA members that the governor's budget plan is just a proposal, not a guarantee.

"We have our work cut out for us to make sure that the House and Senate do at least as much as the governor has proposed," he said. "And we have to continue making the case for substantial new revenues in order to restore and protect our schools, our colleges and our communities."

Budget highlights include the following:

■ **Chapter 70** — Increases state funds for Chapter 70 by \$145 million and keeps funding levels at foundation. No district will receive less than in FY12, and about one-third will receive more.

■ **Other local and school funding** — Level-funds "unrestricted general local aid," most preK-12 education grant programs and most early education accounts.

■ **Higher education contracts** — Sets aside \$25.6 million for the University of Massachusetts and \$17.9 million for the state universities and community colleges to fund negotiated raises.

■ **Higher education campuses** — Level-funds the UMass and state university campus accounts and increases spending on community colleges by \$10.6 million as part of a reorganization plan. The MTA is still analyzing that plan and had taken no position on



it as *MTA Today* went to press. Scholarship funds for students are also level-funded.

■ **Revenue increases** — Eliminates the sales tax exemption for candy and soda, increases the cigarette tax, extends the current 5-cent redemption fee to bottled water and sports drinks and reforms rules governing certain business taxes.

For more information and updates on the budget, please visit massteacher.org.

Funding increase sought to help campuses meet needs

By Sarah Nathan

The MTA is ramping up efforts to boost state funding for community colleges, state universities and UMass, which have been hit hard by budget cuts in recent years.

Over the last decade, state aid to public higher education has been reduced by 42 percent at the same time that student enrollment has reached an all-time high. In fiscal year 2010, Massachusetts ranked 48th out of the 50 states in terms of state and local fiscal support for public higher education as a share of personal income.

At a time when public dollars are scarce, every voice is needed to send the message to legislators who will be shaping the state budget in the upcoming months.

"It's penny-wise and pound-foolish not to invest in our public higher education institutions," said Joe LeBlanc, who serves as chairman of the MTA Higher Education Leadership Council and president of the Massachusetts Community College Council. "We drive the state's economy and contribute to its workforce. There is no question of our value — we are the fuel."

A lobby day promoting public higher education will be held on Thursday, March 8, at the State House. On that day, key stakeholders representing all factions of public higher education — labor, management and students — will join forces to advocate for increased funding. This is the first time — or at least the first time in years — that all of the

A lobby day promoting public higher education will be held on Thursday, March 8, at the State House.

sectors of public higher education will be present and spreading the same message at the same time.

"We are in a desperate situation," said MTA Executive Committee member Max Page, who is a professor at UMass Amherst. "We all need to make the case to stop the cuts and start reinvesting in Massachusetts public higher education."

HELC, which is composed of officers representing all of the public higher ed sectors, has endorsed the lobby day as well as a legislation package. The legislation covers a range of issues, including increasing the number of full-time faculty members, offering pension benefits and access to health insurance to part-time instructors who teach a specified number of courses, and streamlining the legislative process for approving collective bargaining agreements for state employees.

Classified Staff Union President Shauna Manning emphasized the real need for everyone with a stake in public higher education to get involved in the fight for more funding. She urged everyone, including the new president of the UMass system, to take part in the effort.

"Please work with us to help secure additional

funding," said Manning, who represents education support professionals working on the UMass Boston campus. "All of us working together for a common purpose should be our core mission — instead of some of us fighting for the crumbs."

"We all need to get on the same page if we want lasting improvements," she added. "For too long, we've been fighting for short-term solutions, instead of looking at the big picture and figuring out how we are going to improve."

The governor has just submitted his budget proposal, which marks the beginning of a long and involved process. Debate will unfold in both the House of Representatives and the state Senate over the next several months and will likely end by July 1, the first day of the new fiscal year.

For updates on the MTA's higher ed funding campaign, please visit massteacher.org.

Letters policy

MTA Today welcomes letters to the editor from MTA members. Letters should be no longer than 200 words. Each letter submitted for publication must address a topic covered in *MTA Today*, must be signed and must include the writer's telephone number for confirmation purposes. Opinions must be clearly identified as belonging to the letter-writer. We reserve the right to edit for length, clarity and style. To submit a letter, mail it to *MTA Today*, 20 Ashburton Place, 8th floor, Boston, MA 02108 or e-mail it to mtatodayletters@massteacher.org. For additional information, please refer to the guidelines posted on www.massteacher.org.

MTA files suit against Stand petition

PTA president and other stakeholders are among plaintiffs in Supreme Judicial Court case

By Laura Barrett

The MTA has filed a complaint with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court asking that the Stand for Children initiative petition be barred from the November ballot on the grounds that it violates the state constitution.

MTA President Paul Toner said that the initiative is a distraction from “collaborative, ongoing education reform efforts.” He added that, if passed, it would seriously undermine teachers’ bargaining rights over critical personnel decisions and would fail to improve the quality of education provided to students.

“We have been working extremely long and hard with parents, business groups, state officials and other education stakeholders to implement a new evaluation system that is designed to improve the quality of instruction in our schools,” Toner said. “This lengthy and complicated ballot initiative throws a monkey wrench into the process.”

Currently, contracts contain locally negotiated criteria governing the retention of staff and how personnel decisions are made in the event of layoffs, transfers and promotions. Many contracts take qualifications, performance and seniority into



Photo by Christine Peterson

MTA attorney Sandra Quinn, left, talks to plaintiffs Geju Brown and Michael Flynn near the entrance to the Supreme Judicial Court.

consideration, with preference generally given to more experienced teachers, as long as they are qualified.

Under the Stand petition, unions could no longer bargain over criteria used in these kinds of personnel decisions and could not grieve or arbitrate over personnel decisions they believe are in error. In addition, decisions about transfers and layoffs would be based mainly on licensure and “merit and ability.”

Seniority would be a tie-breaker only if those factors were equal.

Thus, for example, a 25-year teacher with Professional Teacher Status and an evaluation rating of “proficient” could be laid off in place of a three-year non-PTS teacher with an evaluation rating of “exemplary.” Moreover, the petition does not define terms such as “merit and ability,” so a district could decide to lay off a more senior PTS teacher even where both the PTS and non-PTS teacher had ratings of “exemplary” based on the principal’s conclusion that the junior teacher, for whatever reason, had more “merit” than the senior teacher.

“The new evaluation system that the MTA has supported makes clear we believe that performance matters,” said Toner. “We do not believe that ‘unsatisfactory’ teachers who fail to improve should be retained. No one benefits by a district’s failure to remove those teachers — not the district, not the community, not the students and not the union.

“But a ballot initiative should not dictate that a teacher in good standing who has been loyal to the district for two or three decades can be laid off in favor of a new teacher based on the subjective judgment of an evaluator.

Continued on next page



NEW VERSION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING SURVEY TO BE ADMINISTERED IN MARCH AND APRIL

As part of the Race to the Top initiative, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be administering a new version of the Massachusetts Teaching, Learning and Leading Survey — Mass TeLLS — from March 12 to April 6. While the survey will be similar to the one administered in 2008, there will be changes in the name — which will now be TELL MASS — and in some of the questions.

Information will be posted as it becomes available on the survey website:

www.tellmass.org

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Teacher Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero, far left, works with student Joeily Bringuier on an essay in a social studies class at the Amherst Regional Middle School. Ortiz-Marrero, who was the 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, says the ballot initiative will disrupt the implementation of Massachusetts' "bold new evaluation system for school personnel." Jae Goodwin, 2010 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, who is shown leading her class at the Charlotte A. Dunning School in Framingham, says the initiative "basically tells teachers to take a back seat in the process."

Photos by Christine Peterson

Plaintiffs believe ballot initiative would harm public education

The plaintiffs in the complaint challenging the certification of the Stand ballot petition have diverse backgrounds and reasons for taking part in the case, but share the belief that the ballot question is not in the best interests of students and public education. The following are some of their comments on the issue.

Richard Hebert, a Scituate resident and a member of the town's School Committee: "I believe in local decision-making. I believe in letting towns and their teachers hammer out the guidelines for reducing staff. This one-size-fits-all approach is dangerous and simplistic. It infringes on the autonomy of towns and ignores the special circumstances each community faces."

Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero, 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, who lives in Amherst and teaches English language learners at the Amherst Regional Middle School: "Teachers, administrators, parents, business leaders and state officials just spent many, many months coming up with a bold new evaluation system for school personnel. We're at the beginning stages of implementing that system now in my district and many others. If this ballot question passes, all that hard work will be thrown out the window. Districts will be forced to implement an untested new system developed by an outside organization — Stand for Children — that most teachers have never even heard of."

Jon Saphier, president of Research for Better Teaching, Inc., and a resident of Carlisle: "Destroying the credibility of the new and needed evaluation system is not what we need. Making the new system work for students is what we need. The Stand for Children ballot question creates a situation where even small distinctions in evaluation ratings can lead to terminations of competent and experienced teachers. This will cause numerous arbitrations and lawsuits where the termination will be overturned because the fine discriminations by evaluators cannot be defended."

Jae Goodwin, 2010 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, who teaches and lives in Framingham: "Teachers know what good teaching looks like. We need to have a voice in setting standards and making sure that the evaluation systems in our districts lead to better teaching. This ballot question basically tells teachers to take a back seat in the process and let the administrators make all the important decisions."

Geju Brown, a Boston Public School parent: "As a parent, I care a lot about my kids having great teachers. The best way to make sure that happens is for everyone to sit down together — teachers, parents and administrators — and come up with good policies and support systems. One group shouldn't try to dictate what goes on in our schools through a complicated ballot question."

Complaint says Stand question violates Massachusetts constitution

Continued from previous page

"Evaluators are not perfect," he continued. "They have their own biases and prejudices. In a layoff situation, teachers are losing their jobs because of budget cuts, not because of poor performance. How the layoffs occur should be decided locally. It is entirely understandable that many communities have decided that seniority should be an important factor because it results in a fair, objective and orderly process."

The petition also makes significant changes in the law governing PTS, including eliminating PTS for part-time teachers.

Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville addressed the ballot question in an e-mail last November.

"I fear that the ballot initiative would set up a distracting and divisive battle, engendering an over-simplified public dialogue that would alienate educators and prevent us from achieving a variety of reform goals," Reville wrote.

The lawsuit, filed on Jan. 23 by the MTA on behalf of seven plaintiffs, asserts that the ballot

question violates state constitutional requirements for initiative petitions in three ways:

- The measure confuses the voters by including unrelated matters in one petition.
- The measure affects the powers of the courts.
- The Attorney General's summary of the petition is incomplete, failing to inform the voters of many significant changes that would be wrought by the petition, including ways in which it impairs the collective bargaining rights of local school committees and teachers.

The plaintiffs are three recent Massachusetts Teachers of the Year, the president of the Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association, a Boston public school parent, an expert on teacher evaluation and a member of the Scituate School Committee.

Mary Ann Stewart, president of the Massachusetts PTA and a member of the Lexington School Committee, said her organization has been "standing for children for 100 years" and does not believe the initiative is helpful.

"This is a huge distraction from what teachers and parents believe is most needed to help students succeed," she said in a written statement. "We need small class sizes, excellent preschools, support services for at-risk students and high-quality professional development for teachers. Instead, this ballot question gives us more top-down mandates and red tape."

Michael Flynn, 2008 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year and a member of the Northampton School Committee, agreed.

"This ballot question is so complicated and bureaucratic, the summary alone is four pages long. There is no way voters can make an informed decision about it in the few minutes they have to spend in the voting booth."

The Stand initiative is currently before the Legislature, which has until May 2 to act on it. If the Legislature does not approve it and if the court has either rejected MTA's complaint or not issued a ruling by May 2, Stand will have to collect another round of signatures to qualify the question for the November ballot.

Anti-bullying event empowers students

By Bob Duffy

More than 4,000 high school and middle school students and their teachers gathered recently at Northeastern University to talk about how to deal with the issue of bullying.

The MTA was one of the sponsors of the first-ever *Stand Up to Bullying* conference, which was held on Dec. 11 and is believed to have been the largest such gathering in the nation.

Dr. Elizabeth Englander, director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University, who co-chaired the event, said that the bullying problem has gotten worse over the past several years. Media such as Facebook make it easier to bully because there is no face-to-face communication, she noted.

"It's important for the victims of bullies to know they are not alone," she added.

Englander talked about two Canadian students who started the "Pink Shirt" campaign to raise awareness about bullying in their high school. The campaign, she noted, went on to spread throughout the country.

Taking even small actions to stop bullying in a community can have monumental outcomes, she noted.

"We want to help you, but you're the ones who are going to make this happen, who are going to stop bullying," Englander told the students and teachers.

The audience also heard from radio personalities, entertainers, elected officials, athletes and students who talked about how being bullied affected them.

One of the speakers was Rick Rendon of the Rendon Group, who conceived, organized and helped fund the event.

"I was a victim of bullying growing up, and we wanted to create an opportunity to educate, motivate and empower young people to actively promote positive social change in their schools and communities around the issue of bullying," Rendon said.

The day-long conference included a best practices exhibition area and a town hall meeting.

Five schools were given awards for making a difference with their work in addressing the issue of bullying. The winners of Stand Up 2011 Awards were Lynn English High School, Lynn; the Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, Cambridge; Bridgewater Middle School, Bridgewater; the Robert Adams Middle School, Holliston; and the VIP Team at Haverhill High School.

Throughout the event, students shared their thoughts and experiences from microphones positioned in the crowd and by answering poll questions on their cellphones, with the results posted live on screens in the arena.

To see an archived broadcast of the *Stand Up* conference, please visit <http://ybatv.com/standup2011/>.



Photo by Bob Duffy

Carol Ireland, a member of the VIP Team at Haverhill High School, right, puts an anti-bullying armband on a fellow educator in the best practices exhibition area at the Stand Up conference in Boston.

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National Center for Race Amity

The MTA is collaborating with the National Center for Race Amity at Wheelock College on a conference and celebration this spring. The National Race Amity Conference will be held May 18-19 at Wheelock College. Presenters include Margot Strom of Facing History and Ourselves, Celeste Headlee of Public Radio International, Jesse Washington of The Associated Press, and Children's Theater Company founder Mehr Mansuri, along with many other leaders in education and efforts to provide access for students. A special PDP program for MTA members is being offered in conjunction with the conference. The second aspect of the collaboration, the Metro Boston Race Amity Celebration, will take place June 10 on the Rose Kennedy Greenway. The celebration is a family-oriented event that will feature celebrity hosts, a health fair, a college admissions fair, rap artists and other musical entertainment, art exhibits, Curious George and Ruff Ruffman. Food from around the world will be available.

For details on both events, please visit www.wheelock.edu/ncra.

Attacks on workers' rights continue to escalate

Opponents of organized labor who are waging war against public education, government spending and working families can't rely on the truth, so they have developed an agenda filled with deception.

They'd like everyone to believe — along with the latest positive headlines about Tea Party followers and union-busting governors and legislators — that the national assault on working families springs from widespread popular opposition to organized labor. They hope educators and others will assume there is a grassroots movement behind measures to pass right-to-work legislation, end collective bargaining for public employees and choke off access to union dues.

And they don't want anyone to see that little has really changed since a few well-funded labor critics launched a 1998 California "paycheck deception" initiative — a money grab that targeted deductions for union dues and political spending. The initiative was overwhelmingly rejected when it became clear that just a few millionaires and billionaires — most of them from out of state — were bankrolling the assault, spurred on by anti-tax organizer Grover Norquist in Washington, D.C.

Since then, labor critics have engaged in regular assaults in courtrooms, in statehouses and at ballot boxes to target union finances and organizing strength. Woven through these obvious assaults are more subtle ones: the "alternative professional" group that pitches itself as a counter to the NEA and the AFT and the so-called think tanks that promote biased research and are increasingly housing their own "news agencies" to push out their materials.

Tactics may have changed some — social media and the Internet deliver messages faster — but the players and the endgame are still the same. A small cast of characters is orchestrating these assaults, drawn from among the richest of the 1 percent. This movement, a mile wide and an inch deep, is taking on everyone else while manipulating policymakers to strengthen its political and financial advantages.

Unions remain the most effective defender to deflect the movement's ultimate goals of smaller government — a goal that promotes privatized schools, fewer regulations and reduced private and public employee benefits and pensions. That means the small-government crowd will make labor a high-profile target in the run-up to this year's congressional, presidential and legislative elections.

Here are some rules of engagement to consider today and as this campaign season unfolds:

■ **A few billionaires can go a long way.** The Koch brothers — David and Charles — needed only to pump their wealth into a few groups such as Americans for Prosperity to finance the framework that created the Tea Party. Joined by a handful of big corporate interests and funders clamoring for less government and oversight, the Kochs and their brethren support the Tea Party structure, think tanks, advocacy groups, legal organizations and political



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action committees to promote a political landscape hostile to unions. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker needed that support to undermine collective bargaining in his state; he could not have sustained momentum for the effort without the puppeteer-like hand of the Kochs. By providing money for organizing, lobbying and campaigns, the Kochs and their handful of donor friends are creating a one-stop shop to take on labor. Look for the same tactics and money this year for anti-collective-bargaining bills and right-to-work legislation in up to a dozen states.

■ **Donors can further hide their identities if they "invest" in anti-labor, anti-education groups.** Wealthy donors are able to hide some of what they spend on the assault by funneling money through two Virginia-based nonprofits, Donors Capital Fund and Donors Trust. "Investments" in the fund are not disclosed, which creates one more layer to bury the identities of donors pouring money into groups challenging government, labor and education. Research suggests that donors include the DeVos family of Michigan, Richard Mellon Scaife, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Searle Freedom Trust and the Humes of California. The two Donors groups paid out \$72 million in grants to right-wing groups in 2009 alone. Smaller groups could not exist without

this money. Many state-based think tanks and policy groups rely on the Donors' funds for as much as one-quarter of their revenues, making it even harder to determine who funds these groups.

■ **Ideologues and corporate interests are drafting the legislation.** It doesn't take a lot of imagination for a legislator to take a bill drafted for one state and introduce it in another. But that's what hundreds of lawmakers are doing with measures targeting labor, education, tax policy and regulations. Each year state legislators, guided by the corporate-backed American Legislative Exchange Council, introduce bills written by company lobbyists with innocuous-sounding names such as the Public Employee Freedom Act and Voluntary Contribution Act — measures that make it harder for unions to organize or use dues for political purposes — or school voucher proposals such as the "Choice Scholarship" Act. Wisconsin's fight over collective bargaining centered around ALEC-inspired anti-union legislation. This year ALEC's state leaders are sharing measures on collective bargaining, right-to-work and paycheck deception, along with a voter-suppression Voter ID Act. And these are just a few of the ALEC-inspired measures that will be reproduced about 1,000 times across legislative sessions this year.

■ **Out-of-state groups help carry the message.** Groups that may have a very small presence in a state are critical messengers for anti-union forces. This is especially true of organizations that promote themselves as teacher-friendly alternatives to the NEA and the AFT. The Association of American Educators, a group backed by some of the deepest pockets in the anti-public-education movement, would benefit from suppressing NEA's influence. Its membership includes teachers outside of public schools, and their interests are not solely focused on public education. The group promotes private and religious schools, supports taxpayer subsidies for private school tuition through vouchers and tax credits, and is celebrating any momentum behind right-to-work laws and legislation ending collective bargaining. The AAE is partnering with the National Right to Work Committee to encourage educators to give up their NEA membership and join an organization that has affiliates covering just six states and provides limited benefits for its national members. All of this is funded by the same contributors who push paycheck deception and reduced spending on public education. Right-wing foundations provide nearly all of the money to the AAE Foundation; two funders regularly provide half of the support.

Even as educators and their allies fight hard for fairness and better communities, it continues to hold true that a select group of people who have deep pockets are spending their money to perpetuate their wealth and narrow world — a world hostile to the prospects of a safe, educated and financially sound future for the rest of us.

It's something to look out for as 2012 legislative sessions unfold and Election Day draws near.

New teachers learn from colleagues' experiences

By Meg Secatore

The 10th annual *Just for New Teachers* conference, held recently in Marlborough, was the last for Nora Todd, who retired from a long and rewarding career in education that very day.

Todd, who started out as an English teacher, served her fellow educators as an MTA Board member and NEA director and then worked for 25 years on the staff of the MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice.

"The *Just for New Teachers* conference was one of the first things that came out of the formation of the MTA New Member Committee," Todd said. "New members were asking for professional development, for help in their classrooms, and this was a great way to reach out."

Each year, the New Member Committee meets these needs with sessions on topics ranging from *Managing the Inspired Classroom* to *Legal Basics for New Teachers*.

More than 180 new teachers from across the state attended the Dec. 2 event for a day of workshops, a luncheon address and a gigantic cake with the icing inscription: "Congratulations, Nora!"

"This was a special moment, to see the ballroom filled with people who were building their careers and are very open to any opportunities that are available to them," Todd said.

In her keynote speech, MTA past president Anne Wass addressed the fears that many new educators face.

As a young middle school teacher in Hanover, Wass said, she faced an all-out insurrection when her students staged a sit-in to protest the cancellation of a camping trip. She ran to get a more experienced teacher.

"He was about five steps into my room and I swear he didn't say 20 words" before the students ended their protest, Wass recalled. She met this mentor recently and told him how much she had admired him. "He said to me: 'I learned a lot from you, too.'"

Wass said that as a young teacher she also approached her vice principal for advice.

"He said, 'If your biggest problem is controlling your class, you're still a good teacher. I can't order you to do this, but if you're willing to do it, go watch some of our other teachers teach.'"



Photo by Bob Duffy

Committee Chair Chris Saulnier addresses the conference audience.

He suggested three teachers who had very different styles but were all in control of their classes. Wass said the lesson she took away was: "You have to be true to your own temperament."

"No matter how well-intentioned we are when we go into this profession, there are times when we feel like a failure," she conceded. "Please find yourself a buddy in your school — an unofficial mentor."

"You're here for professional development," MTA President Paul

Toner told the audience of new educators. "I love the idea that so many of you have come out for that. The MTA is a union of professional educators. There's no separating the two. We are a union and a profession."

Speaking to those important union issues, Vice President Tim Sullivan said: "What happens in your class on a daily basis begins on Beacon Hill, with the school committee, the mayor, the city council. Whether we like it or not, we have to be a player in the political

world. Paul and I consider it an honor and a privilege to work every day on your behalf."

The members of the New Member Committee — "a fantastic group of professionals," in Todd's estimation — design and deliver most of the conference content. The committee chair is Chris Saulnier of Acushnet, who also serves as a member of the MTA Board. Committee members are Naomi Baline, Melrose; Trevor Blanchet, Dracut; Joshua Chranowski, Chicopee; Deidre D'Egidio, Wrentham; Emily Ferrara, Leominster; Katherine Kennedy, Acton; Miriam Kranz, Southbridge; Krystle LaChance, Southbridge; Heather Macpherson, Wrentham; Jennifer Maio, Dracut; Nichole Masse, Dracut; Cheryl McDonough, Malden; Rosie O'Sullivan, Waltham; Andrea Pires, Stoughton; Blythe Purdin, Nahant; Danielle Robillard, Chesterfield-Goshen; Jessica Rosenthal, Stoughton; Nicole Shadeed, Methuen; Laura Vago, Malden; and Maryann Ziemba, Millis.

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EMAC event highlights key issues and diverse cultures

By Laura Barrett

During the 32 years that Dorothy Wright taught in the Auburn Public Schools, she was the only self-identified minority teacher in the district, she said, explaining why MTA's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee and its annual conference are important to her.

Although she retired from teaching in the mid-1990s, she still remembers how isolating it was to be the only minority teacher in a mid-sized district. EMAC and its predecessor organization provided a place for her and other minority teachers to share experiences and support one another.

Wright also believes that EMAC members are in the best position to encourage minority students to go into the education field.

"Tell them to go into teaching to help educate a group of students who deeply need someone they can relate to who cares about them," Wright said, speaking during a break in the 2011 EMAC conference, which was held at

the Sheraton Hotel in Framingham in early December.

Sandra MacKnight-Joseph, a member of the Educational Association of Worcester, said the conference is both informative and fun.

"When I came the first time, I thought it was very nice — fun and interesting," she said. "I met a lot of other teachers from different schools who came from different cultures."

MacKnight-Joseph teaches in a Sheltered English Immersion program and is familiar with teaching students from many nations, including Iraq, Pakistan and a number of African countries. She values meeting teachers from different cultures, as well.

The 63 conference participants were receptive to the Friday evening keynote address on Dec. 2 by Newton Mayor Setti Warren, the first popularly elected black mayor in Massachusetts.

Warren described his years in nonprofit and government work and talked about his vision for what lies ahead.

"Effective government that is innovative, transparent and account-



Photo by Laura Barrett

EMAC Co-Chair Susan Baker, left, shares a moment with Newton Mayor Setti Warren and fellow committee member Julia Monteiro Johnson.

able is what we need," he said, noting that collective bargaining must be part of that mix.

"I was one of the only mayors in the state who did not believe we needed (municipal health insurance) legislation to negotiate good, strong health care contracts," he said. "We got really creative at the bargaining table."

Warren settled contracts with the city's unions last summer that will save Newton millions of dollars over the next three years by increasing co-pays and deductibles, but the changes are part of a package that was widely praised as fair by union representatives speaking at an August press conference.

Warren is a lifelong Newton resident who recently aspired to have a second home in Washington, D.C. He was a candidate for the seat currently held by U.S. Senator Scott Brown until the "other Warren" — Elizabeth Warren — entered the race and instantly became the acknowledged front-runner.

"I think our national priorities are screwed up," the Newton mayor told the audience, noting that only a small percentage of the federal budget is dedicated to public education.

Although students in his city's schools do very well academically, Warren said, the district is no exception; there is a significant achievement gap between students of color and other students, including young people of color who grew up in Newton. Finding new strategies to close that gap is one of his priorities for the Newton Public Schools.

After Warren's address, participants enjoyed music by Bobby Tyne and Tracy Rose of the Never Say Never Jazz Band.

Workshops were offered on Saturday, Dec. 3, on how to create change through social justice, workplace bullying, the inner workings of the MTA and other topics.

Please turn to **Activism**/Page 17

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'Truly great event' is planned for MTA ESPs

Education support professionals from throughout the state will gather on Cape Cod at the end of March for two days of learning, networking and discussion of workplace issues.

The 2012 MTA ESP Conference, which will be held March 30 and 31 at the Cape Codder Resort in Hyannis, will also allow time for members to socialize, enjoy the ocean air and get to know one another.

"We're looking forward to a truly great event," said MTA ESP Committee Co-Chair Millie Ficarra of Weymouth. "The conference keeps growing and getting better, and we're hoping this year's edition will be the best ever."

"There will be something for everyone," added Ficarra, a member of the MTA Executive Committee.

Lorraine Niccoli of Brockton, Ficarra's co-chair, noted that there will

be more than 20 workshops covering a wide range of subjects, from organizing and workplace bullying to digital photography and childhood psychopharmacology.

"The committee and the presenters have put a huge amount of work into making sure the conference covers timely and relevant issues for ESPs working in both preK-12 schools and higher education," Niccoli said. "We can't wait to see everyone in Hyannis."

The event will begin the afternoon of Friday, March 30. There will be a session allowing participants to meet the members of the ESP Committee, along with a number of workshops. The workshops are *Respect Begins with Us*, *It Isn't Easy Being So Challenging*, *Digital Photography*, *Meet Your MTA Leaders*, *Organizing for Power*, *What Is So Special about Special Ed? (Introductory)* and *ESP*



Retirement: What You Should Know about Your Retirement. Participants will then attend a reception, have dinner and hear an address by NEA Vice President Lily Eskelsen. The first of several raffles — with prizes donated by MTA Benefits — will also be held during the evening.

Saturday, March 31, will begin with a breakfast buffet. The morning will feature an array of interesting and challenging workshops. First-session workshops are *Stress in Children and Adolescents*, *Representing Your Members: The Front Line of Union Defense*, *True Colors*, *ESP Professionalism*, *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader*, *Workplace*

Bullying and What Is So Special about Special Ed? (Advanced). Second-session workshops are *Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology*, *Beat Privatization*, *True Colors*, *Putting Locally Grown Food within a Hand's Reach of Every Student*, *Got Air?*, *Not Everyone Cries* and *Empowering the Leader in You*.

After the workshops conclude, the ESPs who attend will gather for a closing luncheon that will also feature the presentation of the annual ESP Award.

The registration deadline is Feb. 24. For information on conference costs, hotel charges and registration, please visit <http://massteacher.org/esp>. Anyone with questions can also e-mail MTA ESP Organizer/Consultant Nancy Robbie at nrobbie@massteacher.org or call her at 800.542.5504.

Future teachers to gather in April at Westfield State University

Registration will open on March 23 for a popular MTA conference aimed at giving incoming educators an insider's view of the teaching profession.

What Every Future Teacher Needs to Know: A Conference for Prospective Teachers is a day-long event that provides prospective educators with opportunities to network, gain some tricks and tools of the trade from veteran teachers and learn more about what it means to be an MTA member.

This year's conference will take place on Saturday, April 21, at Westfield State University. It was initially scheduled for Nov. 5 at the same location, but had to be postponed after a nor'easter hit the state. The conference is being hosted by the Westfield State chapter of the Student Education Association of Massachusetts, the Westfield State Education Department and the MTA.

Participants can attend morning and afternoon sessions on classroom leadership, teaching English language learners, the legal realities of the Internet, closing the achievement gap and disorders on the autism spectrum. After lunch, Meghan McCoy, program coordinator at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University, will lead a workshop on bullying.

The conference is for prospective teachers in teacher preparation

programs and is free for MTA student members. The registration fee for non-members is \$10.

To learn more about the conference, please visit www.massteacher.org. The deadline for registration is 5

p.m. on Friday, April 13. Questions about the event should be e-mailed to pjohnson@massteacher.org.

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Two MTA members win seats on MTRB

By Sarah Nathan

Massachusetts public school teachers recently elected two longtime MTA activists to the state board that administers and oversees retirement benefits for tens of thousands of educators.

MTA-endorsed candidates Karen Mitchell, a teacher in Plymouth, and Dennis Naughton, a retired Millis teacher, were the top vote-getters in the election for two seats on the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement Board, which concluded in December when mailed-in ballots were counted.

Mitchell and Naughton defeated three other candidates in the race. Mitchell, an incumbent, topped the field with 39 percent of the vote, and Naughton, a first-time candidate, received 30 percent. The other three candidates were Paul Andrews, Matthew Gillis and Thomas Campbell.

"Teachers sometimes feel as if they are not empowered, and this election proves that this is not the case," Naughton said. "This is a perfect example of teachers

empowering themselves by electing their own representatives to the state board that oversees important retirement issues."

The MTA made the MTRB election a priority, launching a multi-pronged campaign in support of Mitchell and Naughton. The association reached out to members by mail, on the MTA website and by e-mail

and social media. In addition, the MTA's Legislative and Political Action Team coordinators, who are based in state Senate districts, used their own networks to get out the vote.

The effort paid off handily. The MTRB reported that over twice as many ballots were cast this time around as in the previous election. In 2011, 44,452 ballots were tallied, while 22,132 ballots were counted in 2007.



Dennis Naughton

"Thank you to all of the MTA members who took the time to cast votes and mail back their ballots," said MTA President Paul Toner. "This election illustrates not only our power, but our potential. As a result of your efforts, we now have three well-informed, experienced and thoughtful MTA members representing the best interests of teachers on this board."

In addition to Mitchell and Naughton, former MTA President Anne Wass serves on the MTRB. Governor Deval Patrick appointed her to the board in September.

The board, which meets at least once a month, votes on every disability retirement allowance, investigates all claims for accidental and ordinary disabilities, establishes the rules and regulations of the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System and oversees the dissemination of services and information to more than 88,000 active educators and 52,000 retirees and survivors.

All three MTA members are serving four-year terms. In preparation

for the election, MTRB members were mailed ballots in November and were required to return them by Dec. 12.

Wass said she is well aware of the impact that decisions made by the board have on individual teachers.

"It's important to come prepared and be objective, fair, reasonable and open-minded," she said. "There is so much at stake — we are making decisions about people's financial future, including their pensions. That's a very serious responsibility."

Mitchell, who was first elected in the balloting four years ago, urged all MTA members to learn more about the state teacher pension system and educate others. In this difficult economy, she said, pensions will remain a likely political target.



Karen Mitchell

"We all need to understand our retirement system so that we can do our part to educate the greater public — meaning our friends, families and neighbors," Mitchell said. "Because our pensions are so important to our financial future, we need to do all we can to ensure that this benefit remains intact and that people understand that we largely pay for it ourselves."

To learn more about the system, see the MTA pension toolkit, which is posted at <http://masteacher.org/advocating/toolkits/pensions.aspx>.



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RAA Day has theme of green

The theme is green for a very special 2012 Read Across America celebration.

This year, NEA's Read Across America campaign will showcase Dr. Seuss's *Lorax* book as well as NBC/Universal's *The Lorax*, a 3-D film.

Long before climate change and the conservation of natural resources made it into the public policy limelight, Dr. Seuss used the *Lorax* character to teach children about the importance of the environment. The book centers on a fictional figure who speaks out against the negative effects of overdevelopment on the "Truffula Trees" and the environment.

The film opens nationwide on March 2, which is RAA Day, and Universal, Dr. Seuss Enterprises and Random House have joined the NEA in creating new posters and classroom guides to spread the word.

RAA Day is being celebrated



Photo by Bob Duffy

Teacher Nicole Galvin reads *The Lorax* to her kindergarten class at the Greenleaf School in Haverhill.

on what would have been Dr. Seuss's 108th birthday. The author — whose real name was Theodor Geisel — was a native of Springfield. As is the case each year, educators across the country will be participating in events designed to get millions of children excited about reading.

Further information about RAA events, along with links to video and social media, can be found at www.nea.org/readacross.

Program prepares students for success

Continued from Page 3

which pays for his car. Seniors can earn even more.

Instead of attending shop class during their senior year, they are encouraged to work in their fields. One senior is earning \$17 an hour at Hamilton Sundstrand in Windsor Locks, Conn. Many companies offer their co-op students jobs after they graduate.

"These are good jobs," noted school Principal Jim Lavery. "Manufacturing facilities aren't like they used to be. I've gone into companies where you could have eaten off the floor. They are air-conditioned, clean, nice places to work."

One of the calling cards of the manufacturing program is that it is extremely well equipped. Fucci explained that U.S. Rep. John Olver (D-Amherst) helped to secure a \$294,000 federal grant for the program that the school parlayed into buying the CNC machines and other equipment worth about \$1 million.

The secret to their success, Lavery said, is an active and dedicated advisory committee of educators

and professionals. "It's an advisory committee on steroids," he said.

The committee not only raises \$30,000 a year through a golf tournament, but also uses connections with industries to persuade them to sell the school equipment below cost.

Obtaining grants and donations is essential since WVTSH, a district school, has to get by on \$13,000 per pupil per year, even though vocational schools are more expensive to run than traditional high schools. Regional vocational schools are funded by their sending districts, and some spend more than \$20,000 per student.

While the per-pupil spending is low at WVTSH, the students generally leave with full pockets — a job and \$4,000 worth of tools that they make themselves.

Mazut, a teacher there for 27 years, says the school has a very collegial atmosphere.

"I don't remember a grievance in the 27 years I've been here," he said. "We all get along very well."

But students are the biggest draw to the job. "I like dealing with the kids," Mazut said. "It keeps me young."

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EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

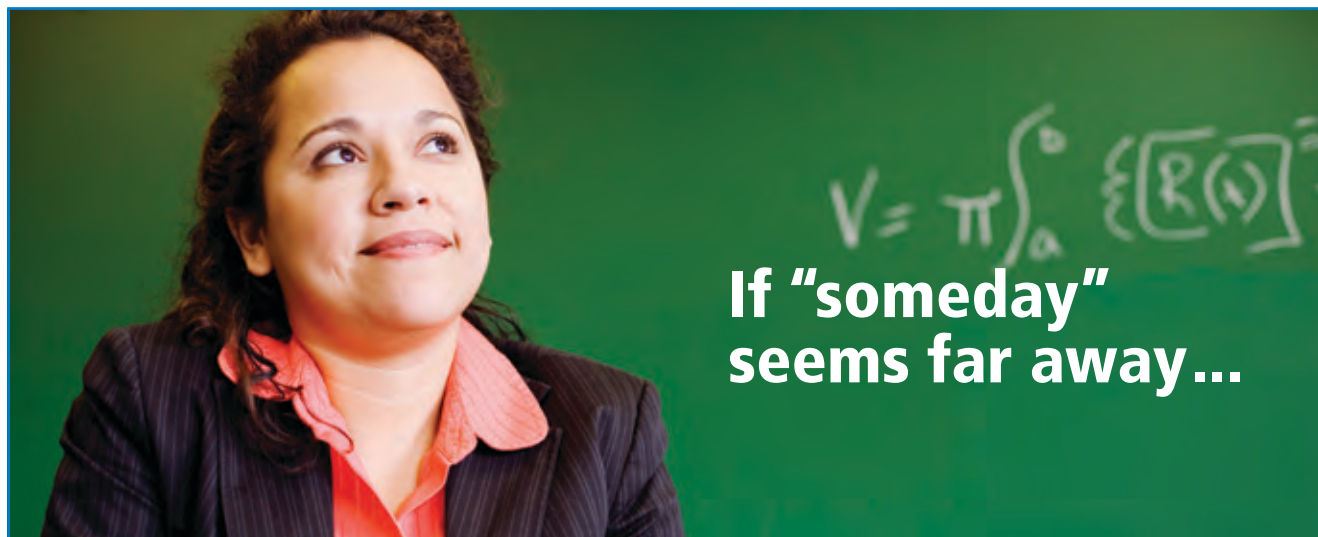
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Bills in House and Senate seek repeal of offsets

The MTA and the NEA are strong supporters of the Social Security Fairness Act, which is pending in both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House. The legislation seeks to repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision, which penalize public employees and retirees in Massachusetts and other states.

Just prior to congressional adjournment, Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) introduced S. 2010, which is a companion to the House version of the bill. That legislation, H. 1332, was introduced earlier last year by Representatives Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-Calif.) and Howard Berman (D-Calif.). All members of the Massachusetts House delegation are currently co-sponsors of H. 1332. The total number of co-sponsors is 147.

Despite the GPO and WEP, it is possible for some MTA members to get Social Security benefits. The following information is from www.mass.gov/mtrs, the website of the Massachusetts Teachers’ Retirement System. More information can be obtained from the Social Security Administration website, www.ssa.gov.

Q. When I retire, I will have 40 credits (or “quarters”) under Social Security. Will my Social Security pension be reduced because I will receive an MTRS pension?

A. If you have 40 credits (or “quarters”) under the Social Security system (in other words, you are

eligible to receive Social Security benefits), then Social Security will use a “modified formula” to calculate your pension unless:

- You had 20 years of creditable service under the MTRS before Jan. 1, 1986.
- Or you were age 55 and had at least 10 years of creditable service before Jan. 1, 1986.
- Or you will have at least 30 years of “substantial earnings” under the Social Security system.

If you do not meet any of these requirements, you will receive a reduced Social Security pension. In order to determine the amount of the reduction that applies to you, please contact the Social Security Administration at 800.772.1213.

Q. I am expecting to collect a spousal or widow’s benefit under Social Security. Will I receive a reduced benefit since I will be receiving a retirement allowance from the MTRS?

A. If you expect to collect a spousal or widow’s benefit under Social Security, these benefits may be reduced by two-thirds of the amount of your MTRS retirement allowance. You will be exempt from this “Government Pension Offset” if you meet all the requirements for Social Security spousal benefits in effect in 1977 and:

- You had 20 years of creditable service under

the MTRS before Dec. 1, 1982.

- Or you were age 55 and had at least 10 years of creditable service before Dec. 1, 1982.
- Or you were age 55 or had 20 years of creditable service before July 1, 1983, and you received half support from your spouse.

In all cases, the SSA requires that male retirees of the MTRS must have received at least half support from their wives to apply for spousal benefits.

Q. Will my Medicare coverage be affected by the Social Security “double-dipping” laws?

A. No; although your Social Security benefits may be reduced by these two provisions, your Medicare coverage will not be affected. If you believe that, based on your age and/or amount of creditable service with the MTRS, you are exempt from either the WEP or the GPO, the SSA will require you to submit a letter from the MTRS that states the date on which you met the eligibility requirement. To request this letter, contact the MTRS at 617.679.6877.

To receive regular updates on the offset repeal effort, please send your name, complete address, MTA ID number, current or former local association affiliation information and home e-mail address to Jo Ann Fitzgerald, MTA retired members service specialist, at jfitzgerald@massteacher.org.



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A proposal for teacher-led transformation

NEA-appointed group makes recommendations to support schools and students

The Commission on Teachers and Effective Teaching, an NEA-appointed group of award-winning classroom teachers and union leaders from around the country, released a report on Dec. 8 to generate conversation among members about teacher-proposed strategies for improving teacher effectiveness and student learning.

Kathleen Skinner, director of the MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice, was a member of the commission that produced the report, which is titled "Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning."

The report makes numerous recommendations and calls on teachers, unions, state education departments, superintendents and school committees to work collaboratively to benefit students and improve the teaching profession. The report specifically recommends:

- Encouraging evidence-based peer-review teacher evaluation systems.
- Basing compensation on career stage, additional roles and responsibilities and success with students.
- Making teacher evaluations a key consideration in assignments, with seniority used for decision-making only when all other factors are equal.
- Replacing tenure with guaranteed due-process rights.
- Establishing a career continuum from novice through teacher leader.
- Establishing national standards for teacher preparation programs and teacher educators.
- Establishing national performance requirements for earning teaching licenses.

The commission report and other research materials are now being considered by the NEA's new Joint Committee on Leading the Profession, on which MTA President Paul Toner is serving.

"We are charged with making recommendations to the NEA Executive Committee and NEA Board on how to change the discussion in this country from the simple-minded narrative of: 'How do we get rid of the bad teacher?' We need to have a real discussion about what teachers need to be successful with their students

and to keep quality educators in the profession," Toner said.

The committee's recommendations could lead to changes in NEA resolutions, policies, bylaws and legislative proposals to be considered

at the next NEA Representative

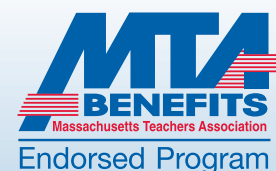
Assembly in Washington, D.C., this summer.

"This report contains many bold ideas about how to help students succeed," said Toner. "At its core, it says teachers need to take control of the profession. We need to define the knowledge, skills and experience that teachers must have.

"There are dozens of recommendations contained in this

report that require a lot of discussion and reflection, all of which will take place in the weeks and months ahead," he added.

Toner encouraged members to read the report, which is available at [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Transforming_Teaching\(2\).pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Transforming_Teaching(2).pdf), and to share their thoughts on the proposals with him via e-mail at ptoner@massteacher.org.



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MTA members are urged to choose whether they want to get *MTA Today* in print or receive a link by e-mail when the magazine is posted on the MTA website

MTA Today provides important news about your association, as well as vital information on leadership opportunities, professional development, member benefits, politics, policies that affect your school or campus, and much, much more.

As the result of a vote by the delegates to the 2009 MTA Annual Meeting, you are being asked to decide whether you want to receive hard copies or be notified by e-mail when the magazine is posted on the MTA website.

Making your selection is simple, so please do not delay.

And don't worry! You can change your mind at any time about whether you want to receive printed issues or be notified by e-mail when *MTA Today* is posted.

To sign up, you will need your MTA membership card or an issue of *MTA Today* that was mailed to you as a member.

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Activism is theme at EMAC event

Continued from Page 11

MTA President Paul Toner offered greetings at lunch. He talked about the fiscal challenges facing Massachusetts schools, colleges and universities and urged members to support the revenue initiative sponsored by the Campaign for Our Communities, a bill that would raise about \$1.3 billion a year, primarily by increasing income taxes on the wealthiest taxpayers.

He also urged conference participants to join the MTA's Legislative and Political Action Teams to support pro-education candidates and policy initiatives.

"I close by noting that there are many more battles ahead of us, but there is also good news," Toner said. "While we never welcome attacks on unions and public employees, what is going on for us right now isn't all bad. People are actually talking about the importance and necessity of unions. It is waking up our members. There is an incredible energy and enthusiasm out there right now to fight for the middle class."

Susan Baker, outgoing EMAC co-chair, said she hopes that more minority members will participate in the conference in the future. Her parting request is that local association presidents strongly encourage their minority members to sign up for this year's conference.

She concluded, "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes every member in our organization to include *all* members in our organization."

Aside from Baker, who teaches in Falmouth, the members of the committee are Co-Chair Christopher Gusman, Wareham; Christine Boseman, Classified Staff Union; Julia Monteiro Johnson, Dennis-Yarmouth; Paul Odongo, Southbridge; Shirley Peaks, Springfield; and Candace Shivers, MCCC-Mount Wachusett.

To see more photos, please visit flickr.com/mtacommunications.

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Winter challenges even the best drivers

One thing most people agree on: New England winter driving is tough and needs to be relearned every year.

The obvious first step before getting on the road is to remove snow and ice from your car to improve visibility.

The next is to review critical winter driving skills.

Starting and stopping

Anti-lock brakes help maintain control in a panic stop, but call for steady pressure rather than the pumping action required by standard brakes.

Given the need for significantly longer stopping distances on slick surfaces, you may have to double the recommended dry-surface rule of one car length of distance for each 10 miles per hour of speed.

You should also travel at a lower speed to better manage longer stopping times and possible sideways skidding in a panic stop.

All-wheel drive only helps you get started — it doesn't help to stop more quickly. In fact, vehicles such as SUVs that have all-wheel drive often weigh more than cars, so their momentum may carry them farther in a panic stop.

Avoiding skids

A skid is typically controlled by gently steering in the direction of the skid, combined with gentle braking and shifting into neutral.

Approach intersections with extra caution as water vapor from stopped cars may have frozen on the road.

Getting out of trouble

Keep a winter kit in the trunk with a scraper, a compact broom, granola or energy bars, a flashlight with spare batteries, cat litter (or a traction mat or bag of sand), a blanket, extra gloves, flares or emergency reflectors, booster cables and a small shovel.

Gain traction if you're stuck by first turning the wheels each way without applying any gas. Gently



apply a small amount of gas to ease forward or rock lightly back and forth. If that doesn't work or the wheels spin, apply sand, kitty litter or a traction mat to the stuck wheels.

Cars produce carbon monoxide and, if lodged in snow that blocks the exhaust, could suffocate those inside the vehicle. Be sure to clear the area around the exhaust and run the engine 10 to 15 minutes per hour. If possible, crack open a window just enough to admit fresh air.

Courses could mean discounts

The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles offers courses to help you learn winter driving techniques. To learn more, go to www.mass.gov/rmv/diversed/selectschool.htm.

A standard advanced driving course may include winter driving techniques and could offer up to a 10 percent discount on most coverages of your auto policy. A two- to three-hour specialized course typically supplements an advanced driver training course.

Winter insurance issues

Aggressive driving is dangerous in any season, but winter conditions vastly amplify the consequences of poor driving. Speeding, following too closely, failure to signal and all other bad road behaviors can easily lead to an at-fault accident on winter roads.

In addition to dealing with the obvious consequences, you will also take a likely hit on your auto insurance if you're responsible for an at-fault accident.

However an accident occurs, the cost of accidents continues to increase. You may want to add coverages and increase limits on bodily injury and personal property damages. For additional protection, an umbrella policy could affordably boost coverage that may protect your home and future earnings should you be sued after a serious accident.

To learn more about your auto insurance options, contact Educators Insurance Agency at 888.908.6822 or visit www.educatorsinsuranceagency.com.

VBT offers biking and walking tours at MTA discounts



MTA members have the chance to explore some of the most beautiful and pleasurable places in the world on VBT biking or walking vacations.

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MTA members get a special discount on their first VBT trip to any of 41 vacation destinations. You can save \$200 on international tours and \$100 on vacations in the United States. For subsequent trips, members get VBT's Frequent Traveler Credits and seasonal discounts. To receive the first-time traveler discount, reference MTA promo code BCFL 290 when making your reservation by phone. You can also get the first-time discount when booking online by giving the promo code to the VBT representative who calls you to confirm the reservation.

Learn more or request your free catalog through the MTA Vacation Center by going to www.mtabenefits.com and clicking on "All Benefits," then "Travel & Vacations."

PRECONVENTION MEETINGS TO BE HELD IN APRIL

Regional preconvention meetings have been set for elected delegates to the 2012 MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates.

At these preconventions, the delegates will receive information and materials critical to their decision-making on organizational matters.

Registration for the preconventions begins at 3:30 p.m. Each meeting is scheduled to begin at 4 p.m.

The following is a list of locations and dates for the 2012 preconventions:

- **Thursday, April 12**, Central Region, Holiday Inn, Marlborough.
- **Monday, April 23**, Western/Berkshire Regions, Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, Northampton.
- **Tuesday, April 24**, Southeast/Metro Regions, Holiday Inn, Taunton.
- **Wednesday, April 25**, Cape Cod and Islands Regions, Cape Codder Resort, Hyannis.
- **Thursday, April 26**, Northeast/Metro Regions, Holiday Inn Select, Woburn.

Further information will be provided to delegates as it becomes available. The Annual Meeting of Delegates will be held May 11-12 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston.

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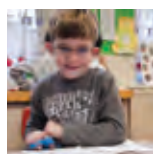
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Obituaries

Peter Chrisom, 81, of Milton. Was a history teacher at Randolph High School and then at North Quincy High School, where he became the head of the social studies department, then assistant principal and principal. Nov. 24.

Robert W. Firing, 84, formerly of North Easton, Mass., and Delray, Fla. Was a guidance counselor and teacher at Brockton High School, retiring in 1989. Nov. 25.

Arthur J. Harrington, 86, of Portland, Maine. Taught English at Melrose High School and Wakefield Junior High School for more than 40 years. Oct. 21.

Dorothy Jackson, 87, of St. George, Maine. Taught for more than 35 years at schools in Beverly, including the Brown, Hardy and Centerville schools, retiring in 1982. Was a past president of the Beverly Teachers Association. Nov. 2.

Susan Emily Janey, 49, of Pittsfield. Taught for 20 years in Pittsfield. Was a science specialist at the Williams and Stearns schools. Dec. 15.

Mary T. Lawrence, 63, of Monson. Was a foreign language teacher for 10 years in Granby, Ware, Monson and Palmer. Sept. 26.

Peter W. Leddy, 60, of North Attleboro. Was a science and geography

teacher at Norton High School and served as science coordinator for the town's middle and high schools, retiring in June 2011. Also represented Massachusetts at the NEA Excellence in Education Awards in 2004, having won the excellence award at the state level. Dec. 4.

Mildred I. Marion, 76, of Baldwinville. Was a registered nurse who taught at Fitchburg State College for 27 years, retiring in 1999. Dec. 27.

Virginia "Ginny" Miscioscia, of Dorchester. Was a legal secretary in the MTA Division of Legal Services. Dec. 3.

Kyle J. Piazza, of Quincy. Was a math teacher and coach for six years at Braintree High School. Oct. 30.

Gerald D. Puccini, 65, of Hyannis. Taught for 17 years in Taunton and was principal of the James L. Mulcahey Middle School for 20 years, retiring in 2004. Sept. 19.

Genevieve M. Smithson, 93, of Rye, N.H. Taught fifth grade for the Merrimac school system. Dec. 28.

Catherine M. Turner, 59, of Middleboro. Taught at the Early Childhood Center for several years and was a substitute teacher for the Middleboro school system for the past 17 years. Dec. 17.

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Two candidates running to become NEA Director

Two MTA members are seeking to be elected to the post of NEA Director.

They are Donna Johnson of the University Staff Association and Diana Marcus of the Burlington Educators' Association.

There is one vacancy. The seat will be filled by direct-mail vote in March and April, in tandem with the NEA statewide and regional delegate elections.

The term is for three years, beginning Sept. 1, 2012, and expiring

Aug. 31, 2015, in accordance with the NEA's fiscal year.

Ballots will be sent to the entire membership.

Each candidate was asked to submit a statement and a photograph. Their submissions are reprinted below.

For further information on MTA nominations and elections, please contact Diane Foley of the MTA Division of Governance by calling 617.878.8217, e-mailing dfoley@massteacher.org or faxing inquiries to 617.742.7046.

Donna Johnson University Staff Association

I am president of the University Staff Association and a former MTA Executive Committee member for Region H. I currently serve as the At-Large Director for Education Support Professionals statewide. I also serve on the MTA Advisory Budget Committee, the

Committee to Evaluate the Executive Director, the Revenue Enhancement Committee and the MTA Benefits Board.

I have chaired the Higher Education Leadership Council and the ESP Committee. I am a graduate of the NEA's Leaders for Tomorrow program, and I am currently working on an NEA workgroup called Elevating the Profession.

I have served in the MTA for the past 12 years and feel I have the experience needed to serve on the NEA Board of Directors. I have represented all members, preK-12 through higher education, and I



Donna Johnson

feel I have the knowledge needed to take all of our issues to the national level.

If given this opportunity, I will take my experience and dedication to Washington, D.C., to speak out for quality, affordable and accessible public education for all.

I ask for your vote for the NEA Board of Directors statewide position.

I thank you for your consideration.

Diana Marcus Burlington Educators' Association

It would be an honor and a privilege to represent you as an NEA Director.

I believe I have the experience and the drive to take the concerns of MTA's members to Washington, advocating for Massachusetts educators at the NEA and on Capitol Hill. Public education, preschool through graduate school, is under attack in the court of public opinion and in our legislatures. We are at a crucial time in our

profession as we look at collective bargaining, school accountability, educator evaluation, health insurance and pensions. Massachusetts has been at the forefront of these discussions, and our voice must be heard. The NEA needs to remain true to its mission and lead the way in advocating for legislative changes in education.

During my career, I have taught at the preschool, elementary and graduate school levels and seen the need for greater support of education professionals in all sectors of our educational system. As a local

president, I have firsthand knowledge of the battles we face to protect our bargaining rights, maintain affordable health insurance, retire with financial stability and be evaluated fairly. You can rely upon me to be your voice at the NEA and on Capitol Hill.

I would appreciate your vote and the opportunity to represent



Diana Marcus

you as an NEA Director.

Experience

- Local president, Burlington Educators' Association
- Elementary classroom teacher
- Special education teacher
- Former adjunct faculty member
- MTA Resolutions Committee (chair)
- MTA GLBT Issues Committee (vice chair)
- NEA Resolutions Committee
- MTA Annual Meeting and NEA RA delegate for the past six years

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TEACHERS ARE GREAT TUTORS — The website www.MyTownTutors.com connects parents with local teachers who tutor. We started in Hanover and now list 215-plus teachers. Membership is \$12 for two years. Teachers keep 100 percent of their hourly fees!

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EDUCATION / LICENSURE

ADMINISTRATOR LICENSURE PROGRAM — If you are looking for a district-based cost-effective program for licensure as an administrator, consult the website of The Education Cooperative (TEC), www.tec-coop.org, and click on “Professional Development and Licensure.” Courses are offered in Dedham in cooperation with Boston University.

M.Ed. IN STEM/M.A. IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP — Looking to advance your initial Early Childhood/Elementary license or STEM expertise? Perhaps seeking an initial administrator license? Want hybrid courses? Norfolk County Teachers Association and Framingham State University are forming cohorts to support your goals. Contact Judy Riley Brown at 617.733.1782 or ntcalicensure@comcast.net.

TEACHER LICENSURE PROGRAM — If you have Preliminary licensure at the secondary level and are seeking Initial licensure, The Education Cooperative (TEC) has a program for you. Go to www.tec-coop.org and click on “Professional Development and Licensure.” Courses are offered on weekends and during the summer at our Dedham site.

EMPLOYMENT

NEED ADDITIONAL INCOME? Could you provide room, board and tutoring for a foreign student of English in your own home (within 2 hrs. of Boston)? Pay from \$550 per student per week. More info: <http://www.HLI-HostFamilies-Boston.com>. Contact: info@HLI-HostFamilies-Boston.com.

2012 TEACH IN CHINA SUMMER PROJECT — Sino-American Bridge for Education and Health seeks experienced teachers for five-week program. All subject areas welcome. Room and board, one-half airfare costs and one week of free travel provided. Visit our website, <http://sabeh.org/>, for more information and an application.

ALWAYS HERE HOME CARE is looking for compassionate and dependable individuals to start careers in care-giving. Services are non-medical and include personal care, companionship and homemaking for the elderly and disabled. We serve Greater Boston and surrounding regions. Caregivers choose their hours. Please send résumés to hr@alwaysherehomecare.com. Or visit www.alwaysherehomecare.com.

RETIRING? Become a Boston tour guide. You’re good at talking, presenting information, being enthusiastic. Don’t sit at home. This is *fun*! We train. E-mail pitcairtours@mail.com or call 617.696.8130.

WE’RE HIRING! Are you a retired teacher looking for meaningful part-time work? Seniors Helping Seniors,

which provides in-home services, is looking for companions/caregivers who want the perfect part-time job. Flexible hours. Work with senior citizens who just need a little help from their friends. Call 508.808.1090 for the Metrowest area or 508.362.2799 for Cape Cod. Or visit www.seniorshelpingseniors.com.

RETIRED TEACHERS — Do you have 10 hours a week and an interest in helping coordinate volunteers who provide pet therapy to elders in Boston? Contact Ellen at 617.482.1510 or e-mail ekirchheimer@fw4elders.org.

FIELD TRIP

LOOKING FOR A “SCOOPER” YEAR-END FIELD TRIP? Participate in the Jimmy Fund Scooper Bowl Scooper Schools Program. Fund-raise for the Jimmy Fund and earn free admission to the Scooper Bowl June 5-7! For more information, visit JimmyFund.org/scooper-schools or e-mail scooper_bowl@dfci.harvard.edu.

FOR SALE

BREWSTER, CAPE COD — Getaway or residence for couple or single; renovated, spacious one bedroom, one bath, eat-in kitchen, lr/dr, in Sea Pines Association. Beautiful private bayside beach, pool, clubhouse, tennis, quiet neighborhood; yard, deck, gardens, garage. Great storage, a/c, w/d, new windows/slider. \$229,000. Call 860.231.1345.

PD

NORFOLK COUNTY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION — Professional Development courses at reasonable prices in partnership with Framingham State University. Online and on-site courses — all three graduate credits. Check out NCTA’s course offerings and membership details at www.myncta.com. Courses open to everyone. Please e-mail Debra Barrett at myncta@aol.com with questions.

SOCIAL STUDIES COORDINATOR — Carol Cohen, education professor and consultant, available either per diem, weekly or long-term to assist in aligning curriculum. Professional development workshop: *Social Studies/Literary Connection*, brought to your school district. E-mail carolcohen@verizon.net or call 617.968.2094.

FIFTH ANNUAL SUMMER STORYTELLING INSTITUTE RETREAT in Western Mass. Aug. 3-5 with international storyteller and certified teacher Rona Leventhal. Learn the art of storytelling and why it’s such a successful tool for motivating kids and promoting language and learning. 20 PDPs! First Early Bird, March 1! Call 413.586.0624 or visit www.ronatales.com.

PD / TRAVEL

GREECE IN APRIL — Join us! *The Examined Life: Greek Studies in the Schools* (Exl) encourages educators, K-12, to apply for Greek Study Fellowships. CEUs, PDPs, graduate credit. Stipends available. Please inquire by e-mailing connie_carven@teachgreece.org or calling 781.405.6094.

TRAVEL

APRIL VACATION WEEK — 4/13-21: Florence, Venice & Rome; Lake Como & Switzerland; Tuscany with Venice; Costa del Sol, Spain. 4/14-22: Sorrento/Rome; Ireland Circle Tour. All/most meals, full sightseeing, fully escorted, first-class hotels, RT flights. 4/15-22: Barcelona City Stay. Group/leader specials. Call Durgan Travel at 781.438.2224 or visit www.durgantravel.com.

RETIRED TEACHERS — Durgan Travel, an award-winning tour operator, has a full schedule of all/mostly inclusive tours, including jet tours and cruises (domestic and international). We have the highest-value, best-priced tours in the industry! Group/leader special promotions! Call Durgan Travel at

781.438.2224 or toll-free at 800.234.9959. Or visit www.durgantravel.com.

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TRAVEL / STUDY

SEMINAR — Education in Ireland (six graduate credits), July 5-28. National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland. Study aspects of the Irish education system and history, literature and culture of Ireland. Contact Barney Keenan, NUI coordinator, by writing him at 127 Glen Road, Gorham, N.H., 03581; calling 603.466.2972; or e-mailing Lilysky@ncia.net. The Trip of a Lifetime!

VACATION RENTALS

CAPE COD: OCEAN EDGE RESORT, BREWSTER, MASS. — Perfect vacation resort setting. Spacious, nicely appointed villa; spiral staircase to large loft; two baths, sleeps six. Excellent location within resort, steps from indoor/outdoor pools, tennis. Nearby beaches, shopping, bike trails and more. Owned/offered by MTA member. Summer weekly; off-season weeks or weekends. Call 413.594.4056 or e-mail dr_jim_c@hotmail.com.

CAPE COD: WEST YARMOUTH — Colonial Acres Resort on Nantucket Sound. Saturday, 8/4-8/11, 8/11-8/18. Call for price and details: 781.335.6849.

CAPE COD: ONSET — “Charming.” Four bedrooms, 1.5 baths, Victorian. Steps away from long white-sand saltwater beach for swimming and kayaking. Enjoy morning coffee on the three-sided porch, filled with wicker rockers and geraniums. “Seamist Cottage.” BONUS: second-floor deck for happy hour sunsets, hot outside shower, grill, kayak, “child safe” rear yard/garden. July/August, \$1,000/wk. Call 508.295.3408 or e-mail seamistcottage@verizon.net.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, CANADA — Fully equipped two-story cottage on private four acres. Sleeps six. Two full bathrooms. Living room with open fire. Satellite TV. Front and back decks. Splendid ocean and sunset view. Cycling, golf and warm, safe swimming. Available June through September. U.S. \$975 weekly. Please call 661.860.6931 or e-mail vcjohnston@aol.com.

EASTHAM, OUTER CAPE — Immaculate, three-bedroom, two-bath cottage with panoramic sunset view overlooking a kettle pond’s sandy beach. Enjoy cabana shower, granite kitchen, dishwasher, Casablanca fans, wicker, lovingly landscaped deck, semi-private pool, tennis court and washer/dryer. Near National Seashore, rail trail and Provincetown. Visit <http://www.easthampinecottage.com>, e-mail LeaSull@aol.com or call 508.616.9838.

DEER ISLE, MAINE — Spacious country house near the sea, 1.5 acres, sleeps six. Sparkling clean, three bedrooms, two baths. Stroll to beach, boat landing, protected shoreline. Hardwood floors, fieldstone fireplace, fully equipped kitchen, Internet, three decks, picnic table, grill, many extras. Dogs by arrangement. \$1,000-\$1,150/week. Details: www.hardyshillhouse.com. Call 978.283.3738 or e-mail hardyshillhouse@verizon.net.

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Shows test students' academic prowess

By Bob Duffy

The MTA is again sponsoring two fast-paced public television competitions that showcase educational excellence and the academic achievements of Massachusetts high school students.

Each week this winter, students representing schools from eastern and western Massachusetts are using their brainpower to battle toward their respective season championships and the accompanying accolades.

High School Quiz Show is in its third season and is produced by WGBH in Boston, while *As Schools Match Wits*, one of the oldest academic challenge shows in the country, is embarking on its 51st season on WGBY in Springfield. Each show will name its own winner when its season concludes.

The MTA has sponsored both shows for the past several years.

"The MTA supports these shows because we recognize the value of quality educational family programming," said MTA President Paul Toner, who was recently videotaped asking questions for students to answer.

Both shows emphasize academic content based on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Curriculum Frameworks, and both use *Jeopardy*-style formats.

"Between *As Schools Match Wits* and *High School Quiz Show*, our teams have created statewide opportunities that recognize and support academic prowess," said Elizabeth Preston, interim vice president of academic affairs and former chair of the Department of Communication at Westfield State University, where the older of the two programs is filmed.

As Schools Match Wits started airing in 1961, and since 2007 the show has been co-produced by Westfield State students and WGBY.

Teams from western Massachusetts high schools — and some from northern Connecticut — are paired off against one another in qualifying rounds to see which can gain the most points and win the



Photo by Bob Duffy

MTA President Paul Toner tapes a promotional spot for *High School Quiz Show* in the WGBH studio.

match; the eight highest-scoring teams from the whole season are then entered into the playoffs, which consist of quarterfinals, semifinals and the championship.

As Schools Match Wits airs at 7 p.m. on Saturdays on WGBY and then again at 9 a.m. on Sundays, followed by an episode of *High School Quiz Show*. *High School Quiz Show* airs at 6:30 p.m. on Sundays on WGBH.

"Academic quiz shows across the country attract a broad following of students, their families, schools and communities in support of the home teams," noted WGBH President and Chief Executive Officer Jon Abbott. "Most importantly, *High School Quiz Show* enables WGBH to further align with the education goals of the Commonwealth."

The 16 competing high school teams for each season gather at WGBH's Brighton studios over the course of three days to tape the first eight qualifying rounds. They are cheered on by a live studio audience of families, fellow students and others.

Each school fields a team of four student players, along with two alternates and at least one coach.

The teams engage in a tournament that includes quarterfinals, semifinals and the state championship match.

They are given the star treatment during the tapings; each team even gets its own green room and makeup artist.

"I have been at Natick High School for 16 years, and the excitement associated with the show has been one of the highlights of my career," said Richard Geckle, a Latin teacher who coached a team that made it to the quarterfinals during last year's season.

For more information on the two quiz shows, please visit www.wgbh.org and www.wgby.org. Go to www.youtube.com/massteacher to see interviews with two team coaches and view the MTA's sponsorship announcements, which run at the beginning and end of each show.

The MTA Advantage is a publication of MTA Benefits, a subsidiary of the Massachusetts Teachers Association

Now is a great time to consider buying or refinancing a home

“We can’t predict the future, but we can say with certainty that there’s never been a better time to buy a home,” said Paul Gershkowitz, president of Greenpark Mortgage, partner in the MTA Mortgage Program.

“Interest rates for 30-year fixed-rate loans are hovering at record-low levels,” he said. “Some customers have been able to close loans on 30-year fixed rates in the mid to high 3 percent range.* Prices have dropped over the last five years, with many homes selling below their assessed value. MTA members have an extra incentive to purchase through the MTA program because they receive an average of \$850 off closing costs.”

Gershkowitz pointed out that it is also an excellent time to refinance, which can reduce monthly mortgage payments by hundreds of dollars.

As an example, five years ago, a buyer with a 6.2 percent fixed rate on a \$200,000 30-year mortgage would have payments of \$1,224.94 a month. Today, for that same type of loan at 4.2 percent, payments would be \$978.03 a month – a savings of \$246.91.

Help from family

For first-time homebuyers, coming up with the standard 20 percent down payment can be almost impossible.

A number of options exist, including no-money-down or low-money-down loans, which push up interest rates and monthly payments. An alternative is using a family “money gift” for all or part of the down payment. Reducing or eliminating the down payment generally qualifies the buyer for a lower rate and, subsequently, lower payments. However, this must be a gift – not a loan – from one family member or more.

Raving fans of Greenpark

Greenpark has handled more than 4,000 transactions for MTA members either refinancing or buying homes. One of them is Kat Craven, a member of the Fitchburg Education Association. She and her husband, Martin, turned to Greenpark when they began planning to buy a home.

“We had an incredible experience with Greenpark,” said Craven. “As a teacher, it’s very important for me to make every dime count. Greenpark helped us stretch our dollars. We received a very favorable interest rate when we bought the home and an even better one when we recently refinanced it. I cannot begin to say enough about the excellent service we received from our Greenpark sales associate. He made every step in the process easy and stress-free.”

Craven appreciated the fact that her Greenpark representative was always



‘As a teacher, it’s very important for me to make every dime count. Greenpark helped us stretch our dollars.’

Kat Craven
Fitchburg Education Association

available – even at night and on weekends – and no question was inconsequential to him. “He treated me like a person, not a number,” she said, noting that her husband was impressed as well. “Through Greenpark and the MTA Mortgage Program, we realized our goal to become homeowners,” Craven added.

In addition to “raving fan” service, Greenpark offers MTA members free pre-qualification and free pre-approval, exclusive programs for first-time homebuyers, a 1/8 percent discount on any points and other special advantages. For more information, contact Paul Gershkowitz at 866.475.HOME, ext. 125, or visit www.mtabenefits.com.

*Rates as of mid-December 2011

The New Faces of MTA

At the *Just For New Teachers* conference on Dec. 2, these new members and others stopped by the MTA Benefits table to learn about all the great discounts and programs available to them.



Grand adventures, rave reviews

The MTA Vacation Center is the gateway to exciting travel with exclusive MTA discounts. MTA members – including MTA Retired members Gary Gilardi and Johanna Roses – offer glowing reviews of their adventures with Go Ahead Tours, a Vacation Center partner.



Gary Gilardi

Seven magical days in Rome

As an ancient history buff, Gary Gilardi was fascinated by the ruins of the once mighty Roman Empire, which he and his wife, Linda, saw during their recent seven-day stay in Rome. They explored the Coliseum and Forum Romanum, the most famous of the landmarks, and the Catacombs, where early Christians and even popes were secretly buried. Visits to the Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain and Pantheon, along with side trips to Florence and Pompeii, were other highlights of their trip.

The Gilardis also visited Gary's Italian cousins in the mountainside town of Monteflavio. "We met for the first time, but it was as if I knew them my whole life," he said. "They were wonderful – warm and welcoming."

"Go Ahead Tours is exceptional," said Gilardi. "We flew direct from Boston to Rome and had expert guides who were always available to answer questions and provide

other assistance. It was my second experience with Go Ahead Tours. I will never use any other tour company."



Unique experiences in Kenya and Turkey

"My trips with Go Ahead Tours were absolutely wonderful – first class," said Johanna Roses. "Because of the small number of people on each trip – six in Kenya and 17 in Turkey – they seemed like private tours."

"The trip to Kenya was the best I've ever taken," added Roses, who has traveled extensively and lived abroad. "It was a mix of nature and wildlife – traveling hundreds and hundreds of miles in a Jeep passing elephants, lions, giraffes and other animals in their natural habitat. It was beautiful and breathtaking."

Another special moment involved visiting a village of the Masai tribe. "They have nothing in material terms, but everything in



JOIN THE MTA PRIVATE TOUR TO ITALY

OCTOBER 11-22

Join other MTA members for an exclusive trip to Puglia and other little-known but wonderful places in Italy. Space is limited, so sign up now for this private MTA trip, starting at \$3,314. For more information, visit www.mta.grouptoursite.com.

‘My trips with Go Ahead Tours were absolutely wonderful – first class.’

*MTA Retired member
Johanna Roses*



what counts – family and a village where everyone cares for each other," Roses said.

Her recent 15-day Grand Tour of Turkey included one of the Mediterranean region's best-preserved classical cities, Ephesus, with its Library of Celsus, Temple of Hadrian and Great Theater, which is still in use today. Other tour highlights were the house where the Virgin Mary is said to have spent her final days; Aphrodisias, with its glowing marble statues honoring Aphrodite; and Istanbul, a reflection of both classical and contemporary Turkey.

"I would recommend other members take advantage of the MTA Vacation Center," said Roses.

**For information, visit
www.mtabenefits.com and click on
"Travel & Vacations" under "All Benefits."**

The Tip Sheet

WHAT TO DO ON WINTER WEEKENDS ...



For thrills

Spend a weekend in the exhilarating atmosphere of a New England ski resort. Select from a long list of favorite resorts that offer MTA discounts – Killington, Ski Bretton Woods, Ski Butternut, Sunday River, Berkshire East, Blue Hills, Catamount, Crotched Mountain, Harris Farm, Lost Valley, Maple Corner, Northfield Mountain, Pats Peak, Ragged Mountain, Wachusett and Weston Ski Track. See the **Ski & Snowboard section of the MTA Discount Directory** for additional information.

For American history

Spend your weekend in **Concord**, home of the American Revolution and such great writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott and Henry David Thoreau. Start at the **Concord Museum** (free to MTA members), which has one of the oldest and most treasured collections of literary and Revolutionary War history, including one of the lanterns placed in the Old North Church on the night of April 18, 1775, and the desk where Thoreau wrote his influential books. Then make your way to the Old North Bridge, where the Colonists battled the British, and the grounds of the nearby Old Manse, where Nathaniel Hawthorne lived with his new bride. You'll discover all this and more in Concord, where history comes alive.



For big-time entertainment

See *Hugh Jackman Back on Broadway*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Jersey Boys* and other big shows playing in New York City. Book ahead through **Premium Seats USA** and get a **10 percent MTA member discount** for hard-to-get theater, concert and sports tickets. Visit www.premiumseatsusa.com and use the discount code **MTA**. A glamorous weekend awaits you!

For sheer relaxation



Soaking in a hot tub and relaxing in a sauna are among the pleasures you can experience during a weekend at **The Captain Daniel Stone Inn** in historic downtown Brunswick, Maine. You'll also enjoy fine food, luxury accommodations and proximity to such nearby attractions as the Federal Street Historic District and Maine Botanical Gardens. Part of the Choice Hotels group, the inn offers a **15 percent discount to MTA members**.

For sun and surf

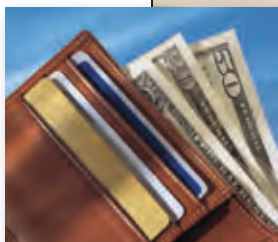
Head for one of the "Hot Destinations of the Week" featured by the **MTA Vacation Center** with stays from one night (Boston to Bermuda) or more, depending on how long you have to get away. Imagine a white beach, blue waters, tropical breezes, warm sun, cool drinks and you. You'll get great deals, luxury accommodations and exceptional amenities at all 26 fun-in-the-sun destinations.



Find more information on what to do in your **MTA Benefits and Discount Directory** – or go online to www.mtabenefits.com.

If you couldn't work because of a disability, what kind of shape would your wallet be in?

Savings may not always be enough when the unexpected happens. A prolonged illness, injury or even maternity leave could cause the average member to use all accumulated sick days or even exhaust sick bank options. Then what?



More than 26 million Americans suffer disabling injuries each year¹. Three out of four working Americans would have trouble supporting themselves within six months of a disability, and 90 million Americans do not have any disability coverage². This is where the MTA Disability Plan helps. It pays you 60 percent of your pre-disability income, tax-free, while you remain disabled due to illness or injury. It even provides a partial benefit if you can only work on a limited basis. These benefits can help cover costs such as your mortgage, rent, food, utilities, school loans, child care and other living expenses.

Sign up now during the MTA open-enrollment period

If your school district has a payroll slot for disability insurance deductions, you can sign up during the MTA open-enrollment period from Feb. 1 through May 11 without answering any medical questions. Your coverage is guaranteed. You will also be taking advantage of the MTA's extremely affordable group rates. Enrollment is simple and quick. Watch for an MTA enrollment counselor in your school or visit www.mtabenefits.com.



What's new for 2012

This year, districts can offer their members the disability plan with the option to have premiums paid through the convenience of a bank draft if they have not previously arranged for a payroll slot. This makes it simple to add the MTA Disability Plan at your school. MTA Benefits is extremely excited about this option because it will make this very important benefit available to a greater percentage of members. For more information, speak to your local president.

Also new this year and offered in conjunction with the disability annual open-enrollment period is the **MTA Critical Illness Plan**. Many

members are concerned about the additional costs they will incur if they suffer heart attacks, strokes, permanent paralysis or renal failure or are diagnosed with cancer. This new benefit through Unum Insurance Company will pay a lump sum to help cover additional costs incurred as a result of a critical illness. You may use the payment however you choose for expenses that health insurance does not cover.

Life can change in a heartbeat, and MTA Benefits is working to keep you protected.

¹National Safety Council, Injury Fact, 2009.

²LIFE Foundation, "Hit Hard by the Economy, Americans Risk Knockout Without Disability Insurance," May 1, 2009.

Take your chances

Sign up for the following online giveaways through MTA Benefits for three chances to win a \$100 gift card.

A total of nine \$100 gift cards – three each from TJ Maxx, Amazon.com and Visa – will be won by lucky MTA members. You might be one of them!

ENTRY DATES	GIFTS
February 13-24	Three \$100 TJ Maxx gift cards
April 16-27	Three \$100 Amazon.com gift cards
June 18-29	Three \$100 VISA gift cards

To enter, go to www.mtabenefits.com and click on "Members Only," then "MTAB Giveaways" and just follow the easy instructions. Winners will be announced on the site soon after each giveaway ends.

