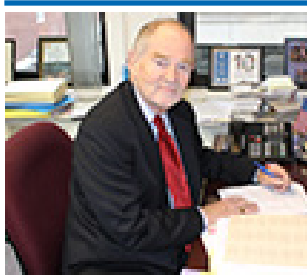


February/March 2018



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas J. Gosnell
President, AFT Massachusetts

AFT MA Meets the Challenge

My article this issue concerns two significant issues about which we all must be informed.

THE DECISION OF THE GROUP INSURANCE COMMISSION (GIC)

The Group Insurance Commission (GIC), in a tribute to the view that the most stupid of decisions can be made, did so last month. One can only wonder whether the majority of commissioners were on a flying saucer in outer space when they voted 8 to 5 to disrupt the lives of tens of thousands of earthlings. See the box on this page showing what the infamous 8 did. Not only was the substance of their decision dreadful, but also the process made one wonder whether they were aware that they function in a democracy and that their decision affected tens of thousands of Massachusetts citizens, some of them with dire health conditions.

The commissioners received the disastrous recommendations the night before they were expected to vote. What a way to prepare for a decision that would affect thousands upon thousands of state and local employees, women and men who provide essential services to the citizens of

Massachusetts. Despite this charade not one of the five labor commissioners was hoodwinked. All of them voted no.

Once the vote was taken, reaction was swift, vocal, universal, and completely opposed. Even Governor Baker, while not objecting to the merits of the plan, claimed that the rollout was very poor. GIC had no allies. Why

States Supreme Court will hear *Janus v. AFSCME*. A union member is claiming that agency fee violates his free speech rights.

In the 1970's the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that agency fee did not violate the U.S. Constitution because it was reasonable that nonmembers pay a fair share fee for the benefits they received from the

collective bargaining agreement. Last year the court in a 4 to 4 vote upheld that decision. Consequently, everyone knows what the positions of eight justices in the *Janus* case are. Justice Gorsuch, who was appointed after the 4 to 4 vote, is the deciding

INITIAL DECISION OF THE GROUP INSURANCE COMMISSION (GIC)

On January 18 the GIC, without regard for those covered by its health insurance plans, shamefully voted to make significant and dreadful changes beginning as early as July 1, 2018 for those whose health insurance comes through GIC.

The GIC voted to drop Fallon, Harvard Pilgrim, and Tufts health plans for all active employees and retirees not on Medicare.

The health plan choices for active employees and retirees not on Medicare will be Unicare, Neighborhood Health Plan, and Health New England. However, those municipal retired teachers who have been in the GIC for many years will be enrolled in Unicare.

The GIC has voted to drop Harvard Pilgrim for retirees on Medicare.

The health plan choices for those on Medicare will be Unicare and Tufts.

GIC is maintaining that most individuals can keep their doctors and networks under different plans.

All five union representatives on the GIC voted against these woeful changes. The final vote to accept was 8 to 5.

The GIC voted to reverse its decision on February 1, 2018.

should it.

Unions, united in their opposition, spoke out loudly and clearly.

The Massachusetts State Senate held a hearing at which Senator Spilka declared that the reaction she had received to the decision was greater than that of any other issue in which she was involved.

I testified for AFT MA at the hearing. Many others also testified in opposition. In fact, no one testified in favor.

Fortunately, shortly afterwards by a vote of 10-2 the commissioners, in a tribute to the strength of common sense and the opposition of so many, voted to reverse itself. Hooray.

However, the threats to health insurance coverage continue because too many believe that those covered should bear the rising costs.

In addition, if on the federal level the Republicans retain complete control of the government after the 2018 elections, be prepared for an assault on Medicare.

THE JANUS CASE

On February 26, 2018, the United

States Supreme Court will hear *Janus v. AFSCME*. A union member is claiming that agency fee violates his free speech rights.

Should the Court dispose of agency fee, what must we do? WE MUST RETAIN OUR MEMBERSHIP!

Retention of our membership means that AFT MA and all the local unions will be a vital force in the preservation and enhancement of public education.

Retention of our membership means that AFT MA and all the local unions can negotiate contracts that will enhance salaries, working conditions, benefits, and better education for our students.

Retention of our membership means that AFT MA and all local unions will be in a better position to fight for helpful legislation and to defeat legislation that attacks us and public education.

WE MUST RETAIN OUR MEMBERSHIP!

If you have any questions or comments, email me at tgosnell@aftma.net. ■

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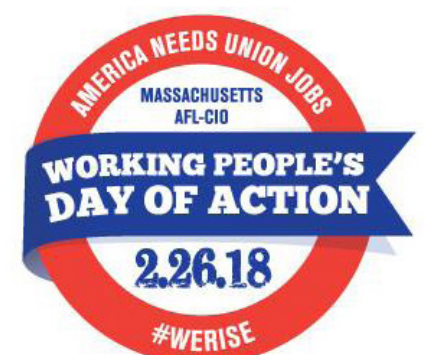
12 MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: East Boston High school

FIGHT WAGE THEFT

On February 26, Atty. General Maura Healey's Office will host a program from 4-6 PM at Suffolk University Law School (120 Tremont Street, Boston) to support people dealing with wage theft.

Lawyers will be available to offer legal advice and to discuss specific cases.

For more information, call 617-963-2327.



GET INVOLVED

Go to <http://bit.ly/WorkingPeopleActionMA>



IN BRIEF

AFT General Counsel David Strom has been working on the AFT brief for the *Janus* case. He recently visited AFT MA to update leaders on the case.

Listen and Lead

MOP training prepares members for engaging conversations

On Saturday, January 20, local leaders from across the Commonwealth came together with AFT MA representatives at AFT MA's Boston office for the first in a series of Member Organizer Program (MOP) trainings.

As the program had been so long in planning, AFT MA Political Director Jeremy Shenk was "psyched" to get started. His enthusiasm was matched by that of AFT MA and BTU organizer Derek Arthur, and AFT's Justin Tzuanos and Richard O'Brien, who had come to Boston just for the training.

"We're here to teach you how to have effective one-on-one communication," Tzuanos said, "which is the most effective way to build trust, move people to action, and simply to win. It is the cornerstone of what we do!"

When asked about his mission, Tzuanos replied that MOP was intended to help participants build power by engaging, activating, and mobilizing members.

"Our path to power is through one-on-one conversations, home visits, worksite team building, small group meetings, and collective actions," he said.

Though many people claim to prefer written or electronic messages, Tzuanos observed how many of these are deleted or recycled without being fully engaged.

"A lot of people may not see or read emails," Arthur echoed. "We need to find other ways to educate and engage them."

"Union meetings are great and worksite meetings are excellent," Tzuanos maintained, "but we need to have...one-on-one meetings because that is often where things get done."

As for social media, Tzuanos posed it as a tool to "drive these kinds of meetings."

Though the participants were clearly engaged and involved and eager to share their understandings of and love for the union, Tzuanos encouraged all local leaders to look for their own replacements right away.

"We need to identify new leaders to strengthen the union," he said, encouraging leaders to "build [your] bench to avoid burn-out."

While leaders need to "identify the next two or three generations of leaders and then motivate and activate them as leaders," Tzuanos also pledged his own and his colleagues' support, going so far as to insist that all leaders contact AFT MA Director of Organization Brian LaPierre weekly and hold bi-weekly team meeting either in person or by phone.

"AFT MA will support you and help you get what you need to do what you need to do," Tzuanos advised. "We will work with you to create a plan, establish goals and benchmarks...and follow up. All of this will support our mission and our vision."

"There is nothing too oppressive here," LaPierre encouraged, "and we are here to help."

Building on his colleagues' emphasis on the importance of personal engagement, Arthur then asked where one-on-one conversations were already happening and noted that they can happen at the worksite, at social engagements, during home visits, or even over the phone.

"The more important question is *why* we have them," he suggested. "The number one reason...[is] we want to build relationships."

When asked why relationships were so vital, MOP participants listed such

reasons as building trust, camaraderie, and solidarity.

"They build the union family," Arthur summarized, "and union strength."

After all, he observed, "if we do not know our colleagues, how can we work effectively with them?"

Arthur noted that one-on-one meetings can also be used to get members to do things like signing petitions or even signing union cards.

"We can also use them to obtain information...educate people...[and to] make assessments of our fellow members for such things as where

they stand on the union," he noted.

The greater part of the session was dedicated to establishing rapport with and engaging other members and colleagues.

"Introductions are hugely important,"

Arthur observed, "because they set the tone for conversations"

"Do not assume that they know why we are there," O'Brien added. "We want to get what is important to them."

In order to establish rapport, Tzuanos suggested a "Three W's" format, which involves saying Who you are, Where you are from, and Why you are there. O'Brien also suggested that members not limit or diminish the importance of the presentation by saying "It will only take a few minutes."

Though Tzuanos realized that members may be reticent or even afraid to engage others, he reassured them by promising AFT's support and also by reminding them that the conversations are not among strangers.

"These people are already in the union," he noted, "so they are already comfortable talking about these things."

Arthur recalled an online campaign in which leaders posted pictures of the doors they had been invited into.

"Many of them said they had only been able to get to a few people," he said, "because the conversations went on so long and they had even been

offered lunch!"

And while the need is great, the lift is relatively small.

"It's not like we're doing 22,000 doors in the next six months," LaPierre said. "We need to identify the people with whom we need to have conversations and focus on them."

With an effective introduction having been established, O'Brien then helped participants transition to the issues they wished to discuss.

"We have what we want to talk about," he suggested, "but we also need to find out what is important to the other person."

O'Brien then emphasized the importance of listening more than you speak, suggesting a ratio of 70:30.

"Listening gets the other person more engaged and can get them more involved," O'Brien observed, encouraging "open-ended" questions that allow and encourage others to speak about what matters to them. "Once you get me talking about what is important to me, it's easier to get me to move to action."

Though there are key issues to be discussed, the facilitators all agreed that finding out what matters to other members can inform current and future engagements.

"Keep asking questions," O'Brien advised. "It will lead to the agitation, which is where you get to your issues."

A packet of MOP materials further prepared members to speak intelligently about the issues and to inoculate themselves and others from anti-union attacks. They also suggested ending all engagements with a specific ask and a note of hope, much of which can be based on the growing numbers of engaged members.

"If you have an issue, it can be scary to go to the principal," Arthur observed, "but what if you can get 50 people to go to the principal together and say, 'This is an issue and it needs to be dealt with?'"

With the support of fellow members, it will also be easier to defend against and even overcome our enemies' arguments.

"It all about power dynamics," Tzuanos observed.

"But we have the union behind us," LaPierre pointed out.

"And remember that AFT is not the national union," Tzuanos added. "It's our national union!" ■



CALL AND RESPOND

Richard O'Brien (right) leads members through an engaging training

The Advocate

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Be Prepared MA AFL-CIO unites unions in preparation for Janus

On January 23, hundreds of union members and supporters from across the Commonwealth and across the labor spectrum (including members of AFT MA, MTA, AFSCME, SEIU, IATSE, Boston Carmen's Union, and Jobs with Justice) gathered at SEIU 1199 in Quincy to be briefed on the pending Supreme Court case *Janus v. AFSCME*, which is scheduled to be heard on February 26.

At the communications training, leaders from MA AFL-CIO and AFSCME briefed their brothers and sisters on the history of *Janus* and its potential consequences. Basically, if *Janus* passes (which it is widely expected to), workers will be able to benefit from the labor of their unions without being full members or paying their fair share of dues. As this result could potentially decimate not only union budgets but also membership (which carries with it the further risk of many locals being declassified if their membership falls below a certain point), members were advised regarding ways to "go on offense" in order to rally union support and maintain (if not enhance) membership.

"We need to make sure our voices are heard," said MA AFL-CIO President Steve Tolman, who invited members to become involved in a week of action the week of February 26 by visiting <http://bit.ly/WorkingPeopleActionMA>. "We need to get our members involved in this because, without our members, we're nothing."

In offering her office's support, MA AFL-CIO Public Sector Coordinator Enid Eckstein noted that the current fight is bringing together unions who do not often work together. "We are building infrastructure," she observed, "which is great!"

Calling the potential threat to the public sector "unprecedented," Tolman suggested that, while many would divide us, "*Janus* is a chance to come together around what divides us" and an opportunity to prove "the potential of our solidarity" and to "reclaim the narrative."

In his presentation, AFSCME International Communications Director Blaine Rummel posed *Janus* as "just one more attack on working people" and listed many past cases related to labor rights. The main difference, he suggested, is the support that we are receiving from members of Congress, Nobel Prize winners, and other legislative and community leaders. With this in mind, Rummel offered hope and suggested that we are "fighting this case to win." However, he continued, if five of the justices vote against us, we need to be prepared.

"We've got a few months left to make sure that we are doubling down on union organizing," Rummel observed, "and to make sure that people stick with their union."

According to Rummel, the "core message" we need to all keep in mind is that "this is a political attack" and must be dealt with as such. He also warned that "we cannot win" if we engage in the opposition's talking points.

"This is an opportunity to see our unions and activism stronger than ever before," Rummel maintained.

"We are trying to show that, come what may, we will be stronger together."

One key to unity and solidarity, Rummel maintained, is a what he called "message discipline."

Noting how union opponents use "jargon" to describe "union bosses" and other elements of the issue, Tolman emphasized the importance of "a unified message," the construction of which was the purpose of the meeting.

In order to craft a single message, 617Media-Group President Jeff Hall showed members how to keep the focus on the larger issues instead of focusing too much on *Janus*.

"The question," Hall suggested, "is what are you going to say when someone asks you about this situation."

Among Hall's tips were using terms that people can understand and discussing points that relate to all union members. Among the suggested talking points were that American needs union jobs, unions protect vital freedoms and strengthen communities and, perhaps most importantly, we are not alone.

"When we combine these frames and make them work together," Tolman suggested, "we create a strong framework."

Responding to members' requests, Hall then presented an example of how to respond to a specific question about *Janus*.

"If asked why we are demonstrating," Hall suggested, "we respond that we are here to support unions as they support working people. If they give us more time, just pivot from one point to another."

While he recommended against using union-specific language, Hall encouraged members to use "us" to talk about working people and "them" to talk about all those who would challenge and disparage workers. He also suggested that members use "the case" not to refer to *Janus* but to speak instead of attacks on working people.

While he had "no problem" with the frameworks, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell asked how workers could avoid talking about *Janus* when it is clear that our action level has risen just before the case is heard.

"We are rising up against a case," Hall replied, "but the case is a larger case against working people."

Pressing Hall as he suggested members might be pressed, MA AFL-CIO Chief of Staff Lisa Gallatin then suggested that members throw out "tough questions" to see how well Hall could "pivot." True to his word, Hall stuck to his talking points and continued offering advice and support for others striving to do so.

"Even if someone asks us what we will do after we lose," Hall suggested, "we can pivot right back to why we are going to stick with our union and the good that unions do."

In order to give members opportunities to practice their "lines," Hall had participants in the conference pair off and conduct faux interviews.

"The best spokespeople are always our members," he said, suggesting that we enlist new members to talk about why they joined unions. "We

need to feel confident going out to others so they can feel confident too!"

Eckstein then offered some details regarding the timing of the case, suggesting that the court "likes to hold the more contro-

versial cases until later" and predicting a decision around June of 2018. She then posed the question of "how we move from the message to organizing" and suggested that "this does no good unless we engage our members."

Among MA AFL-CIO's specific goals are to engage thousands of members in actions and conversations at their individual worksites and to "shift the focus" from *Janus* to those worksites and those members.

"We want to shift the narrative from the death of the labor movement to a story of hope in which workers and allies...demand that American needs unions," Eckstein said.

"Think of what story your words tell," Hall reminded. "Are we talking about facing a challenge...or about our demise?"

In addition to talking points, the conference was intended to share ideas about other things workers can do to support their common cause. Among the worksite actions Eckstein encouraged (during the Week of Action and at other times) were distributing stickers and leaflets, hosting workplace meetings, walking in together at the start of a shift and walking out together at lunch, and taking short "unity breaks," during which members organize mini-rallies around specific issues, such as health care, paid sick leave, and workers' rights. She also encouraged all members to document their activities on social media and elsewhere.

After encouraging members to join the Communications Roundtable, MA AFL-CIO Communications Coordinator Rachael Running also promoted the Twitter hashtag #WeRise and offered customizable templates and an online toolkit intended to help members to promote our unified message most effectively.

As lunch began, Gallatin encouraged participants to plan with their fellow members "so that we can start popu-

lating the calendar of events...during the Week of Action." She also invited members to post ideas on boards that had been distributed around the hall according to geographical region, each of which had the local media outlets listed to encourage members to submit letters to the editor and other news items.

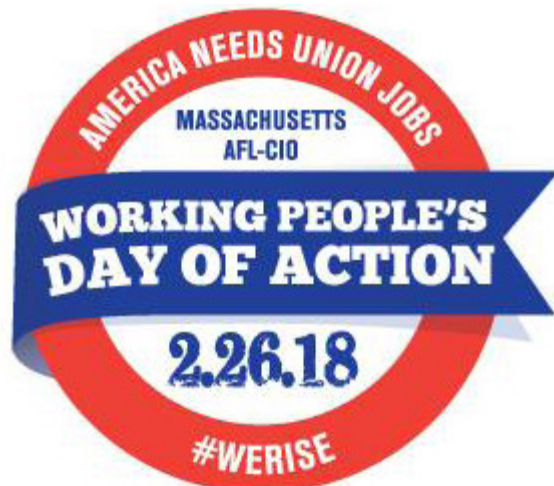
"We also hope that every member will turn out members at events in areas where you have bargaining units," Gallatin added.

During the working lunch, AFT MA representatives brainstormed about the most effective ways to engage and support our members.

"Everyone needs to do something," suggested Political Director Jeremy Shenk. "Even if membership is strong, locals need to get people doing something to get them engaged."

After Gallatin led a rally clap to bring the meeting back to order, Tolman returned to the podium to thank everyone for participating and for their hard work and to promote tools like UnionSignUp.com (which is free to MA AFL-CIO members who use code AFLCIOMA2018).

"We have a lot of work to do," Tolman said, "but we have every tool we need to organize internally and externally...[and] to get our message unified." ■



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Meet Your Representative: Sen. Cindy Friedman

As schools and school departments try to find what is ostensibly the best and most effective (or at least efficient) systems for educating their students, many students end up confused and lost in the shuffle of syllabi.

Fortunately, there are education-minded legislators like 4th Middlesex Senator Cindy Friedman who have felt their pain and are dedicated to doing what they can to at least mitigate it.

“Prior to attending college, I never felt fully capable or comfortable in the classroom,” Friedman recalls. “The style of learning that was prevalent when I was growing up was not the learning style that was suitable for my needs. Because of this, I always felt that I wasn’t successful in school.”

Coming into her own in college, Friedman would use her deep love of learning and her desire to help others for whom education was also difficult as inspiration to complete a Master’s degree in special education.

“I began my career as a public school teacher because I wanted children to have an opportunity and education that I feel I didn’t have when I was growing up,” she reasons.

Though Friedman left public service to work in the high-tech industry for 20 years, she never let go of her desire to make learning better.

“I sincerely missed the work I had done in the classroom,” Friedman

recalls, “and wanted to do something different that would allow me to give back to the community.”

Seeing opportunities in the political realm, Friedman became involved in the campaigns of others before launching her own.

“I decided to get more involved in political campaigns in order to get good people elected to office who shared the same values as I did,” she explains. “Now, as a legislator, I wake up every day knowing that I’m doing the right thing and am fulfilled by the work that I do for my constituents.”

Having been elected to fill the seat of the late Senator Ken Donnelly’s (for whom she served as Chief of Staff), Friedman has ensconced herself securely in many facets of local government. In addition to serving as Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, Senator Friedman is also the Vice Chair of both the Special Senate Committee on Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Options and the Joint Committee on Public Service. She is also a member of the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, the Women Legislators Caucus, the MBTA Legislative Caucus, and the Library Legislative Caucus.



STILL TEACHING
Sen. Cindy Friedman

With all these responsibilities, however, Friedman is still able to dedicate much of her time to maintaining her support for excellent and equitable education.

“Providing education for kids that meets their needs and learning styles is a very difficult task that takes

commitment, resources, patience and time,” she observes. “We need to focus on developing ways that we can provide students with a quality education while also serving their needs beyond the classroom. This requires everyone at the table to be open to new ideas.”

In addition to new ideas, Friedman suggests that true success will also require new perspectives.

“We also need to focus on external issues that may be impacting a student’s learning ability,” she observes, “such as housing, food insecurity, family life, and so on.”

No matter what she does in the legislature, Friedman is dedicated to hearing all voices and considering all ideas so that her opinions and efforts can encourage as many positive outcomes as possible.

“I’m focused on representing ideas and voices that often aren’t at the table in order to ensure that what we do is balanced and represents all interests,” Friedman maintains. “I will continue to work closely with my colleagues and advocates to ensure that our policies serve the interests of all residents of the Commonwealth.” ■

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FirstBook Creates Inviting and Inspiring Environments

By Brant Duncan

As educators, we are always looking for ways to help engage students, but also activate our members, parents and community partners to make learning fun and stimulating.

First Book is a great partner to achieve this goal.

While many AFT-MA members may be familiar with the 40,000 free book distributions led by members at United Teachers of Lowell or the Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals (the Salem Teachers Union and the Peabody Federation of Teachers are working on a 2018 distribution of 40,000 books), there are many more ways to work with First Book to make a deep and lasting impact in your school or community.

For example, the Lynn Teachers Union (LTU) distributed welcome packs for students new to the community including unaccompanied minors with backpacks, school supplies, basic needs items and diverse books to help students be prepared and acclimate to their new schools.

“Since this partnership began, I’m proud to say that LTU through fundraising, registering many of our members with First Book and hosting several book distribution events has helped to bring more than 100,000 free books to our students, members and community programs serving families in need,” said LTU president Sheila O’Neil.

For the past four years, Boston



Teachers Union (BTU) has paired book distributions with back-to-school fairs for parents to not only make sure students and families have books at home, but also to enable BTU members to connect students’ families to critical housing, safety and health information.

“Along with parents and members, we also welcome community partners such as homeless shelters, food pantries and youth centers to receive books to make sure all kids have access to books and reading wherever they are,” said BTU president Jessica Tang.

Several other AFT-Massachusetts locals and members use First Book regularly to get access to low-cost, high quality books and resources for their students, classes, programs and schools.

Here are just a few ideas:

- Use Social & Emotional Learning books to help students learn how to manage emotions, learn self-awareness, and build character. Many of the books featured in First Book’s Social & Emotional Learning Hub (www.fbmarketplace.org/sel-hub) are paired with free, downloadable resource guides for educators and parents.

- Are you looking for resources that speak to children with diverse backgrounds and experiences? First Book’s Stories For All Project (www.fbmarketplace.org/stories-for-all-project) strives to provide all kids with

diverse books that reflect a wide array of backgrounds, languages, abilities, life experiences, and more. Kids feel valued and validated when they see their own experiences reflected on the pages of books, and they develop curiosity and empathy when they read about experiences different from their own.

- Do you have kids who lack even the most basic needs in your school? Baltimore Teachers Union pioneered the concept of creating “Care Closets” in schools to make sure all students have access to toiletries, hygiene products, school supplies and even socks and underwear in easy-to-access but discreet locations to help reduce absenteeism and support families and students in need (www.fbmarketplace.org/basic-needs).

“One of the most impressive aspect of the AFT-First Book partnership is First Book’s willingness and flexibility to find innovative way to help us bring not just resources for our community, but the right resources that our students, members and parents need,” said Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals president Cathy Mastronardi

Regardless if you are a school secretary, PSRP, school nurse, or bus driver, First Book

can help you bring much needed resources to your students, schools and communities, all while engaging your members.

Here’s how to get started:

1. Sign up with First Book! All educators working in a Title I or Title I eligible school can sign up with First Book for ongoing access to brand-new, high-quality books and resources on an ongoing basis. Sign up at www.firstbook.org/AFT
2. Visit the First Book Marketplace at www.fbmarketplace.org to check out First Book’s wide array of books and resources.
3. To customize a plan, contact Melissa Elgersma at melgersma@firstbook.org. ■

Brant Duncan is Secretary/Treasurer of AFT MA.



Learning from History

“Upstanding” UMass Professor Shares Holocaust Stories

As the number of living Holocaust survivors continues to dwindle, it becomes more important for others to tell their stories so that deniers can be denied and the repetition of history can be stopped.

In her new book, *The Jews of Nazi-Vienna, 1938-1945: Rescue and Destruction*, UMass Dartmouth Professor Dr. Ilana F. Offenberger uses archival documents to explore and explain Jewish resistance in Vienna during the Holocaust. Among the topics dealt with in Offenberger's book and her speaking engagements are religious freedom and tolerance, what she calls the “warning signs” of genocide, and how so-called “ordinary” people respond.

“This book is the first comprehensive history of the daily life for Vienna's Jews during the Nazi period written in English,” Offenberger asserts, noting that it offers actual letters that, “allow the voices of the Nazi's victims... to speak for themselves.” And while the book offers many personal testimonies from a certain time and place,

it is also an exploration of universal themes that linger today.

As a full-time lecturer, Offenberger teaches upper-level courses in European History, including some with a particular focus on the Holocaust. She is also a member of the Holocaust



TELLING THE STORY
Dr. Ilana F. Offenberger

Committee of New Bedford and a former staff member at the Brookline-based Holocaust education organization Facing History and Ourselves (www.facing.org), an “incredible institution and resource for teaching strategy and methodology” that has equipped her “with the additional skills needed

true – not only write down the history and pass it forward on an individual basis through the written documentation, but to teach.”

When asked what prompted her “dream,” Offenberger explains that her grandmother had fled Vienna in 1938 and that her grandfather was also from the area. When her grandmother died in 1996, Offenberger

became even more interested in finding out about how they had lived and about the many others who had died. Spending her junior year in Austria, Offenberger visited the archives of the Austrian Republic, where she was presented with a trove of documents regarding her family and other Jews in the region.

“As soon as I found the victims' letters and corresponding documents,” Offenberger explains, “I knew that this was a piece of history that needed to be told, no matter how difficult or how much work it entailed.... I knew that I had to take these words far and wide and share them with as many as possible so that the world would know and never forget.”

Over the course of teaching nine courses at UMass, Offenberger (who will be lecturing about her book at UMass Dartmouth's Claire T. Carney Library in April, alongside one of the survivors she interviewed for the book) has “fallen in love with teaching” and hopes that her book will not only inform her students but serve as a resource to colleagues and other historians.

“The potential audience for this

work reaches beyond the scholarly community,” Offenberger maintains, “to descendants of the many...Jews who fled and to everyone interested in...cultural and social history. It will appeal, too, to readers interested in the emigration/immigration experience; the Nazi era; the study of genocide; or ongoing political issues...such as restitution and reconciliation.”

While she is a dedicated educator, Offenberger also hopes to be able to continue her own learning and research and is currently applying to a number of fellowships.

“[My] next project,” she reveals, “will explore and analyze the relationships between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors...during the Holocaust.”

By investigating what prompts people to go to such lengths to help others, Offenberger hopes not only to preserve the stories of the Holocaust, but to offer life lessons for all.

“These questions and others will be explored,” she says, “while attention is also brought to the question of what makes an ‘upstander’ and what defines the role of the righteous in times of great calamity.” ■

“Not Even the Sky is the Limit”

Dr. Oneeka Williams introduces a colorful new hero

While high-stakes testing continues to emphasize literature and number sense, many are having to look outside of the bubbles to find encouragement and inspiration in other vital fields like science and the arts.

Fortunately, there are people like Dr. Oneeka Williams

In addition to serving her community as a urological surgeon at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston, an Assistant Clinical Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine, and an overseer at the Boston Museum of Science, Dr. Williams also supports students through the courageous character she created- Dr. Dee Dee Dynamo. (<https://drdeededynamo.com>)

“I was first inspired to create Dee Dee for several reasons,” explains the Harvard-educated surgeon who has received the Science Club for Girls 2014 Catalyst Award for Diversity in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and the 2016 EVKIDS Youth Champion Award, and who is looking forward to accepting the 2018 Women of Courage and Conviction Award from the Council of Negro Women. “I wanted girls to see a strong, female...superhero who could solve problems and change the world.” Dr. Williams also hoped to “dispel the myth that scientists are old white men...by creating a platform that would engage and excite...all children about STEM so early that it becomes an integral part of their environment.”

By introducing this new model for a modern mega-scientist, Dr. Williams also hoped to change readers' perspectives about who could become scientists and stimulate interest among children of all backgrounds.

“I also wanted to increase diversity in children's books,” she adds, “so

that kids of color could see themselves represented by a strong and positive protagonist and so that all kids could recognize the value of characters from diverse...backgrounds.”

Such goals have served Dr. Williams well in her work with students, especially in Boston. Through the Boston Chapter of LINKS (<http://bostonlinks.org>), Dr. Williams organized a girl's mentoring program at the King K-8 School called Queens of King.

“The program focused on providing...access to positive role models and exposure to different careers,” explains BPS Office of Social Emotional Learning Director of Instruction and Support Services Khita M. Pottinger-Johnson when describing the monthly meetings of sixth grade girls. “Students were inspired to believe in themselves, resist negative messages, and take social responsibility.”

While at the King, Dr. Williams worked with the Boston Athletic Association to establish health programming and served as co-chair of The Boston Links Health and Wellness Committee, establishing a program that promoted self-esteem and empowerment among young women. Dr. Williams also used the Dee Dee Dynamo materials to promote science and reading at the King and elsewhere.

“I have spoken, read and shared Dee Dee at several other schools around the city, state and country,” Dr. Williams explains, “and she has been enthusiastically received.”

As Dee Dee demonstrates the powers inherent in diverse people and cultures, Dr. Williams suggests that her messages are universal. Among the key themes Dr. Williams cites are “the importance of support from family, friends and teachers, love for science and reading, positive think-

ing, and the power of integrating education and adventure as a viable tool for early and meaningful science exposure.” She also suggests that the books help establish that girls are “not just princesses, dolls and playthings,” which Williams see as “an important message” for both girls and boys.

While maintaining high hopes and standards, this multitasking author/surgeon remains committed to her own sense of fun and passes it along on every page, engaging and enriching readers at various developmental stages.

“All of our children need to be exposed to...positive values, positive role models, and a diverse set of characters that emphasize we are equally valuable and capable of contributing in a significant way to our world,” she suggests.

Among Dee Dee's many adventures have been trips to Pluto, examinations of asteroids and climate change, and other other-worldly and pressing-vital explorations, each of which involves lessons and advice regarding problem-solving and Dr. Williams' own set of what she calls Habits of Positivity.

“There is always a solution,” Dr. Williams asserts, noting that she applies this mantra both to her medical work and to her work as a writer.

By maintaining such a positive and optimistic mindset, Dr. Williams assures that people can better care for themselves and also for others.

“Our purpose is to care for others and to make a difference in people's lives,” she observes. “My daily work,

whether it is in the operating room, in the exam room, or in my books, is to change lives for the better.”

As Dr. Williams continues to strive to find more students and families who can benefit from meeting Dee Dee, she plans to celebrate her creation's fifth anniversary by donating books and materials to area schools. She has reached out to First Book and

also to Lawrence Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin, who is trying to help rebuild the school library for the fire-damaged Rollins Early Childhood Center (please see story on page 6).

“I would love to see the books in every household and in every library,” Dr. Williams says, revealing her own astronomical dream. “I would love Dee Dee Dynamo to become a household name...con-

tinuing to communicate the message of powerful positive girl superhero.... and create a framework for parents to work with children around developing a positive mindset.”

With such passion driving her, Dr. Williams is able to walk the talk that Dee Dee Dynamo offers so often that “Not Even The Sky Is The Limit!”

“My vision for Dee Dee is that she will become synonymous with believing that there are no limits,” Dr. Williams explains, expressing a hope that the books will not only encourage a love of reading, but also a desire to pursue new things, be they scientific or not. “I also hope readers develop a mindset of positivity and an appreciation that everyone has value and can achieve anything, regardless of gender or color.” ■



DEDICATED DOCTOR
Dr. Oneeka Williams

Fire and Ice

Rollins School forced to relocate after blaze ruins building

On one of the coldest days on record, teachers from the John R. Rollins Early Childhood Center returned to their fire-scarred building to pack up their rooms and move to what they hoped would be temporary facilities at St. Mary of Assumption Elementary School so their nearly 200 students could continue to enjoy a safe place to learn with as little interruption as possible.

While other schools in the district dealt with a two-hour delay that was called on account of the frigid temperatures, Rollins staff carried boxes in and out so they could try to prepare their new rooms in the one day before classes resumed.

The Rollins had recently celebrated its 125th year as a Lawrence public school, but an electrical fire on Christmas Eve resulted in a building that was ravaged by smoke and deluges of water, leaving multiple rooms as complete losses and leaving teachers and staff scrambling to replace what items they could in time for the new semester.

Despite the fact that the Center is across the street from a neighborhood fire station, the blaze took hours to control, thanks in great part to the snow and freezing temperatures that made it difficult to pump water into the historic building and also to navigate around it. In addition to firefighters from Lawrence, the multiple-alarm fire engaged teams from Lowell, North Andover, Haverhill, and even Salem, NH.

"The firemen were changing shifts and saw the fire," explains Lawrence Teacher Union (LTU) President Frank McLaughlin, mentioning that, as Lawrence is such a "city of old buildings," many of them predate fire codes.

In recalling the fire, McLaughlin also mentioned that, as there were and remain concerns about the building's structural integrity, the firefighters had to "break through the roof" and many teachers and staff have yet to be allowed back into the building.

"We're not allowed to take everything," noted 30-year Lawrence educator Donna Mogavero, who was concerned about personal and professional property being lost or damaged. On the other hand, Mogavero was

also encouraged by the outpouring of support the fire engendered.

"I've never seen so many people come together," she said, noting that even Principal James O'Keefe had literally rolled up his sleeves and was going room-to-room to see who needed what. "It's amazing!"

"I'm really happy that we were able to find a home where we can gather everyone," added paraprofessional Enfemia DeLaCruz. "I am happy to see how well the School Department and everyone involved - including the union - has gathered together to make this available on such short notice. It's a blessing and I am really proud and happy to be part of this team of Lawrence teachers!"



AN HISTORIC INSTITUTION
The John R. Rollins Early Childhood Center

Help Rebuild the Rollins
Give to
Rollins School Relief Fund
c/o Lawrence Teachers Union
Reliefs In
I Market Street
Lawrence, MA 01843
THANK YOU!

As proud of themselves as the teachers may have been (and rightfully so!), McLaughlin was even more encouraged to see his colleagues collaborating.

"The teachers are all going the extra mile," he observed, "It restores your faith!"

As it is part of a shuttered Catholic Church compound, St. Mary's is a faith-based facility. Even so, many of the teachers wondered what would become of them as they moved into it.

"I am not sure what to take," admitted one school nurse as she hurriedly packed boxes in the Rollins infirmary, noting that her colleague will be going with some of the students to Parthum Elementary. "It's overwhelming what we have to do by tomorrow morning!"

"Try to pull what [the students] like and what will make them feel comfortable in a new spot," one teacher advised.

"What do I do with my own personal items?" another teacher asked, explaining that, in addition to many folders that were filled with IEPs and other vital data, her room contained projects that her students had made for her and also books from her own home library.

As the building is historic, a full rebuild is necessary. The insurance estimates are around \$2 million, including nearly \$1 mil-

lion for the slate roof alone.

"It's going to take a long time to redo all this," observed AFT MA Field Representative (and former firefighter) Andy Powell.

"Thank God I didn't happen when the kids were in there," McLaughlin added.

"Everybody's ok," observed Building Representative Anita Fowler, "and that's what matters!"

As she helped coordinate the move while also organizing her own space, School Secretary Tracy Johnson recalled the Rollins fondly, speaking of the historic building like a lost friend.

"We had flags from each country the students are from," Jones recalled, noting the diverse population the Rollins serves. "They were all destroyed. It's sad!"

As his aunt and wife had both taught there, McLaughlin had special feelings for the Rollins and wanted to do all he could to support the staff there. When asked how they could be sure to get their belongings and that they would be safe in the building while the insurance assessors and construction workers had their way, McLaughlin tried to console and encourage his concerned colleagues.

"We asked the teachers to make a list of things they needed," McLaughlin explains. "One put on Mr. Potato Head. We laughed, but that is a daily essential for four-year-olds as it teaches the body parts. It is something they will use every day!"

In addition to what each teacher packed, parents and other community members brought donations to 301 Lebanon Street to show their support.

"We have a disaster relief fund," McLaughlin mentioned, recalling the many donations that arrived after the Bruce School fire (when many students were also sent to St. Mary's).

Not only will the teachers and students be without many of their familiar toys and tools, they will also have to deal with navigating a new building.

"The change in building for these kids is astronomical," observed Mogavero, citing the many special needs the students have and how sensitive they are to change.

"Can we ask the kids to help set up their rooms?" one teacher queried. "They should be part of it!"

As the Rollins was home to such a significant population of students with special needs, it enjoyed the support of a large cadre of dedicated paraprofessionals (all of whom were on hand to help with the move). Despite the great communal effort, everyone had to deal with additional requirements and restrictions, such as wheelchair access and avoiding items that had become infused with the smell of smoke, mold, or other allergens or irritants. While many teachers expressed a willingness to come in earlier and to lose days from their winter vacations (or even to sleep in the building), the tight timing

forced them to focus even more on why they were all there.

"The kids are our number one reason," one teacher said during an impromptu staff meeting during which LTU offered a catered hot lunch. "We need to be able to support those kids as soon as they come through the doors."

"If we cannot do that for them," a colleague agreed, "we are setting them up for failure."

In an effort to cheer up his col-



"IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S CRYING."
A portrait of John R. Rollins

leagues, McLaughlin reminded them of the holiday concert that had recently been hosted in the auditorium that was now covered with mold.

"Your brothers and sisters are here with you," he reminded his fellow members.

Lawrence Receiver Jeff Riley also thanked LTU and AFT MA for their support, both

with the fire and with the larger Lawrence educational landscape.

"The building is not being shut down," assured COO Anne Marie Stronach, suggesting that people call the new facility (for which the phone numbers are all the same as they were in the old building) "Rollins School Annex" "We want it to be as normal as possible.... We'll get there and well help you through all this."

Despite Stronach's hopeful claims, with only hours before the students arrived and many teachers still mourning their old building and the materials they had to leave behind (at least temporarily), it was difficult for people to look each other in the eye and wish each other a "Happy New Year."

"It's a bad time of year for this," noted AFT MA Director of Organization Brian LaPierre. "It's never a good time, but this is particularly bad." ■



"WE WILL RISE AGAIN"
LTU President Frank McLaughlin assesses the damage



INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS
Damaged flags of the nations represented by the students at the Rollins

Table for Two?

Veteran BPS teacher Michael Maguire sets the table for change

Every day, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school support staff do all they can to provide students (and each other) with information and support that will sustain and strengthen them as they prepare for life's challenges and opportunities. Unfortunately, while districts like Salem (see October/November

2017 issue) are encouraging and involving the students in sustainable and educational nutritional programs, many schools do not provide the sustenance and support that young minds and bodies require.

Veteran teacher and AFT MA Executive Board member Michael Maguire has taken it upon himself to find out why so many school meals are not giving students and staff what they need by inviting school and community leaders to share a school lunch with him. Maguire also invites anyone who wishes to follow the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram handle #BPSLunchDate.

When asked where the idea began, Maguire explains that since he is also a parent of BPS students, he has experienced first-hand what students feel like at the end of a hard day of learning.

"I noticed that my children were 'hangry,'" he says, noting the familiar combination of "hungry" and "angry."

If his own children were hangry, Maguire figured that other BPS students would be too. He decided to act.

A firm believer in leading by example, Maguire decided not only to eat in the cafeteria himself, but to invite others to do so as well.

"I think that the leaders of the schools should endure the same conditions as the students," he suggests. "Truly, it is the only way to improve our students' situations."

On January 5, 2017, Maguire sent an "old-fashioned letter" to Boston City Hall and also to BPS headquarters proposing that, as the people there

are ostensibly invested in the goings on in Boston's schools, they come to see and experience what is going on in the school buildings.

"I asked [them] to walk a mile in the students' shoes," Maguire

says. "I started out with the bold proposal that the cafeterias at both the Bolling Building and City Hall serve the exact same food...as BPS students get." Maguire also suggested that all functions at the two venues use the same prepared meals that students get and that all lunch breaks be kept on the same 18-minute schedule that students ostensibly enjoy.

Receiving no reply to his letter, Maguire emailed over 20 more civic leaders on January 8 to ask them for their thoughts on the school lunch program. Maguire also began a bold lobbying campaign on Twitter to encourage Boston Chief of Education Turahn Dorsey to join him for a meal.

The meal with Dorsey was held on January 17 in the cafeteria at Boston Latin Academy, where Maguire has been teaching for 24 years. Though Maguire is "appreciative" for the "wonderful conversation" he had with Dorsey, he is not sure if either of them were as appreciative of the meal itself.

"When that day arrived," Maguire explains, "we stood in the same lines as the students, ate the same food, and left the cafeteria when the students did." Maguire explains, noting that, in the process of investigating what the kids eat, he found that many do not, as the food is unappetizing or the lines too long for them to get their food and have time to eat it, let alone enjoy it.

"I asked [a] student why he hadn't started his meal, let alone finish it," Maguire recalls. "He said the line to get the food was long and slow moving. The next day I observed the length of the students' lines- They were 55 deep!"

Two days later, Boston City Council President Michelle Wu agreed to meet Maguire for lunch. Maguire even received a timely reply from the office of Mayor Martin J. Walsh, but ultimately their schedules did not cooperate. A bit later, Maguire had the pleasure of dining with City Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George, who is a former BPS teacher (see December, 2015 issue).

"After I was elected," Essaibi-George says, "I knew one thing I needed to do was to go...have lunch with Michael Maguire. He has been and continues to be an advocate for feeding our kids good, substantial meals at school."

After her meal with Maguire, Essaibi-George said her "biggest take-away" was that the portions were "too small."

"I think of my growing boys preparing for high school," she says, "and it just wasn't enough food!"

Maguire also sat down with former City Councilor Tito Jackson, as well as Boston School Committee (BSC) members Michael Loconto and Jeri Robinson. Boston Superintendent Tommy Chang also agreed to a meet-

ing, but again scheduling conspired against them.

"At my lunch with Tito," Maguire recalls, "I showed him what students in Newton eat and compared it to what our students are served." They both agreed Boston could do better.

By the end of April, the Boston Parents Council had sent a letter to the Mayor asking about the vendors who were supplying BPS with food. "I learned that the Council had been lobbying for better food long before I entered the scene," Maguire explains. "We then worked together."

As the school year wound down, Maguire's meal movement continued to heat up. On May 12, he testified at the BSC about school lunch. Four days later, he was joined for lunch by Representative Ed Coppinger. The next day, Senator Michael Rush agreed to a lunch date. On May 22, Governor Charlie Baker's office also agreed to try to find a suitable date for lunch.

"All our efforts paid off." Maguire observes, noting how, over the summer, BPS awarded a new food contract to Revolution Foods. The BPS also increased the budget allotted to pay for student meals, which will allow students to enjoy more nutritious, and admittedly more expensive, foods.

"My mantra through all of this was that, just as BPS has a responsibility

to nourish the minds of Boston's youth," Maguire maintains, "so too must it nourish their bodies."

While student focus is key to any such campaign, Maguire advises, he also has other tips for those who might want to make change in the

system.

"Have a single purpose," he says, "be polite and positive, use pictures on social media, and create a catchy hashtag." ■



BREAKING BREAD

BPS Food and Nutrition Director Laura Benavidez, School Committee Chair Michael O'Neil and BPS teacher Michael Maguire



FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

A typical BPS meal, c. 2016-17

Keeping Her Promise

AFT President Weingarten continues to show support

Just one month after the Rollins fire, AFT President Randi Weingarten came to the temporary home of the Rollins to marvel at the progress the teachers and staff had made and to offer her continued support.

"This is the second time national has stepped in," explained LTU President Frank McLaughlin, recalling the 2015 fire at the Bruce School (please see December 2016/January 2017 issue). "I know that all I have to do is make a call and Randi and her team will be here to help."

"What we are trying to do within the AFT is to walk the walk," Weingarten explained.

"The union wants to do what we can not just to show up (which is important), but to walk the

walk of caring and of fighting for what we believe in."

Upon her arrival, Weingarten was warmly welcomed to the Rollins by Principal James O'Keefe and his talented team.

"The union is more than the re-

leagues, people work together and get the problem taken care of."

As the Rollins is a neighborhood school, Weingarten thanked Mayor Dan Rivera, the local firefighters, union leaders, and school staff and noted how the entire neighborhood

has offered support.

"The teachers were in the street as the school burned counseling the kids," she recalled, "and they had one day of professional development and everything was back up and they are running great now!"

After taking a tour of the school, Weingarten personally involved herself in an even larger circle of support by reading and distributing books that had been donated by FirstBook to the nearly 200 children.

"My goals with trips these days is to



PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AFT President Randi Weingarten promises to help students learn

sources," she observed. "It is the people.... When you have good col-

lift up the resilience and tenacity and caring and compassion of people who work with children and public school workers," Weingarten explained. "To be able to create the kind of normalcy and stability you have only a month out- that's the Lawrence way!" ■



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Holliston

Red Letter Days

Holliston bands together for fair contract

Since December of 2016, the members of Holliston Federation of Teachers (HFT) have engaged in no fewer than 15 negotiation sessions in an effort to garner a fair and equitable contract. Having worked under an expired contract since the start of the current school year, the members of Local 3275 consider this effort urgent and a key step to improving education in the district.

"The HFT is looking to fairly compensate Teachers," explains HFT President Jaime Cutone, noting that teachers in Holliston had their salary step system frozen in each of the previous two contracts and that teachers who have been at the top steps for the past seven years have only enjoyed a 5% cost of living adjustment (COLA), while the cost of town health insurance family plan premium has increased by over \$4000 per year since 2011 in a community where, Cutone points out, "town employees pay a whopping 40% of health insurance premium."

Despite the lack of a contract, the members of HFT emphasize that they have continued to provide the same high-quality and innovative programming and supports that students and families in Holliston have been privileged to enjoy for years.

"Holliston teachers are devoted to their jobs and their students," Cu-

tone maintains, "and pledge that this contract dispute will not affect their professionalism and dedication."

In December of 2017, the sides agreed to engage an impartial mediator to help move the conversation

forward. The first mediation session was held on December 4. At this same time, Holliston teachers began showing up to school wearing red as a symbol of their solidarity and support. To support this effort, a parent group created an online store where staff could obtain shirts to wear on what came to be known as Solidarity Days. Cutone also notes that the union members have been making appearances at School Committee meetings "as a reminder that we're all together while we're working toward a fair contract."



UNITED FOR THE UNION

Holliston educators wear red to signal solidarity during negotiations

In addition to launching social media campaigns to raise public

awareness (@HollistonTeachersHFT and @HollistonHFT), Cutone prepared a press release in the form of an open letter that was intended to notify parents and other stakeholders of the teachers' plight.

"To increase communication between the negotiation team and our constituents," Cutone explains, "we have implemented 10-minute meetings as a way of uniting teachers, giving teachers a voice and communicating relevant information in person."

tone also said that HFT seeks explicit language to protect planning time for elementary arts and specials teachers.

"Lower teacher salaries and fewer benefits can be detrimental to the district in the long run when faced with retaining and recruiting highly-qualified educators," Cutone observes. And while Cutone assures that HFT "fully understands the challenging economic times faced by Holliston," she pledged her local's commitment to "attaining a compensation package that at the very least matches the rate of inflation in our community."

The result of all this effort was that, on January 29, the Holliston School Committee and the Holliston Federation of Teachers reached a tentative agreement, according to which the teachers will receive COLA raises of 1.25, 2.5, and 2.25 percent over the next three years.

"I am so impressed that our teachers never let any of that frustration spill into the classroom while we worked together on a fair contract settlement," said Holliston School Committee Chairperson Anne Louise Hanstad, admitting that the negotiations had been "protracted."

"Holliston's teachers remain united in their efforts to work collaboratively in order to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of all students in Holliston," Cutone commented. "The process of collective bargaining provides teachers with a vehicle so this important work can take place." ■

Meet Your Colleague: Jaime Cutone

As she continues to learn about the ever-expanding lists of demands of being the new President of Holliston Federation of Teachers, Jaime Cutone is able to look to her colleagues and also to her own teachers and guides for inspiration and support. She looks back in particular to a young teacher she had when growing up in what she refers to as a "small, blue-collar hometown" in Rural WA.

"In my ninth grade Geology class," Cutone recalls, "my regular science teacher had taken in a student teacher; a gentleman in his 30's. It was at that moment when I bore witness an adult learning how to be a teacher and combining that with their passion for science, that it dawned on me...[that] I could do that."

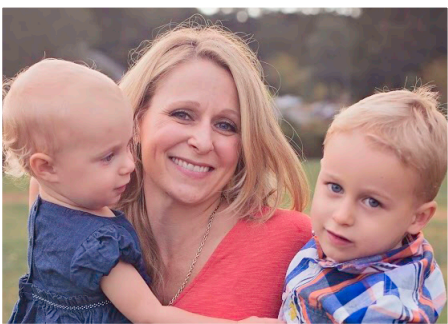
While the junior teacher demonstrated how to learn while teaching, the mentor teacher also inspired Cutone's educational endeavors as well.

"I loved both of my science teachers," she says. "The energy and passion they shared through teaching science and the kindness, attention, and encouragement they gave to their students helped me to see that there's more to teaching than just the facts."

In addition to great teachers, Cutone enjoyed interesting subjects that she would later share with her own students. Top among these was her Introductory Physical Science (IPS) class.

"[It was] a hands-on experi-

ment-based science course engineered to build critical thinking in the scientific mind," Cutone explains. "The valuable skills and incredible experience I gained from the IPS class launched me into planning how I could become a science teacher."



PASSING ON THE LEARNING
Jaime Cutone

ment-based science course engineered to build critical thinking in the scientific mind," Cutone explains. "The valuable skills and incredible experience I gained from the IPS class launched me into planning how I could become a science teacher."

Driven to earn a degree that would lead her to a career teaching science," Cutone enrolled in college courses at the age of 15.

"I grew up knowing that my parents would not be able to help me pay for college," she explains, "so it was up to me to figure out how to reach my goals."

As a local community college was offering dual credits for high school students, Cutone took full advantage.

"I saw this opportunity and realized this was the way for me to be able to go to college," she says, recalling demanding days that included college classes, high school track practice, and a job to help pay for it all. Fortunately, it all paid off.

"In 1994, I graduated with an Associate's degree the same weekend I graduated from high school," Cutone recalls. "Three weeks later, I was living in Bellingham, WA, taking classes at Western Washington University where I eventually graduated at 19...with a Bachelor's in Geology while working three different jobs: waitressing,

nannying and as an office assistant at a law firm."

After graduating from WWU, Cutone crossed the country to attend Lesley University in Cambridge, emerging with an MEd in Science Education.

"MA was attractive to me," Cutone explains, noting that her father's family had a "long familial history" in Cambridge. "As I set my sights on where teachers and public education were held in high regard by the public. MA has had a long-standing reputation of providing a high level of quality education and that was something I wanted to be a part of."

While in the Boston area, Cutone continued to work as a waitress and also volunteered as an educator at the Arnold Arboretum and a teacher and counselor for Horizons for Youth.

"My job as a waitress was the key to being able to attend college," she says. "Waitressing throughout graduate school and during my early years as a teacher was how I supplemented my income until I was finally able to give it up after becoming a more experienced teacher."

After garnering her Masters, Cutone taught and coached at Dover-Sherborn Middle School, eventually becoming the head of the science department. She then spent some time as a licensed family child-care provider. Two years later, she took her talents to Holliston, becoming an eighth grade science teacher at the Robert Adams Middle School. In this capacity, Cutone has supported students in their understandings of such diverse scientific topics as Chemistry, Genetics, Physics,

and, of course, IPS. Cutone has also served the Adams community as a track coach. Cutone has also served the Adams community as a track coach.

"My experience working with children...has enhanced my innate ability to provide a nurturing, positive environment in order to explore creativity and to stimulate learning in children," Cutone says, citing among her greatest strengths her creative and organizational skills, effective communication skills, and "a desire to develop a happy, stimulating environment for children."

In addition to caring for her students, Cutone also cares deeply for her colleagues and strives to do all she can for them as well.

"My involvement with the union started in the early 2000's as a building representative, extra compensatory committee member and negotiations team member," Cutone recalls, noting that she has also served on the negotiations team and now as the president of Local 3275.

"I have continued my activism for speaking up for labor rights in public education," she says. ■

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Librarians Speaking Up

MLSA engaging members and reaching out

On Sunday, January 7, librarians from across Eastern MA dug out of the recent “snow bomb” and jkcame together in the Wayland Public Library’s Raytheon Room for a member meeting of the Massachusetts Library Staff Association (MLSA).

Before the general member meeting began, the MLSA’s Executive Board met to discuss plans for increased member engagement and involvement. Among the ideas raised by newly-elected President Pat Kelly, Vice President Dan Haacker, Secretary Lori Salotto, Treasurer Matt Amory, and AFT MA President Tom Gosnell and Field Representative Mike Regan were the addition of more member meetings that would be offered in various locations in order to allow and encourage retirees and members to attend and an all-librarian conference that could focus on issues that pertain to AFT MA’s librarian members in particular.

“I would love to have a conference just for librarians,” Gosnell said, “just like we do for our paraprofessionals.”

Kelly assured her colleagues that it would be offered on two consecutive days so that more members could attend. Among the topics Kelly suggested were student debt, the challenges facing paralibrarians, and a member suggestion for a discussion of how to deal with guests who do not behave appropriately in the library.

“Tom has mentioned the possibility of getting a speaker from the Library of Congress,” Kelly noted. “And if you cannot think of anything right now, please reach out to us. We really want to hear from you and your members!”

Kelly then took a moment to explain what MLSA is and how it is made up of 31 libraries, all of which contribute dues to fund the field representatives who negotiate their contracts and deal with any necessary disputes or other issues.

“Your field reps are your point of contact,” she explained, pointing out Regan and Caryn LaFlamme, who had joined the group for the member meeting. “What we want to provide is support. We want to provide educational opportunities...and to be here to offer help and guidance.”

Kelly also suggested members check the MLSA website (<http://mlsa.ma.aft.org/>) to search for contract language and to learn what challenges and benefits are currently in play.

After Kelly thanked her colleagues for “braving the snow and ice to come to the first MLSA meeting of 2018,” she introduced colleagues from AFT MA and invited members to introduce themselves and to share from which libraries they had come. Among the communities represented were Braintree, Canton, Lynnfield, Middleboro, and Wayland.

“This is the biggest member meeting ever,” Regan observed.

As the new president, Kelly admitted that she was still “getting up to

speed about the job requirements,” and suggested that her goal was “to meet more chapter chairs and open up...good lines of communication.”

While she does a great deal for MLSA, Kelly was also recently recognized for her work with the North Shore Labor Council. Similarly, Salotto also sits on the board of the

enjoy unionized libraries, Gosnell reassured his fellow members that all of the surrounding communities do.

“I hope that we can all work together to keep libraries afloat and to expand them,” Gosnell said, promising the ongoing commitment of AFT MA. “They contribute so much to the quality of life of the cities and towns of the



LIBRARY LEADERS
MLSA Treasurer Matt Amory, AFT MA President Tom Gosnell, MLSA Vice President Dan Haacker, President Pat Kelly, Secretary Lori Salotto, and AFT MA Field Representative Mike Regan at the first MLSA member meeting of 2018

Massachusetts Library Association’s Paralibrarian Section and helps decide on applications for the Paralibrarian Recognition of Achievement Certification.

“It is a voluntary program that is intended to formally certify paralibrarians who demonstrate breadth of knowledge in up to seven areas of expertise,” Salotto explained.

In addition to being VP, Haacker also serves as the co-chair of MLSA’s Scholarship Committee.

Commonwealth.”

After encouraging all members to reach out to her and to her colleagues on the executive board for any reason, Kelly led the assembled into a proposed amendment to the by-laws (which had been developed with help from AFT MA Counsel Haidee Morris) that would allow members to stay involved and even have leadership positions in MLSA as long as they wish to maintain their affiliation. After a sharp-eyed member noticed the absence of an Oxford comma in the proposal, the amendment was passed unanimously.

After discussions with Morris and AFT MA Treasurer Brant Duncan, it was also proposed that retirees and former members who wish to maintain their affiliation (and so be qualified for union benefits) pay partial dues. This proposal (which recommended \$50 for retirees and \$100 for former members) also passed.

Pausing for questions and comments, Kelly then introduced Regan’s discussion of Supreme Court case Janus v. AFSCME, et. al.

“If they rule- and we expect them to rule- in the negative, agency fee will no longer be constitutional,” Regan explained. “That means that you are either a member or not a member... but you still get the benefits of the contract.”

Though the first impression may be that not paying and still getting is the better choice, Regan pointed out that, “As a member, you obviously get more benefits than a non-member.” Regan also warned that, if membership falls below 50%, unions can be decertified.

“If the union is decertified,” he explained, “you become employees-at-will without a collectively-bargained contract and all that we fought so long for falls away.”

That is why AFT MA has been working so hard to engage members and to convince them to stay involved.

“Look at your contract,” Kelly advised, “and look at what it is doing for you and see what you are really saving.”

“We have to get our members aware of what it means to be part of a union,” Gosnell maintained, “It will be devastating to us as individuals and it will be devastating to us as an organization.”

In fact, Gosnell suggested, it is the “biggest challenge” he has seen in his 50 years as a union member.

Amory then explained the threats that workers are facing, especially those related to their rights to organize.

“For at least the last 60 years, there have been forces aligning against unions,” he said. He then clarified that agency fee payers are not cut-rate union members, but they are also not members of the bargaining unit,

“They are entitled to vote on ratification of contracts,” Amory explained, “but they are not members of the union.”

They get the contract,” Kelly added, “but they cannot get any of the other benefits.”

“They cannot run for office,” La-Flamme added.

“They are not eligible for scholarships,” Salotto said.

“That is why we need to explain this to people,” Kelly emphasized. “A lot of people misinterpret this, but we need to try to decrease the number of agency fee payers.”

“Unfortunately, the trend is not in our favor,” Amory observed. “So I want to make it absolutely clear that we need to have members. We do not need to have agency fee payers. That’s that!” ■

Please join the MLSA Executive Board at an open meeting on March 14, 2018 at 7 PM at the Thomas Crane Public Library in Quincy.

Come with questions, ideas, and concerns.
(<http://mlsa.ma.aft.org/>)

Please note that next full member meeting is Sunday, May 6, 2018.

It’s our union, let’s make it stronger!

“We give \$5,000 to graduating seniors,” he explained, encouraging members to ask for applications and investigate scholarships offered by AFT MA and the AFL-CIO, for which they may also be eligible.

As difficult as the issues facing librarians are, Gosnell said that working with people like the MLSA leaders makes his job much more enjoyable.

“I enjoy my job enormously,” Gosnell said, “but I must admit that the challenges get bigger and bigger.”

Gosnell also noted that, before he entered teaching, he worked at the Boston Public Library.

“I have always liked libraries and librarians,” he said, “and I am so proud to be able to serve you all!”

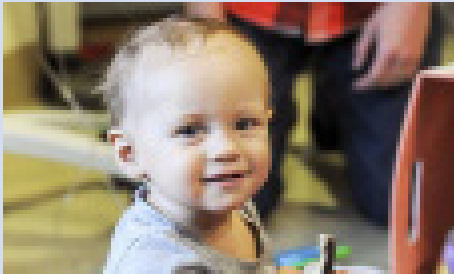
After all, Gosnell observed, librarians are educators.

“When you think of what you provide for lifelong learning,” he said, “it is absolutely fantastic!”

While he admitted that his own hometown of Winchester does not

Care for “Callie”

Calliope “Callie” Carney is Lawrence teacher Kathryn Carney’s daughter. Diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML), she needs YOUR help to pay for medical expenses.

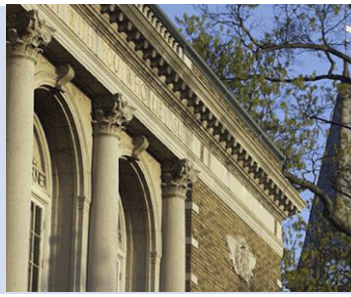


To donate, go to www.gofundme.com and search for “Care4Callie”



On Campus

Grant V. O'Rielly
Executive Committee of the Faculty Federation,
Local 1895



Unbundling the College Degree

I recently read that one of the reasons the Disney Company purchased the 21st Century Fox stable of movies and TV shows last year was that Disney wanted to be larger to better compete in the new era of streaming services. As many consumers are moving away from bundled services like traditional cable providers and towards independent content providers like Amazon and Netflix, the entertainment companies are having to adapt. Some have suggested that this kind of unbundling might also happen in the education arena.

The idea of unbundling the college experience has been discussed for several years by business and employer groups who are looking for specific skills in the employees that they hire, by traditional education groups such as the Association of American Colleges & Universities and the Carnegie Foundation, and by the proponents of new, disruptive modes of education such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), competency-based education, educational badges and certificates, code academies, and the like. While some propose separating

teaching, research and athletics, others suggest that degree courses would be selected by students or recommended by employers. More extreme ideas have advising, credentialing and teaching all being outsourced.

Will education follow the a la carte entertainment model? Might students, (aka "the customers") want to choose which courses to take and when, selecting from different institutions or maybe earning "educational badges" in skills that would transfer to their program of study? This is a very reasonable question. After all, millennials no longer purchase music albums but instead create their own personalized playlists by buying individual songs from iTunes. Why pay for the entire album if you only want one or two songs? Similarly, they may ask, why take that prescribed course when there is a more interesting or meaningful course being offered somewhere else?

Despite its potential appeal, I do not believe that we will see this happen in education. At least I hope not! A college degree is not the same as a mix-tape of songs. While you may not like the third track on an album

and will never listen to it, not taking a course because you have heard that it is difficult, or that employers don't believe that it offers useful skills, or you are just not interested in the material is not the same thing at all.

A college degree is a carefully constructed sequence of courses, some of which are intended to teach foundational concepts and content, others to provide needed background and skills. Then there are the general education courses intended to provide student with a strong liberal arts experience, all challenging the student as they become engaged learners and develop that all-important skill of learning how to learn. And all of these courses are needed to prepare the student to be successful in the varied and multiple careers that he or she will have after graduating from college.

Equally as important as the content of a degree is the fact that the degree earned has the imprimatur of the college. The college must maintain control over what the graduates will learn. Every college has a minimum requirement for in-residence courses as one way of maintaining this control. Dictating the program's curriculum content is another way to ensure

graduates with credentials from the college do meet the college's standards and expectations. Keeping this control over the program content is crucial if the college is going to continue to enjoy its reputation with employers and other schools.

Of course, a program's curriculum should never be unchanging; it must adapt to ensure that graduates do have the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in an ever-changing workplace. Input from employers through advisory boards and external accrediting bodies provides this important feedback. Also, the curriculum should not prescribe every course that a student will take. The undergraduate years are an opportunity for a student to explore his or her interests; this might be Shakespeare's sonnets, or American political history, or astronomy. Having the space to take courses not needed for the major is a chance for students to discover a passion for a minor or even a new major. It is certainly a way to engage with people who have diverse worldviews and is one of the myriad ways in which the college experience provides students with the skills to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. ■

Help the Homeless

Paraprofessional Perspective
By Marcy Winer

I did not know what to expect when I first walked into a motel on the North Shore three years ago. I had just begun my book project, Project DEAR, and was navigating my own path with homeless children and families. I wasn't nervous: I was just very interested in how I could help them.

At my first book reading, there were about six children. My friend Patty came with me to read to them and to help display books so the children could take them home. It went really well and the children were very excited to have books of their own to keep. I also passed out many books to the moms and other siblings. The director was thrilled that I was going to return on a regular basis. During later visits, many children and parents approached me to ask for certain books. More visits were scheduled and a trusted bond was forged.

In 2016, the motel shut down and these families were displaced and moved again to various locations for temporary housing. Many have moved on and relocated to other areas of the state since then. Even so, I still deliver books to the director who is still in touch with some of these families.

The number of homeless children in Massachusetts is staggering. Last February, the *Boston Globe* reported that the number of children who are homeless has more than doubled in nine years. A report stated that more than 33,000 people have stayed in a homeless shelter at least one night. Many of these families have children who attend our schools.

Homeless students can exhibit vastly different behaviors. Some come to school

as though nothing is wrong. They are apparently able to concentrate on schoolwork and seem (emphasis on "seem") outwardly ok. Other children come to school a mess. Their clothes are worn out and they are visibly tired from a commute that is longer than a bus ride should be. It is hardest when students come to

us temporarily. We settle them into the class, they make friends and begin to trust the grownups in the class who care for them six hours each day, and then they move again. Homeless children crave stability and the one thing they desperately need is often the last thing they ever get.

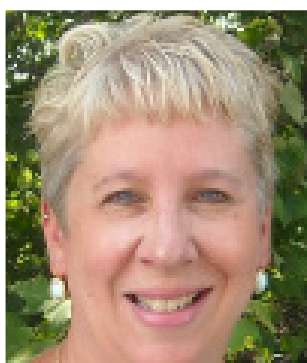
When I see children in the motels and shelters that I visit, I spend as much time with them as I can. As I read to them, they often share with me their stuffed animals or the toys they are playing with. A while back, a little girl climbed into my lap for me to read to her, while her mom pushed a stroller with a younger sibling around the motel lobby to try to quiet his cries. These children are just little people who need the same things that all of us need- human touch, a home and someone to care. I cannot do enough for these children. Nobody can.

In our district, we are fortunate to have Catie's Closet, named after Catie Bisson. Catie's mom Anne-Marie founded this non profit organization in 2010 as a way to honor Catie's memory. This organization provides clothing and toiletries to impoverished children. It is set up in unused spaces in schools and is now in 54 schools throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Children from preschool through grade 12 are helped by this program. What a wonderful way to have Catie's legacy live on by helping children who need it the most!

Homelessness is one struggle that is increasing each school year. It is heartbreaking and will never be some-

thing we just "get used to seeing." All children deserve a home with their family, but if that isn't possible, their school family can be a refuge from their own personal storms. ■

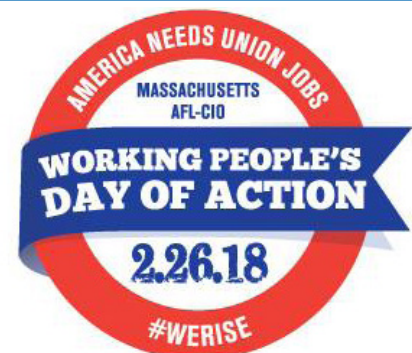
Marcy Winer is a paraprofessional in Lowell and the founder of the literacy program Project DEAR (www.facebook.com/Project-DEAR-738334756244926).



LENDING A HAND
Marcy Winer



MEMBER TO MEMBER
BTU member Rosa Midince reaches out to other members as part of AFT MA's engagement campaign



GET INVOLVED
Go to <http://bit.ly/WorkingPeopleActionMA>

FIGHT WAGE THEFT

On February 26, Atty. General Maura Healy's Office will host a program at Suffolk University Law School (120 Tremont Street, Boston) to educate and support people dealing with wage theft.

Lawyers will be available to offer legal advice and to discuss specific cases.

For more information, call 617-963-2327.



Retiree Corner

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



Get Your Head Out of the Sand!

Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security are under attack and at risk of disappearing!

In the past fifteen months, how many times have you heard these words uttered in disbelief? But it is happening! Apparently, too many members of Congress are seriously contemplating significant changes to these programs. Some readers who are not yet on Medicare or Social Security or may never be eligible may be tempted to stop reading this article, but that would be a mistake. Too often people do not get informed about issues that they feel do not apply to them but that actually do. Every time we let elected officials get away with not representing their constituents' issues and concerns, we weaken our government.

I am very concerned with what lies ahead. All too frequently these days, we hear about another member of Congress who has decided to leave politics. As of January 14, 2018, there were 43 representatives who decided not seek re-election to their U.S. House seats. In the meantime, they have nothing to lose by cutting government programs.

There are not many still in the work force who lived in the pre-Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid era. As a result, few may have experienced what

it was like to not have medical insurance or an income in retirement. As a kid, I remember forgoing nickel ice cream cones because we were all sacrificing to pay for my grandmother's eye surgeries that ultimately failed to preserve her sight. Medical costs were not what they are today, but then neither were salaries.

Many think that because the community in which they work covers them, they do not need to worry. Health insurance costs are the greatest expense next to the school budget and many would love to cut these costs. The federal government gets away with health insurance cuts and communities will most likely be next.

Two pieces of legislation that MRU is supporting are H2987 (43 co-sponsors), and S619 (38 co-sponsors), both of which address improving Medicare for all. Before you dismiss the single payer concept, read how comprehensive these bills are to really understand what this system entails.

We also support and will work for the two bills that deal with how to pay for effective health care: H596 (46 co-sponsors) and S610 (20 co-sponsors) which offer reasonable approaches to paying for health care.

During the George W. Bush administration, members of Congress (with the support of AARP through the

Medicare Modernization Act) levied a surcharge on seniors for Medicare B and Medicare D premiums based on their income. The new tax law lowered the amount of income that increases this premium and for all intents and purposes will have some seniors paying 100% of their Medicare costs. Some suggest getting off Medicare and going on straight insurance. As public retirees in Massachusetts, most of us could not make that decision because our district states that, if we are eligible, we must go on Medicare. We are working with Congressman Jim McGovern to see if something can be done about this injustice in the new tax law. Our hope is not only to get rid of the lowering of the income amount but to actually increase the income amount.

We have all heard the quote that "bad things happen because good people do nothing." I do not think there is any time in our nation's history that apathy has been so pervasive. It is frightening. We all must get involved! Please contact me at 781-365-0205 and let me know that you are interested in helping with these issues. Remember- when we keep our head in the sand, we know what part of the anatomy is sticking up in the air and we are all getting burned there! ■

Meet the BTU Black Caucus

By **Adrienne Jordan**

The Boston Teachers Union Black Caucus is the base for the local chapter in MA for the AFT. The chapter is open to accept members from across the state. I have been the chair of the Caucus since 2016.

I recently had the opportunity to reflect on my time spent under the leadership of Brenda Chaney. Some important issues we discussed were the teaching styles of our Educators of Color.

In our conversation, Chaney observed that, when we first started together, we faced some of the same issues black teachers are dealing with today. She explained that recruitment and retention of African American teachers was an issue then just as it is now. She also remembered having

colleagues who knew recruiters at Historically Black Colleges that would talk to them about having their students apply in Boston.

"We had a couple of people who had expertise about passing the MTEL and helped with tutoring," Chaney recalled. "I remember we also asked what type of professional development we might be able to provide for them. We also tried to do outreach to get more members involved."

In another recent conversation, Timo Phillip reflected on his involvement as a founding member of the Boston chapter. He joined the AFT Black Caucus in the late 70's when the AFT convention was in Boston. Phillip then began to organize the Boston

chapter with their guidance. The Caucus met primarily at the AFT national convention at a time when there were no black delegates for the BTU. Phillip was first elected as a delegate in 1981 when the convention was in New York. There was not a strong presence of

the Black Caucus until Sandy Feldman became AFT President. At the national convention, Caucus members supported important causes such as democ-

racy through secret ballots when voting and constantly pushed for more Black organizational staff in the AFT.

In 2016, several colleagues and I brought the Boston chapter back into existence. Today, I can proudly say that our Black educators

have played a significant role in helping students of color in Boston make contributions in their communities, helping them apply to colleges (especially Historically Black Colleges), and, most importantly, serving as positive role models for them.

In the Black Caucus Boston Chapter, we strive to unify our members through supportive, creative and social change. I believe the best partnerships create something bigger than the sum of what each person can create on their own! ■



LEADING THE LEARNING
Adrienne Jordan



CAUCUS AND COMMUNITY
BTU Black Caucus members at a recent event

SEMINARS

Preparing for Retirement

These free seminars deal with most of the issues one should address when preparing for retirement from a public sector job in MA. They are open to all.

Monday March 5, 2018 2:30-4:30
Salem High School
77 Wilson Street, Salem, MA

Wednesday March 7, 2018 3:15-5:15
Wilmington High School Library
159 Church Street, Wilmington, MA

Wednesday March 14, 2018 2:00-4:00
Wilmington High School Library
159 Church Street Wilmington, MA

Monday March 19, 2018 3:30-5:30
Collins Middle School Library
29 Highland Avenue, Salem MA

Thursday March 22, 2018 3:30-5:30
Franklin High School
218 Oak Street, Franklin, MA

Monday, March 26, 2018 3:30-5:30
Ralph C. Mahar High School
507 South Main Street, Orange, MA

Thursday, March 29, 2018 3:30-5:30
Methuen Education Association Office
184 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen, MA

Monday, April 2, 2018 4:00-6:00
The Relief's Inn
1 Market Street, Lawrence, MA

Monday, May 14, 2018 3:00-5:00
Lynn Teacher's Union Hall
679 Western Avenue, Lynn, MA

Please visit marieardito.com to find additional seminars as they become available.

Register for seminars by calling Marie at 781-365-0205 or emailing mardito@retireesunited.org. Be sure to give your name, phone number, and the names(s) of the seminar(s) you wish to attend. Also, please let Marie know who you hope to bring along.

AFT MA MEMBERS

Do YOU have issues
you want to see
discussed?

Send ideas to
advocate@aftma.net

We want to hear
from YOU!

Help AFT Heal After Hurricanes

Donate to AFT's
disaster relief fund
at www.aft.org

or send a check to:

AFT Disaster
Relief Fund

555 New Jersey Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20001

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: East Boston High School

All's Fair: Science fair gets students talking STEM

On January 12, hundreds of East Boston High School (EBHS) students and scores of faculty and friends gathered in the historic school's gym for the 2018 Science Fair.

"This is truly a great event for our school," says EBHS Headmaster Phillip Brangiforte. "It brings all students of all backgrounds and academic level together."

From paper clip aerodynamics to new ideas for water filtration, over 250 students presented painstakingly designed tri-folded boards to fellow students, faculty, and guests.

"We try to invite as many people as we can from outside," notes 20-year teacher George DeGregorio, adding that, in addition to using EBHS faculty as judges, there were also professors from Boston University who have partnered with EBHS as part of their Research Experiences for Teachers (RET) program (see October/November 2017 issue).

Even if the students do not choose scientific paths after graduation, AP Biology & Physics Teacher John Menkens suggests that the Fair "can really make an impact" as the projects "help young people to create...a place

in which science is freely explored, wondered about and puzzled over."

In addition to encouraging students to engage in scientific study, the Fair also gives them an opportunity to

develop their communicative skills.

"Studies show that most ELL students only engage in English 10 minutes a day," explains Science Director Theresa O'Neill. "This gives them an opportunity to practice English, both through

describing their projects and through the research."

"I was incredibly proud of my students that day for their courageousness to present their projects to judges in a second language," adds SEI Biology Teacher Andrew Faiz. "Seeing SEI students at the Fair is a profound statement of equity in science instruction at our school. The representation and participation of our English learners shows that, even though they are still learning English, they are still capable and ready to engage in the higher-order thinking that scientific analysis demands. It also attests to the dedication of our teachers who work hard to make science accessible, exciting, and an option for their future careers."



DIGGING DEEPER
Science Teacher George DeGregorio engages a student about his research



FRESH INSIGHTS
EBHS students Katherine Delgado and Angel Castillo present their work

research questions and hypotheses to their analyses and conclusions.

"This is our research," explained Angel Castillo, guiding guests through pages of notes regarding the relative amounts of Vitamin C in orange juice of varying levels of freshness.

"We hope to study this further,"

added project partner Katherine Delgado, "perhaps in next year's Fair!"

"It was wonderful to see our students present their work with such excitement and enthusiasm," Menkens

observes, noting that the Fair "would never

have gotten off the ground" without the collective efforts and dedication of our science faculty. It was their kindness and their passion for helping young people that gave our annual showcase life."

"Our students were so proud of their accomplishment," Brangiforte observes, "which makes me so proud of them. I am proud of our school community for coming together to support this very important event.... East Boston High School is truly a family. I am truly blessed to be the Headmaster of such a great school!" ■

Virtual Reality Engages Real Collaborative Learning

As planes flew overhead on their way to and from Logan International Airport, flights of a different kind were taking off inside East Boston High School (EBHS).

Led by self-described "cowboy teacher" Scott Foster, EBHS students were taking full advantage of a short-term loan of a virtual reality (VR) machine from MIT to try their hands at creating worlds through which entire bodies and minds can move without limits.

While VR technology is cutting-edge, Foster suggests that this may be more boon than bane, as pretty much everyone is still in an experimental phase.

"A lot of kids have ideas that have not yet been used on this platform," he says, "so they can find ways to do what exists better. There are not as many points of entry in the PC-based world."

As there is more opportunity for engagement and success, Foster suggests that the class may be uniquely inviting to students, regardless of their past experience with or expertise in technology.

"Computer lab often bifurcates students," Foster observes, suggesting that many students are either really into technology or not at all. "Here... every kid is having fun and engaged!"

Foster adds that some students even stay after class or join the school's Computer Club so they can engage and experiment even more.

"A lot of kids get inspired by others," Foster observes. "If one says they don't understand and one says they do, [they] go with the do!"

Though most students spend a good deal of class time focusing either on their own screens or on the large projector screen in the front of the room, the other walls in the converted classroom also depict their dedicated efforts. In addition to a Van Gogh-esque painting of the time-traveling

TARDIS from the popular PBS series "Doctor Who," the walls are covered with large student-crafted posters that explain some of the worst incidents of hacking and

cybersecurity issues the world has ever known.

"The thing that blows me away," Foster observes, "is the care they took preparing these posters."

Before coming to EBHS, Foster had taught English, math, and other topics in Europe and Asia and had spent time as a Peace Corps volunteer and radio host overseas as well.

"When I first came here nine years ago," he recalls, "we did not even have

computers!"

Undaunted, Foster and his intrepid students scoured the historic building for parts and ended up building their own systems.

And while not all of the current hardware is compatible with the software the students are using, such scarcity has made the students appreciate all they do have and has also encouraged collaboration among them as well.

"We have bright kids here," Foster maintains. "They do what they have to to get what they need."

"It came together through the efforts of all of the organizations," Gonzales explains, noting that teachers were "strategically chosen from various content areas to gauge its effectiveness as a teaching/learning tool across various classes." When asked about Foster, Gonzales praises the teacher's "willingness to try to adapt it" is his school and in his curricula.

"Eventually we would like to see Oculus used throughout the district as a learning tool in all grades and content areas," Gonzales suggests.

When the VR machine first arrived, Foster admits that he was not quite sure what to do with it.

"We all had fun learning together," he recalls, applauding his students for "Frankensteining together" successful

codes, just as they had assembled the computers out of disparate parts using trial and error and mutual support.

"I hope they'll remember the problems they had," Foster says, "so they can realize how they were able to solve them."

As the three-week session was so successful in terms of student engagement

and also in terms of engagement of the scientific method of experimentation and development, Foster hopes to have a permanent loan established soon so that he can develop curricula around VR.

"We started at the Pong level," Foster smiles, referring to what many consider to be the first video game.

"We have come very far!" ■



POINTING THE WAY
Computer Teacher Scott Foster works with EBHS students



COLLABORATIVE EFFORT
EBHS students work together on a VR project

SMILE!

AFT MA has approved a dental plan for its members.

Information can be found on our website (www.aftma.net).

Questions can be sent to John Gregorio at johng@teacher-retirementsolutions.com.