

Educators for a Democratic Union

Guide to the Massachusetts Teachers Association Annual Meeting – May 9th & 10th, 2014

FROM HOUSE PARTIES TO THE HYNES: REFLECTIONS ON RUNNING A GRASSROOTS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN by Barbara Madeloni

For nine months I have been traveling across the state engaging in conversation with MTA members at house parties, at Williams, in meetings with local boards and rep councils, and even a few bars. When I entered this race it was with the intent not only to win, but also to grow Educators for a Democratic Union. While we don't know what the results of the election will be, we do know that EDU membership has taken off, and that the members are beginning to re-imagine what our union can be.

The campaign started in the fall with house parties, small gatherings of educators invited by a friend or a colleague to come meet a candidate for president of the MTA. A few themes emerged within these meetings. It was remarkable how many people felt disengaged from the statewide MTA. Young teachers especially had a lot of questions about the relationship of the local to the statewide union, how decisions were made, and how to have voice. We talked about the issues that mattered to educators and, again and again, I heard: the testing is suffocating us, the teacher evaluations system is based on mistrust and is burdensome, and the RETELL course is a lot of work but will not lead

to better support for our ELL students. I heard from members aching for a chance to tell their stories, to make sense of why they were more stressed and overwhelmed than ever, of why they felt mistrusted, and of how to deal with a growing sense of loss as the work they cared about was reduced to numbers.

There are EDU members talking with their colleagues about becoming active in the union in order to transform it, to engage our union and our communities to end the assault on public education, and bring meaning and joy back to our work.

If the campaign had stayed there, it would have been a failure, but something else happened in these conversations, something best exemplified in the organizing we are seeing in Western Massachusetts where, at the end of a house party in Holyoke a teacher said: Can we have a meeting of Educators for a Democratic Union for western Massachusetts? And we did. About 20+ teachers came to the first meeting. We talked to each other, shared our stories and our hopes. We watched a film clip of a talk by one of the leaders of the Seattle MAP boycott. And before

we knew it, we had plans, strategies, more meetings, with more people attending, stand outs to support teachers at Holyoke's Morgan school, teachers and parents speaking at school committee meetings, a community screening of the film "Standardized," people going to union meetings and running for office. We had an active grassroots movement of educators in Western Massachusetts. And even in those places where we have not yet organized, EDU members are talking with their colleagues about becoming active in the union in order to transform it, to engage our union and our communities to end the assault on public education, and bring meaning and joy back to our work.

Coming into the Hynes Convention Center May 9, I will be filled with enthusiasm and optimism, not only for a victory in the campaign for president, but because, no matter what happens, we have changed the conversation and opened up new ideas for what it means to be a union. We better understand how we can plan, organize and act together for our union, our students, and our future. I have no doubts, we have started something that will not stop.

- -INSIDE THE GUIDE: EDU's 2014 Annual Meeting Primer- -

Our In-depth Guide to this Year's New Business Items, Contested Elections, and Key Issues

AN EDU PRIMER TO THE 2014 MTA ANNUAL MEETING

We hope this guide will help orient newcomers to annual meeting, facilitating your involvement over the weekend.

Annual meeting is a wonderful event, the most democratic part of the MTA, and the one involving the most members. Typically, about a thousand MTA members come together to debate the best direction for the MTA; any delegate may speak to the issues. This year there is a contested election for president, with EDU supporting Barbara Madeloni, and a contested election for vice president (EDU has not taken a formal position).

Annual Meeting Overview

The (formal) meeting begins around noon on Friday, although there are often caucus meetings in the morning (including EDU, itself, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon in Hynes Room 305, and again on Saturday from 7:30 to 9:00 am, same room), and those caucus meetings may be one of the best chances to meet with people who share your interests and viewpoints. Annual meeting contains a mix of from the podium speeches and presentations, together with delegates debating issues and setting

policy for the MTA. Friday afternoon, a key item is adopting the budget.

This year there are contested elections, and Barbara Madeloni, the EDU-supported candidate, has a very good chance of winning *if* we can turn out the vote and reach out to persuade people. The election is from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM on Saturday. If there is a run-off for vice-president, it will take place later in the day Saturday. The annual meeting typically ends early to mid-afternoon on Saturday.

For most of us, speaking at Annual Meeting is the first time we will have addressed a thousand people. But we strongly encourage you to take the plunge.

You may (or may not) enjoy seeing who wins MTA's "Friend of Labor" award (and a bunch of similar awards), and hearing their remarks, events that cumulatively may take half of the total meeting time. But for many of us the most important part of the meeting is debating the issues put forward by members, typically in the form of a New

Business Item (NBI). The New Business Items that have implications for the budget (say, to send \$10,000 to Sandy Hook, or to a group opposing high stakes testing) have to be voted on Friday afternoon before adopting the budget.

Then the budget is debated, often at length, with people making motions to add expenditures for one or another cause, or to put the money set aside for something. On Saturday, we debate items without budgetary implications (say, to direct the MTA to oppose the legislation that would cut the healthcare benefits that members will receive when they retire).

Debating New Business

Anyone may submit New Business Items, and that can be done quite late in the process (up to the end of the day Friday, if the item does not contain budgetary implications), but if you wish to submit an item it is much better to join together with a significant group of people (say, other members of EDU) and to submit your NBI well in advance.

If you want to speak on an issue, you simply go to any micro-

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION: Who We Are

Educators for a Democratic Union (EDU), a caucus within the Massachusetts Teachers Association, strives to open up MTA decision making and develop a more proactive, progressive approach. We want the MTA to listen to members and involve us in all key decisions, and we seek to make the MTA a force promoting educators' vision, rather than simply responding to attacks on educators, and all too often negotiating an MTA retreat.

phone (not necessarily the one closest to where you are sitting) and take the appropriate color-coded sign, which rests in a box by the microphone. Green means you want to support a motion, red that you oppose it, and a yellow sign is to ask a question or raise a point of order. When debate is in progress the chair alternates between those with red and green signs, so that both sides can be heard.

When your turn comes, the chair will call on “Microphone X,” your microphone will turn on and your face will be projected on the screen. You have 3 minutes to make your point. If someone has a yellow sign, they jump to the front of the line. With a yellow sign in theory you are only to ask a question or raise a point-of-order; in practice people often try to make a speech for or against an issue, in the form of a thinly disguised question.

For most of us, speaking at Annual Meeting is the first time we will have addressed a thousand people. But we strongly encourage you to take the plunge: these are your friends and colleagues, fellow educators. This is the largest gathering of educators in the state. It represents a real chance to influence your fellow MTA members.

The voting and debates are important, and it’s impressive that a thousand members are there and that so many speak at one or another point. But annual meeting is also a chance to meet MTA members from other locals, to make new friends, and to share ideas and experiences. Come to our caucuses Friday 10-12 and Saturday 7:30-9:30, both in Hynes 305.

Voting in Elections

For the top offices, president and vice-president, although the term is for two years, the once in four years open seat contest is the best (but not the only!) chance to make a difference. This year there are open seat races for both president and vice-president.

Barbara Madeloni, the EDU-supported candidate for president, is running on the issues as “a new voice for the MTA,” a candidate committed to speaking out against the attacks on education, organizing vigorous member-led discussions of what is happening and how to respond, and fighting for our own vision of education, all of this in alliance with students, parents, and the community. Her opponent is running on a platform of: I’ve been vice-president for four years, and usually the vice president becomes president, and I’ve served faithfully for many years in many different positions, so if you want

to keep things going the way they have been for the last four years, you should support me.

Three candidates are running for vice-president, in the hopes that they will serve as vice-president for four years, and then become president for four more. Those three are Janet Anderson of Taunton, Bob Becker of Wachusett, and Len Zalauskas of Worcester. All are members of the MTA Board and their respective votes on retiree healthcare benefits can be used as one indicator of how each might approach important issues. Bob Becker voted to support the leadership and approve making it harder for current members’ to qualify for full healthcare benefits when they retire. Len Zalauskas abstained, saying that he did so because he had not yet had a chance to consult his members. Janet Anderson spoke in opposition to the cuts and voted against them.

This year, some elections for MTA Board and the Executive Committee will be contested, others not. The Board includes about 50 members elected by district, with each district representing about 2,000 MTA members. Candidates had to take out nomination papers in January or February; to run they had to submit 50 or more valid signatures from their district by March 1.

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION: 2014 CAUCUS MEETINGS

Hynes Convention Center Room 305

Friday: 10am – Noon

Saturday: 7:30am – 9am

Discuss a vision for a stronger union and develop strategies to enact progressive new business items.

PARCC-COMMON CORE: TEST CASES IN THE STRUGGLE OVER DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLING by Jessica Wender-Shubow

A rapidly growing number of parents, teachers and school boards are concluding that high stakes standardized tests are bad for children and bad for democratic society as a whole. They are asserting the rights of teachers, parents and students to opt out and they have the support of school boards in a lengthening list of Massachusetts communities including Worcester, Cambridge, Mendon-Upton, Norfolk, Peabody, Tantasqua, Westford, Westport, Berkshire Hills Regional and Hamden-Wilbraham Regional. These school boards recognize that communities deserve a say.

The democratic impulse behind this stance is at direct odds with a current tendency of MTA's state-wide leadership to sign on to the larger testing agenda, rather than to challenge it at its core. This unfortunately ends up aligning MTA with an "interlocking directorate" of private investors, political appointees (prominently among them, our own Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Mitchell Chester) and venture philanthropy groups that are seeking to use the private money of an economically privileged few (to quote a Boston Globe ad) to "drive the change they demand."

In supporting the opt-out movement, EDU is calling instead for education policy-makers to be made accountable

to communities, and to recognize that communities span neighborhood and workplace. This means respecting collective bargaining too, in a movement that must, to take democracy seriously, work from the bottom up to achieve equity across zip codes. The current emphasis on high stakes standardized tests cannot get us this equitable democratic accountability. For one, there is no transparency.

No number of references to "critical thinking," and "rigor," in descriptions of the Common Core national standards can change the fact that using high-stakes tests means that students and teachers will be required to narrow the meaning of knowledge and creativity.

The new test being piloted in our state called PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) is being created by mega-publishing company Pearson. Like any for-profit company which seeks to protect its proprietary interests, Pearson is refusing to release to schools either test results from its current pilot, or its scoring methodology (which includes questionable automated scoring of essays).

Two, the test is computerized and timed, placing students with less access to computers at school and at home, now and in the past, in a disadvantaged position from the start, just as they are by a system that leaves the wealthy with economic access to other educational supports. Third, the test will be used to evaluate teacher performance without being subject to the collective bargaining process. Thus, as with all one-size-fits-all, standardized tests, PARCC necessarily reinforces the divide between the economically privileged and marginalized communities, and further diminishes the professional power of teachers, individually and collectively. The test emphasizes what unaccountable private investors and employers want students to do and be, not what communities decide they need.

Those of us involved in the opt-out movement know that there is no shortcut to delivering quality education that truly respects the whole child. No number of references to "critical thinking," and "rigor," in descriptions of the Common Core national standards can change the fact that using high-stakes tests means that students and teachers will be required to narrow the meaning of knowledge and creativity. This must be the case because a standardized test only accepts some answers and these must be

delivered (particularly in this instance) in just one sequence as well as form.

Moreover, the value of the Common Core standards methodology itself needs to be debated, as well as the testing. The standards call for enclosing the meaning and significance of any source within evidence presumably given by the written text or math problem alone, and limiting meaning to that. For a worker who needs to understand computer code so she can write a manual that activates it, that might be fine. However, as a formula for all teaching and learning in schools, it has dangerous ramifications if we aim for a just and democratic society. We must ask: what is lost when a student is discouraged from expressing what might be missing from the text -- or perhaps from his entire school experience -- that he believes to be important?

The movement for public education has long argued that

educational materials can and should be used to encourage children to engage with their world in a self-respecting and creative way. The hope has been that this can inspire students to change the world for the better. Movements for social justice extended this fostering of self-respect and creativity to encompass a celebration of cultural diversity and history that helps students fill in gaps and end the distortions left by white supremacy's historical legacy. Such commitments are expressly rejected by the Common Core in favor of a very narrow idea of what the PARCC name refers to as "college and career readiness."

Let's listen to David Coleman, an architect of the Common Core standards, describe the goals of the standards himself, and consider the implications: "...[F]orgive me for saying this so bluntly [but]....as you grow up in this world you realize people don't really give a shit about what you feel or what you

think....It is in a rare work environment that someone says, 'Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood.'" This market-oriented approach to schooling makes the work everything and the individual or unique community nothing; it reduces work and students to the isolated task alone instead of encouraging them to question the task; and it evades responsibility for eliminating democracy in school, the workplace, and the polity, turning all decisions over to people whose power is derived from wealth alone. This is why EDU is calling for MTA, as a union of those who depend on concerted action to counter such power, to commit itself to organizing a more critical stance toward market values and market control of education policy today as a necessary part of respecting students, teachers, and their communities.

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION: SAVE THE DATES!

Whatever the outcome of this year's Annual Meeting, EDU has big plans to move forward with our vision for the MTA. Set aside time in your calendar now to be part of our next steps!

Saturday, May 10: Join us at the Pour House immediately after the close of business on Saturday to celebrate and discuss this year's annual meeting. (The Pour House is at 907 Boylston St, Boston; across the street from the Boylston St. entrance to the Hynes Convention Center, next to Trader Joe's.)

Saturday, June 14: We'll be holding a statewide meeting of the EDU from 10 am - 2 pm somewhere in the middle of the state. Keep an eye out for an announcement confirming the times and location. Among other things, we'll be discussing plans for a fall EDU Conference, and how to engage with a national network of public education union activists.

August 3-7: Are you going to the MTA's Summer Conference in Williamstown? If so, you may be able to connect with the EDU there!

Fall 2014: The EDU is in the beginning stages of planning a fall conference focusing on engaging our locals and communities in efforts to support public education. If you want to be part of the planning process, please come to the EDU meeting on June 14, or contact anneta.argyres@gmail.com.

EDU & HOLYOKE TEACHERS: Defending Students by Fighting Data Walls

Holyoke has been a model of the kind of activity we would like to see around the state. In the fall, teachers in Holyoke held a house party for Barbara Madeloni, the EDU-supported candidate for MTA president. As a result of that house party, teachers decided to hold a Western Mass meeting of EDU.

In the fall there were several meetings, each drawing 20 to 30 people, mostly from Holyoke but from other towns in Western Massachusetts as well. People talked about a range of issues, but the issue that kept coming to the fore was Holyoke teachers' concerns about "data walls."

Holyoke teachers in grades 1 through 8 were being required to put up data walls, typically in areas accessible to the public. Each data wall listed the students in the class by name, and alongside each student's name were their scores on standardized tests, in green if they were passing, in red if they were failing. Holyoke is a low income community, and the students are about 75 percent Puerto Rican. The Morgan school, now pushed into Level 5 status, has the highest percentage of students on free lunch of any school in the state.

EDU members were outraged about many issues, but the one that most concerned them was what data walls did to their students, the ways students were publicly shamed and humiliated.

Teachers and parents decided to make this the first issue on which they took action.

EDU members packed the next meeting of the school committee, and a half-dozen teachers spoke out about data walls. We made sure there was lots of media coverage. No one defended the data walls, and most school committee members (and parents) had known nothing about them.

EDU members were outraged about many issues, but the one that most concerned them was what data walls did to their students, the ways students were publicly shamed and humiliated.

The superintendent declared that he was shocked, shocked, to discover that data walls identified students by name. (Doing so is, among other things, illegal. It violates FERPA. That is much less important than what it does to students.) He said that anyone listing the names of students was violating district policy and by golly he would be disciplining them. Teachers then showed that the Professional Development training they had received included slides showing data walls with the names of individual students, and telling / requiring teachers to follow these models. The district's pictures of teachers winning awards, featuring the teacher, principal, and school superintendent, were routinely taken in front of the

classroom's data wall. The superintendent admitted nothing, but stopped talking about disciplining teachers.

Data walls with individual students' names have, for the most part, come down. Unfortunately, an over-emphasis on high-stakes testing continues. Unfortunately as well, some of the whistle blowers who called the issue to the attention of the school committee have been targeted, and EDU members feel that the union has been less than fully committed to defending those people.

Western Mass EDU has met perhaps a dozen times this academic year. Other actions have included (1) a turnout to the School Committee meeting which discussed the takeover of the Morgan School; more than 100 people attended, lining the corridors and stairways leading to the meeting room (2) a showing of the film *Standardized*, about the effects of high-stakes testing, attended by educators, community members, and parents (3) attending the South Hadley school committee meeting to show solidarity with teachers there, facing demands for a range of employer take-aways and (4) an EDU member running for president of the Holyoke local. We hope to expand our actions to other areas, and to think pro-actively about a campaign to push back against high-stakes tests.

DEBUNKING THE COMMISSIONER’S LEVEL 4 & 5 DISTINCTIONS

by Dorothy Albrecht

DESE is systemically discriminating against low-income and minority communities and their educators by imposing state and private take-overs, stripping local control from districts and suspending the collective bargaining rights of educators in districts with the lowest median incomes. All of the level 4 and 5 districts, which Commissioner Mitchell Chester has coined as “Commissioner’s Districts,” are in Massachusetts Gateway Cities, cities struggling with the most serious effects of economic inequality and cities with the highest percentage of people of color. It is important to know that the Commissioner makes the final decision of which schools and districts are targeted for takeover.

The “standard” that DESE uses to determine whether or not a school or district is “underperforming” is weighted heavily toward achievement (80%) and away from student growth (20%). “Student growth” measures how much a student learns in one year whereas achievement measures how well a student scores.

DESE’s formula has no mathematical basis or statistical

evidence to back it up, and it ignores many important variables that are known to affect student performance and achievement, including the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, the transitivity of the district (the percentage of transient students who come and go through the district), the percentage of homeless and foster children served in the district, and the percentages of ELL and SPED students.

This entire process is wrong: it is based on politically driven educational goals and on the scores from a single test, and it results in great harm to students and their communities, as well as to educators. The MTA must be a stronger voice to oppose this unfair practice.

Thus, the formula ensures that any school in a suburban, wealthier district, where families have more resources and involvement and would never allow a takeover of their local school, is not deemed a ‘failing school.’

The predictable result of this system is the ‘taking’ of schools and districts in poorer communities of color. When a school is taken over, it is removed from the local control of its citizens and elected officials. In addition, teachers and school employees who have strong connections with struggling students and their families are removed from their lives. For many children in these districts, their school is the most stable and reliable constant in their lives. This practice of removing teachers is cruel and detrimental to the lives of students and educators. Finally, local union contracts are rendered useless and teachers have no protection or representation, effectively suspending rights of collective bargaining.

This entire process is wrong: it is based on politically driven educational goals and on the scores from a single test, and it results in great harm to students and their communities, as well as to educators. The MTA must be a stronger voice to oppose this unfair practice that is destroying public education in Gateway cities.

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**REPORT ON THE SOCIAL JUSTICE UNION NATIONAL NETWORK
COORDINATING COMMITTEE** by Cheri Cluff

Our work to build a strong and democratic union for educators in Massachusetts is part of the nationwide movement of educators for social justice, which brings together educators and communities to provide the schools that our children need. With the attack on public education now underway, orchestrated by state and national education administrators, the large traditional unions are having a hard time fighting back. One participant at a recent gathering of educators compared them to a semi-truck stuck in traffic. While the large traditional unions still have their place, progressive caucuses are more like bicycles weaving in and out of traffic, better able to form effective ties with parents, children and the communities they serve while devising actions that get attention and lead to change at the community and national level.

Progressive caucuses in teachers unions across the country are experiencing an upsurge. In the spring of 2010 there were only a few bright spots in the defense of public education against the corporate deformers. But then the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) took over the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union and all of a sudden it appeared that just maybe we might be able to beat back the corporate attack after all. This sense of hope and optimism was

only strengthened when the new CORE-led CTU went on strike with the almost unanimous support of its members and overwhelming support of Chicago Public Schools parents. While the strike was an important success, Chicago teachers continued to face an intense attack from those who aim to destroy public education. And the folks from CORE were under no illusions that this would be an easy fight or one that they can engage in alone.

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In order to support the work of their fellow union reformers and to build national alliances, CORE activists called a national gathering of representatives of reform caucuses from around the country in the summer of 2013. This gathering included representatives of over a dozen caucuses and progressive leaderships from around the country including the Seattle folks who successfully resisted the MAP test, the new leadership of the UTLA, and two members of our very own EDU. The gathering was largely an opportunity to make connections and learn

from each other's experiences, but at the end it was agreed that this conversation needed to continue. It was proposed that a second gathering be organized in conjunction with the 2014 Labor Notes Conference.

That meeting happened in Chicago on April 4 and three members of the Massachusetts EDU were there along with about 50 other teachers from around the country and Puerto Rico. They shared and compared strategies for building the ranks of social justice caucuses within their unions with the aim of pushing back against the increasing corporate influence over education, charter school takeovers and aspects of Race to the Top that are using teacher and student evaluations to make schools feel more like businesses than places of learning. Everyone agreed we must push back against excessive testing.

Some of the strategies for building connections with communities that were shared included having a so-called "walk-in" where parents, students and teachers stage a visible march on the school at the beginning of the day. People also talked about how to organize successful home visits to get parents involved, and how parents have organized neighborhood school fairs to counter charter school fairs.

EDU STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF ADJUNCT FACULTY by Mary Rapien

As community college enrollments and course offerings are on the rise, there is an increase in the number of courses taught by part-time faculty (at both community colleges and 4-year institutions). Adjunct faculty members teach approximately 70% of community college courses. We are fully aware that although adjunct faculty teach the majority of classes, they still face job insecurity, pay inequity, and lack of health insurance and benefits. They are continually expected to do more for less while the divide between full-time and part-time

faculty members grows wider. This must end! Our strength as a union lies in our solidarity. The working and living conditions of adjunct faculty are critical priorities for EDU. While we support increasing the number of full-time faculty in every department, we also understand that this does not solve the problem of inequity among faculty. Therefore, we must also call upon the colleges to provide adjuncts with the same retiree and healthcare benefits as full time faculty members; to create job security for

adjuncts through an implementation of a guaranteed assignment of 3 courses a semester; and get rid of capped maximum course loads for adjuncts. Adjuncts who do choose to participate in college service activities (department meetings, advising, etc.) should be compensated for their time. We must end the situation in which some MTA members in public higher education do not make a living wage, and in some cases are even below the poverty level.

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION'S 2014 SUMMER READING LIST

by Jamie Rinaldi

Reign of Error by Diane Ravitch (Knopf, 2013)

In her most recent book, Ravitch unravels the erroneous and often fabricated positions espoused by the school privatization movement. From charter schools to merit-pay, high-stakes testing to data-driven teacher evaluation, Ravitch contends both common sense and raw data undermine nearly every position privatization advocates use to criticize public education. Instead of attacking teachers and students, Ravitch argues, politicians and policy members should address the main problem plaguing public education: poverty. An invaluable guide for any teacher unionist.

The Future of Our Schools by Lois Weiner (Haymarket Books, 2012)

It's no secret that the attack on public sector unions has eroded support even amongst our own ranks. Weiner offers a bold strategy for how to engage our fellow teachers and connect them with the struggle to strengthen collective bargaining rights and increase union power. Weiner believes teacher unions will only protect member benefits if they fight for a broader platform of economic justice. Outlining a number of innovative strategies, Weiner argues a more progressive platform will reignite teacher unions.

Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity by Micah Uetricht (Verso, 2014)

Uetricht offers the Chicago strike as a vivid case study of how teachers can organize their workplace to effectively fight the attack on public education. Yet, the strike did not simply aim to raise compensation and improve benefits for Chicago Teachers. The CTU demanded better learning conditions for their students and an end to the austerity-driven privatization efforts that have closed school after school in Chicago. As Uetricht explains, the CTU's leadership organized deep inside their membership and built robust connections with parents, gaining diverse support for the strike.

Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook (Jacobin, 2014)

With organized money putting its full weight behind privatization, organized labor needs to develop as many strategies as possible to defend our schools. The authors of this pamphlet offer a diversity of perspectives on how teachers can identify and critique the attack on public education, while building a stronger movement of teacher activists ready to fight for better working and learning conditions. Rich, yet concise: no break room or union hall should be without it. Available for purchase (print mail-order) or free download (digital) at Jacobin Magazine's Website (<http://bit.ly/ljGlv4t>)

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION supports the following New Business Item at this year’s Annual Meeting

EDU NEW BUSINESS ITEM: It’s Time to Kill the Act Providing Retiree Healthcare Benefits Reform by Tom Goodkind and Annetta Argyres

Governor Patrick’s *Act Providing Retiree Healthcare Benefits Reform* will significantly curtail health care benefits for those who retire with less than thirty years of service. If this legislation passes, it will take our members **thirty** years to get the health insurance premium split we get now after **ten** years of service. The proposed legislation will have an enormous negative impact on a huge number of current and future employees, including MTA members who accepted their jobs in part based on the promise of these benefits. Furthermore, the changes will most adversely affect individuals who came to public service later in their careers.

The bill has been given an extension until late June, and it can come out of committee any day and be brought to the floor of the legislature for passage. There were many, many union members testifying against the bill at the legislative hearing last fall, but only one testifying in favor: MTA’s President. Most public sector unions are working

to kill the bill, and we should join them by passing this year’s New Business Item on this issue and actively organizing to defeat the bill.

There is no urgent funding need to pass this legislation without further study and deliberation. On the other hand, there are many urgent reasons unions have taken a stance against this bill. Some have raised concerns about the bill’s impact on current employees, particularly our newer, younger members. Others have called attention to the fact that decent retirement benefits are needed to attract and retain excellent candidates for public sector jobs since our wages are below those in the private sector. Then there’s the reality faced by the average state pensioner who earns around \$30,000 with little to no Social Security; denying retirees living on small, fixed earnings subsidized health care really is the kiss of death. Many union leaders and legislators have pointed out that to the extent that there are long-term shortfalls in funds for retiree

health care, they are primarily the result of a chronic lack of fair taxation and the failure to curb the rising costs of our privatized health care system, despite the claims of the right-wing, Koch-brothers-funded American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

The minor improvements to the bill sought by the MTA since last year’s Annual Meeting would affect only a narrow cross-section of our membership, and there is no evidence that those efforts have led to any significant changes. The legislation is so fundamentally flawed, and so destructive to the economic interests of our current and future members, that it is beyond tinkering around the edges. Our union should not be a party to cutting these benefits for any of our current or future members. Instead, let’s put the strength of our 110,000 members into allying with other unions to do something about the long-term problems, rather than lying down to be railroaded once again.

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EDU NEW BUSINESS ITEM: Freeze PARCC and Teacher Evaluations: Give Teachers a Real Voice by Barbara Madeloni

This new business item moves that the MTA write a letter to DESE calling for a moratorium on PARCC field-testing, the teacher evaluation system, and the use of test scores to evaluate teachers or schools; and it calls for MTA to structure member led democratic discussion at the local level, including students and parents, and within the All Presidents Meeting about the effect of testing and teacher evaluations on our students, our work and our schools; that from these forums and debates members determine if these mandates are good for students, teachers and schools and how we want to organize a response to the mandates; that the MTA actively support educators who speak out against testing and/or the teacher evaluation system.

In 2010 the membership, at the annual meeting, voted against

connecting any student test scores to teacher evaluations and expressed that standardized test scores are simplistic and unjust. The membership has spoken and knows how destructive these tests are. This work must be member led, to allow for vigorous internal debate, and to focus on the real effect these mandates are having on students and teachers.

The MTA Board of Directors released a new position on this issue on April 4, 2014. It says we will “engage state policy makers and education leaders” to “seek opportunities” to be a part of the conversation. We want to pose an alternate approach. Our alternative begins with member led conversations. It understands that our power begins with the membership, and not in soliciting approval from DESE or the legislators. The same Board position also says MTA will ask to have input regarding imple-

mentation and assumes the inevitability of PARCC. This motion calls for an examination of whether or not these mandates- testing and teacher evaluations - should be implemented at all. We also want an investigation of the effect and necessity of any high-stakes testing and demand student test scores not be the sole factor in decisions about students, teachers and schools.

We know that teachers who speak out are being targeted. The combination of the teacher evaluation system, which is ripe for abuse by administrators, and the fear of speaking out are derailing workplace autonomy and speech. The MTA should be active, vocal and public about defending teachers who speak out. Otherwise, the democratic ideal is undone.

EDU NEW BUSINESS ITEM: Raise the State Minimum Wage to \$10.50 by Jamie Rinaldi and Phil Dowgiert

The MTA has already signed on a supporting organization of this November's ballot initiative that would raise the state's minimum wage to \$10.50. Raise Up Massachusetts (RUM) sponsors the

ballot initiative. The MTA should actively encourage members to take part in outreach activities and other campaign events promoting the referendum. The MTA Today should provide a

robust overview of how a minimum wage increase would help Massachusetts workers as well as publicize upcoming campaign events. You can find more information at (raiseupma.org).

EDUCATORS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION supports the following New Business Item at this year’s Annual Meeting

EDU NEW BUSINESS ITEM: Bring Back Bilingual Education in Massachusetts by John Fitzgerald

Twelve years ago a great injustice was perpetrated against immigrant youth in Massachusetts when Question 2 was approved by voters, thereby eliminating bilingual education. Motivated by racism and xenophobia rather than the best interests of Massachusetts’s students, the backers of Question 2 ignored the research and informed opinions of second language acquisition experts and pushed their agenda on Massachusetts after successfully eliminating bilingual education in California and Arizona. Fortunately for English Language Learners (ELLs) throughout the country, the effort to eliminate bilingual education has not been a national success. Unfortunately for ELLs in Massachusetts (and to the great shame of Massachusetts voters), the Commonwealth did follow in Arizona’s footsteps and remains one of only three states in the US where bilingual education is illegal. The results have been

predictable for students needing English instruction. Despite Massachusetts’s impressive (if spotty and unequal) success in educating its children, ELLs have consistently lagged behind their native English-speaking counterparts. As a result, the US Department of Justice informed the Massachusetts DESE in 2011 that by placing ELLs in classrooms with teachers who were not sufficiently prepared, their Civil Rights were being violated. In response, DESE created a plan called Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) that will require all core content teachers to obtain a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) endorsement in order to continue to be licensed to teach in Massachusetts. While an SEI MTEL has recently been announced, many Massachusetts teachers will obtain their endorsement by taking the 45-hour, DESE approved, SEI graduate level course. The reports from the first

cohorts to successfully complete this course are in and the reviews are clear. The SEI course is insulting to teachers and will have no beneficial impact on the education of students needing English instruction. ELLs will continue to be poorly served by our educational system and teachers will be “held accountable” for their failure to “close the gap.” We in EDU believe that RETELL is an inappropriate response to a genuine crisis. We believe that education policy should be determined by teachers, parents, students, and education experts and not businessmen and politicians who seek to serve their own racist and privatizing agendas. And we believe that all children should have access to a culturally relevant education that prepares them for all the challenges and opportunities they’ll encounter in life and not simply for the test. In order to realize these beliefs we plan to submit a New Business Item (NBI) to the 2014 MTA Annual Meeting that calls on us to recommit ourselves to bilingual education and begin the process of bringing it back to Massachusetts, thereby righting the wrong that Massachusetts ELLs have been living with for the past twelve years.

2014 EDU Guide to the Massachusetts Teachers Association Annual Meeting

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