

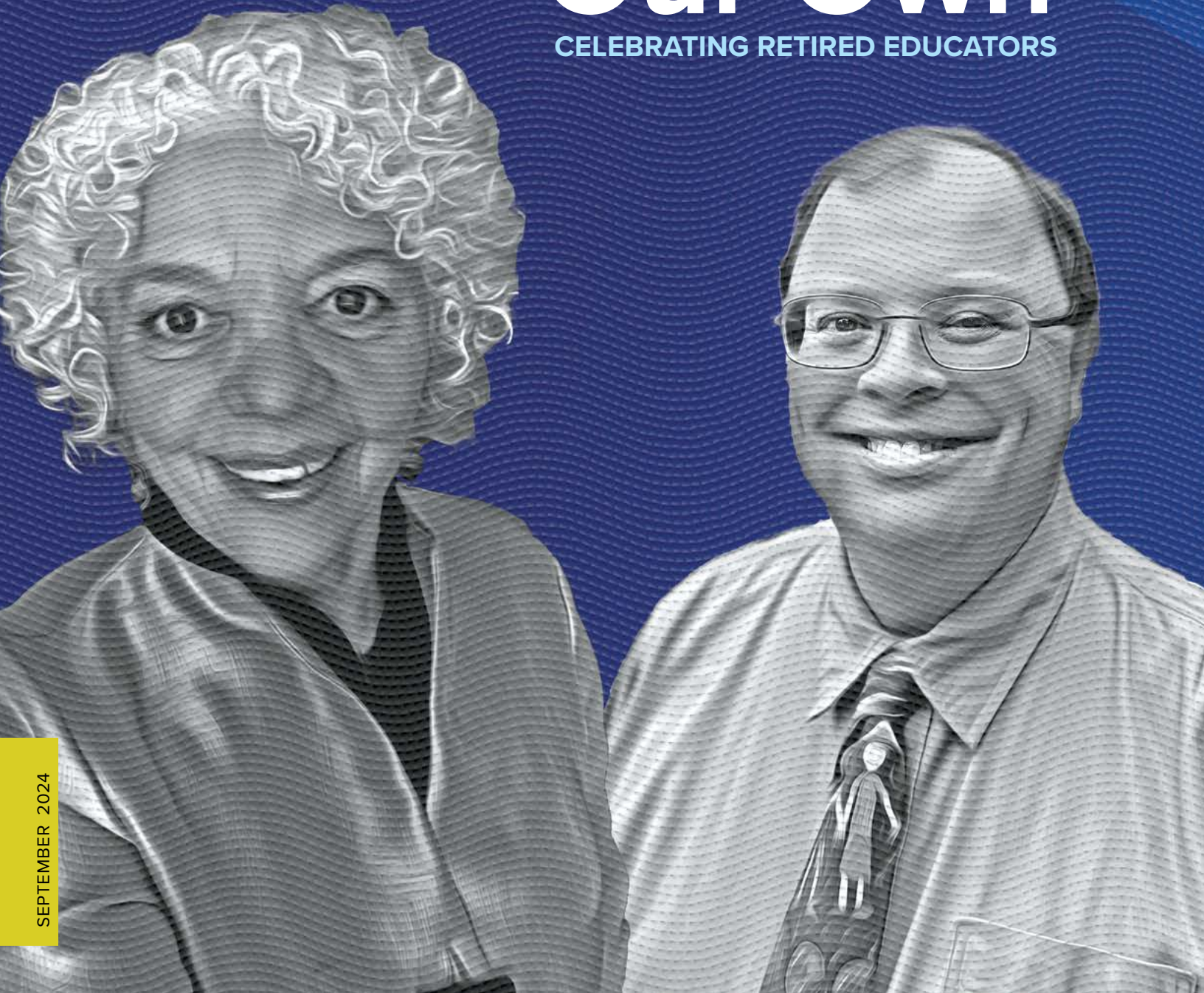
**MTA**

The voice of  
our retired  
members

# REPORTER

## Honor Our Own

CELEBRATING RETIRED EDUCATORS



SEPTEMBER 2024

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SEPTEMBER 2024

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Brenda Johnson  
In Memory of Bob Whalen



The Retired Members Committee and organizer Lisa Lemieux met in July for a retreat.

## MASSACHUSETTS TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor  
Quincy, MA 02171-2119  
800-392-6175

[www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)

### RETIRED MEMBERS COMMITTEE

#### CO-CHAIRS

Kathy Greeley, Cambridge  
Rick Last, Northampton

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Maureen Colgan Posner, Springfield  
Kip Fonsh,\*\* Leverett  
Shelly Fraser,\* Framingham  
Ora Gladstone, Boston  
Joseph Herosy,\*\* Quincy  
Brenda Johnson,\*\*\*\* Weymouth  
Andrei Joseph,\*\* Chestnut Hill  
Dale Melcher, Northampton  
Rafael Moure-Eraso, Medford  
Phyllis Neufeld, Burlington  
Robin Smith,\*\* Springfield  
Amy Wolpin, Florence

#### RETIRED MEMBERS ORGANIZER

Lisa Lemieux  
[llemieux@massteacher.org](mailto:llemieux@massteacher.org)  
617-878-8206

#### MTA COMMUNICATIONS

Amanda Torres-Price, Director  
Mary MacDonald, Editor  
Veronica Sosa-Dunetz, Design  
Laura Mullen, Editorial Assistant

#### MTA MEMBER BENEFITS, INC.

800-336-0990  
[www.mtabenefits.com](http://www.mtabenefits.com)

#### MTA MEMBERSHIP DIVISION

617-878-8118  
800-392-6175

- \* Elected by the Board
- \*\* MTA Board of Directors
- \*\*\* President's Designee
- \*\*\*\* Appointed Active Member

# Message from the Co-Chairs

Kathy Greeley and Rick Last

**W**e are honored to serve as your new co-chairs. After six years of dedicated service on the Retired Members Committee, Patrick Patterson has completed his term as an elected member, including four years as chair. His inclusive leadership style greatly benefited the committee, allowing us to implement numerous impactful initiatives. We are committed to continuing his fine work and building upon the strong foundation he has established.

Thank you, Patrick, for your remarkable contributions.

## **About Us**

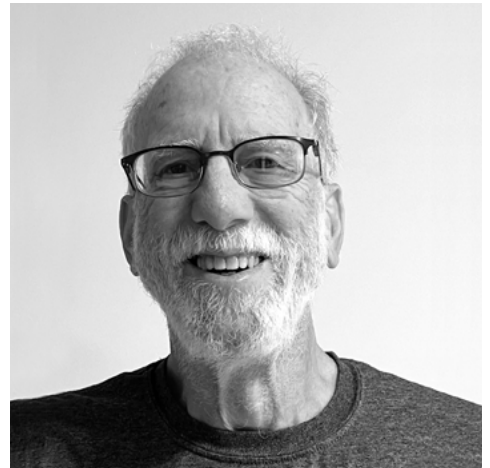
Rick Last lives in Northampton. He retired in 2013 after 28 years of teaching elementary school in Holyoke and Amherst, followed by a role as a professional development consultant at the Collaborative for Educational Services in Northampton.

During his last two years on the RMC, Rick has focused on transforming it into an activist group. He consistently asks: How does our work support organizing retired members for a dignified retirement, including securing true COLA increases,



preserving access to affordable health care, ending the Windfall Elimination Provision, and supporting rank-and-file efforts that contribute to social and racial justice? As the western Massachusetts coordinator for the Wisdom Warriors, Rick is committed to expanding our ranks, engaging retirees by showing up in support of our active members and involving retirees in MTA initiatives.

Kathy Greeley lives in Cambridge and retired in 2018 after a 39-year career, mostly in the Cambridge Public Schools. She taught seventh and eighth grade humanities, went on to be a middle school program developer, director of instruction and, finally, a literacy coach. Elected to the RMC in 2022, Kathy has been particularly active in the fight against standardized curriculum and assessments and corporate education reform. She leads an RMC subcommittee focused on fighting the harms caused by high-stakes MCAS exams. Kathy is also the author of “Testing Education: A Teacher’s Memoir,” published this April by University of Massachusetts Press.



We both believe that retirees have a wealth of experience, wisdom and energy to offer. Our insights as Retired members can play a crucial role in shaping the direction of our union. The RMC is dedicated to fostering democracy and transparency at all levels within our union, while fighting for our public schools.

## **Annual Strategic Planning Retreat**

In July, the RMC held a highly productive, two-day retreat in Worcester. During this time, the committee reviewed our achievements over the past year and laid out plans for our 2024-2025 activities. We took the opportunity to revisit our mission, bylaws and organizational structures. Each subcommittee — Racial and Social Justice, Wisdom Warriors, MCAS/MTEL and Speaker Series — shared reports on their past activities and future plans. We also proposed new initiatives and committees, including Dignified Retirement and Health/Safety. We reviewed how the Retired Members Committee is represented on the MTA website. In addition to

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## IN BRIEF

*continued from pg 3*

proposing website updates, we plan to utilize our newsletter, the Retired Reporter, as a more effective organizing tool to amplify the voices of retired members. Additionally, we are excited to announce an in-person event this fall, where we will present the Honor Our Own Awards. This year's recipients are Elaine Koury and Kenneth Kalen. See the cover story to learn more about them.

The retreat concluded with planning for the year ahead, focusing on retired member outreach and recruitment. We look forward to an engaging and impactful year ahead!

We are happy to announce this year's Retired Members First Wednesday Speaker Series. Last year's series was a great success, featuring a range of engaging topics and attracting nearly 300 attendees. This year's series promises to be just as informative and timely, with a variety of new topics. See Page 13 for topics, dates and registration details.

### Our Subcommittees

The Retired Members Committee has been working diligently on your behalf, and now we're asking for your help. Below are some of the projects we've been focused on over the past year, which we will continue in the coming year. We would love for more retired members to join us in these efforts. This important work can only be accomplished with everyone's participation.

### Racial/Social Justice

The Retired Members Committee of the MTA is committed to involving more members of color as we support fellow educators and build a strong, inclusive

union that reflects all of us. Looking ahead, we've identified three key initiatives as starting points for our work:

- Mentoring new and current educators of color. See the article on Page 8 for more about this program.
- Eliminating MTEL as a barrier for aspiring educators of color.
- Publishing articles in *MTA Today* and the *Retired Reporter* that highlight the experiences of retired educators of color.

Interested in getting involved in these initiatives? Contact Phyllis Neufeld at [pbneufeld@gmail.com](mailto:pbneufeld@gmail.com).

### Wisdom Warriors

The Wisdom Warriors is a statewide program under the Retired Members Committee of the MTA. We offer solidarity and support to local unions when they need it most, especially during their fights for rights. Our efforts combine union solidarity with camaraderie, and we often bring a touch of humor and music to otherwise challenging situations.

Our actions are guided by the needs of the members and the specifics of each situation. We respond to invitations from local union presidents or MTA leadership and maintain a contact list of about 190 retired members, divided by region with regional coordinators. Last year, we participated in 22 local actions across the state. Join us — participate whenever you're able!

For more information or to be added to our contact list, email us at [mtawisdomwarriors@gmail.com](mailto:mtawisdomwarriors@gmail.com).

### MCAS

MTA Retirees Against High-stakes Testing was created to raise awareness about the harmful effects of MCAS and other standardized exams, and to support the MTA's efforts to address the negative impacts of education reform. Our immediate focus is to support the MCAS ballot initiative in November.

For more information on Question 2, please see Page 11 of this edition.

Over the past several months, we've had success in publishing letters and articles in local newspapers, passing resolutions in support of the Thrive Act across the state, and attending hearings at the State House. We were also active in collecting signatures for the MCAS ballot question and plan to be deeply involved in the campaign.

Want to learn more or get involved? Contact Kathy Greeley at [kegreely@gmail.com](mailto:kegreely@gmail.com).

### Dignified Retirement – Protect Our Pensions

We are focused on organizing legislative efforts to improve the teacher pension COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) system in Massachusetts. What actions can we take to advocate for a stronger pension? Additionally, we aim to address the Social Security WEP-GPO (Windfall Elimination Provision - Government Pension Offset), which negatively impacts so many retirees. ■

For more information or to get involved, contact Lisa Lemieux at [LLemieux@massteacher.org](mailto:LLemieux@massteacher.org) and Kip Fonsh at [kipfonsh@gmail.com](mailto:kipfonsh@gmail.com).

Contact Kathy Greeley at [kegreely@gmail.com](mailto:kegreely@gmail.com). Contact Rick Last at [ricklewislast@gmail.com](mailto:ricklewislast@gmail.com).

#### IF YOU HAVE SOME NEWS

from your local retired group that you wish to share, please send it to Lisa Lemieux at [LLemieux@massteacher.org](mailto:LLemieux@massteacher.org).

#### IF YOU'RE LOOKING

FOR NEWS, make sure to visit and bookmark [massteacher.org/retired](http://massteacher.org/retired).

# Executive Committee / Board Report

Andrei Joseph



Even in retirement, the rhythm of the school year remains. I am 13 years retired, but the teacher “terror dreams” return in late August. I startle awake, drenched in sweat with no lesson plan, students misbehaving, the classroom out of control. The price of a lifetime in the profession, I suppose.

Five months have passed since the last *Retired Reporter*. Let me catch you up through the Annual Meeting of Delegates, 2024 Summer Conference and more than one meeting of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

## Ballot Question on the MCAS High School Graduation Test

Our major task and action has been to build the fall campaign to eliminate the high school graduation requirement that is based on an MCAS score high-stakes element of the MCAS exam. Our union’s attempt to reach a negotiated settlement with legislative leaders was unsuccessful. They stalled and were unwilling to promptly accept our major premise: The MCAS exam is a barrier to students, a burden to educators, an enemy to joy in the classroom, and an expression of class and racial bias.

Supported by more than 100,000 people who signed petitions across the state, we now turn to the ballot in November. The Board authorized spending \$10 million of our reserves to fund the campaign. As with our previous success with the Fair Share Amendment, the campaign will include our own members and staff, who will be supported by advisors, video production and a robust media presence. This expenditure was made with eyes wide open. Our reserves remain healthy and well in excess of what our financial advisors say is required for a secure organization. Polling data was presented in executive session, and also considered, as the Board voted overwhelmingly to approve the cost of the campaign. I voted “yes,” as well.

Early voting begins on October 19 and continues through November 1. The statewide election is November 5. Tell your friends: Vote YES on Question 2!

## Expanding Democracy Within the Union

You may recall that Annual Meeting passed a motion requiring the Board to develop a process before it considered any motion regarding our union’s involvement in international issues. Members’ concern about Palestine/Israel remains. Each Board meeting has heard from impassioned guest speakers with different perspectives on the issues. Currently, New Business Items (NBIs) can be submitted “at the last minute” in both Board meetings and at Annual Meeting. The argument has been that this policy is democratic in allowing for spontaneity and full participation from members whose attention might

have been elsewhere in the days leading up to the meeting.

Nonetheless, as a response to the motion from Annual Meeting, the Board heard a policy amendment that would require all NBIs – including those related to international issues – to be presented two weeks prior to meetings. It was suggested by its makers that this policy would make our union more democratic and transparent as agendas would be known in advance, members could engage with their representatives on the Board, staff could prepare relevant documents, and more thoughtful decisions would result. Formal policy changes require two readings. The first is intended to bring the issue to light, the second, at a subsequent Board meeting, renders a decision. As of this writing, the Board has had a first reading which involved questions and discussion but no vote. I intend to vote “yes” when this comes back to the floor in October.

A second proposed policy change is the result of my interaction with a retired member. In the wake of last fall’s Executive Committee and Board of Directors resolutions regarding the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Shelley Stevens of West Roxbury contacted me with significant concerns about both the content and process of these resolutions. Several long conversations between us led to clarity as to our areas of both disagreements and agreements. One such accord was our feeling that the Board could do much better communicating with the membership at large. We visited MTA headquarters

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# An Update from MTA's Legislation, Policy and Political Action Division

Anthony Moreschi

In the early morning of Aug. 1, 2024, the state House and Senate wrapped up formal sessions for the 2023-2024 legislative session. As required by the state Constitution, the House and Senate will continue to meet in sparsely attended informal sessions until early January 2025, when a new Legislature is sworn in. However, during this time, the House and Senate are generally only able to conduct minor business and pass non-controversial legislation that do not require roll call votes. Given that many important legislative items were not passed by the end of the formal sessions, including several of importance to the MTA, there has been public discussion about the Legislature possibly reconvening to take up at least some remaining items. However, as of this mid-September update, there has been no formal announcement about the Legislature returning for additional formal sessions.

Despite the volume of unfinished business, there were several important victories related to the MTA's FY2025 budget priorities and our ongoing campaign to strengthen the pension cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) system. A 3 percent FY2025 COLA on the first \$13,000 in pension benefits for members of the state and teachers' retirement systems was approved as part of the state budget that was signed into law by the governor on July 29, 2024. Importantly, the final budget also includes the special state commission to study the COLA system that was previously described in the April edition of the Retired Reporter. The commission's charge includes looking at the feasibility of possible



policy changes to increase the COLA base and ways to fund such increases, with a report due to the Legislature by Feb. 1, 2025. While the need for an immediate increase in the COLA base remains as urgent as ever, the proposed commission is a major and meaningful step and one that has been made possible by your advocacy. Your thousands of emails, calls and letters throughout this legislative session and in years prior have made clear that this issue demands attention and action. The MTA will be closely monitoring the work of this commission as we head into the next legislative session, and we will be sharing ways for you to continue to help push legislators for a stronger and more secure retirement.

The FY2025 state budget includes several other significant investments in public education, many of which have been made possible due to the work of MTA members and our allies in passing the Fair Share Amendment. Thanks

to revenue from Fair Share, every Massachusetts resident will now have access to free community college and our public K-12 schools will continue to offer free school meals to all students. Fair Share funds also are being utilized to make many other crucial investments in our public schools and colleges, ranging from early literacy supports and clean energy infrastructure upgrades in K-12, to increased financial aid and student support services in public higher education. Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 legislative session, the MTA will work to build on these victories to further strengthen our public schools and colleges and to protect and enhance the rights and benefits of active and retired educators. ■

For additional information on the FY2025 budget and the end of the legislative session, please visit [massteacher.org/legislation](https://www.massteacher.org/legislation).

# The Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset

Mary MacDonald

Pressure is mounting to force Congress to act on repealing the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO), after years of effort from public union members, leaders and allies.

Two U.S. Representatives – Garret Graves, R-Louisiana, and Abigail Spanberger, D-Virginia, – on Sept. 10 filed a discharge petition that would force a House vote on a bill that would repeal both provisions, which have greatly reduced the Social Security benefits of many educators, including in Massachusetts.

Graves and Spanberger introduced the Social Security Fairness Act in January 2023, which would repeal both the WEP and GPO. Their bill enjoys broad bipartisan support, with 326 sponsors to date in the House. Despite this, it has never come to the floor for a vote.

For their discharge petition to succeed in forcing that vote, a simple majority of the House, or 218 members, would have to sign on. The collection process is underway.

MTA President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy plan to lobby on behalf of the bill as part of the NEA’s Super Week, taking place in Washington, D.C. in late September. Educators who paid into Social Security through second jobs or through previous careers have been penalized for far too long, Page said.

“At a time when we need more people to enter the profession, the two provisions are undermining those efforts,” Page said, by reducing

“**WEP and GPO are deeply unjust and are preventing many retired educators and public employees from being able to pay their bills in retirement.**” Max Page

Social Security benefits earned for previous and part-time work. And many educators, particularly women, are working into their 60s and even 70s because they have lost survivor benefits from their spouses, Page said.

“Both WEP and GPO are deeply unjust and are preventing many retired educators and public employees from being able to pay their bills in retirement,” Page said. “Congress needs to move quickly to restore fairness to retirees.”

The reduction in Social Security benefits comes as a shock to many retired members, some of whom said they only learned of the provisions when they retired from education. Social Security statements that previously were mailed to Americans didn’t calculate the impact on estimated earnings.

The Windfall Elimination Provision uses a complex formula to reduce the retirement benefit for retirees who have earned a government pension, but who didn’t have Social Security taxes withheld at that job. Because Massachusetts public educators do not have wages deducted for Social Security, this affects any

income they paid into Social Security through a part-time or summer job, or particularly if they entered education as a “career switcher” from private industry.

The GPO program can reduce spousal or survival income for people who are eligible for those benefits through Social Security, and who also earned a government pension.

Some educators are affected by both provisions.

WEP and GPO affect educators in 15 states where Social Security taxes are not deducted from educators’ salaries. The NEA estimates that WEP affects almost 90,000 people in Massachusetts, including retired educators and other public employees. GPO affects almost 9,000 people.

If approved and signed into law, the Social Security Fairness Act, which also has a companion bill introduced in the Senate, would repeal the WEP and GPO and affect payments made after December 2023. ■

The NEA, MTA and other allies in labor and education are encouraging all members to contact their Congressional representatives to sign the discharge petition. Please go to [massteacher.org/repealtheftal](https://www.massteacher.org/repealtheftal) to send your representative a message..



# New Mentoring Program

Ora Gladstone and Phyllis Neufeld

In 2020, several newly elected members of the Retired Members Committee were taken with the work the committee had already begun, relating to issues centered on retired educators of color. What followed was a commitment to encourage more involvement of educators of color in the MTA, in order to strengthen the union and create more cohesion.

To that end, all RMC members were asked to contact retirees of color with whom they had a relationship and, through a questionnaire designed to address their experiences as teachers of color, speak to them about their lives and experiences. Retired Members Committee members interviewed a total of 16 participants.

While there were some major differences in their stories, a great deal of overlap existed in terms of their feelings of isolation, experiencing ignorant statements of white colleagues and incidents of racism, micro-aggressions and discrimination. While these professionals loved teaching, these barriers had resulted in a good deal of unhappiness and struggle throughout their careers. Though not shocked by the responses, RMC members were troubled and very eager to start working on ways to both further explore and begin to mitigate at least some of what the retired educators had experienced, both as new and long-term teachers.

In December 2023, a group of RMC members, retirees of color and MTA staff shared a meal during which we heard more about the experiences of teachers of color and what they felt would be helpful to incoming and

continuing colleagues. A follow-up meeting resulted in the decision to focus on three initial projects:

- Soliciting articles by retirees of color, to be published in the *MTA Retired Reporter*, about their personal experiences as educators.
- Creating a mentoring program that will pair educators of color in the first five years of their career with retired educators of color. The Retired Members Committee welcomes all retirees of color to participate as mentors, and new teachers of color to participate as mentees. This program, which is in the process of launching, is taking place as a result of a collaboration with the RMC, the MTA New Member Committee and the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. (If interested in participating, please contact [mtamentoring@massteacher.org](mailto:mtamentoring@massteacher.org) for more information). A special thanks to Josh Levit and Lisa Lemieux, MTA staff, for their tireless work to make this program a reality.

- Working to stop the MTEL from being a barrier to Education Support Professionals of color who want to become certified teachers. This work has already begun, with Springfield as the district of initial focus.

All of us involved in this work are excited, energized and determined to begin creating the changes that are essential for educators of color to begin feeling fully integrated in their districts and schools. There's a great deal of education that has to take place, but these first initiatives will hopefully begin to "create the change we all want to see." We are eager to engage more retirees of color in this work, regardless of whether they are current MTA members. ■

Please let us know what you think and contact the RMC if you have any interest in any of the initiatives mentioned, or if you believe there is other work we should focus on in our attempts to make a difference. Contact Lisa Lemieux at [LLemieux@massteacher.org](mailto:LLemieux@massteacher.org).





# Retired Member-New Educator of Color **MENTORSHIP PROGRAM**

## **OVERVIEW**

After interest was expressed by the MTA Retired Member Committee and other retiree members, the MTA New Member Committee voted to establish a subcommittee to develop and implement a Retired Member-New Member of Color Mentorship Program. Interest was prompted by the statewide failure to retain educators of color in their Districts, campuses and the profession.

## **GOALS**

1. Provide an opportunity for new educators of color to be mentored by retired educators of color, who not only lived the experience of these new educators, but also made it all the way to retirement.
2. Provide an opportunity for retirees of color to share their experience and knowledge with new educators of color.
3. Pilot a program that has a positive impact on the retention of educators of color in Massachusetts public education, moving the demographics of educators closer to those of the students that they teach
4. Bring to light the issues and obstacles faced by educators of color and find solutions.
5. Encourage new member and retiree involvement in educator unions.
6. Implement this program for the fall of 2024.

**Interested?** Please contact [mtamentoring@masteacher.org](mailto:mtamentoring@masteacher.org) for more information.



## HONOR OUR OWN AWARD

# Retired Members To Celebrate Two Educators

Mary MacDonald

Two veteran educators who spent decades as instructors and teachers in public schools in Massachusetts will be recognized for their contributions to the profession in October as the 2024 recipients of the Honor Our Own Award.

Kenneth Kalen, a retired teacher who worked for 35 years at Gibbons Elementary School in Stoughton, and Elaine Koury, a founder of Wisdom Warriors and a longtime English and performing arts teacher in Boston and Cambridge, will be recognized at a celebratory luncheon.

The Honor Our Own Award recipients are selected by the MTA Retired Members Committee. Nominations are sought each spring.

Kalen, who lives in Whitman, was a member of the Stoughton Teachers Association. He retired in June 2023. In addition to teaching, he was a mentor to new educators, served as the crosswalk monitor during morning and afternoon dismissals at the school, and volunteered for numerous school-related activities, including multicultural celebration nights and school fairs. Kalen was active for decades in the Stoughton local, serving through multiple contract cycles as a key part of the negotiating team. He was nominated by Stephanie Benenato, a Stoughton colleague. She wrote: "New teachers navigating the challenges of their early career years have found in Ken a wise, reflective, levelheaded mentor and students with a range of learning styles, experiences, dispositions and circumstances have found in Ken an understanding, knowledgeable, supportive teacher



who simultaneously recognizes their holistic selves and meets them where they are while thoughtfully challenging them educationally, so as to promote their healthy growth and development as learners."

Koury, who lives in Somerville, was a founder of the Wisdom Warriors, an organization of retired MTA members who show up to support their active colleagues wherever needed and who participate in MTA campaigns. In a nomination letter, Seth Evans, of Brookline, said Koury came up with the idea while attending an MTA Annual Meeting of Delegates, listening in horror "to an account of how a Boston-area superintendent had asked female teachers to dress with skirts or dresses, high heels and pantyhose. She looked around the convention hall and saw about a hundred ... retired teachers, equally horrified, and thought: 'We are the solution. We can say anything we want, and we can't get fired!'" Evans wrote. The female employees felt they couldn't contest this demand, for fear of losing their jobs.

Koury spent her career, starting in the 1960s, in creative endeavors. She was an English and theater teacher at Dorchester High School, founding the

integrated performing arts company, Boston Youth Theater. She served as a principal at two schools and later returned to teaching, working at Umana-Barnes Middle School in East Boston, at the Baldwin School in the Cambridge public schools, formerly known as the Agassiz School, and finishing as coordinator for the visual and performing arts in Cambridge. ■

## Honor Our Own LUNCHEON

MONDAY

October 21

11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

LOCATION

New England Botanic Garden, Tower Hill, Boylston.



Registration information will be posted at [massteacher.org/retired](https://massteacher.org/retired).

# Campaign for YES on 2 Hits High Gear

Scott McLennan

The final push is on to replace the MCAS graduation requirement, as educators and other public education advocates canvass neighborhoods and call voters to ask for their support on Question 2.

Question 2 on the fall ballot will ask voters to replace the MCAS graduation requirement with certification by local districts that students have completed coursework aligned with state academic standards in the areas tested by MCAS. The campaign began more than a year ago, when the MTA joined forces with a group of parents also seeking to end the use of standardized MCAS exams as a high school graduation requirement.

Since then, more than 170,000 voters across the state have signed petitions over two rounds of signature gathering, placing the question on the ballot. The statewide election is Nov. 5. Early voting in Massachusetts begins Oct. 19 and continues through Nov. 1.

MTA Vice President Deb McCarthy has long maintained that MCAS exams are misused and given too much influence.

“We have high academic standards in Massachusetts. Teacher training and curriculum frameworks are grounded in those standards. What high-stakes MCAS testing has done is actually limit educators’ ability to develop successful teaching strategies for students who do not do well on standardized tests but are quite capable of learning



**High Standards, Not High Stakes**

**“What high-stakes MCAS testing has done is actually limit educators’ ability to develop successful teaching strategies for students who do not do well on standardized tests.”**

Deb McCarthy

the required material,” McCarthy said. “Denying a diploma to these students, who meet every other requirement, is an injustice. And forcing educators to work toward a one-size-fits-all style of teaching is bad policy and practice.”

When Question 2 passes, MCAS exams will still be administered, but used for diagnostic purposes as originally intended. With New York this year ending its use of standardized tests as graduation requirement, Massachusetts will be

one of just eight states remaining that hold on to the outdated practice.

A large, statewide coalition has grown in support of Question 2. That effort includes many retired members.

Deb Mousley, who retired in 2022 after a career as a teacher and guidance counselor in Methuen schools, said she enjoys walking around and talking with people about the question. Many residents she’s spoken to seem to be confused about the impact of the question, and she said after her conversation, she’s converted a few who were skeptical to likely “yes” votes.

“People have no idea that students have been denied a diploma and only given a certificate of attendance,” Mousley said. “People had no idea that those who fail are often marginalized students, who need the diploma.”

## ACTIVISM SPOTLIGHT

**“Most people, when you’re standing outside of Market Basket or the grocery store or the mall, don’t want to sign anything. But when you say ‘MCAS,’ they turn around because they have a story about how much they don’t like it.”** Shelley Scruggs

Lexington parent Shelley Scruggs, who launched the ballot initiative, said finding allies on this issue has been easy.

Scruggs’ son attends Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School and her experiences as the mother of a child who struggles with test-taking drew her to this fight; while gathering signatures to have the question placed on the ballot, she learned she wasn’t alone.

“Most people, when you’re standing outside of Market Basket or the grocery store or the mall, don’t want to sign anything. But when you say ‘MCAS,’ they turn around because they have a story about how much they don’t like it,” she said, adding, “They don’t like it as a student. They don’t like it as a parent, because you just spend an awful lot of time trying to pass the test. My son is in the Class of 2026. He can do the classwork; I don’t want him spending all his time trying to pass these tests.”

### VOTE YES ON 2

Early voting in Massachusetts begins October 19 and continues through November 1.



MTA members canvassed for Question 2 in Worcester in August.

The YES on 2 campaign has drawn several major endorsements. The Massachusetts AFL-CIO, Massachusetts Nurses Association, Massachusetts Association of School Counselors, the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment all have voiced organizational support for Question 2.

“This campaign has the support of educators, working families, community activists and students,” said MTA President Max Page. “The people closest to public education

are saying in one, unified voice that it is time to end the punitive practice of using a one-size-fits-all standardized test as a high-stakes graduation requirement.” ■

A version of this article ran previously in MTA Today online.

For more information on the YES on 2 campaign, please visit the website at [yesonquestion2ma.com/join](https://yesonquestion2ma.com/join).



FIRST  
WEDNESDAY

# RETIREE SPEAKER SERIES

2024-2025



All events are virtual,  
on Zoom.  
**3 - 4:30 p.m.**  
Registration is  
required. Zoom link  
will be sent a few days  
before the event.

Registration  
information will  
be posted at  
[massteacher.org/  
retired](https://www.massteacher.org/retired).



**NOVEMBER 6** **Education and the Rise of the Right**

**Jennifer Berkshire & Jack Schneider**

What do the election results mean for public education? Join journalist Jennifer Berkshire and education historian Jack Schneider, authors of “The Education Wars: A Citizen’s Guide and Defense Manual,” for an engaging, informative look at what’s next for public schools in Massachusetts and beyond.

**DECEMBER 4** **Memory and Aging** **Dr. Rebecca Starr**

Are you worried about dementia? Listen to Dr. Rebecca Starr, an expert on memory loss, and learn the difference between everyday age-related memory challenges and early warning signs of possible dementia. Bring your questions and curiosity about this vital topic in our lives. Understanding the nature of memory loss and dementia will help you learn the best approaches to dealing with this life challenge.

**JANUARY 8** **Media and Bias** **Charlotte Ryan**

What is propaganda? How does it differ from typical political opposition? This workshop will focus on anti-labor propaganda and describe communication strategies used to undermine union organizing and discredit unionized labor. It also will review effective pro-labor communication strategies. We will reserve ample time for discussion, during which time workshop participants will be strongly encouraged to share their experiences.

## STAY TUNED FOR UPCOMING SESSIONS!

Care and Life Balance

Protect our Pensions

HEAT: The Impact of Global Warming on Elders

RMC Educators of Color Mentoring Project

Books Not Bombs: A Look at Education Funding



## Save on Heating Costs This Fall

**A**s fall settles in, it's the perfect time for MTA members to explore ways to manage heating costs. MTA Benefits is pleased to offer two exclusive programs designed to help members and their families save on heating oil and propane, ensuring warmth and comfort without overspending.

### **Enjoy Superior Savings on Heating Oil with Heat USA**

The Heat USA program, the largest heating oil buying group in the U.S., is designed to deliver substantial savings and benefits. By harnessing the collective buying power of more than 80,000 members, Heat USA negotiates exceptional terms with top-rated local suppliers. This means MTA members can enjoy lifetime free or discounted full-service contracts, which include parts and labor coverage. Additionally, the program provides 24-hour emergency service to address any urgent issues and free

annual cleaning and tune-ups to keep your system in optimal condition.

Members typically save between 15 and 20 cents per gallon of heating oil. New Heat USA members can also take advantage of a special offer: a \$10 discount on the first year's membership fee, bringing it down to just \$25, as well as a \$50 equipment upgrade certificate. Automatic delivery ensures Heat USA customers never run low on oil, providing a hassle-free heating experience.

### **Exceptional Deals on Propane with Tankfarm**

For those who rely on propane, the MTA Benefits Propane Discount Program through Tankfarm is a valuable resource. Tankfarm operates similarly to wholesale clubs, purchasing propane in bulk from top local suppliers and passing the savings directly to its members. This program offers exclusive pricing, typically 50 cents to \$1 less per gallon than standard rates.

There are no additional fees for membership or deliveries, and members won't be locked into any multi-year contracts. Opting for tank ownership rather than rental will eliminate unnecessary rental fees. New Tankfarm members upon sign up receive \$50 worth of free propane and a \$100 certificate toward a new propane tank. Tankfarm also ensures local support through the supplier, who will handle tank installation and service appointments. ■

Don't miss out on these opportunities to cut heating expenses this season. Enroll in the Heat USA or Tankfarm programs today to ensure a cozy, cost-effective fall and winter. For more details or to sign up, visit [mtabenefits.com](https://mtabenefits.com).



## Executive Committee / Board Report *continued from pg 5*

in Quincy to meet with staff and together drafted a policy change, which I then presented to the Board for a first reading. Our joint effort would require the agendas and specific wording of NBIs of both the Executive Committee and Board to be posted on the MTA website 10 days prior to meetings, and for the results of significant actions taken to be posted within four business days of a meeting's conclusion. We agreed as to the value and importance of such transparency. At first reading, these ideas were met sympathetically. Hopefully, a positive vote at a second reading will also be joined by an improved, user-friendly website so members can more easily find board proposals and decisions.

**Hiring:** The budget approved at Annual Meeting has allowed us to hire additional field staff in both preK-12 and Higher Ed, as well as regional organizers. Our union is seen as an attractive opportunity for union organizers. There were hundreds of applicants for these positions.

**Elections:** I am very pleased to report that the Board has returned

Shelly Fraser, an Education Support Professional who works in Wayland, to serve on the Retired Members Committee. We also elected Board representatives to CEED (the committee that evaluates the Executive Director-Treasurer), ABC (annual budget) and the Workplace Equity Committee.

**Building:** Our lease in Quincy is ending soon, leaving us with multiple options. We could renew on Heritage Drive, lease space elsewhere in the state, lease at the new AFT facility planned on Columbia Point in Boston or purchase our own building somewhere. There are lots of variables to take into consideration.

**COVID-19:** Considering the current, more modest presence of COVID, some are arguing for a return to a full, in-person Annual Meeting. I pushed back, urging Board members to consider the precarious health of some retirees.

We have been gifted with new, required software for all future meetings. It is called Convene. It reminds me of pilot projects. You remember those. ■

Contact Andrei Joseph at [ajoseph@rcn.com](mailto:ajoseph@rcn.com).

## NEW RMC MEMBER



## BRENDA JOHNSON

Brenda Johnson is an Education Support Professional and an applied behavioral analyst who works with the Weymouth Public Schools. She is a member of the Weymouth Educators Association. Appointed in July by MTA President Max Page as an active member to serve on the Retired committee, Brenda is currently a building representative, executive board member and liaison to ALANA, a statewide organizing effort to support educators of African, Latino, Asian and Native American heritage.

She has long been active in her union and served as a delegate and a silent representative during the recent contract negotiations in Weymouth.

She recently completed the ESP Leadership Weekend Program, a member-led program that is focused on developing leadership, interpersonal and communication skills and strategies among ESPs.

Brenda lives in Weymouth and in her spare time enjoys cooking, reading and planning social gatherings for her family.

"I am excited about my appointment to the committee and look forward to actively engaging in the business of the Retired Members Committee!" ■

Contact Brenda Johnson at [brelej2@gmail.com](mailto:brelej2@gmail.com).

## IN MEMORY

# BOB WHALEN

The MTA Retired Members Committee wishes to extend its sincere condolences to the friends and family of the late Bob Whalen, who died on May 23, shortly after his retirement from the MTA. Bob was a cherished member of the MTA community.

His service started in 1999, originally as an attorney with the legal division, and later working in the field in higher education and as a student member organizer. He worked closely with retired members as the Retired Member Organizer for many years. At the MTA Summer Conference, a memorial for him brought together about 30-40 friends and colleagues, and included a slide show prepared by his family. Several people shared their favorite memories.

Bob was an enthusiastic supporter of educators and the union, had an unflinching sense of humor and brought his brilliant mind and expertise in retirement issues to his work with members. He will be greatly missed. To read his obituary, please visit [everloved.com/life-of/robert-earl-whalen/obituary](http://everloved.com/life-of/robert-earl-whalen/obituary).





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