

Tim Dwyer

Local:

Dedham Education Association

Your biography and experiences:

I am Tim Dwyer. I have been a teacher for 17 years, 16 of them in Dedham. For the last 12 years I have been the president of the Dedham Education Association. For 2 years prior to that I was the Grievance Chair. I represent Region D on the Executive Committee. Earlier in my life I worked for several years at UPS where I was the Teamster shop steward for the night shift. For a brief time period after college I was in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps where I worked as a neighborhood organizer with ACORN. I also have worked as a union organizer with 1199.

I have been married to my wife Debbie for 19 years and I have four children: Sylvester, 1, Addy 15, Molly 11, and Finola 6.

Once when I was in the 8th grade my teacher asked the class to write own on a piece of paper what we wanted to do when we grew up. I wrote that I wanted to do good. She gave it back to me with the correction that it should have read: "I want to do well." I told her that I did not care at all about doing well; what I wanted was to change the world for the better.

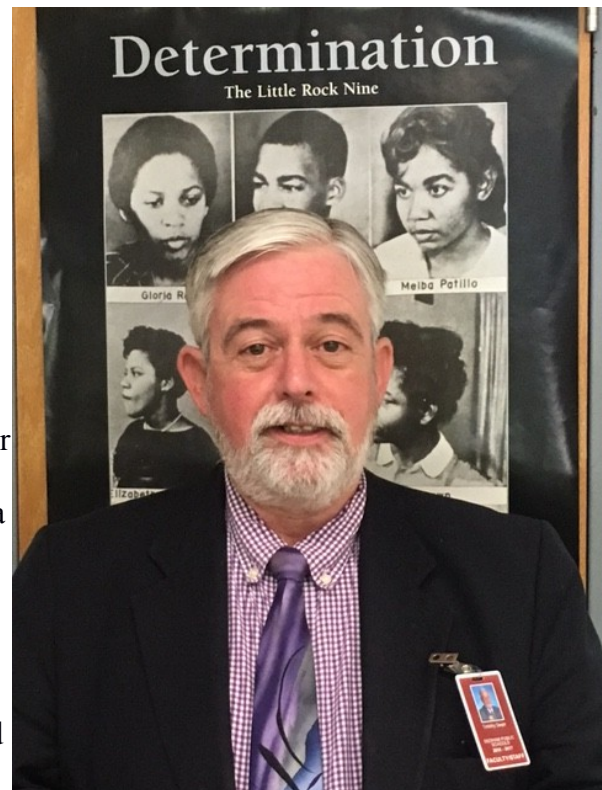
I went to law school because I thought that I could use my skill as a lawyer to bring about that change. I am proud of the work I did representing people who could not afford a lawyer but in the end, I did not bring about any meaningful change. I came to teaching with the belief that education was that path to real change in this world.

One of the greatest influences on my development was my father. He worked for the telephone company for almost 40 years, 25 of them as a shop steward for the IBEW. I remember walking picket lines with him during strikes when I was young. He taught me that you owed your employer an honest day's work but he also believed that your employer owed you respect and a fair salary. A union was an essential means to bring justice to the workplace. Later when I was on the picket line as a Teamster striking UPS or as an 1199 organizer striking nursing homes I never lost sight of my Dad's lesson.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

The first step in engaging our members is for us to listen to what their problems are. Next, we need to organize so that we work toward a solution that involves our members working together to resolve the problem. And we need to be able to connect the problem faced by our member with the broader forces at work. Question 2 was not just about whether a few more charter schools would be built in Worcester



or Boston. The members in Dedham came out to knock on doors and make phone calls because we connected the issue to the broader efforts of billionaires and corporations to privatize public education.

The first step—listening to members requires that we know who they are and have meaningful contact with them. Organizing the members to be part of the solution can represent a huge change in perspective for our members. For members with a service based view of what a union is, organizing toward a solution is not what they want to hear.

Our superintendent is reorganizing the schools to “improve” reading. To accomplish this goal his proposal was to eliminate all reading teachers. Our building representatives organized members person by person, to come to a general meeting to discuss the problem and to formulate a solution. At the meeting angry, frightened teachers wanted to know what I was going to do to fix this problem. I had to tell them that superintendents can reorganize whenever they want and I could not fix this problem on my own. We talked about what could move the superintendent to change course and together we agreed to work together to build toward a public forum on reading in our schools to generate public/family opposition to his plan. We put 15% of our members in the neighborhoods knocking on doors to inform the community about the problem and to get people to attend the public forum on reading. At the forum, 125 community members attended and the forum was rebroadcast on a local cable channel. We are still engaged in the fight. We have had some successes but not a complete victory on the issue. But we have had a victory on the organizing front. Many elementary teachers have told me that they no longer feel like victims. Teachers report that they feel empowered by the experience. They understand that ending the reading program at Dedham Public Schools is part of a larger problem of de-skilling the profession and backdoor privatization of public schools.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

The MTA is officially an association of locals that are independent in their actions. This, along with a longstanding culture of relying on local presidents and field reps to hold the expertise and authority in locals, has made it difficult to organize around assaults that are statewide and impact every local.

- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

We need to build our locals so that there is regular communication, person to person between leadership and rank and file. We need to involve our members ALREADY in fights they care about. We do not have to win every fight. To put it bluntly, if we leave enough blood and teeth on the floor at the end of the fight the boss will be reluctant to engage us in conflict situations. Then we need to keep our members informed about what is going on in their schools and local and what is going on from a broader perspective. And when we have these fights we need to ask, ask, ask for our members help.

Loss of agency fee:

In the next year, we are highly likely to lose the right to collect agency fees. Estimates of the loss of membership range from a low of 4% (the current percentage of MTA agency fee payers) to a high of 25% or more (overall losses in Wisconsin public sector unions).

- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

We need to have built a union with locals that are already communicating with members about what their problems are and organizing to address them. Our members should regard union membership as the MOST essential component of their professional life. Not joining should not ever cross their mind. While we need to consider what our options are with a declining budget we must never approach the loss of agency fee as an austerity problem. No one wants to join a sinking ship. We need to be an organization of fighters that our members view as indispensable in a crisis.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

Evaluations

- We need locals to be organizing around the issue of unfair evaluation systems and unfair evaluations. In Dedham, we are having meetings where members bring their evaluations and we discuss why and how the evaluations are unfair. In some situations, we have taken groups to the superintendent to raise the issue. We are pursuing class action grievances in some cases and we are forcing meetings between angry teachers and mean and incompetent evaluators. Our intention is to make the system completely unworkable in its current usage. We are educating our members about the true nature of evaluations as they are deployed in our schools. Evaluations are not designed to increase conversations between educators and their evaluators. Evaluations are not about helping educators improve their practice. Evaluations are tool that are used by the boss to shift power from workers to bosses by falsely shaming workers or scaring them.
- We need to continue using our new power on Beacon Hill to block the use of DDMs and other unfair aspects of the evaluation system.

Use of high stakes testing

- We need to engage the community by having community forums where parents learn that MCAS results do not help student or schools. Locals need to use the tools we learned in the No on 2 campaign to build coalitions in the community on this issue.
- We need to continue to build the opt out movement

School Privatization

- Charter schools and the money they drain from public schools need to be pat of our focus always. But we also should be looking at the backdoor privatization of public schools. Locals should be demanding to know how much money is spent on private vendors to do jobs we should be doing. In Dedham, after eliminating our experts in reading, the superintendent has hired a reading consultant firm to help provide training for the rest of us, Vendors are being used extensively in every district to provide services and training and we should use these situations as an organizing tool.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

The MTA should reward our friends and do nothing for anybody else. We need to end our toleration of new-liberal candidates. Deval Patrick hurt us. The fact that he is marginally better than a Charlie Baker does not impress me. When we go to the Statehouse we should be going there in a position of strength as we are now. Organizing and winning some battles will make our Beacon Hill relationships all the better.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

The EDU is a fountain of progressive political and philosophical thought. The EDU provides an intellectual and structural organization for progressive expression and direction in the MTA. Before the EDU we were lone wolves baying at the moon. Now, we're a wolf pack—more organized and more dangerous.

The limitation of the EDU is that not everyone will agree with us. We need to maintain the ability to attract situational allies that will be with us for one or more issues but not everything.

Kelly Henderson

Local:

Newton Teachers Association

Your biography and experiences:

At the beginning of each school year I ask students to write a “six word memoir.” Distill your life into a single phrase. They always ask me what mine is and I tell them. “Teaching is an act of rebellion.”

I organized my first walk out – against the Gulf War, in this case – in fifth grade. It was not successful. I sat on the soccer field with another friend, mystified that my demands for action were ignored. I genuinely cannot remember a moment in my life when I haven’t been agitating or organizing in one capacity or another. I have no idea to what I might attribute this; my father swears I emerged from the womb expressly to ask the doctor to sign a petition.

I fell into education by accident, offered a paraprofessional position by a friend. It took approximately seven minutes for me to realize that I was meant to work in schools. And after devouring Friere, hooks, West, Kozol, Ladson-Billings, Tatum --- I knew that the classroom would be where my commitment to social justice activism found a lifelong home.

My resume is missing what many would consider prerequisites for union leadership. I’m newly elected to the Board of Directors and I’ve served for less than a year on two committees: Human and Civil Rights, Education Policy and Practice. In my district, I’m a member of a small group of progressive organizers within our association and we have executed several successful actions thus far. However, for the majority of my career, I’ve worked without a union, which is a primary reason for my determination to preserve and strengthen them.

In spite of the trend to place non-educators in positions of educational leadership (often citing “business world” success as somehow relevant) I believe the *best* qualification for leadership is having been a classroom teacher. I can’t think of a career that requires more versatility, creativity, dedication, or flexibility. From paraprofessional to adjunct to independent school teacher, my various positions outside of a union have revealed to me the conditions Massachusetts is willing to accept for its most vulnerable kids and educators. Part of our role as the MTA is fighting back against the forces that, if left unchecked, will continue to eviscerate whatever protections and stability they can.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

Organizing and teaching have a lot of the same rules. Meet people where they are; start with a battle you can win; don’t mistake fear for apathy. In my local, small actions that required almost no time commitment were very successful in building solidarity and a general willingness to take increasingly substantial actions. When we entered a fresh school year still in a battle for a contract, we knew the annual “appreciation” speeches were bound to be demoralizing. It was also the perfect opportunity for



the union to help members shift the balance of power, even just a little bit.

A group of union representatives handed out brightly colored t-shirts as everyone entered the building that morning. We swarmed the auditorium in our identical shirts and the message was clear: the words of “appreciation” are hollow and we know it. There was another clear message – there are more of us than there are of them, and we’re a united front. There was a palpable shift in the room; we felt a little more powerful than we had the day before.

As the year progressed, the asks grew from wearing a t-shirt to holding signs outside of school in the morning to speaking at school committee meetings. The union wasn’t an invisible dues-collecting abstraction; it was a living breathing organization of which we were all a part. After winning a new contract and then winning on Question 2 in November, we had momentum and an active union culture. I think if we had started by asking folks to canvass or make phone calls we wouldn’t have had nearly as much participation and success. Now, whenever we embark on a new campaign, we start with something small and build from there.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

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- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

Transforming the culture of a large association made up of many satellite associations is a long-term, multi-faceted project, and as such I offer an answer with the caveat that it won’t come anywhere close to reflecting the true complexity of this effort. Based on my experiences trying to make change within an organization on a smaller scale, and having learned from many mistakes in that context, I think the way to begin is by listening and growing outreach. In the case of the latter, it’s essential that the new MTA leadership build on the coalitions we grew during No On 2; our allies need to know that we are committed to an intersectional approach to change and that we are on their side. In terms of the former, I think the first priority of any new leader ought to be listening. If we are to transform a culture, we have to understand it in its current form, and give people an opportunity to be heard. From there, we assess the broader picture and find the places where change is likely to take hold successfully, so that it will inspire confidence in those reluctant to shift.

Loss of agency fee:

In the next year, we are highly likely to lose the right to collect agency fees. Estimates of the loss of membership range from a low of 4% (the current percentage of MTA agency fee payers) to a high of 25% or more (overall losses in Wisconsin public sector unions).

- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

We need to engage in an organized strategic campaign that spans multiple contexts. We need to engage members, shift the narrative about unions as much as possible in the media, preempt the messages that will surely come to members advertising the savings they’ll enjoy by leaving the union, and launch a massive effort to secure commitments from individual members within each local. Clearly this must be

a primary objective for the MTA and will require coordination between multiple departments as well as reallocation of resources. As with Question 2, this is an “all hands on deck” situation and must be approached carefully but with urgency.

As a rank and file member, I will be working on this long before June 2018. Along with other organizers in my local we have begun planning for a commitment campaign. I hope we can use what we learn to help other locals organize successful replicas.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

As a public sector union, “Right to Work” laws and Supreme Court decisions will continue to threaten our very existence. Perhaps more threatening because of their savvy façade, personalized learning initiatives and “public-private” partnerships are a pernicious and elusive enemy. Our third challenge, and the one most difficult to address, is the same in every American institution – the concentration of power among white, cis-gendered males. And we can’t address the first two challenges effectively without dismantling the third. Frankly, as a white person, I think my first step in addressing white supremacy is to admit that I have no idea how to address it. This answer is insufficient, as has been the work we’ve done up to this point on this issue.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

The MTA needs to focus on growing its power as a union and empowering each local to lift rank and file members into leadership roles in their buildings and beyond. The greatest interaction with statewide politics we’ve had in the past few years was the defeat of Question 2. While I hope to see us fighting **for** changes more often, such as the fair share amendment, I don’t believe a relationship with the legislature should be a priority until the legislature is willing to come to US, not the other way around. The democratic party has abandoned public sector unions, and our rubber-stamped support for their candidates is no longer an effective strategy.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

At the Annual Meeting this year the delegates demonstrated that a strong majority shares our principles on a variety of issues. In spite of this strength, our numbers are still relatively small, so is our capacity to organize, and of course we still struggle to reshape the narrative that EDU is “divisive.” Moving forward, we should make it a primary goal to have a presence in every single local, which will require growing the number of organizers dedicated to particular administrative tasks. As we continue to grow our presence and visibility, more members will become interested in being involved. Philosophically, they are already overwhelmingly on our side.

What else would you like to add?

Regardless of which candidates advance to the general election, an EDU victory in 2018 is absolutely crucial. I look forward to the campaign, in whatever capacity I might serve, and our continued movement in the direction of justice and peace.

Heidi Lahey

Local:

Wachusett Regional Education Association

Your biography and experiences:

I am a special education teacher K-2 with a passion for transforming struggling learners into joyful students. I enjoy the creative challenge of teaching children who learn differently and finding new ways to approach foundational skill instruction. The hours I spend every day with students make a difference in their lives.

My formative experiences include being raised as the youngest of five children by parents who valued education over material possessions. I attended college to expand my mind. It was assumed that I would find meaningful work by understanding the world and my place in it, rather than by gaining a skill set. After 20 years working in healthcare, following a short stint as a special education aide, I decided to get a masters degree in special education. I graduated in May 2009 from Fitchburg State, and was hired in 2010 at the school where I had been a paraprofessional and did my student teaching. This is my seventh year as a teacher.

Three years ago, despite our biggest caseload in years, my school had staffing cuts to special education. I spoke against the cuts to the new special education director and my principal, but my concerns about student needs fell on deaf ears. So...I ran for president of my my local union.

I was elected as part of a slate with other candidates in my local who sought to increase transparency and member involvement. Together we have improved access to information, implemented greater democracy in critical decisions, developed solidarity with the other bargaining units, and begun reclaiming our voices as advocates for public education.

Last May I was elected to the MTA Executive Committee seat for Region B as part of Member Action. The Executive Committee position has given me a much greater understanding of the depth and breadth of the attacks on public education, and the real urgency of the fights ahead.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

As leaders, we need to determine when and why people engage with the union- what is the perception



of our members about the work we do as an organization? In my local, there was no outreach or education provided around collective power or voice. I now see how the union exists as a means to balance the power; the collective power of many is equal to the concentrated power of the few. Too many of our locals have lost sight of the power of the group, and have instead created a replica of administrative hierarchy. Too often Leadership is seen as THE Union, rather than members. I believe that transforming this dynamic is our essential work. Ideally, our role is showing members how they can transform education by taking action together, helping them find their own voices, their own solutions, and giving guidance along the way from our collective experience in the union.

We need to help our members understand that their stories are both unique and representative of what is occurring in many other classrooms and schools. It is not just MY school that is short changing children...there is a reduction of resources happening everywhere, and the impact on our society is profound. It is all connected to economic inequality and systemic racial injustice, with the powerful pushing an agenda which will result in continued degradation of life for the many while benefitting the few. In these days, teachers have found ourselves at the front lines in the battle for democracy. How will we be able to come together and win?? Because we must win- the alternative is not acceptable. We need to share examples and real stories of how members have taken collective actions and changed their own workplace dynamic. We have to focus on successes, small and large. Gathering people together and connecting them in relationships is still the foundation work. Nothing works as well as face to face conversation to find common issues and support each other with solutions. It is the hardest work to do, because it is time consuming. But I truly believe there are no short cuts in organizing.

If we can build a membership with informed and active members who are empowered at a local level, that common experience will shift the balance in the statewide and national fights.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

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- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

To transform the MTA, we must stop describing ourselves as a service organization. We must stop trying to do FOR members, and start doing WITH members so they can understand and experience that they hold the power. We have to become an activist UNION and not a professional organization focused on credit card deals and conference opportunities.

These days call for a radically different union.

Teachers have become so distressed by the demands of the profession that many are reaching a “fight or flight” mentality. Each time an articulate and passionate teacher flees the classroom rather than

fighting, we have lost an opportunity. We must reach teachers who are feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, offering them a means to effect positive change in their classrooms through their union. This type of organizing effort will overcome both the agency fee issue and build the power to take on corporate privatizers and austerity narratives.

The tension between the service model and activism is a key issue within MTA. I am not certain that they can co-exist in the current climate. Under stress, humans tend to seek the familiar, and the times ahead are certain to be stressful. Without an overhaul of the union and a change in its key mission, it is likely that business will continue as usual, and meaningful change will not occur. I would recommend a significant restructuring to focus on activism and organizing rather than maintaining all the same structures but changing only the lens through which people see the work. Members want the union to help them fight for improved public education and greater respect for our profession. We won't get that by compromise and collaboration with those who disrespect us and our expertise.

Loss of agency fee:

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- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

Another key issue within MTA is our financial picture related to how we intend to handle the loss of agency fee. The presentation from Grant Thornton clearly stated our current finances are solid and we have time to strategically prepare. In speaking with the Grant Thornton team following the Executive Committee presentation, they made it clear that the path forward was not about stuffing money into saving and preserving the status quo. The agency fee challenge offers MTA tremendous growth opportunities for our overall organization if we use our considerable resources to change the MTA and promote essential fights. We need to have rank and file take part in these decisions. Members should have a clear sense of where their dues are spent and what the priorities are for MTA.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

Another key issue for the MTA is coalition building with union partners. We need to continue our work with other unions, social justice groups, parents and communities to improve our world. The forces against us are many, and we cannot achieve our goals alone. Just as we find strength in solidarity at a local level, we will find greater strength together with the groups that share our vision and goals. There needs to be a move away from our self view as a "professional association" and a deeper solidarity with other groups fighting towards a better society for all.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

My experience of teaching while the Stand For Children language has been put into place is that the compromises of former MTA leadership have contributed in significant ways to a decline in public education that is palpably felt in classrooms. I do not have faith in the promises of politicians or the understanding of anyone on Beacon Hill regarding education policy. Too many people outside the classroom making decisions which they don't have to live with- and ignoring the voices of those of us who see the impact on students daily. Our efforts are best spent growing our power with rank and file organizing on issues. Then educated members can apply pressure on their own elected officials across the state to support OUR education policy agenda. I'm not interested in playing the political game which has brought us to our current state.

I would prefer to see us step further away from the insider deal-making that undermines the power of our members.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

EDU to date has represented an alternative position on power and activism within the MTA. In the growing of a caucus and pushing forward on issues, EDU has demonstrated how members can find strength and success in working together. The group identity is both a strength and a weakness when other members perceive EDU as creating issues rather than confronting them. We have not created the machinery of the current MTA, and pointing out where improvements are needed is only divisive to those seeking to maintain the status quo.

We need to continue to keep our focus on rank and file engagement, open and democratic principles, and standing for public education.

Deb McCarthy

Local:

Hull Teachers Association

Your biography and experiences:

The name is Deb McCarthy and I have been teaching fifth-grade for 22 years. I am currently the local union president, a Board Member of the MTA, the Chair of the Government Relations Committee for the MTA, and a member of EDU. Prior experience includes: building rep. (3), vp (4) President (4), Chair of PR&R (6).

When asked to answer the question, ‘What matters most’, for me it is the students in my classroom, the resistance movement to those who seek to reduce my students to a score for profit, and the deliberate assault to de-professionalize our profession. With each passing year my students are being denied the opportunity of an education that is student- centered, differentiated, and engaging. Instead they are being forced fed a curriculum that is digitalized, sterilized, and politically bought by an education for profit agenda that provides nothing more than a useless skill set of mundane tasks. Running parallel to this educational marketing of my students is the equally destructive and demoralizing direct attack on the teaching profession. With each passing year we are reduced to widgets and clogs in the machination of public education and we are viewed as replaceable commodities. We are not respected as the major stakeholders and experts, but rather regarded as the obstacles that must be denigrated for profit’s sake.

If creating the change my students deserve, my colleagues deserve, and our school communities deserve, means leaving the classroom and fighting as a union leader for what I value above all else, public education, then I am ready to do so.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

To be brutally honest, it is relative easy to engage embers when we are discussing the bread and butter aspects of the collective bargaining process, but in most recent years, fear and retaliation are front and center when trying to mobilize and organize against the constant barrage of threats and attacks that enter our work place on a daily basis. With each passing mandate, accountability measure, and binder requirement, members are feeling more overwhelmed, isolated, and insecure about their capacity to fight back and engage in meaningful resistance. Two instances of success at a local level happened around teacher discipline and student behavior. Prior to entering the Principal’s Office for a grievance hearing, I had teachers gather in the hallway outside her office. We formed a circle, listened to words of accolades for the teacher in trouble, and then stood in silence for two minutes. The message was delivered loud and clear that an injury to one is an injury to all and that we will stand in solidarity and



in testimony for our colleagues.

I have also experienced much success when engaging members around demanding services for the behavioral, emotional, and social needs of the students we serve. With each passing budget cut, our district triages funding foremost for the mandates of the accountability system and this deviates time, resources, and needed services to our most vulnerable students. We have created surveys, formed behavior committees, and bargained language into our collective bargaining agreement. While I believe it is important for members to have ownership of advocacy, and a shared sense of responsibility around solidarity, these actions have not been as successful when asking members to get involved in actions that go beyond the local level. I am convinced that this is an area that the MTA can be more influential and have more of an impact if the engagement is focused upon the issues that matter most to the members.

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- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

I actually believe we are witnessing a transformation within the MTA at this very moment in time, and that we are moving in the right direction. Members are beginning to understand the direct assault on public education and are also beginning to understand that if they chose to be passive, they are going to be complicit bystanders in the demise of public education. I believe it is critical to tap into this sense of urgency and I would propose that we utilize the incredible GrassRoots and Government Relations Divisions of the MTA and redirect their work from the Legislative Work temporarily, and focus their energies towards the building of networks of regional capacity teams. Rather than Senate District Coordinators and Political Action Leaders, I envision tri-town regional pacts for example, that would coalesce the unions in a region coming together as teams of solidarity, focusing on their local issues and steps needed to support each other. If we take the time to build this power locally, then regionally, it will simply transform into the collective power needed at the state and national level.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

I am of the opinion that the three big issues facing the MTA are Betsy, Betsy, Betsy. In a nutshell, she encapsulates all of the threats facing us, and it really is a do or die situation. If we don't understand with every fiber of our union's soul that we are facing an either-or time in our history as a union of public school educators, then we don't understand the dire consequences ahead. We must ignite the fire and passion in every member to fight for the schools our students deserve. We must ignore the deliberate, and at times effective counter-strategy that redirects us from our real work to nebulous conversations around divisiveness, charter school teachers and firebrand presidents, and we must redirect the conversation each and every time to the fight to end the privatization of public education and public unions. We must understand that history is relying on us now to represent, to resist, and to retake what is rightfully ours, a democratic and free public education for our citizenry.

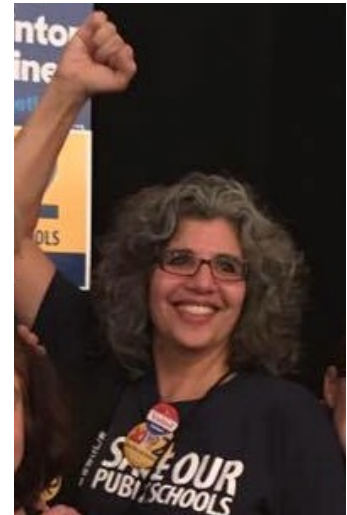
Merrie Najimy

Local:

Concord Teachers Association

Your Biography and Experiences:

Struggling to learn and read, and feeling invisible in the curriculum as a child, inspired me to want to teach. This led me to what is now my 27th year of teaching elementary school. Most of those years have been in Concord, MA. When I began teaching, educators, schools and entire districts were largely in control of their curriculum, assessment and instructional practices. This is what made teaching and learning meaningful.



The privatization agenda for education has robbed education of its meaning, purpose and joy and threatens democracy. I am a union organizer because I believe in the power of building movements to bring social change.

I've served as president of the Concord Teachers Association for a decade and was a founder of EDU. In Concord, we endured a bullying principal, a privatization scheme against unionized bus drivers, and a retaliation campaign against me for my union activity. Morale across both the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Districts was on a rapid decline. We stood together, developed our relationships with each other and across locals, with parents, and the broader community. We lost our fear and built a movement.

After three years of struggle, we stopped the bus privatization, ended the retaliation against me, and the principal resigned in disgrace. The parents and community members involved in our movement went on to run School Committee candidates. By 2016, they won 4 of the 5 School Committee seats and the Superintendent will be moving on at the end of her contract in June 2017. We went on to open bargaining and won one of our strongest contracts ever.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*

We need to have a vision about public education that comes from what brings us joy and meaning in the work we do with our students. It needs to be a shared vision, developed with members, families, students and our communities.

One way to engage our members and develop a vision is through **open bargaining**. The Concord Teachers Association (CTA) lead conversations across our union about the things that brought our members joy in their work with students, what sucked the joy out of their work and what they wanted to change. We developed a platform and proposals based on the themes that came from the conversations, and our members ratified the platform. We brought them into the negotiation sessions, caucused with them and engaged them in a contract campaign along the way. Each morning after a bargaining session, members updated other members about negotiations. Because the members were

involved in the decision making all along the way and engaging each other, they experienced themselves as the union.

At the same time we need to fight back the broad attacks. In our locals, we will also connect with the power of the union on a very personal level, if we share our problems, stick together and act together to solve our problems. Our personal attacks will become shared attacks. The solutions will become collective. We will break the isolation and shame and begin to lose our fear, even when we fight the smallest fights, **together**. This is how we **become** the union.

- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

When members identify the issues and decide on the solutions, they act together. When they act together, they build their collective power. This is what works. But when we try to rally people on issues and/or messages that have not been decided by them, they are likely not to participate.

Transforming the culture of the MTA:

The MTA is officially an association of locals that are independent in their actions. This, along with a longstanding culture of relying on local presidents and field reps to hold the expertise and authority in locals, has made it difficult to organize around assaults that are statewide and impact every local.

- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

The **starting point** is when members see themselves as the union in the way that I described in the question above. This transformation leads to members seeing themselves as **the MTA**. It is beginning to happen. The MTA has held open bargaining summits, and meetings and workshops to end high stakes testing, take on the evaluation system and bully principal, defend immigrant students and confront Islamophobia. I have played a central role in planning and facilitating many of these workshops and meetings. Members are showing up, even if their local leaders are not. They are excited to learn, and are developing plans and going back to build campaigns in their locals and in their communities.

To transform the work of these groups from MTA led to rank-and-file driven, we must take another step; form coordinating committees made up of members of each of these campaigns. Local and statewide member-lead coordinating committees lay the foundation for statewide organizing and to connect the struggles.

Loss of agency fee:

In the next year, we are highly likely to lose the right to collect agency fees. Estimates of the loss of membership range from a low of 4% (the current percentage of MTA agency fee payers) to a high of 25% or more (overall losses in Wisconsin public sector unions).

- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

The response to the crisis doesn't begin after the ruling. It began three years ago, when we elected Barbara Madeloni to the presidency of the MTA. It continued with the fight and subsequent victory on

Question 2. It goes on now through the statewide work we are doing to fight high-stakes testing, the evaluation system and the bully principal.

There is no magic pill. There is no answer out there that we haven't thought of. There are no short cuts. Our ability to survive, and in fact thrive in the impending crisis grows stronger when our locals become the place where we walk around our buildings, talk and listen to each other, reach out to allies, identify our vision, problems and solutions together, take action and solve our problems collectively. I will continue to fortify the work of locals to build their collective power, further the work we've begun to end high-stakes testing, stop bullying principals, fighting against racism and austerity measures and harness that power to grow our statewide power.

Our members will respond yes, to the option of joining a union when they see themselves as the union.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

The most immediate threat to our union is the Supreme Court case on agency fee. In my view, this threat makes the issue of continuing to build a rank and file movement the overarching issue for the MTA. This is how we will weather the storm. The barrage of issues that we face from austerity budgets, to the bullying evaluation system, to high stakes testing, have different levels of urgency to different locals from large, urban locals, to higher ed, to smaller more affluent locals. The MTA must fortify the organizing of the different locals who are being threatened by any of these issues.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

Legislation, while important, is not the vehicle to change. Under the leadership of Barbara Madeloni, the MTA Government Relations Committee has put forth the most progressive legislation in its history. Yet, it gets watered down or dies in committee, despite our best efforts at lobbying.

It is, and always has been social movements that collapse systems of injustice. Movements create the change that legislation will then codify. Take high stakes testing as an example. If parents are unwilling to let their students take the tests, teachers are unwilling to administer the test and students are unwilling to take the test; **then there is no test**. That doesn't happen because of legislation.

When the president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association is judicious about when she visits the statehouse, legislators come to understand that her presence there is because of something big. That is when they stand up and take notice. It is our members who can develop relationships with their specific representatives and speak their truth to their elected official.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

As a founder of the EDU, I have witnessed our own transformation. We were the movement that got Barbara Madeloni elected. We have set the progressive agenda of the MTA through our new business items. We have helped the Annual Meeting think critically about what internal democracy looks like. And when we act, we are effective.

We need to do two things to strengthen EDU: 1) build our own culture to be one where we mentor each on how to build collective power and fight the fights in our own locals and 2) have a stronger presence in the statewide work that is being led by the MTA headquarters. We need to seize the opportunities to form and lead rank and file organizing committees to coordinate the developing statewide campaigns.

What else would you like to add?

Our goal is to help people break their isolation, believe in themselves and each other, and act together, in spite of fear. We have to build a vision for public education within our communities and fight to realize that vision. When we have problems we have to look to each other for the answers. When we do this we transform our union, our culture and lives. Our union is the way to gather the strength and power to reclaim what has been taken away from us.

Max Page

Local:

MSP—UMass Amherst

Your biography and experiences:

Public education is the foundation of democracy. It is one of the most fundamental commitments we make to each other – to educate our young people to participate as full citizens and adults in society.

Unions are the instruments for creating a just society, the only organizations capable of securing the rights and voices of workers.



The MTA is the union of public school educators, which means that it is the most important organization fighting on behalf of the building blocks of a good society, and against a neoliberal ideology that perpetuates class and race inequality and undermines the very notion of the commons.

This is the reason I am willing to be considered by the membership of EDU as a candidate for president of the MTA.

I live in the house I grew up in. I graduated from the Amherst public schools, the same schools my children attend. I am the son of two public school educators. My father, a refugee from Nazi Germany, managed (through the GI Bill) to end up as a professor at UMass Amherst (I discussed this in my [MTA ED Talk](#) a few years ago.) My mother was a drama teacher and then principal of public elementary schools in Rowe and South Hadley.

I have had a career as a teacher and writer about American history, with a focus on the history of cities, and the politics of historic preservation. I have written books on topics such as the real and imagined destruction of New York City in popular culture, and the history and future of historic preservation. I run the historic preservation program at UMass Amherst. I am married to Eve Weinbaum, president of the MSP and professor in the Labor Center at UMass Amherst.

My left political commitments have been deepened through fellowship with people in the MSP Amherst, PHENOM, and EDU. Soon after I arrived at UMass 2001, I became involved in my local, the Massachusetts Society of Professors. A group of us transformed the MSP in the way EDU has helped to transform the MTA. We articulated a vision of the university we wanted, and we fought, through contract battles and on the state level, to achieve that kind of university. I was proud to serve as president of the MSP and to lead these battles.

During that period, the MTA hardly seemed worth our time – it was distant, bureaucratic, slow moving, and conservative when it came to organizing. So I helped launch PHENOM, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts, with the goal of connecting faculty, students, and staff across the 29-campus system to advocate for a progressive vision for public colleges and universities, and to get beyond the circular firing squad that had characterized public higher education advocacy. PHENOM is ten years old now and has had many victories – including helping to make free public higher education

a mainstream proposal.

When I finished my term as president of the MSP, I decided we needed to get more involved in the MTA, in order to harness the potential energy of 110,000 members in every community across the state.

Since 2009, most of my activist energies have been directed through the MTA. I have been a member of the Executive Committee of the MTA, a board member, head of the Revenue Committee, and now Vice-Chair of the Government Relations Committee. I am proud that I helped to found EDU, building on the efforts of the group of local presidents, and the Peace and Justice caucus before them.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

I believe we engage members through campaigns. In the course of those campaigns, we have an opportunity to connect with one another, engage in discussion and learning, and show how the MTA is not a dues collector, but an organization immersed in fighting for what members care about.

I also believe we need to figure out ways for our members to gain a sense of power without, at first, taking on a lot of individual risk. For example, I (along with Bob Pura, Greenfield Community College president) proposed the idea of a rally for public education because I believed that members who don't necessarily participate in rallies would find themselves swept up with hundreds of other MTA members and the righteous pleasure that comes with protesting together.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

The MTA is officially an association of locals that are independent in their actions. This, along with a longstanding culture of relying on local presidents and field reps to hold the expertise and authority in locals, has made it difficult to organize around assaults that are statewide and impact every local.

- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

We are moving forward on a long journey of transforming the MTA. We should not, however underestimate how far we have to go.

A third or more of our locals with almost no connection with the MTA. They don't send delegates to annual meeting, and they don't participate in any meaningful way with our campaigns. While thousands participated in Question 2, tens of thousands of our members played no role.

The prospect of the loss of agency fee should spur all of us to rethink the way we work. Staff also should recognize that engaging unengaged locals, focusing on organizing, building by building in the locals for which they are responsible, is essential to the survival of the union – and their jobs.

I think this means decisively moving away from the MTA structure that organizes staff around a local president. I would like to encourage more conversation among locals in a region, thinking of teams of staff and local leaders working more closely together, supporting each other's individual campaigns, and our statewide efforts. I hope as well that soon we will stop talking about "K-12 and Higher Ed" and instead speak about "P-16" -- pre-school through college.

Loss of agency fee:

In the next year, we are highly likely to lose the right to collect agency fees. Estimates of the loss of membership range from a low of 4% (the current percentage of MTA agency fee payers) to a high of 25% or more (overall losses in Wisconsin public sector unions).

- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

We will keep our members only if we help them feel like the “MTA” is them, their union, their voice not only for securing a fair workplace, but also fighting on behalf of their students, and leading the call for a more just society.

There are those in the MTA who are suggesting we circle the wagons, cut budgets, and focus on so-called “bread and butter issues” – grievances, negotiations, professional development – and put less emphasis on organizing and grassroots political action. I couldn’t disagree more. Members want to see that the organization is fighting for the kind of public education for which they entered the profession.

The loss of agency fee is frightening and awful, another assault on unions. But it also gives us an opportunity to make the case for the union with greater passion and energy than we have before.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

1. Loss of Agency Fee. See above.
2. Passing the Fair Share Amendment in November of 2018. Nothing has been more important to me on the state level than winning progressive taxes, something I have been working on within the MTA for the past decade. I sit with Barbara on the Raise Up Massachusetts Steering Committee, which has successfully brought the Fair Share amendment to the ballot in 2018. Not all of our vision can be achieved with money, but we know that the \$2 billion generated by this tax can have an immeasurable effect.
3. Strengthening our coalitions. I am not sure members appreciate how important a transformation we have made by establishing and strengthening coalitions. The Raise Up Massachusetts coalition is our vehicle for helping to achieve our goals -- funding for public education, yes, but also the \$15 minimum wage, and sick leave and paid family and medical leave for all workers. Similarly, it was the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance that was central to the landslide Question 2 victory, and will be key to winning a reinvestment in public education, a rollback of testing, and the protection of collective bargaining.

Strengthening these coalitions will be the bedrock of our ongoing efforts to build a more just society.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

Having a powerful legislative agenda is important. I’ve been glad to work with Deb on the

Governmental Relations Committee, developing legislation that captures elements of our vision. That the Senate recently approved several amendments to their budget that addressed our concerns is a sign of our renewed power.

I also believe that fighting for building blocks of a more just society through legal challenges (think of the McDuffy and Hancock decisions that brought us the idea of the school foundation budget) and through referendum battles.

But I also agree with what Bill McKibben has written: “Legislation is the mopping-up phase” of a social movement. The great social movements of our history did not begin and end with legislation. We have to create the change on the ground.

In terms of electoral politics, I believe the old MTA largely squandered its use of political endorsements – we give them out too freely, spend too much, and get back too little. The \$100,000 given by the Board to DFER hero, Yes-on-Question-2-voting Seth Moulton, is a case in point.

I believe in supporting those that truly support and fight for our vision for public education. We should be willing as well – with appropriate preparation – to fight to remove legislators who consistently fail to work on behalf of public education.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

We should celebrate how much EDU has achieved in a few short years. We have created a progressive alternative to the old guard, elected a president twice, steered union policies in a better direction, and steadily expanded our representation on the Board – from a few lonely voices to nearly thirty. We helped win a landslide victory over Question 2.

And yet, while EDU regularly attracts seventy members to meetings, and we have outsized influence at Annual Meetings, and a growing influence on the Board, we have not grown appreciably in membership, and our strength is concentrated in a few locals and a few higher ed campuses.

EDU's successes should be the springboard to an effort this coming year to dramatically expand our reach. Let's start with every local represented by the board members we elected. Let's map out a plan to hold meetings within those regions and locals. The caucus will flourish when it is perceived as both the leaders within the MTA, but also when we are seen as the network of local activists, helping locals achieve their goals.

Jamie Rinaldi

Local:

Newton Teachers Association

Your biography and experiences:

I am a history teacher at Newton South High School. I've served as building representative and chair of our negotiation team. I have been a member of Educators for a Democratic Union for six years and I am longstanding member of the caucus' coordinating committee.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*



We saw the potential for a truly militant, activist oriented MTA during the No on Question 2 campaign. We sent a message to all educators in Massachusetts that they have real power.

We need to savor this victory while also recognizing our present reality. School committees and superintendents hell-bent on the bottom line sow fear of lay-offs, larger class sizes, and increased responsibilities. Administrators, some overwhelmed by the vagaries of the evaluation system and others eager to prove their mettle as mid-level dictators, frustrate and intimidate experienced professionals with their constant demand for statistics and paperwork. Too many of our members feel powerless to challenge the coercion and confusion in their day-to-day work lives.

How do we make the union more visible in their daily lives? In many of our locals, the union does the necessary and admirable job of playing a strong defense. In a few of our strongest locals, the unions have placed significant checks on how administrators use the evaluation system. Unfortunately, this is often invisible work, out of sight to most members.

The present moment demands that we imagine new possibilities for member activism. As the Chicago Teachers Union taught us in 2012, transformative campaigns start with the smallest actions.

In Massachusetts, we see members building what I'd like to call "everyday solidarity". Educators across the state stand out to defend students against the real threats of state-sanctioned racism and violence. More and more locals wear union shirts and badges, bringing a spirit of collective action to their buildings.

Small actions can lay the groundwork for larger campaigns. We need cultivate an even greater spirit of experimentation in our best-organized locals and then be ready to replicate those successes across the state.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

The MTA is officially an association of locals that are independent in their actions. This, along with a

longstanding culture of relying on local presidents and field reps to hold the expertise and authority in locals, has made it difficult to organize around assaults that are statewide and impact every local.

- *How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?*

So many of the MTA's efforts live or die on the investment of a local president. Yet, we have to be careful in how we articulate our criticisms. For every president that rules his or her local like a personal fiefdom, there is a president that serves (and suffers) for the collective good.

We have to call out the reactionary notion that "local presidents know their members best" for what it is: paternalism. We need to press the debate with sitting presidents while building our caucus' capacity to run serious electoral challenges in the most conservative locals.

At the same time, we need to offer clearer tools for small and underfunded locals to create a spirit of "everyday solidarity" in their schools. The MTA's Public Relations and Organizing Team should solicit grant applications from the locals in most need of financial support, rather than spend its money on the promotional swag it so often funds. MTA should connect well-funded and effectively organized locals with less resourced unions to share communication templates, contract language, campaign strategies, and success stories. With each local an island, too many of us reinvent the tools a neighboring union has already built. Together we will realize our potential to organize, fight, and win real power!

Loss of agency fee:

In the next year, we are highly likely to lose the right to collect agency fees. Estimates of the loss of membership range from a low of 4% (the current percentage of MTA agency fee payers) to a high of 25% or more (overall losses in Wisconsin public sector unions).

- *Assume that the Supreme Court makes such a ruling in June 2018, after you have been elected and before you take office. What actions would you take, and what would you recommend, in order for the MTA to respond to this crisis?*

As I've discussed above, we have powerful models for how we grow solidarity in our schools. If we can build a sense of common struggle, we will have a union well positioned to fight back the most hostile of threats. But the loss of agency fee presents an unprecedented challenge. It will require experimentation, humility, and resilience.

The MTA leadership needs to identify a small cohort of locals to test drive our operations in a "right to work" environment. Given that we don't know precisely what a post-agency fee landscape will look like, these locals should test numerous approaches. At baseline, every member needs to be asked, face-to-face, to sign a card that declares, "I'm with the union!" Some locals should experiment with creating their own dues collection systems, anticipating the possibility that we could lose payroll deductions.

As the work progresses, leadership and rank-and-file activists need to invite criticism and openly evaluate their mistakes. This work will be humbling but reflection will yield valuable lessons.

This will be hard work. It may be demoralizing and exhausting for the core of leaders and activists that will carry it out. Yet, we know that our division and exhaustion emboldens those conspire to dismantle public sector unions and privatize public education. We have incredible capacity to beat back powerful enemies and affirm our vision of public education. Agency fee presents an even graver test but collectively, we have the strength and experience to win this fight.

Three key issues:

What do you see as the three key issues the MTA faces, and what actions would you recommend to address them?

- **Collective Bargaining:** We have recently seen an explosion of new thinking on contract negotiations. When the rank-and-file draft the union bargaining position or locals open up negotiations to the public, we see conventional wisdom giving way to a spirit of experimentation. Through education and training, the MTA should continue its role in disrupting long held notions about bargaining. The MTA must continue to act as a conduit for sharing progressive and visionary contract language across the organization. Some locals already bargain to combat racial injustice, expand academic freedom, demand professional autonomy, and grow equality in our workplaces. Whenever possible, the MTA must celebrate these achievements and educate other locals on how to replicate them.
- **Win the 2018 “Millionaires Tax” Ballot Question:** The “No on 2” campaign allowed us to talk with voters about our vision of public education. Unsurprisingly, many people worry about how we fund our schools. Districts continue to make egregious cuts to staffing and program, raising class sizes and further narrowing the curriculum. Saddled with more work and given fewer resources, many see an imperiled system. The “Millionaires Tax” campaign offers us an incredible opportunity to expose the chronic underfunding of our system and convince voters that the wealthy few can afford to pay for a system for everyone. Moreover, it offers our movement an opportunity to encourage voters to imagine what a fully funded education system should look like.
- **Internal Education / Labor History and Union Values:** As union activists, we join a long struggle for economic justice and workplace democracy. The labor movement’s victories allow working people to live more dignified lives. This is a proud tradition and we need to openly celebrate our victories, from due process to paid leave! Yet, for our members that grew up during the decades long war on labor, the union seems mysterious. Even some progressive members do not see the union as an outlet for their political involvement. The MTA needs to recommit itself, in the pages of MTA today and on social media (for starters), to telling the story of the labor movement.

Electoral politics:

What are your thoughts about how the MTA should relate to the statehouse and electoral politics?

I support Barbra Madeloni’s position on electoral politics in her tenure as MTA president: if the politicians want our support, they must adopt our positions. Too often this has been misunderstood (or mischaracterized) as a disengagement from conventional politics. Instead, I see it as a much needed recalibration of our union’s political identity. Nearly every academic study on teacher unions argues that the NEA (and its state level affiliates) functions as an auxiliary of the Democratic Party. This weakens bargaining power and mutes criticism. What good is our opposition if a politician knows we will “kiss and make up” come Election Day? With the “No on 2” campaign, we proved wrong that tired adage “if you aren’t at the table, you’re on it.”

I don’t believe in absolutist positions and there will inevitably be situations where compromise has a strategic value. I do believe that our reorientation on the question of statehouse politics does put us on much stronger footing as we prepare ourselves for the challenges ahead.

EDU strengths and limitations:

What do you see as EDU's strengths AND limitations? What proposals do you have to strengthen EDU and address its limitations?

EDU has helped steer the MTA in a more activist direction. This turn proved decisive in our response to charter school expansion. EDU continues to prove itself adept at running successful leadership campaigns and reinvigorating debate at all levels of the union. These candidate forums illustrate our commitment to union democracy and grassroots participation.

Despite these achievements, EDU still needs to grow its presence at the local level. I see the upcoming campaign as an opportunity to deepen our commitment to local organizing. As we plan our campaign for the 2018 MTA elections, we should use each meeting as an opportunity to grow our organizing efforts. Every person that attends an EDU campaign event should leave feeling that they have a tangible next step to grow “everyday solidarity” in their buildings. These struggles will serve as a model for the kind of union we continue to fight for!

Jessica Wender-Shubow

Local:

Brookline Educators Union

Your biography and experiences:

I am about to start my fourth 2-year term as full-time president of the large local of 1100 members. I am a member of the task force of Large Locals, which make up roughly 40% of the MTA membership. I serve on the MTA Education and Policy Committee. Prior to becoming president of my local, I spent seven years as a high school Social Studies teacher.

My education has informed my union work, and both are rooted in lessons from three generations of my family's experience as labor activists. My graduate work ultimately became relevant to our union organizing. I studied how modern liberal thinkers moved away from categorizing marginalized people as intrinsically inferior or superior races and gender "types" and used statistical thinking to invent a new form of "diversity." They ushered in today's measuring of still racially and gender differentiated populations according to "inclusive" "common measures" that seek to treat all "all else" as "equal." Now we are all expected to excel according to what is valued by the wealthy, while their increasingly concentrated power is then celebrated as a sign of merit. As union educators, we must resist professional codes and moves toward deskilling of teaching, both of which evade the fact that concentrated wealth is a function of the growing majority being dispossessed of wealth and power. As union educators, we are well positioned to expose how the current uses of "data" justify more than they diminish social and economic inequality.



However, no amount of clarity of understanding, however articulate, informed, and unified, no matter how amplified and even respected will prevail if forces of repression are allowed to take hold. That is a lesson I heard growing up in my family. My grandmother's work on the job was respected, and she was valued "just like family" by her boss until that day that she joined the Industrial Workers of the World. Then the boss fired her and made sure no one else would hire her. My dad's first client in 1951 was a respected and beloved Boston Latin teacher until McCarthyism changed the definition of Americanism and his refusal to sign a loyalty oath suddenly became conduct unbecoming a teacher. My mother was part of a "value-free" clinical trial on infertility until her political affiliations were uncovered one day and medical science no longer mattered. No amount of union pride and affirmation can stop repression. Only clear-eyed, explicit and unified resistance to a named threat will protect us and everyone else who is targeted, along with a clearly articulated, alternative political vision and plan.

ON ARTICULATING A DISTINCTLY DEMOCRATIC PATH FOR MTA AS A UNION

EDU was formed out of a pressing need to explicitly distinguish a democratic unionism from an insider's game in which leadership is defined as a proven ability to "go along to get along" with those in power in schools, the union, and other institutions, political and economic. MTA president Paul Toner proved to be a master at this when he made back room deals with those bent on eliminating unionism itself. Not surprisingly, the pro-corporate education reform Boston Globe said on June 2 that

they'd like someone like Toner – or maybe him – back in charge of MTA.

I remember when a number of us early organizers of EDU met with Toner in the offices of Jobs with Justice. Paul felt obliged at that point to seek reconciliation with a rapidly growing number of MTA members who were directly challenging his capitulation to Stand for Children's strong-arm attack on seniority and its effort to turn teacher evaluations into instruments of employment at will.

Paul noticed Cambridge teacher Lynn Brown's flyer attacking the corporate interest behind this agenda. He asked plaintively, "what should I say to a member who saw this flyer and said, 'But Paul, my son works for Bain Capital!'" I answered, "Well, you should have had a backbone, Paul, and tell her, it's not personal. We as MTA have policy differences with companies like Bain." Instead, Toner went back to his "new unionism" of management-labor collaboration in which labor is called divisive and oppositional unless it is busy helping management implement management's initiatives. We know this to be called "getting educator buy-in."

In my view, we have a responsibility as the largest labor union in the state to distinguish ourselves and our mission from those of management in every domain. That is what distinguishes independent unionism from "company unions" that management implicitly controls. We must not be afraid to proudly seize our historical legacy of unions as "laboratories of democracy," rather than promote them as associations that look more like a club or fraternal association than political fighting machine.

Focusing on interpersonal unity and loyalty tends to resonate values of "family" and "community," both of which undercut efforts to analyze power and figure out how to get more of it—collectively and democratically. Valuing consensus for consensus' sake is not the stuff of democracy in which alternative paths are articulated and pursued. Management uses values of "family" – even a family that celebrates its diversity -- to shame employees out of standing up together for their rights. Focusing on personal loyalty leads people to shy away from productive conflict and encourages paternalism and deference. The language and exercise of "labor-management collaboration," of business or labor "communities" and of "public-private partnerships" distract us from articulating our collective insight and exercising independent power as employees and skilled educators. We cannot afford to shy away from asking how a given policy and practice increases or decreases the power of those we represent. Union *solidarity* has never meant unity for unity's sake; it has always involved naming and calling out an adversary.

Engaging members:

- *How do we engage rank-and-file members to understand the union as a way to both address the immediate problems in their working lives AND build a better world?*
- *In your experience, what has worked well and what has not?*

In Brookline's recent contract campaign, I watched members fiercely defend both intellectual engagement and care-work that prioritizes interpersonal engagement with students. Members named both as valuable labor, not selfless service—always a dangerous formulation for work associated with women. When a message crystalized out of small group meetings that teachers wanted to eliminate what is in the way of them doing quality work – double- and triple-booking of the same minutes, useless paperwork, being interrupted with standardized, top-down mandates— teachers spoke proudly with confidence with groups of parents, to the press, and at school committee meetings. They spoke for themselves and one another on rally signs they filled in, thereby balancing individual voice with unity. When it came to demanding a livable wage for paraprofessionals, we already had a context for the kind of schools ESPs ought to be given proper means to be part of, and we were unified across

units.

We said management needed to lessen the workload contractually or pay more for that load, and teachers said their preference was for a fair workload. It felt like the good fight and it was galvanizing. Teachers were publicly defending an alternative vision of public education. We found ourselves in common cause with parents and their children while the school committee became a clear adversary. We will see in time if it takes hold in a broad way on a political level. Our initial foray into recruiting and electing school committee members had a major impact. Now we have an educational justice alliance in town.

Three related pitfalls arose: 1) we took too long to come up with choices of voluntary activity to withhold with an eye on targeting the administration, not direct service to children, so that our alliance with parents would be strengthened. 2) We should have had a game plan laid out from the start, but that was difficult because, 3) we didn't from the start weave into our "vision," the practical steps to achieve it. We should have made more fundamental why it was so important to having a comprehensive way to call for, and assess, member readiness to act. We were left having to guess what our capacity was and therefore what we could credibly threaten. Modeling of such campaigns for locals is what MTA needs at every level.

Transforming the culture of the MTA

The MTA is officially an association of locals that are independent in their actions. This, along with a longstanding culture of relying on local presidents and field reps to hold the expertise and authority in locals, has made it difficult to organize around assaults that are statewide and impact every local.

How do we transform MTA culture to cultivate both rank-and-file organizing at the local level and vigorous action on statewide fights such as the Fair Share Amendment?

TIME TO CONSOLIDATE AND FOCUS OUR POWER

I believe it has come time to affirmatively point to today's unions as the most consistent defenders of the principles of fairness, inclusion, and solidarity. We can boldly displace outdated clichés about union bosses with the fact that unions today are the most gender, racially, and ethnically diverse institutions in this country, institutions, furthermore, that are the strongest focused on enabling working people and the economically dispossessed to achieve improvement in their condition.¹ No other institutions are better equipped to support efforts to defend a social safety net, economic fairness and civil rights, and protection of all life on this planet. I believe we must assert that a collective voice *independent of management* is fundamental to the system of checks of balances that needs to be strengthened today.

FACING THE ASSAULT

To achieve fairness, inclusion, and solidarity, we need to encourage and support explicit opposition to what threatens members' wellbeing and we must forge alliances in support of achieving this for all people. Explicit evidence of successful action, locally and in other school districts and communities involving MTA members, should be the core of all presentations. In the campaign for the MTA presidency and vice presidency, I would like to see rank and file members from other locals with the candidate(s) telling a story about how they stood up to management and won. I'd like to see our

¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union, A Century of American Labor* (Revised and Expanded), Princeton: Princeton, 2013: 18)

candidates expand that to a picture of all the recent political wins and their relationship to resistance to the concerted attacks on unions and marginalized communities.

It is fair to ask our opponents in MTA elections what direct, explicit work they have done in the past year to help organize a group of members to improve specific working conditions. We should ask educators: do you want committees in your schools, union, or government agencies with the power to actually change working conditions or ones in which our people act like members of a club or focus group where power is controlled from above?

In my experience, it is not the scale of the action that inspires but its success. So once a committee lists all of the successes however small, a ten-minute meeting reporting on an Agency Fee decision can include an optimistic report on a struggle underway in another building or a recent victory won. Then the question becomes, what's our next action? At every level we can then say: we are determined to strengthen independent unionism, in solidarity with those fighting for social and economic justice, and in defense of strong and effective democracy at work and in the society at large.