

# 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:**

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**

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:**

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 for the future:**

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:**

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:**

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.