

MSCA Delegate Assembly

April 23, 2021

Vice President Report

Maria Hegbloom

Overview

This has been a year of upheaval, change, and transformation. While the pandemic has created significant concerns and problems for our universities, members, and union, it has also opened new opportunities to rethink some of our work, our priorities, and how we might take advantage of possibilities for connection and action in the upcoming years. So it is within this context that I would like to highlight a few key areas of our union work as we look toward growing our power in the coming years. These have been priorities for me in my work as Vice President and I feel that they have helped to make our union stronger as we face continued threats in the coming years.

- Utilizing zoom technologies for new opportunities for member-to-member engagement, state-wide union activities and actions, and member inclusion in bargaining.
- Growing attention to funding issues, campus debt, and the need to address these through organizing and activism.
- Stronger connections between the work of the MSCA, MTA, and the NEA to grow our union power.
- Increased transparency so that our members know what is going on in the MSCA and MTA and feel prepared to get involved.

MSCA Summer Forum Series: Statewide Member Engagement

Taking advantage of the introduction of zoom as a platform, we were able to create new opportunities for our members across the state to come together and discuss key issues that are shaping the landscape of public higher education. These discussions were successful for shaping some of the work that the union engaged in throughout the rest of the year, but also in helping define the conversations our members would have with one another, with their administrations, and in their communities.

Over 350+ members from across the nine state universities attended one or more of the forums that were held throughout June/July.

- *Fall Return? Considering Safety and Educational Quality in a Global Pandemic*
- *Public Educators and Educating the Public: Fighting Racism in our Communities, Campuses, and Classrooms*
- *Now More Than Ever: Funding the Future of Public Higher Education in Massachusetts*
- *Don't Waste a Good Crisis: (Re)Defining Public Higher Education*

These forums were planned and led by a variety of [union leaders and members](#).

A number of key items came from these forums and helped us to move issues forward throughout the year.

Fall Return: Health & Safety

- [Checklist](#): This checklist represents some of the key health and safety concerns that members' voiced in relation to their university return plans. It was shared earlier in the summer as a tool that chapters and members could use to assess the plans of their own university
- **Collective Bargaining Agreements**: Our bargaining committee has worked to incorporate health and safety language into our 1-year proposal that we hope to secure agreement on before the beginning of the semester to provide some increased security for the rights of our members to a safe and healthy workspace.
- **Continued Monitoring**: Chapter leaders will continue to monitor the health and safety protocols and plans on their campus and we encourage members who have specific concerns to contact their chapter presidents. In addition, our MSCA statewide board of directors will be working to create a Health & Safety committee to help keep track of broader state-wide and federal guidelines and to incorporate the tools and advice from MTA on health and safety at our local levels. Union members interested in serving on this committee should contact their chapter president.

Fighting Racism in our Classrooms, Campus, and Communities

- [Union Statement](#): In response to the George Floyd murder and subsequent protests, our statewide Board of Directors crafted a public message outlining our union commitment to fighting racism.
- **Working toward Collaboration**: Several of our campuses have already started to engage with their own campus police units to seek collaborative change that acknowledges systemic racism within policing and seeks implementation of anti-racist measures on our campuses. We plan to have several forums open to our entire statewide community to share information about these initiatives to aid other members seeking change on their campuses.
- **Collective Bargaining Agreement**: Our union feels that anti-racism is essential to our very work as public educators. As such, we feel that including this work in our collective bargaining agreement is important. To that end the bargaining committee has proposed language to create a standing committee within our structure of shared government which would be focused on assessing racism on our campuses and making recommendations toward change. We hope to win agreement for this committee in our negotiations with management.

Funding our Future

- [Now More than Ever](#): This powerpoint offers resources and links to current public higher ed funding fights at the federal and state level as well as tools for examining campus finances to hold our local administrations' accountable for allocation of funds. We hope that this will provide some useful starting points for members interested in becoming more involved in this fight for funding.
- [MTA Massachusetts Agrees Campaign](#): The MTA has launched an important campaign to hold our employers accountable for fighting for the funds that our public colleges and universities need to stave off layoffs and furloughs during this COVID-crisis. MSCA has been working with public universities across the state on this initiative. Several key actions have taken place at chapters to bring attention to the funding crisis, over 2000+ members have signed a petition sent to Marty Meehan and Carlos Santiago demanding that they fight for us and for public higher education, a media campaign including targeted advertisements and member op-eds has been working to get the message out, and numerous meetings bringing our members together with legislators to

discuss this crisis have and will continue to take place. Actions are being planned throughout the coming months and we hope members will look for opportunities to get involved.

We hope to continue this *MSCA Summer Forum Series in 2021* looking toward issues around austerity, the return to face-to-face, and other dangers faced by our members to create more opportunities for our members to engage with one another across the campuses and discuss problems that are shared by us all.

In addition, we will be holding a *Summer Book Club* via zoom on the book [“A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door: Dismantling of Public Education and the Future of school”](#) by Jack Schneider and Jennifer Berkshire which examines the dangers faced by public education today and how to fight against those seeking to dismantle it. Schneider and Berkshire are hosts of the popular, education-focused podcast [“Have you Heard”](#) and are being awarded the [Friend of Labor](#) award at the 2021 MTA Annual Meeting.

Those interested in participating should add their names to this [form no later than May 5th](#). The MTA will provide books to participants and we will be in contact with those interested in joining to discuss meeting dates/times that will work best. The club is likely to have its first meeting in late May/early June. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact MSCA VP Maria Hegbloom at hegbloommaria@hotmail.com.

Strengthening ties with the MTA

One issue that often occurs in organizations is that there is a significant amount of information and it is easy for important actions, updates, and ideas to get lost in the traffic. One thing I have tried to do is to better package information that might be of interest and benefit to our members so that this does not get lost in the mix. In particular, I have tried to pull out important information about MTA initiatives, events, actions, state budgets, and legislation that members may want to know about. These reports are shared with the BoD each month and chapter presidents are encouraged to share these with their larger membership. I have included the most recent of these as example (included below).

Overall it is my hope that these efforts have helped to create opportunities for members to become more involved with the MSCA, to connect with one another, to connect to statewide opportunities through the MTA, and overall to feel more ownership in your union as it is through our connections and work together that we have strength!

MSCA BoD
VP Report
4.23.21
Maria Hegbloom

MTA Member Opportunity

Throughout the year and at their annual Summer Conference, the MTA provides opportunities for educators and union leaders/activists to learn from one another through professional development workshops and conferences. While these offerings have sometimes favored the K-12 classroom and educator experience, we are hoping to grow the higher ed options for members in these areas. So, if you are a higher ed faculty or librarian who has skill in classroom practice, pedagogy, teaching and learning, union activism, or union leadership and you want to share your knowledge with others, please consider adding your name to this facilitator database so that you can be considered for upcoming conferences, workshops, and events. The MTA provides a gender stipend of \$125/hour for facilitators with additional compensation for recorded sessions or those that have significantly large attendance.

Training & Professional Learning- [Facilitator Database \(smartsheet.com\)](#)

Bargaining Committee & Union Leader Opportunity

The Annual Labor-Management Conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, to be held May 17-20, is FREE this year. The conference is titled Higher Education, Collective Bargaining, and the Biden Administration and includes panels on topics such as: bargaining and online learning, adjuncts and strikes, preparing for grievances and arbitrations, and the pandemic and the future of higher education. You can register for the conference [here](#). Please share with others you think might be interested.

Budget & Legislative Update/April

NEA & FEDERAL UPDATES

Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF): [American Rescue Plan Act provides funding for public schools and colleges \(massteacher.org\)](#)

- The big picture:
 - \$4.5 billion for the state – half this spring, half next spring, to be used by 2024
 - \$3.5 billion for cities and towns – half this spring, half next spring, to be used by 2024
 - \$1.8 billion for our K-12 public schools – all this spring for use through 2024
 - \$438 million for our public colleges and universities – all coming to your campuses this spring for use through 2024, half of which goes to financial aid support for our students. This builds on the level-funding for this year we all won this past fall.
- Find out how much your university is receiving here: [heerf -allocation in - american rescue- plan.pdf \(massteacher.org\)](#)

- Possible uses of this money (HEERF)
 - Lost revenue (can mean almost anything)
 - Tuition, fees, room and board, enrollment declines, supported research, summer terms
 - Reimbursement for expenses already incurred
 - Technology costs associated with a transition to distance education
 - Faculty and staff trainings
 - Payroll
 - Financial Aid Grants to Students
- Ask campuses if they have reports of how they are using this HEERF funding

For more information on how these funds can be used and a great toolkit for thinking about how to organize so that this money is spent in responsible ways, check out the [NEA website](#).

Biden Infrastructure Bill:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/01/what%E2%80%99s-2-trillion-infrastructure-plan-higher-ed>

- **American Jobs Plan** was introduced by the White House in March, a comprehensive infrastructure package that includes provisions to address traditional American infrastructure projects, such as roads, waterways, bridges, air transit. The package also includes \$100 billion for K-12 public schools and \$12 (billion) for community college infrastructure. Congressional leadership is currently translating this into legislation and figuring out whether to move this plan in a bipartisan manner or exercise reconciliation again, like they did with American Rescue Plan.
- **American Families Plan** is the second part of Biden’s infrastructure plan, the side of “human infrastructure.” This has not been released yet, but is nearly finalized by the White House. We expect it to include additional huge investment in public education and establish a program to provide free community college. First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden has made comments recently asserting free community college will be part of this plan’s inclusion.

Status of Student Debt Relief

- Sens. Warren, Schumer and Rep. Pressley continue to press on the White House to use executive authority to enact broad-based federal student debt cancellation of \$50,000. The NEA is in support of this and fully believe this is the best pathway forward in getting this done. There are too many hurdles to get this done via legislation, and the NEA and consumer protection groups fully believe that the Presidency has the authority to do this.
- The American Rescue Plan, passed in March, included a provision to make any student loan forgiveness passed between Dec. 31, 2020 and Jan. 2, 2026 tax-free. Typically, forgiven debt, excluding Public Service Loan Forgiveness, would be treated as taxable

income. This clears a major hurdle for President Biden to implement broad-student debt cancellation through executive action.

- In April, the NEA [led a letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Education demanding an audit of Public Service Loan Forgiveness and provide immediate cancellation of student loans for public sector workers who have served 10 or more years. 17 other national unions cosigned the letter to represent more than 10 million public service workers in the letter.
 - We have since received resounding support from community partners and media attention - [Business Insider](#) and [Politico](#) covered our efforts in exclusive stories.

On capital debt relief

- In early April, the U.S. Department of Education discharged \$1.6 billion in capital debt provided to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), providing relief to 45 HBCUs. These institutions were all participating in the HBCU Capital Financing Program. This was allowed due to the passage of December's COVID relief package – *the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*.
- American Rescue Plan did not expand on this further and we do not expect additional action in the future.

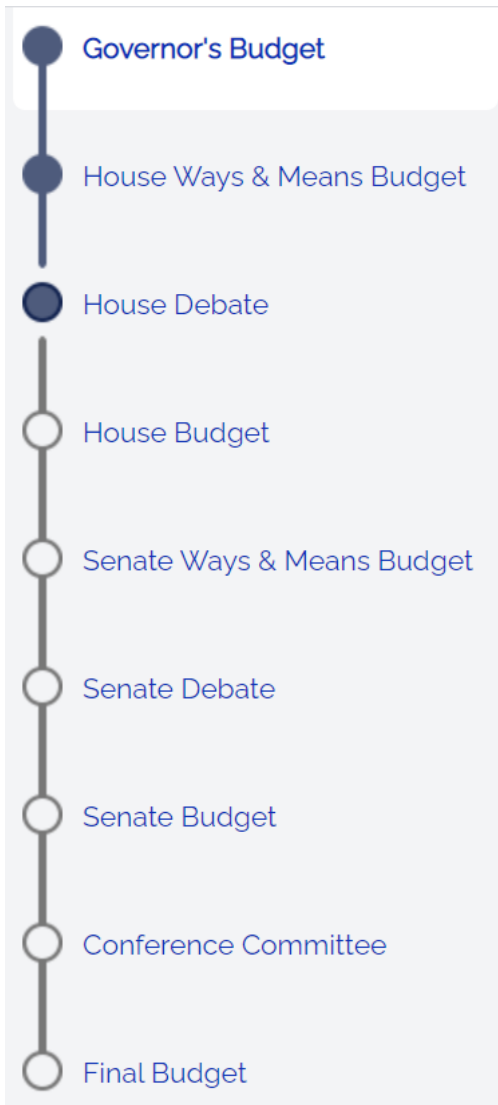
We cannot emphasize enough the historical investment to public education American Rescue Plan provided to public education by including NEA's \$170 billion ask for the Education Stabilization Fund. This included \$40 billion for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF III).

MTA & STATE UPDATES

State Budget Updates

State Revenues are up \$1.5 Billion up from where the state expected. [February Tax Haul Shatters State's Expectations, With Collections Rising Nearly 25% | Bostonomix \(wbur.org\)](#)

State Budget Process - On Schedule for a normal budget year.



Governor’s Budget – “Level-funded” higher education, which was actually a cut because it did not include any of the other items we had won in the previous budget.

House Ways & Means Budget - Increases higher education funding by \$35 million over FY21. Increases funding for campuses at each level of higher education by just about 2%, which will likely be enough to keep pace with inflation. Increases funding for scholarships by \$10 million, bringing the total to \$130 million. Increased funding by \$3.5 million for the [SUCCESS](#) program, bringing the total to \$10.5 million. This program provides supports needed to help students who face significant obstacles to be able to thrive and succeed in college.

But, this funding level is well below the [\\$136 million increase that the MTA has called for](#) to begin the process of providing higher education institutions with the resources needed to meet the needs of all students. The MTA has recommendation of a \$70 million increase to state operating budgets, \$26 million increase to funding for scholarships, and a \$14 million increase for the SUCCESS program.

House Debate - The MTA is backing [an amendment](#) to the House Budget #746, filed by Representative Sean Garballey (D-Arlington) to increase the public higher ed allocation by \$120 million, the level that would be required under the [Cherish Act](#). Go [here](#) to urge your legislators to support the *Cherish Act* and to support amendment 746.

Money Beyond the Budget! – The legislature has decided to address the \$4.5 billion dollars in one-time Federal Covid aid granted to Massachusetts in a separate budget process. This money must be spent on COVID-related stuff, but this is defined very broadly. This is a chance for public higher education to get some additional funding to offset the past years of struggle. The real discussion/debate on how to use these funds will likely be taken up late May/early June when the state budget is in Conference Committee. But we need to make noise now to make sure our interests are represented in the use of these funds.

UNION ACTIVISM & MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

While the budget process is only beginning, it moves very quickly and it is important that we **make noise now** so that our representatives will have us in mind as they move through debates and decide about funding.

[Our MTA union priorities](#) for this budget include increasing funds to our students through expansion of the MassGrant Plus program and increased resources for student support, health benefits and pay parity for our part-time faculty, as well as increasing overall operating budgets.

This funding is necessary for addressing the significant **inequities** that the pandemic has illuminated and ensuring that access to educational opportunities is part of how the Commonwealth recovers from this pandemic. [investing-in-student-success-fact-sheet.pdf \(massteacher.org\)](#)

Legislative Forums - You can help us to get the message out about why public higher education is so important and the significant need for increased funding to our students and our institutions.

Please consider coming to one of the Legislative Forums that will be held through the end of April, beginning of May. If you live or work in one of these districts that is great! But even if you do not, please feel free to attend and help us to represent higher ed.

There will be forums held on:

- Monday, April 26th @ 4:30 – Greater Taunton area
- Thursday, April 29th @ 5:00 – Greater Springfield/Chicopee (House)
- Friday, April 30th @ 4:00 – Cambridge/Somerville/Belmont/Watertown
- Tuesday, May 4th @ 3:30 – Bedford/Burlington
- Wednesday, May 5th @ 5:00 – Greater Springfield/Chicopee (Senate)
- Thursday, May 6th @ 4:30 – Greater Lowell
- Thursday, May 6th @ 4:30 – Lexington
- Tuesday, May 11th @ 3:30 – 3rd Middlesex
- Thursday, May 13th @ 4:00 – Norfolk & Suffolk

You can see more about which legislators will be in attendance and sign up for these forums here: [2021 Spring SDC In-Districts - Google Sheets](#)

Is your representative a Co-Sponsor for the Cherish Act? Our funding fight this year is really only the first step in working to ensure that the Cherish Act is ultimately passed and funding to public higher education is restored to an appropriate level. Unfortunately, we have fewer legislative co-sponsors so far for this bill. Please [Urge Your Legislators to Support the MTA-Backed Cherish Act! - Action Network](#)

Look for opportunities in May for actions to call your legislators and make some noise for public higher education!