

2023

CLASSROOM SOLUTIONS

TO THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN OUR SCHOOLS



MTA WikiWisdom Forum on
Mental Wellness in Schools

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Introduction

“

Teachers are having mental health issues and are expected to help our students who are in the same place. How can we provide the support they need when no one is supporting us?

–Jennifer M.

”

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare and amplified many dark realities of life in America and in our schools. Today we focus on just one: the mental health crisis in Massachusetts schools. It affects educators' ability to teach and students' ability to learn. We see it every day in our classrooms, from Pre-K through higher education.

This report, based on the ideas generated during a unique, online discussion among MTA members and refined by five educators who were identified as thought leaders in that online conversation, lays out eight recommendations for change and proposes 26 solutions in answer to this prompt:

Based upon your observations and experience in your classroom and school what are your ideas for improving mental wellness for your students? For your fellow educators? For yourself?

As Massachusetts educators, we see up close what is happening in our classrooms and in the lives of our students. To help all of our students thrive we propose a powerful plan for bringing more mental health professionals and other supports into our schools, raising and respecting the voices of educators and students, partnering with caregivers, creating safe spaces for students and educators, ensuring more time for kids to move every day, and reducing the high-stakes use of MCAS and the harmful stress it creates.

This report was written by Cindy Richards based on the 38 ideas posted in the online forum and the recommendations made by the following thought leaders: Donna Grady, Nick Ironside, Sarah Joncas, Clare O'Neill and Cynthia Roy.

FROM THE WIKI

Students cannot learn if they are struggling with their mental health, and yet teachers have this immense pressure on them to get through the curriculum and teach to the test.

–Kristin M.

Recommendations and Proposed Solutions

RECOMMENDATION 1

Bring More Licensed Mental Health Professionals into Schools

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Embed in contract language the proper ratio of students to mental health professionals (one psychologist to 500 students and one counselor to 250 students) to support the number of professionals that should be employed in schools, and spell out exactly what skills, expertise and credentials they should have.
2. Partner with colleges and universities to train more social workers and psychologists to work in schools with students and educators.
3. Partner with foundations to fund pilot programs in schools and collect data on the results so that programs can be rolled out across the state.
4. Partner with community mental health agencies to pool limited resources and increase access to mental health services in and out of schools.
5. Lobby the state Legislature to fund school-based health centers that expand the concept of “[community schools](#)” and address all of the needs of our students, including their physical and mental health. This is particularly needed in communities with students from low-income or other marginalized backgrounds, where there may be more barriers to accessing quality health care.
6. Develop effective professional development for educators, create protocols for referring students to adjustment counselors, and audit whether those protocols are followed.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Give Educators More Help in the Classroom

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

7. Write contract language that provides educators with access to a “floater” educator who works in the schools to relieve educators in the classroom on an as-needed basis.
8. Develop professional training for co-teaching so more educators can team teach.
9. Increase funding to hire more Education Support Professionals to work in classrooms supporting groups of students.
10. Embed plans and processes for obtaining support services for students into educator contract language, so that the grievance procedure can serve as an enforcement mechanism.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Raise and Respect the Voices of Educators and Students

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

11. All public entities that have the power to make education policy – the governor, state legislative committees, individual legislators, DESE, local school boards, district administrators – even school principals – should be required to engage in meaningful, two-way communication with current educators and students before a policy can be put in place.
12. Provide voting power to student representatives on school committees.
13. Establish school-wide Teacher Leadership Teams – which include one educator elected by their colleagues from each department and grade level – that collaborate with school leaders to create school policies that do not violate the collective bargaining agreement or limit the rights of the union.
14. Develop a mental health questionnaire that is administered annually at the school level to students and a questionnaire that the union administers annually to educators. Require schools to publish the data and use the results to appropriately reevaluate school, district and state policies.
15. Establish a student/educator mental health organization that functions independently of school districts and DESE.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Partner with Caregivers

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

16. Launch a series of community forums sponsored by MTA to connect caregivers with resources.
17. Partner with a foundation to fund a public service campaign that explains to caregivers how they can access resources.
18. Train educators on best practices for caregiver engagement and community organizing, including the legal protections they have in doing this work.
19. Amplify the work of local unions and community partners such as fire, police, health agencies, youth clubs, churches and community coalitions that are organizing alongside caregivers, and provide resources, support and encouragement to spread this work to more communities.
20. Negotiate additional time and/or staff to engage caregivers with universal and targeted mental health resources and supports.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Create Safe Spaces for Students and Educators and Make it Safe for Them to Access Those Spaces

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

21. Lobby for a state law that ensures every school has a fully funded library that is open for the hours that school is in session, and is designed with rooms or private areas that students can access as needed.
22. Fund school libraries as a mental wellness resource and staff them with certified school librarians.
23. Analyze school rules and policies and alter them as needed to prioritize and support people's needs for time away from the pressures of the classroom. This can include outdoor green spaces. There is often no better way to regulate your nervous system than being outside.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Ensure More Time for Kids to Move Every Day

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

24. Make recess for younger children and physical education for older children a priority by codifying it in law and in contract language.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Require schools to certify that students have met state standards based on satisfactory completion of coursework, rather than continue the misuse of MCAS as a barrier to graduation for students who have trouble with standardized tests

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

25. Expand time for teaching and learning and improve the social and emotional well-being of students by ending inappropriate high-stakes uses of MCAS, and have schools certify that students have met the state standards based on satisfactory completion of coursework. Gather benchmark data on student learning, as well as student and educator mental health.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Expand Collective Bargaining Goals to Include More Initiatives for Mental Wellness

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

26. Codify mental wellness supports in contract language so that any breach of that contract can be challenged through the grievance system.

Bring More Licensed Mental Health Professionals into Schools

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Our students are suffering from [anxiety, depression and stress](#). The challenge is particularly acute for students from low-income and other marginalized backgrounds. As educators, we are ill-equipped to deal with those challenges, leading us to experience similar challenges with our own mental health. Increasing access to human resources in schools – especially individuals who are trained to provide mental health support – will establish a safe learning environment for students and working environment for educators.

FROM THE WIKI

Educators cannot be responsible for the mental health our students are demonstrating. “Growth Mindset” and “Think Positive” are just not cutting it. Schools/teachers were never intended to be responsible for student mental health and trauma. Yet, it suddenly has become a superpower we must obtain quickly! These kids are demonstrating needs beyond what we are capable of supporting for various reasons. GIVE US THE CLINICIANS that these kids need!!!

–Bridget D.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Embed in contract language the proper ratio of students to mental health professionals (one psychologist to 500 students and one counselor to 250 students) to support the number of professionals that should be employed in schools, and spell out exactly what skills, expertise and credentials they should have.
2. Partner with colleges and universities to train more social workers and psychologists to work in schools with students and educators.
3. Partner with foundations to fund pilot programs in schools and collect data on the results so the programs can be rolled out across the state.
4. Partner with community mental health agencies to pool limited resources and increase access to mental health services in and out of schools.

FROM THE WIKI

Even in a school where we have an ample number of school counselors, we cannot adequately meet the mental health needs of students. We provide Tier 1 and some Tier 2 services, but we are most effective when we are able to connect our students with mentors and mental health clinicians.

Wait lists are still long for youth so we have begun a partnership with a local clinic that received funding for school-based therapy. These services are ideal because families don't need to worry about scheduling appointments or transportation. Counselors can communicate face-to-face with clinicians.

We also have a partnership with a mentoring program that was started by a former school counselor. They partner with local schools and provide school-based mentors. Students meet with their mentor twice a week (individually and in a group). We have seen amazing results from this partnership.

–Rani G.

5. Lobby the state Legislature to fund school-based health centers that expand the concept of “[community schools](#)” and address all of the needs of our students, including their physical and mental health. This is particularly needed in communities with students from low-income and other marginalized backgrounds, where there may be more barriers to accessing quality health care.
6. Develop professional development for educators, create protocols for referring students to adjustment counselors, and audit whether those protocols are followed.

FROM THE WIKI

School counselors as well as educators need PD in how to identify if a student needs to be referred to an adjustment counselor. So many students fly under the radar because they aren't disruptive, then we find them in crisis because there wasn't an earlier intervention.

–Kristin M.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

We know that our students need mental wellness supports far beyond our training and expertise as educators. We also know that when a student is suffering from anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges, they cannot learn. Students who get the mental wellness supports they need will be better able to focus on learning.

FROM THE WIKI

Training to be a psychotherapist is tremendously challenging and expensive; universities mint money with MA and PsyD degrees that provide weak training, leaving many providers under-equipped to address the complex issues that constitute general practice in mental health today, particularly with BIPOC and LGBTQ+ patients.

Our state colleges struggle to hire providers who are up to the task of treating our students, because they pay something on the order of 50% of what clinicians earn in private practice and because they require them to see too many students for too short a duration to make a real difference.

Too many of our communities do not have local providers who can treat our students, in part because MassHealth fees for services bear no resemblance to the actual market costs of psychotherapy. This issue is an order of magnitude more severe for minor children because MassHealth puts all manner of onerous demands on providers who see children.

–Carter C.

Give Educators More Help in the Classroom

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching can be a lonely profession. We spend the majority of our days as the only adult in the room. Having a second adult – on a full-time basis as a co-educator, paraprofessional or as an on-demand resource – can alleviate the stress that comes with shouldering all responsibility. As schools report [a rise in disruptive student behaviors](#) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing the number of adults present to support students will benefit both students and educators.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

7. Write contract language that provides educators with access to a “floater” educator who works in the schools, to relieve educators in the classroom on an as-needed basis.
8. Develop professional training on co-teaching so more educators can team teach.
9. Increase funding to hire more Education Support Professionals to work in classrooms supporting groups of students
10. Embed plans and processes for obtaining support services for students into educator contract language, so that the grievance procedure can serve as an enforcement mechanism.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

Managing 20-30 kindergarteners or 100-plus high schoolers all day, every day, can feel overwhelming. When one child is in distress, it takes our attention from all of the others. Having another adult in the room or on call as needed will alleviate stress for educators and ensure that our students don't pay the price when one student is experiencing a mental health challenge.

Raise and Respect the Voices of Educators and Students

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The people who create policies are far removed from the day-to-day reality inside a classroom. Legislators, state board members, and even district leaders and school principals need to hear from the people on the frontlines if they are going to design policies that affect educators and students. The people in the classroom recognize the disparities between policies' intended purpose and their day-to-day impact. Educators and students understand better than anyone the collateral impact of policies and the ways in which they affect educator and student mental health.

FROM THE WIKI

Based on discussions and feedback offered by students and educators, school policies should be critically examined. This will not look the same in every school or district. We need to consider the effect of policies regarding cell phones, bathrooms, school start times, make-up policies, standardized testing, etc., from the perspective of the impact on student mental health.

Ultimately, our goal should be to make school a place where students feel safe, comfortable and engaged. If they trust the adults in the building and feel safe, they're more likely to attend.

I've observed chronically absent students attend school for the first time in two weeks, only to get pulled from class to complete MAP testing. They don't return the next day and later complain about how they always have to test when they attend. Students have described the stress related to attending class in which a teacher only allows them one bathroom pass a week.

How are our policies impacting student mental health and how can we make sure we no longer prioritize academics over mental health? If the well-being of students is suffering, so, too, is their academic progress.

– Nick I.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

11. All public entities that have the power to make education policy – the governor, state legislative committees, individual legislators, DESE, local school boards, district administrators, even school principals – should be required to engage in meaningful two-way communication with current educators and students before a policy can be put in place.
12. Provide student representatives on school committees with voting power. Offering voting power to student representatives shows that we truly believe our students’ voices and opinions matter.
13. Establish school-wide Teacher Leadership Teams – which include one educator elected by their colleagues from each department and grade level – that collaborate with school leaders to create school policies that do not violate the collective bargaining agreement or limit the rights of the union. TLT members and the school principal will each have a vote to determine whether a school policy goes into effect. This democratic process elevates the voices of the people responsible for implementing policies in their classrooms. TLTs would be codified in contract language and by school committee policies.
14. Develop a mental health questionnaire that is administered annually at the school level to students, and a questionnaire that the union administers annually to educators. Require schools to publish aggregated data from student surveys to increase transparency about the state of mental health in schools, and use the results to reevaluate school, district and state policies appropriately.
15. Establish a student/educator mental health organization that functions independently of school districts and DESE. This organization would serve as an informal network connecting students and educators across the state. Its purpose would be to connect students and educators, elevate the concerns of students and educators by gathering data, and develop policy proposals to help ensure we are meeting the mental health needs of people who are in classrooms every day.

FROM THE WIKI

If this effort results in meaningful change, it will require policymakers to take mental health as seriously as they've taken efforts to confront "learning loss." This means that budgetary decisions, the allocation of resources (financial and human), and the collection/analysis of/ response to data will reflect the value they place on mental health.

–Nick I.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

Educators and students are typically excluded from decision-making or only allowed to participate in a superficial manner. Including educator and student voices in a manner that is meaningful, rather than performative, will help us shape strong policies and cultivate trust among educators, students and administrators at the school, district and state levels. Centering the voices of people who spend every day in the classroom will establish shared responsibility for implementing and upholding the policies that affect educators' and students' daily experiences.

Partner with Caregivers

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Caregivers know their kids are struggling. Like educators, they are desperate for more help and resources. Even when the resources are available, caregivers don't always know how to access them.

FROM THE WIKI

Psychoeducation for students, their families and staff is a must, whether it is Mental Health 101, generalized anxiety, depression or other topics like social anxiety and school avoidance, even suicidality.

We must accurately inform our students, staff and communities, and normalize their feelings, symptoms and related behaviors, in order to reduce stigma and harsh judgment of ourselves and others. It's also important to provide a safe and supportive environment for honest questions to be asked and answered.

–Jen T.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

16. Launch a series of community forums sponsored by MTA to connect caregivers with resources.
17. Partner with a foundation to fund a public service campaign that explains to caregivers how they can access resources. This will help to reach caregivers who are unable or unwilling to attend community forums.
18. Provide training to educators on best practices for caregiver engagement and community organizing, including the legal protections they have in doing this work.
19. Amplify the work of local unions and community partners such as fire, police, health agencies, youth clubs, churches and community coalitions that are organizing alongside caregivers, and provide resources, support and encouragement to spread this work to more communities.
20. Negotiate additional time and/or staff to engage caregivers with universal and targeted mental health resources and supports.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

Schools cannot solve this problem alone. All of the stakeholders in a student's life – caregivers, educators, neighbors, clergy, etc. – need to work together if we are to turn the tide on this mental health crisis

Create Safe Spaces for Students and Educators and Make it Safe for Them to Access Those Spaces

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It's tough to get away from the stress of a classroom. Educators who understand that will do what they can inside their classrooms to create spaces where students can retreat when they need a moment. But that is not enough. Every school should have designated safe spaces – a private corner of the library, a green space or an educators' lounge, for example – where people can go when they need to get away. And the school must prioritize that support – educators must be encouraged to grant students the time out of class and the school must supply another adult to take over a classroom when the educator needs to take a moment.

Libraries, in particular, are targeted when budget cuts are needed. This is a shortsighted reaction. Many students who might not want to visit a guidance counselor, nurse or administrator still find comfort and ease in a library. Libraries have been used for individuals, small groups and even large groups to facilitate help. Libraries should be a place of respite, learning and fun. The Massachusetts School Library Association, as early as 2017, worked with PBS to create mental wellness resources.

FROM THE WIKI

If I had the power to, I would create a space in every classroom and office space within our schools for students (and staff) to take a break...to refocus, recharge, regulate and be better prepared to return to the task at hand in a more balanced state. Our adults would not only model them in planned lessons but also in authentic situations.

Call them Calm Corners, Regulation Stations, Peace Tables, or whatever you choose. Intentionally design them, explicitly teach how to properly utilize them, sincerely encourage their use, and facilitate time and space for self-care.

I also suggest an adults-only space like this for staff, and taking steps to ensure that its use is not only supported but encouraged.

– Jen T.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

21. Lobby for a state law that ensures that every school has a fully funded library that is open for the same hours that school is in session. Advocate for library designs that include rooms or private areas that students can access as needed.
22. Fund school libraries as a mental wellness resource and staff them with certified school librarians.
23. Analyze school rules and policies and alter them as needed to prioritize and support people's needs for time away from the pressures of the classroom. This can include outdoor green spaces. There is often no better way to regulate your nervous system than being outside.

FROM THE WIKI

Fifteen years ago, there were so many more schools with functioning libraries that offered solace, respite and so much more. One student back then was what I'd call a "frequent flier." Running into his mother recently, she told me that the MS library and then the HS library were the factors that let her son be successful.

Over the years, the library has offered sanctuary to after-school clubs, safe lunch spots, safe holding spaces – calm, cool, collected ones – while waiting for the guidance counselor, psychologist or administration.

It used to be that it was a judgment-free zone, too. No one was there to say you owed them work (books, maybe, but not the same pressure). School committees and central administration are shortsighted when they look at a library and think it can be easily cut.

– Clare O.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

School libraries are a critical resource. They support educators, teach students and provide respite from the daily pressures in the classroom. Most of all, they are a judgment-free zone where students and educators can just "be" and leave the pressures of the classroom for at least a few minutes during the school day.

Ensure More Time for Kids to Move Every Day

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kids need to move. Period. But our focus on time-on-task classroom learning – in a misguided attempt to make up for the interrupted learning due to the pandemic – means that kids are moving far less. They have fewer opportunities for recess. They have less time in PE classes. Fifteen minutes of movement every other day is not enough. All students need the opportunity each day to move several times, and not just from class to class or from one activity to another. Movement should be meaningful and provide time for social and active interaction.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- 24. Make recess for younger children and physical education for older children a priority by codifying it in law and in contract language.**

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

There is [ample research](#) that shows students learn better when they are able to move more. Movement strengthens the prefrontal cortex (executive functioning) and the hippocampus (memory and learning). Stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are decreased while feel-good neurotransmitters such as serotonin and endorphins are triggered. Movement can enhance the overall feeling of well-being, and increases memory, perception, language, attention, emotional regulation and decision-making. It promotes self-awareness, awareness of others and relationship-building. Movement supports the ability to think creatively, focus, retrieve key information and problem-solve.

For students, movement improves alertness, attention and motivation. When language is combined with movement, studies have shown that language acquisition can improve by 90%. Combining movement and learning allows students to connect concepts to action and allows learning through trial and error. Students whose learning incorporates movement exhibit better coordination, motor competence and strength. Students' development of self-confidence and cooperation also increases and improves.

Require schools to certify that students have met state standards based on satisfactory completion of coursework, rather than continue the misuse of MCAS as a barrier to graduation for students who have trouble with standardized tests.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM - PART I

Rather than measuring student progress, the focus on high-stakes standardized testing has become a detriment to student success. High-stakes testing leads to student anxiety and low self-esteem. Time spent drilling students on test prep consumes precious classroom time – time that is critically needed as we try to make up for teaching time lost to the pandemic. Testing narrows the curriculum and deprofessionalizes teaching, leaving educators anxious and depressed. And, because standardized test results are considered valid when the data produces a bell curve, the tests are expressly designed to ensure that the test results in failure – most likely the failure of schools that serve low-income BIPOC students. Those results are then used to promote efforts to privatize “failing” schools and further reduce access to music, art and recess, perpetuating the cycle of educational inequality.

If we stop spending so much time on test prep for high-stakes standardized testing, we can use that money and time for the things that are known to actually improve student mental health and, in turn, student performance:

- Licensed mental health professionals working in school buildings to support educators as well as students.
- More instructional time that is not dictated by test content.
- Less disruption to the school calendar.
- Educators who are in control of their classrooms and can match the learning agenda to their students’ needs.
- More time spent on recreation, creativity and play.
- More time for educators to develop culturally relevant, engaging lessons.

Standardized tests are a very limited and often misused tool. There are many more holistic and accurate ways to measure student performance, including self-assessments, observations, interviews, portfolios, final exams and public defenses – all of which provide a comprehensive approach to evaluating students’ strengths, unique abilities and growth.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM - PART II

Classroom educators are trained experts in developmentally appropriate, accurate and holistic assessment of student learning and growth. They are able to continue to develop, select and administer authentic, meaningful assessments for the students in their classes. Additionally, one of the major benefits of educator-designed assessment is that educators are able to collect, analyze and act on the data from these assessments right away, something that simply isn't possible with MCAS due to the delay between students taking the test and their scores being available.

If more data is required, we can measure the quality of schools by looking at the number of licensed clinicians, SEL programs, art, music, after-school activities and other programs that support students' mental wellness.

FROM THE WIKI

It is clear that what is going on inside our schools when it comes to mental health needs is not sustainable or realistic in our schools today. They weren't before Covid and they certainly are even worse now. The overarching problem here: Students need more support than schools can provide and administrators are trying to minimize the problem, resulting in teacher burnout and ongoing mental health issues in our schools.

I've learned that most of the minimization from district and state administration is because there is no funding for what we really need, so let's just pretend we are OK in order to not show weakness and cause waves.

– Bridget D.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

25. Require that schools certify that students have met the state standards based on satisfactory completion of coursework, rather than continue the misuse of MCAS as a barrier to graduation for students who have trouble with standardized tests. In addition:

- Offer annual mental health screenings for anxiety and depression and supports to students and educators.
- Create professional development that teaches administrators how to lead a school that values mental wellness.
- Create PD for educators focused on culturally responsive teaching that understands the identity and lived experiences of their students.
- Create PD for educators focused on trauma-informed education practices.
- Create PD on restorative practices for educators and administrators and replace punitive disciplinary measures with restorative practices.
- Integrate SEL practices across all disciplines.
- Develop a [mental health literacy curriculum](#) that deepens school stakeholders' capacity for understanding mental health and promotes positive well-being.
- Fund art, music and libraries in all schools.

FROM THE WIKI

We all know that students aren't ready to learn with the social/emotional needs we are seeing right now, yet leadership is surprised kids aren't testing well???!

– Bridget D.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

The focus on high-stakes testing makes it harder for educators to meet the needs of each student, keep them excited about learning and help them truly to master the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. It leads to excessive time on test prep, rather than focusing on education, and it can make it harder to meet the social and emotional needs of students. The biggest challenge for change in schools is a lack of resources. Using more accurate and holistic assessments rather than high-stakes tests frees up more teaching time during the school year and will tell us, once and for all, whether testing or teaching does more to improve student learning.

Expand Collective Bargaining Goals to Include More Mental Wellness Initiatives

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While the state board and local school district might say they want to support educators' mental wellness, that may not be the reality at the school level. Too often, the system provides individuals with the power to circumvent those good intentions. The result is educators who are [demoralized and stressed](#) – and in no condition to support their students who also suffer from anxiety or stress.

FROM THE WIKI

Protected prep time, living wages, and even the length of duty-free lunch are all critical issues so that people can balance their jobs with other parts of their lives. We need contract language to ensure these rights are protected, and school cultures that support and even encourage educators to find balance.

– Sarah J.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

26. Codify mental wellness supports in contract language so that any breach of that contract can be challenged through the grievance system. Mental wellness initiatives that should be included in contract language include:

- **Work/life balance**
 - Adequate daily preparation and collaboration time during the contractual workday.
 - Duty-free lunches for all staff that allow them to eat at a reasonable pace.
 - Limits to the quantity and length of after-school and evening meetings.
 - Release time for union officers.
 - Flexibility in when and how personal days are used.
- Access to safe, green spaces for students and staff.
- Access to mental health professionals in the schools.
- Partnerships with community agencies for immediate support for students, families, staff.
- Bargaining for the common good initiatives that support communities, students, families and educators.

- Debriefing protocols to be used after all potentially traumatic events.
- Training for administrators about supporting students and educators who experience secondary trauma.
- Enforceable caseload cap for school-based mental health professionals, school nurses and related services providers.
- Enforceable class-size limits.
- Paid time off, including the option to use sick days for mental well-being.
- Assault protections and response procedures for educators.
- Health insurance for educators that [provides for mental health care above and beyond](#) what is required by the mental health parity law.
- Living wages for all school staff to alleviate financial stress and anxiety.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS WILL WORK

Our union and our contract give us the power to advocate for ourselves and our students. A stronger union and a stronger contract is the armor we need!

MTA WikiWisdom Thought Leaders



Donna Grady has been an educator for 34 years, most of that time teaching kindergarten and pre-K. She has taught in private, public and international schools. She is currently in her 25th year in a Massachusetts district, teaching kindergarten. She is the president of her MTA local and a member of the Board of Directors for the state union. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in British literature from Bridgewater State University and a master's degree in early childhood education from Wheelock College. She believes strongly that children/students learn through play and hands-on activities. She participated in a two-year, nationwide task force on the importance of play for children, through the Defending the Early Years Institute, affiliated with Lesley University. She has also been a mentor and peer coach.



Nick Ironside teaches English as a Second Language in Boston. Previously, he taught high school English Language Arts in Springfield for three years and also taught English as a Foreign Language in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Fulbright Program. Nick earned his M.Ed. (secondary education, English) from Framingham State University.



Sarah Joncas is an elementary music teacher. She is the vice president of her local educators' union. She earned a master's degree in music education from Boston University, and a bachelor's degree in music education with a minor in psychology from UMass Amherst.



Clare O'Neill is a recently retired educator from Groton-Dunstable Regional Middle School, spending her 28-year career there as librarian, fifth- and sixth-grade ELA teacher (during budget cuts), yearbook advisor, Diversity Club advisor and co-coordinator with the Young Adult Advisory Committee at the Groton Public Library. She has been active in her local as vice president and building representative, working on many contracts, including contracts for paras and administrative assistants.

MTA WikiWisdom Thought Leaders



Cynthia Roy, Ph.D., is an experienced public school educator with a background in teaching at the secondary and postsecondary levels. With nearly two decades of experience, Cynthia has developed a deep understanding of diverse student needs. As a community organizer and union leader affiliated with the MTA, Cynthia has successfully managed grassroots campaigns and community-based initiatives. Her work reflects a commitment to social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion efforts. With a research background, Cynthia has contributed to original studies, policy development and legislative experience relevant to the education sector.

About WikiWisdom

How do leaders or decision makers easily capture the valuable insights, ideas, observations and wisdom from the hands-on experience of frontline peer groups that reside at the bottom of the power pyramid? How do they learn from the frontline about issues that are plaguing the system? How can you make it comfortable for them to come forward and share what they know in a way that could be used to inform policy making and priority setting?

WIKIWISDOM IS THE ANSWER.

A WikiWisdom Forum harnesses the power of technology, peer collaboration and networks to unearth frontline wisdom and connect it to the people with the power to make changes. WikiWisdom uses the internet to offer people a chance to do more than gripe about their situation. It gives them the opportunity to use their knowledge to tell the powers that be how to do things better.

It's a rare gift to people at both ends of the power structure.



The power of technology,
peer collaboration
and networks.

wikiwisdom.net