Deep Learning

+ The professor who lives in her car

NEA Higher Ed on Capitol Hill: Dream Act, HBCUs, and more

Protesting staff layoffs in Massachusetts

An open letter to Betsy DeVos about campus sexual violence
Alert: House GOP seeks overhaul of Higher Education Act

AN AGGRESSIVE PLAN TO TRANSFORM HIGHER EDUCATION was released in December by U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), chair of the House’s education committee, and met with quick disapproval from NEA Higher Ed members. Called the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, the bill represents Foxx’s efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). Much of it would be harmful to poor and middle-class students, and would make it more difficult for Americans to get high-quality, affordable higher education. Among its provisions are:

Caps on student loan borrowing. The bill would limit the amount of money that students and families could borrow from the federal government to pay for college. Instead of solving the student debt crisis, this likely would force borrowers into more expensive private loans, says NEA higher-ed policy analyst Mark F. Smith. “The solution is to invest directly in higher education as the rest of the world does,” says Smith.

Elimination of loan-forgiveness options. The federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program helps teachers, firefighters, and other public-service workers afford their own homes and send their children to college. Without it, these careers become even less attractive to young people. NEA believes PSLF must be protected.

Roll back regulations on for-profit colleges. There are good reasons for the regulations put into place by the Obama administration. They help ensure that students don’t end up with overwhelming debt and no prospect of employment.

Create new regulations for Minority Serving Institutions. Even as the House bill eliminates rules for for-profit colleges, it creates new ones for Minority Serving Institutions. Specifically, it would require them to meet certain graduation rates or lose federal funding. “How about we focus instead on new ways to support these institutions?” asks Smith.

Repeal the definition of distance education. Last year, a federal investigation found that Western Governors University, a “competency-based” institution without faculty, did not meet the federal requirement for distance education and should return millions of dollars in federal aid. The House’s answer is to change the definition of distance education, so that real interaction between qualified instructors and students is no longer necessary. NEA strongly opposes this measure.
On a recent weeknight, writing instructor Ellen Tara James-Penny sits with a student in a parking lot near San José State University for more than an hour, explaining the perils of “hasty generalizations” and other pitfalls in college-level writing. Then, James-Penny and her husband get into their aging Volvo sedan and drive a few blocks to a local church, where she sleeps in their car with one dog and he sleeps in a tent a few feet away with the other. Despite the four college courses she teaches, and the master’s degree she earned a few years ago, James-Penny is homeless. She simply does not earn enough money as an adjunct professor to afford the high cost of rents in Silicon Valley. Unfortunately, she is not alone. Even as tuitions rise, faculty pay does not, and the situation is especially dire for contingent employees.
Of course it’s not just Ellen James-Penny who is struggling.

“It’s adjuncts in general, it’s adjuncts across the nation, and it has to stop!” she says. More than 70 percent of U.S. college faculty are adjunct or contingent faculty. Studies put their typical income at about $2,700 per course, or between $20,000 and $25,000 a year for a full-time load of courses. Often, they commute from college to college to build a living wage. Many receive no health care or other benefits. Retirement is a pipe dream, as they commonly earn less than the federal minimum wage and struggle to pay their bills. A quarter rely on public assistance such as Medicaid or food stamps, according to a UC Berkeley study. Indeed, many campus food banks report feeding their adjunct faculty.

This past fall, the Guardian reported on an instructor who turned to $200-an-hour sex work to pay her apartment rent after her course load—and income—was cut unexpectedly in half. “I am terrified that a student is going to come walking in,” she said.

A Collective Voice

James-Penny has at least one thing going for her. She’s a member of one of the largest, most powerful faculty unions in the U.S., the 23,000-member California Faculty Association (CFA). Over the past decades, CFA has successfully bargained for pay raises and job security for “lecturers” in the Cal State system, including three-year appointments for lecturers who have taught at least one semester in a single department for six consecutive years.

This kind of stability is important to faculty, but it’s also critical to student success. As Adrianna Kezar, Daniel Maxey, and Elizabeth Holcomb wrote in a 2016 NEA Thought & Action article: “A mounting body of evidence shows that institutions’ failure to properly support [non-tenure-track] faculty is resulting in numerous negative impacts...It is detrimental to student learning and outcomes. This includes problems for first-year persistence, retention, transfers from two- to four-year colleges, and graduation rates...”

Investing in adjunct faculty is about investing in students, but often it seems college administrators do not see it that way. A 2014 study from the Institute of Policy Studies found that at the 25 public universities with the highest paid presidents, the number of part-time adjuncts grew 22 percent faster between 2005 and 2011 than the average national growth—“a sure sign that those schools are offsetting their administrative bloat with cheaper labor,” reports Atlantic Monthly.

“One striking example: between 2010 and 2012, Ohio State University paid its president about $6 million. During that time, it also hired 670 administrators, 498 contingent faculty members, and just 45 tenure-track faculty.

How do you make the case for paying adjuncts more? For providing health and retirement benefits, and pathways to tenure? As an individual, it’s near impossible.

That’s why, in 2009, Errol Magidson picked up the phone and called the Illinois Education Association (IEA). Magidson, an adjunct professor of psychology at St. Xavier University (SXU) in Chicago, also was teaching at Roosevelt University and was a member of the IEA-affiliated Roosevelt Adjunct Faculty Organization.

At Roosevelt, because of its union contract, Magidson earned almost twice as much, per class, as he did at SXU. “I said, ‘Look, why can’t we have a union at St. Xavier?’” Magidson and IEA formed an organizing committee and, in 2011, a vote was held. In 2016—five years later—the ballots were counted, and the St. Xavier Adjunct Faculty Organization had won. In the intervening years, SXU administrators had dragged the process through the national labor relations board, claiming that the university’s Catholic affiliation was incompatible with unionization. (SXU already has two unions on its campuses, including one for full-time faculty.) The board ruled otherwise, but St. Xavier has continued to appeal its decision.

“EVEN THOUGH I LOVE TEACHING...I CAN’T KEEP DOING THIS AND LIVE IN A CAR.”

— ELLEN JAMES-PENNY
Meanwhile, SXU’s adjuncts are paid $2,500 per class, regardless of how long they’ve been teaching that class, and are limited to two classes per semester—a cap that means the Catholic university can avoid paying healthcare benefits for its adjuncts, as would be required by federal law for employees who work at least 30 hours a week.

“The people that do the work need to get paid for the work that they do,” Jeff Tangel, an adjunct political science professor, told the Chicago Tribune. “I get a check every two weeks with $280. Two-hundred eighty-four dollars and fifty-six cents.”

In September, the college president told a local newspaper that if adjunct faculty wanted to be paid more, they could go elsewhere. “Does that sound like ethical behavior?” Magidson asks.

**Colleges = Corporations**

Meanwhile, back on the West Coast, Ellen James-Penny earned $28,700 last year, according to California’s state worker salary database. This year, thanks to salary raises negotiated by her union, she should earn a little more. But it’s not enough money to make the move from automobile to apartment, she says. And so, every morning, she and her husband hustle to pack up his tent, quickly walk their two rescue dogs, and get James-Penny to campus on time—and not looking like somebody who just woke up in a car. Every night, they wonder where they’re going to sleep. Every day, they work to evade parking police, to find healthy food, to wash themselves and their clothes, and, above all, to not look homeless.

It’s not easy, it’s not cheap, and it’s not sustainable, she says. The nights are getting colder, and she’s already had meningitis twice. “I tell my students ‘I love you dearly, but I’m going to love you from a distance,’ and then I get the hand sanitizer out,” she says.

Making matters worse, to pay for her master’s degree, James-Penny borrowed more than $140,000 and her monthly student loan payments top $400. This is not unusual. The number of people who owe more than $100,000 in student debt quadrupled over the past 10 years, according to Federal Reserve Bank of New York data. About 25 percent of graduate students now owe more than $100,000 in loans.

Something that would help James-Penny and other adjuncts is U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin’s Adjunct Faculty Loan Fairness Act, which would make adjuncts eligible for public-service loan forgiveness. (For more, see the NEA Legislative Action Center at nea.org/lac.)

In the meantime, James-Penny doesn’t see a way out of her car, not if she continues with the work she loves. “Even though I love teaching, even though I have such passion for it, I can’t keep doing this and live in a car,” says James-Penny.

The problems, James-Penny notes, go far beyond any one campus. “Colleges are becoming corporations, and their concern is not education,” she says.

“What I want ultimately is for our society to value education, and I mean value,” she says. “The majority of really good teachers leave the field. They just can’t afford it. It’s sad.”

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**25**

The percentage of adjunct faculty who rely on Medicaid, food stamps, and other **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.**

**$20,000**

The estimated **ANNUAL SALARY** for adjunct faculty in the U.S.

**70**

The percentage of U.S. faculty who are **NON-TENURE-TRACK.**

Above: SUNY Cortland union members raise awareness of campus equity.
Successful Strategies for Teaching for Deep Learning

Yes, you understand the importance of deep learning, and you want your students to become deep learners, but you’re not sure how. Here are some surefire strategies to accomplish your goal.

In September of 2015, we published “Teaching for Deep Learning” in these pages [33(4), pp. 12-15], an article that focused on the overall theory of how to utilize the four Rs—Receive, Retrieve, Rate, and Reflect—to inculcate deep learning in students. Since then, we’ve been asked repeatedly if we have specific strategies to accomplish that goal.

Actually, we published a book, Transforming Your Students into Deep Learners (2016), and several articles on that very subject. Deep learning has come to permeate every one of our campus endeavors, including the motto of our unit, “Helping Teachers Help Students Learn Deeply,” our student learning outcomes, and even an online faculty development system we created called DEEP (Developing Excellence in Eastern’s Professors). Perhaps our greatest accomplishment was making deep learning part of our university’s strategic plan.

What follows are summary and synthesis of the most effective strategies to turn both faculty and students into deep learners. We’re sure you will be able to utilize, even adapt them, in your course objectives, syllabi, and daily classes.
Deep Learning Strategies

Our definition of deep learning comes from Achieving Excellence in Teaching: A Self-Help Guide (2014): “deep learning students synthesize (rather than memorize) ideas in order to develop a conceptual understanding—i.e., the new information takes root in their basic apparatuses for apprehending the world—and to make meaning out of material under consideration (p. 11).”

Follow these strategies, and watch your students learn deeply.

**STRATEGY #1:** Begin each semester by teaching (not merely mentioning) the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), and emphasize that its six stages will inform your teaching and students’ learning. Explain that deep learning necessitates lower-order skills (i.e., remembering and understanding) and higher-order skills (i.e., applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating). Students who do not learn the basics in a field—i.e., lower-order knowledge—cannot hope to utilize the higher-order skills.

Once you have explained Bloom’s learning pyramid, give an example of how the skills work. For instance, if you were teaching Intro to Poetry, you might show Shakespeare’s famous sonnet #73 (“That time of

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**TALES FROM REAL LIFE > DEEP LEARNING APPLICATIONS**

In a recent course—ENG 101 Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric—students focused on developing critical reading, academic writing, and rhetorical practices. Students are first year, and many are first time in college. In this course, students are learning academic writing, along with how to think about and reflect on related processes. Thus, Rusty teaches students to learn deeply about critical reading, writing, and rhetoric. Students learn strategies and approaches they can apply in this course and in other academic experiences. To help students learn deeply, I follow a broad-based plan in each class meeting. Students receive information either through our campus Learning Management System (LMS) or through in-class mini-lectures (no longer than 15 minutes). During that time, I cover theoretical or foundational material, often fundamental and powerful concepts students must know or learn to be successful. In the next segment of class, students learn by doing. Students employ the strategy or concept, retrieving the information they have received and drawing from previous information. My class sessions involve a reflective exercise, given at various times, encouraging students to evaluate their process and progress.
I BEST PRACTICES  >

4. Focus, where possible, on higher-order RBT. On some additional strategies for using the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (RBT) (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), including:

1. Iterate: use the RBT language throughout the semester, not just at the end. Demand that your students use the RBT language during classroom discussion or in five-minute reflection papers.

2. Define: explain what the RBT means in your discipline.

3. Create many exercises using RBT. On daily quizzes, you might use your last question to ask your students to classify a previous quiz as requiring they use one of the six RBT levels.

4. Focus, where possible, on higher-order RBT skills. Essay questions afford such opportunities at any level.

STUDENTS WHO DO NOT LEARN THE BASICS IN A FIELD—I.E., ITS LOWER-ORDER KNOWLEDGE—CANNOT HOPE TO UTILIZE THE HIGHER-ORDER SKILLS.”

The following tactics are effective for developing metacognition in students:

• Explain how to “Nosich” their reading and notes to achieve focus: Nosich (2009) explains that all fields have fundamental and powerful concepts “that can be used to explain or think out a huge body of questions, problems, information, and situations” (p. 105).

• Teach students to mind map: Have them circle the “fundamental and powerful concepts” (FPC) in a text or lecture notes. Then have them create radii from each FPC to supporting concepts or examples.

• Use five-minute reflections for your students at the beginning of class (in place of a quiz), in the middle after complex mini-lectures/discussions, and at the end (e.g., I had trouble with concept X…).

• Make certain your student learning outcomes/objectives specify the importance of metacognition.

STUDYING THE META: FIVE STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE DEEP LEARNING

Remember those happy days when your students condition themselves to learn, and rattle off the Great Lakes! Well we’ve learned that your old buddy ARTS can come in handy when helping students learn deeply. One of the most effective strategies we have come across is a technique we label S3P. After introducing a new concept or idea, have students write out four sentences:

- State the new concept.
- Paraphrase the concept.
- Provide an example of the concept.
- Prepare a similar metaphor that embodies the concept.

This strategy will help your students get the concept clear in their mind, allow them to communicate the concept to others, and embed the concept deeply. And while we’re on an acronym roll, we’ll mention a strategy we’ve used in every class over the years to help our students condition themselves to learn deeply. Simply practice the ARTS.

| BEST PRACTICES > TWO TERRIFIC STRATEGIES |

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1. **Attend every class.**
2. **Read every assignment carefully.**
3. **Take notes by hand.**
4. **Study later in the day, making an effort to reorganize and prioritize items in your notes.**
• Sufficiency. Make certain you have collected sufficient information to analyze. One fact is usually not enough.

• Specificity. Start with the four Ws of Who, What, Where, and When. Examine the credentials of sources. Check to see you have the most up-to-date info.

• Objectivity. Take your and your sources' biases into account. Examine the entire spectrum of the claim, not just the “for” or the “against.”

• Relevance. Make certain the evidence aligns with the claim. Be willing to cut irrelevant information.

To use PASSOR as a lens to analyze an argument is to think deeply. The strength of PASSOR is its versatility: it can be applied to any argument in any field.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES
spacestrategic_approaches_to_learning.pdf
WHO ARE WE?

My HBCU Story

Thousands of NEA Higher Ed members work at Historically Black Colleges and Universities from Pennsylvania to Florida. These are a few of their stories.

KRYSWAL WILLIAMS, president of the graduate student union at Florida A&M University (FAMU) and Ph.D. pharmacy student: “What you have here is a family. That’s really what it is…When I meet prospective students, my question is: What are you looking to do? What are your professional goals? FAMU, and the family you create here, will help you get there. That’s our mission. Our network, our culture, it’s something that once you’re a part of, you’re always a part of. Wherever you are, you’re a part of it. My journey led me to public health and the research that I’m passionate about, which is on medication adherence among African-American women with HIV and AIDS who suffer from depression. The fact is that my research deals with my family—my university family—because there are women here with HIV. I can’t say if I wouldn’t have been supported in this research at another institution because I’ve only ever been here, but I can say I have always felt very supported here.”

STEPHANIE CLARK, math instructor at Lincoln University: “I started taking classes full-time at Lincoln when I was 25 and had a baby—it wasn’t the easy way to do it! It was the one place where, for the first time, people accepted me for who I was. There wasn’t any prejudice against me for any past, youthful indiscretions, or anything like that. It’s a small school, with small classes, and the teachers here were the first ones to get me looking at what I could be capable of doing. When I started taking classes, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. When I was taking my math classes, my teachers were telling me I was really good at it, which was kind of a surprise to me. I started taking more classes, and I helped out with a tutoring program as a student, and that’s where I really began to see that I could help other people. I got a degree in secondary ed, taught in high school for a year, but then a job at Lincoln opened up as a professional tutor, and it was basically like coming back to my family. I earned my master’s degree while doing that and I was able to transition over to the faculty side about five years ago, and I’ve been here every since. Many of my students remind me of myself.”

LEARN MORE:

NEA RESOURCES FOR HBCU FACULTY AND STAFF

See here: nea.org/HBCU
A Looming Crisis for HBCUs?

Two new briefs from NEA Research explore the history of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) founded by the 1890 Second Morrill Act, and how those 21 HBCUS ALWAYS HAVE RECEIVED UNEQUAL FEDERAL FUNDING compared to the 53 predominantly White universities in the first Morrill Act. In recent years, the disparity has deepened—and it only could get WORSE UNDER THE TRUMP/DEVOS PROPOSED BUDGET, which would provide $30 million less than HBCUs received in 2010! For more, see nea.org/HBCU.

BY THE NUMBERS

AN UNEQUAL NEED FOR DOLLARS

NON-HBCU, predominantly White land-grant institutions collect their revenues from more varied places, including about 10 percent from their university hospitals, 10 percent from student residence halls and health centers, and 9 percent from private gifts and grants. Meanwhile, the HBCU land-grant institutions rely heavily on state and federal funds.

AN UNEQUAL BURDEN OF CUTS

FEDERAL MONEY for land-grant institutions come primarily through four sources. The Smith-Lever Act and Hatch Act for the predominantly White institutions of 1862, and the Evans-Allen Act and National Agriculture, Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act (NARETPA) for the HBCUs of 1890. Between 2014 and 2017, these sources received unequal cuts that hurt HBCUs more.

WHAT’S NEXT?

“WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING SURE HBCUS GET THE RESOURCES YOU NEED TO FULFILL YOUR MISSIONS.”

— U.S. REP. TERRI SEWELL (D-AL) TOLD VISITING HEA HBCU LEADERS IN NOVEMBER

The first step is to say no to the proposed Trump/DeVos budget. Visit the NEA Legislative Action Center to tell Congress to fairly fund HBCUs: http://edadvocacy.nea.org/highered.

$30 MILLION LESS

How much less will be provided to HBCUs under the Trump/DeVos Budget compared to 2010.
“THIS IS ELI. SHE IS MY HERO,” Scott Launier, president of the United Faculty of Florida-University of Central Florida (UCF) chapter, told lawmakers on Capitol Hill this fall. Eli, a senior at UCF, is a Dreamer, a young adult brought to the U.S. as a child, who has been protected from deportation by the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which President Trump ended last year. Now, if Congress doesn’t pass a Dream Act, Eli, and Gustavo, and Mario, and many more UCF students will be deported. And they’re not the only ones—about 240,000 college students across the U.S., and an additional 365,000 high school students, would be affected, the Migration Policy Institute has estimated. Among them are future nurses, teachers, or, like Gustavo, computer scientists. In speaking to members of Congress this October, Launier carried messages from those students. From Mario: “I have embraced the meaning of the word ‘dreamer...’ And I am living my dream. But the journey continues and we will not reach the final destination until a [Dream Act] has been secured.”

“WE NEED ACTION NOW!” U.S. Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC) told more than 100 Historically Black College and University (HBCU) faculty and staff, who came to Washington, D.C., in November for the first NEA HBCU Summit. “It’s shameful to me that the President can have HBCU presidents in the Oval Office, and then cut our budgets!” said Adams, co-chair of Congress’ HBCU Caucus. Under the Trump/DeVos proposed 2018 budget, HBCUs would receive $30 million less in federal dollars than they did in 2010. Additional proposed cuts to federal student grants, and tuition assistance and college access programs also would disproportionally affect HBCU students, said NEA HBCU faculty and staff leaders. “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu,” warned U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell (D-NC). In response, NEA faculty and staff committed to fighting for fair funding. “What we’ve heard over and again is that the squeaky wheel gets the oil,” said Kirsten Green of Alabama’s Lawson State Community College, a member of the NEA HBCU Summit Steering Committee. “We need to have the uncomfortable conversations with people who don’t even know what HBCUs are.”
THE STATE OF HIGHER ED

6 percent salary raises for Cal State faculty over 2 yrs

With 98 percent approval, California Faculty Association members have extended their contract for two years. The agreement provides for 3.5 percent salary raises next year, and 2.5 percent in 2019. The agreement also protects all benefits at current levels through June 2020. Between negotiations in 2016 and this extension, it adds up to a cumulative increase of at least 17.6 percent from June 2016 to July 2018.

“I’m in!” say hundreds of new union members in MN

All along the borders of Minnesota, scary things are happening to the rights of faculty and staff. (Look east, see Wisconsin. Look south, see Iowa.) But members of the Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF) are building strength from within, and readying for potential threats to their ability to bargain on behalf of full-time and part-time faculty at the state’s two-year colleges. “We have a front row seat to Wisconsin and Iowa, and we recognize our union membership is our insurance against whatever they put up against us,” says MSCF Secretary Gretchen Long. These concerns include challenges to shared governance, academic freedom, and curriculum control. Since September, through one-on-one conversations, 78 percent of MSCF’s 4,200 members have signed new union membership cards, and nearly 300 new union members have joined.

Iowa faculty defend unions

In 2016, Iowa legislators passed a union-busting law mandating annual recertification votes for public-worker unions. But if their hope was the dissolution of unions, they failed. This fall, faculty at six community colleges voted to recertify. Out of 752 voters, only 17 did not return a ballot or voted no. The Iowa State Education Association has challenged the law in court.

STLCC union delays layoffs

The faculty union at St. Louis Community College has struck an agreement with the college’s board to hold layoff notices for up to 70 faculty and 25 staff people until March. The delay would allow for at least one round of voluntary buyouts, potentially reducing the number of layoffs. “We’re moving in the right direction,” union president Robert Hertel told the Post-Dispatch. “I think what we did is at least give people more time (to decide) to retire and lower this number. I realize we may not stop it completely.” The timeline was approved at a raucous November board meeting, where a dozen students fell to the floor in protest, while others chanted loudly. “I think the board has seen the extent to which students will go to protect their educational interests,” said union vice president Emily Neal. The board blames declining enrollment and state funding cuts for their budget deficit.

Another alarming proposal in South Dakota

South Dakota’s House Speaker announced in November that he would introduce legislation to ban collective bargaining at the state’s six public universities. Mark Mickelson said he was inspired after hearing law school faculty were unwilling to work on weekends. “These people need to be shaken up,” he told a local newspaper.

UMASS BOSTON UNIONS: “ONE PERSON, ONE JOB” PROTESTS

With the fate of at least 50 UMass Boston staff jobs on the line, dozens of students, staff and faculty marched outside a Board of Trustees finance committee meeting this November, while activists inside demanded trustees use $5 million from a $96 million unrestricted reserve fund to save the jobs and programs at risk.

“We cannot move forward by destroying our university and what it stands for,” said Juan Pablo Blanco, a UMass Boston graduate student.

The UMass Boston Board of Trustees claims a $30-plus million deficit, but the Classified Staff Union (CSU) and the Professional Staff Union (PSU) believe that figure is inaccurate, and that the university’s debt is related to the cost of repairing poorly built buildings.

This fall, more than 35 PSU and CSU members received layoff notices, and more are expected. “The layoffs are unnecessary and they will hurt students,” said PSU President Tom Goodkind.

Campus activists acknowledge that using reserve funds is a short-term solution, but it would provide time to develop a strategy for addressing construction needs without harming the school’s mission. “We are being punished for a problem we did not create,” said CSU President Janelle Quarles.

The UMass Boston coalition also asked the trustees to publicly endorse the Fair Share Amendment headed to the 2018 state ballot. That initiative would raise roughly $2 billion annually for public education and transportation through a 4 percent tax on annual income above $1 million.

By Scott McClellan, Massachusetts Teachers Association

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Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, Matt Lauer...the list grows each day with new revelations of sexual misconduct, harassment, and outright assault. A long-overdue reckoning is underway. While recent headlines have focused largely on the high-profile worlds of politics and entertainment, women from all walks of life have bravely offered their own stories to shine a light on this pervasive—even systemic—problem.

The world of academia and higher education is not immune. For example, last year, the dean of UC Berkeley Law School resigned in the wake of a sexual harassment complaint. And, just within the last few months, Boston University has been rocked by allegations of sexual misconduct by a prominent member of its faculty while leading a research team in Antarctica.

Indeed, higher education seems to foster many of the dynamics that allow a culture of sexual harassment to take root and grow. Graduate students and research assistants often are beholden to professors who provide job recommendations and control access to research opportunities. Senior faculty run research laboratories and control grant funds that more junior faculty rely on to develop their academic reputations. Stories abound of unscrupulous men exploiting these situations, while their fellow colleagues turn their heads to avoid making waves.

Add to that the increasingly contingent nature of academic employment. As a greater proportion of the teaching force works as adjuncts, they lack the protections of tenure and job security that would allow them to speak without fear of retaliation.

Beginning in the 1970s, pioneering feminist scholars and lawyers like Catharine MacKinnon worked tirelessly to ensure that sexual harassment was recognized as a form of legally actionable sex discrimination. In 1986, the Supreme Court finally adopted that view in a case called Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson. But, in doing so, the Court said that workplace harassment only rises to the level of civil rights violation if it involves a quid-pro-quo demand for sexual favors in return for some kind of job benefit or the creation of a “severe and pervasive” hostile work environment.

Suffice it to say, with a judiciary dominated by well-off men, “severe and pervasive” can be a difficult threshold to meet. In one influential case, an appeals court ruled that a woman was not subjected to a hostile work environment when her supervisor tried to kiss her on multiple occasions, placed “I love you” signs on her desk, called her a dumb blonde, put his hands on her shoulders, and asked her out on dates. In other cases, courts have rejected claims from women who alleged that supervisors propositioned and kissed them, or grabbed their breasts.

When a workplace culture can be so toxic, and the law so inadequate for the task of addressing it, what are victims of harassment to do? One powerful solution is collective action through your union. Long before there were federal civil rights protections for women, unions were advocating for equal rights and negotiating contracts to secure those rights. Collective bargaining agreements can enshrine workplace standards that are more protective than federal or state laws, and they can provide grievances mechanisms that are faster and more effective than the daunting prospect of litigation.

But more than anything, progress will come from the brave women who are willing to stand up and declare #MeToo and demand that their colleagues and their unions stand with them.

Jason Walta is an attorney in the NEA Office of General Counsel and an adjunct faculty member at American University’s Washington College of Law.
This fall, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos reversed Obama administration policies on how colleges address sexual violence. As someone working on this issue for 25 years, I fear these changes will weaken sexual violence protections, create confusion and inequity, and increase the likelihood that survivors will not report. Two steps forward, three steps back.

Changing the standard of proof to one used in a court of law serves no good purpose. College disciplinary processes are not criminal proceedings, for good reason. Requiring colleges to meet a “preponderance of evidence” standard will only make it harder to hold students accountable.

Allowing campuses to decide how to handle complaints and removing the deadline to adjudicate cases creates confusion and inequity. While the current 60 days is sometimes difficult, letting these matters drag on creates more stress for both sides, affecting students’ academic and emotional wellbeing.

We live in a culture that engages in a huge misperception about false reports. Methodologically rigorous research consistent with FBI data finds the percentage of false reports converge at 2 to 8 percent. I observe daily how fearful students are to report or pursue charges. Research indicates that 42 percent of college students tell no one about their assault. Reporting is critical because survivors heal much better when they get support services.

One of the most harmful parts of DeVos’ policy permits mediation as a means to resolve sexual assault cases. Mediations involve meetings where the accuser and accused hash out their differences. Sexual assaults are not misunderstandings on which to compromise! They are violations of college policies and the law.

In my sexuality studies in five European countries, I observed cultures with comprehensive sex education, where teens are viewed as capable decision-makers, have much lower rates of STIs, pregnancy and sexual violence. In the U.S., we extend adolescence, expecting teens to be irresponsible. Older adolescents are fully capable of understanding consent. I know this because I have spent decades having these conversations with college students, as a judicial administrator and now an advocate. We need to stop viewing this behavior as youthful indiscretion and hold students accountable.

Our culture seems on the precipice of a sea change, recognizing the need to reform deeply rooted societal problems leading to sexual violence. We must stop discrediting people who bring forward allegations, giving more power to the accused; often motivated by power. Colleges have a critically important role in this.

Ms. DeVos, I leave you with two thoughts: sexual assault is not a misunderstanding and an untold story never heals.