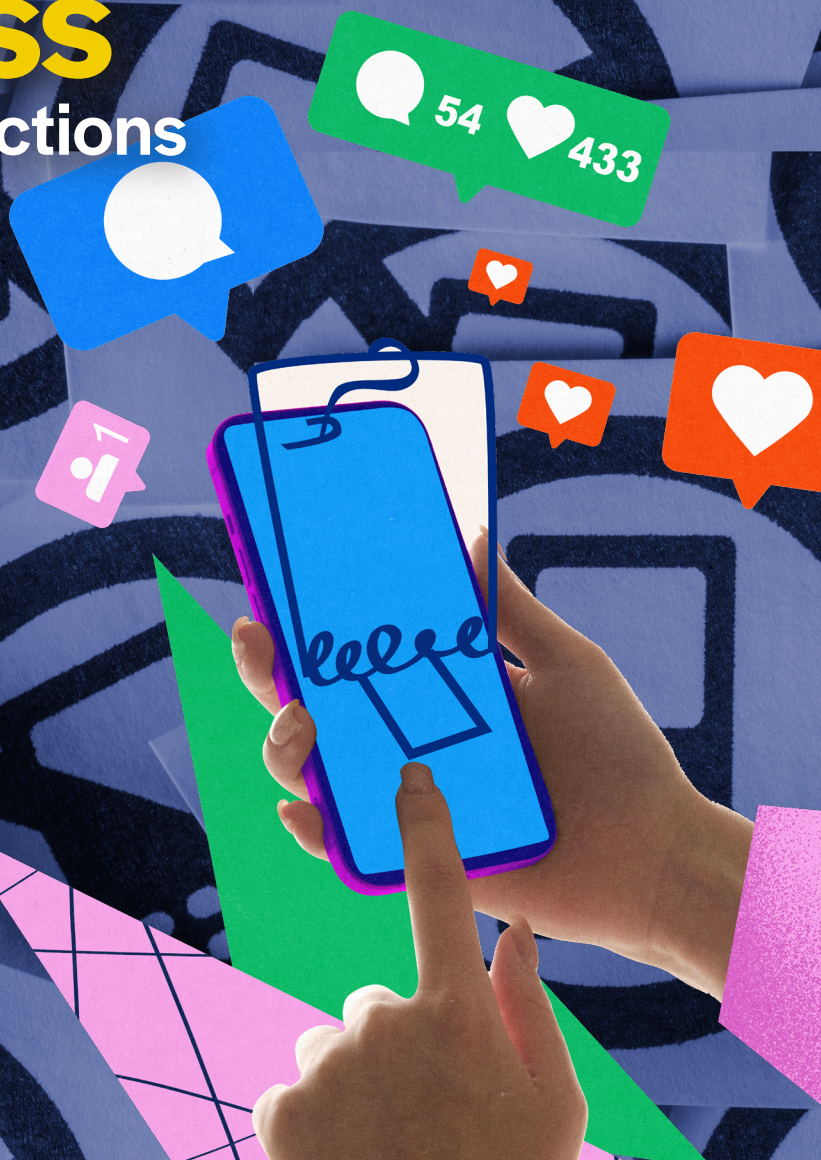
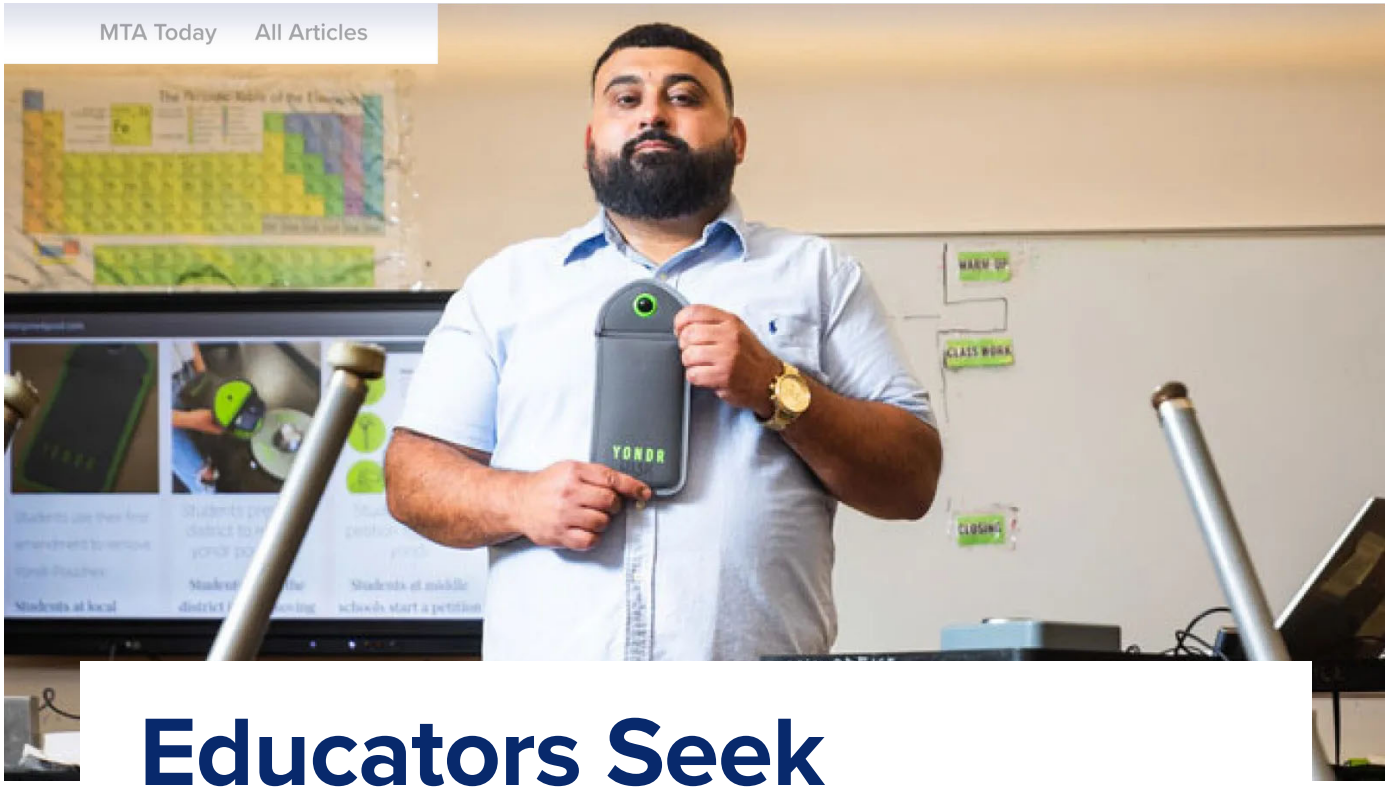
MTA
A publication of the Massachusetts Teachers Association
TODAY
massteacher.org/mtatoday

Keep Phones Out of Class

Educators Seek Restrictions on Devices



Volume 55, No. 4 | SUMMER 2025



Educators Seek Restrictions on Phones, Electronic Devices

Many educators throughout Massachusetts have had it with smart phone and digital distractions in schools.

By: Mary MacDonald

Published: July 2025

SHARE

Many educators throughout Massachusetts have had it with smart phone and digital distractions in schools.

Individual districts and schools have applied restrictions, hoping to refocus students on academics, but educators say a statewide law to require districts to adopt a so-called “bell-to-bell” ban could bring more uniform enforcement.

Legislation recently approved by the state Senate would require public districts to develop a policy that includes prohibiting access to cell phones and other personal electronic devices on school grounds during the school day by the start of the 2026-2027 school year.

Exceptions would be available for students who need devices as part of an individualized education plan. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will provide guidance on a model policy. The proposal is now before the state’s House of Representatives.

In Fall River, the public school district last year enacted its own ban on electronic devices in classrooms and common areas, requiring students to secure their devices in a locked Yondr pouch on entering the school. Educators say the relief was immediate.

Before the policy, because students still had access to their phones, they consistently used them and it was disruptive, said Joseph Michael, a Fall River Educators Association member, who teaches science at Kuss Middle School.



Joseph Michael, who teaches science in Fall River, shows the Yondr pouch used in that district. Photo by Eric Haynes

“In the 2023-24 school year, there was … I’m going to call it chaos,” he said. “Kids were on their phones in the hallways. Kids were TikToking, recording. It was a distraction schoolwide.”

Now, when he sees a student using a device – they sometimes sneak them in if they bring in a second phone – he can enforce the policy by pointing to the district’s rules. The discipline meted out for a first offense, second offense, etc. follows a matrix that all educators use. If a parent complains, he can refer them to administration.

“It’s up to the grade-level administration to create a vision for that school,” Michael said. “I feel Kuss did a really good job taking on a

district initiative and then portraying that vision."

Consistency in enforcement of any ban is one of the things that educators say they want. It's difficult to be the one saying, put the phone away, if another professional is allowing them. That's one of the reasons why many say they want state-level action.

Jenn Pompetti, a sixth-grade teacher at Henry Lord Community School in Fall River, said she considered leaving the district two years ago, when she taught at a different school. The distractions caused by the phones and other devices were constant, she said.

"[You] ask the kid to put the phone away. Two minutes later, you ask again," Pompetti said. "Some would, others would swear at you, and now you've escalated the situation to a point where if you took the phone, forget it."

Pompetti, now at a new school in Fall River and working under the new policy, said: "It's a thousand-times better, let me tell you."

Smart phones have been available since 2007, when the iPhone launched, but social media has grown in use since then, and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, educators say students seem more attached to their devices. The devices – which now include watches, earbuds and eyeglasses – also are being used by students at younger ages.

By 2023, when the first state adopted a ban on cell phone use in schools, a survey by the Pew Research Center found 72 percent of high school educators reported the devices were a "major problem" in classrooms. By this summer, 35 states had approved restrictions on access to cell phones in schools, according to the Associated Press.

The Massachusetts legislation passed the state Senate with a 38-2 vote in late July.

State Senator Jason Lewis, D-Winchester, who helped develop the legislation, cited research that's shown myriad negative effects linked to the use of cell phone use in schools, including worsened mental health, academic performance, relationship building and social skills.

Over the past year, he worked with the MTA and other organizations including the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Phone Free School Coalition and Smartphone Free Childhood to fine tune the proposal.

"We heard from both parents and teachers that they would like a more uniform cell phone policy enacted statewide," he wrote, in an email. "Large variations in policies and enforcement from school to school, and even classroom to classroom, have made things much more difficult for students and educators."

Because parents expressed concern about not being able to remain in contact with their children, he said, a provision in the bill will require schools to have at least one method for parents or guardians to contact students during the school day. In most cases, this would be the main office.

Christine Mulroney, president of the Framingham Teachers Association, said Framingham High School adopted a no-cell-phones restriction in classrooms last year, which showed fast results. "There was some immediate improvement in students connecting with each other and with instruction." The challenge, she said, was students still could use their phones and connect to social media in the hallways and during lunch.

A law, she said, would provide more consistency and backup in creating policies and follow-through for violations.

The MTA supports the legislation, and both President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy have testified before a legislative subcommittee to support its passage. In a statement, they said: “Having a statewide framework for districts to use in creating policies to exclude students’ access to cell phones and social media during the school day will produce healthier, more supportive learning environments for all.”

Join the conversation on Facebook. What do you think of cell phone restrictions?

GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard education researcher. The Curiosity Desk is hosted by Edgar B. Herwick III on GBH News, 89.7 FM. This segment aired on August 25, 2026.

Contract Highlights Show Gains in Salary, Leave, Use of Democratized Bargaining

MTA locals throughout the state negotiated transformational contracts in the 2024-25 school year, many aided by using democratized bargaining. A sampling of highlights provided by the Field and Organizing Division follows:



Members of the Somerville Educators Union at a rally. Photo by Scott McLennan.

By: Scott Mclennan

Published: July 2025

SHARE

MTA locals throughout the state negotiated transformational contracts in the 2024-25 school year, many aided by using democratized bargaining. A sampling of highlights provided by the Field and Organizing Division follows:

Fitchburg Education Association educators won 21-26 percent pay increases for ESPs and 17.5 percent increases for three-quarters of the teachers, who are at the top step.



Fitchburg educators, shown in fall 2024, made substantial gains in their contract. Photo by Scott McLennan

Bellingham Teachers Association educators won an 11.5 percent pay raise over three years, plus 10 days of paid parental leave. Lunenburg Education Association educators won 11 percent pay raises over three years, plus 20 days of paid parental leave.

The Faculty Staff Union at UMass Boston raised salary floors by 10-15 percent, increased an antiracism fund pool that is controlled and distributed by the union, and locked in across-the-board raises, rejecting management's push for merit pay from the state's financial parameters.

The Beverly Teachers Association won six weeks of paid parental leave, a $15,000 pay increase for Education Support Professionals and 16 percent pay raises over three years for licensed staff.

Springfield Education Association educators negotiated 13 percent pay raises over four years.

The Boxford and Topsfield teachers associations both won 12-21percent pay hikes for ESPs over three years, plus four weeks of paid parental leave.

Everett Teachers Association educators won 11 percent raises over three years for teachers, 34-52 percent increases for ESPs, four weeks of paid parental leave and 50 percent pay for eight additional weeks of leave.

On the Cape and Islands, the Barnstable ESPs won an improvement to their health insurance split from 50/50 to 70/30, with 70 percent paid by the district. The Martha's Vineyard Educators Association won four weeks of paid parental leave.

Somerset Teachers Association educators won an average 14.7 percent pay increase over three years.

The Somerville Educators Union won a starting salary of $50,000 for ESPs and 12 weeks of paid parental leave for all educators. The Fall River Educators Association won 17-20 percent pay increases over three years, plus four weeks of paid parental leave.

Impressive contract victories are only possible when local associations organize members to participate in democratized bargaining. Some elements of democratized bargaining include the use of silent representatives, creation of a public bargaining platform, forming a contract action team, or CAT, to work with the local's bargaining team, securing proposals for the common good, coordinating bargaining among different units in the same local, and deploying a strategic, escalating contract campaign.

The following locals are among those that used silent representatives as part of a democratized bargaining plan: Professional Staff Union -

UMass, Classified Staff Union - UMass Boston, Massachusetts Society of Professors – Lowell, the Faculty Staff Union - UMass Boston, Association of Professional Administrators, Massachusetts State Colleges Association, Massachusetts Community College Council, Springfield, Chicopee, Northampton, Southern Berkshire, Agawam, Holyoke, Amherst-Pelham, Longmeadow, Clarksburg, Florida, Rowe, Savoy, Erving, Greenfield, Leverett, Swift River, South Hadley, Belchertown, Southwick-Tolland-Granville, Frontier Regional, Central Berkshire, Mohawk, Union 38, Quaboag, Leicester paraprofessionals, Central Mass Collaborative Union Paraprofessionals, South Worcester County Educational Collaborative, Berlin-Boylston, Sutton ESPs, Keefe Tech secretaries, Blackstone-Millville, Westford, Hudson Paraprofessionals, West Boylston, Maynard ESPs, Clinton, Winchendon, Freetown-Lakeville, Fairhaven, Mansfield, Middleboro, Halifax, Plympton, Easton, Franklin, Bristol-Plymouth, Norton, Acushnet, Mashpee, Dartmouth, Rochester, Barnstable administrators, Upper Cape Tech, Wareham, Dighton-Rehoboth, Haverhill, Malden, Quincy, Watertown, Belmont, Somerville, Canton, Dedham, Waltham, Westwood, Braintree, Abington, TEC Connections Academy, Pembroke, Cohasset, Weston ESPs and Foxboro.

GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard education researcher. The Curiosity Desk is hosted by Edgar B. Herwick III on GBH News, 89.7 FM. This segment aired on August 25, 2026.

Two Organizations Win MTA Civil Rights Awards

Two organizations dedicated to strengthening communities by empowering individuals at risk were the recipients of the 2025 MTA Human and Civil Rights Awards, which were presented July 27 at a ceremony featuring keynote speaker Cornel West.



Denise LaPolla, chair of the Human Relations Committee, and Cornel West, the keynote speaker, speak following the awards ceremony. Photo by Scott McLennan.

By: Scott McLennan

Published: July 2025

SHARE

Two organizations dedicated to strengthening communities by empowering individuals at risk were the recipients of the 2025 MTA Human and Civil Rights Awards, which were presented July 27 at a ceremony featuring keynote speaker Cornel West.

MTA's Human Relations Committee presented its annual awards for the first time at Summer Conference, allowing for a larger audience to hear from the organizations being recognized and experience West's presentation, which was part lecture and part call-to-arms to "hold up the best of us" in the face of America's rising despair and cynicism.

The "best of us" certainly could be found in M.O.C.H.A and Uncommon Threads, the organizations recognized by MTA for their important work in their respective communities.

M.O.C.H.A – Men of Color Health Awareness – is based in Springfield, where its staffers fan out to talk to Black and Latino men about their health and offer pathways to greater well-being. M.O.C.H.A. seeks to dismantle the health care disparities related to race, gender and class, which show up among men of color as higher levels of stress and overall poorer health compared to other segments of the population.

M.O.C.H.A. received the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award, named after former MTA president and longtime union activist Kay Roberts. Members of the Massachusetts Society of Professors chapter at UMass Amherst nominated M.O.C.H.A. for the award.



Cornel West, second from left, poses for a photo with members of M.O.C.H.A. Photo by Bob Duffy.

“The very name of the award — creative leadership — resonates deeply in M.O.C.H.A.’s journey,” said project director Lamont Scott when accepting the award on the organization’s behalf.

M.O.C.H.A. formed in 2010 and carries out its work through a network of partnerships with UMass Amherst, YMCA of Greater Springfield, Baystate Hospital and various city and state agencies. M.O.C.H.A. offers workshops and classes aimed at encouraging men to take better care of themselves, and the organization’s staff shows up at civic events and visits places where they feel they can begin conversations with men about their health. M.O.C.H.A. urges men to develop healthy routines

around regular exercise and routine doctors' visits for check-ups and appropriate scans. Men participating in M.O.C.H.A. programs report being more physically fit, feeling better, and reducing the use of alcohol or drugs.

"M.O.C.H.A. was founded on the simple, yet profound, belief that by empowering men and women to prioritize their health — physically, spiritually and mentally — we foster stronger individuals, families and communities," Scott said.

Similarly, Uncommon Threads in Lawrence sees the impact of its work as extending far beyond the initial impact of providing clothing to women experiencing trauma and crisis.

Uncommon Threads received the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award, named after a pioneering educator who promoted equal opportunity for all. Members of the Andover Education Association nominated Uncommon Threads for the award.



Cornel West poses with members of Uncommon Threads after the awards ceremony. Photo by Mary MacDonald

Uncommon Threads founder Susan Kanoff uses clothing and fashion as a jumping off point for women to repair and rebuild their lives. In addition to providing clothing to women, Uncommon Threads offers workshops and other services with the goal of building confidence in women and empowering them to pursue life-improving opportunities.

“It’s not just about the clothes,” Kanoff said. “It’s about that moment when a woman sees herself in a positive light, it’s about making someone feel valued and supported by a community of women who truly care, so when that woman looks in the mirror she thinks, ‘I am capable, I am worthy, I am enough,’ and she owns her power.”

Kanoff combined her background in social work and fashion to open Uncommon Threads in 2016. The organization has helped about 20,000 women since then. Kanoff said Uncommon Threads typically gives warm clothing to at least 500 women each winter, and this year she expects to

provide clothing and services to 6,000 women in the Greater Lawrence area.

“When we invest in women, we create a ripple effect. A confident woman lifts up her family, community and society,” Kanoff said. “Empowering women isn’t charity, it’s smart.”

In his keynote address, West zeroed in on the importance of the values being celebrated by the HCR awards, which the MTA has been giving out since 1983.

In his trademark fiery delivery, the tall, animated, black-clad West bemoaned a culture of “addiction and distraction” in America, where young people in particular are vulnerable to becoming simply consumers rather than engaged citizens.

He lifted up the power of education and of the arts, calling on MTA members to “push back” against policies that undermine education and devalue the humanity of people.

“We need to create disruption, and you need to be willing to assert yourself,” West said. “We need to be learning from each other and be willing to take risks for the sake of our children.”

He offered up the formula of “respect, correct and protect” to educators and others looking to guide young people toward deeper beliefs about the importance of community and caring for others.

West did not hold back on his criticism of the Trump administration as the very embodiment of a spiritual crisis affecting America.

“A hypocrite knows the standard and chooses to ignore it. A gangster has no standards. Trump is a gangster,” West said.

West encouraged action and solidarity to bring about positive change, citing the work of educators and the HCR award winners as examples of the different ways to break through the malaise and allow individuals to flourish while also supporting others around them.

“Find your own voice,” he said. “This is not about being an echo.”

To learn more about the Human and Civil Rights Awards of this and previous years, please visit **massteacher.org/hcr**.

GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard education researcher. The Curiosity Desk is hosted by Edgar B. Herwick III on GBH News, 89.7 FM. This segment aired on August 25, 2026.

MTA Summer Conference: "Now More Than Ever"



More than 900 members attended the 2025 MTA Summer Conference.

By: Mary MacDonald

Published: July 2025

SHARE

More than 900 people attended the 2025 MTA Summer Conference, where the theme “Now More Than Ever” reflected the urgency of the moment for education professionals and unionists. It was the largest attendance in decades.

The three-day conference, held at UMass Amherst in late July, featured notable guest speakers and a full array of professional development and enrichment selections. In addition to discussion of critical topics, including community schools and the impact of high-stakes testing, the conference featured a member art show, MTA Reads book club get togethers, outdoor yoga, early-morning Zumba, a walking tour of campus architectural highlights led by President Max Page, and fun parties and dances that brought members together at night.

Keynote speakers Cornel West and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor inspired members on the opening day. **M.O.C.H.A. Springfield** and **Uncommon Threads** received the 2025 Human and Civil Rights awards. In another highlight, United Farm Workers co-founder Dolores Huerta spoke virtually after a screening of the documentary “American Agitators,” which was hosted by the MTA’s Ethnically Marginalized Affairs Committee.



Cornel West, the keynote speaker at the Human and Civil Rights Awards ceremony, greets De'Shawn Washington, the 2024 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year. Photo by Scott McLennan



Summer Conference 2025 Photo by Bob Duffy



Cornel West, a political activist, intellectual and academic, spoke at the Human and Civil Rights Awards ceremony. Photo by Scott McLennan



MTA members met in several workshops and spaces throughout the conference. Photo by Bob Duffy



Early morning Zumba was a popular event. Photo by Mary MacDonald

GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard education researcher. The Curiosity Desk is hosted by Edgar B. Herwick III on GBH News, 89.7 FM. This segment aired on August 25, 2026.



Chandler Creedon Jr., 2025 Honor Our Own Award Winner

Chandler Creedon Jr. is the former president of the Franklin Education Association.

By: Mary MacDonald

Published: July 2025

SHARE

When you're the oldest of eight children, working with children comes naturally.

Chandler Creedon Jr. estimates he's been working since age 7 and he's not likely to stop soon. Although retired for eight years from the Franklin public schools, Creedon has continued to work since then for various districts when needed.

A 32-plus-year school psychologist, Creedon recently was named the 2025 Honor Our Own Award winner. He will be honored at a luncheon on Oct. 7 at the Publick House Historic Inn and Lodge in Sturbridge.



Retired Franklin educator Chandler Creedon Jr. won the Honor Our Own award in 2025.

He became interested in education and counseling while a student in college, and he's been at it ever since.

"Education is the basis for everything," Creedon said. In Franklin, where he worked with middle school students for most of his career, Creedon created a week-long summer program for incoming sixth graders called "Middle School Magic." It was designed to ease the transition for

students who might be struggling and introduced them to the routines and new environment.

No matter where he worked, he approached the job the same. Building relationships with students was always his first goal.

“What is it that they need and how do we develop the tools that they need to be successful?” he said.

Creedon served for eight years as the president of the Franklin Education Association, stepping into the leadership role when he saw an opportunity. He learned quickly on entering the public education profession that educators needed a collective voice.

A resident of Worcester, Creedon holds a sociology degree from St. Anselm College and a master’s degree and certificate of advanced graduate study from Anna Maria College. He was nominated for the Honor Our Own award by Emily Constantine, a speech pathologist with the Franklin public schools.

“Chandler is a person who leads by example,” Constantine wrote. “He was the kind of colleague you could always rely on to lend a hand or offer insightful advice. His commitment to doing whatever it takes to support his colleagues, students and the larger community made him an exceptional asset to our school community.”

Six years ago, when he worked in Clinton, a student asked him why he was wearing a pin of a rainbowcolored flag. Creedon explained that it was symbol of diversity, equity and inclusion and seventh grader promptly told him: “Kids aren’t going to understand that.”

She promised him she'd give him a present the next day. Her gift, a pin of a crayon box, was better at getting the idea across, she said. "Kids will understand that you don't want all the same-colored crayons in your crayon box," Creedon said, recalling the conversation. "I've worn it ever since." ■

GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard education researcher. The Curiosity Desk is hosted by Edgar B. Herwick III on GBH News, 89.7 FM. This segment aired on August 25, 2026.



