

# What & Why?

As you consider the benefits of belonging to TABCO-RETIRED, and renewing your membership, please read through the next few items. Our accomplishments for retired educators currently, and within the recent past, include:

- Negotiated with BCPS and Baltimore County Government to provide over **\$745,000 in reimbursement to retirees** affected by the BCPS ransomware attack and its effects on pension deductions
- Persistently brought the issue of the poor communication of BCPS personnel with retirees to the attention of senior BCPS officials; they subsequently instituted a BCPS Employee and Retiree Customer Service Center.
- Advocated for the retention of several **choices** of Medicare plans; still fighting to prevent yet another automatic reassignment of all retirees to an Advantage medical plan (a private Medicare plan that has been found to provide inferior coverage)
- Working to get BCPS policy aligned with state and federal regulations regarding Medicare transition and prevent future healthcare cancellations.
- Working for a change in TABCO Bylaws to provide for a retired member on the TABCO Board of Directors.
- Bringing BCPS Office of Benefits and Retirement personnel to our events (both virtual and in person) to respond to retiree questions and concerns
- Sending frequent timely updates to retired members on retiree issues via email and a retiree newsletter



**Pathway to Retirement—TABCO-R's service project for TABCO members—**  
**Pictured: Retiree Committee members, retired member Christine Beard, and RetireeFirst reps offer advice.**

TABCO-Retired is a class of membership that is affiliated with MSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired  
**TABCO-R Steering Committee Members:**  
Chairperson: Angela Leitzer  
Elizabeth Ceanfaglione, Stephanie Foy  
Julia Hinton-VanHook, Edward Kitlowski, Cindy North  
Roxann Russo, Barbara Tyler,  
Mary Ellen Vecchioni, Cheryl Vourvoulas  
**Messenger Editors: Stephanie Foy, Angela Leitzer**  
**To reach the TABCO-Retired Steering Committee,**  
**email: [bookends68@comcast.net](mailto:bookends68@comcast.net)**



## MSEA NEWS

As of July 31, 2024, current **MSEA President Cheryl Bost** will be retiring. She has held the post since 2018, previously holding the position of MSEA vice president, and had served as TABCO vice president, and four terms as TABCO President. She was an elementary classroom teacher in BCPS for 25 years. Her significant contributions to the cause of public education are both well-known and countless. We wish her a healthy, happy retirement.

Taking on the position of MSEA president will be **Paul Lemle**, a teacher of American Government and Law in Howard County Public Schools and former president of the Howard County Education Association.

### Your TABCO-Retired MEMBERSHIP

#### Membership renewals:

MSEA collects annual dues and distributes the TABCO-R portion to TABCO. A portion of dues stays at MSEA and a portion goes to NEA. The best time to pay your dues is in late August, as the membership year runs from September to September. To avoid the trouble of sending a check each year, have your dues deducted from your pension once each year—you can authorize this by contacting: [esakalas@mseane.org](mailto:esakalas@mseane.org).

**Dues dollars:** The portion of your dues that is returned to TABCO is \$13 (**out of \$75**). This is the total dues for the year (amounts to less than 21 cents per day or \$6.25 per month). All TABCO activities and materials are funded through the TABCO budget. The only increase in retiree dues this year is a \$6 increase in the MSEA portion of lifetime dues. Annual dues are not being increased at any level.

**Membership forms:** Updated forms for 2024-2025 are being created by MSEA and will be posted on the TABCO website as soon as we receive it. <https://tabco.org/about-us/tabco-retired/>

**Teachers Association of Baltimore County**  
President Cindy Sexton, Vice President Kelly Olds  
Treasurer John R. Wilkins, Secretary Frank Soda  
and the TABCO Board of Directors  
Executive Director Ben Forstenzer

TABCO office: 410-828-6403 fax: 410-337-7081  
1220 C, Suite 514 E. Joppa Rd. Towson, MD 21286  
**Contact person for TABCO-R at the TABCO office:**  
**Kim Melfa, [kmelfa@mseane.org](mailto:kmelfa@mseane.org)**



## TABCO-R MESSENGER

RETIRED~NOT EXPIRED  
SPRING 2024  
volume 9 number 1

TABCO-RETIRED'S 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY~ 10 YEARS OF ADVOCACY FOR RETIREES

## News and Notes

By Angela Leitzer, a.k.a, [bookends68@comcast.net](mailto:bookends68@comcast.net)

#### Celebrating ten years of TABCO-RETIRED!

TABCO was organized in 1918—the vision of a small group of teachers, but it took another 96 years and another small group to convince TABCO leadership to approve the organization of an advocacy group for retired teachers. In December of 2014, the board of directors voted and chose a chairperson. Three months later, a group of seven retirees began organizing and here we are, a decade later, having gathered a local retiree membership that is only second in total membership of all Association locals in the state of Maryland. But that is not enough! Thousands of folks who retired prior to 2014 haven't found us, and hundreds more fail to understand the importance of belonging to an advocacy group. As we celebrate, we must continue to grow in strength—you can help by talking to your retired colleagues about joining us. And stay tuned for information about celebration events!

#### What is the deal with that other bunch?

They are already emailing folks who have submitted their retirement papers...referring here to the BCRSPA/MRSPA, which is an AARP group. We have no issue with another retiree group's existence,

but we DO have a problem with personal contact information being disseminated (by...?), and with the claim that they are the only group representing all retirees and that they have access to BCPS via, "Additional information is being sent to you through interoffice mail." How does an outside entity gain access to BCPS data and use of interoffice mail? Perhaps because many of the BCRSPA leadership are retired BCPS administrators or supervisors? **Do you know that TABCO Headquarters is no longer located in the old Towers?**

Surprisingly, we have even had some active members go to the old building rather than attending to the new address. I wonder if the demise of the delivery of a paper newsletter to current teachers has resulted in this disconnect? Just to be sure that all retired members know this—TABCO moved to an office park location further east on Joppa Road in 2018. The address there is **1220 E. Joppa Rd, Bldg C, Suite 514, Towson, MD 21286.**

#### What issues are we working on?

- **Benefits cancellations:** We have submitted multiple statements and references on both state and federal laws on the subject of cancellation of medical insurance during Medicare transition to BCPS

See "News and Notes," page 3

## Legislation and Education: The Blue Print for Maryland

By Edward Kitlowski

In 1965, the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed by the US Congress and initiated greater involvement of legislators and politicians in education. Then-President Johnson stated, "full educational opportunity" should be "our first national goal." It also had a civil rights component to address the education gap and equal educational opportunities.

In 2021, the Maryland Legislature passed the Blue Print for Maryland to *enrich student experiences, accelerate improvements to student outcomes, and improve the quality of education in Maryland*, at the cost of \$3.8 billion over ten years.

The Blue Print identifies five areas or "pillars" that are essential to improving Maryland education and therefore, student achievement. The five Pillars are: Pillar 1 Early Childhood development, Pillar 2 High Quality and Diverse teachers and leaders, Pillar 3 College and

Career Readiness, Pillar 4 More Resources for students, Pillar 5 Governance and Accountability. At face-value, this is solid thinking. The Baltimore County Board of Education members have been debating and approving policies and changes to comply with the law.

There is much research that shows the importance of the first five years of a child's development in school achievement and life outcomes. Pillar 1 calls for increased early education. Pillar 2 legislates a starting salary of \$60,000 for teachers and a \$10,000 bonus for those who attain National Certification, with the opportunity for those teachers to earn an additional \$7,000 a year if they work in a low performing school. There are also plans to encourage high school students to enter teaching and for career changers to become teachers.

Pillar 3 is a major shift in educational ideology. In-

See "The Blue Print," page 2



Read any good books lately?

By Barbara Tyler

We teach our students that there are different purposes for reading. Now my friend Elizabeth always tells me about the socially important memoirs and autobiographies that she reads, and Cindy likes her British mysteries. I consider myself a reader of fiction. It allows me to meet interesting people and be transported to places to which I will never travel.

One of my favorite authors is David Baldacci. The first of his books that I found was *Wish You Well* set in rural Virginia during the 1930s. It is a family saga and is the only one of his books that I have kept a copy of on my shelf. Then I began reading his other books, which were totally different, and became captured by his fast-paced politically intriguing stories of spies and international incidents. I am hooked. It is a good day when I find a new David Baldacci book on the shelf at the library. On one occasion I almost had to knock over an older man when he picked up the title I was reaching for. In order not to create an incident I unhappily relented.

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear David Baldacci speak at a program sponsored by the Carroll County Public Library. He was there introducing his new book *A Calamity of Souls*. A son of Virginia, his love of the area is evident in the vivid descriptions of fictional Freeman County as well as the portraits of the characters who live there. He spoke eloquently and passionately about social justice, which led him to author this book. He said it took him ten years to complete the novel. Some critics have

"The Blue Print" continued, from page 1

stead of the focus being on graduation rates and test performance, the Blue Print calls for preparing students for post-secondary life in what is called College and Career Readiness (CCR). It expands the standards for graduation to include more pathways that are not just academic, but also areas that require certification and/or technical training. The tenth grade will be the target year to achieve CCR goals instead of twelfth grade. Those who have not achieved the goals by tenth grade will be given additional and individualized instruction.

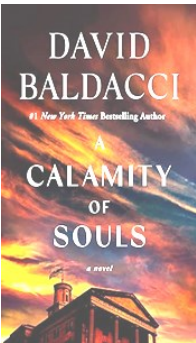
Pillar 4 addresses curricula. The legislation acknowledges the need to change what and how students are taught. It directly calls for new curricula in math and reading. Instruction time for social studies in elementary school was decreased to give more time for reading and math in order to prepare students for the standardized tests. Research indicates more integration of social studies with reading and math results in positive outcomes. Pillar 5 calls for more means of assessing student progress beyond standardized tests.

There are several statements in the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) literature that are problematic. In the section on curriculum, there is the statement, "Unfortunately, teachers frequently create or "find"

said it is the best book he has written. The story takes place in the turbulent year of 1968 during the desegregation of the South where racial injustice under the law was the norm. It is in this uneasy time that a local White attorney John Robert Lee agrees to defend Jerome Washington, a Black handyman who is accused of murdering his wealthy White employers. Jack's family is an important part of his life, from his special needs sister to his Viet Nam deserter brother, to his parents who are a reflection of the wide variety of attitudes on race.

The trial becomes high profile when a Black lawyer from Chicago, Desiree Dubose, is sent by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to assist Jack. Throughout the trial Jack and Desiree must find their way through the myriad of legal and political roadblocks that arise in defending Jerome. Their vastly different life experiences are reflected in the different approaches to the defense.

Baldacci does not disappoint with all of the twists and turns and surprises throughout the story, making it hard to put the book down. I think *A Calamity of Souls* had enough factual descriptions and commentary of the times for Elizabeth and enough intrigue befitting a British mystery (although not the setting) for Cindy. I'm a fan. Four stars!



Above: April 24, 2024 retirement fair brings potential retirees and Benefits Office personnel together to share information under TABCO-R sponsorship

curricular materials rather than implementing high quality materials."

There is another statement that addresses the root of low performance. "Findings show that the more money a student's parents earn and the higher the education level they have completed, the more likely a student will score higher on these assessments." It is 2024. We all knew that already. What was not stated was there is a direct link between so-called low performing schools and the legacy of racism that evolved from slavery and resulted in discrimination.

As taxpayers, we all have a stake in public education. Our future democracy and prosperity are dependent on those presently in school. Given the failures of No Child Left Behind and the ESSA with the Common Core, it is not unexpected that there is skepticism about The Blue Print for Maryland schools.

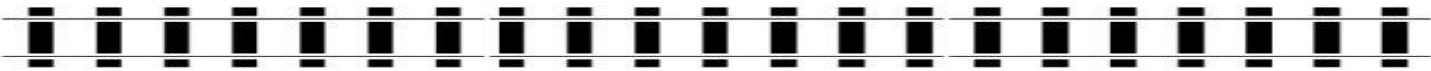
News and Notes continued, from page 1

leadership and board of education members. So far, they have only offered to review the information. We will continue to press them on correcting their practices in this regard.

- **Healthcare Choice:** The potential of losing healthcare choices is concerning. As Medicare Advantage is promoted by more and more companies and organizations, we continue to find multiple news articles that address how sub-par the Advantage plan is in covering various surgeries and treatments. We must continue to advocate for maintaining Medicare Surround and other choices as the fall enrollment period approaches. Your voices count, too, and the more, the better. Dr. Rogers, BCPS Superintendent, can be emailed by going to the BCPS website (bcps.org) and

scrolling to **Email Dr. Rogers** under the heading **"Superintendent."**

**TABCO Bylaws:** Though the Bylaws Committee did not complete the process of submitting language to place a retired member on the TABCO Board of Directors in time for the 2024 TABCO election, it is hoped that this will be accomplished early in the fall of 2024. This will provide retired membership with a voting member representing them. We owe President Sexton many thanks for her persistence and support in bringing this to fruition. It is worth noting that a bylaws amendment is being proposed at the fall 2024 MSEA Representative Assembly that would place a retiree on the MSEA Board of Directors.



All Aboard the Amtrak Auto Train

By Cheryl Vourvoulas

**Snowbird: a northerner who moves to a warmer southern state in the winter.**

We confess. My husband and I are snowbirds. We don't like the snow, sleet, or freezing rain of the northeast during the traditional winters there. Since we own a condominium in Melbourne, Florida, Gus, and I have become snowbirds for the past four years. We go south from January to early April. (Gus has to stay long enough for Oriole spring training games.)

With our advancing ages and our dislike for the I-95 traffic, we have become frequent "flyers" on the Amtrak Auto train. We choose to reserve two coach seats. The auto cars themselves are loaded with everyone's personal cars or trucks, or even motorcycles. We pack our car with everything we need to take to the condo. On the train, we pack personal items like snacks and drinks in a small cooler, all our preferred electronics and chargers, and pillows and blankets. In the reserved coach seats, you have a pull down tray, like on an airplane, two outlets for power, and lights overhead for later at night. The seats are like recliners. Granted, they are not the overstuffed kind like I have in my living room, but we have found them to be comfortable enough for the sixteen hour trip. We can sit at booth tables in the club car to use a computer or



play cards. There are hot dogs, burgers and snacks and drinks for purchase if you don't bring your own. There is free continental breakfast in the morning before we get to our final location.

The biggest negative we have found with the coach car is the bathroom access. We must climb down a narrow staircase to the bathroom area. But hey, I usually only have to do that trip twice. When our mobility becomes problematic, we will choose a bedroom with its own bathroom. This YouTube link can give you an idea what a bedroom experience might be like. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzqCR5QLe-k>

Some will quickly say the cost is too much. But wait... wear and tear on your car, price of gas, food stops, possibly one hotel night or two depending on how far you drive, and your emotional well-being... must I go on? Plus, if we fly on a plane, then we have no vehicle once we arrive. That rental car cost can really add up.

Reserve seats often can be found for as little as \$95 per person one way and the cars cost about \$300. The rates fluctuate based on the time of year and weekdays vs. weekends. For the snowbirds, trains usually sell out. So, booking early is strongly advised. Get Amtrak's app and sign-up for notifications of their sales.

We have talked with many travelers, and most have shared that they have been traveling this way for years and that they will use the train again. So come on! All aboard!