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Boston BTU Union

Great Students Start With Great Teachers! Teacher

The Award-Winning Newspaper of the Boston Teachers Union, AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

President's Corner by Richard Stutman

Discriminatory Performance Evaluation Hurts Both School Department's Credibility and Our Members



Richard Stutman
BTU President

Imagine this: A math teacher gets hauled into the principal's office at the end of the first term and is asked to explain the ins and outs of his grading system. It seems that of his 150 students, the white students 6% receive a failing grade while 30% of the black students fail. By gender a similar [pattern emerges: 4% of his female students fail and 12% of his male students fail. Many of the students on the receiving end of this disparate treatment complain, and the teachers vows to examine his practice. Next term, the same pattern remains. And so on. Two years later, the teacher has shown no understanding of the issue, no willingness to justify or even discuss it, and no attempt to change his practice. Now extend this behavior to all teachers in the school. The principal, of course, would not look the other way.

Now consider the analogous results of the teacher performance evaluation process. The most current data, as of 11/1/13, reveals that a black teacher is more than five times as likely as a white teacher to receive an unsatisfactory evaluation. A Hispanic teacher is more than twice as likely. Similarly, a male teacher is three times as likely as a female teacher to receive an unsatisfactory. And a teacher older than 60 is twice as likely to receive an unsatisfactory as a teacher between 50 and 59 and 12 times as likely as a teacher between 30 and 39. The discriminatory outcomes have per-

sisted throughout the school system for two years. So, why should policy makers look the other way?

The disturbing patterns in the evaluation process first became public last spring. It was later revealed that the pattern had first become known the *previous* year. The department promised it would look at the problem and take some action steps. Here's what the department said in late May 2013:

"We (the school district) recognize that factors such as age, race, and gender may improperly affect the evaluation that a teacher receives, and we are taking steps to eliminate these biases."

1. *Reviewing all cases to ensure that these trends do not unfairly impact career decisions*
2. *Raising racial, gender, and age consciousness of evaluators*
3. *Using additional evaluators to validate evaluations"*

We are still waiting for the department to explain or justify itself. We are still waiting for a report on the steps that have been taken.

When these patterns first became known the district said that that the data were incomplete, that the report had come in mid-evaluation cycle and that we shouldn't jump to any conclusions. Now the data is complete and the patterns of discrimination are persistent

and no less alarming.

In late November, the *BTU E-Bulletin* ran two, albeit unscientific, polls asking readers' opinions on two issues: 1) Is there bias in the evaluation process; and 2) regardless of your answer to the first question, does the department owe us an explanation as to the disparate outcome in the process? The results are clear.

66% of respondents believe the current performance system to be unfair and biased. And 88% feel, simply, that the department owes us an explanation as to the disparities in what is advertised as an objective process.

A few takeaways here: The polls drew large numbers – far larger than in past polls – of respondents. And most respondents are not bearing the brunt of the results (i.e., they're

not getting bad evaluations), and are therefore in a truly objective place to view the process.

We all have a problem in this. On the one hand, the process is biased and discriminatory, and our members are suffering. On the other hand, the department is suffering from a credibility problem whether it admits it or not. Given all the internal discussion over this and given the sensitivity of the issues involved – not to mention the unfairness to our members – the department ought to act sooner rather than later.

The union has taken legal action in this matter.

Citizens for Public Schools Event Highlights Education and Civil Rights

Editor's Note: On December 2nd the Citizens For Public Schools invited author Pedro Noguera to speak on the issue of education and civil rights. Also speaking at the event was BTU Director of Organizing Jessica Tang. Included below is her speech.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hi and welcome. My name is **Jessica Tang** and have been a Boston Public Schools teacher for the last eight years, most recently at the Young Achievers School.

I have worn many hats over the last decade as a teacher, organizer, and activist and tonight I was asked to share the work of the Teacher Activist Group-Boston and the work the Boston Teachers Union has engaged in to bring stakeholders together to advocate for educational equity and justice, and to provide some local context to tonight's topic, talk, and dialogue.

I'll begin with TAG-Boston. The Teacher

Activist Group Boston is part of a national network of Teachers Activist Groups that began with groups including the New York Coalition of Radical Educators, Educators for Social Justice in Chicago and San Francisco, Teacher Action Group in Philly amongst others.

We have all adopted an eight-point platform that includes

1. Democratic School Governance
2. School and Community-Based Solutions to School Transformation
3. Free, Public and Equitable Educational Opportunities for All Students
4. Curricula and Pedagogies that Promote Creative, Critical and Challenging Education
5. Multiple, High-quality, Comprehensive Assessments
6. Teacher Professional Development that

continued on page 6

Despite two years of performance evaluation data showing a higher incidence of poor ratings for teachers of color, male teachers, and older teachers, the school district maintains that the system is fair and unbiased. What do you think? Is the performance evaluation system fair and unbiased?

Results	Number	Pct.
Yes, it is fair and unbiased	148	29%
No, it is not	331	66%
I have no opinion	25	5%

Notwithstanding your answer to the previous poll question, would it be helpful if the school department could explain why there is such a disparate outcome (by race, gender & age) in the performance evaluation process?

Results	Number	Pct.
Yes, it would	356	88%
No, it is not necessary	40	10%
I have no opinion	7	2%

Happy Holidays from the Officers and Executive Board of the Boston Teachers Union!

Playing the political field

The recent mayoral election tells us that we need to find allies wherever we can. The big media outlets bought into the propaganda that an army of moms were fighting against the teachers for better schools. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course, but the spin was fierce and it was nearly effective. We need to conduct better outreach to parents both as individuals and in organizations. We all have to become involve. "The union" cannot do it alone. **Brenda Chaney** and **Jessica Tang** can help lead us but we all must be willing to follow.

We also should seek new allies. Sadly, the Democrats have turned on us. From **Barack Obama** and **Arne Duncan**, to **Deval Patrick** and our local representatives; seemingly all our natural allies have sold us out to corporate education reformers.

Perhaps our former allies truly believe the message of ed reform or perhaps they are taking kickbacks, but one thing is certain: we are getting kicked around. Hard.

So let us turn elsewhere. I suggest we give the Republicans a try.

Now before you stop reading, hear me out.

The latest spin on labor unions by our detractors seems to be "unions once served

a noble purpose, but they are no longer needed today." By couching their argument in this way, our opponents seek to sway those who are presently neutral on the topic. Their strategy is to get people to think that unions have outlived their usefulness. That way, good people need not feel badly about being anti-union since it's the unions that are out-of-touch.

It's a good tactic. Our counter attack needs to be two-fold: a) we need to disway the public from such sophistry, and b) we need to convince the republican base that unions are not their foes.

I propose that we send members of the BTU to local, state, and national Republican conventions. I'm not suggesting that we "infiltrate" the GOP, rather I suggest that we send our members who are already registered Republicans to the GOP gatherings the very same way we send BTU members who are registered Democrats to Democrat gatherings. This way we can build allies in both camps.

In terms of education, our message ought to be that charter schools are no economic bargain for the taxpayers. Laying aside the gross inequity of services, we focus on the

money. What fiscal conservative could possibly welcome the money drain that are charter schools? Attack the money, and lure of charter schools diminishes automatically.

Walmart is another example. Call attention to the sky high cost of providing food stamps to the employees of our nation largest employer, and watch support for Thanksgiving Day shopping dry up faster than the leftovers.

The Republican bigwigs will not rally to our side overnight, but they are not our audience. Our audience is the hardworking small business owners who see the Democrats and unions as pickpockets targeting their profits. By pointing out that Republican policies are in fact hurting their bottom line, the rank and file may start to question their leadership on our key issues.

Once we have a foothold in the GOP, we then flirt more openly with the Republican leadership. In statewide elections the GOP does well considering how few in number they are in comparison to Democrats and so-called independent voters. Our support could help them; they might be thankful for that assistance.

It may seem heretical for a labor union



Michael J. Maguire
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

to court Republicans but let us consider our last four governors. In 2010 Governor Patrick signed the Act Relative to the Achievement Gap. This version of ed reform has been more detrimental to public education than anything the previous three Republican governors had crafted. Why then would we want second helpings from the Democrats?

In the long run, we want not to be taken for granted. Lately, both locally and nationally, the Democrats are stepping on us and yet we still support them. The Democrats aren't going to change unless we give them a reason. I propose we give them that reason in the upcoming gubernatorial contest.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy and is co-editor of the Boston Union Teacher.)

A Mission and Vision for Professional Learning

By Paul J. Tritter,
BTU Director of Professional Training

In the first months of this school year I have had the great pleasure of talking to educators across BPS about their experiences with professional learning. I have been fascinated by the range of learning opportunities provided for and created by our members. Of course these opportunities vary in quality and impact, but each and every educator has had at least one powerful learning experience that has made a lasting impact on his or her career and practice.

As I hear from more people about their learning, I am increasingly excited to work to build this Professional Learning Initiative into something that will help our members have more such experiences.

In order to do this, it is important that we develop a shared understanding of what makes successful professional learning and try to create experiences based on that understanding. In planning workshops in September and October we began to craft a mission and vision for the PLI that reflects this understanding. Responses to the BTU Professional Development Survey (<http://bit.ly/BTUPDSurvey>) and the many conversations I mentioned above have also played a critical role in shaping this mission.

What follows is a first draft of a proposed BTU Resolution on Professional Learning. Because it is so important that the beliefs espoused in this document reflect the beliefs and experiences of our members, I am asking you to read it and let me know what you think. What parts make sense to you? What do you disagree with? What is missing from this document? What does it need?

The best way to share your thoughts is to join a public conversation within an online version of the document itself. If you navigate to <http://bit.ly/BTUPDMission>, a Google Docs version of the mission is open for public comment. Instructions for how to do so are available on the site. Of course, you can also send your comments directly to me at ptritter@btu.org.

After an extended public comment period, a revised version of this resolution will be up for a vote at a full membership meeting.

Here is the proposed resolution:

Boston Teachers Union Resolution on Professional Learning

Whereas: The Boston Teachers Union believes that professional learning for educators is "one crucial factor in creating and maintaining an excellent public school system", and

Whereas: It is necessary to create a culture of continuous professional learning in order to continuously improve educators' professional practices in order to benefit student learning and well-being, and

Whereas: The BTU recognizes the establishment of the Professional Learning Initiative as a new opportunity to make professional learning in the Boston Public Schools more relevant and meaningful to educators and to work toward developing the teaching profession, and

Whereas: Such "Professionalization will improve the School Department's ability to attract, develop, and retain excellent teachers",

Be it resolved that: The Boston Teachers Union, through the Professional Learning Initiative, shall provide and advocate for professional learning opportunities for educators in accordance with this mission and vision:

Mission and Vision for The Professional Learning Initiative

The Boston Teachers Union believes that successful professional learning that promotes and improves student-learning and well-being requires that educators be recognized both as professionals and as learners. In accordance with this understanding, the BTU sets forth the following as standards for powerful professional learning, and through the Professional Learning Initiative aims to support, promote, and create learning experiences that are:

Relevant - In order to be relevant to educators' work, professional learning should be job-embedded and role-related, allowing educators to practice their learning over time in the authentic contexts in which they work. Relevance is also achieved by differentiation, with learning opportunities that respect and

build upon the unique knowledge and skill of the individual educator, balancing the need to learn specific tools and strategies with the complementary need for reflection and theoretical understanding.

Inquiry Driven - Priorities for professional learning must be identified at the classroom level, arising from educators' authentic challenges and questions of practice. Where priorities are identified at the school and system level, the voice and experience of practitioners must be taken into account. The process for identifying these priorities should be data-informed, with questions arising from multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data, especially student-work.

Continuous - Deep learning is unlikely to occur within the span of a short workshop or lecture, so professional learning should be designed to allow educators the opportunity to experiment with new practices, incorporate new research, and make adjustments to practice over time.

Led by Educators Themselves - Wherever possible, professional learning should be facilitated by the professionals who do the work everyday, while valuing the knowledge and potential contributions of education researchers and outside experts. When qualified practitioners are not able to facilitate,



Paul J. Tritter
Director of
Professional Learning

professional learning should be designed to build capacity among educators to lead in the future.

Learning Oriented - In accordance with the best research on adult learning, professional learning should be collaborative among groups of colleagues with diverse knowledge and experience. This learning develops and depends on reflective communities of practice (physical and virtual) in which accountability is developed internally while ensuring safety and support for appropriate risk-taking and mistake-making inherent in processes of deep learning.

Documented and Shared - Professional learning should be designed to produce documentation (written research, performance tasks, etc.) that can be shared with other educators in order to support their learning.



1 pg. 83 - Agreement Between the School Committee of the City of Boston and the Boston Teachers Union, Local 66, AFT, AFL-CIO, 2012.

2 Ibid.

What is legally acceptable as gifts to public school teachers and staff?



Caren Carew
BTU Secondary
Field Representative

When posed this question from a colleague, I made an inquiry to the lawyers at the AFTMA and they furnished me with the following information. In general, a public employee may not accept any gift worth \$50 or more that is given because of the position he or she holds. Public employees may accept gifts that are worth less than \$50, but they have to disclose in writing that they have done so if, based on the specific circumstances, a reasonable person would think that the public employee might unduly show favor to the giver or the giver's child, or be influenced by the giver.

The law prohibits gifts to public employees, not gifts to public agencies. You may give gifts to a public school, or a particular classroom, and the \$50 limit does not apply. Your school district may have its own additional rules about gifts, which you should follow. *Example:* A Parent-Teacher Organization wants to give \$75 gift cards to teachers to buy classroom supplies. The teachers may accept the gift cards but must use them to buy classroom supplies, and should keep receipts to show that they did so. Supplies bought with the gift cards are the property of the school, not the teachers.

The Ethics Commission recently created an exemption to permit class gifts to teachers. A teacher may accept a gift, or several gifts during the school year, from public school students and/or their parents and guardians, with an aggregated value of up to \$150, if the gift is identified only as being from the class, and the identity of the givers and the individual amounts given are not identified to the recipient. Gifts received pursuant to this exemption are not required to be disclosed. The donor is unknown, so a reasonable person would not conclude that the gift would influence the teacher's conduct with regard to any individual or would cause the teacher to favor any individual. *Example:* A teacher has a class with 23 students. Parents of 20 of the students collect money and give the teacher a \$150 gift certificate to a book store, indicating that it is a class gift. The teacher may accept the \$150 class gift certificate and no disclosure is required. The teacher may not knowingly accept any additional gift from any of the parents who participated in the class gift.

A teacher may accept a class gift and also individual gifts from persons who did not contribute to the class gift. Unlike class gifts, which are not required to be disclosed, individual gifts must be disclosed if, based on the specific circumstances, a reasonable person might think that the teacher's actions would be influenced by the gift. *Example:* A child who did not participate in the class gift gives a plate of homemade cookies to the teacher. The teacher may accept the cookies, and no disclosure is required, because a reasonable person would not think that the teacher would

be influenced by a gift that has no retail value. Similarly, a teacher would not be required to disclose acceptance of other homemade food items, hand-picked (not purchased) bouquets of flowers, and handmade gifts, candy, or other gift items worth less than \$10, because a reasonable person would not think that the teacher might unduly show favor to the giver of such gifts or the giver's child, or be influenced by the giver. *Example:* Parents of a child who did not contribute to a class gift and whose child is awaiting a college recommendation gives the teacher who is writing the recommendation a bottle of wine worth \$40. The teacher must disclose the gift in writing to her appointing authority, because a reasonable person might think that such a gift might influence the teacher to write a better recommendation for the student.

The following is the link to the required disclosure: [11d. Disclosure of Appearance of Undue Favor or Improper Influence required by section 23\(b\)\(3\).](#)

How are bylaws/operational procedures for SSC's determined?

Each School-Site Council determines most of its own operating procedures through the adoption of SSC bylaws. Each SSC is required to pass bylaws to govern its operation. The bylaws must be approved by two-thirds of the BTU members in the school and by two-thirds of the parents who come to a parent meeting for which there must be at least two weeks notice.

The SSC bylaws must include the following operational procedures: how elections will be organized and conducted; when meetings will be held; the notice procedure for announcing meetings; who is responsible for co-chairing the SSC with the Principal and for recording minutes; what the system is for selecting alternates who have the same racial identity as the members they would be representing; the terms of office and how they will be staggered; and what the salary is in regards to members who fail to regularly attend.

The bylaws may also include provisions that address the following: what subcommittees will be established in addition to the Personnel Subcommittee; if a portion of each meeting is set aside for public comment by individuals in attendance who are not SSC members; how the SSC will inform the wider school community of its decisions and activities; where minutes will be posted and distributed; what the process is for amending the bylaws.

In addition to a primary program area (PPA), don't I also have an active alternative program area (APA) in BPS if I have a current Mass. license on file at Court Street in case I want to transfer into a position using that

certification?

No. In addition to having an active license in the subject area you are currently teaching in *aka* your primary program area (PPA), you must apply for your other current licenses on file at Court St. to become "active" in Boston. To do so, you must fill out an 'Application for Additional Program Area(s) in Boston Public Schools' [attachment 1] Superintendent's Circular HRS-HR-7 "Staffing Reassignment And Hiring For School Year 2014-15" (usually posted on BPS website mid-December) which must be submitted on or before February 1st. In order for the active license to be considered an APA in Boston, one of the following criteria must be met, in addition to submitting the afore mentioned application;

Your state cert must be five years old or less. This means you need to have obtained it for the first time, not just recertified it, within the last 5 years.

Submit 15 course credits [grad or undergrad] earned within the last five years, which are relevant to the cert area.

A mean score on the National Teachers Exam earned within the last ten years.

Two years of teaching experience within the last ten years where you've taught at least 50% of the week or more all year in that subject area. In order to verify this, you must obtain and submit with the application, a letter from your principal detailing the specific years you taught the subject area 50% of the week or more.

The contract reads, "Teachers may be considered for transfer in any subject area in which they recertify under the 1993 Massachusetts Educational Reform Act, even if they do not hold an active Boston Program Area; however, a schools Personnel Subcommittee shall not be required to select any such individual." Often, if a teacher applies to transfer in an area that they do not hold a BPS APA, HR will not forward the info to the school for consideration.

Why do we have to jump through these hoops if we have already recertified the license, isn't that redundant? In my opinion, yes it is. This process is a holdover from long ago and far away, when Mass. teachers were issued 'licenses for life'. A teacher could be certified in an area they hadn't taught in or taken course work for in decades, and still be eligible to transfer into teach that subject area. This APA process was negotiated in order for the BPS to ensure the teacher be 'cur-

rent' in the subject area in question. The BTU attempted to negotiate elimination of this arguably antiquated process, but the School Department wanted too much in return for agreeing to do so which would have further limited a teachers flexibility and rights. We couldn't settle for that!

What happens when there is no heat in my class?

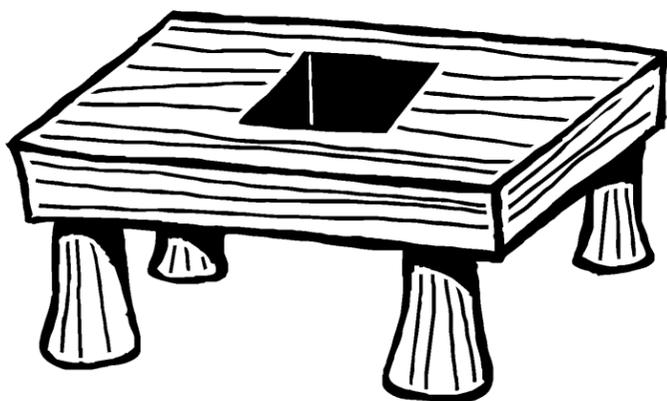
The contract is clear on this issue. "A classroom will be closed when the temperature falls below 60° f., or whenever the temperature or climate becomes too oppressive."

Report and record the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available space that is heated adequately as well as remedy the heating problem in your classroom. Keep a record or log of all of the days without heat and the temperature in the room at that time. The Principal should immediately report this in order to have the heat restored. Teachers should file a Step 1 grievance with the Principal as well.

If the entire school falls below the acceptable heat level, each building has an alternate plan in case of emergency. If the heating issue can't be fixed quickly, then the emergency plan for relocation should be employed. The BTU members at the affected school should file a Step 1 grievance at the school in addition. If the entire school is without heat and it has been reported to the School Department, please contact the BTU office as well.

BTU Phone Numbers	
Office.....	617-288-2000
Health & Welfare.....	617-288-0500
AFT Massachusetts.....	617-423-3342
Function Office.....	617-288-3322
Lounge Office.....	617-288-3322
Vision Center.....	617-288-5540
Tremont Credit Union.....	781-843-5626

Why Aren't Our Schools Interested In Developing Well Rounded Individuals?



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EDITORIAL NOTE:

The opinions expressed in the *Boston Union Teacher* do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or those of its members.

WHEN WRITING:

All correspondence to the *Boston Union Teacher* must be typewritten and include the author's name and school or department if not school-based.

All articles must be appropriate to the publication, and in good taste.

Letters to the Editor should be sent to letters@btu.org.

DEADLINE:

The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* is December 20th.

All copy should be e-mailed to gvirchick@btu.org and mmaguire@btu.org. This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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BTU/AFT Teacher Leader Fellows meet with local, state and national education leaders

Fifteen BTU members were selected in August to participate in a new Teacher Leader program that supports educators to better understand and influence education policy. In the first session, leaders had the opportunity to speak with BTU president **Richard Stutman** about the challenges and goals of our union. Last month, fellows met with Secretary of Education **Matt Malone** and had the opportunity to ask him questions and hear from him about policy decisions made at the state and national levels. In January, fellows will be joining other fellows from around the country to speak with and hear from AFT president **Randi Weingarten**.

The 15 Teacher Leader Fellows are:

Robert Baroz, Dearborn
Gary Bechtold, Otis Elementary
Edverette Brewster, Lila G. Frederick
Kristy Ferreira Dupuis, Boston Latin School
Riana Good, Boston Latin Academy
Natasha Huggins, New Mission High School
Darcel Hunt, Urban Science Academy
Chima Ikonne, Mary Lyon
Afra Khan, Holland Elementary
Theresa Lee, Sumner Elementary
Bernadine Lormilus, JFK
Suzie McGlone, Orchard Gardens
Nathan Proulx, Orchard Gardens
Sarah Sawyers, Ohrenberger
Cassandra Wallace, Boston Arts Academy



WE'RE LEARNING HERE

A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.

Snowden International High School



I took the Orange Line downtown on a crisp fall day to visit Snowden International High School. Classes are held in two buildings near Copley Square, the main one being an impressive brownstone on Newbury Street built in the mid-19th century. Inside, an elegant staircase leads from the main entrance to the second floor.

Assistant Director **Vicky Magaletta** escorted me through a maze of classrooms in this former mansion, some with huge windows overlooking Dartmouth Street, others with no windows at all. Students were reading textbooks or novels, solving algebraic equations, and using laptops to research topics of personal interest. On the door to **Jaclyn Snell's** class was a poster-sized graphic that caught my interest by highlighting a variety of ways that mathematics is used: from reports on how many Americans have allergies (50 million!) to evidence that people have been blowing kisses since 3000 B.C.

We then walked to the former YWCA, where several other classes are held in the basement. It was fun watching ELA teacher **Seth Peterson's** 11th grade World Literature students, who were planning and enacting scenes from *The Alchemist*, by Paul Coelho. History teacher **Karen McCarthy** had painted her room in the most wonderful colors and filled a wall with masks from around the world. **Lin Liu** was reviewing vocabulary by having students name each Chinese character she held up on a card. She escorts a group of her students to China every year and one wall was filled with photos from their most recent trip.

Although it has always taught several world languages (currently Japanese, Mandarin, French and Spanish), Snowden has recently added an International Baccalaureate Program. Headmaster Cara Livermore explained that this academically challenging program gives Snowden its focus and inspiration, with all students encouraged to take at least one IB class. In addition, every year a teacher volunteers to organize a service-learning project in a different country during April vacation week – this year a group of students will travel to Costa Rica!

I hope the daily journeys with your students are joyful and satisfying, and the challenges more invigorating than exhausting... **HAPPY HOLIDAYS!** Please invite me to visit **YOUR** school!



We were doing sit-ups in Physical Education class with Ms. Taylor. We're studying how our hearts work by measuring our heart rate before and after exercise. We've learned that your heart rate increases the harder your body works. If you don't work out much, you need to do it at a lower intensity to avoid damaging your heart.

Nathan Mahabir & Freddie DePina, Grade 9



This is in Study Skills class with Mr. Abbott. I was working on my homework assignment for my International Relations class, searching for and writing about articles about local, national and world events. In this class I'm learning how to research colleges, write a good application essay, get financial aid, and much more.

Frankie Correa, Grade 12

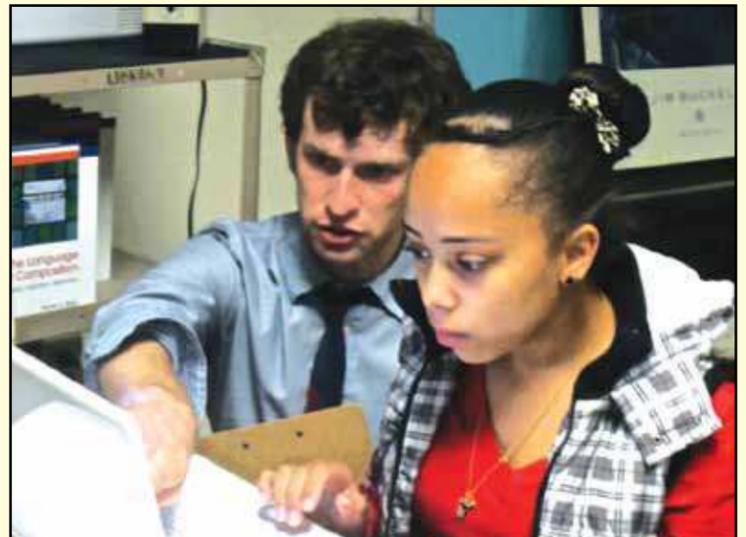
Amika (ü)

Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed. D.
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I am working on a "Do Now" problem in Algebra 1, which some students volunteered to solve on the board. In this class we're learning about absolute values and how to graph them.

Josie Ortiz, Grade 9



Mr. Tetenbaum was helping me create an outline for my research topic, homosexuality in ancient times. This is my Research Writing class, where I am learning how to select what's important and how to better express ideas in writing my essay.

Kielle Andrade, Grade 10

[Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist.

Her "We're Learning Here" Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.]



I was reading the novel *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright. This book has challenging vocabulary and Ms. Terry was helping me with it. In this class we've learned how to diagram sentences and analyze text. I'm writing an essay about how the author felt powerless in a society of racism and segregation.

Zinha Coronel, Grade 9



I was working on an art assignment to draw the mirror image of a picture. I'm learning the basics of drawing and studying the «isms» of art history, such as surrealism and impressionism.

Leah Suarez, Grade 12



I was reading and Ms. Pacho was grading my classwork in chemistry class. We're learning about different elements and which ones, like copper, can be changed from one state of matter to another.

Boubacar Seck, Grade 10



We were practicing speaking in Spanish, telling our partners about the people in our family. This is part of a Family Tree Project in our Spanish 1 class with Ms. Sager. So far we have learned basic vocabulary: words for numbers, pets, interests, personality and physical traits, etc.

Gilbert Martinez, Erika Mateo, Christina Stinson, & Vannia Santos, Grades 9-10

continued from page 1

- Serves the Collective Interests of Teachers, Students, and Communities
- 7. Protect the Right to Organize
- 8. School Climate that Empowers and Liberates Students

These are the guiding principles that direct our work and here in the greater Boston area we have been driven in particular by point number 2—the belief that solutions to the challenges of public education need to be

school based and community based. Our members also span beyond Boston Public Schools. We include educators, grad students, retired teachers, and youth workers not just from Boston, but also from surrounding areas such as Newton, Cambridge, Brookline, Framingham, and also from charter schools.

We have partnered with local youth and community organizations to create dialogue and begin collectively working together to

identify and propose a vision for creating the type of schools we believe all students deserve.

While TAG members are involved in many different efforts such as advocating for restorative justice, participating in study groups for critical pedagogy and social justice unionism, our signature event each year is a social justice educator's conference. Because we prioritize the importance and power of youth voices, most recently we co-planned and sponsored last year's conference with the YOUNG Coalition-Youth Organizers United for the Now Generation, which includes youth organizations such as Boston Youth Organizing Project and Boston Student Advisory Council/Youth On Board. Our goal is to create a movement that places young people, educators, and community members' voices at the center of change and decision making for our schools.

This is also happening at the Boston Teachers Union. In the late fall of 2011, the BTU Executive Board voted to create a Community Advisory Board with a vision



BTU Director of Organizing Jessica Tang cate for greater educational justice.

In fact we have a town hall planned for next Monday, Dec 9 at Madison Park. Hope-

aft NEWS from the American Federation of Teachers

School improvement grants results show some promise

Preliminary data from the first two years of the Obama administration's School Improvement Grants program, which put extensive additional resources—but also prescriptive interventions—into low-performing schools, suggest mixed results.

The data show that more than two-thirds of the schools that first received funding in 2010-2011 made gains in reading and math after two years in the program. That holds true across the different turnaround models that schools adopted as well as across school levels and locations. In addition, schools that were in the program for two years showed better results overall than those that were in the program for just one year.

While money matters, and the SIG schools did receive additional resources, the increased test scores are due to the hard work of educators and students, as well as the opportunity to try multiple interventions and innovations. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's news release on the SIG results highlights Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore, where the AFT represents educators. In a school where nearly 90 percent of the students

qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the dropout rate was cut in half, and proficiency in English language arts rose from 41 percent to 53 percent in the first year of the grant, the release notes. And it outlines some of the school's innovations: a night school where students can get tutoring or take credit-recovery classes, a recording and media production studio where career and technical students can train, and the chance to take dual enrollment classes at nearby Baltimore City Community College.

The SIG program likely will be overhauled when Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Republicans have tried to eliminate the funding, while Democrats support continuing it with added flexibility in what designs schools can use to improve student performance. The AFT has consistently argued that the turnaround models required under SIG are too narrow and often preclude effective reforms, and we have pushed for expanding the models and intervention strategies available to schools under ESEA.

[Beth Antunez, Jane Meroney, Education Week, Dan Gursky]

“It should not just be those with power, privilege, or social, economic, and political capital that get what they want or get to implement what they think is best—well intentioned or not. My hope is that those who do currently have power realize that what they think might be the best solutions are not always grounded in the realities of what students, teachers, and family members are facing on a day to day basis.”

of beginning a two-way discussion among stakeholders to improve our public schools and support student success. We wanted to create a comfortable and honest forum for authentic, practical and solutions-oriented conversations between BTU members and community stakeholders with the goal of creating schools we are all proud of.

This effort has grown into a community coalition called Boston Truth. At the end of last year, several community and youth groups were concerned about proposed legislation to lift the cap on charter schools. They came to the BTU and asked us to co-plan and support an action to support funding for public schools and keep the cap the cap on charters.

I have to be very clear here because charters schools have become an extremely divisive issue in Boston and MA. We came together not because we are against teachers who choose to teach in charters, or parents that send their children to charters, or students who attend charter schools. We came together because we were and are concerned about equity and accountability and expanding a system that has created two separate and unequal systems.

We are committed to making sure that all students receive a quality education—not some at the expense of others, and not some through competition with others.

In fact, we do not believe that competition and market-based reforms are appropriate models for public education because just like health care, market-based systems often do not serve those who have the greatest needs. Just like insurance companies don't want to serve people with pre-existing conditions, market-based education solutions, which include an over-emphasis on testing create dis-incentives to serve the most under-served populations.

I'm sure **Prof. Pedro Noguera** will be speaking more to this, and how these policy decisions inextricably intersect with race and class, but the point I would like to make is that there is a growing coalition of students, parents, educators, labor, and community members that are working together collaboratively—not through competition—to advo-

fully you received the flier.

This is a time of transition and transformation, and it should be those of us who work in our schools, send our children to public schools, live in the neighborhoods of Boston, who attend our schools that have the greatest voice in deciding what happens to our schools and what the solutions are.

It should not just be those with power, privilege, or social, economic, and political capital that get what they want or get to implement what they think is best—well intentioned or not. My hope is that those who do currently have power realize that what they think might be the best solutions are not always grounded in the realities of what students, teachers, and family members are facing on a day to day basis.

For example, at a recent meeting, a student shared her frustration with applying to colleges when she realized that she needed to have a pre-requisite of learning a second language, but that her high school didn't even offer one. Another example is the expectation of new testing initiatives like the PARCC that expect computer based assessments to be used when a large number of BPS schools don't even have a computer lab still. While policies are being made, their goals and implementation are often out of touch with what is really needed to support students in schools.

If we as a society and city are truly committed to creating a more equitable public school system that truly provides a quality public school experience, then we have to start engaging the true stakeholders, listen to each other, and speak loudly and collectively—So loudly, that we cannot be ignored by leaders, by power-brokers, or by mainstream media.

I hope you all will get involved in whatever way you can in growing this movement to reclaim public education, re-invest in creating public schools that truly meet the needs of all students, and re-direct conversations around education to the core issues that impact our communities most such as poverty, access to health care, and social-emotional supports by actually involving community members in the solutions we need to transform our public schools.

Retiree activism is a major resource for the union

Retiree activism is one of the labor movement's greatest resources, AFT chief of staff Mark Richard told the opening session of the AFT's Retiree Leaders Conference on Nov. 20 in Washington, D.C.

Richard urged conference participants to use their passion for activism to help the union move its agenda—and to somehow pass that passion on to younger members. One way of connecting with younger, newer members, Richard suggested, is through technology. “We have to find a way to use our passion and skill set in a way that resonates with a technology-driven society.”

Wellyn Collins, a member of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers retiree chapter, agreed. When it came to technology, “our younger members told us we needed to change, and once we accepted that and began to incorporate everyone's ideas, the power of technology worked for us.”

“We incorporate all of the things we've done in the past as well as new technology,” added Jim Carr, a retiree member of the New York State Public Employees Federation. “We hold rallies, we use Facebook, we write letters to the editor. We have to embrace what works.”

Embracing technology often requires an “attitude adjustment,” said Roger Boudreau of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers retiree chapter. “There has to be an acceptance about the nature and speed of change that technology brings.”

The use and acceptance of technology doesn't mean everything changes, Richard noted. “Our core values will remain the same—and they are what unite us. Even if the modalities and solutions we use are different, the principles of our organization will never

change.”

During a session later in the day, Sam Luebke, an AFT deputy director of organizing and field services, reiterated the need for retirees to continue supporting and working with the union, urging conference participants to focus on building connections with both active members and the community.

It's also important, Luebke said, to build strong retiree chapters, which means ongoing organizing. “One-on-one contact moves people to join a movement.” That includes connecting with the community as well as retired members, he said. “If you can get teachers and parents saying the same thing, it's an alliance that can't be broken. Retirees can play a direct role in meeting that goal.”

The conference gave AFT retiree leaders a chance to also talk about how to engage members so that they will be more active in the chapters. The ABC Federation of Teachers retiree chapter organized around several ballot initiatives in California's 2012 elections, Laura Rico, president of ABC's retiree chapter said. By doing so, “we found something tangible to share with members,” Rico said. “The members could see how their actions made a difference.”

Rico is already looking ahead to the 2014 elections. “If we can change the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014, then we change a lot. I want to win and I know we know how to win, and it starts with the retiree chapters.”

The two-day retiree leaders conference also focused on pensions, social media, voter protection, community engagement, and organizing around legislative and political issues.

[Adrienne Coles]

Testimony from the Retirement Board Meeting on 11/13/13

By Lawrence J. Connolly and Sandra M. Carle,
Co-chairs RTC Legislative Committee

Below is the text of the testimony at City Hall. We thank the members of the RTC that took the time to attend the meeting: Marilyn Marion, Martha Cotton, Paul Tenney, Ruthanne Kennedy, Walter Wood, Jean Cristiani, Mary Glynn, Ann and Jim Tobin, Connie Thibeault, Phil Fasano, Janey Frank, and Angela Cristiani.

★★★★★

In the past we told you how unlike all but six other states, Massachusetts public employees do not participate in Social Security, saving the state or municipality thousands of dollars per year in FICA costs but depriving a retiree of up to \$30,396 (or \$46,314 with spousal benefits) in Social Security benefits each year. Thirty-six other states and the Federal government provide automatic COLA's to their retirees on all or on substantially all of the pension grant and generally in the range of 3-5% per year, unlike the miniscule adjustment Massachusetts retirees receive.

Recently, an independent study by Buck Consultants, a nationwide private actuarial firm, found that the Massachusetts pension systems provide a sustainable defined benefit pension that provides a *modest* benefit at below average cost to taxpayers. The study found the taxpayer cost is lower than in peer states and this is magnified when compared to most states which also provide Social Security at a premium of 6.2% to the taxpayer.

Buck Consultants found that ongoing state and teacher pension costs, the so called "normal costs", are less than 4% and this is due to the large contributions paid by today's public employees. Most Massachusetts public employees now pay an average of 10% with teachers paying a flat 11% – among the highest contributions in the country!

The study shows that Massachusetts is in the middle of the pack when it came to benefits paid **BUT** when the lack of Social Security is factored in, it is in the **BOTTOM 25%!!**

The Retirement Board has not only a moral responsibility but also a fiduciary responsibility, I believe, to increase the COLA base to the maximum allowed under Chapter 188 immediately. A fiduciary is required to make decisions that are in the best interest of not himself or his firm but the interest of the individual whose funds he manages. Since the overwhelming proportion of the assets of the City or PRIT holds are the contributions of the employee, he is your primary responsibility. When I learned that 2300 recipients of Boston pension payments are under \$1,000 per month and almost 5,900 (over 42%) are under \$2,000 per month, there is a question of moral responsibility to those who worked long and hard at low wages and lived too long for an inadequate COLA to offset inflation.

The Retirement Board can afford to increase the COLA to

the maximum amount for a number of reasons:

Of the 21,805 current employees only 465 or 2% are paying 5 or 7 % contributions; 20,587 or 94 plus % are paying 10 or 11%.

Pension reform, passed in the Legislature, greatly reduces the benefit to all employees hired after April 2, 2013 and thus reduces future costs. A current retiree in Group 1 with 30 years of service at age 60 receives 60% of his highest 3 year average. A new employee (4/2/13) at age 60 and 30 years of service receives only 43 and ½% – a huge savings in future retirement liability, especially considering he is paying the highest contribution rate!

Employee contributions last year totaled \$111,636,473 (\$47,632,336 teachers / \$64,004,137 non-teachers). Investment returns last year totaled \$458,388,927 (\$125,424,334 teachers / \$392,904,593 non-teachers). The combined total of contributions and investment returns totaled \$560,025,400. Pension payments for 14,000 retirees last year totaled \$487,785,327 (\$196,788,815 teachers / \$282,372,932 non-teachers). The surplus of contributions and investment returns minus pension payments for the years is \$72,240,073 (\$560,025,400 minus \$487,785,327 equals \$72,240,073).

Actually the investment returns alone of \$458,388,927 last year almost cover the pension payment of \$487,785,327 – only a deficit of \$29,396,400 which is much less than the planned FY13 real cost of \$51,378,201. While 2012 was a good year for investment returns at 12.8% for the City and 13.9% for PRIT, 2013 barring a calamity will be even better. Historically, the City return of 9.11% and PRIM of 9.45% annualized over the past 28 years substantially exceeds the targeted rate of return leaving a substantial cushion for unexpected contingencies.

Every \$1,000 increase in the COLA base costs the system \$420,000 per year (14,000 retirees x \$30 per year). Going to \$16,000 base now, costs \$1,260,000 more than the current base and to \$18,000 as a number of systems have done (Methuen, Hampden County, etc.) would cost \$2,100,000 per year. With this year's surplus of contributions and investment returns over pension payments of \$72,240,073, going to \$16,000 now would still leave a surplus of \$70,980,073 and going to \$18,000 would leave a surplus of \$70,140,073. Both choices are those of a responsible fiduciary. Going to \$18,000 better the life of low paid retirees and is the hallmark of a morally responsible fiduciary.

Finally, I'd like to point out that the future of the pension system is rosier than the present when it comes to funding. Contribution rates of employees are more than double those of the past, the age of early retirement for each group has increased by five years greatly reducing the number of years in retirement, the retirement factor has been reduced (from 2.0

per year to 1.45 per year at age 60) reducing the pension grant by 27.5%-all making it quite possible to substantially increase the COLA base.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

RTC Executive Board Minutes
October 7, 2013

Members present: Annie-Marie Adduci, Anne Marie Broderick, Mary Cahalane, Martha Cotton, Larry Connolly, David Donovan, Chairman, Phil Fasano, Donna Cooley-Hilton, Ruthanne Kennedy, Marilyn Marion, Secretary, Leonard Miraglia, Vice Chairman, and Mary Jo Murphy, and Paul Tenney.

Excused: Linda McNamee, Sandy Carle, Eileen Ganley.

Guests: Mary Jane Drinkwater.

Legislative Committee Member: Mary Gaughan.

Meeting was opened by the chairman.

Officers

Secretary's Report was read and accepted.

Treasurer's Report was read and accepted.

Chairman: Stated that the speaker for the business meeting had not been finalized. Discussion continued on how to schedule speakers and set the agenda for the business meetings. The chairman stated that if the invited speaker decided that she couldn't come, he would then ask Dr. Shulman from the eye care center to speak. The issue of new retirees and their invitation to the September retiree was settled with the following motion: *All retirees who have submitted an application for membership will be invited to the luncheon.* Motion was unanimously accepted. Report Accepted.

Co-Chairman: There are 2,172 Delta members. There will be an increase of \$1 a month for 2014-15. Report Accepted.

Travel: Inserting a flyer in the last two mailings has resulted in more reservations made for the Quabbin Reservoir trip on October 22 and for the Blithewold Mansion on December 3. As of today, the following reservations have been made for scheduled trips.

49 – Quabbin and Salem Cross Inn

7 – Nashville from November 13-21

19 – Blithewold Mansion on December 3

10 – Mt. Washington from December 10-12

Nine members and guests left Boston on September 29th for the National Parks. On Tuesday, October 1st while at Lake Powell (a National Park), Collette cancelled the trip and would fly everyone home on Thursday, October 3rd and a full refund would be made to each person. Collette realized on this third day there was no solution to the situation. Collette did an admirable job handling and resolving the problem due to the shutdown. Report Accepted.

Benefits: The Chairman read a letter from Delta that states their increase in the premium from \$47 to \$48 per month. Report Accepted.

Remembrance: Condolence cards were sent to five retiree's families. Report Accepted.

Social: The committee is working on the fall luncheon. Report Accepted.

Legislative: The Committee wants to thank the members of the Legislative Committee and RTC members who attended the State House hearings on pensions. The Legislative Committee chairman testified on the behalf of retirees. They have also spoken to Mike McLaughlin, Retirement Board member, to make sure that he and Sean Kelley, the labor member of the Retirement Board, get an appropriation in the City budget to increase the COLA. The Committee invited Michael McLaughlin to the November meeting for an update. Report Accepted.

Scholarship: The Committee will be meeting to review the scholarship application. They will attempt to make it less confusing and more user friendly. Report Accepted.

Old Business: None.

New Business: After much discussion on the subject of how to honor our centenarians, the following motion was made: *Any member of the RTC who is 100 or over will receive a bouquet of flowers presented at the fall luncheon.* The motion was unanimously accepted.

Because of the acoustics of the hall used for the fall luncheon, the Committee wanted to investigate the possibility of purchasing or renting a sound system for the November fall luncheon.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
 Marilyn F. Marion, Secretary

BTU ADULT HOLIDAY PARTY
with DJ Ed Regal

NEW DATE!!! Thursday, December 19, 2013
 BTU Hall • 3:00-8:00 pm

Suggestion Donation:

\$10.00 to food pantry or an equivalent food donation. Check out btu.org for the best foods to donate.

This is an adult party, please do not bring children.

The 2013 BTU Holiday Party fun will include, but is not limited to... LINE DANCING, HOLIDAY KARAOKE and ADULT GAMES!



BTU CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY PARTY

Friday, December 27, 2013 • 12:00 noon - 2:00 pm
 Sponsored by the BTU Social Committee

This event is best suited for children 10 and under and all children must be accompanied by an adult.

There will be a kids DJ, fun activities and light refreshments.

Since we have a limited number of tickets, they will distributed on a "first come, first served" basis and tickets cannot be held.

Tickets are free and will be available in the BTU office on Monday, December 9th.

Questions? Call Jeannie at (617) 288-2000.





Garret Virchick
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

The high cost of low prices: Walmart protests educate the public

On the day after Thanksgiving Boston teachers joined with the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart) to educate holiday shoppers about

the exploitative practices of the country's leading retailer.

Last month a photo of collection bins at an Ohio Walmart went viral. In front of the bins

was a sign: Please donate food items here so Associates in Need can enjoy Thanksgiving Dinner. The photo enraged many and has helped spark a nationwide protest against the world's largest retailer.

Recently the employees of Walmart have started fighting back. For the first time in the company's 50 year history workers at multiple stores around the country have gone on strike. The strikes were coordinated by OUR Walmart, a labor group backed by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

Through aggressive marketing, expansion, and union busting Walmart has become a global giant. But the hidden costs of their corporate practices are borne by all. Often they bully their way into communities with promises of jobs and low prices. Small businesses in the community, unable to compete, are closed. Across America this has resulted in shuttered businesses in downtown areas.

The jobs they offer are low wage jobs. Many of the "associates" at Walmart are forced onto public assistance. It is not uncom-

mon for Walmart employees to use Medicaid for their health insurance and need food stamps to feed their families. The company profits and the rest of us bear the tax burden of their corporate model.

Why should Boston teachers care? There is no Walmart in Boston. But much of the wealth generated by Walmart has been funneled into the tax exempt foundation of the Walton family. This money has been used to push a privatization agenda of school vouchers and the replacement of unionized public schools with non-union charter schools. Walmart knows that the best way to keep unions out of their stores is to bust unions everywhere.

For more information go to <http://forrespect.org/>. And spread the word.



This photo went viral and sparked outrage across the country about Walmart's corporate practices.



Boston teachers at the Quincy Walmart on Black Friday. In front, Debra Price. In rear from L-R, Garret Virchick, Jessica Tang, Riana Goode, and Angela Cristiani.

Former teacher and founder of DonorsChoose.org Charles Best honored with New Frontier Award

By Michael J. Maguire

Charles Best, CEO and founder of DonorsChoose.org, was recently honored at the Kennedy School of Government receiving one of this year's New Frontier Awards. The New Frontier Award recognizes individuals who have positively changed their communities through public service.

Mr. Best worked at as a history teacher at a Bronx public high school when he was 24. He was dismayed to see that even basic supplies were considered luxuries. He knew there were many philanthropic people around, especially in NYC. The trouble was getting the donors to connect with the needy

classroom teachers. And since teachers do not have a glamorous PR department, Mr. Best decided to make a website of his own.

He sketched out his plan with pen and paper and then enlisted the help of a programmer. He next cajoled his colleagues into submitting requests. Once they were funded, word spread like wildfire. In the intervening decade, DonorsChoose.org has raised many millions of dollars for nearly half of all the public schools in the United States.

DonorsChoose.org is a group funding site. A project may cost \$200 or \$2,000, but a donor only need contribute as little as \$1. Moreover, a donor can choose the project closest to his heart or even closest to his zip code. The idea is to bring many smaller donors together for a bigger project. The donors then get thank you notes and pictures of the students using the purchased supplies.

I was invited by DonorsChoose.org to attend New Frontier Awards ceremony last month.

Seeing Mr. Best receive his award and listening to him speak passionately about teachers and teaching, it was easy to forget about the hardships and struggles of urban education. Many in the audience caught Mr. Best's infectious enthusiasm. He need not convince me, I am currently seeking funding for my ninth project.

To date I have received \$7,000

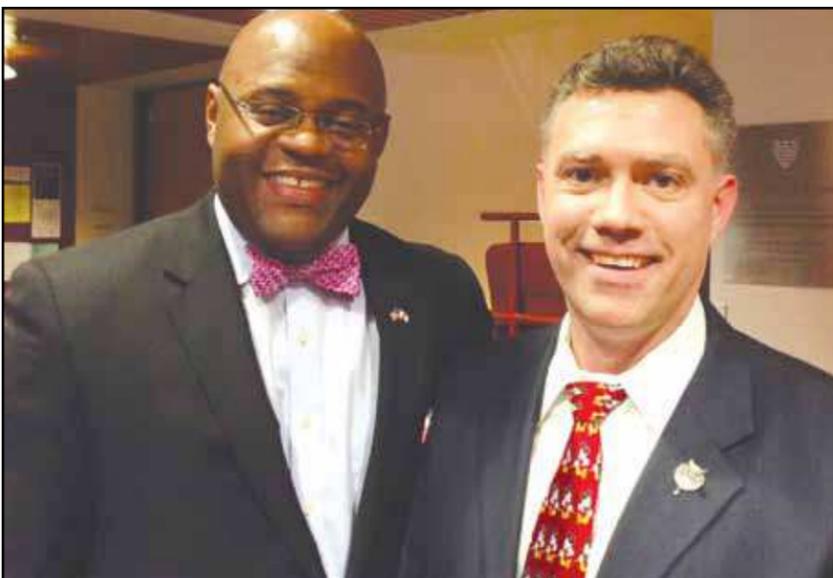


CEO and founder of DonorsChoose.org Charles Best accepts the New Frontier Award from the Kennedy School of Government.

worth of supplies for my classroom. From magic markers to a document camera, DonorsChoose.org has helped me make my classroom experience a bit more enjoyable. The nicest aspect of the experience is that the supplies stay with the teacher even if the teacher changes schools. The only catch is that if a teacher leaves the profession, the supplies stay with the school.

I spoke with Mr. Best after the ceremony to thank him for helping all teachers. In his disarming way, he profusely thanked me for teaching students. He gave me his card and even donated to my project.

In an ideal world, all teachers would have adequately stocked classrooms. Until the world becomes ideal, DonorsChoose.org is a great place for us to obtain the supplies our students sorely need.



Former US Senator William "Mo" Cowan (D-MA), member of the New Frontier Award committee, and Michael J. Maguire.