Negotiations Around the Corner: What We’re Doing to Get Ready

Looking at the current school budget, as it is constructed.

The district has chosen to use scarce BPS resources to pay for replace-
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The district has opted to purchase replacement teachers at a rate of no one trained or profes-
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These are each deliberate choices the district has made to decide. When we hear in negotiations that “there’s no mon-
ey,” we’ll have an unambiguous response: There would be some money for added resources, supplies, nurses, and so on if the district would prioritize its budget differ-
ently. There’d also be a LOT more money for the district if it would take a position against Commonwealth Charter expansion. These charters currently drain $121 Million from the school department’s budget.

Our negotiations begin the first week in February and we have carved out ten five-
hour bargaining sessions through the end of June. It’s possible but improbable that we’ll have an agreement by then. Both sides enter these negotiations with a real desire to make steady progress towards a resolution. We have no illusion that this will be easy, but we are committed to getting this done in a respectful and efficient manner.

Our package will be thoughtful and reasonable. We will have to prioritize our needs, and we have a fifty-member Col-
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PEER-to-PEER: Putting Yourself Out There

By Mark Lonergan and Anne Slater

I was the end of a busy, productive day at work, but I still had one more item on my to-do list. I had put it off hoping to find a quiet space during work hours, but it was now 4:30 and I still hadn’t found that quiet moment. “Hello,” said the voice on the other end of the line, “This is the Employee Assistance Program.”

With new confidence in my voice, I replied, “I think I need some help.”

Looking back, my problems were somewhat mundane: I was having trouble dealing with the challenges of being a busy father and husband while adjusting to the stresses of a new job and some uncertainty around budget cuts. The specifics aren’t as important as the anxiety I felt in having to do something I never thought I would do. I needed an immediate sense of relief once the phone started to ring. Even before the conversation started, I knew I had gotten over the biggest hurdle. “Hello,” said the voice on the other end of the line, “This is the Employee Assistance Program.”

In planning this column, we’ve realized how hard it is for all of us to put ourselves out there, both when it’s time to ask for support and when it’s time to say, “Hey, look at this cool thing that I’ve done.” Garret Keizer, author of Help: The Original Human Dilemma says, “There is an understandable fear that if you put your guard down, you’ll get hurt, or that this information you don’t know how to do will be used against you.”

Both of us work with teachers in need of support. Our two programs are designed to give individualized attention and coaching to teachers who wish to improve their evaluation rating and may also need to expand their teaching practices. For some, the most challenging part of the journey is taking that first step forward and asking for support. In her TED Talk “The Power of Vulnerability,” Brené Brown describes this as having “the courage to be imperfect.”

In an ideal world, we’d all have the courage to put ourselves out there to ask for help when we need it, but we often wait until a moment of crisis to step forward. M. Nora Klaver, author of May-Day! Asking for Help in Times of Need sees procrastination as a big obstacle to seeking support. “Sometimes (people) sit on projects for weeks because they didn’t want to ask for help.” Likewise, in our work to support teachers, we’ve seen that it’s much easier to coach a teacher back towards proficiencies if they’ve come forward early on in the process, instead of waiting until the last minute.

We’ll be asking our colleagues in PA and PAR to contribute from time to time, but for this column to work, we’re also going to need you to put yourself out there. Maybe you’ll ask a question or suggest a topic. We’ll let the Employee Assistance Program (city of Boston.gov/city) help you with any of your personal problems, and use this space to address your professional dilemmas or areas where you’d like to improve your practice.

Or maybe you’ll volunteer to share a solution. At the end of each column, we’ll ask you to share a successful practice or useful resource.

Five reasons we don’t ask for help when they need it:

1. We don’t want to be seen as weak.
2. We don’t want to be rejected.
3. We don’t want to impose or be a burden on others.
4. We don’t want to be dependent or owe others.
5. We don’t feel worthy of help.

Resources/Links:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/brené_brown
- https://www.ted.com/talks/nora_klaver
- http://www.theleaderoftomorrow.com/ask-for-help/

Retired Teachers Chapter Renews Contract with Delta Dental

The BTC Executive Board voted to renew the contract with Delta Dental. The contract’s renewal is considerably less than the increase sought by Delta. Benefits Committee Chair Walter Wood and BTU Secretary-Treasurer Charles Johnson will resume in January when the rate increase will occur. By this time most educators who are having issues with their coverage will have been co-written by Mark Lonergan, a Consulting Teacher with the PAR program, and Anne Slater, a Peer Assistant with the PAR program. Most of our work is 1-on-1 coaching with teachers, so we’re excited and nervous to put ourselves out there for a wider audience.

Open Postings, SPCs and Evaluation...

is done by Professional Growth Specialists. There is no continuous sense of how an educator is performing. The Professional Growth Specialists only visit the school occasionally and do not view everyday performance. Educators who are currently serving in suitable professional capacity will need to apply for positions next spring as their current positions will not exist next year. The posting will be competing for positions against the transfer list and the PTP.

The BTU will continue to offer support to educators who are having issues with their evaluation. The workshops on evaluation will resume in January. By this time most will be receiving their Formative Assessment and the other municipal unions negotiate with the city. While 5% may seem a stiff hike, the premiums for Delta Dental have not increased in three years.

Retired teachers and paraprofessionals should check their retirement check stub in January when the rate increase will occur. If you are a subscriber to the insurance plan you should see the deduction under union dues. The deduction includes the RTC plus the premium cost of $50 for individual plans and $101 for family plans. Teachers should see a deduction of $55 for individual plans and $106 for the family plan. The deduction for Paraprofessionals will be $52.50 for the family plan and $103.50 for the family plan. Only members of the Retired Teachers Chapter are eligible for this dental insurance benefit. You must be a member to be covered by Delta Dental.

In other news affecting retirees, the bi-partisan budget deal recently passed in Washington DC contained important provisions that protected Medicare beneficiaries from huge increases. Mass. Retirees reports on its website that Medicare Part B premiums will be capped at $120 per month for 2016 for those retirees not receiving social security benefits. For those retirees paying a higher premium due to greater income levels, Part B premiums are capped at $15 and $35. Even when you don’t need support, it can still be hard to put yourself out there. For our column next month, we’re hoping to profile teachers who have found innovative ways to incorporate everyday technology into their classrooms. Maybe you’re using a cool new app to communicate with parents? Or maybe your students love a particular website that’s helping them learn? If so, it’s time to put yourself out there and let your own horn. Email us at galdonerg@bostonpublicschools.org or aslater@bostonpublicschools.org and share your wisdom.

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How Much P&D Time Do Middle/Grades 6-8 and High School Teachers Receive?

By Careen Careaw

All Secondary teachers (contractually defined as teachers of grades 6-12) in "traditional schools" must be scheduled for a minimum of 240 minutes for planning time each day and will be scheduled in blocks/pairs. The contract reads, [Secondary] 'Teachers will have planning and development time each day and will be scheduled in blocks/pairs for a minimum of 240 minutes.' P&D cannot be chopped up or segmented into smaller aggregated blocks/pairs. Additional teachers are scheduled for 40 minutes, five days a week, which is a 40 minute block, less than the minimum amount mandated in the collective bargaining agreement/contract. This violation should be immediately grieved.

If a teacher unavailability loses a P&D period due to coverage issues and the like, the administration should make every effort to free them up on their administrative period or on another agreed upon time. If the teacher does not receive the time off, they must keep good records of when, date and duration of the missed P&D and submit this info to the school secretary for inclusion for compensation. A 'change of date' form. This form is to be submitted twice a year for the reporting times to BPS Payroll Department. If you need a copy of said document, the BPS Payroll Department will fax it to you. A link to this form has also been included in the BTU e-bulletin.

If you lose a P&D period due to being deprivied of same through administrative directive, and are not given another period during that day in lieu of the originally scheduled P&D period, please keep very good notes of the date, and length of period your missed P&D was in order to submit accurate records on the afore mentioned form. Prior to the submission date listed on the form, please make a copy of your completed form & pass both forms in to your school secretary, having the secretary date and initial/sign one copy confirming receipt of said document which you will take back as reference if needed to keep in your personal file. The secretary will ensure the school administrator's signature and submit the other copy to the BPS Payroll Department. This form is never submitted by your school to the Payroll Dept, you have an exact copy with the proof (secretary's signature/date) that it was signed by the secretary at your school in a timely fashion. This way, if any good cause is to be found to be the potential lack of compliance of your school in following through with the process, you have written documentation that the form was not turned in to the Payroll Department in order for you to receive your earned compensation.

What election protocol are BTU Reps to use for school-based voting?

The BTU has protocols and procedures as to how its members conduct school based voting which is the same for all BTU schools. School with autonomies; have the same process for voting which is different from the manner in which BTU business is as an organization through its membership and representatives is done. All school based reps are conducted in person and an easy secret ballot. The school-based BTU protocol is: • Elections are run by the BTU Building Reps or Faculty Election Committee • Building reps control location and time for voting which must be listed in the notice to the BTU staff prior • BTU Reps give five school days written notice as to the date, time, location of the vote to BTU members • Voting is conducted by written secret ballot • Those BTU members eligible and present can vote (eligible are those who have voted more than 50% of their time at the school the vote is being taken at. Depending upon the location of the vote certain BTU members in addition may not be eligible to vote—please check the contract or with your respective BTU Field Rep for clarification. Substitutes do not vote in school based elections) • Ballots are counted by BTU members other than the candidate(s) for election, ex. Faculty Senate Chair, BTU rep, BTU volunteers • Counting of ballots should directly follow voting and be open, counted by BTU members not on the ballot and then reported out in writing right away to BTU staff members. The sign in sheet shall be signed by the person who voted, the used ballots and the tally sheet should be put in a sealed envelope labeled and kept until the end of the SY in case there is a future question concerning the election

Please use this protocol even when the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of openings to allow for write in candidates. We want to encourage increased participation and capacity building for your By-laws.

Who do SCC/Governing Board members obtain on-going training to become effective representatives participating in their school’s governance?

SCC/Governing Board trainings are being held scheduled from October – March of this school year jointly run by the BTU & BPS Office of Engagement (OFE) reger for or for more info BTU members contact careaw@btu.org. These trainings will have dinner served and will be held either at the BTU office (7:30-9:30) or at the BPS Office of Engagement 5:30-7:30, the Bolling Building 4:30-6:30. Saturday SCC Team trainings will be held at BTU Fisher Hall 8-10:30 am (breakfast & lunch served). There will be additional trainings through March 2016. Workshops are open to all elected SCC members including parents, BTU members, high school students and school administrators all of whom are encouraged to attend.

The following dates are the workshops to be held in mid-December-January: On December 10, February 8, the training will be SCC 105: Engaging Students in Decision Making which will focus on learning how to engage high school students as active participants and decision-makers as well as deepen student’s understanding of their role and responsibility on SCC. On December 2, 3, and 7, the training will be SCC 102: School Site Council & Budget which focuses on the important role of developing & approching the school’s budget, High School teams will learn about weighted student funding budget process and obtain experience with consensus building. On January 7, 20, and repeated February 12, the training will be SCC 106: Personnel Subcommittee which focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the SCC in selecting candidates for the Subcommittee to hire school staff, & provides support to ensure that the subcommittee works effectively. On January 30, there will be Saturday training for SCC teams. Please refer to the BTU e-bulletin for the link to the training sessions dates flyer for the specifics on the time and location of each session.

How are bylaws/operational procedures for School Site Councils (SSC) determined?

Each School-Site Council determines most of its own operating procedures through the adoption of a "Class 'C' form". Each SCC 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 SCC 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 students and parents; what the system is for selecting alternates who are apprehensive of the vote being taken at. Depending on the vote to BTU members.

Do I get time off to go to court?

The contract states, "The Boston School Department will provide release time without loss of pay for court appearances on school business, including cases involv-jobs-related teacher assaults." If you are being brought to court or are bringing a student to court, you get release time. If you have jury duty, you must give a copy of the jury duty letter to your school’s secretary. Once you have successfully completed the jury duty period, you will be paid. You will have that time properly coded by the school secretary so it will not be deducted from your sick/personal days. Make sure you carefully scrutinize your pay stub to determine if that has occurred.

If you are subpoenaed to court by someone or are subpoenaed to court by someone or are subpoenaed to court by someone or are subpoenaed to court by someone or are subpoenaed to court by someone or are subpoenaed to court by someon non-related to school business, or if you are appearing at court for an appeal of a moving violation, and the like, that is not covered under court leave and will be deducted from your sick/personal days.

RTC Renews Delta Dental Contract...

continued from page 2

COLA been scheduled for 2016. No Social COLA will occur in 2016 due to the flat Consumer Price Index (CPI). This is only the third time there has been no COLA to Dental Security. Six hundred retirees attended the Fall Luncheon at the Marriott in Quincy. It was a great opportunity to get together with colleagues and share stories, news and fun. The retirees honored David Donovan, the former RTC Chair and Lenny Miraglia, the former Vice Chair with a plaque for their service to the retired members.

Know Your Rights

by Careen Careaw

How Much P&D Time Do Middle/Grades 6-8 and High School Teachers Receive?

Caren Careaw

BTU Secondary Field Representative

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 BTU members, how the BTU 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.

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BTU Supports Fast Food Workers in the Fight for $15 and a Union

By Jessica Tang, BTU Director of Organizing

On Tuesday, November 10th, BTU members joined hundreds of supporters in Boston for a rally and march to support low wage and fast food workers on strike. The day was part of a national day of action coordinated locally by the Wage Action Coalition – a broad-based, labor and community alliance that is supporting fast food workers, airport workers and other low wage workers organizing for a $15 wage and a union. Many community members, including BPS parents and students impacted by these low wages and poor working conditions, appreciated our support and presence.

If you would like to join us for future solidarity actions, please let us know! We can add you to our solidarity activist list. Please email jtang@btu.org.

BTU Members Discuss Public Education with Their Legislators During “Real Teacher Real Talk” Events

For more info on future events, contact Angela Cristiani at 617-288-2000.
The “Best Literature Costume” Finalists posed for a group pic during Literacy Night at the Joseph Lee School K-8.

A large group of BTU members find out important Union information during the November monthly membership meeting at the BTU Hall.

Newly-elected Boston City Councillor Annissa Essaibi-George thanks the BTU members for their support during the recent municipal election.

BTU member Katie Manning and her daughter Georgia talk up Jose Mateo Ballet Theater’s “The Nutcracker” outside of the BTU meeting.

Photos by Colum Whyte
By Jessica Tang,

**Director of Organizing**

**Nov. 16**

On Tuesday, November 17th, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to adopt Commissioner Mitchell Cheever’s recommendation to “merger-mangle” PARCC or MCAS, but MCAS 2.0. This computer-based test will be the next generation MCAS with PARCC-like questions. The vote, which passed 8-3, Interestingly, confused many on the Board seem to have familiar pattern—the dissenting votes coming from the parent, student and labor representatives. The parent representative, the only elected representative on the board, emphasized that he could not vote for a system that drives teaching to the test instead of real learning. He felt a sense of responsibility to his fellow students to vote against the recommendation. The parent, Mary Ann Stewart, defended her position in post position.

“Across the discussion of ‘how to do tests in Massachusetts,” I’ve observed a tendency to do what the one hand is essential for student/well-being and learning and what, on the other hand, strikes us as essential for the future economy...For example, we are dedicated and accountable to child/student well-being, teaching and learning may have little relevance for many children, that we contribute to a problem we’re trying to solve while putting students at risk of being unprepared - not only for their role in the future economy, but for their lives. Education is more than a talent pipeline for employers, after all, it’s an end in itself.”


*Many of our members testified in the hearings across the state, prior to the recommendation.*

The last hearing occurred on Monday, November 16th, the day before the vote. Two members of the BTU’s Less Testing, More Learning Organizing committee submitted testimonies to the board. Their testimonies are re-printed here with their permission.

**Dolores Wood – English/ESL teacher Boston Public Schools**

nineten out of the 24 original PARCC states have dropped the PARCC test during the past few years. Many of these states have declared they found the test’s questions to be meaningless and unclear. Proponents of PARCC claim it is more rigorous than MCAS. But PARCC’s “rigor” in English Language Arts has been less of a stimulating challenge and more a matter of mincing words and parsing ininitesimals between indistinguishable ideas. PARCC is not demanding. It is confusing.

What concerns me most about the latest idea to combine PARCC and MCAS for an MCAS 2.0, is that it could end with all the confusion of PARCC and none of the assets of the MCAS. At least the MCAS has a more straightforward presentation and execution. If you can comprehend an excerpt and reply to a question with claim, evidence, and reasoning, you can pass the MCAS. To date, every student who attends public or private school has taken the “state” as the lowest levels – a second-year ESL student, to the highest honor students. Generally, students don’t have to mince words on the MCAS. Hyperbole is clearly represented as exaggeration; irony is clearly represented as the opposite of what you expect, etc. There is little juggling or nip-picking like there is in PARCC, where students find themselves trying to determine whether a wild statement in the reading is “exaggerating the human” or “pointing out the ironic” which can be very similar in some cases.

We are, after all, discussing a high school test. We have the SAT and numerous AP tests to increase the rigor into the college arena. Urban students, especially, will rebel when they are asked to do something like an arcanum stimulus-response testing ritual. They rebel when they are asked about the structure of a test, but are not challenged to produce original ideas of its significance. They feel disrespected. They stop reading mindless exercises and they start wildly making grammar opiniatoes about ramin- ing their futures will deter them. Their rea- soning? The deck is stacked against them and so why try, or they can’t fail if they don’t.

On the other hand, urban students will make a sincere attempt at claim-evidence-reasoning on open response and long composition when they are asked to grapple with problems to be solved or profound thoughts to interpret. I have received many insightful and well-written essays on MCAS topics such as “For Some Pain Is Orange,” about seeing the world through different eyes, an article on synthesis in Smithsonian Magazine. My students have produced many thoughtful essays about character development from excerpts of authors such as Austen and Prudie, or figurative language from Dickens’s Hard Times, and setting from Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, to name a few. It is wrong to say there is a lack of rigor here.

If our destiny is to be MCAS 2.0 whether we like it or not, I hope you will put yourselves in the shoes of those of us teaching these students and the goals we are trying to achieve. Fussy arcane arguments about literary devices and ambiguous shades of meaning are not going to tell you what you need to know about our high school students and whether they should graduate. You need to know that they have the foundations to proceed. MCAS gives you that. There also are many other exciting ideas for assessing student knowledge with portfolios and/or progressive stages of assessments instead of one, all-or-nothing, high-stakes test. Massachusetts has achieved the nation’s top spot in education and ranked among the short list of the world’s finest seats of learning without a confusing, meaningless, computerized exercise. “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education,” said Martin Luther King, Jr. A robot is the opposite of that direction. Please don’t take us backward with an MCAS 2.0 that is just PARCC in disguise.

**Ryan Jacon – 3rd Grade Teacher Boston Public Schools (Chair of the BTU Less Testing More Learning Organizing Committee)**

Thank you all for allowing me to testify today. As a teacher, I implement effective teaching strategies such as Writer’s Workshop, Reader’s Workshop, Inquiry-Based Teaching, Understanding by Design, Workshop Model, Theme-based curricular planning, Exposure to multiple genres, authors, cultures, and experiences; Turn and Talk, Cooperative Group Work; Portfolios; Project-Based Learning, Oral Presentations; Arts, dance, and music; Open Circle; Students move about the room, engaging in dialogue with their peers. Leading guided reading groups while other students buddy read. All these rigorous pedagogical principles are researched, proven best-practices to ensuring our students are successful future citizens: mindful, thoughtful, well-read, and determined human beings. As a prior 9th grade teacher and current 3rd grade teacher, I know that these are best teaching practices. I know that the best way to teach children is to identify their passions to teach those via multiple means. But what really ends up happening in my classroom is: Math and ELA, ELA and Math. My students take twenty standard- ized tests a year that focus exclusively on ELA and Math. These tests happen every six weeks so there is no time for thematic teaching and engagement. The tests follow no developmentally appropriate structure for developing learners. For example, my 3rd graders, within the first six weeks of school had taken three standardized tests, focusing on multiplication and division when they could barely add and subtract three-digit numbers. I know that it was inappropriate to teach them multiplication in 4 weeks, but due to the nature of “data-driven” instruction, I am forced to teach to the test. Then focusing on depth and conceptual knowledge, I give my students breadth to ensure that I am exposing them to every possible standard that might be on the next standardized test.

My students are successful, engaged, curious, and kind eight year olds who express their best learning via the creation of informational posters, engaging in thoughtful dialogue, creating their own two-step word problems and fraction models, producing their own unique dance presentation which they presented to the entire school. My students are often so excited to answer questions that they practically leap out of their seats. Life is not a multiple-choice question and neither is my classroom. But, all twenty standardized tests they take are thus. My dilemma: do I teach them to respond to multiple-choice questions or how to effectively argue their point of view in a Socratic dialogue? Do I teach them to “slash-the-trash” on a multiple choice question or do I expose them to culturally relevant reading material with which they can create presentations to share with their peers? Do I teach them only Math and ELA for these multiple-choice tests or do I expose them to Social Studies, Science, and the Arts via cross-curricular, thematic lesson planning and partnerships?

I am a 3rd grade teacher. My students take Terranova, BPS Predictives, ANET in ELA and Math, WIDA, and MCAS. This equals 120 hours of testing, which means, at a minimum, 20 days of lost instruction and learning each year. We can do better.

As the new assessment is developed over the next year, our members and allies will need to stay vigilant and informed about what it may mean for both our stu- dent and us. We will need to continue to raise our voices and advocate for assessments that make sense. With that in mind, the committee will be holding a forum with BPS Superintendent Dr. Chang on Monday, December 21st from 4:30-6:30pm. We invite you attend the forum and encourage you to come to the Less Testing More Learning Organizing committee so that educators, working with students, parents and allies across the city and state, can continue to push for assessments that support teaching and learning in a meaningful way.

**Upcoming BTU Organizing Events:**

**LGBTQ Organizing Committee Conversation with new BPS Equity Director Steven Chin-Creating Welcoming Schools for LGBTQ Families**

Wednesday, December 2, 3pm at the Bolling Building

Please RSVP to Shanika Houlder at shoulder@btu.org

**Less Testing More Learning Forum with Superintendent Chang**

Monday, Dec 28 at the BTU

Please RSVP to Jessica Tang at jtanq@btu.org

*The Less Testing and Inclusion Committees will be planning a meeting with the new Director of Social Emotional Learning. Please see the e-bulletin for the finalized date.*

For a description of all our Organizing Committees, please visit www.btu.org under “Resources.”
Welcome! Thank you for carving out this time from the mountain of work and commitments I know you all feel clammyed by. It can be really hard to be in a room full of educators who have come together because they care -- deeply and intelligently -- about what goes on in schools and what others think should go on in schools. We're glad you are here whether you came out of curiosity, cynicism, or support -- you're here to think and care and we can never have too many people doing either one of those things. My job today is to talk a bit about my role on the High School Redesign Team, to tell you how I ended up on it and why I believe this design stuff is worth our valuable time.

There is great need (maybe not yet enough demand) for educator voice -- for the words and wisdom of those who can fill in the substance, provide the road map of much that we are doing. We take the students we serve to the destinations the public forums have dreamt up. You will be at the front and center, wherever rubs meet road, as you always are.

Students, too, are a constituency whose voices must be honored. They are often our most underrepresented and most acute critics. We have had many student forums and many students at forums. We need to make sure that the students of Boston maintain their voice, and have a say in phases as well -- the prototyping and implementation of our future designs.

I have been sitting on the planning committee since last Spring. I was appointed by the union when the Redesign Team decided it might be wise to have a classroom teacher’s voice as a part of the team. I don’t have a clue what that’s actually all about. Making sure we (as a team, as a district, as a city and society) don’t make a mess of any more opportunities to learn from our educators, to incorporate teachers -- and all school-based stakeholder groups -- in the design stages. We must carve paths forward together rather than the tired old pattern of thrusting the “new new thing” on our educators and feigning concern when they do what they know -- collaborate, problematize, tweak, and improve it.

Design thinking is fixed in human social interaction, which is always powerful and nearly neat or pretty. It is amorphous, vague, and somewhat difficult to build on. It was my job to tweak, and improve it!

Design Thinking is a broad term for bringing together invested parties across experience and perspectives to solve problems in creative, collaborative ways. The goal is to generate possible models and new solutions quickly. It urges us to build from the needs or desires first, then tweak based on the feedback. What interests me about this work is that it blends two qualities deeply I value and two qualities that make educators such an extraordinary work force: creativity and collaboration.

Design thinking is a strategy, a tool that helps teams and organizations think differently about the work they do. It's an approach to problem solving that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, empathy, and iteration. Design thinking is a process that guides you through a series of steps, from understanding the problem, to ideating possible solutions, to prototyping and testing those solutions. It's about fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

I know that many of you have been involved in or are currently working on similar projects. I am sure you have all had similar experiences and lessons. I want to share with you some of the things I have learned and some of the challenges I have faced as part of the High School Redesign Team.

I have been involved in the design process since the beginning. I was appointed to the team by the union when the Redesign Team decided it might be wise to have a classroom teacher’s voice as a part of the team. I don’t have a clue what that’s actually all about. Making sure we (as a team, as a district, as a city and society) don’t make a mess of any more opportunities to learn from our educators, to incorporate teachers -- and all school-based stakeholder groups -- in the design stages. We must carve paths forward together rather than the tired old pattern of thrusting the “new new thing” on our educators and feigning concern when they do what they know -- collaborate, problematize, tweak, and improve it.

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The Margarita Muñiz Academy is a two-way bilingual high school located in the former Agassiz School building in Jamaica Plain. Named for Margarita Muñiz, the founder and longtime principal of the Hernandez K-8 School, it opened three years ago and now has a full complement of 320 students in grades 9-12.

I love that the school organizes instruction around yearly themes selected by staff: Revolution in 9th grade, Immigration in 10th, Social Movements in 11th, and Leadership & Community in 12th. The themes build on each other and are designed to offer opportunities for authentic learning. Each term students explore a different topic within the theme.

At the beginning of this year seniors are participating in the BPS High School Redesign effort. Students hope to influence the discourse, planning, and the decision-makers in the district. In science they will be doing a building analysis to examine environmental impacts related to global warming.

Visual Arts teacher Daniel Villafana had students using laptop computers to write individual “artist statements” connecting their work to a quote, while at least three different classes of students practiced a variety of musical instruments.

There is ample evidence of critical thinking about issues that affect student lives throughout the building. Students in Marilú Alvarado-Hernández’s Spanish class are reading El País de las Mujeres, by Gioconda Belli, as they learn about feminism and the issues of gender inequality. Giant posters in Wanda Murie’s ESL classroom show students’ agreement and disagreement with various provocative statements about public education. In Antonio Arvelo’s Humanities class, 11th graders were examining obstacles to attaining the American Dream. Students also have a variety of opportunities to work in small groups, often leading their own inquiries.

Juan Gomez’s pre-calculus math students were collaboratively examining and making sense of graphical representations of data. In Rohyn Pelletier’s Humanities class, tenth graders were grouped to study and take on different roles from an event in American history.

Students at every grade level spend a day visiting area colleges, and large posters in the entrance area show the results of student research on a variety of institutions of higher learning. Muñiz Academy is definitely preparing its students to enter college with 21st century skills!

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This is in Spanish class. Our teacher, Marli, was checking my reading log and giving me feedback for revisions. We are studying feminism and reading El País de las Mujeres, by Gioconda Belli. This is the story of a fictional country in South America where women rule, which helps us think about relationships and power in our own society. I’m learning about the difficulties that women face and how different groups of people understand feminism.

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We were trying to identify some substances in chemistry class and Ms. Laskey was helping us. We are learning how to change one element into another. For example, today we changed zinc to copper by adding nitric acid.

Diara Cabroja & Perla Baez, Grade 11

[A m i k a K e m m l e r E r n s t i s a r e c e n t l y r e t i r e d B P S N e w T e a c h e r D e v e l o p e r w i t h e x t e n s i v e e x p e r i e n c e a s a c l a s s r o o m t e a c h e r , c u r r i c u l u m d e v e l o p e r , a n d g r a p h i c a r t i s t .

H e r “ W e ’ r e L e a r n i n g H e r e ” P r o j e c t f e a t u r e s i m a g e s o f e v e r y d a y l e a r n i n g i n o u r p u b l i c s c h o o l s , a l o n g w i t h t h e w o r d s o f t h e s t u d e n t s p i c t u r e d . ]

We were playing the clarinet in our Wind Symphony class. This year we’re learning different kinds of music. We are practicing a piece of music from Spain called “Amparito Roca.”

Kenya Reyes, Grade 12, & Danielpul Bautista, Grade 11

This is in Humanities and Mr. A is helping me understand the classwork he’d assigned. Our theme is the American Dream. We’re reading articles and learning how to identify evidence for or against a particular claim, such as how education or wealth inequality are obstacles to achieving the American Dream. We’re also learning about local political candidates and what they say they would do to make it possible for more people to have successful lives.

Emily Selina Rijo, Grade 9

I was solving problems in physics class on vectors and scalars. A vector has direction, while a scalar has quantity but no direction, like temperature or age. We are studying motion and I’ve learned how to use distance and time to figure out the velocity of a moving object.

Jordan Carter, Grade 9