President’s Corner

There is No Plan to Close Schools, But the City Plans to Close Schools

There is no plan to close schools in Boston. How many times have we heard that? There is no plan to close schools in Boston. Make no mistake about it. There is most surely a plan afoot to propose the closing of as many as 20 or 30 schools in Boston next year.

The spin will be as follows: We need the money saved from the closings to help out the schools that remain. Two or three new schools will be proposed to be built—that will sound good—but the greater pain and suffering caused by closing of 20 to 30 schools will be minimized.

There’ll be no mention made that along with the closings will come massive layoffs that will raise class size and cut course offerings. There’ll be no mention made of the disruption to the lives of thousands of students. And there’ll be no mention made of the suitors for those closed buildings already lining up at the schoolhouse doors, hoping to expand their charter school franchises. The proposal will be met with fierce resistance from parents, students, and the BTU. The proposal will also carry with it the full support of the city and the school district. This will be the most important battle our schools face for the next decade.

Why does the city want to close schools? It wants to save money. Simply, if 20 or 30 schools with, let’s say, 800 teachers and 200 paras are closed and their students distributed among existing schools, the smaller the footprint, the greater pain—less savings. Districts do not save real money to employ all of those 1000 members. And moved elsewhere, the system will not need 200 paras are closed and their students schools with, let’s say, 800 teachers and 200 paras.

By now most have probably heard of the McKinsey Report, which claimed that Boston Public Schools has an excess seating capacity of 38,000 seats and called for the closing of 30 to 50 schools. Though discredited by many city councilors and school committee members, the report, which cost the city $870,000, has become a central piece of the city’s blueprint for a school closing proposal next year. What’s more, though its estimate of 38,000 excess seats has received widespread criticism from many quarters, the city has failed to renounce that calculation. A report that relied on much more recent data about the city’s schools pegged the excess capacity at around 4,900.

Why are these foundational reports important? It wasn’t all that long ago that the city embarked on a drastic school closing proposal whose scope defies imagination. From January 1, 1975 through December 31, 1979, the city closed 41 school buildings. From January 1, 1980 through July, 1981, the city closed an additional 28 school buildings. Those 69 school closings paved the way for massive teacher layoffs and a huge spike in class size. 710 permanent teachers were laid off at the end of the 1981 school year. An additional 959 permanent teachers were laid off at the end of the following school year.

Wherever one sees a facility report claiming absurdly high levels of excess capacity, there’s a school closing proposal right behind.

How are we preparing? We have asked each BTU building representative to fill out a survey of his or her school looking carefully at how each school operates space-wise. Are there classes in the corridor? Does the Occupational Therapist share a space with others? Does the music class meet in the auditorium stage? We need this data so we can push back with authority when we’re fed the line that our schools are swimming with excess seats. How can a school have surplus seats when its ESL class meets in a corridor?

We understand schools are expensive to run. But after all, the city has never been economically healthier. One look at the city skyline affirms. We need this data so we can push back with authority when we’re fed the line that our schools are swimming with excess seats.

The spin will be as follows: We need the money saved from the closings to help out new facilities—we agree with the city about that—but those building costs should not come out of our operating budget. We have a great many small schools that work well. We have a great many small, medium, size schools that work well. Their needs, the needs of their students, count. Closing schools is sometimes necessary, but not here and not now.

There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse what words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words. There may be no plan to close schools. Let’s parse those words.

There is no plan to close schools. And

Richard Stutman

BTU President

Richard Stutman

Water, Water, Everywhere, Not A Drop to Drink

by Michael J. Maguire

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ancient mariner would feel right at home in many of today’s Boston Public Schools. This past April the media reported that lead was discovered in several Boston Public Schools. My workplace, Boston Latin Academy, is one of them. The water fountain outside my room was turned off and a portable, office style water bubbler was placed nearby. Unfortunately this is the only bubbler for the freshmen and it does not take long for a five-gallon drum of water to empty out. It does, sadly, take a long time for those drums to be replaced.

On May 6, I had had enough. I tweeted a picture of an empty water drum with the following caption. I guess no water is better than lead in the water.


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For the third year in a row the City of Boston has not sponsored the Educators of the Year Awards. Nearly two years ago my wife directly asked the then newly-elected mayor why he hadn’t sponsored the annual event. In short, Mayor Martin Walsh said the event got lost in the transition. Mayor Walsh advised my wife to speak with his newly-appointed Chief of Education, Rahn Dorsey. She did.

Now years later we still do not have an event celebrating our hard working teachers. I have Tweeted, emailed, telephoned Mayor and personally spoken with officials both at the Bolling Building and City Hall. A very nice person at the Bolling Building informed me that the Educator of the Year Program is a City Hall affair and that I should address my concerns there. I did, but to no avail.

To be frank this issue is important to me not because I am a teacher but because of the amazing teachers who have taught my own children over these three years. I am not the only one. I am not my children’s favorite teacher. I am, however, embarrassed that yet another school year has come and gone without our great city honoring the hard working people who help all our children.

In the meanwhile, I offer my list of Educators of the Year:

**Rookie Teachers** – Young people and mid-career professionals who knowingly enter into our vilified profession deserve our admiration. Longer hours, larger classrooms, and fewer resources can’t be the reason people study education in college. Their pure love of the task cannot be taken for granted; for if it is, they won’t stay in education long enough to become veteran teachers.

**Art Teachers** – Whether they teach drama, dance, music or visual arts, our arts teachers often are the reason why so many students come to school every day. My favorite dialogue from “Mr. Holland’s Opus” is the following:

***Vice Principal Wolters***: I care about these kids more than you do. And if I’m forced to choose between Mozart and reading and writing and long division, I choose long division.

**Art Teachers** – I believe I can cut the arts as much as you want, Gene. Sooner or later, these kids aren’t going to have anything to read or write about.

**Educators of the Year**

**Peripatetic Teachers** – Teaching is a tough job, teaching without a classroom in infinitely more difficult. Having to tote around one’s office on a wheeled cart is a logistical nightmare. Being held to the same high standard while traveling is both challenging and stressful. Imagine having to know where everything is in six different classrooms, having to subordinate your teaching style to the classroom norms of other teachers.

**Librarians** – Teachers may assign projects but librarians assist in their completion. Librarians only have one task: to know everything the students need to discover.

More than just knowing, they can often anticipate what is coming and have the materials prepared for the students who march in the usual day before the deadline.

**Suitable Professional Capacity Teachers** – Teachers in general are castigated in the media, but those teachers designated for Suitable Professional Capacity (SPC) jobs are harshly persecuted in many media outlets. Most SPC individuals are guilty of nothing more than having worked in a very difficult school. How is it that dedicated workers, with good evaluations, are marginalized by the city? I don’t know all the SPC people, but those whom I’ve met in my children’s schools are nothing short of terrific. It takes a great deal of self-respect to play the cards you are dealt when the deck is stacked against you.

**Students Who Walked Out – Twice** – Telling students they are the future is one thing, seeing them take charge of their own fate is quite another. Thousands of middle and high school students took to the streets this year demanding that their schools be fully funded. Despite some initial criticism by the powerbrokers of Boston, the students won over the hearts of the general public. A few days after the first walkout, the high school budgets were greatly improved. Seeing students come together peacefully and forcefully ought to give us all confidence that our democracy is strong.

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**A Gift We Will Never Forget**

by Carolyn Burrell

I walked in from February break and immediately heard the news. One of my former students had been killed, an all too often experience at our school. As the rumors started flying, I knew that I had to address my class. My supervisor came down with the guidance counselor, and we let the children know that their former classmate was killed the day before. We talked for a while about how, as a community, we had to “do better.”

In the back of my mind, I kept thinking about the special guest who was visiting the following week. A Holocaust survivor who had been through so many traumas was going to tell his story. I thought “Should I cancel?” So many people had cancelled on visitors like him over the years, and I really didn’t want to do that again. I talked it over with my team and we decided to just leave it as it is.

The day came, and the students were super excited because they had long been researching the Holocaust. To be able to meet someone who had experienced it first hand was unheard of to them. I met Sam Weinreb, an 80-something year old Holocaust survivor, and Elyse Rast, a JFK&S staff member, outside and walked them into the auditorium, hoping the students would show this man the respect he deserves.

As the students started to enter the auditorium, one by one they came up front. Sam started to share his story, and he talked for an hour. You could hear a pin drop in the auditorium. Sam’s tragic and heroic story captivated the students. He told them about losing his entire family, going to jail, and eventually going to Auschwitz. I could see tears in the eyes of students and adults alike during this talk. When Sam told us about meeting his wife and how they recently celebrated their 66th wedding anniversary, the whole auditorium cheered.

In my 13 years of teaching at McKinley, I have been to many presentations with our students; I have never seen anything like this. They respected Sam and his amazing journey and they also identified with some of his losses. Many of our McKinley students have experienced violence, loss, and trauma. For them to hear about someone running from a death march, surviving, and still going on to have a successful life to having a family that he clearly loved very much was something all of their young ears needed to hear.

But it didn’t end there. The students stood up and asked questions. They asked important, thought-provoking questions. Sam’s most profound answer was to share that he has to have hope and he doesn’t have time for hatred. What an incredible way to end a talk. Afterward, a 16-year-old young man, wearing a RIP shirt for his friend, said to me, “Burrell, I can’t believe I met this guy. I can’t believe everything he went through, and he still has hope.”

Many of the students in my class said his story was heroic and that Sam gave them hope.

When Sam left, he grabbed my hands and said, “Your students are amazing. They are wonderful!” And that was something I needed to hear and it gave me hope. When I walked back into the school, it was charged with a respect for Sam and his story. Every student and staff member who attended thanked me. The whole school couldn’t stop talking about it. It was the path to healing that we all needed at that time.

I can’t thank Elyse Rast and Sam Weinreb enough for providing us with this amazing experience. It was a teaching highlight for me and a life highlight as well as a gift that our students and staff will never forget.

Carolyn Burrell is a Special Education teacher at McKinley South End Academy in Boston. She holds a master’s in special education, and has been a teacher for 13 years. She is currently an English language arts teacher for 9th-12th grade. Ms. Burrell enjoys exploring different topics that involve the human spirit that brings out the best in her students.
What are the Procedures when a BPS Student Goes Missing?

The following is a summary of the standard procedures to follow, found in detail in BPS Superintendent’s Circular SA-9 “Lost Children Procedures” if a case of a BPS student who may not arrive at school on time has occurred during the school day or who leaves school at dismissal but does not arrive home.

1. Gather as much info as possible re: the student (name, ID#, school, grade, address, phone #, bus stop/bus #, place last seen/with who, etc.)
2. Immediately notify the Principal/Headmaster/Program Director
3. Make every effort to locate missing child

The Principal/Headmaster/Program Director will:

1. Notify the Principal Leader and Safety Services
2. Contact parent/guardian
3. Contact teachers, students, and other parent who may have info about the lost child
4. Make every effort to locate missing child

The Principal Leader will:

1. Make every effort to assist in locating missing child
2. When child is located, arrange to get child home; BPS Transportation may be used if available
3. Notify first receiver of info and Building Administrator of child’s school that they are located

Safety Services will:

1. Coordinate search process for lost child
2. If transported child, call bus company who’ll contact driver to check with students on same bus
3. Notify Superintendent’s Office & the Boston Police Department
4. If children unaccounted for by 4:00 PM, special situation warrants it

The first person who discovers or receives info the student is lost/missing will:

Do every step (1-3) listed in first section as well as notify Safety Services at 617-635-8000

Safety Services will:

1. Coordinate search process for lost child
2. Update parent/guardian of situation and assure them of continued efforts
3. Provide parent/guardian with phone #s of central Transportation and Safety Services and additional resources
4. If transported child, call bus company who’ll contact driver to check with students on same bus

5. Notify Superintendent’s Office and Boston Police Department
6. Notify first receiver of info, Principal/Headmaster/Program Director, and Superintendent’s Office when child is located

The Transportation Department will:

- Make every effort to locate missing child & if they find child, inform BPS Safety Services

*If Boston Police Dept finds wandering child, it informs BPS Safety Services they located child and make arrangements to get child home.

When Do We Have to Submit Final Grades and Marks for the Academic Year?

The contract states: In Elementary Schools: ‘No final records will be required of teachers until May 1st for Grade 5, and 15 days before the close of school for all other grades.’ In Middle Schools: ‘Final marks shall not be required of any teacher before May 1st for Grade 8, and 15 days before the close of school for Grades 6 and 7.’ In High Schools: ‘The number of marking periods for all schools shall not exceed five (5) per year. Final marks shall not be required of any teacher before May 1st for seniors, and 15 days before the close of school for other students. Grades for all high school and Latin School students shall be recorded by the data processing method and no teacher shall be required to record numerical grades on duplicate records at the school.’

Is There Coverage for Elementary Individualized Benchmark Testing?

The contract states, “All elementary teachers for grades K-3 will be provided with substitute teacher coverage while administering individualized benchmark testing. These teachers will receive substitute coverage for the equivalent of two days, the equivalent of one in September and the equivalent of one in June-per teacher per year. The substitute will be compensated at the rate of $15.00 per hour. The union will facilitate the hiring of retired teachers and others for this purpose. But if a regular substitute is used, he/she will be paid in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement.”

What Does COBRA Mean?

COBRA stands for the Consolidated Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1985. It is the law that requires employers who offer group health insurance plans to give their employees the opportunity to stay on their group health insurance plan if they are no longer employed by the employer and the former employee isn’t eligible for health insurance coverage through a spouse’s insurance.

If a teacher is terminated by the City of Boston, they will be mailed information about COBRA benefits. For further inquiries concerning COBRA continuation of coverage, get in touch with the Health Benefits and Insurance Office, Room 807, City Hall. Give them a call at 617-635-4570.

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WHEN WRITING:
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DEADLINE:
The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the Boston Union Teacher is July 18th. All copy should be e-mailed to buntu@buntu.org.

BOSTON UNION TEACHER | June, 2016
and main office. My students found no H2O this p.m.”

Technically the BPS was correct. There was over a dozen five-gallon drums in the basement of BLA. Little good they did hiding down there.

Like the ancient mariner, our students are surrounded by water by cannot access it. The custodial staff at the schools contends that refilling the water bubblers is not in their contract. The BPS acknowledges this situation, yet to my understanding has not come up with a viable plan to deliver water. Meanwhile the mercury is rising; it regularly reaches mid-80’s in my classroom.

We all need to stay hydrated. The BPS even has a sign hanging in the new (air-conditioned) Bolling Building acknowledging such. Those of us who make a living with our voices must keep our vocal cords lubricated. Such a task is difficult when the water remains safely tucked away in the storage rooms.

Weeks later I learned that the Bolling Building cares equally little for the students at the Ohrenberger school. May 26th was the O’s annual art show. After an hour or so many students started to run around, play tag, and generally amuse themselves while the adults (myself included) lingered over the art and chatted with the teachers and fellow parents. Soon thereafter my son asked me if I had any drinks with me. “Isn’t there a water bubbler nearby?” I innocently asked. “Yes,” he replied, “but it’s out of water.”

I’m sure the vein on my forehead must have started to throb. I told my son and his friends that I’d get water. I found the storage room (mere yards away) and replenished the bubbler. It took all of five minutes.

Here we are five weeks into the water crisis and there is no plan to distribute the water. With fewer than five weeks of school left my money says we won’t have a plan in place until at least September.

But it doesn’t take a divining rod to figure out what to do. The BPS must rip out the offending pipes and install new plumbing. This task should be started now and continued day and night through the summer. All it takes is political courage and common sense.

Like the ancient mariner, I fear I am doomed forever to tell my tail of woe to all who cross my path. I can only hope they heed my warnings like the Wedding Guest did 200 years ago in the famous Rime.

In case anyone at the Bolling Building doesn’t recognize me, I’m the guy wearing an empty five-gallon drum around my neck.
A grade two student shows her stop and jot work.

and questions. I realized we were on to something.

Last month’s Peer-To-Peer column began to dig into the role of engagement and how research helps us to understand the power of the read-aloud session. I lay awake half the night and happily read it aloud to me. Again I lay awake the night before.

What is the purpose of this group? I asked my sleeping husband to tell him. Why would she be reading that all year? She was already a fine decoder and her comprehension was good. Why wasn’t she excited about reading?

Then I learned that she had been assigned to an intervention reading group. Each day she brought home a dull leveled reader and read it aloud to me. Again I lay awake half the night.

“We leave me alone,” he said.

I set out to find a book that would make her turn on her flashlight after bedtime and hide under the covers reading. One day at BJ’s we found the graphic novel version of The Baby-Sitters Club.

She was captivated by the comic book format and read the whole book in two days. I bought a set and took it to two second grade teachers and asked if they were interested in using it.

They were interested.

In addition to The Baby-Sitters Club, the grade two team tried a vertical text set about dinosaurs, a poetry club in English and Spanish, and a textbook level club in their reading. Students became, “experts” at conducting literacy conversations. The classroom conversation and learning to conduct literacy conversations is the deeper work that leads to the comprehension and critical thinking necessary to become literate members of the academic community.

Field Trips

A better way of building engagement is to organize a unit of study around a field trip. In an article on using field trips for building vocabulary development, authors Camille Blachowicz and Connie Obrochta describe criteria for building content vocabulary.

(From Vocabulary Visits: Virtual Field Trips for Content Vocabulary Development by Camille Blachowicz & Connie Obrochta)

Field trips can have a content focus. Good field trips connect to the curriculum and its content which provide an integrated context for learning and a relational set of concepts and terms. Field Trips engage the senses. Students are seeing, hearing and sometimes tasting as they encounter new concepts and vocabulary.

Field Trips are preceded by preparation that includes “plow the soil” for planting the seeds of new learning. Students know what they are going to encounter and often teachers do a read aloud to get them ready.

Field trips involve a follow up of new concepts and terms.

One year we organized a unit for kindergarten built around a visit to the Trailside Museum, a sanctuary in the Blue Hills Reservation that keeps a small sample of native wildlife that are unable to live in the wild. At the museum’s website you can find out each animal’s name and story before the trip. We kicked off the unit with a school visit of a screech owl from the Trailside Museum at $172 for one hour. We followed up.

Afterschool, I brought in bags of library books on snakes, eagles, owls, and other native animals. Students browsed books and talked about the animals that they would meet. They wrote their own research books.

When we went to the museum, it was early May and we were the only group there. We were able to sit and sketch the animals without being trodden on by other groups or waiting to get a glimpse over some bigger kids heads. Students used their sketch books to draw the animals that they studied. We picnicked on the grass. We did a scavenger hunt through the woods. Inside the museum we saw bees in honeycomb, a Great Horned Owl and a model Native American village. A naturalist guide brought out the screech owl. In the days and weeks following our trip, we finalized our book projects incorporating the many things we had learned on the trip. Students were able to read the nonfiction texts about the animals they had seen with new voracity.

The Arnold Arboretum is another destination that provides the opportunity to tie a trip to science curriculum. The Arboretum offers guided tours where students can investigate leaf uncover to uncover pills and worms to support the student of organisms (Foss Kit). In this photo, students from the EBEUC use their science notebooks to sketch and write scientific observations. The education coordinator can help to craft your trip to make the most of the Arboretum. She can provide you with a bus if you ask in September and guides, or teachers can use a packet to guide the study. Before visiting the Arboretum, we studied local plants, had pill bugs and compost bins in the classroom. We spent most of the trip digging for leaf litter and joyfully examining the organisms that we found. We didn’t try to see everything and we had a relaxing picnic near the pond where we scooped out tadpoles and closed our eyes to hear the sounds around us. Again when we returned to school we wrote and talked about what we experienced. These types of small group targeted trips can propel learning forward with the rush of energy that cannot be gained by pen and paper tasks.

Tips for Trips:

Tie the trip to a unit of study. Read a book, look at videos, write and read, talk and talk. Focus the trip. Many times on field trips we spend the whole time walking in lines and waiting for the bathroom. Focus on a small area of the zoo (free) or aquarium (apply for free entry in the fall). Just observe the gorillas or the nocturnal animals. Sketch, observe and then use those observations to deepen instruction back in the classroom.

Go with a smaller target group. Split the trip into more than one session if your school has several of the same grade.

Go earlier in the season to avoid the crowds.

So before you pack up your classroom for its summer slumber, mark your calendar. It is free and will give you a bus and guides if you ask early in the year. Just observe the gorillas or the nocturnal animals. Sketch, observe and then use those observations to deepen instruction back in the classroom.

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Go earlier in the season to avoid the crowds.

There are many quick and easy grants available through filling out a short form that can support field trips or in class visits. Target gives out field trip grants for up to $700. Deadline is October 1. See corporate.target.com/education/scholarship/helpforfieldtrips.aspx.

The Museum of Science has bus grants and half-price admission during some times of the year. The Arnold Arboretum has some transportation grants available. Contact studentgroups@massaudubon.org for information.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council offers grants to support field trips to cultural organizations. The Massachusetts State Library offers grants to support field trips to cultural organizations. The New England Aquarium has some grants available. See newenglandaquarium.com or contact Susan Belkis at glasher@lirn.nea.org.

The Franklin Park Zoo is free for MPS classes. See Franklinparkzoo.org.

The Blue Hills Trailside Museum will arrange school visits with animals and offers very low admission. See massaudubon.org.

Petco offers grants for schools. See Petco.com.

Donor’s Choice lets you create a trip of project and seek funding from online benefactors. See donnorschoice.org.
School Nurses Key to BPS Kids’ Wellness

By Ayanna Pressley

I used to hide out in the school nurse’s office. There was rarely anything physically wrong with me. Throughout middle school, I would feign a headache or upset stomach and get permission to visit my school nurse. At the time, I couldn’t verbalize why I was hurting. I couldn’t talk about what was happening in my home, what was being done to me, and how that made me feel. I’d sit in class, at once both desperate for help and terrified to admit I needed any, and wonder if everyone knew my secret. Until I couldn’t take it anymore and had to escape.

There was one person I knew would make me feel better - my school nurse. The school nurse of popular culture is a kind-hearted woman who puts on Band-Aids and checks for lice. Today, on National School Nurses Day, it is time to retire once and for all that outdated and misleading portrayal and get real about the critical role nurses play in strengthening our schools, and for all that outdated and misleading portrayal and get real about the critical role nurses play in strengthening our schools, and, ultimately, in the education of our children.

Today, there are 110 full-time BPS nurses. All are certified by the state and must have three prior years of nursing experience. Three of them have PhDs in nursing, and another 73 have a master’s degree. All BPS nurses are involved in continuing education programs including those focused on LGBT students, mental health, nutrition, and oral health. They also lead regular trainings for BPS teachers and staff on a variety of issues including allergies and use of Epi-Pen, CPR/AED, and seizures.

In 2014-15, there were 381,673 student visits to Boston Public Schools (BPS) nurses who encountered an average of 414 students each month. There were 741 occasions when they referred a student to urgent care, or call 911. Of the 911 calls, 54 percent were for mental health emergencies. BPS nurses administer 115,466 doses of medication, of which 67 percent were psychotropic. The record shows that 10,724 students had asthma; 933 had a seizure disorder; 2,201 students had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); 1,085 students had reported being diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder; and some 1,600 students had been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder and other mental health conditions.

Those are the facts. But even those startling numbers don’t tell the full story of what our school nurses encounter on a daily basis. Domestic violence. Eating disorders. Hunger. Homelessness. Trauma. Sexual assault. Substance abuse. It’s a chaotic, complex, and seemingly hopeless situation. In other words, a job only a nurse can handle.

For the last seven years, I have been meeting with our school nurses and working to support the essential role they play in Boston’s public schools, and, ultimately, in the education of our children.

As part of the recently passed opiate bill, Aids and checks for lice. Today, on National School Nurses Day, it is time to retire once and for all that outdated and misleading portrayal and get real about the critical role nurses play in strengthening our schools, and, ultimately, in the education of our children.

Today, there are 110 full-time BPS nurses. All are certified by the state and must have three prior years of nursing experience. Three of them have PhDs in nursing, and another 73 have a master’s degree. All BPS nurses are involved in continuing education programs including those focused on LGBT students, mental health, nutrition, and oral health. They also lead regular trainings for BPS teachers and staff on a variety of issues including allergies and use of Epi-Pen, CPR/AED, and seizures.

In 2014-15, there were 381,673 student visits to Boston Public Schools (BPS) nurses who encountered an average of 414 students each month. There were 741 occasions when they referred a student to urgent care, or call 911. Of the 911 calls, 54 percent were for mental health emergencies. BPS nurses administer 115,466 doses of medication, of which 67 percent were psychotropic. The record shows that 10,724 students had asthma; 933 had a seizure disorder; 2,201 students had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); 1,085 students had reported being diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder; and some 1,600 students had been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder and other mental health conditions.

Those are the facts. But even those startling numbers don’t tell the full story of what our school nurses encounter on a daily basis. Domestic violence. Eating disorders. Hunger. Homelessness. Trauma. Sexual assault. Substance abuse. It’s a chaotic, complex, and seemingly hopeless situation. In other words, a job only a nurse can handle.

For the last seven years, I have been meeting with our school nurses and working to support the essential role they play in Boston’s public schools, and, ultimately, in the education of our children.

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And, yes, BPS school nurses still treat skinned knees and check for lice. It is important for everyone to understand the reality of what today’s school nurses do in the schools because nursing nostalgia continues to inform policy-making and budget decisions. We now recognize the impact that social-emotional health can have on student performance, but our recognition means little if we don’t actually ensure that all students have access to a school nurse.

There is widespread consensus among education experts that students who are present and healthy are best prepared and able to learn. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the presence of a school nurse improves student health, reduces absences and early dismissals, and allows teachers to spend more time on curriculum. There is also a documented economic benefit. A 2014 cost-benefit analysis of the Massachusetts Essential School Health Services Program revealed that every $1 invested in full-time school nursing services yields $2.20 in overall savings – in teacher education time, caregiver work productivity, reduced medical care costs, etc. – to communities.

Boston is on the right track. The Boston public schools, under the leadership of Superintendent Chang, is the first in the nation to appoint an assistant superintendent for social emotional learning and wellness. This new office is working to build student support teams at every school, and school nurses are essential members of those teams. It’s time we fund a full-time nurse (and, dare I say it, a social worker) in every school.

While I was hiding out in my school nurse’s office, I never told her I was being abused. I didn’t need to. She figured it out on her own. When I was young, I received the help I needed. Shouldn’t every child?

Ayanna Pressley is a Boston City Councilor-at-Large.

Editor’s note: this op-ed originally was published in the Dorchester Reporter on May 11, 2016.

Photos by Colum Whyte
BTU Members Have a Great Time at RED SOX Night!

Photos by Patty O’Donnell
What I’ve always told my fellow BTU members as I’ve encouraged them to be more involved is that the BTU is truly democratic. Decisions are made in an open and fair manner. What happened at the last meeting on May 11, was a disgrace.

The Executive Board put up a proposal to have delegates fly in the day before conventions and stay a day after. Those who spoke in favor mentioned the need to “caucus” nationally. Those opposed spoke of cost – $10,000 - $14,000, and the lack of accountability for the time and money as well as the better use of those funds in the charter school fight locally. The matter was put to a vote, the extended stay losing 41-50. Keep in mind that many people in the room go to these conventions. That is about a 20% spanking for that proposal. There was an immediate call for a quorum count. We had one. People begin leaving, it’s 6:00 PM and this one issue has taken about a half an hour.

Next we have a member get up and ask that we donate $500 to the Verizon IBEW union who have no income or health insurance at the moment. That suggestion passes with a voice vote. Good for Verizon workers and a good “caucus” for BTU as these Verizon workers are likely Massachusetts voters should the charter school issue make it to the ballot.

“How about a quorum count,” is screamed a proponent of the extended stay issue. We do. There is no quorum though the matter seemed to have great support in the voice vote. No money for the communication workers, no show of solidarity by BTU.

This parliamentary procedure was used in anger from someone who did not get their way on a previous vote and totally lost sight of organized labor members in need. Democracy is ugly but it needn’t be petty.

– Charles Lucas, Building Rep, Mather School

Letters to the Editor

The BTU welcomes letters to the editor from all members. The content of all letters represents the individual member’s opinion. All letters are subject to editing and to review.

Parliamentary Procedure Used to Tantrum

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BPS Students “Do The Write Thing”

About 300 BPS students, families, teachers, and other guests packed UMass Boston’s newly-minted Science Building for the 2016 “Do the Write Thing” Boston Recognition Ceremony on Saturday, May 7.

The Do the Write Thing Challenge is an essay contest for middle school youth, which is held in thirty states. Essay writers tackle youth violence as they find their voices by telling their stories. They offer solutions to put out the raging fires of youth violence and promote a culture of hope amidst the all too common culture of violence that impacts so many.

Chancellor Dr. J. Keith Motley recognized dozens of grade 6-8 students from the Timilty, Murphy, Lee, Gardner Pilot, Haley Pilot, and Up Academy for their efforts in the essay contest. Two students from each grade level were chosen as essay winners. Each received an iPad mini as well as MA House of Representatives and the City of Boston Citations.

“Do the Write Thing Challenge” judges chose two students, from the Timilty and Murphy, to be ambassadors to Washington D.C. in July. These students, accompanied by a parent and teacher, will represent Boston at the National Do the Write Thing Conference. The students’ writing will be published in the Library of Congress and they will have the opportunity to make their voices heard to leaders on the National stage.

“Congratulations to all who participated! I encourage middle school teachers to get involved in this important essay contest next year. Certainly, many have stories to tell and it’s our job to listen. Let’s do the “write” thing together and help be proactive in amplifying student voice in a positive way.

Photos by Colum Whyte

By Colum Whyte

A
Retired Teachers Chapter Spring Luncheon A Success

By Joan Devlin, BTU/RTC Secretary

Over two hundred RTC members gathered for the annual spring luncheon at the Venezia Restaurant in Dorchester. While the luncheon is a strictly social event, it is also the occasion where the BTU/RTC honors members for their service to the RTC.

This year’s honorees were Mary Gaughan and Constantia Thibault (Connie to her many friends). Mary Gaughan’s service to the RTC is the stuff of legend. She assists the social committee chairs in setting up the luncheons and operating the 50/50 raffle. When Mary isn’t selling raffle tickets, she works behind the scenes to assure a smooth operation and excellent service. She is also a member of the Rapid Response Team, always ready to be called to assist in helping the Legislative Committee.

Constantia (Connie) Thibeault can be found at the legislative committee meetings and hearings. She is an active member of the RTC Rapid Response cadre and has attended hearings and testified before the Retirement Board as well as at the City Council and state house.

The lucky recipients of the 50/50 raffle are also shown. Congratulations to Anne Aronson and Rosemary Anderson. Tom Gosnell, AFT-MA President also won money in the 50/50 raffle, but generously returned the money to the raffle.

Legislative Committee Attends Retirement Board Meeting

Larry Connolly, co-chair of the RTC legislative Committee; Marilyn Marion, RTC Chair; Janey Frank, RTC legislative Committee member; Angela Cristiani, BTU Political Director; and Joan Devlin, RTC Secretary all testified to the need to increase the COLA base and to provide a COLA for the upcoming year. No formal action was taken at the meeting, but a City official did report that the conditions necessary for a COLA increase had been met. He also testified that the City could not afford to increase the COLA base this year. The legislative committee, with the assistance of the BTU’s Political Director will continue to press the retirement board and the city to vote to provide a COLA increase and to increase the COLA base. The president of the Massachusetts Retirees also testified before the Retirement Board on the need to increase the COLA base.

The retirement board will meet on June 15 when any vote on the COLA or COLA base will take place.

RTC Chair Attends AFT Retirees Committee Meeting

Marilyn Marion is a member of the AFT Retirees’ Committee and participates in the quarterly meetings of the group. The committee discussed ways to recruit and engage members in the activities of the retirees. The BTU/RTC has active and engaged members and the relationship between the BTU and the Retired Teachers’ Chapter is very positive and supportive. The RTC Executive Board continues to discuss ways to engage more members and to make sure that those BTU members that are retiring know that they should apply for membership in the chapter.

In addition to the committee meeting, the chair attended the AFT Executive Council meeting. The meeting included a presentation by Richard Stutman and Jessica Tang on the BTU Walk In on May 4. With participation of 50 schools, Boston was identified as one of the most successful walk-in, with parental support and community support to stop the budget cuts and support public education.

The Walk Ins are part of AFT’s Reclaim the Promise initiative to garner public support for public schools by partnering with students, parents and community to demonstrate their support for strong public schools.

Keeping Up With the RTC

Summer is coming and we encourage all retirees to check the BTU website, the Retired Teacher Chapter section for the latest news. We will post the results of the retirement board votes after the meeting on June 15, 2016. In addition we will include any information in Richard Stutman’s weekly email.

RTC Luncheon Photos by Mary Glynn

A video of BTU President Richard Stutman and children from a number of schools point out the increased activism this year.
Dear Union Member,

Regarding Joseph B. Cohan and Associates, who have examined the balance sheet of the Boston Teachers Union and the related statements of activities and cash flows for the years ended August 31, 2015, and the related internal control over financial reporting.

The audit was conducted in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. When an audit includes examination of internal control relevant to the preparation of financial statements, it also involves assessing the related internal control over financial reporting, as a basis for determining the nature, timing and extent of audit procedures in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of Boston Teachers Union’s internal control. Accordingly, we express no such opinion.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The procedures selected depend on the auditor’s judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement and whether those risks are mitigated by controls, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial statements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Our audit was conducted for the purpose of forming an opinion on the financial statements of the Boston Teachers Union for the years ended August 31, 2015 and 2014.

The Union's policy is to capitalize tangible personal property with a useful life of three or more years. Property and equipment are recorded at cost. Depreciation is provided on a straight-line method over the estimated useful lives of the related assets.

The financial statements of Boston Teachers Union have been prepared in accordance with the accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. These principles require that the Union exercise prudent judgment in the application of accounting policies. Actual results could differ from those estimates. The audit procedures applied in the audit of the financial statements and the related disclosures should be read in conjunction with this report.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly in all material respects, the financial position of the Boston Teachers Union as of August 31, 2015 and 2014, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

The following is a summary of the significant accounting policies followed by Boston Teachers Union in preparing its financial statements:

The financial statements as a whole.

Information is fairly stated in all material respects in relation to...
The Michigan House of Representatives, ignoring fierce opposition from the Democratic minority, on May 5 passed a dead-of-night financial aid package for Detroit schools that had been supported by a partisan screen against Detroit teachers and school employees. The AFT and other groups are urging the governor to reject the House’s scheme and move forward with Senate-passed legislation, which is much closer to what Detroit schools’ stakeholders need to keep schools strong.

For Detroit schools “The partisan bills force through in the dead of night by Speaker Kevin Cotter and the House majority used its legislation as an opportunity to lash out at Detroit educators and staff.” The Michigan House also used the financial package as an opportunity to move away from punitive and destructive policies. The AFT fought hard to ensure that the federal Every Student Succeeds Act created opportunity for all children to learn. We will continue to fight to make sure this is front and center in any final regulations.

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We're Learning Here

A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed.D.

McKay K-8 School

The McKay K-8 School is in East Boston. Fully 90% of its 700 students are classified as Hispanic, and 65% are English Language Learners. The school works with the community to make sure each class has paraprofessionals, City Year Corps members, and/or student teachers (many from UMass Boston’s Teach Next Year program) to provide support to classroom teachers.

Fourth graders were eagerly studying various small critters – millipedes, African dwarf frogs, and fiddler crabs – working in small groups and taking notes while their teachers asked questions to deepen their observations. Fifth graders were rehearsing plays based on books they’d read and discussed, for example, Niki Thomas was directing her students in their presentation of a talk show introducing the characters of Esperanza Rising.

Paraprofessional Whitney Tibolt was teaching a second grade class about the different ways to express halves. Middle school science teacher Mary Shetterly had students classifying organisms by their role in the ecosystem, using cards taped to the black board. Students in Anthony Roman’s gym class were practicing throwing a ball with a lacrosse stick, while fourth graders were singing with Bryan Bigelow in music class.

During common planning time, teachers at the McKay meet in grade level teams to select texts and tasks they feel best meet the needs of their students. When I asked Principal Jordan Weymer about finding time for thematic teaching at the McKay, he said: “We don’t worry too much about high-stakes assessments. Our instruction and tasks are all aligned to the standards and if you plan and implement with the standards in mind, then the testing takes care of itself.”

Veteran first grade teacher Carmen Torres said that her colleagues and students are what make the McKay special. Jennifer-Jo Lee, who teaches one of the fourth grade classes, agrees. “I have grown so much as a teacher through my sixteen years here. We thrive on collaboration and pride ourselves on the high expectations we have for students and each other. Hearing my students say things like, ‘I love school!’ remind me how honored I am to tell people not only where I teach, but where I learn every day.”

Have a great summer, and please invite me to visit YOUR school next year!

Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed. D.
Amika45@comcast.net

We were observing the fiddler crabs and taking notes. We’ve learned that the males have one big claw, they move sideways, and they use their claws to eat. They are scavengers so they eat anything they can find. We are also studying millipedes and African dwarf frogs as part of our science unit on animal adaptations.

Ashley Martinez, Stephanie Aguilar, Miro Guillen, Christopher Alarcon, & David Romeros, Grade 4

(Amika Kemmler Ernst is a 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.)