President’s Report | Jessica J. Tang

A Time to Give Thanks and A Time to Take Action!

The holiday season is often a time to reflect, share gratitude and set goals for the new year ahead. Here at the BTU, we are taking time to do so as well!

Much has happened in just this calendar year, and there is much to be thankful for. A full year after the Janus Supreme Court decision, our membership continues to strengthen and grow – not just locally, but across the state and nation as well. We were able to settle a contract that took many significant steps towards creating the teaching and learning conditions that our students and staff deserve – including a nurse in every school, increased staffing in behavioral health, lower class sizes for EL students, addressing student homelessness and greater pay equity for our lowest paid members, just to name a few.

Just as we looked to other cities for inspiration and models of common good bargaining language, others, including the striking Chicago Teachers Union looked to our language and wins as well. We are part of a coordinated and growing movement across the nation to stand up for our students, our schools and public education as the wave of #RedForEd and #FundOurFuture continues to spread.

The very soon to be signed historic, once in a generation win at the State House for the Student Opportunities Act investment of $1.5 billion is setting the stage for growing public education investment fights across the country as well.

Locally, our membership meeting attendance continues to grow, as does the activism happening at our school sites and through our organizing committees. BTU members are coming together to fight for #InclusionDoneRight, holding organizing meetings at dozens of schools and showing up at the Inclusion Task Force meeting and centrally organized BTU Inclusion meetings to ramp up the campaign.

School communities are also coming together to ensure there is a proactive, not just reactive, organized voice when it comes to BuildBPS changes or neighborhood changes that impact the school, as the McCormack community has done. BTU Unafraid Educators are working hard to ensure immigrant and undocumented students feel safe in their schools. These are just a few examples of the growing activism of our members.

The message is clear: union educators in Boston and beyond will speak up, advocate, vote and fight when needed for what is right. As we look ahead, our collective action is also needed to implement and enforce our contract, to ensure that new funding is spent in ways that will help our students and get to our classrooms, and to also begin conversations and create opportunities for dialogue and education on the upcoming 2020 election year. This will continue to happen through our #BTUvotes and #AFTvotes campaigns. Educated voters are critical to a successful democracy and we must do our part.

Lastly, as shared at the last membership meeting, we will have updates on health care negotiations with the city very soon. After close to ten months of negotiations with other city employee unions, we are hopeful that an agreement will be signed soon. While educators in other districts have deductibles of over $4,000 (which Dedham educators went on strike over) and even $5,000, we are very grateful to have the best public employees’ health care in the state still. And while costs everywhere continue to go up, we are confident that we will continue to have some of the best health care options for public employees in the state, which will help to ensure that we both attract and retain our highly skilled educators.

So as we wrap up 2019, there is so much to be thankful for. Despite the challenges, the political environment and changes, our union remains not just strong, but proactive in leading the way towards better schools, better communities and a better future.

However, this is only possible when we continue to take collective action, stand up, advocate, fight, and, of course vote. There is still much work to be done and taking action will continue to be our focus in 2020 and beyond! In the meantime, we are so very grateful to all of you.
Many of you have asked me, ‘If we want to encourage young people to take the Student Opportunity Act, where will it be spent?’ My short answer to this question is, ‘Not in the places we want it, unless we also make a plan together and then fight for it.’

So here’s our plan: change the way textbooks are purchased. Instead of standard educational programs, courses, and services, and staffing that every school should have. They do the math, and the city foots the bill.

In Boston, funding is different. We use a weighted student formula, aimed to address issues of equity. Each student is assigned a base ($4,291 in FY20), and an additional amount depending on the type of student (grade, disability, ELL, high risk, etc.). These numbers are based on prior year enrollment. In any newly enrolled classroom, about 87% of the money goes to the classroom teacher's salary, and the remaining 13% is made up of special education, administration, and other support services.

This works great when a class-room and school are at 100% projected capacity, but as soon as you lose one or two students from a classroom, BOOM. All that money goes back to the central office budget. There are literally describing the system of apprenticeship. This system has already failed in one major way – making it impossible to consider apprenticeship as a viable alternative to college. To understand that college is not a one-size fits all education, there are issues however the high school motivates individuals.

I wish I more consistently knew the stories of their adult lives. I wish I were more comfortable. I wish I more consistently knew the stories of their adult lives. I wish I were more comfortable with my own of success. This idea is purported by many in the anti-education/collar camp. Nevertheless, the camps are due to a variety interna-

The Danger of a Single Story: Why I Teach

By David Russell, McKinley South End Academy

When I started teaching at McKinley South End Academy, a special Boston Public School for students with emotional and behavioral problems, back in 1988, the teacher next door, I learned later, predicted that I wouldn’t last until Christmas.

Thirteen years later, my student Henry came to me with exasperation, “Why don’t you quit, Mr. Russell? I wouldn’t put up with all the trouble we give you.”

Now I write, early in my 31st, and last, year at my school. Why did I persist? How did I thrive?

In a word, the kids.

Oh, I could go on about their shortcomings. Countless curse-outs. Reliable refusals. Daily deceptions. But I've loved my job. With mission-driven, skilled, empathetic, resilient, and good-humored colleagues, we've fought the good fight. Every morning it’s ‘game time,’ a fresh opportunity to dig deep and to see what impact we can have. My colleagues and my students have challenged me, stimulated me to grow, and made me a better person.

Where are my former students now?

We hear a lot now about the impact adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the future prospects of children. The frequency of those experiences among our students is chilling, and consequently the battles of their lives are steeply uphill.

I wish more consistently knew the stories of their adult lives. One fact: the number of my former students who have been killed is a mul-

In about a month he agreed to be in a group photo but looked straight down at the ground and check it off your list, but really use it ready to fight with us.

For better or worse, we have risen on my forearms and my eyes are slightly moistened. I will miss Eyal to me more than a Hallmark-like message. As I type these words, goosebumps are not successful?

Gotti is not alone in this sentiment, perhaps the best evidence is the steady stream of students who return to visit and reconnect. Throughout the year former charges stop by to report on their progress and to voice appreciation for the support and assistance they received at our school. It's into double figures how many how many have come by already this year.

A year ago a student from decades ago returned to visit. Living in Florida, married, a cook, and father of four, Ozzie proclaimed, “Whenever I come back to Boston, I need to come to McKinley to thank you for what you did for me.”

My favorite recent evidence is in two contrasting photos.

Late in the spring he looked into the camera with a bright smile as he held in his hands an open book that he was reading. Antwaun agreed to have a 20x30 portrait of him taken. He is a student.

In a word, the kids.

The most upsetting part of this argu-

The most upsetting part of this argu-
My School Still Doesn’t Have a Full-Time Nurse, Aren’t We Supposed To With the New Contract?

Y es, during next school year, 2020-21, we negotiated and fought for all school buildings to have a full-time nurse. The language in the new, permanent contract language [Article V, section 12 (B), paragraph (1)] reads: “There will be at least 0.07 TE [full time equivalent] nurse in every school building the district will begin to implement this in school-year 19-20 and finish in school-year 20-21. Nurses in schools with lower enrollments may be available to help with other nursing work from other schools,” provided the nurse does not require them to leave their assigned school. This addition to the contract language in a new added contract section was the result of endless discussions and months of careful, timely and fair negotiations. The district will make recommendations regarding the acuity of the Assistant Superintendent and his/her designee re: acuity. Ultimately, the school nurse will be responsible for servicing the assigned school, but cannot be limited to the list of individuals and their compensation at the contractual hourly wage in a new added contract section of $13,068 to be divided amongst those it serves on their stead as SSC members at the affected school.

Nurses of course are critical members of the school community. This team approach doesn’t prohibit voting in every case.

Looking for consensus, voting should be the last step in the decision-making process. If the vote results in a simple majority but does not reveal consensus on the issue debated, it should be viewed as a signal that the best option has not yet been developed and presented. Unless all members are willing to support a majority decision, more discussion is needed. Votes which split parents and BTU members are of particular concern and a clear indication that consensus hasn’t been achieved. In such cases, the decision should be set aside and the issue should be revisited.

The Principal may veto a majority decision of the SSC. The Principal must vote with the majority of the SSC and they may not delegate their vote. Here, the purpose of voting is to validate and to make official consensus decisions.

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; matters responsible for 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 choose to regularly attend the bylaws.

What should the SSC Take Toward Decision Making?

It is expected that the SSC will function by consensus or general agreement of its members. Members of the SSC are expected to operate as a single decision-making team. It is the task to work together to fashion effective solutions to the school’s educational challenges. SSC have parent, BTU, student, staff, and associate members to guarantee that decisions reflect the viewpoints of everyone in the school community. Reaching consensus does not mean that all members must agree with decisions unanimously. Consensus is a way of working together where some members may disagree with a final decision but, yet agree to support it. Consensus occurs when most, if not all, members agree on the matter to be decided. Consensus is necessarily in endless discussions and no decisions, particularly if the following guidelines are followed: Prioritize the importance of the issue at hand. Normally, the more important the issue, the more time members should be willing to devote to reaching consensus decision. Routine matters should be given much less valuable time and energy than fundamental issues. Provide adequate opportunities for all views to be expressed. Members with differing views should have the opportunity to make sure other members have understood their views before ending the discussion. Although others may still not be persuaded, everyone must have a chance to state their views and to have others listen. The depth of feeling about an issue must be gauged. How strongly members feel should guide how much time should be devoted to an issue.

SSC meetings are not competitive, win-or-lose events. Making decisions solely on the basis of majority votes runs the unacceptable risk of dividing the Council. School improvement is definitely a matter of teamwork, trust, and shared commitment on the part of everyone in the school community. This team approach doesn’t prohibit voting in every case.

Occasionally, periodic “straw polls” may be a good idea to identify the common ground on the way to reaching consensus decisions. Voting can save valuable time during decisions on routine matters. Under the terms of the BTU Contract, decisions must be formalized by a majority of the SSC. The Principal must vote with the majority of the SSC and they may not delegate their vote. Here, the purpose of voting is to validate and to make official consensus decisions.

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 from whatever the temperature becomes too oppressive. A heat problem and recording the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available room that is heated adequately and as well as remedy the heating problem in your classroom. Keep a record or log of all of the times you have reported 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 of 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.

Who is Responsible for Plowing School Parking Lots?

The contract states, “The School Committee shall guarantee that snow is plowed from school yards used for parking at no expense to bargaining unit [BTU] members.”

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EVERYONEISWELCOMEHERE!

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Know Your Rights Careen Carew

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BTU Secondary Field Representative

December, 2019 3
BTU Holds Fall Leadership Conference

Photos by CasSandra Samuel and Michael J. Maguire
La Cadena 2019: Uniting Teachers

By Lindsay Thornquist

On Saturday, November 2, 2019, over 70 educators united at the Rafael Hernandez School in Jamaica Plain. Teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, college professors and more came together to learn about the incredible work that is currently going on in Boston’s Dual Language Programs. This day was transformative, inspiring and led to the creation of a strong network that we will continue to build and strengthen.

History of Dual Language Education in Boston

Back in 2001, the English for the Children movement led to the closing of just about every bilingual program in Massachusetts with the exception of a few that jumped through hoops to stay in existence. Teachers lost their jobs, books and curriculum were thrown away and thousands of students lost their ability to stay engaged in their native/family language.

In 2017, with the LOOK act (Language Opportunity for Our Kids), we have overcome this barrier, and legislators have realized the benefits of having dual language programs. We know that bilingualism has a huge impact on students’ performance and, for our students classified as English Learners “ELs”, we should provide an asset-based approach to their education. Students in our programs feel empowered, in touch with their roots and proud of their heritage.

Bilingual teachers have overcome this barrier, and legislators have realized the benefits of having dual language programs. We know that bilingualism has a huge impact on students’ performance and, for our students classified as English Learners “ELs”, we should provide an asset-based approach to their education. Students in our programs feel empowered, in touch with their roots and proud of their heritage.

While their cognitive gains are surely evident, their self-esteem and social consciousness about the world around them is also something that cannot be denied to anyone seeking it.

With talk about increasing the number of dual language programs, we understand that it is more important than ever to get the word out and support one another, particularly those who are teaching in a Language Other Than English (LOTE).

How We Got Started

Through the help of a BTU organizer, Natalia Cuadra-Saez, we began this work through the Dual Language Educators Committee. With the work came together to do, we were able to identify some problems that we had in common between the different programs. We have difficulty finding relevant professional development and attaining the proper resources to create our curriculum.

Teachers were frustrated, tired of translating and spending hours finding the right resources. Through these interactions, beautiful things happened, we felt that we had a voice. We asked questions to other programs to learn about language models and we engaged in discourse that reflected our background and expertise. Educators in Boston are already doing so many things, yet we are kept in silos. What would happen if we could just all come together and collaborate?

Teacher Leadership Fund

As a result of these discussions, we knew it was time to take action and hence La Cadena was born! We created a strong application to the Teacher Leadership program where we proposed a “Dual Language Institute”. After hours of work and time waiting, we were extremely pleased to hear that our proposal was chosen and we began the process of planning. While it was a daunting task, the outcome could not have been more worth it.

As we worked, we wanted a strong symbol to show our resilience despite the political climate. We chose a rising phoenix, inspired by a picture my colleague Margot Johnson drew as we taught the novel Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan. While the attempt may have been to burn our programs down back in 2001, we are rising above the ashes, now only stronger than ever!

Boston’s Got Talent!

Finding educators to facilitate these programs has opened my eyes to how much knowledge we have tucked away waiting to be discovered. Ben Parad and Ryan set out on an adventure to find educators to share their wealth of knowledge and while digging, we uncovered some bright and shiny treasures!

Through this effort, we were able to find experienced educators to share what they have created over the years. We are proud that we began to have some cross-school collaboration with Maritza Martinez and Armando Jaime, who are teaching in a Language Other Than English (LOTE).

Engaging in Purposeful Discussion

Ever heard of EdCamp? Ben Parad and Armando Jaime have attended one and was inspired to start a participant-led breakout session series that received much praise from all who were able to attend. In these rooms, participants took on the roles of leaders.

As people left they exchanged information, made plans for the future and a fire was burning that we will make sure continues to stay bright and strong.

Boston’s Bilingual Ed. Programs

Boston Public Schools offers 6 different bilingual education programs in the city. The Rafael Hernandez K-8 in Jamaica Plain, the Sarah Greenwood in Dorchester, the Hurley in the South End and the Umana in East Boston offer K-8 bilingual education programs in Spanish. The Margarita Muñiz is Spanish bilingual high school and the Mattahant offers a bilingual Haitian-Creole program.

All of our students deserve the opportunity to engage in a bilingual education. It is important that we are spreading the word that these programs exist and to explain the benefits of them to families considering schools in BPS.

¡La lucha continua! The fight continues!

We are fighting to achieve equitable resources in our schools for all students and teachers. Every student deserves the opportunity to be bilingual and those who are learning English as a Second Language deserve the right to build on the knowledge that they have in an additive process as opposed to taking away their language and identities.

Teachers need support delivering curriculum and translating materials. We deserve recognition in the district for our unique circumstances. One size does not fit all and that is clear!
THE NEXT BTU MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE YEAR WILL BE ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11TH AT 4:30 PM AT THE BTU HALL, 180 MOUNT VERNON ST., BOSTON, MA 02125

The BTU membership meetings are open to all BTU cardholders. Meetings are on the second Wednesdays (Sept.-Jun.) and start at 4:30 pm. Child care is available by appointment.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE!

BOSTON UNION TEACHER | December, 2019
by Segun Idowu

The following is the text of the speech Segun Idowu delivered at the October 16, 2019 Boston School Committee meeting.

I really am an honor to be able to stand here next to my teachers, Ms. Wright and Ms. Fillion, and share a few words about their impact on my life.

As I thought about what I would say today, I heard a song by Dinah Washington – one of the greatest singers of her era – where she sang:

“What a difference a day makes. Twenty-four little hours, Brought the sun and the flowers, Where there used to be rain.”

What a difference a day makes. Not just for lovers, or partners, or friends. But also for the student who finds their motivation, their compass, and their foundation in a teacher.

Because what a difference a teacher makes. What a difference a teacher makes. Just one little class. Brought the knowledge and understanding, To get me off my assumptions. What a difference a teacher makes.

As my Sunday School teacher, Ms. Wright taught me that my purpose in this world was not to serve myself, but to be of service to others; that even if I could not change the whole wide world, it was my responsibility to change someone else’s.

Ms. Fillion taught me that Latin did not die, it was just sleeping. For every day, she brought new energy to that ancient language and gave it new context and new meaning.

She taught me “sum, es, est, summus, estis, sunt, eram, eras, erat, eramus, eratis, erant!”

But Ms. Wright and Ms. Fillion are more than teachers. They don’t turn on their commitment when they hit the school door and turn it off when they leave the building behind. No, they live out their devotion to making us all a little better than when they found us.

What a difference Alma Wright and Janet Fillion have made and are making. Their quiet elegance. Their lives of beauty. Their brilliant passion. Their commitment to duty. What a difference these two have made: in my life, in your lives, in the lives of untold others.

The ancients told us that... “If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. But if you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow people.”

Well, Ms. Wright, Ms. Fillion:

I know that the future of our city is bright; the direction of our Commonwealth is clear; the success of our country is ensured; and the concerns of the greater cosmos are contained because for your entire lives, you have poured into and nurtured and grown people.

We thank you. We love you. We honor you. We wish you Godspeed on your journey, and pray that this world will give back to you even a portion of the abundance you have given to us, now and forevermore.
they didn’t speak much English. Most of
my work was given in Spanish. In third
grade, I went to a middle school in a
classroom and it was a culture shock. I
couldn’t read in English, but I was really
self-motivated and able to navigate pretty
well after some time, but a lot of my friends
struggled when we got to mainstream because
there wasn’t a strong home-school con-
nection.

Why Did You Decide to Become a Teacher?
I have always loved being a learner, and
I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. But, I think a really important
reason was to help families connect the
school culture to the home culture. After
2nd grade, I didn’t have a teacher who
could fully identify with me until my
junior year of college. working in the business field. After years
of working, he went to Harvard Business School. I asked him why he went back to school after already establishing himself, he
stated, “I wanted to build on the learning I’d
gotten in my first couple of jobs out of
college. I studied History and Spanish as
an undergraduate, but went into business
after graduating. Even though I’d learned
a lot on the job, I wanted to expand my
skills by getting a bachelor’s degree in
business, finance, and accounting, in an academic setting.”

Mr. Lloyd highlights the benefits of
an academic setting, and why we should
be fighting to make it more accessible.
People should have the opportunity
to pursue passions and build skills within
an academic environment.

DANGER
There is a real danger to an entire
population of people growing up not
valuing higher education.

Gold Rush/Going Viral
During the Gold Rush, people would
set out to the frontier in the hope of
finding their fortune. Instead most would
wind up in financial ruin, death, or return home
with nothing to show for it.
However, the prevailing myths of
the few that “hit big” would still encourage
many to take great risk of moving out
west to strike it rich. Our current,
future generation is being inundated with
internet overnight success stories, people
who dropped out of college to start a multi
billion dollar business, viral sensations,
ultra successful entertainers turned
business moguls.

Our matriculating generation needs
to recognize that the chances of you
team up with Jay-Z and building a
second empire to none. But,
involving a viral sensation or starting a
multi billion dollar business in your
parents’ garage has the same amount of pitfalls
and potential for success as moving to
San Francisco and discovering a gold
mine and becoming a millionaire.

One Teacher’s Opinion on College
(continued from page 2)

What Do You Think are the Best Ways to Enhance Home-School Connections?
Little things are always the most effect-
ive. As a district or even in a school, there are events on a large scale, but regul-
lar communication makes the biggest
type. Technology makes this so much
easier than when I first started teaching.
I frequently text parents and take photos
that connect them with their child’s work.
I also use EasyBlog for student blogs
that are shared with parents. Even apps
like ClassDojo makes it really simple to
connect about kids in native languages,
and parents can comment on a student’s work in a timely manner. It also
motivates students to see their parents and even other teachers in the school
comment on their work on their blogs. I also try to catch
parents at drop off or pick up as much as possible – whatever
I can do to make the communica-
tion with families personal and
meaningful.

Why Did You Decide to Pursue National Board Certification?
I had heard about it for a long
time, and finally went to an
information session. I was
overwhelmed by the whole process, but
I had to make a decision whether to go
through with it or not. [NBCT and fel-
low Roosevelt teacher] Noah Patel also
encouraged me to consider the process,
and he spoke highly about it, so I stuck
with it because I was looking for mean-
ingful professional development. The
sometimes PDE can be hit or miss, but
National Board is focused on improving
teacher practice.

I also got a lot of support from our
school administrators. When I got
back from that information session, I
debriefed my thoughts with the prin-
cipal, and she was really encouraging. I
think it might’ve changed my decision to
pursue certification if admin or col-
leagues weren’t supportive of the process.

What Was the Process Like for You?
I had to really analyze why I did any-
thing I did in the classroom – thinking
about the purpose for an activity and
the impact that it had that I want to
learn about. I then wrote a student learning [NBCT mentor] Kelly Garafolo would
lead workshop sessions for National
Board candidates. She would have us
discuss our written work, our students’
progress, and ask why we did a particular
thing and why it was important for
results. We had to outline how to
deliberately move individual students
to make growth. I had to consider the best
instruction that I needed to implement
to move a student in a group and to a
higher level of work. I had to dissect
myself, and, at times, it was excruciating.

What Has Changed About Your Practice AfterCompleting Certification?
I think it might’ve changed my decision to
pursue certification if admin or colleagues
weren’t supportive. The process
was another step in my professional
growth. I had to consider the best
instruction that I needed to implement
to move a student in a group and to a
higher level of work. I had to dissect
myself, and, at times, it was excruciating.

Being an Organizer
My experience being an organizer has been rewarding. It has allowed me to
learn about how politics and education coincide in the career of a teacher.
My journey began during the spring of 2019 when I decided to attend the
WILD conference (Women Institute for Leadership Development), which
the BTU sponsored members to attend. The conference was such an amazing exper-
ience; I learned a lot and met so many women in leadership. I heard their stories
about their contribution to their workplace and/or place where they volunteer.

I was supported and encouraged by the discussion that was going on. I was
not the only person to be fighting to make it more accessible.

At the summer organizer institute, I learned many beginning steps to organiz-
ing such as an organizer’s essential tools, how to determine if a topic is conduc-
tive to organizing around or if it can be resolved at the school level and the hierarchy of how and when to take action when organizing around a particular problem.

Last summer I was involved in one initiatives spearheaded by the union. I
worked on the Fund Our Future Campaign where the BTU came to the membership
to ask for their support in supporting the bill. It was such a profound moment in my
growing up around a great cause. It was also a profound moment in my
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Bethany Niedbala’s 7th grade students match the beat introduced by a classmate. We are learning the history of rap and hip hop.

We were in music class, using our hands to clap out a beat; later we used bucket drums to talk with one group about how to include everyone’s ideas.

Building towers of straws that will hold a tennis ball for at least five minutes, while their teacher builds straws, multiples, factors. I’ve learned that prime numbers have only two factors, but most numbers have more than two. I’ve also learned that there are an infinite number of multiples.

Christina Gouras, Grade 6

I was taking a math test online. This year we’re learning about ratios, multiples, factors. I’ve learned that prime numbers have only two factors, but most numbers have more than two. I’ve also learned that there are an infinite number of multiples.

Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ed. D.

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.)