Every year, members of the BTU join leaders and civil rights advocates from across the city and state for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Breakfast. This year’s 50th anniversary theme was “The Struggle Continues: Moving Forward Together.” The event is an opportunity not just to celebrate the life, learnings and legacy of MLK Jr, but also to reflect on how far we have come as a society in fighting for his vision for a more just world, and far we still have to go.

Our union is proud both to be a part of the struggle and a part of the movement to move forward together. Our fight for educational justice and worker justice, through our collective bargaining, labor solidarity, and community coalition work is a critical part of this work. We are fighting not only for our workers and educators, but also to correct decades of disinvestment in our public schools, which has been rooted in racial segregation as well as systemic, institutionalized racism.

Our BTU organizing committees are also leading the way in seeing MLK Jr’s vision come to fruition. For this year’s Black History Month, BTU members are participating for the third year in the national Black Lives Matter at Schools week of action. A committee of BTU members met regularly and planned activities both for in the classroom and outside the classroom for the week of February 3-7.

The events included a kick-off event for the week at Madison Park, lesson plans and curriculum sharing after school, an action at School Committee, and culminating in an appreciation event for black educators at the end of the week. This year, over forty schools signed up and were trained to participate and share the events with their schools. The national demands include “ending zero tolerance discipline policies, mandating black history and ethnic studies, hiring more black teachers and funding more counselors not cops.”

The BTU also was one of the first public endorsers of Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley’s PUSH OUT bill, which was discussed on a panel at the Congressional Black Caucus’ historic first visit to Boston on January 11, 2020. The bill, “The Ending Punitive, Unfair, School-Based Harm that is Overt and Unresponsive to Trauma (PUSH OUT) Act,” seeks funding to incentivize restorative practices over punitive practices that harm students more than support them. As the bill introduction states:

Across the country, the education of Black and brown students is often disrupted as a result of discriminatory and punitive discipline policies that criminalize and push them out of school. For instance, Black girls are suspended, expelled, referred to law enforcement and arrested on school campuses at disproportionately higher rates than white girls due to unfair dress code and hair policies and a lack of understanding of the historical, social and economic inequities such as poverty, trauma, hunger, and violence that often impact student behavior. As a result, girls of color are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary school discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion, which can have long-term effects on the safety, wellbeing, and academic success of all students.”

Many of our members were in attendance at the packed event, including members of our Restorative Justice Organizing Committee and SEL-Well Committee.

The BTU Ethnic Studies Now! Organizing Committee has also been working hard to carry out MLK Jr’s vision of racial justice. The stated mission of the organizing committee is “to build a popular movement of people (parents, families, students, educators, community members) to advocate for the funding, staffing and professional training needed to develop, implement, and sustain ethnic studies in all BPS schools. We also serve to recruit and support educators to teach ethnic studies through providing professional development and building solidarity.”

The committee in Boston is also part of a national movement that has roots in Phoenix, Arizona and has also been adopted in districts including Oakland, Los Angeles and Rhode Island. Educators at the Boston-area Educators for Social Justice conference connected in 2018 and then later were supported by the BPS History and Social Studies department as well as by a BTU Teacher Leadership Grant to create curriculum that could be shared and disseminated by the district. Since then, the committee continues to grow and the support of ethnic studies was recently a part of our latest collective bargaining commitments through an MOU and is a part of the superintendent’s draft strategic plan.

The vision for Ethnic Studies in Boston Public Schools is reflective of not just MLK Jr’s legacy and the importance of Black History Month, but also that of an inclusive school district that honors diversity and inclusion. It reads:

“The vision for Ethnic Studies in Boston Public Schools centers the history and experiences of people of color to empower us to collaboratively read the world, while honoring and affirming our intersectional identities. Through Ethnic Studies we develop our capacity to interrogate and critique systems of power while building solidarity with others in order to realize a world without racism and other forms of oppression. Ethnic Studies harness the power of communities of color and their social movements to inspire us to act collectively toward justice and transformation.”

We at the BTU are proud that our members are leading in efforts to “act collectively toward justice and transformation.” This collective action is what we will need to transform our society this year in 2020, whether it be through organizing, door knocking, voting, phone banking, calling legislators, writing, speaking out and/or other forms of activism. As MLK Jr. said, “the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” However, the arc does not bend by itself. We will need all hands on deck to ensure that the “moral arc of the universe” does indeed “bend towards justice.”
Since the fraud-in-chief eked out a victory in the Electoral College, after losing the popular vote by nearly three million votes, we have seen children from Latin America thrown into cages, Nazis and white supremacists marching in the streets of Charlottesville, and misogynist Supreme Court appointments threatening a woman’s right to choose. No longer is sitting on the sidelines acceptable because you aren’t interested in politics.

Recently the Boston Teachers Union has jumped into the Democratic Primary and voted to support Senator Elizabeth Warren in the March 3rd, Massachusetts Primary. I was heartened to see both supporters of Elizabeth Warren and Senator Bernie Sanders come up to the microphone in the union hall and both speak passionately about their candidate AND speak in positive terms about the alternative. At the end of the day no matter who wins the Democratic Primary we must come together as people who care about the future of this country and fight like hell to make sure the crook who sits in the White House now is removed post haste.

Not convinced yet? There’s more. As he - who - will - not - be - named tweeted about a migrant invasion a Pittsburgh man picked up a gun and killed eleven people in the Tree of Life synagogue because they were part of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Over one weekend last August, nine people were killed in Dayton, Ohio and twenty-two were gunned down in El Paso, Texas. In Texas the gunman targeted Latinos and has been connected to an anti-immigrant manifesto. The liar in the Oval Office sends his thoughts and prayers while gun legislation stays on the desk of Mitch McConnell.

According to the Washington Post, 83% of the impeached President’s tax cut went to his crooks in the 1%. Meanwhile food stamps are cut and the infrastructure of this country continues to deteriorate.

Just last month, the guy with bone spurs opted to assassinate an Iranian general prompting the pentagon to deploy thousands of young men and women to the Middle East putting them in harm’s way. It’s nice to be rich and send other people’s kids off to war.

Wildfires engulf California and Australia as the planet heats up. Every reputable scientific study blames climate change brought on by human activity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we may have just twenty years. According to these scientists, “The extreme droughts, devastating wildfires, massive floods, deadly hurricanes, and widespread famines that we’re seeing more and more of these days will cease to be statistical anomalies and instead be more like seasonal markers, as regular as the changing of the leaves.”

Climate change denial is the order of the day at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue as the Environmental Protection Agency has been given a proposed budget cut of 31%, the oil lobby gets whatever it wants, and the USA has pulled out of the Paris Agreement. The future of the planet is in peril.

So which side are you on? Apathy is not an option. When the Democrats pick a candidate it may not be the one you want. Next time, work harder for the one you do want. But when it comes to defeating the guy who gets up at rally after rally insulting women, emboldening white supremacists, denigrating the free press, and spouting lie after lie the choice is clear. Organize a house party. Call your friends, family and neighbors, especially in other states. Get out the vote. Our future depends on it.

The Boston Teachers Union awards three scholarships to deserving high school seniors who are children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces or grandnephews of BTU members. One of these scholarships is earmarked for a student who chooses to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution. Applications for these scholarships can be picked up at the BTU website. The deadline to apply is April 1, 2020. Envelope must be postmarked by this date.

Retirement Seminar
with
Michael W. McLaughlin
BTU ELEMENTARY FIELD REPRESENTATIVE and Trustee, State-Boston Retirement along with staff from the State Boston Retirement System, and Group Health
Thursday, March 26, 2020
4:30 PM • BTU Hall
Retirement Planning Seminar
NAME: ___________________________
SCHOOL/DEPT: ___________________
HOME TEL: ______________________

Register Online: click this link and fill out the online registration form!
T
he contract states, “No later than Feb-
uary 1st,” programming preference
sheets shall be distributed to all teachers.
For High and Middle School teachers it
reads, “Programming preference will be
honored to the extent consistent with the
provisions of this Agreement [contract].” All
preference sheets shall be returned by March 1.” This means that a ‘pre-
ference’ is just that, it does not mean that the
teacher is guaranteed their choice
as submitted. The contract also details,
“On or before February 1, a list of all non-
teaching assignments for which admin-
istrative personnel are given in a teacher’s
program will be posted in each school.
These assignments may be applied for in
the teacher’s program preference sheet as
herein [within the contract] provided. An
applicant for such a non-teaching assign-
ment who does not receive the assign-
ment shall, upon his/her request, be given
the reasons for not having been selected by
the Principal or Headmaster.”

How Do I Interpret the
BSU Seniority List?

The seniority list for BPS employees in
the teachers bargaining unit includes
only those teacher bargaining unit mem-
bers who have obtained (PTS) Profes-
sional Teaching Status or as BPS refers
to it; permanent status. Provisions or
those in acting positions are not includ-
ed, and those have not obtained senior-
ity in this district. It is very important
to annually review the seniority list to make
sure your information is up to date, to
see what status your licensure is in, what
your (PTA) Primary Program Area is
listed as, whether (your) APTA Alternate
Program Area is listed, and to monitor your seniority order by PPA
in your school/district. The list is usu-
ally updated mid-January of each school
year, just prior to the starting season and
on-line on the BPS website.

The teachers’ seniority list is agra-
ged in three separate ways. Each of
these lists contains the same information
that is grouped in a way that accesses the
information differently. One way is by alphabetical order; each of these con-
tains all permanent teachers in the dis-
tric listed by alphabetical order irrespec-
tive of their PPA or school/department. The
other way is by (PPA) Primary Program
Area: this list reflects all of the teachers aggregated by the PPA they are
currently listed by by seniority. This
second list is especially helpful for teach-
ers in lower incidence areas such as Art
as they can see how many other teachers in
their district are in the same area and
where they fall in seniority order in case
of layoff, etc. The final way teachers
are listed is by School, the district which calls
Dept. This is the most useful seniority list to usually reference as it captures
the teachers discreetly at schools by their
Dept. This is the list that information
there where they are located in seniority order
by the program they are teaching within
the school/department they are assigned.
When referencing these seniority lists, it is always important to remember that
provisional teachers who are teaching at
their schools/departments are not listed,
but are legally considered the least senior
in seniority order; there is no other list in
which they are contained as there are for
teachers.

There are also a group of seniority
lists for the smaller in number groups
contained within the teacher bargaining
unit including but not limited to nurses,
SLP, OT, PT, COSSES, etc. These smaller
groups are grouped in a way that accesses
the list of the areas/subjects a teacher is
listed as for purposes of excessing, layoff
etc. The final way teachers are
listed vertically above the top line on
the page of the seniority report. Start
at the far-left side of this area of the
form. Look at the top row of labels
distributed vertically above the line on
the page of the seniority report. Start
at the far-left side of this area of the
form. Look at the top row of labels
and you should notice which teacher
name is first name as it officially
appears in the BPS records. Very impor-
tant info on a regular basis and
keeping track of the stage, level, and expiration
date you should commit to memory
is the heading "Stage" which designates
the grade span this license the teacher has
covers. To the right of that on the form, is
the heading "Expiration Date" (expiration date).
This is the date that a Professional level
license must be renewed or it will expire
thus rendering the teacher "provisional"
unemployable in a Mass. public school
district. The responsibility for keeping track of the stage, level, and expiration
date of licenses falls to the individual
holder of said licenses: the
teacher. It is not up to anyone else, the
district or DESE to remind the teacher
of these dates. "Stage" refers to the level of the licen-
sure (Preliminary, Initial, Professional).
It is a mechanism for breaking the tie if
most senior teacher determined? There
are also a group of seniority lists for the
smaller in number groups
contained within the teacher bargaining
unit including but not limited to nurses
S

Who's Who: John McNicholas

The next BTU Membership Meeting of the
year will be on Wednesday, February 12
at 4:30 pm at the BTU Hall, 180 Mount Vernon St., Boston, MA 02125

The Boston Union Teacher is published eleven times a year September - July, inclusive.

Caren Carew
BTU Secondary Field Representative
Price of the Ticket, Collected Non-Fiction

(Excerpts from “A Talk to Teachers,” 2020)

Since I am talking to schoolteachers and everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced, not by Khrushchev, but from within. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people – be prepared to “go for broke.” Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won’t happen.

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managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to think about one aspect of anybody's history, you must lie about it all. If you have to lie about my real role here, if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad.

Now let's go back a minute. I talked earlier about those silent people - the porter and the maid - who, as I said, don't look up at the sky if you ask them if it is true that they talked to their faces. My ancestors and I were very well trained. We understood very early that this was not a Christian nation. It didn't matter what you said or how often you went to church. My father and my mother and my grandfather and my grandmother knew that Christians didn't act this way. It was a simple as that. And if it was so there was no point in dealing with white people in terms of their own moral professions, for they were not going to honor them. What one did was to turn away, smiling all the time, and tell white people what they wanted to hear. But people always accuse you of reckless talk when you say this.

All this means that there are in this country tremendous reservoirs of bitterness which have never been able to find an outlet, but may find an outlet soon. It means that well-meaning white liberals place themselves in great danger which have never been able to tell white people what they wanted to hear. But people always accuse you of reckless talk when you say this.

The Bible says somewhere that where there is no vision the people perish. I don't think anyone can doubt that in this country today we are menaced - intolerably menaced - by a lack of vision. It is inconceivable that a sovereign people should continue, as we do so abjectly, to say, "I can't do anything about it. It's the government." The government is the creation of the people. It is responsible to the people. And the people are responsible for it. No American has the right to allow the present government to say, when Negro children are being bombed and hosed and shot and beaten all over the Deep South, that there is nothing we can do about it. There must have been a day in this country's life when the bombing of the children in Sunday School would have created a public uproar and endangered the life of a Governor Wallace. It happened here and there was no public uproar.

I began by saying that one of the paradoxes of education was that it does not exist. The political level in this country now, on the part of people who should know better, is abysmal. The Bible says somewhere that where there is no vision the people perish.

What passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors. It's astounding to me, for example, that so many people really appear to believe that the country was founded by a band of heroes who wanted to be free. That happens not to be true. What happened was that some people left Europe because they couldn't stand there any longer and had to go somewhere else to make it. That's all. They were hungry, they were poor, they were convicts. Those who were making it in England, for example, did not get on the Mayflower. That's how the country was settled. Not by Gary Cooper. Yet we have a whole race of people, a whole republic, who believe the myths to the point where even today they select political representa-tives, and fanatics, as I can tell, by who closely they resemble Gary Cooper. Now this is dangerously infantile, and it shows in every level of national life. When I was living in Europe, for example, one of the worst revelations to me was the way Americans walked around Europe buying things saying that they knew everybody – not even out of malice, just because they didn't know any better. Well, that is the way they have always treated me. They weren't cruel, they just didn't know you were alive. They didn't know you had any feelings.

What I am trying to suggest here is that in the doing of all this for 100 years or more, it is the American white man who has long since lost his grip on reality. In some peculiar way, having created this myth about Negroes, and the myth about his own history, he created myths about the world so that, for example, he was astounded that some people could prefer Castro, astounded that there are people in the world who don't go into hiding when they hear the word "Communism," astounded that Communism is one of the realities of the twentieth century which we will not overcome by pretending that it does not exist. The political level in this country now, on the part of people who should know better, is abysmal.

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Overview

The BTU recently received two arbitration decisions related to class size grievances filed from 2007 to 2018. The first decision is mixed for BTU members, but provides a solid basis for the second decision and positions teachers and students well for ensuring that our contract is honored going forward; students get the small classes they deserve and teachers receive the correct compensation in the future for class size violations that remain unresolved.

Decision 1: 2007-2015

The first case covered 2007-2015 and Arbitrator Richard O'Brien. In that case, the union argued that many teachers who filed class size grievances never had their class size reduced and did not receive the proper compensation via two 1992 arbitration awards (Golick and Dorr) for the violation of their contract. BPS argued that teachers who filed grievances during these years were properly compensated, and that they had reached resolution with many members by paying the teachers “stipends” to stay with oversized classes. In this case, the arbitrator rejected BPS’s arguments on their merits and found that the contract was violated, but only insofar as the district withheld information about pay- ments that had previously been made in class size claims.

In terms of compensation for mem- bers who had filed class size grievances, Arbitrator O’Brien ruled that the union waived its right to claims for compensa- tion beyond the $278,000 that the BTU advocated for successfully in 2015, and which BPS paid. Therefore, no teachers will receive additional compensation for class size claims from 2007-2015. While we are disappointed in the arbitra- tor’s ruling on this important issue, and believe it is erroneous, there were other positive aspects of the decision that are critical to remedying future class size violations.

First and foremost, Arbitrator O’Brien ruled that there was no past practice of the union accepting “stipends” to resolve class size grievances. Instead, he reaffirmed that the Golick and Dorr arbitration awards provide the proper formula for compensating teachers whose classes are over sized. To provide some illustra- tion of this, the district has been paying elementary teachers whose classes are over the contractual limit $1500 per student per year. The correct formula depends on the teacher’s actual salary and the class size limit, but is generally over $4500 per student per year for experi- enced teachers whose class exceeds the limit of 22 or 25 students. In the case of secondary teachers and elementary spe- cialists, the difference is even more pro- ductive. For instance, the district has been paying a high school teacher whose third period class is over the limit of 31 students a paltry $300 per year, but the correct formula would actually pay that teacher over $9,000 for the same average!

We believe that in order to best advo- cate for the class sizes that our students need to have their individual needs met and thrive in school, the district must be held to account for their over-assign- ment of students. If the district can stuff more students in a class by paying a minor sum, historically, the district has shown that they will do this in hundreds of cases each year. Insist- ing on payment under the Dorr/Golick arbi- tration award formulas is the only way we can ensure that our contract is enforced and our kids’ education is protected. The O’Brien award helps make this possible.

Decision 2: 2015-2018

The above-described portion of Arbitrator O’Brien’s decision paved the way for Arbitrator Irving’s interim decision in the second case, which cov- ers school years 2015-2018. In this case, the arbitrator ruled in the union’s favor and directed the school department to compensate all teachers who filed class size grievances payment according to the Dorr/Golick formulas, with interest. He retained jurisdiction over the case to make certain he can supervise the implementation of his remedy, and we will be working diligently to be sure that teachers who filed valid class size griev- ances over this three year period receive every penny of the compensation they are owed.

Furthermore, Arbitrator Irving declared that the “Class Size Grievance Resolution Formulas” that the district has been using are invalid, and can no longer be used and reaffirmed the right of teach- ers to insist their class size be reduced. So if you have filed a class size grievance and your principal ambushed you to sign one of these forms, please ask for a copy, decline to sign, and let BTU Vice President Erik Berg know immediately.

Legal Update: Two Recent Arbitration Decisions on Class Size

Erik R. Berg
BTU Executive Vice President

these opportunities are a set of collabora- tive practices that tie families, educators & community partners together: inclu- sive leadership, shared ownership for results, community partners, improved coordination & data-driven planning. Capacity building supports put their trust in their families, and supports continu- ous improvement. This community hub schools framework (aspires to) lead to the support of the traditional college, career, and civic-ready students; strengthening vibrant and healthy communities.

Do Itinerants Get a Place to Secure Files in Schools They Service?

There is an item in the contract that addresses this issue. It is found under, Article VII, Section A, 18 and states; “The teacher shall have the right to provide a lockable file cabinet in each school and location serviced by itinerants (e.g., school psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists) for secure storage of student records.” Please let the BTU know if this is not occurring.

How Do Teachers Obtain Access to their Personal File?

In order to view your personnel file, go to the BPS Office of Human Capital on the fourth floor of the Bolling Building within a reasonable amount of time during regular business hours (900 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) for OHC to retrieve it and for you to then look at its contents. A photo ID to verify your identity in order to have access to your file must be presented. If you would like to contact the OHC Depart- ment you may call them directly at 617-635-9660. A teacher has a right to access their file once a year. You also have access to your ‘teacher files’ at the individual school level, if your principal/ headmaster keeps them there as well. The same parameters detailed below apply to your official files at OHC and to the ones at your school if kept.

The BTU labor/management contract states, “No material derogatory to a teach- er’s conduct, service, character, or person- ality shall be placed in the files unless the teacher has had an opportunity to read the material. The teacher shall acknowledge that he or she has read such material by affixing his/her signature on the actual copy to be filed, with the understanding that such signature merely signifies that he or she has read the material to be filed. Such signature does not necessarily indicate agreement with its content.” The con- tract continues, “The teacher shall have the right to answer any material filed and her or his answer shall be reviewed by the Personnel Manager and attached to the file copy. Upon receipt of the answer the teacher shall be furnished a reprodu- ction of any material in his file” If you are denied access, find a copy of this clause and have it certified that you were unaware of which has been described above, and the like, you have a right to a file a grievance to remedy the situation.

What is the Policy on Scheduling Individual Parent/Teacher Conferences?

According to the contract, “Individual parent/teacher conferences shall be held at the school at a time that is mutually agreed upon by the parent and the teacher. If a parent is unable to come to a conference at the school, the teacher/ parent conference regarding the children school performance shall be conducted by telephone. All BPS elementary homeroom teachers will arrange for individual par- ent/teacher conferences in the fall. Follow- up individual conferences with all parents in the spring shall be encouraged; however, teachers shall schedule a second individual conference with any parent whose child is not meeting his/her progress toward the next grade.”

Who Are the People Coming Into My Classroom?

Our contract language states that, “All visitors to a classroom shall knock on the door and, if invited to do so, will be introduced themselves.” This is significant in that it means you, as the teacher, in the classroom have the right and duty to request the person entering your class to identify who they are and what orga- nization they represent. If they are an administrator in the BPS, are an elected official, or a member of the Department of Education, we must let them enter. If they are students who are not being provided the individual attention that they should get, but we hope that these are things that will force the district to be more careful and thoughtful when they assign too many students to classrooms.
Bringing Joy to the Job!

This Valentine’s Day I’d like to share how I found joy in my job. Now, I’ve always loved teaching, and I still do. The students are amazing. Young people see the world differently and they show me things that I’ve either missed or forgotten. I also work with terrific people and I consider myself blessed to work in the same school I attended as a student.

All of these things are important and would be reasons enough for me to dedicate years to our noble profession. But they are not the reason I have joy. A dear departed friend of mine taught me how to enjoy my job and how to actually bring joy into the classroom. I remember him every day.

His name is Edward “Ned” Seddon. People who knew him best called him “the Big Guy.” If you didn’t know Ned well you’d think the “Big Guy” was in reference to his large frame. While appropriate in its own right, those of us who knew him realized that his big heart and unending capacity to find the good in people is why we used the appellation. In school year 2002-2003 I taught in the seventh grade cluster along with Ned. I’d been teaching at BLA since 1994 when I started out as a substitute teacher. Ned had been a Teamster (and one is always still a Teamster) and then got his teaching license. He taught at Westie; not West Roxbury High School, and certainly not the West Roxbury Educational Complex. Ned taught at “Westie” before BLA. He was that kind of guy.

Back in those days I thought I was a wild man for wearing a Mickey Mouse tie with my dress shirt. Casual Friday might mean denim jeans and a polo. Things changed when I spent Fridays with Ned. Even before we worked together in the seventh grade cluster, Ned and I had classrooms kitty corner from one another. We’d monitor the halls together and we got to chatting. In no time I counted Ned as a true friend.

Fridays with Ned were a fashion eye-opener. The Big Guy wore even bigger baseball jerseys. For as much as he loved his Red Sox, Ned loved “The Game” even more. He wore jerseys from the likes of the Yankees and Brooklyn Dodgers. He wore the names and numbers of players who did more than hold statistical records, he wore his jerseys so that he could introduce his students to the historical impact some players and teams had on American history. His Jackie Robinson jersey was the shirt that launched a week long discussion of “what it all means” both then and now. His Negro League jerseys became legendary.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then flatter Ned I did. I started gathering my fair share of Red Sox jerseys (after all ’03 and ’04 were epic times for the Ol’ Town Team). I started branching out into Disney jerseys. Ned would wear a Mickey Mantle jersey and I’d wear a Mickey Mouse sports jersey. He’d laugh at me in a good natured way and I’d make fun of the Yankees. But in the end he knew I was authentic to my vision of happiness as much as he was to his.

Years later we again found ourselves kitty cornered from each other in another part of the building. By now my Disney wardrobe had increased to include hockey and football teams from the Disney universe. I also picked up soccer jerseys from the European cities I had visited. We started to outdo each other on Fridays. We each looked forward to seeing what the other would wear. The students got into it too. Sometimes giving us praise, other times grief, and occasionally joining in with jerseys of their own.

Fridays were fun because we were ourselves. Fridays were important because we each encouraged the other to be authentic.

Ned passed away a few years ago. He is still with me each Friday when I wear a jersey. Over the years I started to also wear BLA team t-shirts and hoodies. The students are happy when they see me representing their team or club. I am happy that they are engaged in their school and in our class.

Admittedly it’s a simple joy. But aren’t those the best kind?
Charles Sumner Elementary School

Located just off Roslindale Square, the Charles Sumner Elementary School serves 550 students in grades K-5. Every inch of the two story building is utilized, and hallway walls are covered with student work. At the entrance is a large “Meet the Sumner Team” bulletin board with names and group photos of each grade level team and support staff – a handy guide for visitors!

In Irischa Valentin’s third grade class, students take a few minutes at the beginning of each school day to meditate, lying on their backs with eyes closed, while a classmate gently strikes a singing bowl. They tell me it helps them “forget bad thoughts” and feel calm throughout the day.

K1 students in Linda Sabina’s class are doing a variety of letter-matching activities, while Renee Joseph’s K1 students are building with blocks, role-playing in a kitchen center, using a stamp pad to print letters, putting puzzles together, playing learning games on iPads, and making shapes with plasticine.

Madalyn Buck reads a story to her first graders, and Pamela Brodie’s second graders work in pairs to create “glued” words with Fundations tiles by adding initial consonants to common 3-letter combinations. Tracy Freeman leads a discussion of Dog Man: Lord of the Fleas with a half dozen SEI third graders, while 5th grade teacher Reba Reynolds kneads on the rug to help students find and record details about a character in the book they’re reading. Many children work with computers and fourth graders are learning to code. In Jeff Holland’s 5th grade inclusion class, students work in pairs to build 3-dimensional paper walls to match their blueprints. Fifth graders have also written letters to Superintendent Cassellius, which are displayed outside their classroom.

Theresa Lee teaches science in a tiny basement room crammed full of materials to support students’ explorations. K1 children take turns observing and drawing crabs while their classmates try to re-create crab-shapes with interlocking blocks. Across the hall, PE teacher Ruben Carrizosa divides his K2 class into two teams; their classmates cheer as a member from each team tries to be first to get the ball into a basket set between them. One boy tells me he’s learned to “take aim, squat down, then jump up and shoot!”

Second grade teacher Jeff Cipriani tells me that he appreciates the wisdom of the many veteran teachers in the building, and Judith Reid, a K1 teacher, says using ClassDojo for communication with families has been a big boost to parent engagement. What makes YOUR school a good place to work?

We're Learning Here!

We were meditating to help relax us before getting to work. We listen to a bell, close our eyes, breathe deeply, and smell the calming spray. Meditation makes us happy, helps us forget bad thoughts, and keeps us from being stressed. We are learning how to be a community. We’ve learned that we can sit with and support friends who are feeling sad.

In this picture Ms. Reynolds is helping us organize and record our notes about a character named Elsa, taking details out of the story and putting them on a poster. We’re reading Esperanza Rising and learning about the life and challenges of a girl who immigrated from Mexico to Canada. We’ve learned the importance of laws to protect human rights.

June Jones, Justin Garcia-Nunez, & Yasmeen Gulien, Grade 3

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June Jones, Justin Garcia-Nunez, & Yasmeen Gulien, Grade 3

I was looking at the crab in science class with a seeing thing that makes it bigger, so I could draw it better. I learned that crabs have tiny brains, eyes that stick up from their heads, and sharp claws instead of feet. The boy crab has a BIG claw!

Enzo Ventura, K1

We were working on our phonics boards. Ms. Brodie is helping us make words by adding different letters to “glue” sounds that blend together, like “ost” and “ing.” This helps us with our reading and writing because you can sound out words. We are also learning how to make a good argument.

Siddhi Dash, Princess Estilet, & Nander Lee, Grade 2

We were listening to Ms. Buck read the story Maybe Something Beautiful. We read books and are learning lots of things in first grade. We’ve learned that verbs are things you can do, run and laugh. In math we’re doing geometry and learning about shapes like triangles and quadrilaterals, that have four sides. We’ve also learned that the vertex is a corner where two sides meet.

Ms. Buck’s first grade students

Mr. Vargas was helping me do coding. I’m learning how to code to make my own game and I’m working with characters from the video game Fortnite. I’ve learned how to take a picture from Google and put it into Scratch, the coding program we use.

Jay Jay Pagan, Grade 4

I was trying to get the ball into the bucket in gym with Mr. C. I was earning points for the blue team, and Jeronimo was earning points for the red team. We are learning to aim by holding the ball with two hands, squatting down, and then jumping up to shoot for the basket.

Avery Viglianti, K2

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