As we all say goodbye to 2020 — a year for the history books — we gladly welcome in 2021! It is a new year that will undoubtedly also have its own challenges, but with a new administration in DC with new opportunities to begin the healing process and undo the harms of 2020 and the prior four years. There is much hope that the worst of the pandemic may be over and that there is a better way forward.

The hope comes in the form of vaccines for health care workers and, soon, educators and school-based staff as well. But also in the hope that comes with a new federal administration, Secretary of Education, and Secretary of Labor.

The policies and laws that might be enacted, and the relief that hopefully is on the horizon, depends much on the outcomes of the Georgia Senate races. That is why our members, and union members across the nation have been engaged in supporting the Democratic Senate candidates in Georgia who support public education, support labor and support the values we believe in. 2020 has made abundantly clear that the elected political leaders of our government make not just decisions that impact schools and education, but health, housing, and a myriad of other issues.

The impact of political policy can be felt from the federal level down to each household. The COVID-19 relief bills decided whether or not school districts had funding to adequately upgrade antiquated and obsolete facilities. It also decided for how long educators could continue to count on the Family First Coronavirus Act to take leaves for child care or health reasons. That bill expired December 31, 2020. The relief bills were the difference between a family getting evicted or being able to pay rent; to have to choose work, and risk their health and life, or pay for food and housing.

The damage of the last four years is far from over. Unfriendly immigration policies as well as the pandemic has led to a decrease in enrollment of Boston Public Schools. This will affect budgets and could lead to potential layoffs or reductions in force. The lack of funding to get rapid testing for educators and students as well as adequate ventilation in schools delayed the district’s ability to bring students back in person. There is a dire need for compensatory services for our special needs students and a lack of guidance and regulations to decrease community spread of the virus while also helping suffering businesses are actually all connected.

While it is often uncomfortable for many of our BTU educators to get involved in politics, (we didn’t pursue careers in education in order to get involved in politics) the politics absolutely determine what we do every day. Do we have the resources to do our jobs every day? Will the stress from teaching in underfunded schools affect our health? That is why the political action work we get involved in is absolutely necessary. That is why we ask for COPE contributions, we endorse candidates, and then organize and mobilize to get them elected.

Public education is political. There is simply no way to avoid the conversation.

We get involved to put our words to action and truly use our collective union power to advocate for what educators and retirees need to be healthy and secure. And because it’s not just about us, we get involved for our students, families and all the community to be healthy, secure and cared for as well. The belief that working people deserve security, stability, equity, and the ability to meet their basic needs is what the labor movement was founded on and that is what we fight for and will continue to fight for. That includes the political fight because the decisions our political leaders make determines our reality every day.

As we welcome in 2021, we have the opportunity, with new leaders and a new administration to hopefully get a new deal—not just across the nation, but locally, too. We must fight nationally so that locally, we have what we need and deserve for our students, educators and families. Our fight in BPS for Safety, Equity and Transparency as schools continue to reopen and we address the disparities that have always existed, is the same fight that our brothers, sister and sibling locals all across the nation are fighting for. And always, when we fight together, we are stronger and better and will continue to advocate and stand in solidarity not just with our sister locals in Massachusetts, but beyond as well.

This year, there will be challenges. The hard work still lies ahead. And there will, as always, be forces that try to divide us — within our union, within our schools, within our communities — and we must be prepared to resist those divisions and not turn on each other, but turn to each other to remember our common goals, values and humanity as we tackle the work ahead and work through the hard conversations and dialogue.

While there will always be challenges and fights, in this new year there is also hope that we can continue to push the ‘arc of justice’ as Martin Luther King Jr. described, in the right direction. If we truly believe in the values of social, racial and economic justice that the labor movement and public education movement has embraced, not only can we continue to bend that arc, we must. And we will do so together.

Happy New Year and welcome 2021! We are ready for you.

“The Purpose of Education” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As I engage in the so-called “bull sessions” around and about the school, I too often find that most college men have a misconception of the purpose of education. Most of the “brethren” think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with noble ends rather than means to an end.

It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.

Morehouse College Student Paper, The Maroon Tiger, in 1947

A student is a person who is expected to study, to acquire knowledge and skill, to become an educated person and qualify for a certain type of work. A teacher is a person who is expected to teach, to teach knowledge and skill. A schoolchild is a person who is expected to learn, to acquire knowledge and skill. An educator is a person who is expected to educate, to teach knowledge and skill. An education is a process of learning that takes place in a school.

Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult. We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half truths, prejudices and propaganda. At this point, I often wonder whether or not education is fulfilling its purpose. A great majority of the so-called educated people do not think logically and scientifically. Even the press, the classroom, the platform and the pulpit in many instances do not give us objective and unbiased truths. To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.

The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with the best reasoning powers.

The late Eugene Talmadge, in my opinion, possessed one of the better criminal minds of Georgia, or even America.

Jessica J. Tang
BTU President
The sickness and death are not the only disparities laid bare by this global pandemic. As teachers we have been well aware of the underfunding of public education. The lack of investment in school infrastructure has made it impossible for teachers and students safe from this highly infectious disease. In NYC alone 72 employees have lost their lives to COVID. The list of educators who won’t last across the country grows every day.

As cases rose in Massachusetts, what did Governor Charlie Baker do? Rather than close schools he changed the metrics by which communities are ranked high risk. Was this due to pressure from the business community? In this country workers can be replaced like so many widgets. They would rather risk the lives of teachers, students, and families than to lose the profit when employees need to stay home with their children.

This system does not take the needs of people into account. Profit is first and last. In the beginning of the pandemic the frontline workers in America’s hospitals could not get enough personal protective equipment. The system was not prepared. Hospitals, like every industry, have been set up to maximize profits. Why have too much on hand? Have just enough so the bottom line is not affected this quarter. As a result it took months to mobilize industry to produce more, contributing to the deaths of doctors, nurses, and hospital staff charged with keeping the rest of us healthy.

Not just medical workers, all essential workers are at risk of contracting coronavirus. And if you are a person of color you are more likely to be in one of these face to face occupations. Many of these are low wage occupations. When you live paycheck to paycheck you are more likely to get to work when you are sick, potentially putting co-workers at risk as well. High wage workers and professionals, on the other hand, are more likely than not to be in a job that can be done remotely.

Wage inequality also means lower health inequalities. Obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases are much higher in low income communities. These comorbidities have contributed to the increased rates of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID we are seeing in black and brown communities.

During the Gilded Age of American capitalism in the late 1880’s we saw comparable inequality. This led to it on workers.

After the event initial shutdown of the country the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed in late March staving off a collapse of the system. Since that time it has been ignore, ignore, and ignore from Mitch McConnell and the Republicans. It was like pulling teeth to get a second

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalizations, and Deaths, by Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic or Alaska Native, American Indian, or Native Hawaiian persons</th>
<th>Black or African American, Non-Hispanic persons</th>
<th>Hispanic of any race, Non-Hispanic persons</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native, White, or Non-Hispanic persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases¹</td>
<td>1.8x</td>
<td>2.6x</td>
<td>2.8x</td>
<td>4.0x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalization²</td>
<td>0.6x</td>
<td>1.1x</td>
<td>2.8x</td>
<td>1.2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death³</td>
<td>1.4x</td>
<td>3.7x</td>
<td>4.1x</td>
<td>1.7x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A grievance is a statement which says that a teacher’s rights have been violated due to a misrepresentation or noncompliance with the contract. A grievance must be filed every time an individual teacher’s rights are violated, not only for the individual, but for the membership as a whole. This is because a grievance can set a dangerous precedent not only for the individual, but for the membership as a whole. The contract itself as a document is only as good as the enforcement of it at the school level by each teacher. If grievance aspects of the contract are overlooked, it can set a dangerous precedent not only for the individual, but for the membership as a whole.

If aspects of the labor-management agreement, better known as the BTU contract, are misinterpreted or not as expected and implemented, then a grievance can and should be filed. The contract details, “An employee or his or her Union rep may either orally or in writing present a complaint to the Principal, Headmaster, or Director within a reasonable time, normally thirty (30) school days after knowledge by the employee of the facts or the facts have risen to the act or condition which is the basis of his or her grievance.” It is best to put the grievance in writing so that there is adequate documentation that the violation was delivered to the administrator in a timely basis and to curtail any misunderstanding of the intent of the exchange. There is a time limit on how long after the violation has occurred for a BTU member to file grievances — it must be done within 30 school days.

BTU Building Reps and/or your respective Field Representatives can assist you in framing the letter. The letter should be dated, addressed to the specific Administrator who has the ability to fix or remedy the situation, and should state that it is a Step 1 grievance because of the following contractual violation. At this time in the letter, you would detail the violation(s) and site the Article(s) and portion(s) of the contract or BPS policy that has been violated. The grievance letter should also state the basis of the grievance or what it would take to fix the situation, making the grievance whole. The letter should be signed by the grievant.

Step 1 grievance letter should be delivered with your BTU Rep present to assure that the first step is taken. If the Step 1 grievance letter is denied or not responded to within 5 days, the grievant must get a copy of the Step 1 grievance to their respective BTU Field Representative so that we are able to refer it to mediation through the BTU Vice President. If the grievance is unresolved at Step 1, a mediator shall be assigned to assist the parties in an attempt to resolve the complaint. If the dispute is not resolved following the mediation, the grievance may be appealed to the next Step, Step 2. Once the Step 2 grievance goes to Step 1, the BTU Vice President handles the process of mediation, Steps 2, 3 and finally if necessary, arbitration.

When do programming preference sheets come out?
The contract states, “No later than February 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 1st.’ This means that a ‘preference’ is based on merit and is not meant to be a right. Teachers are guaranteed their choice of programming.

The contract also details, “On or before February 1st, a list of all non-teaching assignments for which administrative periods are given in a teacher’s program shall 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 assignment who does not receive the assignment shall, upon his/her request, be given the reasons for not having been selected by the Principal or Headmaster.”

What is considered ‘corporal punishment’ in BPS?
Referencing Superintendent’s Circular GL-20, ‘Corporal Punishment,’ ‘Corporal punishment includes but is not limited to the following:’

• Slapping or hitting students
• Pulling students by their arms, shoulders, etc.
• Pushing students from one location to another
• Forcibly causing students to sit down
• Grabbing students by any body part
• Staff may restrain students only in order to protect students, others or themselves from an assault and may only use such force as is reasonably necessary to repel such an attack. Violation of the policy and law will result in disciplinary measures and may result in the filing of an assault and/or criminal charges.”

The circular states, “… the use of corporal punishment is strictly forbidden by BPS Committee policy as well as by Massachusetts State Law G.L.c. 76, §13a et seq.”

This information may seem self-explanatory, but we should all be mindful of the moments in the hallway when a challenging student isn’t moving in the direction so told, isn’t sitting down after repeated requests to do so, is behaving in a manner that is confrontational or overly playful, will not extricate themselves from a potentially volatile situation, etc. It is in these moments that our intellectual filters can slip and exasperation or desperation can rear its ugly head resulting in a corporal punishment. As a result in some cases, it can result in ruining one’s career. Even if there have been no repercussions for previously putting one’s hands on a student, it is just a matter of time that there will be. In doubt, do not touch at all. If the act can’t be construed into corporal punishment, it can only be interpreted as sexual harassment. Don’t laugh — there have been many BTU staff who has found themselves in the hot-seat discipline wise over what they honestly viewed as an inconsequential or innocent act. Re-reading the list is a good exercise in prevention.

If I move, get a new phone or email address and update it on the HUB does BPS automatically notify the BTU?
No. You must contact the BTU directly to update changes. Obtain your phone number, email addresses. The BTU does not have access to the updates you file with the BPS.

What is the ‘contractual hourly rate’ for teachers?
The current contractual hourly rate for teachers is currently $71.74. During the standard school day, individual teachers are paid at their own rate (pro rata) based on the amount of years teaching, (step levels) and the amount of educational degrees obtained and graduate credit earned (salary lanes) applied for, and on file at BPS Office of Human Capital.

What happens when there is no heat in my Class?
The contract is clear on this issue. ‘A classroom will be closed when the temperature falls below 60°F, or whenever the temperature or climate becomes too oppressive.’ Report and record the actual temperature in writing to the Principal, keeping a copy yourself. The Principal must assign your class to an available space that is heated adequately as well as remedy the heating problem in your classroom. Keep a record or log of all of the days without heat and the temperature in the room at that time. The Principal should immediately report this in order to have the heat restored.

Teachers should file a Step 1 grievance with the School Principal as well.

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

What is the new benefit for maternity/paternity leave for second and third year Provisional Teachers and Paraprofessionals?
Eligible BTU members (teachers and paras in their second and third years of employment) can take the first ten days of their maternity leave with pay and without using any sick time. The next ten days are at 75%, so it would use 2.5 days of sick time to make up the difference. The next ten days are at 50%, so the second and third year provisional teacher or paraprofessional would use an additional five sick days. So, at the end of the first six weeks of maternity leave, the member will have used 7.5 sick days rather than 30 sick days, which was previously the case.

What is the process for filing a grievance?
Teachers Take to Twitter Demanding #SafetyFirstBPS

Follow the BTU on Twitter @BTU66

David Weinstein (@DavidWe52822710) BTU Pilot School

Sarah Cook (@_sarahcook) McCormack Middle School

Nicole Mullen (@mullen_n) Boston Arts Academy

Erik Berg @ebergteacher

BTU Members at the Curley School walk in for Safety, Equity and Transparency before starting their day. #SafetyFirstBPS

Are BPS and the City of Boston S.E.T. to Safely Reopen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAFETY</th>
<th>EQUITY</th>
<th>TRANSPARENCY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Adequate PPE for all staff and students</td>
<td>• Decisions around reopening made based on neighborhood rates and with all voices included, not only those with the most privilege</td>
<td>• Adequate notice to staff and families around school reopenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commitment to minimize staff in buildings</td>
<td>• Cancel the rents and impose an eviction moratorium</td>
<td>• Adequate time to plan for any transition to in-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commitment to stop phasing in new schools while rates rise</td>
<td>• Provide easily accessible, high-quality, free internet for all</td>
<td>• Transparency around contact tracing and quarantining learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weekly testing for all staff</td>
<td>• Improve language access for multilingual families</td>
<td>• Transparency around decision-making for school reopening and metrics used to determine reopening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adequate air filtration (at or better than the standards in the most recent MOA)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Here’s my classroom ventilation, courtesy of a box fan awkwardly placed near the tilt-in window. I haven’t been given any masks yet, but I heard they arrived at my school today and I will get one. Also pictured: the new $900 camera we didn’t ask for. #SafetyFirstBPS

#SafetyFirstBPS Safe schools mean proper ventilation in ALL buildings! Our schools’ ventilation is not adequate now and they definitely won’t be in the winter! Worcester spent $15 mil to upgrade their systems, but the kids of Boston get half measures and cheap shortcuts.
Commentary
Michael J. Maguire
Lingua Latina Omnibus
January, 2021

The original version of this story ran in The Boston Herald on October 17, 2015.

Whenever I read the "latest study" on "how far behind" students are during this pandemic, I think of just how outdated our educational system is. I love the Facebook and Instagram posts which counter with "Our students aren't falling behind, they are surviving a pandemic." Such posts always remind me that grade-level benchmarks are a) relative, and b) were established pre-COVID. I don't mean to belittle benchmarks; they are important so that we know how education is progressing. The benchmarks, however, did not come down to us from Mt. Olympus. They are an agreed upon set of standards. Let's agree to reset them.

Let's add Latin to all our schools. Now hear me out. I am not an elitist. Offering Latin in all our schools — if all students could help close the so-called achievement gap, could ease the tensions around exam schools, and would help us better understand the world.

Roughly two-thirds of the words in the English Language are of Latin or Greek origin. These words either came into English after William the Conqueror of French descent. HeNormandy invaded England in 1066, or the words were fabricated during the Renaissance to express the advances being made in art, science, and technology. The result is Latin gives the English speaking student a broader vocabulary.

After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into space, American high schools dropped Latin in favor of expanding math and science offerings. In fact, the language exam scores showed a sharp and immediate drop and remedial English classes in colleges increased. Latin benefits students more than just SAT verbal scores. Latin's noun and verb forms encourage higher order thinking and help foster deductive reasoning. These skills are necessary for excellence in the fields of math and science. Far from being the language of the elite, Latin was spoken by commoners during Roman times. Once a few basic rules are mastered, the language and poetry is easy to follow. Why should the BPS deny a subject sought by so many? Clearly, hundreds, if not thousands, of families seek this educational opportunity; it is foolishly shortighted of the city to ration such enthusiasm.

In most of our high schools the Latin and Haitian populations are quite high. Students who already speak one of the Romance languages would excel at Latin, and thus would improve their English skills simultaneously. Again, I am not an elitist; but wouldn't it be terrific if Boston graduated thousands of students each year who have mastered Latin?

Just a few months ago the Boston School Committee removed the "test" as an entrance requirement for the exam schools. I understand that the issues surrounding the exam schools are much more serious than the Latin language, but there is no reason to limit Latin to two schools.

Aside from the language, the history and culture of Rome remains with us today. Our nation's Founders drew their inspiration for a new nation from the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Whereas today's pundits might lament educational gridlock, the Founders would be astounded in the knowledge that their Constitution has thus far thwarted a new Caesar from rising to power.

As sensational as Donald Trump's tweets and legal maneuverings are, they are insignificant compared to the machinations of the Julio-Claudians. From immigration and assimilation to economics and infrastructure, Rome offers the United States many positive and negative examples of how to govern. Over 200 years ago, William Tudor called Boston the Athens of America. Today we can live up to that moniker by offering all our students the gift of Latin and perhaps even Ancient Greek.

(Michael J. Maguire teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy.)

News from the American Federation of Teachers

AFT on Nomination of Dr. Miguel Cardona as Education Secretary

The American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and AFT Connecticut President Jon Hochadel issued the following statement after President-elect Joe Biden nominated Miguel A. Cardona to be the next U.S. secretary of education:

AFT’s Weingarten said: “Miguel Cardona is not just a proud product of public schools — he’s made strengthening public education and fighting for equity his life’s work. With his experience as a student, fourth-grade teacher, principal, assistant superintendent and commissioner in Connecticut, Dr. Cardona — a former AFT member — will transform the Education Department to help students thrive, a reversal to Trump’s dark vision of the Department of Education: an agency that disrespects for educators.

This is a victory for teachers. Under the DeVos disaster of the last four years, the Education Department was a key part of the war on public education — attacking teachers, undermining Title IX, and pushing regressive test scores over real education. This is a stark reversal of the DeVos disaster of the last four years.

Cardona is a teacher who understands that challenge is exciting for anyone who cares about the future of our schools and students. He will transform the Education Department to help students thrive, a reversal to Trump’s dark vision of the Department of Education: an agency that disrespects teachers.

We are proud of our history of supporting leaders like Dr. Cardona who want to transform our schools. We need the resources and put the public health safeguards in place, we can open schools safely in the second semester — and his first 100 days. This is what visionary, steady and effective leadership during a pandemic looks like. Between this, a vaccine and a reopening of school buildings safely — and, in turn, to help get people back to work safely as well. As we wait for the Biden-Harris administration to take charge of recovery efforts and continue our work to secure more funding for our cities, states and communities, Congress should pass this critical relief to ease the suffering of Americans.”

Title I and $14.1 billion for special education, so educators can help address the social and emotional well-being and academic needs of their students.

Responds to Congressional Agreement on the Latest Round of COVID-19 Relief

AFT President Randi Weingarten responds to the agreement to fund $1.9 trillion in relief as part of the coronavirus recovery package.

“While this deal is both too late and not perfect, it is a necessary lifeline that we support. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and others’ refusal to help address the needs of states and localities, which have been Americas frontline since COVID-19 erupted, is a bitter pill.

Since the pandemic took hold in early March, 8 million more people in the United States have been plunged into poverty. Demand at food banks is up 60 percent. Millions of Americans remain unemployed, and as healthcare workers face unprecedented COVID-19 cases, educators work around the clock to meet the needs of their students, all while facing diminished state budgets, chaotic safety protocols and increased concerns about vaccine and testing availability.

And with the life-saving benefits provided by the CARES Act set to expire, it’s not a moment too soon. If passed, this emergency aid would invest much-needed resources into our public schools for testing, cleaning, PPE, ventilation upgrades and other safety guardrails, as well as baseline budget appropriations of $16.5 billion for Title I and $14.1 billion for special education, so educators can help address the social and emotional well-being and academic needs of their students.

These resources are vital to reopening school buildings safely—and, in turn, to help get people back to work safely as well. As we wait for the Biden-Harris administration to take charge of recovery efforts and continue our work to secure more funding for our cities, states and communities, Congress should pass this critical relief to ease the suffering of Americans.”

AFT on Joe Biden’s Plan to Reopen Schools in First 100 Days

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten issued the following statement after President-elect Joe Biden announced his plan to reopen the majority of U.S. schools in the first 100 days of his term with the supports in place to protect students, educators and staff.

The AFT released its "Blueprint to Safely Reopen Schools" last week.

"Hallelujah! Unlike Trump, President-elect Biden understands that if we secure the resources and put the public health safeguards in place, we can open schools safely in the second semester — and his first 100 days. This is what visionary, steady and effective leadership during a pandemic looks like. Between this, a vaccine and a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director who is ready to give national guidance free of political interference, we see a path forward for safe school buildings reopening."
I want to tell you about the disconnect between our governing bodies, the community, and the Teachers Union about the reopening of school. We are all reading the same data and reading the same studies, but how are we so far apart on the issue.

The cause of the disconnect is how we interact with BPS communities, first.

SEE. We as teachers come to serve and build up. While others come to win and be built up by communities. We empower communities, while others are powered by communities. They clean your homes, basically raise your children, get your coffee and do the tasks that help you maintain your status.

We suffer with communities while others knew them enough to suffer with them.

We give to communities while others take from communities. (Like their land to build sports fields and condos)

We stand with communities while others knocked, sorry, stand on their necks.

For decades teachers have been the bandage behind fancy studies or titles. The issues can no longer be hidden behind fancy studies or titles. The majority of our students come to our school hungry and hurting. For decades teachers have been the band-aid stretched very thin over deep cuts. COVID-19 ripped that bandaid off and now society can no longer ignore the racial bleeding of communities of color in Boston.

What was lost

Now that teachers don’t provide internet, family counseling, hugs, food, child care, and emotional support for Boston’s neediest families the city has lost their greatest crust/vell.

However, this great loss could be an opportunity for a unified group of work- ers to unite under the banner of change and true equality. United with an Anti- racist mindset we could make changes that could improve the lives of Boston families for generations to come.

Get out of the way

Access to the internet affects all poor children, but disproportionately affects children of color, food scarcity affects all poor children, but disproportionately affects children of color. If you want to argue with numbers and facts, in grace and in truth, I am not interested in hear- ing your excuses so please step out of the way and let us work.

Possibility is a sin

Whoever is slack in his work is a broth- er to him who destroys. — Proverbs 18:9

This is a call to action to all union members who: love their students, who know in their hearts the way Boston families are being treated is wrong, who are sick and tired of being sick and tired, who give their all to only be consistently disrespected by the city. For the mem- bers who watch as the families they serve, simply deserve a decent school, but are consistently given less. Who watch budgets at the same schools get smaller, who watch and are consistently given less.

The disconnect is our view of the communities we want to send back to school.

Some of us have a parallel view of the communities in Boston. We see the sick, hurt, scared, old, forgotten, hungry, those lacking in hugs, those who are unsafe in their own homes, or who are homeless. Schools are the only place these students will be back in person – not even under a hybrid plan – until all possible health and safety precautions have been addressed. Purchasing and distributing PPE based on individual school need.

a. Applying all science-based guidelines and OSHA requirements for safely reopening of schools
b. Repairing building and HVAC systems if necessary
c. Establishing baseline protocols for maintenance and cleaning
d. Establishing protocols for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases, including isolation rooms, testing and contact tracing

The things we are asking should be easily agreed upon since it will save lives, minimize risk and connect teachers back to the communities that we love and care for.

In summary, the problem is one group is connected to the families and students while another is disconnected.

That’s all I got.

(Joel Richards teaches at the Blackstone School.)

COVID-19 Forces the Union to Be Unified and Stay Strong

By Joel Richards, Blackstone School

I 2020 and COVID-19 has shown our union anything, it’s that we need to be united and stay unified.

The loss of deniability

COVID-19 has exposed the systemic issues that plague the communities we serve. The issues can no longer be hidden behind fancy studies or titles. The majority of our students come to our school hungry and hurting. For decades teachers have been the band-aid stretched very thin over deep cuts. COVID-19 ripped that band-aid off and now society can no longer ignore the racial bleeding of communities of color in Boston.

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Possibility is a sin

Whoever is slack in his work is a broth- er to him who destroys. — Proverbs 18:9

This is a call to action to all union members who: love their students, who know in their hearts the way Boston families are being treated is wrong, who are sick and tired of being sick and tired, who give their all to only be consistently disrespected by the city. For the mem- bers who watch as the families they serve, simply deserve a decent school, but are consistently given less. Who watch budgets at the same schools get smaller, which while another is disconnected.

That’s all I got.

(Joel Richards teaches at the Blackstone School.)

BTU Election Information

Interested in running for office? N ominations will open after the January membership meeting for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary Treasurer, Political Director, Field Representative, Executive Board, Paraprofessional Council, and Delegate to All Affiliated Bodies. The committee will host a New Candidate Orientation Event via Zoom at 5 p.m. on January 19, 2021. Former BTU President Richard Stutman will moderate. A detailed candidate guide will be available soon. This timeline gives an overview of the important dates and deadlines for potential candidates.

Election Committee News

The Election Committee meets via Zoom at 5 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month. BTU and RTC members are welcome to attend, and can obtain the link by emailing Denice Dwyer at ddwyer@btu.org. Fifteen minutes is set aside at the beginning of each meeting for member questions and comments. Unlike past years (and due to the pandemic), candidates will primarily collect their nomination signatures electronically this year. The BTU tech team has been working on a secure system that will allow BTU and RTC members to nominate (‘sign for’ candidates) by logging into the BTU member portal. A nomination petition will still be available for those who prefer it. The nomination/signature collection process will run from January 13 to March 10. Details of the new procedures will be available shortly.

Grassroots Campaign Virtual Training Event: Saturday, January 30, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Join Mass Alliance, AFT Mass and BTU for a training event to introduce future campaign leaders, activists, and candidates to the theory and practice behind successful grassroots campaigns. Sessions will include field organizing, message development, working with the press, and other time-tested tactics for winning campaigns. Contact Roberto Jimenez Rivera at jiminezr@btu.org or Johnny McInnis at jmcinnis@btu.org.

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Remember when we were growing up and every book had a dead dog in it? (No More Dead Dogs by Gordon Korman.) What we need right now is some silly book suggestions to shake off the apocalyptic. I love funny books that just about being silly and maybe not so much about teaching a lesson. There are the books that kids want to hear every day over and over. One of the picture books that I love is Go, Dog, Go! by Sandra Boynton although I read this to a second grader the other day and he gave it a mixed review. For younger graders, check out the Dory Fantasmagory series by Abby Hanlon. I think the first one is the funniest and the most true to the imaginative world of little kids, but there are some laugh out loud funny parts in both Dory and the Real True Friend and Dory Dory Black Sheep. This is one of my favorite scenes from Dory Fantasmagory where characters grapple with the same tough topics the reader is facing. (adapted from Parents Magazine, J Rodriguez 2018)

Spotlight on the books by Debbie Reed Fischer is a hilarious chapter book about Abby, a seventh grader who has ADHD. What I really liked about this book was that the theme of the book isn't overly overtly, as much as it shows how ADHD can be different for different people. The main character is charismatic and funny as she gets into trouble and works her way out of it.

Felicia Humphries, Excel High School librarian recommends: I'm Judging You by Luvvie Ajayi Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar, author of The Wayside School series. While that series might be a hit with younger independent readers, or as a hit with older readers, as it's a great way to help kids connect and fall in love with books. The laughter can come from funny books

Hysteria 2021 / Try Laughing!

Not only are funny books enjoyable to read, this article from Parents Magazine lists four ways that funny books can engage students. Funny books can:

1. Hook kids in love with reading: This can often be lightened with a little humor. The laughter can come from funny books

2. Motivate kids to Read: Reluctant and struggling readers, in particular, need to find books that hook them in and keep their interest. ...The potty humor in Captain Underpants by Dav Pilkey has the potential to entice a child to want to read the whole series.

3. Enhances Comprehension: We tend to remember information that is associated with a certain emotion or sensory triggers. We remember these parts of the stories because they make us laugh.

4. Helps Kids Deal With Difficult Situations: A challenging situation can often be lightened with a little humor. The laughter can come from funny books

Here are some funny book faves from our wonderful BPS librarians (and a few teachers!)

Morgan Van Clef, librarian/ Media Specialist at the PA Shaw Elementary says: The Big Bed by Bunmi Laditan always has my younger students laughing. It's about a little girl who doesn't want to sleep in her own bed at night and hilariously pleads her case to her dad. For my older students that prefer an early chapter book, the Elphick Jokes series by Sally Warner always have them giggling at the main character's Jenkins Jokes. Both books feature Black protagonists.

Heidi Boulegue, School Librarian, Jonah Quincy Elementary School says: The Digital titles my students always laugh listening/reading: Marsupilai Sue Presente. The Runaway Pancake on Tumblebooks by John Lithgow

Kerry O’Rourke, grade 2 teacher from the Edison K-8 said: My kids are reading The Mad Scientist Next Door on Epic! There are good comics in Epic and the Mercy Pig books are funny.

Billie MacDonald, library para from the BPS School’s personal favorites include: Walter the Farting Dog by Kotsiwinkle, Murray, Colman (Warning: This book may cause flatulence!) Baa-Baa Smart Sheep by Mark Sommerset and Rowan Sommerset: Books That Drive Kids CRAZY! Did you take the B from My...ook? by Beck Stanton and Matt Stanton

We Don’t Eat Our Classmates by Ryan T. Higgens

We all agreed that: The Book With No Picture by BJ Novak definitely is hilarious as a read aloud for kids.

Call for Submissions!

Would you like to see your work published in the BTU paper? We are accepting submissions from all BTU members including those who are retired. Please send your images and poems will be at http://www.bostonpublicschools.org. If you have a topic you’d like to explore, please email us.

Did you take the B from my...ook?

More funny stuff from Dory Fantasmagory Dory Dory Black Sheep:

As I leave the room, I hear his small muffled voice from the hamper. “Excuse me Captain Puff! It’s sort of uncomfortable because I’m sitting on some wet hiking clothes that fell in the tole.”

When my mom picks me up, she asks me a million questions in the car. “Where was Rosalie’s brother? She thought it was a little brother? And I don’t understand how nobody knows where your clothes are? Why did you put that costume- that’s clearly way too small for you- on the first place? It’s a size 3, Rascal! That means it’s for three-year-olds. How on earth did you get it over your head? I feel terrible that we had to take your costume. We’re going to have to cut it off! With scissors. At least we left them the cape. Rascal, why do we do these things?” “A hero does good for good.” I say in my Captain Puff voice. “Not for glory.”