President’s Report  Jessica J. Tang  

**Cozy Up to Our Contract This Winter**

As falling temperatures, snowfalls and windy days continue to cause unwelcome impacts on our schools and classrooms, there is no better time to “Cozy Up to Our Contract,” this year’s Winter Conference theme. Amidst the many challenges of pandemic teaching and learning, it is hard to continue the momentum of our contract campaign—there have been many emergent, urgent and ever-changing challenges that the longer-term campaigns are easy to forget about.

These urgent concerns, particularly during this pandemic, include cold classrooms on freezing days when windows are still supposed to be cracked open for air ventilations. Many students have lost loved ones and primary caretakers, increasing the need for stable relationships and support from mental and behavioral health providers. Many students are also dysregulated, needing extra attention from their educators who often are also managing their own stresses and anxieties throughout this pandemic. However, it is through our contract campaign that we can address many of the conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic: Green, updated facilities with HVAC, sustainable caseloads and workloads, more social psychologists and mental health providers. The pandemic has also underscored the need for family friendly policies such as a parental leave policy on part with other city workers.

---

**Annual MLK, Jr. Breakfast Honors Black Women**

This year the 52nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast was held virtually. The keynote speaker was Dr. Annette Gordon-Reed, a Pulitzer Prize winner and history professor at Harvard University. The theme of this year’s breakfast was “From Resistance to Representation: Black Women Proving the Dream.” In her speech, one sentence above all others resonated with me. “School was the site of resistance.” Dr. Gordon-Reed explained how “teaching was part of the movement.” Professor Gordon-Reed explained how the day to day battles for equal justice occurred in the schools and in the homes. Without those supports, the more popularized events of the 1960s would not have been possible. “When my parents sent me to integrate the school system,” Gordon-Reed said, “it was an act of defiance.” The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were designed to bring black Americans into citizenship. Lawyers in the 1920s challenged the ensuing Jim Crow laws. A generation later Dr. King and others took to the streets when the legal challenges failed. Dr. Gordon-Reed encourages all of us to keep the movement going. Certainty times now seem like one set back after another (the US Senate filibuster and the stalled Voting Rights Bill), but this reentrancement is not impossible to overcome. “The cuddly King is not the man who changed the elite.” Professor Gordon-Reed emphasized that black humanity has been a central question since the founding of our nation. “Even though it is bleak now, it is not harder today than it was for our ancestors,” she said.
The greatest disservice we do to children is to pretend that the past two years had no ill effects upon their mental health. Whole days had been spent teaching brains and years of experience to draw upon, whereas children – especially teenagers – are still developing both their brains and their understanding of the world around them. While students are back in their schools, the ramifications of prolonged remote learning and the psychological effects of fear of a deadly virus are only just unfolding.

To teach this year as if it were any other year is pandemic year is to ignore the development (or lack thereof) of our students. Imagine if you hadn’t walked on your ankle for a year. Let’s say it was injury, but not that serious. Do you think you’d be able to run the day the doctor took the cast off? Of course not. You’d need physical therapy first. Then, after careful and steady escalation, you’d be walking and then running.

Our society does much better with physical illness than it does with mental illness. Maybe the difference is that we can see the broken limb far easier than we can see the damage to the brain or with emotions. Maybe, despite all our affirmations of self-care, as a society we aren’t able to handle the brain. In simplistic terms, the students are still in a flight or fight mode. Their cognitive development depends upon our helping them to heal from the trauma before we press on.

So, what should we do? Roman Emperor Augustus taught us festina lente or make haste slowly. We advance our students’ learning but with an understanding that their formal education was in fact severely interrupted. My current 9th graders last had a full year of formal schooling in the 6th grade. They missed out on crucial social development, so I allow them time each day to get to know their classmates.

Boston Latin Academy is a 7-12 grade school. Of course the 7th graders are new to our building, but so too are the 8th graders for they were taught at home last year. All schools must welcome all their “new” students with equal joy and orientation. To do anything less is to compound their year’s experiences.

Students, regardless of age, need more experiential learning and less time sitting in chairs. They need more field trips, more recess, more time to make friends. Maria Montessori famously said “Play is the work of the child.” So let’s allow them the time and means to work hard at play.

Most importantly the students need to feel heard. Nearly all the days we’ve finished what I had planned because a spontaneous discussion breaks out in the classroom. Teachers need and students deserve the freedom to explore their world. We can certainly cover the material another day. Having administrators systematically devise grading guides does not alleviate the anxiety the students feel, it only makes it worse.

Action steps: I suggest having honest heart-to-heart conversations with program directors and principals. Tell them that the pre-COVID pacing guides are hopelessly out of date. Tell them your stories and observations. Invite them to be partners with you in redesigning curricula and expectations.

Call, not Tweet or email, your elected officials. Share with them your stories and observations. When speaking with our state representative and senator, ask for their assistance in ending the MCAS for several years. When you get the standard line “well, the MCAS will help us to diagnose the students’ learning loss…” please tell them that:

a) the MCAS takes weeks to administer and that that time would be better spent on the students’ wellbeing, and
b) the money spend on MCAS could be put to better use (like N-95 masks), and c) the MCAS will tell you that urban and rural kids are faring worse off during the pandemic than the suburban kids are, and d) it just sends the wrong message: that test scores are more important than the social-emotional well being of the students.

If you still push back, tell them you are a union member who votes. Just tell them what you think is needed to improve public education. Then call them back a couple of weeks later to ask them what they’ve done. Frankly the lobbyists are doing this same thing every single day. So why can’t we?

All of this is exhausting. The powers that be hope we will tire of the constant, relentless obstacles placed in front of us and that we will give up. We all become weary and withdraw for a bit.

Please know that when you do re-engage you are not alone. You are loved and supported by your union brothers and sisters. We all know how hard the fight is and we all appreciate your efforts.

( Michael J. Maguire is co-editor of the Boston Union Teacher and teaches Latin at Boston Latin Academy.)

12 Ways to Stay Positive... from Stephanie Castro

By Anne Slater and Stephanie Castro

I caught up with Stephanie Castro, Instructor Coach at the Irving Middle School and Ray of Sunshine to all, about her contagious positivity and how to get some.

Stephanie:

When I was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer in March of last year, I realized that if the Lord wanted me to share my journey with others, I felt like it would be the best way for me to cope with what was to come. Sharing my journey on social media has been a way for me to engage with others who share going through the same experience to let them know that there is hope and there is a way to keep your joy through the obstacles. You can read about my journey by following the link to the writing a book that I am going to write: This Joy I Have: Discovering Joy on the Mountaintop and in the Valley.

The purpose of this book is to share how we can discover joy during the good times and bad times, and to ultimately know that joy is not something that the world can give, but something that comes from within. There are things in life that can make us happy, however, joy is not manufactured and can also fade. Once those things are gone, happiness goes right along with them. Being happy is a temporary state of mind, but joy when within is permanent when you card and lift that concern up in a silent prayer. I was at a point in my life where I was doing so many things that I wasn’t fulfilling anything that I was engaged in, mom, teacher, wife, selling Mary Kay. One of the cards was “Understand and Know God’s purpose for your life. I thought to myself, what is my purpose? What is the common thread in everything that I do? The answer is that I give joy in everything I do and positive energy, I bring it to everything that I engage in. This was when I started speaking to my spirit and confirming my purpose. Bring joy to my people!!!

I am so glad that I don’t look like what I’m going through or what I’ve been through and that has a lot to do with my frame of mind. My natural state is joy and positive energy. I am an energy giver, but I need energy to thrive. I can’t thrive in a negative environment. It’s not uncommon for me to speak up when I’m in a negative space. If we spend a lot of time harping on what is terrible or what is wrong, we can’t see the possibilities. Focus on what thing.

12 Tips for Staying Positive from Stephanie

1. Faith: I believe that things will always get better for you and someone else is going through worse.

2. Get great people with a, “Hey! How are you doing?”

3. Have a Mindset of Everybody is Important!

4. Focus on what you have, not on what you don’t have.

5. Keep a grateful journal. Write one thing every day you are grateful for.

6. Get dressed, put on some makeup (from Mary Kay of course!) and put on a nice outfit

7. Some things you take to heart, but let other things roll off like water off a duck’s back.

8. Find that thing that brings you joy: a mani/pedi, a massage, spending time with your family, taking a drive to the water. Be intentional about doing that thing.

9. Positive affirmations are your number one tool.

10. Remember what it feels like to be in a place of joy. After things are going away, access that memory of when things were going great! All in all… Focus on the positive!

11. Fill them (negative people/thoughts) with kindness.

12. Be present and listen. People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

(Stephanie Castro is a 7th grade teacher at Boston Latin Academy.)

Michael J. Maguire
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

Annie Slater
Boston Union Teacher
Co-Editor

continued on page 11
**Know Your Rights**

**Caren Carew**

What is Considered “Corporal Punishment” in the BPS?

R eferring to Superintendent’s Circular LGL-20, “Corporal Punishment.”

**Corporal punishment includes but is not limited to**

- Slapping or hitting students
- Pulling students by their arms, should- ers, or hair
- Pushing students from one location to another
- Forcibly causing students to sit down
- Grabbing students by the hair

Staff may restrain students only in order to protect students, other persons or themselves from an assault and may only use such force as is reasonably necessary to repel such an assault. Violation of the policy and law will result in disciplinary action which may only be taken by the district wise over what they honestly believe to be necessary to prevent corporal punishment, it could be
that a student, it is just a matter of time that has occurred.

- Desperation can rear its ugly head result-
- "...the use of corporal punish-
- Templefall below the
- accelerable heat level, each building has an
- an alternate plan in case of emergency. If
- the State judicial system is not able to
- the BTU members at the affected school should file a Step 1 grievance at the school in addition. If
- methodology is required to remove all
- allowable, each building has acceptable
- regulated by BTU national bylaws, to
- than the Principal and one other voting
- SSC's are required to open
- SSC's must have Co-Chairs com-
- primary session.
- SSC for corrections as a group if needed,
- SSC's to work, there must be inclu-
- SSC's must keep minutes of each meeting
- including date, time, location, members
- must accept all of these without this
- SSC's to attend a vocational school or equivalent institution.
- The application and the four supporting documents must be typewritten and include the author’s name and

**BTU DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIPS**

This year there will be 16 scholarships in the amount of $2,000 awarded to high school seniors who are

Each year, the Retired Teachers Chapter of the Boston Teachers Union awards three scholarships in the amount of $2,000 to deserving high school seniors who

- The application and the four supporting documents
- The application and the four supporting documents

**RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIPS**

Each year, the Retired Teachers Chapter of the Boston Teachers Union awards three scholarships in the amount of $2,000 to deserving high school seniors who

- Applications for these scholarships can be downloaded from the BTU website at btu.org and return with: 1) a transcript of

**EDITORIAL NOTE:**

The opinions expressed in the Boston Union Teacher do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or of any of its members.

**WHEN WRITING:**

Please check the Boston Union Teacher to ensure your name is appropriate and exclusive to

**DEADLINE:**

The deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of the Boston Union Teacher is

**BOSTON UNION TEACHER**

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

**President**

JESSICA YANG

**Vice President**

ERIK K. BERG

**Secretary-Treasurer**

MICHAEL J. MAGUIRE

**Editors**

MAJOLINE RIVIERE

Caren Carew

LEA SERENA

Chief Content Officer

ANNE SLATER

Co-Editors

Michele L. Maguire

**Boston**

BOSTON UNION TEACHER | January-February, 2022 | 3

180 Mount Vernon Street

Boston, MA 02125

617-288-2000 Fax 617-288-0024

www.btu.org

© 2022 Boston Teachers Union

All Rights Reserved

AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

Boston T eachers Union,

AFT Local 66, AFL-CIO

BIENVENIDOS

¡TODOSSON

AQUÍ!

**BTU Phone Numbers**

Office.............617-288-2000

Health & Welfare.............617-288-0500

AFT Massachusetts.......617-423-5342

Function Office.............617-288-3232

Lunch Office.............617-288-6888

Vision Center.............617-288-5410

Tremont Credit Union.......781-843-5626
Being/Becoming a Critical Consumer of Your Curriculum
A few thoughts on what it means to become a critical consumer of your Curriculum, how to go about it, and the benefits.

By Dr. Nadine O’Garr

I write this opinion piece from a place of personal experience with this very topic: becoming a critical consumer of Curriculum. Let’s start at the beginning. In my first SEVERAL years of teaching I was skeptical about everything; the curriculum, its editors, the grade level content standards and my students abilities. I did not at all believe that anyone KNEW my students better than I did. In my first SEVERAL years of teaching I did not know how to align my grade level content and I rarely assigned work from the curriculum, because it looked way too hard for MY students.

My “lesson plans” during that time, if you could call them that, were a hodge-podge of worksheets and activities that I photographed from several different workbooks (teacher.pay.teachers and internet searching for material wasn’t yet a part of the discussion). Fortunately, what we did use, we make a classroom workshop 2-3 pages, never enough for students to finish. Whatever students did not finish in class became homework. Rinse and Repeat. Usually, Friday was quiz day (all skill and procedural based) that would take the whole class period to finish. At the end of the year, I used to tell my students that they were more engaged (some even smiling) than I had ever control and that was uncomfortable. Thinking back now, these mini-project and group assignments were performances (lots of color and glitter) but not a very good demonstration of what students learned or understood.

An observer visiting my classroom would see a mostly orderly and organized classroom with zero energy and zero drama. But the truth is I was always passing from “teaching” to lecture my students about their behavior, their lack of motivation, and how important education is — blah blah blah. In this seemingly orderly classroom my students and I were not on the best of terms and I had no idea how to help improve teaching and learning. It was during this very painful time that I learned teaching was about more than just students. Teaching was about the materials that I was teaching in front of my students were grade levels below and I had not at all worked through common core shifts. I was then strongly encouraged to work over the summer to unpack my grade level content standards, read through the curriculum, complete the major assessments of the year and DO some of the lesson activities of the first unit that I would be presenting to students in the fall.

Fellow educators, though it was an absolutely tense time and I was under extreme pressure (my job was on the line) I did not realize the exact experience I needed to catalyze my becoming a critical consumer of my Curriculum. Without that experience I would not have come to appreciate how knowing my standards and doing the work would empower me as a classroom consultant to more effectively and efficiently support my students. And when they had a question I distinctly recall the following feelings - confusion, uncertainty, and discomfort. Which is why I would inevitably lead to me accusing students of not reading the directions or not paying attention (to what, I don’t know). But when I started DOING the assignments I then understood the curriculum developers intentions. I was able to identify where my students might struggle and proactively plan a mini-lesson, and during classwork time and the summary discussion I was better able to facilitate my students learning by helping them become aware of the work I understood where students needed to end up to meet the learning objective. Doing the work also provided me an opportunity to brush up on skills and concepts I did not understand (googling with a purpose). Being prepared to support my students and provide them with access to grade level content through mini-lesson. Facilitating student thinking and class discussions with forward moving questions that encouraged multiple perspectives, and sometimes even debate, was the noticeable shift that brought joy into teaching and learning for both my students and myself, we were having fun while learning.

So let’s say you don’t have time to become a critical consumer of the curriculum you are forced to use because you were given the curriculum in the middle of the first term, instead of at the end of the school year to work on over the summer. In a very unfortunate case such as this - the shortcut is to do the assignment(s) before you give them to your students.

Ex. Unit 1, Lesson 5

Think Aloud

What is the objective? Let me do the work. What parts of this lesson am I keeping and emphasizing? What part of this lesson am I going to do to de-emphasize? Which students will I need to support and how? Which students will I need to provide an extension for and how?

This will allow you to:

• Identify what it is students will experience and whether that experience will result in them having access to the learning objective.

• Help you to further clarify both the learning and language objectives (i.e. by the end of this lesson students will be able to _____ by ______)

• Think aloud when explaining and summarizing their thinking.

• And let’s not forget the opportunity you will have to brush up on forgotten or unclear concepts for yourself.

Doing the work yourself will allow you to be able to collect data during class about whether students are grasping the learning objective. Sometimes this will mean stopping and providing a quick mini-lesson, other times it might mean highlighting student work that is on the right track, asking students to compare what they have and to ask questions about any differences they notice.

The goal of doing the work yourself is that you will be able to think on your feet about your in the moment teaching moves; stopping to clarify misconceptions, pulling a small group aside, providing an extension for those who are ready to move on, etc. What teaching moves do you use during the lesson to make sure students are meeting or exceeding the learning and language objectives of the day? Okay, if you are still with me let’s keep going.

Why is this important?

Becoming a critical consumer of your curriculum is important because we are not curriculum developers. Classroom teachers, it is imperative that you use a curriculum (small c) to ensure you and all your students understand the curriculum well enough to use it effectively for your students. Beware of creating a hodge podge of activities. I’m talking to you internet gurus who spend hours searching for “something” your students can do, that seems aligned with grade level goals. This is a slippery slope we want to avoid because there is far too much work for us, as curriculum developers, to water down the grade level learning experience. It is far too easy for us to lose sight of the rigor students need to grapple with in order to engage in meaningful learning.

Ex. In some cases that might look like avoiding problems with irrational numbers in high school or accepting summaries of readings instead of evidence based reflection.

Using your curriculum will save you hours of internet searches that lead to rabbit holes and result in activity based teaching and learning which is more likely than not of high quality, coherent, or on grade level.

Use the internet and other curriculum resources to find supplements that enhance your lessons.

Additionally, by doing the work and becoming aware of what has been included and left out of the curriculum you will be able to pre-plan ways to make connections to your students’ lived experiences (e.g., i.e., be culturally responsive to the students in your class and the experiences they bring with them to school.

Here are questions you might ask yourself (do these look familiar)

• Who is at the table? Who’s missing?

• Are we including those perspectives that have been silenced historically?

continued on page 9

-- Toni Morrison

If there’s a book that hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it."

--- Toni Morrison

4 | BOSTON UNION TEACHER | January-February, 2022
Happy Black History Month!

This month’s February calendar is brought to you by Brianna Perkins, literacy specialist teacher at the Condon Elementary School.

In June 2020, Brianna created an Instagram page and instinctively named it litforblackkids. While she was not sure what the end game would be, she knew that she wanted to share books that feature Black authors and Black protagonists with the world. It was important for others to know the authors and the books exist despite hearing time after time in the media that they did not.

Fast forward to today and the Lit for Black Kids platform is flourishing. With a community of over 15k followers, Brianna’s page has become known as the place to go on Instagram when one is in search of children’s books that highlight Black authors and Black characters. In 2020, Brianna set out on a mission to amplify the voices of Black authors during Black History Month. She partnered with Scholastic, Inc. for their Share Our Stories initiative and separately used her platform to enable more than 80 Black authors to share their books via live read alouds. Brianna’s stretch into the world of literary advocacy continues as she sets her sights on the creation of the LIT Mobile, a bookmobile that will travel around the greater Boston area to bring books and literary programs to children in underserved communities (As written on her website - https://www.litforblackkids.com/).

You can also follow her on Instagram @litforblackkids. I have followed litforblackkids for the past year and a half and love seeing how stories with black children are amplified. Representation matters and her Instagram always comes through with fantastic suggestions! Whether it’s a snow day, a holiday, or any day Brianna’s Instagram has the story for you! These February suggestions are absolutely beautiful! Last year I ordered “Wash Day” for my goddaughters with big beautiful hair! This book really encourages enjoying your wash day and different hair types. My students also performed “Black is a Rainbow Color” for our virtual African American history celebration. I love teaching students that black is beautiful! When I first started teaching I noticed how often black and brown crayons were the colors not used. I actively tried to change that in my classroom. This book talks about all the beauty in black!

You can also follow her on Instagram @litforblackkids. I have followed litforblackkids for the past year and a half and love seeing how stories with black children are amplified. Representation matters and her Instagram always comes through with fantastic suggestions! Whether it’s a snow day, a holiday, or any day Brianna’s Instagram has the story for you! These February suggestions are absolutely beautiful! Last year I ordered “Wash Day” for my goddaughters with big beautiful hair! This book really encourages enjoying your wash day and different hair types. My students also performed “Black is a Rainbow Color” for our virtual African American history celebration. I love teaching students that black is beautiful! When I first started teaching I noticed how often black and brown crayons were the colors not used. I actively tried to change that in my classroom. This book talks about all the beauty in black!

I encourage everyone to always have a diverse library and classroom! However, I task everyone with adding at least two new books to your classroom library this month (or watching a read aloud virtually). Finally, I leave you with this quote by Toni Morrison: “If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet then you must write it”. I used to have this in my writing center, as I installed in my students that they were today and tomorrow’s authors and how much I could not wait to have their books in my library one day.
Dear Union Brothers and Sisters,

My name is Joel Richards. And I work as a technology teacher at the Blackstone school. I have been a teacher for fifteen years, eight of those in BPS. Like many of you, I have experienced the highs and the lows of teaching. More and more the best parts of being a teacher are the lows and the highs. No matter how bad our experiences are as teachers, we keep coming back. So yes we are crazy!

Yes we are crazy!

When my wife learned she was pregnant with our son, she made me promise never to let her have another baby. Through the morning sickness, the swelling, the discomfort my wife never stopped thinking about having another baby. But not even thirty seconds after she gave birth to our beautiful Johann Sebastian Richards, she looked at me with all sincerity, and said “I can’t wait to do this again.” The bond she instantly made with our son is the same bond we have created with our students, colleagues, and fellow teachers. So at the end of the year no matter how low we are, we come back. Love causes situations to amplify how bad our experiences are, as teachers, we keep coming back. So yes we are crazy because we are in love. And love makes us abandon all reason.

What we did

After everything we go through in a typical year, none of us could have imagined the COVID pandemic. It was an incredible tragedy. The whole world suffered and we all suffered more new stresses too. Nothing could have prepared us for that, but we survived. We learned to teach in a way that has never been done before, on such a massive scale. We read to our students over zoom. We made school literally out of nowhere. We returned to a new way of doing things, as if nothing happened. Without even giving us new shoes to run this race.

The love

Love is helping us power through this marathon, despite the worn and tear, and our shoes are wearing, but is that sustainable? Passion can only carry us so far, without the needed support. We have to ask ourselves how much longer we can run this marathon? How can we get the shoes we need to run this race? How can we finally get the support that we, our students and the families we serve so desperately need?

Joel Richards

---

**Commentary Joel Richards**

**A Union Epistle**

(to be read aloud to fellow Union members)

I have been to summer PDs to learn for fifteen years, eight of those in BPS. Yes we are crazy!

Yes we are crazy!

When my wife learned she was pregnant with our son, she made me promise never to let her have another baby. Through the morning sickness, the swelling, the discomfort my wife never stopped thinking about having another baby. But not even thirty seconds after she gave birth to our beautiful Johann Sebastian Richards, she looked at me with all sincerity, and said “I can’t wait to do this again.” The bond she instantly made with our son is the same bond we have created with our students, colleagues, and fellow teachers. So at the end of the year no matter how low we are, we come back. Love causes situations to amplify how bad our experiences are, as teachers, we keep coming back. So yes we are crazy because we are in love. And love makes us abandon all reason.

What we did

After everything we go through in a typical year, none of us could have imagined the COVID pandemic. It was an incredible tragedy. The whole world suffered and we all suffered more new stresses too. Nothing could have prepared us for that, but we survived. We learned to teach in a way that has never been done before, on such a massive scale. We read to our students over zoom. We made school literally out of nowhere. We returned to a new way of doing things, as if nothing happened. Without even giving us new shoes to run this race.

The love

Love is helping us power through this marathon, despite the worn and tear, and our shoes are wearing, but is that sustainable? Passion can only carry us so far, without the needed support. We have to ask ourselves how much longer we can run this marathon? How can we get the shoes we need to run this race? How can we finally get the support that we, our students and the families we serve so desperately need?

Joel Richards

---

**Commentary Joel Richards**

**A Union Epistle**

(to be read aloud to fellow Union members)

I have been to summer PDs to learn for fifteen years, eight of those in BPS. Yes we are crazy!

Yes we are crazy!

When my wife learned she was pregnant with our son, she made me promise never to let her have another baby. Through the morning sickness, the swelling, the discomfort my wife never stopped thinking about having another baby. But not even thirty seconds after she gave birth to our beautiful Johann Sebastian Richards, she looked at me with all sincerity, and said “I can’t wait to do this again.” The bond she instantly made with our son is the same bond we have created with our students, colleagues, and fellow teachers. So at the end of the year no matter how low we are, we come back. Love causes situations to amplify how bad our experiences are, as teachers, we keep coming back. So yes we are crazy because we are in love. And love makes us abandon all reason.

What we did

After everything we go through in a typical year, none of us could have imagined the COVID pandemic. It was an incredible tragedy. The whole world suffered and we all suffered more new stresses too. Nothing could have prepared us for that, but we survived. We learned to teach in a way that has never been done before, on such a massive scale. We read to our students over zoom. We made school literally out of nowhere. We returned to a new way of doing things, as if nothing happened. Without even giving us new shoes to run this race.

The love

Love is helping us power through this marathon, despite the worn and tear, and our shoes are wearing, but is that sustainable? Passion can only carry us so far, without the needed support. We have to ask ourselves how much longer we can run this marathon? How can we get the shoes we need to run this race? How can we finally get the support that we, our students and the families we serve so desperately need?
Every year, the RTC Legislative Committee fights for an increase in the COLA and an increase in the COLA base. Many new retirees do not realize that any COLA increase is applied to a portion of your pension, not to the total amount of your pension. Unlike social security, where the cost of living adjustment is based on the total amount of social security that you receive, public pensions in Massachusetts only increase by applying the COLA (percentage increase – currently 3% – voted on by the Boston Retirement Board) to the adopted COLA base. The minimum amount for the COLA base is set by the Massachusetts Pension Laws. The minimum base is $12,000. There is no maximum amount in the law. Every city and town votes to set the COLA base for all retired public employees.

Mayor Thomas Menino raised the COLA base in 2013 to $13,000. Mayor Martin Walsh raised the base to $14,000 in 2017, and in 2021 then Mayor Kim Janey included an increase in the Boston COLA base from $14,000 to $15,000. The RTC Legislative Committee and Executive Board engaged in letter writing and phone calling efforts to encourage the Mayor’s Office and the City Council members to raise the base from $14,000. We had the full support of the BTU, AFT-MA, and many labor and local leaders in contacting City Council members and the Mayor. Our COLA in 2021 resulted in an increase from $420 per year to $450. We are grateful for the work that the committee and members did to achieve this increase.

Given the current rate of inflation, you can be sure that a $30 increase over the course of a year will not cover the increases in groceries, utilities, gas, insurance and prescription costs. We must continue to fight for further increases in both the COLA and the base used to calculate the increase.

The legislative Committee Co-Chairs Larry Connolly and Sandy Carle, Legislative Committee Secretary Janey Frank and other committee members know that in order to increase the COLA base we need to influence the budget process. We cannot wait until May to start contacting the retirement board members, City Council members and the Mayor. If we want to have retirees’ needs included in the city budget, we need to start our campaign earlier than ever. We will need RTC members to write letters to the members of the Boston Retirement Board, the Mayor and the City Council.

**Rally for COVID Safety**

By Heidi Winston

On the afternoon of December 19th, a rally/vigil was held in front of the State House in the name of fighting for COVID Safety in Boston Public Schools. The rally was an important and unified effort led by “Families for COVID Safety”, (FAM-COSA) and organized with BPS school nurses and the Boston Teachers Union. The unity and commitment needed to STOP the spread of COVID through our school buildings — and to support our children fully was evident in the speeches made by parents, school nurses and community supporters and healthcare professionals.

Families for COVID Safety (FAM-COSA) was created by BPS families in response to the Curley School’s closure for 10 days due to 46 cases of COVID. The families believe that more needs to be done to protect our students – their families and our community — and to support our health care workers.

Cases continue to rise in our neighborhoods and across Massachusetts, so we must continue to fight the system in order to protect our children’s health and welfare.

The demands of the FAM-COSA rally are as follows:

- Safety and ventilation especially during mealtimes;
- Consistent pooled testing;
- Prompt and reliable contact tracing in every school;
- Increase the percentage of students who are vaccinated;
- Ensure equity in COVID safety efforts;
- DESE must count all the remote days for any school that has to close because of an outbreak.

School nurses spoke about the importance of the unity between families and BPS staff in this struggle and the importance of not dividing. Nurses and parents also spoke about fighting racist inequities in healthcare which this pandemic has brought to the surface.

Nurses and BTU members informed the audience of onlookers and the media that the COVID health and safety improvements – such as improved ventilation – were fought and won by us as unionized workers and healthcare workers. However, the COVID testing that we fought for has been underfunded and privatized thus much of the work involving testing and contact tracing has fallen on BTU staff, especially the nurses.

Mothers spoke eloquently of the hardship they experienced as breadwinners and caretakers of their families when children were inferred or died from the effects of this deadly virus. We spoke and chanted in unison as the sun set, holding candles in memory of those lost to COVID.

Since the December rally the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has reported that there are more than 50,000 known COVID-19 infections in students and staff in the first two weeks of January.

More than 89,000 public school children and 20,000 staff have tested positive for COVID-19 since school began in September. There are a disproportionate number of COVID cases in children in several cities, including Boston, where more than one thousand children in each of these cities and towns have tested positive since September (DESE report, 1/2022). By January 10, 2022, the US had the most infections since the start of the pandemic of any country – 61,263,030 and the most deaths – 851,356, (https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/ compare-virus-data-explorers).

It is clear, looking at these numbers that not enough has been done nationally and locally regarding policies and funding to effectively mitigate or end this pandemic. As it goes for our schools and our school children and their families and for us – we must fight harder and join with FAM-COSA to take a stand against the lack of funding for public health and COVID prevention in our schools.

When Colleen Mason, KO-K1 teacher from the East Boston EEC asked her 3 year old son Liam to tell her about this picture and he said, “It’s my Covid test results!”
Politics in Education
Johnny McInnis

The Boston City Council is elected by residents of the city of Boston every two years. The council is made up of four at-large councilors that represent the entire City, and nine district councilors that represent specific areas within Boston. The current term is from January, 2022 to December, 2023.

The Boston Teachers Union endorses candidates for the Boston City Council. During the election cycle, both incumbents (those who are currently in office) and new candidates will reach out to the Boston Teachers Union, requesting an endorsement. The BTU responds to this request by sending a questionnaire referencing issues that are important to our members. After a completed questionnaire is returned, the COPE committee (Committee on Political Education) will review it to decide if the candidate should be interviewed.

If COPE decides the candidate would be a viable candidate supporting our issues a recommendation is made. The decision to make a recommendation to the E-Board is made by a ⅔ vote by the COPE Committee members.

Next, the E-Board receives the recommendation and reviews information about the candidates. A vote is then held by the E-Board members to decide whether the candidate should be recommended to the membership. Again a ⅔ vote is required.

Lastly, a vote is held at the BTU monthly membership meetings during which members have the chance to approve or oppose candidates. A ⅔ vote is again required to pass.

Non-incumbent Councilors who have won their election create an important relationship for advocacy on our issues. Incumbent Councilors that we have endorsed continue to support the BTU in many ways. City Councilors are important advocates for city policy as the governing body. Members often contact their Councilor as a constituent for issues that matter to them. The BTU contacts Councilors for support on policies and issues that pertain to our Union.

For example the BTU has had conversations that have led to hearings about school funding, PILOT, inclusion in schools, and working conditions just to name a few. Because of our professional relationship, when candidates run for reelection they often ask for support from our members. Support from the BTU includes mailings to members on behalf of our endorsed candidate, phone banking to our members via member to member calls, showing up for stand outs, and door knocking with the campaign.

Boston City Councilors
At-Large: Michael Flaherty
Ruthzee Louijeune
Julia Mejia (Chair of Education)
Erin Murphy

District 1: Lydia Edwards
District 2: Ed Flynn (Council President)
District 3: Frank Baker
District 4: Brian Worrell
District 5: Ricardo Arroyo
District 6: Kendra Hicks
District 7: Tania Fernandes Anderson
District 8: Kenzie Bok
District 9: Liz Breadon

I have been asked to talk about conditions in the schools with regards to nursing, positive COVID cases and pool testing. As it stands, pool testing and contact tracing, which are public health jobs, are being contracted out to a private company. The state promised us that they would implement pool testing. Find the positive cases in the pool tests, and do Test-and-Stay so students would miss minimal school. But it took months for pool testing to get off the ground.

The private company that BPS has contracted to do contact tracing is out-of-state which makes the actual process of contact tracing impractical and burdensome. Since Health Services has been so overburdened with contact tracing as well, and the Public Health Commission doesn’t have enough public health workers - private labs and companies are paid to do it. They are not contacting those who test positive or school staff until a week later or more in many cases. Nurses and health services pick up the slack. This puts us all at risk for COVID.

Money needs to be immediately allocated to our public health commission in Boston and Massachusetts. Decisions need to be based on science, not politics. We need a robust testing and contact tracing system. We need outreach regarding vaccination and a vaccination campaign that educates, dispels myths, informs and empowers our teens and families.

This “profits-first” economic system under which we live does not put children and families needs first. It especially does not put families of color and immigrant families first. A million deaths, many of them preventable, are apparently an acceptable loss to those in power as long as the profits keep flowing. Meanwhile, working families are struggling to hold onto their housing, their jobs, their healthcare, and struggling to provide their children with proper education and emotional wellbeing. This is doubly true for people of color and immigrant workers. This cannot continue. And we will continue to fight! We need fully funded public schools. We need fully funded public health.
Bein...g a Critical Consumer of Your Curriculum...

To be a critical consumer of your curriculum means YOU KNOW (all caps) the following:

- This is worth repeating
- You must know your grade level standards, with an emphasis on the priority standards.
- You must know the big idea(s) for each unit, what is it that students will know and be able to do by the end of the unit?
- You must know your classroom(s) context, which changes year to year. Who are your students this year? What are their learning needs? What lived experiences are they bringing into the classroom?
- And you need time. Especially if the curriculum is new to you. So don’t be too hard on yourself. Chip away at learning your curriculum by doing the work before you give it to your students.

What are the benefits of being/becoming a critical consumer of your curriculum?

Becoming a critical consumer of your curriculum will save you a lot of time: it doesn’t require an upfront investment. For me it took me a full weekend to unpack my grade level standards and skim through the curriculum text. It was a worth-while investment.

When you become a critical consumer of your curriculum you will have more flexibility in what you present, how and in what order. For example as you are planning and you go through a unit you might decide that everything contained in the priority standards is manageable and meaningful for the students you are working with that year. Alternatively, you may notice there are some missing concepts or opportunities to practice skills that you need to find supplements for; this results in you building your Curriculum (big C): the coherent grade level learning activities (with the supplements you include to ensure the students you have get what they need.

Benefits:
- Avoiding watering down the grade level standards
- The ability to think on your feet during the lesson to provide support or enliven the lesson
- Transferable skills that can be applied to any new curriculum you are asked to use preferably not after the school year has begun.
- And most importantly having fun!

Note to school leaders: The work of becoming a critical consumer of your Curriculum is best done over the summer, when teachers have more time and fewer competing responsibilities. To support your teaching staff, introduce a new curriculum in June.

I know I am forgetting some important points, so let’s start a conversation: What does being a critical consumer of your Curriculum mean to you?

( Ndaine O’Garro is an Instructional Coach who works with K-12 educators and educational leaders. With over 16 years in K-12 education as a classroom teacher and now instructional coach, Ndaine supports school leaders and classroom teachers in developing high level practices and instructional strategies that are effective with diverse learners. Through her coaching Ndaine provides guidance on how to improve instruction to ensure ALL students receive a high-quality culturally affirming educational experience. Ndaine earned her BS in Business Management and Entrepreneurship, received a Master of Arts in Education and Ph.D. in Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies from UMass Boston. She is available and looking forward to supporting your work and can be reached at ndainegarro@gmail.com.)

Congratulations to Our Newly Certified and Renewed National Board Certified Teachers

S everal BTU members recently achieved National Board Certification by completing a rigorous cycle of reflection, learning, and leadership. Congratulations to these outstanding educators and the eight BTU members who renewed their certification this year.

Newly Certified
- Jesse Southwick - Boston Latin School
- Kayla Bailey - Healy Greens School
- Quaisiya Clarke - Henry Drew School
- Priscilla Lau - Boston Latin Academy
- Sinta Cebrian - Henderson K-12
- Edwin Cebrian - Mozart School
- Hannah Erickson - Boston Day and Evening Academy

Renewed
- Silvia Gonzalez-Powers - Roosevelt K-8
- Matthew Kazuakas - John D. O’Bryant
- Amanda Minerva - Mary Lynn K-8
- Aaron Osowski - Boston Latin School
- Carla Zils - Edison K-8
- Bridget Driscoll - Brighton High School
- Nicole DaSilva - Boston International Newcomers Academy
- Brian Lensus - Boston Latin Academy

If you achieved or recertified this year and are not listed here, please email Paul Tritter at ptritter@btu.org to let us know. If you are interested in participating in our BTU/National Board support programs, please visit bostonpublicschools.org/ rplus/1896
The AFTMA December meeting and Distinguished Service Award (DSA) recipients. Chantei Alves received the DSA for a member 35 years of age or younger. James Timo Phillip received a DSA as a retired member.

Cozy Up to Our Contract This Winter…
continued from page 1

These are just a few of our many priorities as our negotiating team, silent reps and staff continue to regularly meet with BPS to share our full list of proposals.

It is understandable that as we continue to confront seemingly a new crisis every month that our contract may not be on the top of everyone’s mind. However, we have been working without a contract since September, and in order to win a new agreement that reflects the schools our students and educators deserve, we will need everyone to help us elevate and amplify our demands. In February and the upcoming months, we will be ramping up our campaign. Please be on the lookout for upcoming actions as we continue to draw attention to the much-needed changes our schools and educators need to continue to address the challenges we face every day.

We are stronger, together and more than ever, we need to count on each other to get through these tough times. Our contract is one of our greatest tools to support each other and get educators and their students the respect they deserve. So in the cold weeks and months ahead, don’t forget to cozy up to our contract as we turn up the heat to fight for a new contract!

To get more involved and learn more, visit btu.org and explore the “Negotiation Updates” banner at the top!

12 Ways to Stay Positive…
continued from page 2

you do have instead of obsessing over what you don’t have. I believe everyone has a purpose for being here.

This joy I have, the world didn’t give it to me, and the world can’t take it away. How do we discover joy on the mountain and in the valley? Sometimes it will take some effort to find that thing that helps bring you joy and remember your joy. Remember what it feels like to be in a place of joy: when things are going really good in your class, your life, your family, your office, remember how you feel when things are going well, and hold on to that memory. When things are going awry, access that memory of when things were going great!

All in all…Focus on the positive!
The BTU Black Caucus has been busy volunteering, touring and having fun. These photos are from The Black Caucus Tour of Nubian Square. History was shared with members of the Caucus from the granddaughter of Nubian Notion, a black owned family business from the 1960s in the heart of Roxbury which now is called Nubian square. There were stories told by other black business owners, Mr. Leonard Egerton of Frugal bookstore, and Mrs. Kai Grant Owner of Black Market. These are more than stories, this is the history of our culture.

– Adrianne Jordan

Tracy Romain, Chantei Alves, Denise Berkeley, A. Vanessa La Rocque, Johnny McNeece, Adrianne Jordan, Casandra Samuel and Cynthia Grant-Carter.

Adrianne Jordan and Denise Berkley volunteering at Toys for Tots at the Boston Convention Center.

“I really appreciate the opportunity to support a great cause,” said Adrianne Jordan. “Giving back especially at this time of season is worthwhile to so many families. On behalf of the BTU Black Caucus, I say, let’s all do something positive this coming year and give. MERRY CHRISTMAS 🎄🎁.”